

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
CREATIVE RESEARCH AND STUDIES**

www.ijcrs.org

ISSN-0249-4655

**Souvenirs and their Brand Personalities: An Analysis of  
three Regions in Japan****Fiona Sussan**Professor, Department of Global Innovation Studies  
Toyo University, Tokyo, Japan**Abstract**

*Prior research suggested that souvenirs are the best products for place branding because souvenirs often reflect the images of the places visited.<sup>1</sup> However, whether souvenirs reflect the characteristics of tourism destinations is rarely investigated leading to the purpose of this paper to address this gap. More specifically, this paper used the brand personality concept to evaluate the alignment of souvenirs to destinations. The setting of this empirical research was in Japan in which destination food souvenirs are abundantly available and popular. With 5 brand personality dimensions that specifically address Japan<sup>2</sup>, this paper hypothesized that there are regional differences in destination souvenir brand personalities. A between-subject quasi-experiment that uses 36 adjectives from the brand personality dimension scale was conducted to test the hypotheses. The statistical student t-test results comparing the three groups of subjects evaluating three destinations (Hokkaido, Kyoto, Okinawa) supported most of the hypotheses. Nuanced interpretation of the results and subsequent managerial implications and further research were discussed.*

**Keywords:** Place Branding, Brand Personality, Omiyage, Food Souvenirs, Japan

**Introduction**

Food and travel are highly correlated activities. A recent report found that seventy percent of travellers typically bring back food or drink as souvenirs from their trips.<sup>3</sup> In the same report, the survey found 37% of U.S. travellers were willing to splurge on food and drink spending 27% of their travel budget on domestic trips and 16% on trip abroad. In fact, food is one of the main attractions for people to visit a place to begin with.<sup>4,5</sup> Not only that people are motivated to visit a place because of its food or engage in gastro-tourism<sup>6</sup>, they want to purchase food souvenirs to retain the memories of the experiences that they encountered at the places that they visited.<sup>7</sup>

Food souvenirs and the places that these souvenirs come from are intermingled. Research showed that travellers purchase souvenirs that reflect brand image of the places and the emotionality attached to the place visited.<sup>8</sup> Emotionality of a brand can be captured by their perceived brand personality.<sup>9</sup> While there is a small body of research investigates the brand personality of tourist destinations,<sup>10</sup> research that investigates whether food souvenirs of a place are congruent with the place branding is scant.

### **Statement of Problem**

People purchase food souvenirs to remind them of the places that they visit. Food souvenirs have emotionality attached to them. Emotionality of a product can be captured through brand personality. The emotionality attached to food souvenir can be captured by their brand personality, hence the need for the present study to investigate the brand personality of food souvenir brand personality.

### **Purposes of the Study**

- i. The study specifically seeks to understand consumers attitude toward food souvenir brands that originate from various places or destinations.
- ii. Ascertain to the extent that perceived brand personalities of food souvenirs align with tourism destination branding.
- iii. Determine the brand personalities of food souvenirs differ from destination to destination.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- i. To establish the relationship between food souvenir brand personality and destination branding through empirically evidence.
- ii. To determine that the brand personality of food souvenirs reflect the brand personality of the travel destination.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. Do food souvenirs have brand personalities exhibited in different brand personality dimensions?
- ii. To what extent do brand personality of destination food souvenirs differ from destination to destination?

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Food Souvenir***

The relationship between souvenir and destination is intertwined in that souvenirs have the capability to define a certain destination and to capture the unique traits of a place.<sup>11</sup> According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the origin of the word souvenir was from the Latin word *subvenire* which means 'to come to mind'. Souvenir is something kept as a reminder of a place one has visited. Applying this to the context of food souvenir, researchers confirmed that food souvenirs symbolize the destination as food often inspires the traveller to think of the food as a symbol of the region.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, food serves as an attraction to a place before visit and after visit as tourists subsequently bought food related souvenirs to retain that memory of the food experience at destination or the local culture.<sup>13,14</sup> Besides, food is always a popular souvenir choice as it is a good gift-giving option.<sup>15</sup>

