

# Destination Brand Experience and Authenticity

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**Keywords:** Destination Brand Experience, Authenticity, Semiotic, Destination Marketing.

**Abstract:** Tourism has an essential role in the development of the national economy and especially in North Sumatra. The Tourism Sector is a leading sector as a support for the economy outside the oil and gas sector. The government pays special attention to the tourism sector because Indonesian tourism has a competitive advantage and comparative advantage. The competitive advantage and comparative advantage mean that tourism is expected to be the largest foreign exchange earner, also expected to be the best in the region. Experience-based marketing paradigms want to gain through customer satisfaction when consuming by including the influence of the authenticity of a product to achieve customer loyalty.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Brand experience conceptualized as sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses arising from brand-related stimuli that are part of brand design and identity, packaging, communication, and the environment (Brakus, *et al.* 2009). This view is following Zaltman (1997) who revealed that; Consumer preferences and motivation are far less influenced by the functional attributes of products and services than the unconscious and emotional elements that are inherited by the total experience. Loyalty characterized by a commitment to buy products or services. This view is following Zaltman (1997) who revealed that; Consumer preferences and motivation are far less influenced by the functional attributes of products and services than the unconscious and emotional elements that are inherited by the total experience. Loyalty characterized by a commitment to buy products or services.

Destinations are considered as a mix of individual products and knowledge opportunities that combine to form the total experience of the area visited (Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith, 2000). Therefore, in creating experiences in the context of objectives, natural settings and city views become visual symbols of expertise, while place names become brands (Morgan, 2006).

Authenticity is known as purity. authenticity in tradition or authenticity in aura. Postrel (2003)

proposes several subjective forms of genuineness, namely authenticity as formal harmony, balance, or pleasure. Then explained that is authenticity as a connection to time and place is essential for consumers because it contains the value of tradition (Postrel,2003).

Wang (1999) distinguishes authenticity in tourism in two ways: one related to tourism experiences (or authentic experiences) and the other refers to attractions, also called objective and constructive (or symbolic) authenticity. Although it was proposed decoupling from the experience of tourism and appeal, Wang suggested that the terms co-exist. In this case, the tourist experience is not always related to the authenticity of the attraction.

For example, Wang (1999) proposes an analysis of tourists who walk in the desert or do it themselves. In this type of tour, tourists are not concerned with finding authentic attractions but with the authenticity of the experience of living on a journey. For them, involvement in unusual activities, free from the constraints of everyday life, becomes far more relevant. In this case, the existential experience involves personal feelings that are marked as being more authentic to tourists than visiting attractions.

The relationship between brand experience and authenticity is developed from two perspectives. The first is a direct relationship that states that elements of brand experience (Behavior, Affective, Intellectual, and Sensory) contribute to generating genuine feelings. According to Derre (2010), activities and

experiences can refer to authentic exposures. Exposure can produce authenticity, brand experience can create authentic flavor; by doing it consistently.

Second is the indirect relationship where the antecedents of brand experience contributes to authenticity. In this case, destination interaction favorability as an antecedent of brand experience adds to the knowledge that will provide an assessment for its authenticity. The interaction between guides, tour leaders and fellow tourists and this authenticity are important for the evaluation of tourist experiences (Buchmann et al. 2010)

Tourism has an essential role in the development of the national economy in general and North Sumatra in particular. The tourism sector is the leading sector as a support for the economy outside the oil and gas sector. The government pays special attention to the tourism sector because Indonesian tourism has competitive advantages and comparative advantages. The competitive advantage and comparative advantage in question is that tourism is expected to be the largest foreign exchange earner in 2019, Indonesian tourism is also likely to be the best in the region, making Indonesia Incorporated. Followed by making Indonesia a Tourism Hub, the last is the allocation of resources where tourism is the Government's priority, especially in terms of the budget.

The decline in the foreign exchange target was carried out by the Government through the Ministry of Tourism because it saw that up to the first quarter of 2019 it had not shown significant progress towards the target. The number of Nusantara tourist trips in Indonesia during 2017 reached 270.82 million visits, an increase of 2.45 percent compared to 2016, which reached 264.34 million visits.

