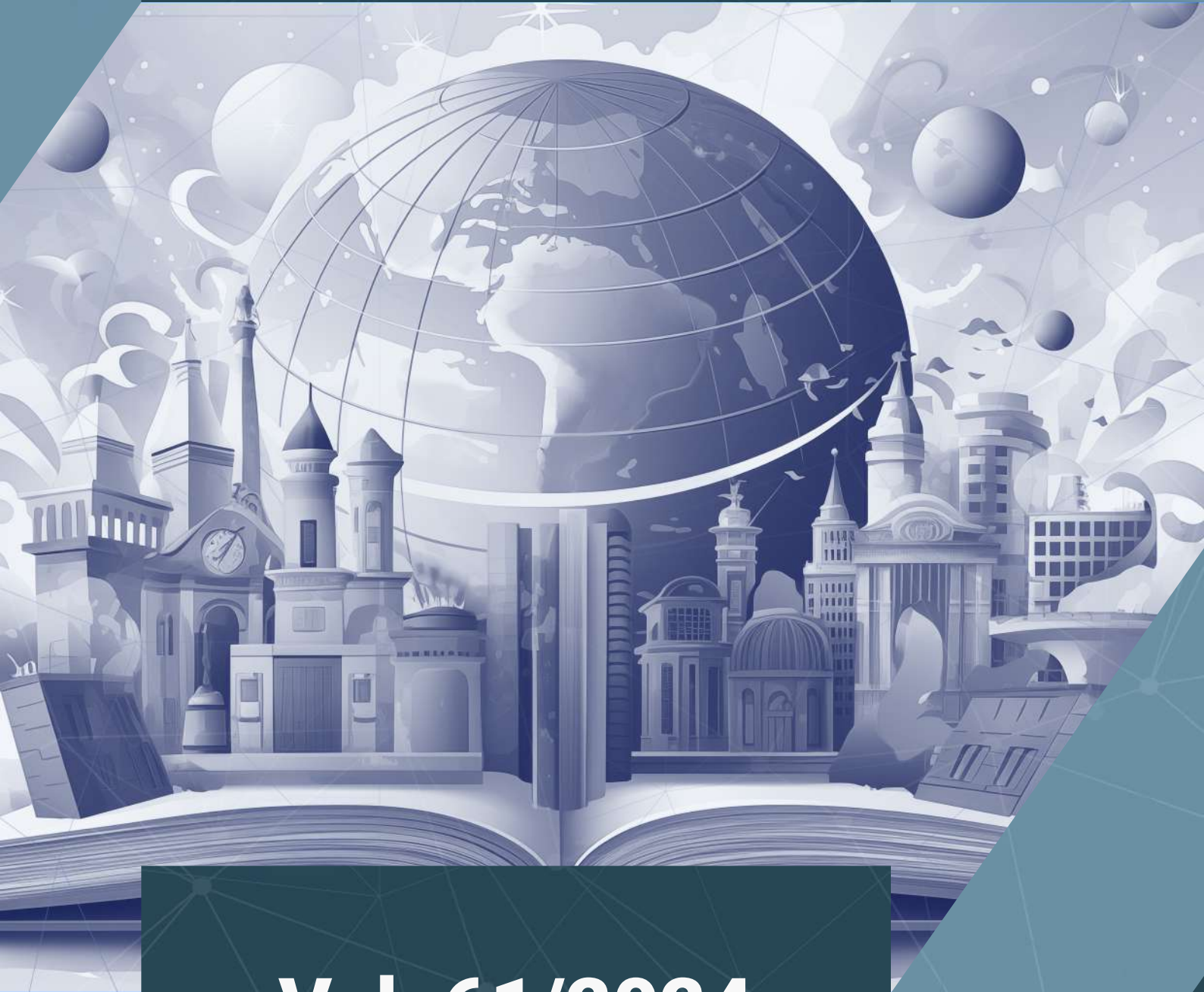




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Destination brand authenticity to destination brand engagement in tourism destination

Intan W. Sakti¹, Zakiah Darajat², Yori Rismayanti³

1,2,3Universitas Widyatama -Bandung, Indonesia

intan.sakti@widyatama.ac.id, zakiah.darajat@widyatama.ac.id,
yori.rismayanti@widyatama.ac.id

Abstract. This study examines Destination Brand Engagement (DBE) in the context of tourism primarily focusing on its outcomes rather than its antecedents. This study differs from previous studies in examines the impact of destination-centric drivers and tourist-centric perspectives. Specifically, this study explores how destination brand experience and destination brand authenticity (DBA) influence DBE. The results obtained from 352 tourists as sample and tested using structural equation modeling techniques revealed that destination brand experience and DBA positively and significantly influence DBE, along with discussions of significant managerial and theoretical implications.

