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Article

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How Does Brand Legitimacy Shapes Brand Authenticity and Tourism Destination Loyalty: Focus on Cultural Heritage Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The existing cultural heritage tourism research rarely pays attention to the antecedents of brand authenticity. This research fills this gap and points out the critical role of brand legitimacy in building destination loyalty by constructing a theoretical framework.

Design/methodology/approach: This study collected 436 valid samples through an online questionnaire survey in China. The respondents were adults over 18 years old who have visited cultural heritage tourism destinations in the past year. This research used a combination of SPSS and AMOS statistical software to examine the theoretical model.

Findings: The empirical analysis results showed that the tourist destination's brand legitimacy positively impacts the three dimensions (consistency, credibility, and originality) of the destination brand authenticity. At the same time, brand authenticity positively affects the perceived value, and brand trust positively impacts. Moreover, brand authenticity has a mediating impact on the relationship between brand legitimacy and perceived value and the relationship between brand legitimacy and brand trust. Similarly, perceived value and brand trust also play a mediating role in the relationship between brand authenticity and tourism destination loyalty.

Research limitations/implications: This research emphasized the importance of historical inheritance and puts forward specific theoretical and practical enlightenment for heritage tourism from the perspective of brand legitimacy management. However, there are still some research limitations. Future research could expand the research samples to other countries and utilize a more systematic data collection method. Then, the measurement tool of brand legitimacy can also be explored from multiple dimensions.

Originality/value: Readers of this paper can understand that brand legitimacy is a necessary but seldom discussed driving factor of authenticity related to heritage tourism. And discussing their positive influence on tourists' loyalty can make readers and destination managers better understand tourists' behavior in brand management.

Keywords: Brand legitimacy, Legitimacy theory, Brand authenticity, Brand trust, Cultural heritage tourism

I. Introduction

One of the essential attributes of cultural heritage tourism is the perception of authenticity (Yi et al.,

2018). The authenticity of cultural heritage can usually reflect the value of heritage and potential competitive advantages (Bryce et al., 2014). On tourism development, authenticity is the basis for the differentiation of tourism products (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020).

But over-commercialization easily separates cultural heritage from authentic context and negatively impacts

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local culture's protection and inheritance (Hung et al., 2017). Since over-commercialization has always been the most frequently heard problem in the tourism development process (Cheer et al., 2013), destination brand authenticity is of great significance in tourism development planning, development, and management (Dai et al., 2021).

Also, the pursuit of authentic experiences is considered one of the main trends in the tourism industry (Cheer et al., 2013). Brand authenticity is one of the crucial criteria for tourists to consider when choosing cultural heritage destinations. For example, Shi et al. (2021)'s experimental research showed that people would have higher levels of positive emotional reactions to the original historical architectures than the new architectures with collective historical memories. It can be inferred that historical and cultural factors impact the authenticity judgment of tourist destinations. In this context, brand legitimacy, as a symbol of the profound and rich cultural connotation of the brand, needs to attract sufficient attention from scholars (Guo et al., 2017; Martin & Capelli, 2017).

However, scholars' research on cultural tourism mostly focuses on the analysis of the authenticity's results (Kim & Kim, 2019; Park et al., 2019) and less deeply understands the reasons for the formation of authenticity (Chen et al., 2020; Farrelly et al., 2019). Furthermore, in the marketing study of brand authenticity, scholars found that brand legitimacy is an essential driving factor (Fritz et al., 2017). But in the process of destination branding for cultural heritage, there are almost no relevant researches on the role of brand legitimacy. This study focuses on the role of legitimacy in the destination branding process and explores its influence on tourist destination's brand authenticity and loyalty. To better explain its impact, this study introduces two other vital concepts in tourism brand research: perceived value (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019) and brand trust (Kim & Kim, 2020). Since identifying and distinguishing tourism destinations with the help of branding (Lund et al., 2018) has become an effective way for tourist destinations to quickly deliver real information to tourists, reduce the cost of tourist information search,

enhance tourists' perceived value, reduce the perceived risks of tourists, so as to gain competitive market advantages.

