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## The Role of Destination Brand Love in Mediating Destination Brand Authenticity on Destination Loyalty

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the role of destination brand love in mediating destination brand authenticity on destination loyalty (a study of marine tourists in Wakatobi National Park). The study on destination brands is important for several reasons, firstly, there are still limited studies on destination brand love as a mediation of destination brand authenticity to the destination loyalty. There were four hypotheses developed and tested within 100 travelers as sample frame. Respondent data were collected from 100 tourists from Wakatobi National Park through questionnaires. Partial Least Square Data Analysis Technique (PLS) was used as a data analysis technique in this study. The results of this study showed that the path of destination brand love can mediate destination brand authenticity on destination loyalty and the hypothesis was accepted in this study.

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## INTRODUCTION

There is the increase of interest and need of tourists for the authenticity of the destination [1]. It is driven by the success of brands in the future with no longer depend solely on operational strength but also on maintaining consumer perceptions of their authenticity [2]. Beside that, authenticity is also considered a driving force that forms tourist preferences and desires that is more than the quality [3]. The destinations that tend to have high authenticity can be used to reflect the personality and characteristics of the destination [4]. Therefore the management of destinations that have authenticity must be maintained in order to be a factor driving tourist loyalty.

The study conducted by Fu (2019) [5]; Kolar & Zabkar, (2010) [6] explain that destination brand authenticity had significant influence on tourism loyalty. It is different from Hsu et al., (2021) [7]; Loureiro, (2020) [8] who found that destination brand authenticity had no influence on increasing tourist loyalty. The conflicting finding between destination brand authenticity and tourist loyalty initiate the need for further research to solve these problems. Bagozzi et al. (2017) [9] explained that brand love is a high contraction experienced by consumers that includes cognition, emotions and behavior regulated by consumers in their mental prototypes. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) [10] explain brand love as a level of emotional bond that is passionately satisfied by consumers to have a brand. Based on the love that increases to this positive attitude, it will provide impetus to tourists, so in this study we suspect that destination brand love will be able to become a mediation concept that can overcome these problems. with indicators from Bryze et al., (2015) [11] namely self-brand integration, passion-driven behavior, positive emotional

connection, long-term relationship, anticipated separation distress, attitude valence and attitude strength to connect destination brand authenticity to destination loyalty.

Previous studies have been carried out such as Gunawan & Siemon, (2020) [12]; Mody & Hanks, (2020) [13] but limited to marketing. hospitality goods and services. In the context of tourism it is still quite limited where the love of the destination brand will encourage to increase tourist loyalty. Authenticity in tourism has become important topics in tourism research because tourists are always looking for authentic experiences Li et al., (2021) [14] but in previous debates, researchers Boorstin, (1992) [15] described tourism experiences as inauthentic. Three studies using this model are supported by Chen et al., (2020) [16] who explain that brand love can overcome these problems. The purpose of this study was to determine the role of destination brand love in mediating the effect of destination brand authenticity on destination loyalty.

## Hypothesis Development

### Destination Brand Authenticity on Destination Brand Love

Consumers attention to authenticity is increasing. Currently, brand authenticity is very important for academics and practitioners [17]. Research on brand authenticity is still limited [18]. In tourism literature studies, authenticity becomes the driving force of consumers to travel faraway with distant times. Consumers who looking for the authenticity tend to be attracted to the original brands in their purpose or that claim that they provide an authentic experience. Jang et al. (2012) [19] found that consumers expect to learn about a new culture and have an authentic experience at an ethnic restaurant that may increase the

positive emotions. Consumers love for a brand comes from a strong emotional bond and a passionate desire for it [20]. Consumers find brand love through different aspects of the product/brand, such as great quality, intrinsic reward, self-identity, positive influence, a natural sense of affinity, emotional attachment, and through frequent thought and use. In addition, integrity, commitment to quality, and a sense of moral virtue encourage brand love [21]. Previous research found that destination brand authenticity had a significant influence on brand love, Aro et al, (2018) [22]; Manthiou et al, (2018) [1]; Safeer et al, (2020) [23] study showed that the authenticity of the destination brand can increase love for the destination brand.