Keywords. Destination Brand Authenticity (DBA), Destination Brand Experience, Destination Brand Engagement (DBE)

Introduction

A city is an object that can bring up various perspectives, especially when associated with a tourist where a city can be an identity, product, memory, an experience, and tourist destination (Halwani & Cherry, 2023). In era of increasingly rapid globalization, information and culture can easily flow from one part of the world to another, the challenges for cities as tourist destinations are increasingly complex, one of the key aspects in attracting tourists is brand authenticity (Li, et al., 2024). This concept refers to the extent to city's identity that can be conveyed honestly and sincerely, creating an experience that is not only interesting but also profound for visitors because each city has a unique story that shapes its character and appeal, starting from cultural richness, rich history, to enduring traditions, these elements play an important role in determining the image of city in the eyes of the world, and when city is able to convey its brand authenticity, it not only offers an interesting tourist experience, but also creates an emotional attachment between visitors and the place (Isaac & Rumbidzai, 2024). In this context, the importance of maintaining and promoting brand authenticity becomes increasingly clear that today's tourists are not only looking for places to visit, but also looking for real and immersive experiences, they want to feel the local atmosphere, interact with local people, and understand the essence of the existing culture, therefore a city that is aware of and preserves its authenticity will not only increase tourist appeal, but also contribute to sustainable economic and social development (Sjuhada & Zulfa, 2024). Through this narrative, we will

explore how brand authenticity can be optimized in the context of city tourism, as well as the importance of collaboration between government, community, and other stakeholders to strengthen the city's identity as an authentic and attractive tourist destination. This research is one of the first to investigate the direct influence of destination brand experience and Destination Brand Authenticity (DBA) on Destination Brand Engagement (DBE) in the tourism context. Studies examining destination brand experience, and brand engagement (Xu et al., 2020) in the tourism sector are still rare (Chen et al., 2020).

Literature review

This study identified five key factors of brand engagement: enthusiasm, attention, absorption, interaction, and identification, on the other hand, the psychological and behavioral perspective defines destination brand engagement as the level of an individual's mental state related to the brand, which motivates and is characterized by cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activities in direct brand interactions (Kumar & Kaushik, 2020). Referring to previous studies that describe two independent variables: destination brand authenticity consisting of four (4) sub-variables and destination brand involvement, this study will focus on how tourists subjectively evaluate the level of destination authenticity (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022). Saleem (2021) defines that tourist brand engagement as all activities related to the interaction between consumers and brands that have a positive impact on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors. This perspective emphasizes the relationship between consumers (tourists) and brands, showing that highly engaged tourists tend to recommend a brand to others, accept brand mistakes, and create memorable experiences (Chen et al., 2020). Brand experience is increasingly important in product branding due to its crucial role in evaluating consumer reactions to a brand as a whole (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022). Brand experience is described as “subjective internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses elicited by brand-related stimuli that are part of the brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environment” while brand experience shares connections with other established brand components or constructs, such as brand trust, brand attachment, and brand personality, it remains distinct (Jiménez-Barreto, 2020). Brand experience evokes sensations, cognitions, thoughts, and actions triggered by various stimuli, emerging when customers engage with a particular brand directly or indirectly thereby extending brand experience to encompass tourism destinations, introducing the notion of destination brand experience. Which is defined as the emotions and significance that tourists attribute to the pleasurable experience of visiting a destination (Khan & Fatma, 2021).

In the marketing literature, brand authenticity has been conceptualized as the extent to which a brand image reflects deeper meanings beyond mere surface-level impression management (Chen & Zhou, 2020). For example, brand authenticity has been described as a consciously constructed attribute, shaping how individuals subjectively perceive it rather than being an innate aspect of objective reality (Dedeoğlu & Celuch, 2019). Brand authenticity is described as the perceived coherence of a brand's actions, reflecting its fundamental principles and standards, by which it is perceived as authentic, maintaining its brand identity and substantial essence, that a brand's authenticity must be reliable for its identity and effectively conveyed to consumers so that consumers perceive, trust, and form positive impressions about the brand based on their subjective experiences, in this case the consumers in question are tourists (Saeed & Shafique, 2020). Existential authenticity, which applies to various tourism activities, has been widely used in the literature defining destination brand authenticity as “the extent to which a tourist subjectively evaluates a destination as sustainable, credible, honest,

and symbolic”, in depth it can be said that research on brand authenticity is still rare, especially in the tourism and hospitality sectors (Chen et al., 2020; Tarigan et al., 2021). Therefore, additional research is needed to improve its understanding, especially in the context of tourism destination brands.

