

Tai Dam Cultural Capital: Souvenirs, Creative Tourism, and Long-Term Tourist Loyalty

ทุนทางวัฒนธรรมไทดำ: ของที่ระลึก การท่องเที่ยวเชิงสร้างสรรค์ และความภักดีของนักท่องเที่ยวในระยะยาว

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คำสำคัญ: การวิจัยแบบผสมวิธี,
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Abstract

Background and Objectives: In an increasingly competitive tourism landscape, cultivating sustainable tourist loyalty is a critical asset for the long-term sustainability of destinations. Modern travelers, driven by the “experience economy,” are shifting from passive sightseeing towards seeking authentic, immersive encounters that foster deep emotional connections. Creative tourism, which emphasizes hands-on participation, has emerged as a key framework for this, elevating cultural souvenirs from mere keepsakes to catalysts for deeper engagement. However, a comprehensive understanding of the structural relationships between cultural capital, souvenir value, creative tourism, and long-term loyalty remains limited, with research often neglecting the host community’s voice and the longitudinal evolution of loyalty. This research addresses this gap by developing and testing a holistic model of the loyalty value chain. There are four objectives: 1) to quantitatively establish the causal links between souvenir value, creative tourism, and loyalty; 2) to qualitatively explore the tourist experiences behind these links; 3) to integrate the host community’s perspective for a balanced understanding; and 4) to assess the durability of loyalty in the long term. The research is situated within the Tai Dam ethnic community in Thailand, renowned for its textile weaving heritage.

Methods: This study employed a multi-phase, longitudinal mixed-methods design to build a comprehensive understanding. **Phase 1** employed a quantitative survey of 400 tourists using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized structural model. **Phase 2** qualitatively explored these findings through in-depth interviews with 18 tourists, focusing on the narratives connecting souvenir value to creative engagement. **Phase 3** incorporated the host perspective via semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 20 Tai Dam artisans, leaders, and elders. **Phase 4**, the final phase, introduced a temporal dimension by re-surveying 185 tourists from the original cohort one year later to assess the evolution and durability of their loyalty, comparing creative tourism participants with non-participants.

Results: The multi-phase research validated the proposed theoretical framework. Quantitative analysis confirmed that the perceived value and authenticity of souvenirs (PVAS) was a significant predictor of engagement in creative tourism (CRT) ($\beta = 0.58$), which in turn was a primary driver of continuing tourist loyalty (CTTL) ($\beta = 0.65$). Qualitative findings explained this link through three themes from the tourist perspective: “the narrative imperative,” the pursuit of authentic connection,” and the high value placed on “the embodied souvenir.” At the same time, a critical counter-narrative emerged from the host community, reflecting “the burden of authenticity” and a strong preference for “students” over “customers.” The long-term findings also indicate that loyalty generated through creative participation is significantly more enduring. The CRT group demonstrated a markedly higher repeat visitation rate (28% compared with 6%) and word-of-mouth recommendations about the destination (82% compared with 45%) after one year.

Applications of this Study: The findings provide an evidence-based blueprint for stakeholders. Destination managers should shift from promoting sites to curating holistic experiences that support artisans as cultural facilitators. Cultural entrepreneurs can enhance value by reframing their offerings from products to experiences, such as workshops, to attract a more engaged tourist segment. Policymakers should invest in “soft infrastructure,” such as community capacity-building and legal support for intellectual property, while implementing policies to mitigate the “burden of authenticity,” for instance, by supporting community-defined “backstage” cultural spaces.

Conclusion: This research confirms that sustainable tourist loyalty is co-created through the fusion of meaningful cultural products and participatory experiences. This process is grounded in mutual respect, community empowerment, and fair economic exchange. Sustainable loyalty is not a commodity sold to tourists but a relationship built through a dynamic dialogue between a guest and a host. To achieve both economic prosperity and cultural preservation, tourism development must prioritize authentic engagement, community well-being, and fostering long-term, mutually beneficial relationships.

บทคัดย่อ

ที่มาและวัตถุประสงค์: ในภูมิภาคที่มีการท่องเที่ยวที่มีการแข่งขันสูงขึ้น การสร้างความภักดีที่ยั่งยืนของนักท่องเที่ยวถือเป็นสินทรัพย์ที่สำคัญต่อความยั่งยืนในระยะยาวของจุดหมายปลายทาง นักท่องเที่ยวสมัยใหม่ซึ่งขับเคลื่อนด้วย “เศรษฐกิจเชิงประสบการณ์” (experience economy) กำลังเปลี่ยนจากการท่องเที่ยวชมทิวทัศน์แบบตั้งรับไปสู่การแสวงหาประสบการณ์ที่แท้จริงและดื่มด่ำ เพื่อสร้างความผูกพันทางอารมณ์ที่ลึกซึ้ง การท่องเที่ยวเชิงสร้างสรรค์ (creative tourism) ซึ่งเน้นการมีส่วนร่วมลงมือทำได้กลายเป็นกรอบการทำงานที่สำคัญสำหรับแนวคิดนี้ โดยยกระดับของที่ระลึกทางวัฒนธรรมจากเพียงของฝากให้กลายเป็นตัวกระตุ้นการมีส่วนร่วมที่ลึกซึ้งยิ่งขึ้น อย่างไรก็ตาม ความเข้าใจอย่างครอบคลุมเกี่ยวกับความสัมพันธ์เชิงโครงสร้างระหว่างทุนทางวัฒนธรรม คุณค่าของที่ระลึก การท่องเที่ยวเชิงสร้างสรรค์ และความภักดีในระยะยาวยังคงมีจำกัด โดยงานวิจัยมักละเลยเสียงของชุมชนเจ้าบ้านและวิวัฒนาการของความภักดีในระยะยาว งานวิจัยนี้จึงเข้ามาเติมเต็มช่องว่างดังกล่าวโดยการพัฒนาและทดสอบตัวแบบองค์รวมของห่วงโซ่คุณค่าความภักดี โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์ 4 ประการ ได้แก่ 1) เพื่อพิสูจน์ความเชื่อมโยงเชิงสาเหตุระหว่างคุณค่าของที่ระลึก การท่องเที่ยวเชิงสร้างสรรค์ และความภักดีในเชิงปริมาณ 2) เพื่อสำรวจประสบการณ์ของนักท่องเที่ยวที่อยู่เบื้องหลังความเชื่อมโยงเหล่านี้ในเชิงคุณภาพ 3) เพื่อบูรณาการมุมมองของชุมชนเจ้าบ้านเพื่อให้เกิดความเข้าใจที่สมดุล และ 4) เพื่อประเมินความคงทนของความภักดีในระยะยาว โดยมีพื้นที่วิจัยคือชุมชนชาติพันธุ์ไทดำในประเทศไทยซึ่งมีชื่อเสียงด้านมรดกการท่องเที่ยว