Food souvenir is especially popular in Japan. Japan has a ritualistic custom called 'omiyage' gifting. The term Omiyage represents destination food souvenirs that one purchase for friends, families, and colleagues when they travel.<sup>16</sup> In that context, omiyage refers to inexpensive food items such as sweets, cakes, wine, and tea packaged nicely or wrapped with materials that are printed with destination sceneries.<sup>17</sup> It is not uncommon that Japanese tourists seek famous omiyage which capture the soul of the destination.<sup>18</sup> The main difference

of the meanings of omiyage and souvenirs in Japan and the West is that the former is obligatory while the latter is more likely to be purchased for oneself for keepsake.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Place Branding and Tourist Destination Branding***

Place branding is originally defined as the practice of applying brand strategy and other marketing techniques to the economic, socio-political and cultural developments of cities, regions, and countries and later extended to include engaging in marketing strategy activity with the goal to evoke positive emotions and psychological attachment to a community, a town, a city, or a country.<sup>20,21</sup> Place branding often uses trademarks to distinguish the uniqueness of the place from other places.<sup>22</sup> The purpose of place branding is to move toward promoting business development in a place, or advancing political agenda.<sup>23,24,25</sup> As such, place branding is a multi-layer activity that involves a web of stakeholders such as local authorities, private sector representatives, investment agencies, local business, and others. It is therefore the creation of a 'sense of place' that encompasses time, ancestry, landscape, and community.<sup>26</sup>

Tourism destination branding is one aspect of place branding viewed from the tourism industry or from the tourists.<sup>27</sup> Very crudely, tourism destination branding is conducted to lure consumers or visitors while place branding is to lure business. Tourism destination branding thus needs to create symbols that convey the cultural significance of a destination that will in turn add value to visitors.<sup>28,29</sup> In the operationalization of tourism destination branding, semi-government entities like destination management organizations (hereafter DMO) has become increasingly important in positioning the competitiveness of a tourism destination, including matching advertising language with destinations.<sup>30,31</sup>

### ***Brand Personality Dimensions for Japan***

Originally developed for the U.S. in 1997, brand personality dimensions were adapted and calibrated for Japan market. Brand personality (hereafter BP) is the perception consumers have toward a certain brand, and the perception can be direct or indirect and is emotional and symbolic. Directly, one can perceive the BP of a product or service via the use of a brand or via the CEO of a company.<sup>32,33</sup> Indirectly, BP can be perceived through product-related attributes, brand name, symbol or logo, price, and their distribution channel.<sup>34</sup> Brands with stronger BP are associated with higher levels of usage and preference than brands with weaker BP.<sup>35</sup>

The original US brand personality consists of five dimensions of Excitement, Competence, Sincerity, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. For example, in apparel brands and their BP, Diesel is perceived as excitement, Polo Ralph Lauren as sophistication, Timberland as Ruggedness, Gap as sincerity, J. Crew as competence.<sup>36</sup> These BP were captured by asking subjects to evaluate the personality attributes of these and other brands in the U.S.

For Japan, researchers replaced the dimension of ruggedness with peacefulness in the investigation of 24 brands in Japan (e.g., Suntory, Pocari sweat, Denter T toothpaste, Yomiuri Shimbun, Nintendo, Sony, Mizuno, and others).<sup>37</sup> According to these authors, there are 5 dimensions, 12 facets, and 36 adjectives in Japan Brand Personality. The dimensions are Excitement, Competence, Peacefulness, Sincerity, and Sophistication. More details of the facets and adjectives will be described later in the paper.

### ***Food Souvenir and Destination Branding***

Prior literature has mixed views on the relationships between destination branding and food souvenirs are mixed with some reporting success and some reporting failure. Prior studies that report success include a study about a food souvenir brand offered in a national park in Italy in which the values of freedom, animal welfare, and eco-sustainability positively influence the perception of food souvenir brands offered in the park.<sup>38</sup> However, in the case of the rebranding Nagano prefecture in a campaign of rebranding Nagano to the umbrella brand of Shinshu for local agricultural produce, wine, sake, rice, and shochu failed.<sup>39</sup>

The relationship between destination branding and food souvenirs can be bi-directional with place influencing food and food influencing place. On the one hand, research focuses more on place leading to food in the example of Italy national park, Japan Nagano rebranding to Shinshu. On the other hand, research reported that it is the food that leads to place branding by 1) the notion that it is the perceived value of souvenir food image that positively contributes to destination brand, food souvenir image positively contributes to touristic value;<sup>40</sup> 2) it is the unique food culture that boosts a destination brand;<sup>41</sup> 3) strong food image promotes purchase of food souvenir;<sup>42,43</sup> and 4. destination food image adds to destination brand evaluation.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Destination Branding Personality and Souvenir Branding Personality***