Based on the above explanation, researchers are interested in studying that semiotic perspective may explain these phenomena.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Destination Brand Experience

Investigated brand experience in the context of destination is unique because unlike product or service where the offerings consist of majority of goods or services, tourism destinations may be regarded as an amalgam of individual product and experience opportunities that combine to form a total experience of the area visited (Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith, 2000). Another distinct feature of experience in destination is that the experience needs to be

delivered in every phase of the transaction. This is due to the nature of tourism products, which required in front purchase and delay consumption.

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Thus, marketing activities in destination branding aimed at offering tourism destination centers. The goal of branding is defined as a series of marketing activities consisting of the creation of a graphical identity, communication of impressive travel experiences and associations, strengthening the emotional connection between visitors and goals and finally, it serves to reduce the cost of finding consumers and perceived risk.

### 2.2 Authenticity

Recent studies showed that marketing practices that concentrate solely on consumer satisfaction are not sufficient to enhance the holistic consumer experience (Tsai, 2005), McCole (2004) stated that the heard of the experiential marketing paradigm lies in extending the concern of marketers beyond the realm of consumer satisfaction into that of attaching the consumer experientially to the product/service. Thus, research considered to add other value indicators that encompass social value and hedonic value to complement satisfaction. Authenticity concept as it is found to indicate the consequences of experience and leads to loyalty (Kolar and Zabkar, 2010; Lewis, 2010; Shuling and Ma, 2009)

According to Beverland (2005), researchers in psychology and marketing have studied authenticity, but this concept is lacking for a general definition. This may be because the concept of authenticity in marketing is still limited but is developing. On the other hand, authenticity in tourism has taken root since McCannel (1973) but conceptualization is still questionable (Wang, 1999). There are two approaches to defining authenticity in the world of Marketing. The first group tries to define the synonym of the word. Authenticity refers to the quality of authenticity, truth, and reality (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Rose and Wood, 2005). Synonyms of authenticity include ethical, natural, honest, simple, impeccable, sustainable, beautiful, rooted, and humane (Boyle, 2003). Often called words: original, unique,

traditional, and real (Munoz et al., 2006) by modern consumers.

The second approach tries to define authenticity by explaining and describing the term. Arnould and Price (2000) state authenticity according to how individual behavior is consistent with their thoughts and feelings, which express their true identity, as opposed to the outside roles they play. While Pine and Gilmore (2007) define authenticity as a purchase base on self-adjustment.

### 2.3 Semiotic

Previous research (Mick, D. G., 2003) related to codes, symbols, and myths that developed among social communities in tourist destinations. Mick (2003) is still a gap where semiotics refer to systems, symbols, and rules that underlie interpersonal and intrapersonal communication in residents, which will appear to be authenticity in these populations (Echtner, 1999). Furthermore, Semiotic elements are included as indicators on the authenticity variable.

The semiotic of the local population, namely signs, meanings, symbols, metaphors, and knowledge. Research in the field of linguistics generally examines semiotics about concerning brands (logos as signs, symbols, metaphors, and information) but what researchers think are symbols, metaphors, and information on the authenticity of the destinations represented by residents, events displayed to tourists.

Semiotic approach to the qualitative method, in which this approach is to look and dig more in-depth information and phenomena that exist in the tourist area of Lake Toba, North Sumatra. The aspect that found at several tourist spots complained about the arrogant impression of the seller, as well as from other officers. This creates a feeling of insecurity to conduct transactions so that the lack of interest in shopping. The Semiotic approach will introduce further the local population's communication system because it is associated with icons, symbols, and indexes.

The author conducts this research to provide a new perspective that semiotics in local communities can be a strategy that can advance the Lake Toba tourism area on an ongoing basis.

## 3 DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Authenticity with Semiotic

Semiotics refers to philosopher Charles Peirce's theory which stipulates a triadic relationship between sign, designatum, and interpretant. On the other hand,

linguist Ferdinand Saussure coined the term semiology for his opinion which specifies a dyadic relationship between signifier and signified. Despite some commonalities, the two opinions are different, for example, Saussure, but not Peirce, methodologically abstracts from extra-linguistic referents (see Noth 1990 on Peirce's and Saussure's theories). In postmodernist opinion, the reference is usually to Saussure, but the term semiotics is often used. I follow this conventionalized usage.