Therefore, this paper focuses on the formation process of tourists' perceived brand authenticity of cultural heritage and their loyalty behavior. Based on the result, this study provides theoretical and practical significance for promoting the research on the authenticity of cultural heritage and solving the practical problems in destination brand management for heritage tourism. Resultingly, the research objectives of this article are as follows: (1) Verify the influence of brand legitimacy on brand authenticity in tourist destinations. (2) To further explore how brand authenticity can be conducive to tourists' perceived value and brand trust, and how the perceived value and brand trust significantly impact destination loyalty. (3) And then confirm the indirect influence of brand legitimacy on destination loyalty.

II. Literature Review

A. Destination brand legitimacy

With the rapid development of tourism and the popularization of tourism activities, various places have tried to develop related cultural heritage in tourism. The competition among tourism destinations has become increasing (Kirillova et al., 2020). Due to simple copying and imitation, it is difficult for tourist destinations to form unique characteristics, so homogeneous competition becomes increasingly fierce. Besides, nowadays, people have higher and higher requirements for a tourism experience. Some so-called antique architectural, scenic spots are challenging to attract tourists for a long time without a deep cultural foundation (Shi et al., 2021). Under this background, brand management with the core concept of identification and difference has become the key to win in the fierce destination competition (Lund et al., 2018; Ruiz-Real et al., 2020). An effective brand is not only the guarantee of providing tourists

with a high-quality tourism experience but also helps the tourist destination to establish its market position different from its competitors. Therefore, more and more tourist destinations regard branding as an essential means of marketing and management practice.

Especially for heritage tourist destinations, the inheritance of tradition makes them an advantage in brand marketing since their long history has given them a favorable reputation and brand equity as a brand (Lee, 2015). But the over-commercialization has caused people's misunderstanding of traditional values and challenged people's moral consensus (Hung et al., 2017). On this basis, this research introduces the concept of brand legitimacy. Brand legitimacy can be regarded as a variable describing consumer brand fit and refers to 'the brand's degree of integration in the set of values and norms shared by a community.' (Fritz et al., 2017, p331). Suchman (1995) identified three primary legitimacy forms: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy. And pragmatic legitimacy reflects whether the consumption of a particular product or brand is considered beneficial to the individual's image in a specific social environment and whether the reference group's values are similar to brand values (Cuervo Carabel & Orviz Martínez, 2019). Moral legitimacy indicates whether an individual's brand consumption behavior conforms to the current ethical norms and whether consumers of certain products and brands are regarded as representing moral values (Suchman, 1995). Cognitive legitimacy indicated to what extent an individual's social environment accepts the consumption of a particular product or brand is necessary and believes that the inconsistent shared norms during the community are incredible (Liu et al., 2014).

Moreover, Deephouse and Suchman (2008) stated that brand legitimacy is a prerequisite for creating value because it is impossible for a brand lacking legitimacy to be praised by consumers. Martin and Capelli (2017) analyzed the advertising legitimacy of a place brand and its influence on the effectiveness of marketing communication in the context of region branding. The results showed that advertising legitimacy played a mediating role between place advertising

exposure and advertising efficiency. Therefore, Evaluating the legitimacy of a specific brand is related to the values shared by individuals in one particular social environment and directly affects the consumption of any particular brand (Cuervo Carabel & Orviz Martínez, 2019). In marketing, brand legitimacy is regarded as the antecedent variable of brand authenticity (Fritz et al., 2017). So this article attempts to analyze the role of brand legitimacy in the branding of heritage tourism destinations.

B. Brand authenticity

Since MacCannell (1973) introduced the concept of authenticity into tourism research, authenticity has become a widely discussed topic in tourism study. Constructing tourist attractions is essentially a process of creating meaning and value (Verma & Rajendran, 2017). It is also the process of authenticating the characteristics of attractions (Chen et al., 2020). Therefore, the key to enhancing the appeal of cultural tourism destinations is to explore the cultural symbols and meanings of the tourism destinations themselves (Ross et al., 2020). The types of authenticity cited in tourism research mainly include objective authenticity (Park et al., 2019), constructive authenticity (Shen et al., 2014), or existential authenticity (Yi et al., 2018). And in the context of tourism, authenticity usually is an expression of the degree of perception of the tourism experience. Most of these studies have focused on the authenticity of travel experience quality (Kim & Song, 2020; Meng & Choi, 2016). Unlike these studies, this research focused on brand authenticity from a brand management perspective (Rosado-Pinto et al., 2020). Brand authenticity refers to consumers' subjective perception and evaluation of the brand based on its inherent attributes and previous experience and knowledge (del Barrio-García & Prados-Peña, 2019). Customers always expect to get more authentic brand information when making purchase decisions (Arya et al., 2019).

