

Exploring the Brand Attachment Dimension to Build Tourism Loyalty

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Abstract. The contribution of the tourism sector in the world occupies a significant position in influencing world economic growth. Every country strives to develop its tourism sector to gain a competitive advantage and rapid economic growth. This research seeks to explore the factors that influence the level of loyalty of visitors to tourist destinations. Brand relationships, which are considered as a whole, are analyzed separately based on the form of relationships that occur in influencing brand attachment and brand loyalty at tourist destinations. A total of 385 visitors participated in this study. The model was evaluated using structural equation path modeling using SmartPLS. Results indicated that there are two relationships that have a significant effect in increasing brand attachment and brand loyalty, namely consumer to brand and consumer to consumer relationships. This study also shows that there is no significant influence from consumer to product and consumer to marketer for tourist destinations. The key to increasing consumer loyalty lies in the brand attachment that is attached to the minds of consumers. In an effort to encourage tourist destination loyalty, it is highly recommended to build relationships between brands and consumers.

Keywords: Brand Attachment, Brand Loyalty, Brand Relationship, Tourism Activity

1 Introduction

The tourism sector is considered to be the sector that plays the biggest role in driving the world economy, especially the circulation of products and employment from the sector [1], [2]. The tourism sector provides many jobs for people around the tourist area. If considered further, the contribution of tourism can be seen through foreign exchange earnings, job creation and business opportunities, making tourism one of the main drivers for a country's economic progress. The world tourism sector contributes 10.4% of gross domestic income (GDP) and creates 1 in 10 jobs worldwide.

A campaign to optimize tourism has been started since decade ago [3], [4]. Many studies have conducted research related to how maximizing tourism potential [5], [6]. Tourist destination

loyalty has been accepted as a concept that optimizes the function of tourist destinations where a visitor will show positive behavior towards his tourist destination experience. This condition is expected to increase repeat visits as well as provide recommendations to potential visitors who have the potential to increase future visits to the destination.

Although destination loyalty is a major topic in tourism function optimization, existing research addresses destination optimization from different aspects. For example, destination loyalty is considered as something that is influenced by direct tourism experiences that form loyal attitudes and behaviors towards tourist destinations [7], [8]. Other research sees that there is an important role of marketing activities in shaping tourist destination loyalty [9]. In the context of its implementation, many researchers see that marketing activities carried out will form brand attachment in an individual even though they have never visited the tourist destination. It is possible that people become loyal to a product even when they never experience or consume the product itself.

In marketing literature, many firms use marketing activities to shape their existence within target market's mind [10], even though they never use or experience the product. Similar case applied to tourism. To some extent people become loyal to a destination even though they never visit the destination. Marketing played big role to reshape the consumer behaviour.

In the concept of brand attachment, tourist destinations have a psychological role towards their visitors who form place attachment, which is a psychological feeling attachment to a tourist visit [11]. In the context of tourism, brand attachment indicates that psychological attachment to a tourist destination will form loyalty behavior towards a tourist destination. However, the existence of brand attachment from a marketing perspective is still relatively rare. In the marketing literature, brand attachment is defined as the degree of connection between consumers and a brand. This connection is subjective which is an assessment of each individual against a brand. The lack of evidence between brand attachment and loyalty become point of interest of this research.

The interaction between marketing activities and visitors to tourist destinations is reflected in the brand relationship. Marketing activities can occur not only between marketing activities and consumers directly. Brand relationships can occur in the form of consumer-to-brand, consumer-to-marketer, consumer-to-product and consumer-to-consumer. Literature shows that brand relationship is evaluated as a whole, yet this paper wants to evaluate each relationship and its effect on brand attachment and destination loyalty. Brand relationships can occur in the form of consumer-to-brand, consumer-to-marketer, consumer-to-product and consumer-to-consumer. Literature shows that brand relationship is evaluated as a whole, yet this paper wants to evaluate each relationship and its effect on brand attachment and destination loyalty.

2 Literature Review & Hypothesis

Destination loyalty is the loyalty of tourists to a tourist destination, in this study are tourists visiting the Lake Toba Tourism Area. In general, this loyalty is measured by having the intention to visit more, stay longer and spend more money in tourist attractions, especially in this study in the Lake Toba Tourism Area, Indonesia. The tourist experience in the destination is

understood as a product, the level of loyalty can be reflected in the future intention of their behavior to revisit the destination and the intention to recommend the experience to friends and relatives [12]. Thus, visitor loyalty is defined as a measure of loyalty from customers in visiting a destination at a certain period of time in a situation where there are many choices of destinations that can fulfill their desires and visitors have the ability to get them.

