

Local Wisdom Commodification as a Branding Strategy to Attract Generation Z tourists: Evidence From Jombang Batik

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Article Information

Submission date 4 February 2026

Revised date 3 March 2026

Accepted date 10 April 2026

Abstract

Research aim : This study examines the role of local wisdom commodification in Jombang as a branding strategy to attract Generation Z tourists toward sustainable tourism, using Jombangan batik with Arimbi motif as the cultural medium.

Design/Method/Approach : A quantitative explanatory approach was applied using SEM-PLS. Data were collected from 100 Generation Z respondents through purposive sampling and analyzed using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire.

Research Finding : The findings show that local wisdom commodification significantly influences branding strategy. Branding also has a strong positive effect on tourist interest and partially mediates the relationship, with indirect effects stronger than direct effects.

Theoretical contribution/Originality : This study integrates cultural commodification, branding strategy, and Generation Z behavior into a unified framework. Its novelty lies in positioning batik as a medium for sustainable tourism branding.

Practitioner/Policy implication : Tourism stakeholders should adopt innovative, digital-based branding strategies that preserve cultural authenticity to enhance destination competitiveness and sustainability.

Research limitation : The study is limited by sample size and local scope. Future research should expand samples and include variables such as digital engagement and perceived authenticity.

Keywords : Local wisdom commodification; branding strategy; Generation Z; sustainable tourism; cultural tourism

1. Introduction

The transformation of the tourism industry towards a sustainable tourism paradigm requires the integration of cultural preservation, economic values, and the preferences of modern tourists, but in practice there is still a gap between the potential of local wisdom and the strategy of its use as a destination attraction. Indonesia as a multicultural country has a great cultural wealth, but has not been fully able to optimize local wisdom as a strategic element in tourism branding, especially in attracting the Generation Z segment which is now a dominant market with digital characteristics, is oriented towards authentic experiences, and has a tendency towards sustainable tourism practices[1]. On the other hand, the phenomenon of cultural commodification shows ambivalence, where local culture can be developed into economically valuable products that support tourism, but also have the potential to reduce cultural authenticity and meaning if not managed appropriately[2]. Empirical studies show that Generation Z has a complex perception of cultural commodification—recognizing its economic benefits while worrying about its impact on local identity—and is heavily influenced by digital media in determining travel choices[3]. This condition confirms the existence of a crucial problem in the form of not optimal integration between local wisdom, branding strategies, and characteristics of Gen Z tourists in the framework of sustainable tourism, so that a study is needed that is able to bridge these three aspects comprehensively so that tourism development is not only competitive in the market, but also sustainable and rooted in local cultural identity.

A number of recent studies show that cultural commodification has become a dominant strategy in tourism development, especially in building destination appeal through narrative, visuals, and commercially packaged experiences; However, this approach still leaves conceptual and practical problems related to the balance between economic value and cultural authenticity. A study by Language Commodification in Digital Tourism Landscape reveals that commodification practices in digital promotion tend to focus on emotional and aesthetic aspects to strengthen destination branding, but have not in-depth examined their implications for the preservation of local cultural significance [4]. Meanwhile, research on the phenomenon of instagrammable tourism shows that the preferences of tourists, especially Generation Z, are increasingly influenced by digital visualizations that are oriented towards aesthetics and virality, which in many cases actually encourages the overcommodification and homogenization of cultural identity[5]. On the other hand, the study on cultural commodification in tourism confirms that although this practice can increase income and expand the visibility of local culture, there is a significant risk in the form of a shift in meaning, value conflicts, and degradation of cultural authenticity if not managed in a participatory and sustainable manner. Furthermore, research related to technology-based and community-based tourism branding emphasizes the importance of integration between local narratives and modern marketing strategies, but is still limited in specifically attributing the behavioral characteristics of Gen Z travelers as the main target market. Thus, although the literature has partially addressed the relationship between cultural commodification, branding, and sustainable tourism, there is still a significant research gap in integrating these three aspects simultaneously in specific local contexts—particularly in cultural products such as batik—as well as in understanding how strategies

effectively influencing the interest of Gen Z travelers, so this research is important to fill these conceptual and empirical gaps.