Previous research reported brand personalities of European cities, cities in Turkey, and others. For Turkey, researchers identified 6 brand personality dimensions among three major cities.<sup>45</sup> The six dimensions for Turkey are excitement (passionate, outgoing, feminine, sympathetic), malignancy (unreliable, arrogant, self-seeking), peacefulness (calm, domestic), competence (authoritarian, sophisticate), conservatism (religious, uneducated), and ruggedness. An earlier study that investigated three cities in the U.K. however found 3 dimensions of excitement, sincerity and conviviality.<sup>46</sup> Another research that used Aaker's brand personality dimension to investigate twelve European cities by analysing the websites of these cities reported that the personality of cities are mostly excitement related cultural attractions and activities, sophistication related to gastronomy.<sup>47</sup>

For food souvenir branding personality, researchers hypothesized and confirmed that there exists an alignment between souvenir brand personality and destination branding with empirical evidence from Hokkaido, Japan.<sup>48</sup> Their research found Hokkaido was highest in the Sincerity dimension followed by Sophistication. Another research reported mixed results hypothesizing Kyoto to be peaceful but did not find empirical support.<sup>49</sup> The same research did not hypothesize but found Okinawa to have the BP of Excitement.

### ***Japan Regional Souvenir and Destination Branding***

In Japan, Hokkaido, Kyoto, and Okinawa are ranked, in sequence, the top three prefectural brands in 2021.<sup>50</sup> These three destinations were the focus of this paper. For each of these destinations, sources from the official Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), semi-official Destination Management Organizations (hereafter DMOs), and independent third-party international tourism websites of Fodors and Lonely Planet were used. It is important to integrate official, semi-official, independent third-party, domestic, and international sources so that the views of multiple stakeholders are reported in any given tourist destination branding.<sup>51</sup> The process of capturing and summarizing each destination branding includes visiting websites and the many webpages of the sources, taking note of the common themes across sources, sorting through the location and the importance of the information (e.g., main page of website). As information on each website is subject to change at any time, the researcher conducted the search and analysis within one week in October, 2021.<sup>52</sup> The summary of the three destinations is as follows.

- i. According to various sources mentioned earlier, the number one ranking Hokkaido is filled with nature and wilderness alongside with its famous ski slopes like Niseko and Shirogane for overseas and domestic visitors seeking winter adventures. Hokkaido food souvenir brand personality is found to be predominantly sincerity followed by sophistication.<sup>53</sup>
- ii. In its second place, Kyoto is famous for its refined culture arts that exhibits exquisite craftsmanship and stellar designs in its arts and crafts. Owing to its traditions, history, and traditional architecture, Kyoto represents the spiritual heart of Japan and possesses a refined symbolic Kyoto mindset. Kyoto also boasts its refined traditional dining. As it comes to souvenir brand personality in Kyoto, prior research hypothesized Sophistication and Peacefulness but did not find empirical support.<sup>54</sup>
- iii. Okinawa, rounding up as the top three in prefecture branding in Japan, is a sub-tropical popular vacation destination with beaches and coral reefs. Sources describe the locals as fun-loving

Okinawans offering welcoming hospitality. It is the place for honeymoon tourists. From research of Okinawa souvenir brand personality, previous studies reported BP of Peacefulness and Excitement. Prior research hypothesized and found partial support of Peacefulness, did not hypothesize but found the facet of Happiness (Happy, Likable, Friendly) within Excitement dimension to be one of the most prominent BP of Okinawa.<sup>55</sup> More specifically, their factor-analysis based research found Happiness loaded on the first and the most important factor.

## Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated as supported by and extended from prior research findings:

Hokkaido has been found to have the strongest brand personality of sincerity from previous research leading to the hypothesis:

**Ho1.** For food souvenir of Hokkaido, the perception of their five dimensions of brand personality do not differ.

**Ha1.** For food souvenir of Hokkaido, the perception of their five dimensions of brand personality differs with the dimension of Sincerity most predominant.

Although there is an absence of prior academic research findings on the brand personality of Kyoto, most description from trade-related sources about place branding described Kyoto as refined in its culture, arts, gardens, and culinary dining pointing toward sophistication, elegance.