Brand Relationship is a time-to-time relationship between consumers and a brand that makes consumers consume the brand repetitively [13]. People have a unique relationship with a brand that they buy and use regularly, this is what makes them loyal to a brand. Strong relationships are created by communication. Relationship-building communication programs are used to build strong relationships between loyal customers and the brands they consume and consume again on an ongoing basis. Brand Relationship communication aims to remind about the brand that is already known and build trust in the minds of consumers for the product. In the context of communication that occurs between brands and consumers can occur through four dimensions, namely customer to brand, customer to product, customer to marketer and customer to customer. Each interaction is unique and forms a general brand relationship. In this research, each interaction will be evaluated so that it can describe the effect of each interaction that occurs.

In this study, we also evaluate the concept of brand attachment. The concept of brand attachment is derived from attachment theory, which is a scientific basis based on a person's psychological condition. Based on attachment theory, emotional ties to an object can predict an individual's interaction with that object. The emotional bond reflects a mental state or feeling that is connected or attached to the brand. In marketing literature, brand attachment was developed as an effort to improve the long-term relationship between a product and consumers [14], [15]. Consumers who have an emotional attachment to a brand will show a loyal attitude to the brand. Social concepts such as social status also influence a person's brand attachment. In other words, brand attachment in this study refers to visitors' emotional attachment to a tourist destination.

The concept of brand attachment is shown through two important factors that reflect the conceptual nature of brand attachment, namely brand-self connection and brand prominence in a person's cognitive dimension [16]. Brand-self connection refers to the relationship between brand and self that is cognitive and emotional. This connection is important to facilitate the fulfillment of utilitarian, experiential and or symbolic needs. Brand prominence is the extent to which positive feelings and memories about the object of attachment are perceived as customers' top of mind.

Visitors to tourist destinations are emotionally attached to their tourist experiences reflected in images, feeling a connection, passion or affection towards them, to a degree that can vary from one tourist destination to another. Brand attachment is a basic characteristic of emotional bonds. This influence is cognitively perceived by the visitor so that it will stick in his mind as a psychological formation of the visitor. Thus, a positive attitude towards the brand attribute can increase attachment to a brand emotionally [17]. A positive attitude towards the brand attribute can also shape behavior towards tourist destinations. The context of the brand attribute is reflected in the interactions that occur between consumers and their tourist destinations. Interactions that occur can take the form of interactions with tourism brands, interactions with products (tourist experiences), interactions with marketers (marketing exposure received) and interactions with fellow consumers (tourist talks). Therefore, this research hypothesizes:

- H1 : Customer to brand relationship has a positive and significant effect on tourists' brand attachment
- H2 : Customer to product relationship has a positive and significant effect on tourists' brand attachment
- H3 : Customer to marketers relationship has a positive and significant effect on tourists' brand attachment
- H4 : Customer to cutomers relationship has a positive and significant effect on tourists' brand attachment

In addition, the emotional attachment between visitors and the tourist destination provides an opportunity for a consumer to behave positively towards the tourist destination. This positive attitude can be in the form of the intention to visit more, stay longer and spend more money in tourist attractions. A well-organized experience in consumption in the form of a tourist visit can create loyalty to the tourist destination. Many argue that brand relationships affect visitor satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore,

- H5 : Customer to brand relationship has a positive and significant effect on tourists' brand loyalty
- H6 : Customer to product relationship has a positive and significant effect on tourists' brand loyalty
- H7 : Customer to marketers relationship has a positive and significant effect on tourists' brand loyalty
- H8 : Customer to cutomers relationship has a positive and significant effect on tourists' brand loyalty

Brand attachment is a psychological condition of a person where the person has an attachment to a brand (Anisimova, 2007). In this study, brand attachment refers to attachment to tourist destinations. When a person has a strong emotional bond with a tourist destination, it is likely that the person will make a repeat visit or tell positive things about the tourist destination which is in accordance with the concept of visitor loyalty. Thus,

- H9 : Brand attachment has a positive and significant effect on tourists' brand loyalty

In order to answer the hypothesis, this study develop model based on literature above with structural model as showed in Figure 1.