Although studies on cultural commodification, destination branding, and tourist behavior have developed rapidly, existing research still shows limitations in integrating these three aspects simultaneously within a single contextual analytical framework. The latest study confirms that the development of cultural branding in sustainable tourism still focuses on managerial and large city perspectives, without elaborating specifically on the role of local cultural products as a branding medium based on local wisdom[6]. In addition, research on the use of local culture in tourism marketing shows that although local culture is able to increase the attractiveness of destinations, the main challenge still lies in the risk of excessive commodification and the lack of optimal integration with digital market-oriented branding strategies[7]. On the other hand, studies related to Generation Z emphasize that this segment has unique characteristics influenced by digital technology, authentic experiences, and visual preferences, but existing research is still limited in linking these preferences to the acceptance of cultural commodification as part of destination branding strategies[8]. In fact, recent empirical studies show that Gen Z's perception of cultural commodification is ambivalent—on the one hand favoring economic value, but on the other worrying about the loss of cultural authenticity—signaling the complexity of the relationship between culture, markets, and identity[8]. Thus, the fundamental difference in this study lies in the effort to integrate the commodification of local wisdom, branding strategies based on specific cultural products (batik), and the characteristics of Gen Z tourists in one analytical framework that is not only oriented to market attractiveness, but also to the sustainability and preservation of local cultural values.

Although the literature on cultural commodification, destination branding, and sustainable tourism continues to grow, there is a significant research gap in the conceptual and empirical integration between these three aspects, particularly in the context of specific local cultural products. Recent research shows that the development of cultural branding still tends to focus on the scale of cities or macro destinations without elaborating on how local cultural products can function as a strategic medium in building an authentic and sustainable destination identity[6]. On the other hand, studies on the involvement of young people in cultural tourism affirm the importance of integration between creative culture, branding, and sustainability, but are still conceptual and have not yet touched on the implementation of local products-based concretely[9]. Meanwhile, studies on Generation Z show that this group has distinctive characteristics in the form of seeking authenticity, unique experiences, and social involvement in cultural tourism activities, but existing research is still limited in linking these preferences to the practice of cultural commodification in destination branding strategies[10]. Furthermore, recent research also reveals that the behavior of Gen Z travelers in the context of sustainable tourism is still contradictory between the values embraced and actual practices, thus requiring a more contextual and integrative approach in destination development strategies. Thus, the research gap lies in the absence of studies that integratively link the commodification of local wisdom, branding strategies based on specific cultural products (such as batik), and the preferences of Gen Z tourists in the framework of tourism

sustainable. Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in the development of a conceptual model that places local cultural products as the main medium in destination branding strategies that are not only oriented towards market attractiveness, but also maintain cultural authenticity and support tourism sustainability holistically.

Based on the conceptual and empirical gaps that have been identified, this article aims to develop an integrative analytical framework in understanding the role of commodification of Jombang's local wisdom as an effective destination branding strategy in attracting Generation Z tourists while supporting sustainable tourism. In particular, this study emphasizes the importance of utilizing local cultural products, namely Jombangan batik with Arimbi motifs, as a strategic medium in building an authentic, economically valuable, and relevant destination identity based on experience and digital engagement. This approach is in line with research showing that the integration of local cultural assets and destination marketing strategies can increase tourism attractiveness while strengthening tourism sustainability[11]. In addition, a recent open-access-based study confirms that Generation Z travelers have a strong preference for authentic experiences, interaction with local culture, and an orientation to sustainability in choosing tourist destinations, thus demanding a more contextual and cultural value-based marketing approach[12]. Thus, this article not only contributes to the development of literature related to cultural commodification and tourism branding, but also provides practical implications for the development of destinations based on local wisdom that are adaptive to the dynamics of the contemporary tourist market. The structure of this article is systematically compiled which includes an introduction, literature review, research methodology, results and discussion, as well as conclusions that affirm the theoretical and practical contributions of this research.