Research method

Analyzing the research hypothesis data were collected using questionnaire that distributed to tourists visiting Bandung, chosen as the object of this study because of its status as one of the favorite tourist destinations, which offers many attractions and facilities for visitors (Savira et al., 2022). Bandung has an iconic city background, thus providing a prime setting to study tourist behavior and perceptions in a diverse and dynamic environment (Utami & Prayitno, 2020). Respondents were probed through questions in the questionnaire related to their demographic features (e.g., gender, age, etc.) and then about their visit (e.g., the beginning and motives of the visit). The researcher ensured complete randomness in data collection by initially selecting various tourist locations, including cafes, tourist attractions, and recreational places in Bandung. Of the 362 responses obtained, 352 responses yielding a response rate (98%) were used for the final analysis, considering that 10 responses were found to be incomplete. Partial Least Square (PLS) is an alternative method in Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) modeling that can be used to estimate models with reflective or formative indicators, where PLS was developed as a solution to overcome the limitations of the SEM method (Hair, 2016). In addition to being used as a confirmation of theory, PLS can also build relationships that do not yet have a theoretical basis or proposition, Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) is a powerful analysis method because it allows structural equation modeling with the assumption that the data used does not have to be normally distributed, SEM-PLS can use a relatively small sample size, and the indicators used are reflective, formative, or a combination of both (Hair et al., 2020). Model measurements consist of Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and factor loadings. The findings showed that all loadings for the latent constructs were above the recommended value of 0.6, which supports previous findings (Ahakwa, 2024; Odai et al., 2021). The values for α , CR, and AVE were above the recommended values of 0.81, 0.83, and 0.52 (Hair et al., 2020). These results support the internal consistency, construct reliability, and convergent validity of the model, which supports previous findings (Ahakwa, 2024; Chen et al., 2024; Korankye et al., 2021). This study used two procedures to examine Common Method Bias (CMB). First, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was tested to assess potential multicollinearity and check for CMB problems. Multicollinearity is a phenomenon in statistics that occurs when predicting constructs in a highly correlated model, where higher values indicate that it becomes difficult to accurately assess the contribution of predictors to the model (Bock, 2020). Kim (2019) proposed that VIF values exceeding 5 for all constructs indicate problematic multicollinearity in the model. However, all constructs had VIF values lower than 5, proving that there was no multicollinearity problem in the model. Kock (2017) argued that if the VIF exceeds 3.3, it indicates severe collinearity and increases the prospect of the model being affected by CMB. The absence of VIF values exceeding the 3.3 benchmark indicates that the model does not have CMB. The main concept underlying this approach is that when a large number of CMBs exist, a single factor will become apparent through factor analysis, or a single overarching factor will explain most of the observed covariance among the measures. According to the results of this test, CMBs in this study do not appear to be a significant concern, as the initial factor explained a small portion of the observed variation (37.68%).

The research results are visible in several data processing processes, including:

1. Correlations Variable

Table 1

Relation (Destination Brand Experience)	Path (β)	T- statistic	P-value	Decision
Sensory to Destination brand authenticity	0.597	9.863	0.000***	Supported
Affective to Destination brand authenticity	0.511	6.355	0.000***	Supported
Intellectual to Destination brand authenticity	0.372	6.728	0.000***	Supported
Behavioral to Destination brand authenticity	0.311	6.118	0.000***	Supported
Destination Brand Authenticity (DBA) to Destination Brand Engagement (DBE)	0.823	11.88	0.000***	Supported

significant at T-value >1.96 ; *** $p < 0.05$

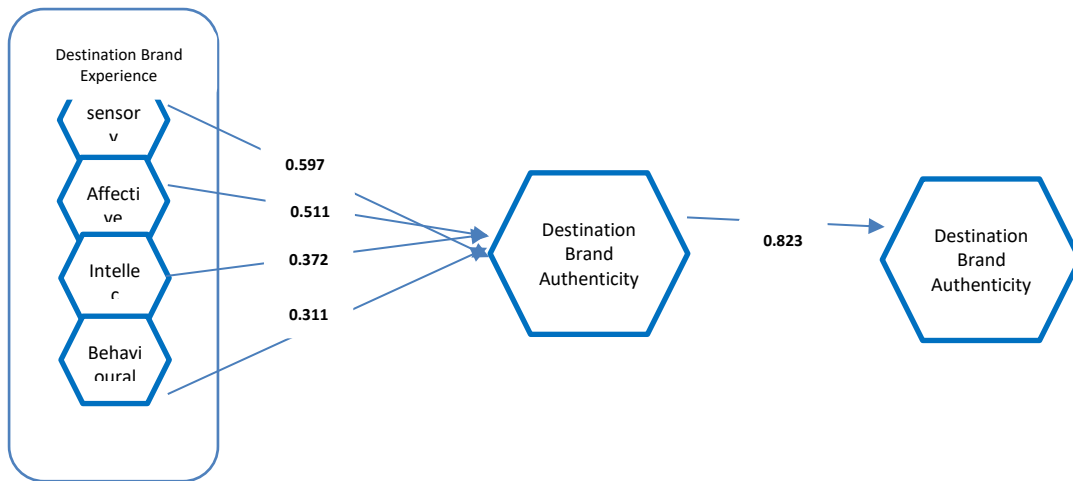
Table 1 shows the derived values of the path estimates, along with the corresponding t-statistics. All path estimates in the conceptual model, which are significant at the 0.05 level of significance offer statistical support for the hypothesized direct relationships. The results indicate that destination brand experience: sensory ($\beta = 0.597$; $T = 9.863$), affective ($\beta = 0.511$; $T = 6.355$), intellectual ($\beta = 0.372$; $T = 6.728$) and behavioral ($\beta = 0.311$ $T = 6.118$) are positively related to DBA. Again, the results prove that DBA is positively related to DBE ($\beta = 0.823$ $T = 11.88$). It is concluded that based on the path estimates, overall the relationship between variables is correlated and has a contribution.