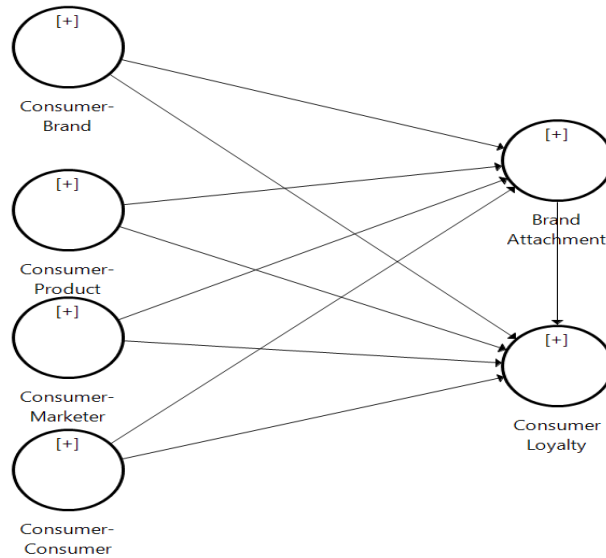


Fig 1. Reserach Model

3 Research Method

The study was taken with the sample of visitors of Danau Toba as the object of this study. Even though we believe that loyalty can be achieved without consumption or without taking tourism experience, this study involve tourist who has been visiting Danau Toba at least once to measure their level of loyalty. A five-point likert scale was used in this study with 1 equal to strongly disagree and the highest value, 5 equal to strongly agree with given statements. Consent was taken as part of questionnaire for this study. People may disagree to participate the study by not turning in the questionnaires. A number of 500 questionnaires were distributed conveniently. The number of returned questionnaires were 385 of 500 which repretet 67.00% respond rate. The characteristics of respondents summarized as follow:

Table 1. Respondents Characteristics

Characteristics	N of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	385	100.00
- Male	212	55.06
- Female	173	44.94
Origin		
- Within North Sumatera	322	83.64
- Outside North Sumatera	53	16.36
Point of Interest		
- Recreation	301	78.18
- Water attraction	277	71.95
- Cultural attraction	102	26.49

In accordance with Table 1, the visitors of Danau Toba that participate in this study mostly male within the province and mainly focused on family recreation or water attraction. As most of the tourist were from the province, Danau Toba attract more on local tourist that already acknowledge the point of interest.

In order to analyze the research model as showed in Figure 1, this study used structural equation modelling by using SmartPLS [18]. It is argued that SmartPLS can help to estimate or predict the effect between complex model with less restriction to the estimate [19]. The confidence level used in this study was 95%, thus we reject *null hypothesis* with cut-off value of 0.05. As structural equation is used, we also evaluate the model for both outer model (measurement model) and inner model (predictive model) [20]. Outer model analysis assessed the reliability and validity of reflective construct to measure respective variable in structural model. Inner model analysis evaluate hypothesis testing.

4 Result and Discussion

The first step to our analysis is to ensure the model was measured with the right indicators for each constructs thus we employ outer model analysis. Outer model analysis were assessed to evaluate our research model based on construct validity, reliability and discriminant validity. Table 2 summarized the outer model result.

Table 2. Outer Model Analysis

	Loading Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Attachment		0.875	0.891	0.905	0.616
Brand-self_Attachment1	0.749				
Brand-self_Attachment2	0.819				
Brand-self_Attachment3	0.831				
Brand_Prominence1	0.745				
Brand_Prominence2	0.859				
Brand_Prominence3	0.792				
Consumer Loyalty		0.762	0.835	0.802	0.677
Reccommend	0.770				
Retain	0.767				
Revisit_Intention	0.921				
Consumer-Brand		0.817	0.824	0.891	0.731
A_Consumer-Brand	0.874				
B_Consumer-Brand	0.835				
C_Consumer-Brand	0.855				
Consumer-Consumer		0.795	0.795	0.880	0.709
A_Consumer-Consumer	0.860				
B_Consumer-Consumer	0.839				
C_Consumer-Consumer	0.827				
Consumer-Marketer		0.737	0.789	0.850	0.706
A_Consumer-marketer	0.844				
B_Consumer-marketer	0.774				
C_Consumer-marketer	0.898				
Consumer-Product		0.778	0.724	0.821	0.604
A_Consumer-Product	0.758				
B_Consumer-Product	0.788				
C_Consumer-Product	0.785				

In order to achieve construct validity, it is required to all indicators to have loading factor more than 0.708 in which ensure $AVE > 0.500$. Table 2 showed that construct validity has been achieved thus we evaluate the reliability based on composite reliability (CR), cronbach's alpha, Dijkstra–Henseler's rho (ρ_A). The cut off value of each measurement was 0.700. Table 2 also showed that all construct had achieve reliable status for the model measurement. Thus the analysis was continued on discriminant validity based on Fornell Larcker Criterion and HTMT Ratio. The result showed in Table 3.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Measurement