**Ho2.** For food souvenir of Kyoto, the perception of their five dimensions of brand personality do not differ.

**Ha2.** For food souvenir of Kyoto, the perception of their five dimensions of brand personality differs with the dimension of Sophistication most predominant.

Previous academic research found Okinawa food souvenir BP of Excitement, specifically Happiness.

**Ho3.** For food souvenir of Okinawa, the perception of their five dimensions of brand personality do not differ.

**Ha3.** For food souvenir of Okinawa, the perception of their five dimensions of brand personality differs with the dimension of Excitement most predominant.

## Research Methodology

### *Design of the Study*

This research uses a quasi-experiment approach and collects responses from three groups of subjects evaluating souvenir brand personality of three regions or three prefectures of Japan, namely Hokkaido, Kyoto, and Okinawa. Three food souvenir brands representing the three destinations (i.e., Hokkaido, Shiroyo; Kyoto, Nama Yatsunashi; and Okinawa, Santa Andagi) were used as stimuli. These brands were the best-selling food souvenirs in Japan reported in a national survey.<sup>56</sup>

This is a between-subject design with three versions that represent three regions. An online survey was constructed using Google Forms.

### *Population of the Study*

The population of the study is Japanese nationals.

### *Sample and Sampling Techniques*

This research uses non-random sampling technique. Japanese undergraduate students in a marketing research class at a university in Tokyo undertook the responsibility of soliciting responses from their Japanese friends and their friends' friends. A snowballing sampling method is used via social media platform.

### ***Instrument for Data Collection***

The instruments used for the measurement of BP was from the original Japan brand personality study developed by Aaker et al. (2001). There are a total of 36 adjectives categorized under five brand personality dimensions of Excitement (12 adjectives), Competence (9 adjectives), Peacefulness (6 adjectives), Sincerity (3 adjectives), and Sophistication (6 adjectives). Respondents were asked to rate to what extent a product describes each of the 36 personality traits in a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Demographics of age was also collected.

### ***Method of Data Collection***

This research followed the guidelines of research provided by the Research Ethics Board at the University where the data is collected. The researcher tasked the undergraduate students in the marketing research class as part of the deliverables of the course to design the survey using Google Forms and generate weblinks for the three regions. Students worked in teams and took many iterations to reach consensus and approval from the instructor. Responses were then solicited via social media (i.e., LINE in Japan) and email through a snowballing technique. The Google Forms survey began with an informed consent agreement, then respondents were introduced to the concept of brand personality and was asked to imagine that they were visiting a destination (three versions of Hokkaido, Kyoto, Okinawa) and they came across a food souvenir gift that they may consider purchasing. At that point, a color photo of the food souvenir was presented. After the photo, respondents were asked to evaluate the 36 adjectives representing the 5 brand personality dimensions. In between each dimension, a snippet of food trivia was inserted to avoid respondents' fatigue and boredom.

### ***Method of Data Analysis***

The research questions were answered by comparing the evaluation respondents give to each of the souvenir brand personality dimension in any given brand under investigation. More specifically, by comparing the means of each dimension within a brand shed light on the importance of each dimension. The hypotheses were tested with Student's t-test.

### **Results**

A total of 151 response was collected. After performing data cleaning removing responses that omitted evaluating an entire dimension or answered all 36 adjectives with the same rating, 130 responses were used for analysis.

Table 1 depicted the descriptive statistics of the 36 adjectives collected for each of the three brands. In the first column of the Table was the dimension, the second column was the facets. The facets were from the original Japan Brand Personality by Aaker and colleagues that adds a layer of refinement to the five dimensions. This paper did not analyse at the level of the facets but would reference it in the discussion section. Besides adjectives, means and standard deviations at the dimension level were also calculated by averaging adjectives that are originally categorized under each dimension.

Prior to hypotheses testing using Students' t-test, three assumptions had to be met.