วิธีการศึกษา: การศึกษานี้ใช้การออกแบบการวิจัยแบบผสมวิธีเชิงระยะยาวและหลายขั้นตอน (multi-phase, longitudinal mixed-methods design) เพื่อสร้างความเข้าใจที่ครอบคลุม **ระยะที่ 1** ใช้การสำรวจเชิงปริมาณกับนักท่องเที่ยว 400 คน โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์สมการโครงสร้างกำลังสองน้อยที่สุดบางส่วน (PLS-SEM) เพื่อทดสอบตัวแบบโครงสร้างตามสมมติฐาน **ระยะที่ 2** เป็นการสำรวจเชิงคุณภาพผ่านการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกกับนักท่องเที่ยว 18 คน เพื่อเจาะลึกเรื่องราวที่เชื่อมโยงคุณค่าของที่ระลึกเข้ากับการมีส่วนร่วมเชิงสร้างสรรค์ **ระยะที่ 3** รวบรวมมุมมองของชุมชนเจ้าบ้านผ่านการสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างและการสนทนากลุ่มกับช่างฝีมือ ผู้นำ และผู้อาวุโสชาวไทดำจำนวน 20 คน **ระยะที่ 4** ซึ่งเป็นระยะสุดท้าย เป็นการเพิ่มมิติของเวลาโดยสำรวจซ้ำกับนักท่องเที่ยว 185 คนจากกลุ่มเดิมในอีกหนึ่งปีต่อมา เพื่อประเมินวิวัฒนาการและความคงทนของความภักดี โดยเปรียบเทียบระหว่างกลุ่มที่เข้าร่วมและไม่ได้เข้าร่วมกิจกรรมการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสร้างสรรค์

ผลการศึกษา: การวิจัยหลายขั้นตอนได้ยืนยันความถูกต้องของกรอบแนวคิดเชิงทฤษฎีที่น่าเสนอ การวิเคราะห์เชิงปริมาณยืนยันว่าคุณค่าและความแท้จริงของของที่ระลึกที่รับรู้ (Perceived Value and Authenticity of Souvenirs - PVAS) เป็นตัวทำนายที่สำคัญของการมีส่วนร่วมในการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสร้างสรรค์ (Creative Tourism - CRT) ($\beta = 0.58$) ซึ่งในทางกลับกันเป็นตัวขับเคลื่อนหลักของความภักดีอย่างต่อเนื่องของนักท่องเที่ยว (Continuing Tourist Loyalty - CTTL) ($\beta = 0.65$) ผลการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพอธิบายความเชื่อมโยงนี้ผ่าน 3 ประเด็นหลักจากมุมมองของนักท่องเที่ยว ได้แก่ “ความจำเป็นเชิงเรื่องเล่า” (the narrative imperative), “การแสวงหาความเชื่อมโยงที่แท้จริง” (the pursuit of authentic connection) และการให้คุณค่าสูงกับ “ของที่ระลึกที่เปี่ยมด้วยประสบการณ์” (the embodied souvenir) ในขณะเดียวกัน ก็ปรากฏเรื่องเล่าโต้แย้งที่สำคัญจากชุมชนเจ้าบ้าน ซึ่งสะท้อนถึง “ภาระแห่งความจริงแท้” (the burden of authenticity) และความต้องการที่จะมองนักท่องเที่ยวเป็น “ผู้เรียนรู้” (students) มากกว่า “ลูกค้า” (customers) ผลการวิจัยในระยะยาวยังแสดงให้เห็นว่าความภักดีที่เกิดจากการมีส่วนร่วมเชิงสร้างสรรค์มีความคงทนมากกว่าอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ โดยกลุ่ม CRT มีอัตราการกลับมาเยือนซ้ำ (28% เทียบกับ 6%) และการบอกต่อเกี่ยวกับจุดหมายปลายทาง (82% เทียบกับ 45%) สูงกว่าอย่างชัดเจนหลังจากผ่านไปหนึ่งปี

การประยุกต์ใช้: ผลการวิจัยนี้ได้มอบพิมพ์เขียวบนฐานของข้อมูลเชิงประจักษ์สำหรับผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสีย ผู้จัดการแหล่งท่องเที่ยวควรเปลี่ยนจากการส่งเสริมสถานที่ไปสู่การสร้างประสบการณ์แบบองค์รวม และสนับสนุนช่างฝีมือในฐานะผู้เอื้ออำนวยทางวัฒนธรรม ผู้ประกอบการวัฒนธรรมสามารถเพิ่มมูลค่าโดยเปลี่ยนกรอบการนำเสนอจากผลิตภัณฑ์ไปสู่ประสบการณ์ เช่น การจัดเวิร์กช็อป เพื่อดึงดูดนักท่องเที่ยวกลุ่มที่มีส่วนร่วมมากขึ้น ผู้กำหนดนโยบายควรลงทุนใน “โครงสร้างพื้นฐานเชิงสังคม” (soft infrastructure) เช่น การสร้างขีดความสามารถของชุมชนและการสนับสนุนทางกฎหมายด้านทรัพย์สินทางปัญญาควบคู่ไปกับการใช้นโยบายเพื่อลดทอน “ภาระแห่งความจริงแท้” เช่น การสนับสนุนพื้นที่ทางวัฒนธรรม “หลังบ้าน” (backstage) ที่กำหนดโดยชุมชน

บทสรุป: งานวิจัยนี้ยืนยันว่าความภักดีที่ยั่งยืนของนักท่องเที่ยวถูกสร้างขึ้นร่วมกัน ผ่านการผสมผสานระหว่างผลิตภัณฑ์ทางวัฒนธรรมที่เปี่ยมความหมายและประสบการณ์แบบมีส่วนร่วม กระบวนการนี้ต้องอาศัยรากฐานของการเคารพซึ่งกันและกัน การเสริมสร้างศักยภาพชุมชน และการแลกเปลี่ยนทางเศรษฐกิจที่เป็นธรรม ความภักดีที่ยั่งยืนไม่ใช่สินค้าที่ขายให้นักท่องเที่ยว แต่เป็นความสัมพันธ์ที่สร้างขึ้นผ่านบทสนทนาที่มีพลวัตระหว่างแขกผู้มาเยือนและเจ้าบ้าน เพื่อให้บรรลุทั้งความเจริญรุ่งเรืองทางเศรษฐกิจและการอนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรม การพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวจะต้องให้ความสำคัญกับการมีส่วนร่วมที่แท้จริง สุขภาวะของชุมชน และการส่งเสริมความสัมพันธ์ระยะยาวที่เป็นประโยชน์ร่วมกัน

Introduction

1. The Evolving Quest for Loyalty and the Imperative of Sustainability

In the increasingly competitive global tourism industry, tourist loyalty has evolved from a desirable outcome into a critical strategic asset for long-term destination success (Jebbouri et al., 2021). Contemporary travelers seek authentic, emotionally resonant experiences rather than standardized itineraries, reflecting the broader shift toward the experience economy (Candra, Yasri, & Abror, 2025). In this context, loyalty extends beyond repeat visits to encompass affective bonds grounded in trust, inspiration, and a sense of belonging that enhance price tolerance and resilience to minor service failures.