2. Predictive Power

Table 2

Construct	R^2	Adjusted (R^2)	Q square
Destination Brand Authenticity (DBA)	0.803	0.800	0.681
Destination Brand Engagement (DBE)	0.686	0.685	0.382

Table 2 shows the results that the R^2 value indicates the variation in the outcome variable due to the predictor variable. The R^2 values of 0.803 and 0.686 in this study are above the threshold of 0.26 proposed by Cohen (1988), indicating the model's excellent predictive ability. Again, blind analysis is used to estimate the model's predictive ability. Q^2 above 0 indicates the model's predictive ability, while Q^2 below 0 indicates the opposite. The Q^2 values of 0.681 and 0.382 strengthen the model's predictive ability for the outcome variable.



The relationship between brand experience and brand authenticity can be understood through Heider's (1958) attribution theory, which states that individuals' perceptions of the motives behind their previous actions shape their future behaviors and responses. Human experience allows us to distinguish between internal and external triggers, facilitating the understanding of implications and anticipation of events based on experiences (Amer et al., 2023). Rodrigues et al. (2023) assert that every consumer interaction with a brand presents an opportunity to differentiate it from competitors and enhance its bond with customers. Exceptional brands typically have a distinct sense of their identity and values, which are consistently reflected in their communication style and behavior across all interactions. This sense of coherence often emerges effortlessly, laying the foundation for authenticity (Tran & Nguyen, 2022). A brand is perceived as authentic by customers when they believe that the company delivers on its promises (Raza et al., 2021). In this study, destination brand experience, identified as a key destination-focused driver, and DBA, recognized as a traveler-centric perspective, were examined as antecedents of DBE. The results show that DBE, as an outcome, is derived from antecedents such as destination brand experience and DBA. In addition, each dimension of destination brand experience: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral, directly affects DBA, and DBA in turn directly affects DBE. This study enriches the academic understanding of DBE in the context of tourism. Second, this study provides empirical evidence proving that DBA has a positive impact on DBE. Investigations into brand authenticity are still in their infancy, and there is a need for further exploration of the concept (Södergren, 2021). Previous studies have investigated the impact of brand authenticity on brand associations and customers, focusing on aspects such as brand trust (Portal et al., 2019), brand affection (Osorio et al., 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2023), and brand attachment (Arya et al., 2019). However, the influence of brand engagement has been neglected. It is highlighted that authentic experiences significantly increase customer engagement, although the relevance of authenticity is recognized in the tourism sector, research on brand authenticity in the destination context is still scarce (Chen et al., 2020; Tarigan et al., 2021). In addition to proving the positive impact of DBA on DBE, researchers also emphasize DBA as a second-order construct that is reflective-reflective and illustrates its reliability and validity. Finally, by shifting the focus from merely examining DBE outcomes to identifying the factors that drive its development, this study presents a significant advancement in attribution theory. Specifically, this study investigates the multifaceted elements of destination brand experience, including sensory, affective, intellectual,

and behavioral dimensions. Within the framework of attribution theory, it explores how these variables interact with DBA and influence tourists' engagement with the destination brand. Furthermore, this study highlights the critical role of destination brand authenticity as a fundamental construct in shaping tourists' perceptions and behaviors. By examining these dynamics through the lens of attribution theory, the researchers uncover the cognitive and physical processes that underlie the drivers of tourists' engagement with destination brands, offering a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. This study aims to deepen insights into DBE by examining the impact of destination-focused and tourist-centric drivers. In essence, this study investigates destination brand experience from sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral perspectives, as well as DBA as an antecedent, analyzing their impact on DBE. Overall, this study significantly complements the current literature by offering a better understanding of tourists' experiences and perceptions of destinations, which influence their engagement with a particular destination. The overall findings of this study emphasize the need to create distinctive, engaging, and authentic brand experiences with destinations.

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