H1: Destination Brand Authenticity is significant to Destination Brand Love

### **Destination Brand Love on Destination Loyalty**

Brand love includes passion for the brand, attachment to the brand, positive brand appraisal, positive emotions in response to the brand and statements of love for the brand [24]. Rossiter (2012) [25] defines brand love with deep affection from consumers for brand products and the difficulty of separation if the product is not available. Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) [20] determined that interpersonal love is bidirectional whereas brand love is unidirectional. Several streams of destination branding research tend to focus on emotions because positive emotions elicit unforgettable experiences and predict loyalty [26]. The love that visitors have for branded destinations is undoubtedly an important aspect of the relationship between visitors and destinations. Brand love is more inclusive and has a stronger power to predict brand loyalty [27]. However, despite the importance of the

objective brand love construct and its effect on brand loyalty, little academic attention has been paid to identify the relative significance of the objective brand love sub-dimension in shaping brand loyalty. So far, the effect of destination brand love on destination brand loyalty differs between first-time and repeat visitors is unclear. Previous research also has some contradictions. Findings regarding destination brand love on loyalty had a significant influence on destination loyalty [28], [29], [30], [31].

H2: Destination Brand Love significant to Destination Loyalty

### **Destination Brand Authenticity on Destination Loyalty**

The study of authenticity in the tourism context refers to real experiences as perceived by tourists. The term implies that a tourist attraction can be considered authentic even though it is not authentic, it can be explained as a result of staged authenticity. The existence of authenticity has a high influence in establishing tourist loyalty commitments [32]. In the tourism industry, authentic experience is an important motivation for a tourist. Therefore, when the brand authenticity of a destination is high, the need for authenticity is satisfied, and tourists are more likely to revisit the destination and recommend it. The consumer contact with the product/service is the premise behind their perception of brand authenticity. Furthermore, authentic brands are acceptable, authoritative, trustworthy, and true to their original designs, rather than promoting fiction, fakes, or imitations [16],[21]. Studies conducted by Chen et al, (2020) [33] have found that the perception of authenticity can increase customer loyalty for tourist destinations. It is also supported by Bryce et al, (2015) [11]; Kolar & Zabkar,

(2010) [6]; Shen et al., (2014) [34] . It shows that the more one loves the destination, the more tourists loyalty.

H3: Destination Brand Authenticity is significant on Destination Loyalty

**The Influence of Destination Brand Love in Mediating the Influence of Brand Authenticity on Destination Loyalty**

Researchers are attempting to delve deeper into the link between destination brand authenticity and destination loyalty. Given the unpredictability of prior findings about the relationship between brand authenticity and destination loyalty, add brand love mediation as a stepping stone to increasing destination loyalty. As a result, brand love is intended as a moderating variable in this study. Given the broad scope of brand love and its demonstrated ability to predict favorable economic results [35]. As a result, positive emotional attachments in the form of brand love that are poured into a place tend to alter tourist destination loyalty and preferences [36]. If travelers express their passion for the destination brand, it will create a lasting interest in the destination culture and result in visitor loyalty. All of this will encourage tourists to participate in long-term cultural interaction with the place [37].

Customers may sense the significance of a brand, experience its superior quality level, and ultimately exhibit a high level of devotion to the company through brand resonance [35]. It is expected that brand love, as a mediator, would bridge the gap between past studies on destination brand authenticity and destination loyalty. According to research Gunawan & Siemon, (2020) [12]; Mody & Hanks, (2020) [13] , brand love can moderate the influence of brand authenticity on destination loyalty. As a result, it is possible to conclude that brand love can mitigate the influence of brand authenticity on destination loyalty.

H4: Destination Brand Love can mediate the influence of Destination Brand Authenticity on Destination Loyalty

**RESEARCH METHOD**

Respondent data were collected from 100 tourists from Wakatobi National Park through questionnaires shown in table 1. Partial Least Square Data Analysis Technique (PLS) was used as a data analysis technique in this study. PLS is an alternative approach that shifts changes from a covariance-based SEM approach to a variance-based approach [38].

**Table 1.** Respondent Demography

No	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Gender	Male	48	48
		Female	52	58
2	Education	Postgraduate	4	4
		Graduate	78	78
		Diploma 3	14	14
		Senior High School	4	4
3	Age	19-30	73	73
		31-40	21	21
		41-50	6	6
4	Monthly gross profit	< 5 millions	16	16

No	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
	6-10 millions	46	46
	11-15 millions	21	21
	16-20 millions	12	12
	21 millions	5	5

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Variable Measurement

Variable measurement items were adapted from previous research with modifications to adjust the research objectives. All variables were measured using a five-point

Likert scale, from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The research variables and their measurement indicators can be seen in the following [table 2](#) and [table 3](#).