This affective loyalty is further amplified through positive word-of-mouth, particularly via digital and social media platforms, transforming loyal tourists into credible advocates and co-marketers of destinations (Huang & Chelliah, 2025). Such advocacy reduces customer acquisition costs while strengthening destination reputation and social legitimacy within host communities.

Crucially, the pursuit of durable tourist loyalty is intrinsically linked to sustainable tourism development. Sustainable tourism seeks to balance economic benefits with cultural integrity, social equity, and long-term environmental stewardship (Tian et al., 2020; Uslu et al., 2023). As conscious consumerism grows, travelers increasingly favor destinations demonstrating ethical and sustainable practices, positioning sustainability as both a moral imperative and a competitive advantage (Yuliana et al., 2023).

Positive and meaningful tourist engagement plays a pivotal role in this relationship. Deep satisfaction fosters repeat visitation, advocacy, and pro-social behaviors that support local economies and cultural preservation (Shen, Guo, & Wu, 2014). When destinations actively preserve heritage, support local communities, and reduce environmental impacts, they enhance experiential authenticity and quality, thereby strengthening emotionally rooted loyalty (Park, Choi, & Lee, 2019; Zhang, Yin, & Peng, 2021). This reciprocal dynamic creates a virtuous cycle in which sustainable practices cultivate loyalty, and loyal tourists reinforce sustainability, forming the foundation for long-term tourism resilience.

2. Creative Tourism, Cultural Capital, and the Quest for Authenticity

Cultural tourism is a globally significant sector, accounting for approximately 40% of international tourism arrivals and exhibiting growth rates exceeding those of other tourism segments (UN Tourism, 2024). In Thailand, cultural tourism constitutes a strategic pillar of the national economy and a core mechanism of the country's soft power policy, supporting income distribution to local communities through creative and cultural routes. For ethnic destinations such as the Tai Dam community in Nakhon Pathom, however, a critical challenge lies in transforming static cultural capital—such as traditional weaving practices and linguistic heritage—into dynamic creative experiences that appeal to contemporary tourists while safeguarding cultural integrity.

The Tai Dam community possesses rich intangible cultural heritage, most notably Pha Sin Tin Jok, a handwoven textile featuring symbolic motifs that reflect spiritual and cosmological beliefs, as well as a distinct language and traditional script. These elements represent “living heritage” that can be activated through hands-on workshops and storytelling, offering tourists immersive and authentic experiences (Qi-Jie et al., 2012). Such creative tourism experiences have been widely recognized for fostering emotional bonds between visitors and destinations, thereby laying the foundation for enduring tourist loyalty. By shifting tourists from passive spectators to active participants, creative tourism challenges the conventional sightseeing gaze and replaces standardized consumption with co-creation, experiential learning, and meaningful human connection (Šebová et al., 2014).

Within this immersive context, souvenirs assume a pivotal role. No longer trivial keepsakes, culturally grounded souvenirs function as meaningful artifacts that extend and anchor the tourist experience, reinforcing memory, emotion, and cultural resonance (Chang, Wall, & Hung, 2012; He & Timothy, 2023). When designed and produced through local tangible and intangible cultural capital, souvenirs become objectified cultural capital, transforming abstract experiences into enduring symbols of authenticity and cultural exchange (Torabian & Arai, 2016; Liu, Chen, & Wang, 2022). A hand-woven Tai Dam textile, for instance, becomes not merely a product but a tangible reminder of shared learning and engagement with living traditions.

In practice, the Tai Dam community has operationalized creative tourism through interactive showcases, such as at the Kasetsart Kamphaeng Saen Agriculture Fair, where visitors participate in Pia Flower embroidery and traditional weaving workshops. These activities transform exhibition spaces into “living classrooms,” enabling tourists to co-create souvenirs, enhancing perceived authenticity, and cultivating long-term interest and loyalty, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Practical Implementation of Creative Tourism at Kasetsart Kamphaeng Saen Agriculture Fair
(Source: Tamnanwan & Sangnak, 2025)

3. Addressing the Research Gap: A Multi-Phase, Multi-Perspective Approach

Notwithstanding the recognized significance of these concepts, a comprehensive empirical grasp of their intricate structural interdependencies remains surprisingly circumscribed, particularly within distinct ethnic milieus. The existing body of research often adopts a siloed approach, examining these concepts in isolation or from a single, tourist-centric perspective. A significant gap in the literature is the absence of holistic models that integrate the host community's perspective and account for the evolution of loyalty over time. The host's voice, a source of cultural capital, is often absent, and loyalty is typically measured as static intention rather than evolving behavior. This study directly addresses this deficiency by focusing on the Tai Dam ethnic group in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand (Taecharungroj & Tansitpong, 2017).

Recognizing that traditional quantitative or qualitative methods alone tell only part of the story and can omit the community's voice, this research adopts a multi-phase, mixed-perspective explanatory sequential design to forge a more complete and dynamic understanding of the cultural tourism value chain. This approach was deliberately chosen to leverage the strengths of multiple methodologies synergistically, building a progressively richer picture with each phase. The principal aim was fourfold, with each phase addressing a specific research objective: Phase 1 (Quantitative Tourist Survey) established the statistical foundation and identifies key relationships; Phase 2 (Qualitative Tourist Interviews) explained and elaborated upon significant statistical findings; Phase 3 (Qualitative Host Community Inquiry)

incorporated the perspectives of Tai Dam artisans and leaders, critical for an ethical and balanced understanding; and Phase 4 (Quantitative-Longitudinal Tourist Follow-Up) introduced a temporal dimension to assess the durability of loyalty, by systematically weaving together the “what” of statistical patterns, the “why” of tourist experience, the “so what” of host community impact, and the “what next” of long-term loyalty. This research endeavors to forge a new, more holistic, and ethically-grounded lens through which to understand and strategically manage the intricate dynamics of cultural tourism and loyalty creation (Creswell, 2024).

Building upon this critical context and identified research gap, the subsequent section systematically reviews the pertinent academic literature to establish a robust theoretical framework and articulate the specific hypotheses guiding this multi-phase investigation into the drivers of continuing tourist loyalty.

Research Objectives

1. To quantitatively establish the causal links between souvenir value, creative tourism, and loyalty.
2. To qualitatively explore the tourist experiences behind these links.
3. To integrate the host community's perspective for a balanced understanding.
4. To assess the durability of loyalty over an extended period.