- i. Data are normally distributed. Jarque-Bera test in Excel was used. For Hokkaido, 2 out of 36 adjectives were not normally distributed. For Kyoto, 4 out of 36 adjectives were not normally distributed. For Okinawa, 10 out of 36 adjectives were not normally distributed. However, at the dimension levels, none of the dimensions in the three destinations violated the normality test.
- ii. Outliers. Z scores in Excel was used to calculate outliers for each of the 36 adjectives for the three destinations. All the z scores fall within the absolute value of 2.5 confirming that there were no outliers in the data.<sup>57</sup>

- iii. Homogeneity of variance. F-test for equal variance in Excel was calculated across the three destinations and their dimensions. For within destination BP dimension comparisons, this test was not necessary. For the comparison of dimensions across destination, except for the Peacefulness dimension with no unequal variance across the pairs (i.e., Hokkaido and Kyoto, Hokkaido and Okinawa, Kyoto and Okinawa), all other four dimensions found unequal variance in the pairs of Hokkaido and Okinawa, and Kyoto and Okinawa. For pairs of unequal variance, t-test for unequal variance in Excel was used to test the hypotheses.

Tables 2 and 3 report the results of hypotheses testing within destination (Table 2) and across destination (Table 3). Based on Students t-test results, Ho1, Ho2, and Ho3 were rejected.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics of Adjectives and Dimensions for Three Destinations**

Dimension	Facet	Adjectives	Hokkaido	Kyoto	Okinawa
			n=44	n=41	n=45
			Means (SD)	Means (SD)	Means (SD)
Excitement	Talkative-ness	Talkative	2.20 (1.31)	2.46 (1.36)	4.51 (1.03)
		Funny	2.93 (1.53)	3.03 (1.61)	3.55 (1.14)
		Optimistic	2.69 (1.36)	2.80 (1.50)	2.11 (1.20)
	Freedom	Positive	2.80 (1.36)	2.76 (1.55)	4.72 (1.00)
		Contemporary	2.47 (1.27)	2.00 (1.07)	4.24 (1.37)
		Free	2.98 (1.37)	3.02 (1.57)	3.95 (1.24)
	Happiness	Friendly	3.47 (1.66)	3.44 (1.53)	5.15 (0.87)
		Happy	3.87 (1.49)	4.05 (1.58)	4.80 (1.09)
		Likable	3.80 (1.63)	3.80 (1.62)	4.72 (1.07)
	Energy	Youthful	2.56 (1.39)	2.51 (1.49)	3.55 (1.33)
		Energetic	2.76 (1.35)	2.95 (1.50)	2.56 (1.37)
Spirited		2.69 (1.36)	2.88 (1.54)	3.76 (1/48)	
<b>Excitement Dimension means (SD)</b>			<b>2.93 (0.86)</b>	<b>2.98 (1.05)</b>	<b>3.97 (0.65)</b>
Competence	Responsibility	Consistent	3.47 (1.70)	3.90 (1.61)	2.00 (0.89)
		Responsible	3.20 (1.56)	3.93 (1.42)	2.03 (1.14)
		Reliable	3.89 (1.45)	4.22 (1.44)	2.19 (1.09)
	Determination	Dignified	4.00 (1.48)	4.39 (1.32)	3.57 (1.41)
		Determined	3.98 (1.44)	4.10 (1.34)	3.09 (1.44)
		Confident	4.13 (1.53)	4.24 (1.51)	4.45 (1.27)
	Patience	Patient	3.40 (1.62)	3.71 (1.72)	4.13 (1.34)
		Tenacious	3.29 (1.66)	3.80 (1.66)	4.32 (1.41)
		Masculine	1.76 (1.00)	2.80 (1.23)	3.49 (1.47)
<b>Competence Dimension means (SD)</b>			<b>3.42 (1.10)</b>	<b>3.90 (1.06)</b>	<b>3.26 (0.68)</b>
Peacefulness	Mildness	Shy	2.76 (1.23)	3.29 (1.40)	4.77 (1.13)
		Mild mannered	4.16 (1.51)	4.17 (1.56)	3.09 (1.39)
		Peaceful	4.51 (1.47)	4.68 (1.51)	3.84 (1.61)
	Naivety	Naïve	3.04 (1.45)	2.68 (1.35)	3.95 (1.37)
		Dependent	2.67 (1.43)	2.78 (1.44)	2.53 (1.18)
		Childlike	2.33 (1.31)	2.17 (1.53)	3.25 (1.34)
<b>Peacefulness Dimension means (SD)</b>			<b>3.24 (0.87)</b>	<b>3.30 (0.87)</b>	<b>3.59 (0.73)</b>
Sincerity	Warmth	Warm	3.89 (1.70)	4.10 (1.69)	4.45 (1.27)
		Thoughtful	3.51 (1.44)	3.78 (1.42)	2.45 (1.17)