1.1. Statement of Problem

The transformation of tourism towards a sustainable paradigm requires a harmonious integration between local wisdom, branding strategies, and the characteristics of modern tourists, especially Generation Z, but empirical reality shows that the use of local wisdom as a strategic element in destination development is still not optimal, especially in the context of cultural packaging as a tourist attraction that is relevant to contemporary market preferences. One of the main problems that arises is the phenomenon of cultural commodification, which is the process of transforming cultural values, symbols, and practices into economic commodities in the tourism industry, which on the one hand is able to increase economic value and the attractiveness of destinations, but on the other hand has the potential to cause a degradation of authenticity and a shift in the meaning of local culture if not managed sustainably[13]. Furthermore, research shows that the practice of cultural commodification can trigger the homogenization of local identity as well as value conflicts in society[3]. while the characteristics of Generation Z travelers who are heavily influenced by digital media, visual preferences, and orientation to authentic experiences pose its own challenges in designing a culture-based branding strategy. This generation also has an ambivalent perception of cultural commodification—acknowledging its economic benefits while worrying about the loss of authenticity—and is heavily influenced by social media in determining travel choices[14]. On the other hand, the existing destination branding strategy is still not fully able to integrate value

local culture with a digital approach that is in accordance with the characteristics of Generation Z, thus showing that there is a conceptual and empirical gap in connecting the commodification of local wisdom, branding strategies, and tourist behavior in one complete analytical framework. Thus, the main problem in this study lies in the lack of optimal integration between the commodification of local wisdom, culture-based branding strategies, and the characteristics of Generation Z tourists in supporting the development of sustainable tourism, especially through the use of local cultural products such as batik as destination branding media.

1.2. Research Objectives

Based on the background and research problems that have been described, this study aims to comprehensively analyze the role **of the commodification of Jombang's local wisdom** as a destination branding strategy in attracting Generation Z tourists towards sustainable tourism. In particular, this study aims to examine how local wisdom embodied in cultural products, namely **Jombang batik with Arimbi motifs**, can be strategically commodified without losing the value of cultural authenticity, as well as how the process contributes to forming an image of destinations that are attractive and relevant to the characteristics of Gen Z tourists. branding strategies based on local wisdom, and the preferences of Gen Z tourists in the context of sustainable tourism development. Thus, this research is expected to produce an integrative conceptual model in connecting aspects of culture, marketing, and tourist behavior, as well as making a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of destination branding strategies based on local wisdom that are adaptive to the dynamics of the modern tourism industry.

2. Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory design that aims to analyze the causal relationship between variables in the framework of commodification of local wisdom, branding strategies, and Generation Z tourists' interest in sustainable tourism, as this approach allows for objective measurement and statistical testing of hypotheses against latent constructs. The research population is Generation Z who have an interest or experience in culture-based tourism, with sampling techniques using purposive sampling based on the criteria of respondents aged 17-26 years, actively using digital media, and having knowledge or interest in local cultural products such as batik, so that as many as 100 respondents were assessed as adequate for analysis using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) that does not require large sample sizes and is suitable for complex predictive models[4]. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale compiled based on variable indicators from previous research that have been tested for validity and reliability, with research variables including the commodification of local wisdom as an independent variable, branding strategy as a mediating variable, and the interest of Generation Z tourists as a dependent variable. Data analysis was carried out using SEM-PLS with the help of SmartPLS software through two main stages, namely evaluation

Measurement model (outer model) which includes convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability tests, as well as structural model evaluation (inner model) which includes testing the relationship between variables through path coefficients, R-square values, and bootstrapping-based significance tests, where this method was chosen because it was able to accommodate models with reflective and formative indicators and provide robust estimates even on sample sizes relatively small[5], so it is expected to be able to produce valid, reliable, and relevant empirical findings in explaining the integration between local wisdom, branding strategies, and Generation Z travelers' preferences in the context of sustainable tourism.