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

This section undertakes a systematic and comprehensive review of the pertinent academic literature to establish a robust theoretical underpinning for the proposed causal model. Drawing upon established theories in tourism management, consumer behavior, cultural studies, and strategic design, each core construct is carefully delineated, and the hypothesized relationships between them are presented and justified.

1. Souvenir Product Development (SPD) and Its Foundational Antecedents

SPD in cultural tourism is critical to the destination experience and local economy. It involves the thoughtful, strategic, and culturally sensitive creation of items that champion local culture and conserve traditional skills. A successful SPD process is a complex synthesis of several key inputs.

1.1 Integrated Cultural Capital and Local Identity (ICCLI): The foundation of any authentic cultural product is the meaningful amalgamation of local cultural capital and the destination's distinct identity. Cultural capital encompasses both tangible resources (e.g., traditional textile patterns, unique raw materials) and intangible resources (e.g., myths, artisanal skills, community rituals). When skillfully embedded in products, these resources elicit potent emotional resonance. For the Tai Dam, this pertains to their unique weaving traditions and symbolic patterns. The emphasis here is not merely on the existence of cultural assets but on their active integration and reflection of a distinct local identity, which makes SPD truly effective and authentic. This suggests that the process involves more than merely replicating traditions; it entails infusing products with the living essence of the culture (Ponglawhapun, 2024).

- Hypothesis H1: Integrated Cultural Capital and Local Identity (ICCLI) significantly positively influences the quality and effectiveness of SPD.

1.2 Souvenir Design Strategies (SDS): Strategic design shapes cultural capital into an appealing and marketable form. Effective design must strike a balance between tradition and contemporary appeal, avoiding uninspired replication

and disrespectful appropriation. It should reflect the destination's distinctiveness while meeting tourists' demands for aesthetics, functionality, and commemorative value. This highlights that SDS is not merely about aesthetics or market trends; it carries an ethical dimension. The explicit mention of avoiding "uninspired replication and disrespectful appropriation" underscores the importance of culturally sensitive and responsible design, aligning with principles of sustainable tourism (Fafouti et al., 2023).

- Hypothesis H2: Effective SDS have a significantly positive influence on the quality and marketability of SPD.

1.3 Efficiency of New Product Development (ENPD): A practical and flexible approach to new product development is essential when launching premium souvenirs into today's fast-moving marketplace. Success hinges on customizing products for different traveler groups, responding swiftly to emerging trends and feedback, and upholding consistent quality from start to finish. This emphasizes the importance of market responsiveness and adaptability in the product development process (Yan et al., 2024).

- Hypothesis H3: The ENPD processes significantly positively influence the overall success and sustainability of SPD.

1.4 Financial Sustainability of Development (FSD): The financial sustainability of the development enterprise is a critical determinant of its long-term success and ethical grounding. This ensures both short-term profitability and long-term operational continuity, as well as fair benefit sharing. Key indicators include a fair price–performance ratio, product durability, and transparent revenue distribution. The influence of FSD extends beyond mere financial viability to encompass ethical grounding and trust. This connection is crucial for sustainable tourism, where economic benefits must be equitably distributed, and operations must be transparent, as these factors affect both the quality of the product and its perceived value (Snyman & Bricker, 2019).

- Hypothesis H4: The FSD has a significant influence on the long-term viability and quality of SPD.

2. Perceived Value and Authenticity of Souvenirs (PVAS) and Its Multifaceted Drivers

PVAS represent a consumer's holistic assessment of a product's utility and significance. In cultural souvenirs, authenticity, encompassing objective, constructive, and existential dimensions, is a primary determinant of perceived value. PVAS is not an inherent quality but is actively constructed in tourists' minds, shaped by personal experiences and interactions with the souvenir's cultural context (Shen & Yaacob, 2024).

2.1 Marketing and Communication Strategies (MMSS): Strategic marketing, including compelling storytelling and authentic branding, articulates PVAS. These strategies illuminate the value inherent in a cultural item by conveying its narrative, craftsmanship, and the identity embedded within it. This suggests that MMSS is not just about promoting a product but about articulating its inherent narrative and cultural significance, aligning with the qualitative finding of "the narrative imperative" (Leong et al., 2024).

- Hypothesis H5: Effective MMSS significantly positively influence tourists' PVAS.

2.2 Financial Sustainability as a Cue for Trust (FSD → PVAS): The perceived ethical grounding of the enterprise can influence PVAS. A financially stable and ethically managed process that ensures fair wages and uses authentic materials serves as a powerful signal of quality and trustworthiness to consumers. This reveals a crucial pathway: FSD not only affects product development but also directly influences consumers' perceptions of value and authenticity through ethical cues. This highlights the growing importance of transparent and ethical supply chains in shaping consumer trust and perceived value (Ezra & Duffy, 2022).

- Hypothesis H6: The perceived financial sustainability and ethical practices of development significantly influence tourists' PVAS.

2.3 SPD as the Primary Determinant of PVAS: The most direct influence on PVAS comes from the quality and integrity of the SPD process itself. A well-developed souvenir is inherently perceived as more valuable and authentic (Suttikun & Meeprom, 2021).

- Hypothesis H7: The overall quality and integrity of SPD have a significant influence on tourists' PVAS.

2.4 Information Technology and Innovation (ICIT): The creative integration of technology, like QR codes or augmented reality, offers powerful new tools to enhance PVAS by creating personalized, immersive experiences that bring a product's story to life. While theoretically promising, the lack of support for this hypothesis in the quantitative results suggests that the practical implementation of technology must genuinely enhance perceived value and authenticity, rather than merely providing information (Prabuddha et al., 2024).

- Hypothesis H8: The innovative use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has a significant influence on tourists' PVAS.

2.5 Perceived Community Involvement (PCInv): When tourists perceive that local communities are genuinely and equitably involved in and benefit from souvenir production, it significantly enhances the product's perceived authenticity and social value. This suggests that PCInv is a crucial factor in social sustainability, directly influencing perceived value among tourists. The finding that it acts as a mediator (CTSDC → PCInv → PVAS) implies a more complex causal chain, highlighting how a supportive broader context enables community involvement, which then enhances perceived value (Kattiyapornpong & Rattanaphinanchai, 2020).

- Hypothesis H9: PCInv significantly influences PVAS (as a mediating path from Cultural Context and Sustainable Development framework (CTSDC)).

3. The Experiential Pathway to Loyalty: PVAS, Creative Tourism (CRT), and Continuing Tourist Loyalty (CTTL)

This study posits a nuanced trajectory to achieving loyalty, mediated by perceived product value and deep, experiential engagement in creative tourism.

3.1 PVAS as a Catalyst for CRT: High PVAS is hypothesized to lead directly to greater engagement in CRT experiences. A valuable and authentic souvenir can be a potent catalyst, triggering curiosity and a desire for deeper participation. This redefines the role of souvenirs: they are not merely post-experience reminders but drivers of deeper, active engagement. This highlights the strategic importance of souvenir design in activating further tourist participation (Shen & Lai, 2023).