		Kind	4.38 (1.50)	4.50 (1.40)	4.67 (1.31)
<b>Sincerity Dimension means (SD)</b>			<b>3.93 (1.30)</b>	<b>4.11 (1.25)</b>	<b>3.86 (0.90)</b>
Sophistication	Elegance	Elegant	3.71 (1.77)	4.95 (1.66)	4.45 (1.51)
		Smooth	4.09 (1.52)	4.66 (1.65)	2.40 (0.89)
		Romantic	3.73 (1.67)	3.73 (1.47)	2.56 (1.27)
	Style	Stylish	3.51 (1.50)	3.73 (1.58)	1.79 (0.75)
		Sophisticated	3.84 (1.74)	4.59 (1.40)	4.77 (1.27)
		Extravagant	3.22 (1.36)	4.05 (0.50)	4.80 (1.30)
<b>Sophistication Dimension means (SD)</b>			<b>3.69 (1.25)</b>	<b>4.28 (1.24)</b>	<b>3.47 (0.59)</b>

**Table 2: Hypothesis testing of brand personality dimensions within Destination**

<b>Dimension Comparisons</b>	<b>Hokkaido t- stat (p-value)</b>	<b>Kyoto t- stat (p-value)</b>	<b>Okinawa t- stat (p-value)</b>
1 vs. 2	-2.38 (0.02)	-3.94 (0.00)	4.83 (0.00)
1 vs. 3	n.s.	-1.50 (0.07)	2.48 (0.00)
1 vs. 4	-3.40 (0.00)	-4.43 (0.00)	n.s.
1 vs. 5	-4.35 (0.00)	-5.12 (0.00)	3.64 (0.00)
2 vs. 3	n.s.	n.s.	-2.12 (0.02)
2 vs. 4	-2.03 (0.05)	n.s.	-3.40 (0.00)
2 vs. 5	n.s.	-1.49 (0.07)	-1.49 (0.07)
3 vs. 4	-2.99 (0.00)	-3.4 (0.00)	-1.49 (0.07)
3 vs. 5	-2.91 (0.00)	-4.14 (0.00)	n.s.
4 vs. 5	n.s.	n.s.	2.32 (0.01)

Note

- Dimension 1 = Excitement
- Dimension 2 = Competence
- Dimension 3 = Peacefulness
- Dimension 4 = Sincerity
- Dimension 5 = Sophistication



**Table 3: Hypothesis testing of brand personality across destinations**

Dimension	Hokkaido	Kyoto	Okinawa	Across Destinations Comparison		
				t-stat (p-value)		
				Hokkaido vs. Kyoto	Hokkaido vs. Okinawa	Kyoto vs. Okinawa
	Means (SD)			t-stat (p-value)		
<b>Excitement</b>	2.93 (0.80)	2.98 (1.05)	3.97 (0.65)	n.s.	-6.30 (0.00)	-5.18 (0.00)
<b>Competence</b>	3.42 (1.10)	3.90 (1.06)	3.26 (0.68)	-2.13 (0.02)	n.s.	3.34 (0.00)
<b>Peacefulness</b>	3.24 (0.87)	3.30 (0.87)	3.59 (0.73)	n.s.	-2.00 (0.02)	-1.62 (0.05)
<b>Sincerity</b>	3.93 (1.30)	4.11 (1.25)	3.86 (0.90)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
<b>Sophistication</b>	3.69 (1.25)	4.28 (1.24)	3.47 (0.59)	-2.40 (0.01)	n.s.	3.86 (0.00)

## Discussion

For Ha1, t-test results supported the notion that the predominant BP of Hokkaido was Sincerity. As reported in Table 2 earlier, sincerity dimension received the highest means or evaluation among the 5 dimensions measured for Hokkaido. However, Sincerity was not statistically different from Sophistication dimension within Hokkaido. When compared across destinations, Sincerity was not statistically significantly different from either Kyoto or Okinawa. In other words, as reported in Table 3 earlier, there was no difference among the three groups of Japanese respondents when it comes to evaluating Sincerity BP of the three food souvenirs from the three destinations. The results for Ha1 nevertheless confirmed the findings of Horii et al., 2018 in their study of Hokkaido BP, in which Sincerity was found to be the most important dimension.