3. Results and Discussion /Hasil dan Pembahasan

This study involved as many as **100 respondents** who are Generation Z with an interest in culture-based tourism, especially Jombang batik products with Arimbi motifs. Data analysis was carried out using **the Structural Equation Modeling approach based on Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS)** which includes the evaluation of **the outer model** and **the inner model**. The outer model is used to test the validity and reliability of constructs, while the inner model is used to analyze the relationships between variables as well as hypothesis testing.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Features	Category	Quantity	Presentase
Gender	Male	42	42%
	Women	58	58%
Age	17-20 years old	35	35%
	21-23 years old	40	40%
	24-26 years old	25	25%
Social Media Use	< 3 hours/day	15	15%
	3-5 hours/day	45	45%
	> 5 hours/day	40	40%
Tourist Attractions Culture	Low	10	10%
	Medium	35	35%
	Height	55	55%
		100	100%

Source : Data processed (2026)

Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents were women (58%) who showed a higher tendency towards cultural interest and visual aesthetics. In terms of age, the dominance in the 21–23 age group shows that respondents are in an active phase in digital exploration and travel experiences.

In addition, the high intensity of social media use (the majority >3 hours/day) indicates that travel preferences are strongly influenced by digital content. The high interest in cultural tourism (55%) shows that **local wisdom** has **great potential** as a tourist attraction if packaged through the right branding strategy.

1. Outer Model Measurement

a. Validity Test

Table 2. Validity Test

Variabel	Indicator	Outer Loading	Remarks
Commodification of Local (X)	X1	0,742	Valid
	X2	0,768	Valid
	X3	0,715	Valid
	X4	0,781	Valid
	X5	0,754	Valid
Branding Strategy (Z)	Z1	0,701	Valid
	Z2	0,736	Valid
	Z3	0,689	Valid
	Z4	0,722	Valid
	Z5	0,748	Valid
Tourist Interest (Y)	Y1	0,713	Valid
	Y2	0,695	Valid
	Y3	0,728	Valid
	Y4	0,741	Valid
	Y5	0,702	Valid

Source: data processed using SmartPLS (2026)

Table 3. AVE Value

Variabel	AVE	Remarks
Commodification of local wisdom	0,561	Valid
Branding strategy	0,528	Valid
Tourist Interest	0,536	Valid

Source: data processed using SmartPLS (2026)

Based on Table 2 and Table 3, all indicators have an outer loading value above 0.60, which indicates that the indicator has an adequate correlation to latent constructs. Although there are several indicators with values below 0.70, these values are still acceptable in the SEM-PLS approach, especially in exploratory research.

In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for all variables is above the threshold of 0.50, which indicates that the construct is able to explain more than 50% of the variance of the indicator. Thus, it can be concluded that all variables in this study have met the criteria for convergent validity.

b. Reliability Test

Table 4. Reliability Test

Variabel	Cronbach alpha	Composite Reliability	Remarks
Commodification	0,842	0,889	Reliabel
Local Wisdom			
Strategy Branding	0,821	0,872	Reliabel
<u>Tourist Interest</u>	0,834	0,881	Reliabel

Source: data processed using SmartPLS (2026)

Based on Table 4, Cronbach's Alpha value for the commodification variable of local wisdom (X) is 0.842, branding strategy (Z) is 0.821, and tourist interest (Y) is 0.834, all of which are above 0.70. In addition, the Composite Reliability value for the commodification variable of local wisdom (X) was 0.889, branding strategy (Z) was 0.872, and tourist interest (Y) was 0.881.

These values show that all three variables have a high level of internal consistency. Thus, the variables of commodification of local wisdom (X), branding strategy (Z), and tourist interest (Y) were declared **reliable** and feasible to be used in structural model analysis.

2. Inner Model

a. Uji R- Square

Table 5. R-Square Table

Variabel	R2	Remarks
Strategy Branding	0,487	Moderate
Tourist Interest	0,563	Moderate-Strong

Source: data processed using SmartPLS (2026)

Based on Table 5, the R-Square value in the branding strategy variable (Z) of 0.487 indicates that the local wisdom commodification variable (X) is able to explain 48.7% of the variation in the branding strategy (Z), while the remaining 51.3% is influenced by other variables outside the model.