Saussure argues that the relationship between signifier (e.g., the word or sound 'cat') and signified (the idea or concept of cat) is entirely arbitrary, i.e., that a particular word/sound should mean a specific thought is due not to anything intrinsic about the word/sound, but purely a matter of convention. Within the sign system, a specific word/sound signifies what it signifies solely because it is different from other words/sounds. Hence, meaning derives from difference, instead of essence (something intrinsic to the signifier). This view, known as anti-essentialism, constitutes a core postmodernist theoretical position (Barker 2003, p 435).

In suggesting that 'tourist attractions are signs, MacCannell equates tourist sight to signified and what he calls marker to signifier. He defines tag as 'any information about a sight,' including name, picture, plan or map, and information 'found in travel books, museum guides [etc.]' Thus, the signifier (marker) signifies (explains) the meant (what the sight is). MacCannell argues how 'a specific sight is hardly worth seeing, but the information associated with it [i.e., the marker] makes a visit worthwhile anyway.

MacCannell's conceptualization of marker as signifier seems problematic. Firstly, signifier simply signifies a concept, it does not provide any information or talk about it. The marker is in many cases (e.g. in travel writing) more like discourse than anything else. It is remarkable that Culler, a Saussure scholar, misses this point in taking up MacCannell's argument. He refers to as markers such discourses as the 'symbolic encrustations [i.e. ideas, folklores, etc.] with which a culture has surrounded the sight' that mediate a tourist's experience of the sight, and an authority's certification of the authenticity of a tourist object (Culler, 1981). Sign, symbolic at the local of destination parts of authenticity.

### 3.2 Authenticity as Consequence of Brand Experience

Sharpley believes that this search for authenticity is directly related to nostalgia, where longing for the

past is driven by dissatisfaction with the present or fear of the future. As such, he considers the search for authenticity in tourism based on myths and ideals of cultural ideals (Sharpley, 1994).

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To apply authenticity in the context of purpose and branding, literature from both fields was investigated. In the area of branding, the definition of authenticity is brought into brand characteristics. Like Beverland's (2005) findings of investigations in luxury wine brands, which found that brand authenticity translates in terms of inheritance and genealogy, style consistency, quality commitment, place relationships, and production methods, thus discouraging commercial motives. The study of the characteristics of authenticity by Liao and Ma (2009) identified six attributes of authenticity: originality, commitment to quality and credibility, inheritance and persistence, scarcity, purity, and purity. This approach focuses on the evaluation object.

In the context of the destination, authenticity has been investigated within the frame of the tourist experience. Cohen (1979) proposed five primary modes of travel experience: Recreation Mode, Diversionary Mode, Experiential Mode, Experiment Mode, and Existential Mode. Typology is arranged as a series of tourist experiences, starting from the conception of the modern tourism charismatic space in one pole and pilgrimage trips at another pole. The five types of phenomenology conclude that the search for authentic experience inexperience and the level of emotional attachment to the destination increases when the experience is closer to the mode of existential experience (Padgett & Allen, 1997).

In recreational mode, travel is seen as a mere form of entertainment and is not personally significant as a means of self-realization or self-expression. Although the trip may have a high level of impurity, that does not mean that authenticity is irrelevant in this kind of travel experience.

Experiential Mode sees travel experience as a way to look for the meaning of one's life by looking at the lives of others (McCannell, 1976). These are the direction of tourism's perception as a form of seeking authenticity while modern life is considered as not authentic. The Experimental Mode is characterized

by experiences where people are involved in the search for alternatives from spiritual centers elsewhere than in their communities. Tourists engage in authentic life but refuse to be fully committed. Finally, the Existential Mode is an extreme pole where tourists are fully committed to the spiritual center. At some extreme, pilgrimage may be permanently attached to the center and begin a new life by surrendering to society and cultural society. These five modes of travel experience imply that the desire to seek authenticity from a tourist experience exists even though it may have a different intensity level for each tourist

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

To apply authenticity in the context of purpose and branding, literature from both fields was investigated. In the area of branding, the definition of authenticity is translated into brand characteristics. The study of the aspects of authenticity by Liao and Ma (2009) identified six attributes of authenticity: originality, commitment to quality and credibility, inheritance and persistence, scarcity, purity, and purity. This approach focuses on the evaluation object. For other types of tourism, such as cultural tourism and ethnic tourism, authenticity is an essential factor insofar as these types of tourism involve representations from others or the past

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