For Kyoto BP in Hypothesis Ha2, t-test results supported the hypothesized BP of Kyoto being predominantly Sophistication. This confirmed the many descriptions from various sources including official and unofficial travel sites. Also, the empirical results here supported prior research that hypothesized Kyoto's Sophisticated BP but did not find empirical support (Sussan et al., 2022). When compared across destinations as shown in Table 3, Kyoto's Sophistication BP was statistically significantly different from Okinawa and Hokkaido. However, within Kyoto destination, Sophistication did not statistically significantly differ from Sincerity dimension. The results also showed that in the Competent dimension Kyoto was statistically significantly higher than Hokkaido and Okinawa. One possible explanation was Kyoto was a historical place with deep traditions. Competence maybe linked to traditions in the Japanese context with words like reliable, consistent, patient, dignified, confident may be linked to the concept of being traditional.

For Okinawa, the results supported Ha3. Okinawa was found to have the highest scores in the Excitement dimension both within and across destination. Across destination, Excitement in Okinawa was statistically significantly higher than Kyoto and Hokkaido. Notably in Table 1 within the Excitement dimension, Okinawa scored very high on the facets of Happiness and Freedom when compared to the two other destinations.

One interesting observation from the results reported in Table 3 showed that the BP of Sincerity did not differ across the three destinations. This either suggested that across three destinations they were equal in their Sincerity BP or there was an absence of Sincerity BP. Previous research that investigated food souvenir BP of Hokkaido, Kyoto, Okinawa, and Tokyo concluded that Sincerity personality failed to emerge in all destinations when the 3 adjectives of Sincerity failed to load into any particular factor that was interpretable.

**Table 4: Summary of Hypotheses Testing**

<b>Hs</b>		<b>Results</b>	<b>Supported</b>
Ha1	Hokkaido Food Souvenir BP Sincerity	Sincerity received the highest evaluation out of the 5 dimensions and is statistically significantly different from Excitement, Competence, and Peacefulness. However, Sincerity is not statistically significantly different from Sophisticated.	Yes. Mostly supported
Ha2	Kyoto Food Souvenir BP Sophistication	Sophistication received the highest evaluation out of the 5 dimensions and is statistically significantly different from Excitement, Competence, and Peacefulness. However, Sophistication is not statistically significantly different from Sincerity.	Yes. Mostly supported
Ha3	Okinawa Food Souvenir Excitement	Excitement received the highest evaluation out of the 5 dimensions and is statistically significantly different from Competence, Peacefulness, and Sophistication. However Excitement is not statistically significantly different from Sincerity.	Yes. Mostly supported.

## Conclusion

This study addressed a gap in the food souvenir branding literature and proposed that there exists an alignment of food souvenir brand personalities and tourism destination brand. The empirical results collected from 130 respondents in Japan evaluating food souvenirs brand personality for the top three tourist destinations (Hokkaido, Kyoto, Okinawa) showed that the alignment exists in all three destinations. Specifically, Hokkaido BP is predominantly Sincerity, Kyoto BP is Sophistication, and Okinawa BP is excitement.

The contributions of this paper are two folded. First, this paper adds empirical evidence to a small inventory of research that investigated brand personality of food souvenir. This addition enriches the research stream of gastro-tourism and builds an even stronger bridge between food souvenir and destination branding. The second contribution rests on the results of this paper providing nuanced managerial implications which we will discuss next.

For food souvenir managers, the results of this study confirmed the BP of three top tourist destinations in Japan. For Kyoto and its Sophistication BP, managers may calibrate their marketing strategies to position their food souvenirs in the elegant and sophisticated sector of the perceptual map, meaning that they may be able to offer products at a higher price than other regions. For Hokkaido and its Sincerity BP, managers of food souvenirs may consider advertising concepts like the adjectives of warm, thoughtful and kind and offer products with quality of genuine and authentic. For Okinawa and its Excitement BP, food souvenirs that convey happiness may be the most appropriate.

This paper collected responses from Japanese nationals. While it is an advantage to collect responses from natives who have deep knowledge of their own country and places and provide nuanced personalities of souvenirs, for inbound tourism industry, it will be interesting to collect responses from foreigners also. Future research should consider collecting both domestic and foreign visitors and compare the difference in their perception of food souvenir brand personality. This current study compared three popular tourism destinations and their food souvenirs in Japan. Future research should consider expanding to destinations and investigate less well-known omiyage.

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