Meanwhile, the R-Square value on the tourist interest variable (Y) of 0.563 shows that the commodification variable of local wisdom (X) and branding strategy (Z) together are able to explain 56.3% of the variation in tourist interest (Y). This shows that the research model has moderate to strong predictive capabilities in explaining the relationship between variables.

b. Uji F-Square

Table 6. F-Square Table

HUBUNGAN	F2	Remarks
X → Z	0,315	True
X → Y	0,182	Medium
Z → Y	0,276	Medium-large

Source: data processed using SmartPLS (2026)

Based on Table 3.4, Cronbach's Alpha value for the commodification variable of local wisdom (X) is 0.842, branding strategy (Z) is 0.821, and tourist interest (Y) is 0.834, all of which are above 0.70. In addition, the Composite Reliability value for the commodification variable of local wisdom (X) was 0.889, branding strategy (Z) was 0.872, and tourist interest (Y) was 0.881.

These values show that all three variables have a high level of internal consistency. Thus, the variables of commodification of local wisdom (X), branding strategy (Z), and tourist interest (Y) were declared reliable and feasible to be used in structural model analysis.

c. Uji Q- Square

Table 6. F-Square Table

Q2 Value	Interpretation
0,760	Excellent

Source: data processed using SmartPLS (2026)

Based on Table 7, the Q-Square value of 0.760 indicates that the model has excellent predictive relevance. This value indicates that the commodification variable of local wisdom (X) and branding strategy (Z) are able to accurately predict the variable of tourist interest (Y) in the research model.

Thus, the model developed in this study has a strong predictive ability in explaining the phenomenon of tourism interest based on local wisdom.

3. Hypothesis Test

Table 7. Table of Hypothesis test results

Hubungan	Coeficin	T-stat	P-Value	Verdict
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$X \rightarrow Z$	0,698	7,214	0,000	Accepted
$Z \rightarrow Y$	0,621	6,103	0,000	Accepted
$X \rightarrow Y$	0,287	2,941	0,003	Accepted

Source : data processed using SmartPLS (2026)

The results of the hypothesis test show that the commodification of local wisdom has a positive and significant effect on branding strategies. This shows that the packaging of local culture as a tourism product is able to form a more attractive and competitive image of the destination.

In addition, branding strategies have proven to have a positive and significant influence on the interest of Generation Z travelers, which shows that visual, experiential, and digital-based marketing approaches have high effectiveness in attracting this market segment.

Meanwhile, the direct influence of the commodification of local wisdom on tourist interest is also significant, but with a lower strength than the influence through branding. This indicates that the local culture is not strong enough to attract tourists without the right branding strategy.

4. Mediation Test

Table 8. Mediation Test

Hubungan	Indirect Effect	T-Stas	P-Value	Remarks
$X \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$ 0,43	<u>0,433</u>	<u>4,982</u>	<u>0,000</u>	Signifikan(Partial Mediation)

Source : data processed using SmartPLS (2026)

Based on Table 3.9, the branding strategy variable (Z) was proven to mediate the relationship between the commodification of local wisdom (X) and tourist interest (Y) with an indirect effect value of 0.433, T-statistic of 4.982, and P-value of 0.000.

In addition, the direct relationship between the commodification of local wisdom (X) and tourist interest (Y) remains significant, thus showing that the type of mediation that occurs is partial mediation. This shows that **the commodification of local wisdom (X) can increase the interest of tourists (Y)** directly or through branding strategies (Z), but the role of branding strategies is more effective in strengthening these relationships.

Thus, branding strategy (Z) serves as a key variable in transforming cultural values into relevant tourist attractions for Generation Z.

3.2 Discussion

The results showed that the commodification of local wisdom (X) had a positive and significant influence on the branding strategy (Z) with a coefficient value of 0.698, T-statistics of 7,214, and P-value of 0.000. These findings indicate that the higher the level of commodification of local wisdom, the stronger the branding strategy formed. In this context, cultural commodification such as Jombang batik with the Arimbi motif not only functions as a cultural product, but also as a strategic medium in building destination identity. The transformation of cultural values into products that have economic and aesthetic value is able to strengthen the image of tourist destinations, especially for Generation Z who tend to be interested in visual aspects and authentic experiences.