		Brand Attachment	Consumer Loyalty	Consumer-Brand	Consumer-Consumer	Consumer-Marketer	Consumer-Product
Fornell-Larcker Criterion	Brand Attachment	0.785					
	Consumer Loyalty	0.227	0.823				
	Consumer-Brand	0.478	0.199	0.855			
	Consumer-Consumer	0.363	0.038	0.508	0.842		
	Consumer-Marketer	0.294	0.137	0.422	0.507	0.840	
	Consumer-Product	0.318	0.150	0.539	0.507	0.543	0.777
		Brand Attachment	Consumer Loyalty	Consumer-Brand	Consumer-Consumer	Consumer-Marketer	Consumer-Product
Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio	Brand Attachment						
	Consumer Loyalty	0.274					
	Consumer-Brand	0.539	0.232				
	Consumer-Consumer	0.420	0.116	0.626			
	Consumer-Marketer	0.355	0.187	0.561	0.686		
	Consumer-Product	0.404	0.235	0.712	0.689	0.751	

Table 3 showed that diagonal value of Fornell-Larcker criterion was higher than the value between constructs that indicated each constructs valid to measure proposed model. Value within Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio showed that all value less than 0.850 which indicated that discriminant validity has been fulfilled. Thus concluded the outer model analysis.

In order to extract the significant value of inner model analysis, this study used 10,000 number of sub-sample generated with SmartPLS 3.0. As we used confidence level of 95%, any significant value with less than 0.05 will not support this researc hypothesis. A one-tailed analysis was used in this study. The result of inner model analysis summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 indicated that consumer to brand relationship has significant effect on both brand attachment and consumer destination loyalty thus H1 and H5 is supported. Consumer to product relationship showed insignificant effect for both, thus this study does not support the H2 and H6 as stated before. The similar situation also found on consumer to marketer relationship thus this studi does not support H3 and H7. This study also showed that consumer to consumer relationship has a significant effect for both construct thus we support the H4 and H8. Lastly, Table 4 indicate a significant effect of brand attachment to consumer loyalty thus we accept H9.

Table 4. Inner Model Evaluation

No	Relationship	Total Effect	t-Statistics	p-Values	Decision
H1	Consumer-Brand -> Brand Attachment	0,376	5,276	0,000	Supported
H2	Consumer-Product -> Brand Attachment	0,015	0,232	0,408	Not-Supported
H3	Consumer-Marketer -> Brand Attachment	0,059	1,379	0,084	Not-Supported
H4	Consumer-Consumer -> Brand Attachment	0,135	2,203	0,014	Supported
H5	Consumer-Brand -> Consumer Loyalty	0,196	2,453	0,007	Supported
H6	Consumer-Product -> Consumer Loyalty	0,067	0,757	0,225	Not-Supported
H7	Consumer-Marketer -> Consumer Loyalty	0,089	1,295	0,098	Not-Supported
H8	Consumer-Consumer -> Consumer Loyalty	0,141	2,088	0,018	Supported
H9	Brand Attachment -> Consumer Loyalty	0,182	3,462	0,000	Supported

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The study showed three part of discussion. Firstly, there is no significant effect of both consumer to product relationship and consumer to marketer relationship for both brand attachment and brand loyalty within tourism activity. Both relationship showed a one-way relationship whereas consumers could not communicate to product or marketers directly. All of marketing activities campaign was programmed to ensure the target market noticed the destination [21]. However, in this study it is not the main reason why consumers remember the brand. For most part of marketing studies, marketing have a significant effect on brand attachment. Yet, this study indicated that the effect was not necessarily true to destination loyalty. The interaction from marketers and products in tourism activities indifferently to this study.

The second part of this study showed interaction or relationship that significantly affect both brand attachment and destination loyalty, the consumer to brand and consumer to consumer relationship. The talk or interaction between tourist become a talk that share experience on consuming tourism. The situation create a chance to improve to remember about their experience more, either they realize it or not [9], [14]. In addition the consumer to brand relationship showed the highest t-value to affect consumers' brand attachment. The more people interact with destination as a brand, the more they attached to the brand itself.

Lastly, there is a significant effect of brand attachment to brand loyalty. As people attached more the a destination, they will be most likely revisit the destination, at least recommend or retain to visit in the future. When a brand have a strong prominence in people's mind, they will influence the consumer behaviour toward the destination [22]. The more they attached, the more loyal they will be to a destination.

5 Conclusion

As this study explore the brand attachment dimension, the most important part is to evaluate the brand relationship structure within tourism destination. This study suggested that there were two remarkable findings in order to build brand attachment and destination loyalty. Firstly it is important to pay attention to customer-brand relationship and customer-customer relationship as they will directly improve people's state of brand attachment and loyalty to tourism destination. Secondly the customer-product and customer-marketer relationship may improve the situation but less likely due to limited interaction between them. Beside the two conclusion, this study also give evidence where brand attachment will improve people's destination loyalty. As this study is limited to visitors of Danau Toba, it is advised for the future research to broaden the sample to contribute and improve loyalty to any tourism activities.

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