- Hypothesis H10: PVAS significantly influence tourists' engagement in CRT experiences.

3.2 CRT as the Engine of CTTL: High-quality creative tourism experiences, characterized by active participation and meaningful interaction, are posited to nurture deep emotional connections that contribute significantly to CTTL. The memorable and personal nature of these experiences is crucial for encouraging repeat visits and enthusiastic recommendations. Creative tourism is positioned as the primary mechanism for generating durable, affective loyalty, moving beyond superficial satisfaction. The emphasis on the "memorable and personal nature" of these experiences is key, as it explains how the emotional bond is formed, leading to long-term loyalty and advocacy.

- Hypothesis H11: Engagement in high-quality CRT experiences significantly positively influences the development of CTTL.

4. The Foundational Ecosystem: Underlying Contextual Factors

The success of this entire system depends on foundational contextual factors that create the enabling environment for the ethical and practical development of cultural tourism.

4.1 Cultural Context and Sustainable Development Support (CTSDC): This overarching factor encompasses a supportive policy environment, fair regulatory frameworks, and strong community backing. This foundation is essential for ethically cultivating and leveraging cultural capital. CTSDC is the enabling environment for ethical cultural tourism. Its influence is broad, impacting the ability to leverage cultural capital, shape design strategies, and build community capacity. This highlights the crucial role of governance and policy in fostering sustainable and equitable tourism development (Jiang, Eck, & An, 2022).

- Hypothesis H12: A strong and supportive cultural context and sustainable development framework has a significant influence on the ability to leverage integrated cultural capital and local identity (ICCLI).

- Hypothesis H13: A strong and supportive cultural context and sustainable development framework significantly influences the CCTC stock.

4.2 ICCLI as a Core Asset: A strong sense of cultural identity within the host community shapes design strategies and builds the capacity of local stakeholders to engage with tourism on their terms. ICCLI is a dynamic asset that empowers the community. It influences both the creative output (SDS) and the community's organizational capacity (OCCR), underscoring the local community's agency in shaping its tourism engagement (Rocha, 2022).

- Hypothesis H14: ICCLI has a significant influence on the development of effective SDS.

- Hypothesis H15: ICCLI significantly influences OCCR.

4.3 Organizational/Community Capacity and Readiness (OCCR): This construct refers to the community's ability, knowledge, and skills to effectively manage and benefit from tourism development. Converting cultural treasures into excellent visitor experiences requires this social and human infrastructure. OCCR represents the human and social capital necessary for effective and sustainable tourism. It highlights that booming cultural tourism relies on empowering local stakeholders with the knowledge and skills to participate actively in and benefit from tourism activities (Moscardo et al., 2017).

- Hypothesis H16: High OCCR significantly influence the efficiency of new product development (ENPD).

The relationships hypothesized above form the basis of the structural model tested in this research. For clarity, Table 1 summarizes all proposed hypotheses, providing a concise overview of the theoretical framework before delving into the empirical investigation. This table serves as an indispensable guide for understanding the complex interdependencies explored in this study.

Table 1 Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Independent Variable (Cause)	Dependent Variable (Effect)
H1	Integrated Cultural Capital and Local Identity (ICCLI)	Souvenir Product Development (SPD)
H2	Souvenir Design Strategies (SDS)	Souvenir Product Development (SPD)
H3	Efficiency of New Product Development (ENPD)	Souvenir Product Development (SPD)
H4	Financial Sustainability of Development (FSD)	Souvenir Product Development (SPD)
H5	Marketing and Communication Strategies (MMSS)	Perceived Value and Authenticity of Souvenirs (PVAS)
H6	Financial Sustainability of Development (FSD)	Perceived Value and Authenticity of Souvenirs (PVAS)
H7	Souvenir Product Development (SPD)	Perceived Value and Authenticity of Souvenirs (PVAS)

Table 1 Summary of Hypotheses (cont.)

Hypothesis	Independent Variable (Cause)	Dependent Variable (Effect)
H8	Information and Communication Technology (ICT) / Innovation (ICIT)	Perceived Value and Authenticity of Souvenirs (PVAS)
H9	Perceived Community Involvement (PCInv)	Perceived Value and Authenticity of Souvenirs (PVAS)
H10	Perceived Value and Authenticity of Souvenirs (PVAS)	Creative Tourism (CRT)
H11	Creative Tourism (CRT)	Continuing Tourist Loyalty (CTTL)
H12	Cultural Context and Sustainable Development Support (CTSDC)	Integrated Cultural Capital and Local Identity (ICCLI)
H13	Cultural Context and Sustainable Development Support (CTSDC)	Cultural Capital of Tourism (CCTC) stock
H14	Integrated Cultural Capital and Local Identity (ICCLI)	Souvenir Design Strategies (SDS)
H15	Integrated Cultural Capital and Local Identity (ICCLI)	Organizational/Community Capacity and Readiness (OCCR)
H16	Organizational/Community Capacity and Readiness (OCCR)	Efficiency of New Product Development (ENPD)

Note. These hypotheses are derived from the literature review in Section 2 and serve as the basis for the quantitative model tested in Phase 1 of the research.

Research Methods

This study employs a multi-phase, mixed-perspective explanatory sequential design, deliberately structured to build a comprehensive and dynamic understanding of the cultural tourism ecosystem. Each phase is designed to inform the next, creating a rich tapestry of quantitative and qualitative data from multiple viewpoints and across time (Pappalepore, Maitland, & Smith, 2014). This pragmatic approach allows the research to harness the explanatory power of statistics, the contextual depth of narrative inquiry, and the crucial perspectives of both guests and hosts.

Phase 1: Quantitative Tourist Survey—Mapping the Structural Landscape

Phase 1 examined the hypothesized structural model from the tourist perspective, providing the quantitative foundation for later qualitative phases (Candra, Yasri, & Abror, 2025). A structured survey was administered to a convenience sample of 400 tourists and individuals interested in Tai Dam cultural products in Nakhon Pathom province, with strict inclusion criteria applied to mitigate selection bias (Chaidirek, 2025). The instrument was literature-based, validated using the IOC index, pilot-tested ($n = 50$), and demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.80$) (Chang & Hung, 2021). Data were collected using multi-item 7-point Likert scales and analyzed via PLS-SEM to assess measurement and structural models (Hair et al., 2022). Longitudinal follow-up procedures further reduced potential non-response bias.