**Table 2.** Variable and Measurement

Variable	Scale/Item	Source
<i>Destination Brand Authenticity</i>	<i>Continuity</i>	[1]
	<i>Originalitas</i>	
	<i>Reliability</i>	
	<i>Naturalness</i>	
<i>Destination Brand Love</i>	<i>Self-brand integration</i>	[37]
	<i>Passion-driven behavior</i>	
	<i>Positive emotional connection</i>	
	<i>Long-term relationship</i>	
	<i>Anticipated separation distress</i>	
	<i>Attitude valence</i>	
<i>Destination loyalty</i>	<i>Attitude strength</i>	[16]
	<i>Revisit intention</i>	
	<i>Recommendation Intention</i>	

**Table 3.** Discriminant Validity

Variable	<i>Destination Brand Authenticity</i>	<i>Destination Brand love</i>	<i>Destination Loyalty</i>
<i>Destination Brand Authenticity</i>	0.821		
<i>Destination Brand love</i>	0.720	0.808	
<i>Destination Loyalty</i>	0.596	0.596	0.903

Consumers who consider the authentic brands tend to expect the authentic experiences from destinations. Once authentic service meets the consumer need, the experience is likely to create a strong impression in memory. Therefore,

the importance of authenticity is the evident in the setting of the experience in the excursions to tourist attractions, luxury accommodations, and can be considered as a key factor in brand success shown in figure 1.

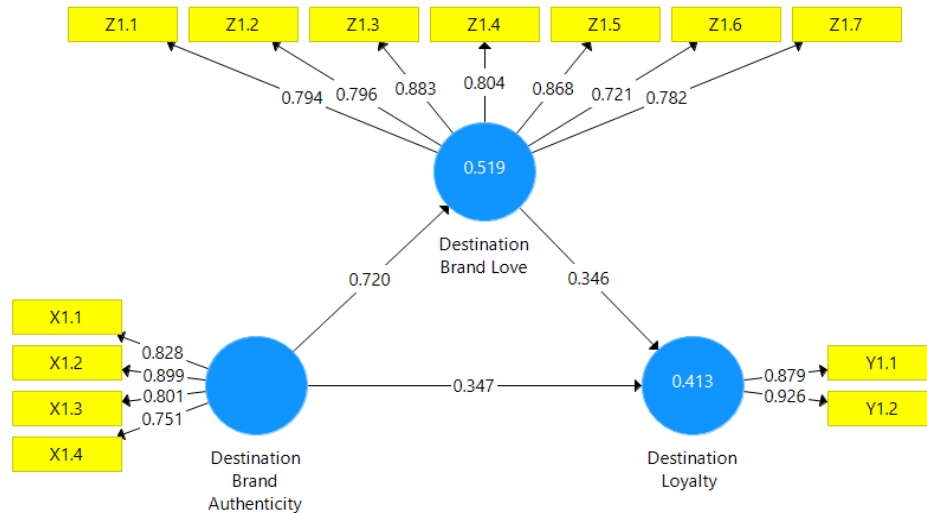


Figure 1. Structural Model

Table 4. Outer Loadings, Rsquare and Q2

Variable	Items	Loading Factor
<b>Destination Brand Authenticity</b>	<i>Continuity</i>	0.837
	<i>Originalitas</i>	0.899
	<i>Reliability</i>	0.801
	<i>Naturalness</i>	0.751
<b>Destination Brand Love</b>	<i>Self-brand integration</i>	0.794
	<i>Passion-driven behavior</i>	0.796
	<i>Positive emotional connection</i>	0.883
	<i>Long-term relationship</i>	0.804
	<i>Anticipated separation distress</i>	0.868
	<i>Attitude valence</i>	0.721
	<i>Attitude strength</i>	0.782
<b>Destination loyalty</b>	<i>Revisit intention</i>	0.721
	<i>Recommendation Intention</i>	0.782
<b>R-Square</b>	<i>Destination Brand Love</i>	0.519
	<i>Destination loyalty</i>	0.413
<b>Q<sup>2</sup></b>		0,394