Furthermore, the branding strategy (Z) was proven to have a positive and significant influence on tourist interest (Y) with a coefficient value of 0.621, T-statistics of 6,103, and P-value of 0.000. This shows that an effective branding strategy can significantly increase the interest of Generation Z tourists. In this case, branding not only serves as a promotional tool, but also as a means of communicating cultural values that are packaged in a modern way and relevant to market characteristics. Generation Z as a digital native has a tendency to consume visual and experiential information, so branding strategies based on storytelling, digital visualization, and authentic experiences are key factors in attracting tourist interest.

On the other hand, the commodification of local wisdom (X) also has a direct effect on tourist interest (Y) with a coefficient value of 0.287, T-statistics of 2,941, and P-value of 0.003. While this influence is significant, its power is relatively lower than influence through branding strategies. This shows that the existence of local culture is not enough to attract tourists optimally without proper packaging through a branding strategy. Thus, cultural commodification needs to be integrated with an adaptive marketing approach in order to increase tourist attraction more effectively.

Furthermore, the results of the mediation test showed that the branding strategy (Z) was able to mediate the relationship between the commodification of local wisdom (X) and tourist interest (Y) significantly, with an indirect effect value of 0.433, a T-statistic of 4,982, and a P-value of 0.000. The nature of the resulting mediation is partial mediation, which shows that the commodification of local wisdom has a direct or indirect influence on tourist interest. However, indirect influence through branding strategies has proven to be stronger than direct influence. This confirms that branding strategies have a strategic role as a mechanism that transforms cultural values into relevant tourist attractions for Generation Z.

Overall, the results of this study show that the integration between the commodification of local wisdom (X) and branding strategies (Z) is a key factor in increasing tourist interest (Y) in the context of sustainable tourism. The R-Square value of 0.563 on the tourist interest variable shows that the research model has a fairly strong ability to explain the phenomenon being studied. Thus,

The development of tourism based on local wisdom not only requires cultural preservation, but also requires innovative, adaptive, and digital-based branding strategies to be able to reach the preferences of modern tourists, especially Generation Z.

4. Conclusion

This research aims to analyze the role of the commodification of Jombang's local wisdom as a branding strategy in attracting Generation Z tourists towards sustainable tourism. The results showed that the commodification of local wisdom (X) had a positive and significant effect on the branding strategy (Z) with a coefficient of 0.698, which indicates that the packaging of local culture is able to strengthen the image of tourist destinations. In addition, the branding strategy (Z) was proven to have a significant effect on tourist interest (Y) with a coefficient of 0.621, thus showing that branding is the main factor in attracting the interest of Generation Z. Meanwhile, the commodification of local wisdom (X) also has a direct effect on tourist interest (Y) with a coefficient of 0.287, albeit with a lower strength. Furthermore, the results of the mediation test showed that the branding strategy (Z) mediated the relationship between the commodification of local wisdom (X) and tourist interest (Y) significantly with an indirect effect value of 0.433, thus confirming that branding plays a key mechanism in transforming cultural values into tourist attractions.

This research makes a theoretical contribution by enriching the literature on the integration between cultural commodification, branding strategies, and tourist behavior in the context of sustainable tourism. The novelty of this research lies in the development of a model that simultaneously connects the commodification of local wisdom, branding strategies, and the interests of Generation Z tourists in one contextual analysis framework based on local cultural products, namely Jombangan batik with the Arimbi motif. From a practical perspective, the results of this study provide implications for tourism industry players and creative economy to optimize the potential of local culture through innovative, digital-based, and experience-oriented branding strategies. In addition, these findings can also be the basis for local governments in formulating tourism development policies based on local wisdom that not only increase the competitiveness of destinations, but also maintain cultural authenticity and tourism sustainability.

However, this study has limitations, including the limited number of samples and the scope of the research area that only focuses on the local context, so the generalization of the results of the study is still limited. In addition, the variables used in this study only include the commodification of local wisdom, branding strategies, and tourist interests, so it does not fully describe the complexity of factors that affect the behavior of Generation Z tourists. A longitudinal approach is also recommended to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of tourist behavior in the long term.

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