Phase 2: Qualitative Tourist Interviews – Unveiling the Human Experience

Phase 2 employed a qualitative approach to explain the strong quantitative relationship between PVAS and engagement in CRT ($\beta = 0.58$). Reflecting an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, this phase explored the underlying mechanisms of this linkage from the tourist perspective. A purposive sample of 18 visitors who exhibited the PVAS–CRT relationship in Phase 1 participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Open-ended questions elicited narratives on how meaningful souvenirs motivated participation in creative activities (He & Timothy, 2023). Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, allowing key experiential themes to emerge and providing contextual depth to the quantitative findings.

Phase 3: Qualitative Host Community Inquiry – Incorporating the Artisan Voice

Phase 3 foregrounded Tai Dam community perspectives—artisans, leaders, and elders—using purposive stratified sampling ($n = 20$) to move beyond a tourist-centered lens (Park, Choi, & Lee, 2019). Data were collected via 15 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups to capture individual and collective experiences of cultural production and tourism impacts (Shen, Guo, & Wu, 2014). Interactions were conducted in the local language with a cultural liaison. Audio-recorded data were transcribed, translated, and thematically analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, with member checking ensuring interpretive accuracy, ethical rigor, and cultural respect.

Phase 4: Longitudinal Tourist Follow-Up – Tracking the Evolution of Loyalty

Phase 4 added a longitudinal dimension by re-surveying the initial tourist cohort one year later to assess the durability of loyalty beyond stated intentions (Akhoondnejad, 2016). A follow-up online survey yielded 185 matched responses (46.25%). Measures captured behavioral loyalty (repeat visits and online purchases), attitudinal loyalty (emotional attachment), and advocacy behaviors (recommendations and online promotion) (Yuliana et al., 2023). Longitudinal data were analyzed using paired-sample t-tests and regression models to examine whether initial engagement in CRT predicted more durable loyalty over time (Tosun et al., 2007). As shown in Figure 2, the study employed a four-phase longitudinal mixed-methods design: Phase 1 quantified structural relationships using PLS-SEM ($n = 400$), Phase 2 explored tourist experiences qualitatively ($n = 18$), Phase 3 incorporated host perspectives ($n = 20$), and Phase 4 assessed the long-term evolution of tourist loyalty one year after initial engagement.



Figure 2 Multi-Phase, Longitudinal Mixed-Methods Research Design Flowchart

(Source: Tamnanwan & Sangnak, 2025b)

Research Results

This section presents the comprehensive findings from the study's multi-phase, mixed-perspective explanatory sequential design. The four research phases organize the results to build a multi-layered understanding, systematically weaving together quantitative patterns, the lived experiences of tourists, the critical perspective of the host community, and the long-term evolution of tourist loyalty.

Phase 1: Quantitative Structural Model Results

The initial phase tested the proposed theoretical framework using data from a structured survey of 400 tourists and individuals interested in Tai Dam cultural products in Nakhon Pathom province. The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was assessed for reliability and validity before hypothesis testing. All constructs demonstrated high internal consistency and validity, meeting established thresholds and confirming the instrument's robustness. Table 2 summarizes the validation results.

Table 2 Summary of Measurement Model Validation

Assessment Criterion	Metric	Result	Status
Indicator Reliability	Outer Loadings	All significant and > 0.70	Confirmed
Internal Consistency	Composite Reliability (CR)	All constructs > 0.80	Confirmed
Convergent Validity	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	All constructs > 0.50	Confirmed
Discriminant Validity	HTMT Ratio	All ratios < 0.90	Confirmed

Note. Results confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model, a critical prerequisite for structural model testing. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; HTMT = Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio.

1. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was then analyzed to test the 16 hypothesized relationships. The model demonstrated strong explanatory power for the endogenous variables. The detailed results of the hypothesis tests are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Results of Hypothesis Testing (Structural Model)

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	P-value	Finding
H1	ICCLI $\rightarrow$ SPD	0.42	< 0.001	Supported
H2	SDS $\rightarrow$ SPD	0.35	< 0.001	Supported
H3	ENPD $\rightarrow$ SPD	0.23	0.011	Supported
H4	FSD $\rightarrow$ SPD	0.19	0.028	Supported
H5	MMSS $\rightarrow$ PVAS	0.28	< 0.001	Supported
H6	FSD $\rightarrow$ PVAS	0.16	0.041	Supported
H7	SPD $\rightarrow$ PVAS	0.49	< 0.001	Supported
H8	ICIT $\rightarrow$ PVAS	0.07	0.215	Not Supported
H9	PCInv $\rightarrow$ PVAS	0.24	0.008	Supported *

Table 3 Results of Hypothesis Testing (Structural Model) (cont.)

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	P-value	Finding
H10	PVAS $\rightarrow$ CRT	0.58	< 0.001	Supported
H11	CRT $\rightarrow$ CTTL	0.65	< 0.001	Supported
H12	CTSDC $\rightarrow$ ICCLI	0.55	< 0.001	Supported
H13	CTSDC $\rightarrow$ CCTC	0.61	< 0.001	Supported
H14	ICCLI $\rightarrow$ SDS	0.47	< 0.001	Supported
H15	ICCLI $\rightarrow$ OCCR	0.51	< 0.001	Supported
H16	OCCR $\rightarrow$ ENPD	0.44	< 0.001	Supported

Note.* Denotes a H9 represents the supported mediating path from CTSDC to PCInv and then to PVAS.

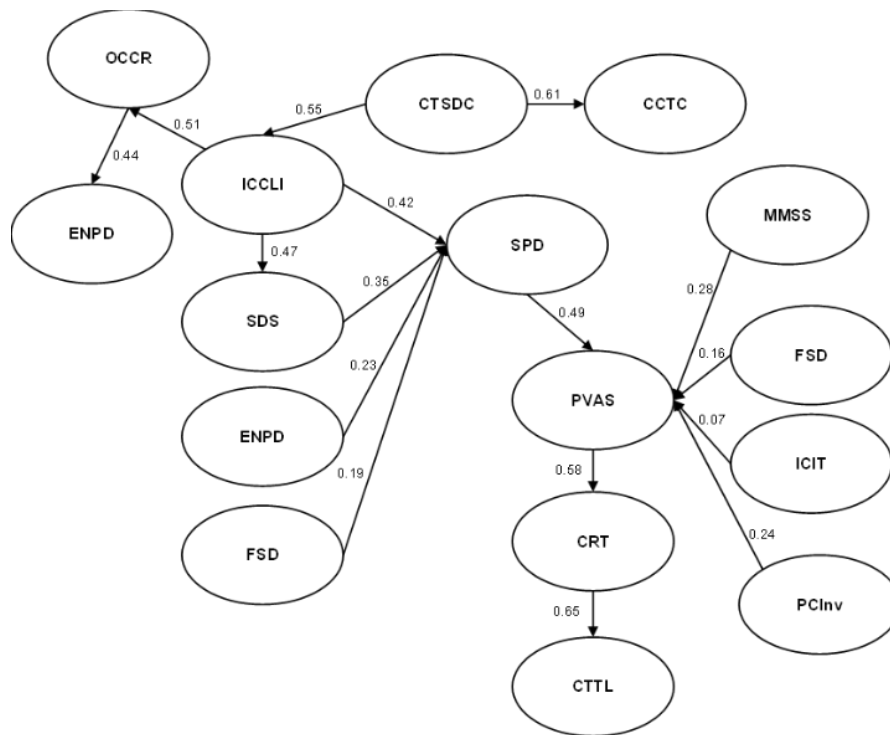


Figure 3 Structural Model

(Source: Tamnanwan & Sangnak, 2025c)

Based on Figure 3, the structural model illustrates a multi-layered causal mechanism through which enduring tourist loyalty is co-created by integrating cultural products with participatory experiences. Foundational conditions—CTSDC and ICCLI—act as key antecedents of SPD and OCCR. Together with SDS and ENPD, these factors significantly enhance the PVAS.