**Table 5.** Direct and Indirect Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Influence between Variables	Original Sampel	t-statistics	P- Values	Information
H1	Destination Brand Authenticity -> Destination Brand love	0.720	15.184	0.000	Accepted
H2	Destination Brand love -> Destination Loyalty	0,347	3.109	0.002	Accepted
H3	Destination Brand Authenticity -> Destination Loyalty	0.346	3.332	0.001	Accepted
H4	Destination Brand Authenticity-> Destination Brand love -> Destination Loyalty	0.250	3.241	0.001	Accepted

**The Influence of Destination Brand Authenticity on Destination Brand Love**

Consumers find brand love through different aspects of the product/brand, such as great quality, intrinsic reward, self-identity, positive influence, natural sense of belonging, emotional attachment, and the frequent thought and use. [20]

The results of this study also support the study conducted by Aro et al. (2018) [22] that found the brand authenticity closely related to the brand love. The results of this study are supported by Manthiou et al, (2018) [1]; Safeer et al, (2020) [23] who found the significance of destination of brand authenticity to destination of brand love.

The analysis found that destination brand love had a positive and significant effect on destination loyalty, so that the second hypothesis was supported, it means that the better the destination brand love, the higher the destination loyalty it describes in table 4 and table 5. It is reasonable because tourists give an agreeable perception of various statements regarding destination brand love when viewed from self-brand integration,

passion-driven behavior, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship, anticipated separation distress, attitude valence, attitude strength. The love that the visitors have for branded destinations is undoubtedly an important aspect of the relationship between visitors and destinations. Emotional attachment, brand romance [37], brand passion and brand trust, brand love is more inclusive and has a stronger power to predict brand loyalty [33]. This result is supported by Drennan et al, (2015) [28]; Hsu et al., (2021) [7]; Huang, (2017) [29]; Lumba, (2019) [30]; Sallam & Wahid, (2015) [31] found that destination brand love had significant influence on destination Loyalty. So it is necessary to love the brand to be able to increase destination loyalty from tourist visitors in Wakatobi Regency.

Destination brand authenticity had a positive and significant effect on destination loyalty then the third hypothesis was accepted, the meaning is that if the destination brand authenticity was good, it will be able to encourage an increase in destination loyalty. Apart from experience and knowledge development, there are also other factors that can be

used as a basis in building destination commitments for tourists. One of the factors that can determine is the existence of authenticity with the interaction from the authenticity of educational tourism objects with tourists. The existence of authenticity had a high influence in establishing tourist loyalty commitments

Praswati & Suryoko, (2020) [32] with the existence of postmodernism that changes the perspective of tourists, it can change the perspective of the existence of the authenticity in total. The results of this study are supported by Chen et al., (2020) [33]; Fu, (2019) [5]; Hsu et al., (2021) [7]; Kolar & Zabkar, (2010) [6]; Loureiro, (2020) [8] who found that destination brand authenticity had significant effect on destination loyalty. It showed that if Wakatobi National Park can maintain the authenticity of its tourism, it will encourage the tourists loyalty.

Research on destination brand authenticity on destination loyalty leads the researchers to attempt to explore more deeply about the relationship between them. Given the unpredictability of prior findings about the relationship between brand authenticity and destination loyalty, I add brand love mediation as a stepping stone to increasing destination loyalty. As a result, brand love is intended as a moderating variable in this study. Given the broad scope of brand love and its demonstrated ability to predict favorable economic results [12]. As a result, positive emotional attachments in the form of brand love that are poured into a place tend to alter tourist destination loyalty and preferences

[36]. When travelers express their affection for the destination brand, it creates a lasting interest in the destination culture and results in visitor loyalty. All of this will encourage tourists to participate in long-term cultural interaction with the place [39]. Customers may sense the significance of a brand, experience its superior quality level, and ultimately exhibit a high level of devotion to the company through brand resonance [35]. This study's findings are reinforced by Gunawan and Siemon, (2020) [12] and Mody and Hanks, (2020) [13], who discovered that brand love might moderate the influence of brand authenticity on destination loyalty. As a result, it is possible to conclude that brand love can mitigate the influence of brand authenticity on destination loyalty.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to build a conceptual model on maintaining tourist destination loyalty by encouraging destination brand authenticity through destination brand love in Wakatobi National Park. The acceptance of our proposed hypothesis provides some input in maintaining the authenticity of brand owned by the destination. This study has several limitations. First, the sample size is relatively small less than 100 respondents and only focused on Wakatobi National Park. Second, the generalization of research findings required wider dissemination. The recommendations for future researchers can add variables outside of this study such as brand experience as an endogenous variable or positive WOM as a mediation.



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