PVAS emerges as the central catalyst ($\beta = 0.58$), motivating tourists to transition from passive consumption to active engagement in CRT. This participatory engagement subsequently functions as the primary driver of CTTL ($\beta = 0.65$), fostering emotional attachment that translates into repeat visitation and sustained destination advocacy. Quantitative results strongly support this causal chain, identifying PVAS $\rightarrow$ CRT as the strongest predictive pathway, thereby providing a robust empirical foundation for the qualitative exploration of immersive cultural experiences (Li, Yang, & Lau, 2021; Candra, Yasri, & Abror, 2025).

Phase 2: Qualitative Findings from the Tourist Experience

This phase was designed to explain and elaborate on the significant statistical findings from Phase 1, particularly the strong link between PVAS and CRT. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of 18 tourists. Thematic analysis of the transcripts revealed three major themes that explain the underlying mechanisms behind the quantitative relationships. Table 4 presents these themes and their connections to the quantitative findings.

Table 4 Thematic Analysis of the Tourist Experience

Theme	Core Concept / Description	Quote	Link to Quantitative Finding
1. The Narrative Imperative	"Tourists are not merely acquiring an object but are 'buying into' the cultural story, knowledge, and history the souvenir represents. A powerful narrative creates a desire for deeper, participatory engagement." (He & Timothy, 2023)	"The hand-woven scarf was beautiful, but it was just an object until the artisan explained the meaning of the motifs. Suddenly, I did not just want to own it; I wanted to understand it. That is why I signed up for the workshop."	"Explains why high PVAS, rich in narrative and meaning, directly motivates a desire to engage in CRT."
2. The Pursuit of Authentic Connection	"Tourists actively seek genuine, non-transactional interactions with local people. Creative workshops provide a structured and authentic opportunity for this connection, moving beyond the typical tourist-vendor relationship."	"The most memorable part of my trip was not a landmark; it was spending an afternoon with the potter, sharing stories while our hands were covered in clay. That human connection is what I was searching for."	"Clarifies that the 'Value' in PVAS is not just in the object but in its potential to facilitate authentic human connection, which is realized through CRT."
3. The Embodied Souvenir	"The most valuable and authentic souvenir is often the one the tourist co-creates or makes themselves. This 'embodied souvenir' serves as a tangible anchor for memories, skills learned, and personal achievements, representing a profound form of existential authenticity."	"I bought a professionally made textile, but the one I treasure most is the small, imperfect one I made myself. It embodies the entire experience: the challenge, the learning, the laughter. It is my story, woven into the fabric."	"Demonstrates the ultimate fusion of PVAS and CRT, where the creation experience imbues the resulting object with unparalleled personal value and authenticity."

Note. These themes were derived from a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 18 tourists, conducted to explain the quantitative link found between Perceived Value and Authenticity of Souvenirs (PVAS) and engagement in Creative Tourism (CRT).

The theme of "the narrative imperative" emphasizes that tourists value not only the physical attributes of a souvenir but also the cultural narratives, knowledge, and history it embodies. This deeper understanding directly motivates a desire for participatory engagement in creative tourism. "The pursuit of authentic connection" further clarifies that the perceived value of a souvenir extends to its potential to facilitate genuine human interaction with locals, a capacity that creative tourism activities uniquely provide. Ultimately, "The embodied souvenir" showcases the profound fusion of PVAS and CRT, where the act of co-creation imbues the resulting object with unparalleled personal value and existential authenticity, rendering it a powerful anchor for memories and acquired skills.

Phase 3: Qualitative Findings from the Host Community Perspective

This phase incorporated the voices of 20 Tai Dam artisans, community leaders, and elders through semi-structured interviews and focus groups to move beyond a tourist-only perspective (Uslu et al., 2023). The objective was to understand their lived realities, motivations, and the perceived impacts of cultural tourism. Table 5 presents a thematic analysis of the host community's perspectives.

Table 5 Thematic Analysis of the Host Community Perspective

Theme	Core Concept / Description	Quote	Implications for the Tourism Model
1. The Burden of Authenticity	"Hosts feel immense pride in their cultural heritage but also experience significant pressure to perform a version of 'authenticity' that meets tourist expectations. This creates a form of 'emotional labor' and risks the commodification of their culture." (Zhang, Yin, & Peng, 2021)	"We are proud they travel to see us, but sometimes we feel like we are in a museum. We must always be smiling, always traditional. It is tiring to be 'authentic' all day, every day. Our culture is how we live, not just a show."	"It adds a critical counter-narrative to the tourist's quest for authenticity, revealing the potential negative social costs and pressures on the host community." (Park, Choi, & Lee, 2019)
2. "Customers" vs "Students."	"Hosts draw a sharp distinction between tourists who are transactional 'customers' and those who are respectful students. 'Typically engaging in creative tourism, the latter are seen as partners in a reciprocal exchange of knowledge and culture.'" (Zhang, Chen, & Hu, 2019)	"A customer buys a product and leaves. A student comes to learn, to listen. They respect our time and our knowledge. We prefer one good student over ten quick customers. It is more rewarding for our spirit and our community."	"Suggests that the quality of the host-guest interaction, a key feature of CRT, is a crucial moderator for positive outcomes, mitigating the risks of cultural commodification and fostering mutual respect." (Shen, Guo, & Wu, 2014)

Note. These themes were identified through a thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups with 20 Tai Dam community members, offering a critical perspective from the host community.

The theme "the burden of authenticity" presents a critical counterpoint to tourists' pursuit of authenticity. While hosts take pride in their heritage, they experience pressure to perform a curated version of their culture, thereby generating emotional labor and risks of commodification. This underscores the social costs that must be addressed for sustainable tourism to remain viable. The theme "customers" vs. "students" highlights hosts' distinction between transactional tourists and those who engage respectfully as learners in creative tourism. "Students" are perceived as partners in reciprocal knowledge exchange, fostering mutual respect and community well-being. Together, these findings suggest that the quality of host-guest interaction is a key moderator of positive outcomes, mitigating commodification risks and enhancing the sustainability of creative tourism.

Phase 4: Longitudinal Follow-Up on Loyalty Evolution

The final phase introduced a temporal dimension by re-surveying the initial tourist cohort one year later to assess the durability of their loyalty. The analysis compared the behavioral and attitudinal loyalty of tourists who had participated in

creative tourism (CRT Group) with that of those who had not (Non-CRT Group). Table 6 presents the comparative analysis of tourist loyalty after one year.

Table 6 Comparative Analysis of Tourist Loyalty After One Year

Loyalty Indicator	Measurement Metric	CRT Group	Non-CRT Group	Key Finding / Statistical Note
Behavioral Loyalty	Returned to the destination within one year.	28%	6%	The CRT group demonstrated a significantly higher rate of repeat visitation ($p < 0.01$).
	Purchased Tai Dam products online.	41%	12%	Engagement in CRT was strongly predictive of subsequent direct economic support.
Attitudinal Loyalty	“Expressed a “strong” or “powerful”, emotional connection to the community.” (Jebbouri et al., 2021)	75%	35%	The emotional bond formed through creative engagement proved to be significantly more durable over time.
Advocacy (WoM)	Actively recommended the destination/ experience via social media or to friends/family. (Huang & Chelliah, 2025)	82%	45%	CRT participants became far more active and enthusiastic advocates for the destination.

Note. Data are from a follow-up survey of the initial tourist cohort ($n = 185$) conducted one year later, comparing the Creative Tourism (CRT) Group with the Non-CRT Group. WoM = Word-of-Mouth.

The longitudinal results unequivocally demonstrate that the loyalty forged through participatory, co-creative experiences is significantly more durable and resilient than loyalty derived from passive consumption. The CRT group exhibited a markedly higher rate of repeat visits (28% vs. 6%), online product purchases (41% vs. 12%), stronger emotional connection (75% vs. 35%), and more active advocacy (82% vs. 45%) than the Non-CRT group. This indicates that the initial investment in a creative experience translated into more significant long-term value for the destination through sustained repeat visits, continued economic support, and powerful, credible advocacy.

Integrated Discussion: Weaving a Multi-Threaded Narrative

The longitudinal findings unequivocally demonstrate that loyalty cultivated through participatory, co-creative tourism experiences is significantly more durable than loyalty derived from passive consumption. Tourists participating in CRT exhibited substantially higher repeat visitation (28% vs. 6%), online product purchases (41% vs. 12%), emotional attachment (75% vs. 35%), and advocacy behavior (82% vs. 45%) compared to the Non-CRT group. These results confirm that initial investment in creative engagement generates sustained economic, emotional, and reputational value for destinations.

Drawing on four interconnected research phases, this study offers actionable insights for destination managers, artisans, tourism entrepreneurs, and policymakers seeking resilient cultural tourism models grounded in cultural capital (Srichai Thapatiwong, & Tistueng, 2024).

Phase 1 confirmed a strong causal pathway in which PVAS significantly drives participation in CRT ($\beta = 0.58$), which in turn robustly predicts CTTL ($\beta = 0.65$). This underscores that loyalty cannot be manufactured through promotion alone but must be earned through authentic, value-rich experiences (Candra, Yasri, & Abror, 2025). For destination management organizations (DMOs), this necessitates a strategic shift from promoting destinations as visual spectacles

toward curating participatory cultural experiences supported by integrated product–service design and artisan-centered ecosystems (Pappalepore, Maitland, & Smith, 2014).

Phase 2 revealed that tourists interpret value primarily through narratives and emotional resonance. Themes such as the “narrative imperative” and “pursuit of authentic connection” indicate that souvenirs function as storytelling vessels rather than mere commodities. Experiential formats such as artisan-led workshops enable the creation of “embodied souvenirs” imbued with memory, meaning, and emotional attachment, thereby enhancing loyalty (Li, Yang, & Lau, 2021). Repositioning tourists as learners rather than customers fosters respectful engagement and deeper cultural appreciation (Bohne, 2021).

Phase 3 centered on host community well-being, uncovering the emotional labor and stress associated with the “burden of authenticity” experienced by artisans (Altamirano, 2022). While hosts valued cultural transmission, pressures of commodification and external expectations of authenticity generated fatigue and tension (Wu et al., 2021). These findings highlight the need for rights-based, community-centered tourism governance that protects cultural agency by ensuring fair pricing, emotional wellness support, and the creation of “backstage” spaces insulated from the constant tourist gaze (Prasetyo et al., 2021).

Phase 4 demonstrated that CRT engagement translates into loyalty as a durable economic and emotional asset, evidenced by repeat visitation, continued spending, and credible advocacy over time (Li, Chung, & Kim, 2018). These results suggest that destination branding should pivot from transactional visitation models toward relationship-based loyalty cultivation, emphasizing artisan-led experiences, memory-rich encounters, and community storytelling as core brand assets.

Practical and Managerial Implications

For **DMOs**, the findings emphasize experience curation over destination promotion. Supporting artisans as facilitators of cultural learning—through artisan trails, workshops, and experiential branding—can strengthen both destination identity and long-term loyalty.

For **cultural entrepreneurs and artisans**, reframing offerings from products to experiences creates new revenue streams, justifies premium pricing, and builds sustainable businesses rooted in loyal advocacy rather than one-time consumption.

For **policymakers and NGOs**, the study highlights the importance of investing in soft infrastructure, including community capacity building, intellectual property protection, and participatory governance structures. Addressing the burden of authenticity through community-defined backstage spaces and tourist education initiatives can significantly reduce host emotional labor and preserve cultural integrity (Zhao et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This multi-phase longitudinal study demonstrates that enduring tourist loyalty emerges through the co-creation of meaning between hosts and guests. Authentic cultural objects initiate the relationship, participatory experiences deepen emotional bonds, host empowerment validates ethical integrity, and shared memories sustain loyalty over time. Sustainable cultural tourism, therefore, depends on mutual respect, community well-being, and long-term relationship building rather than short-term transactional gains.

Limitations and Future Research

The study is limited to a single ethnic group (Tai Dam) and geographic context, which may constrain generalizability, and the Phase 4 response rate (46.25%) suggests potential attrition bias. Future research should conduct cross-cultural comparisons and explore how digital innovations, such as augmented reality (AR), can enhance the perceived authenticity and experiential value of embodied souvenirs.

Ethical Statement

The Human Research Ethics Committee reviewed and approved this research. All procedures were conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, and voluntary informed consent was obtained from all participants before their participation. Approval No. KUREC-KPS68/119.

Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies declaration: By the policy on the use of generative AI, the authors declare that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were utilized in the writing process of this manuscript. The authors are entirely responsible and accountable for the entire content of the work.

Declaration of interests:

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper

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