Besides, Schallehn et al. (2014) pointed out that brand consistency, continuity, and individuality drove

the construction of brand authenticity. Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2020) divided brand authenticity into consistency, credibility, and originality and discovered the mediating role of brand authenticity between the quality of tourist experience and behavior intentions. Therefore, it is necessary to study further the relationship between destination brand authenticity and tourist behavior. Resultingly, the current research explored the mechanism of brand authenticity on tourist loyalty based on the multi-dimensional brand authenticity (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020).

This study tried to find support from marketing literature because of the lack of research on the relationship between brand legitimacy and brand authenticity in the tourism and hospitality field. Capelli and Sabadie (2006) suggested that advertising's legitimacy significantly affects promoting brand image. Martin and Capelli (2017) showed the significant positive impact of perceived legitimacy on advertising efficacy through case studies and experimental methods. Fritz et al. (2017) also verified that brand legitimacy has a significant positive effect on brand authenticity through empirical research. When tourists face a heritage destination brand with traditional symbolic culture, if the tourists believe that the marketing strategy, performance, or content of that tourist destination are reasonable, appropriate, and consistent with their values, their perception authenticity of that destination brand will be strengthened. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: Destination brand legitimacy has a direct positive impact on brand authenticity (consistency, credibility, originality).

C. Perceived value and brand authenticity

The concept of customer perceived value has been derived for a long time. Zeithaml et al.(1988) is recognized as the first scholar to put forward the concept of customer perceived value. He noted that customer perceived value is the perception and comparison of relevant customers' benefits and costs during market transactions. Follow-up research has

continuously improved the definition and characteristics of perceived value (Chen & Tsai, 2007). This concept is also used in the field of tourism and hospitality (Frias-Jamilena et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2015; Yen et al., 2018).

Hernandez-Fernandez and Lewis's (2019) empirical research found that authentic brand performance predicts perceived value and enhances consumers' willingness to buy. Consumers are also willing to pay more for authentic brands and recommend them to others (Cheah et al., 2016). That is, brand authenticity plays a vital role in the generation of consumers' perceived value (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019). Moreover, Johnson et al. (2015) also suggested that brand authenticity can increase perceived value and enhance brand community identification. Therefore, this study believes that in the field of heritage tourism, the authentic tourism destination character can also improve perceived value with tourists. So Hypothesis 2 is proposed:

H2: Destination brand authenticity(*consistency, credibility, originality*) has a positive impact on perceived value.

D. Destination brand trust and brand authenticity

The concept of brand trust was first put forward by Howard and Sheth (1969), who believed in a positive correlation between brand trust and purchase intention. This opinion was also recognized by several subsequent scholars (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Brands represent safety and comfort, and consumers tend to be more willing to buy brands they trust (Roy et al., 2017). Before using a specific brand, consumers mostly rely on their trust in the brand to decide whether to buy the products or services and recommend them to others (Afzal et al., 2009). Better brand trust can reduce market risks (Matzler et al., 2008). Even if the brand has poor market performance or harmful information dissemination in a period, the continuation of Consumer' trust in the brand can effectively curb the occurrence of brand

transfer (Carnevale et al., 2018).

Brand authenticity often stimulates customers' positive emotion perception (warmth, competence) of the brand (Portal et al., 2019), which in turn affects brand trust. Simultaneously, the research showed that brand authenticity directly influences brand trust (Portal et al., 2019). Scholars have also proved the positive relationship between brand authenticity and trust in other different situations (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019). Schallehn et al.'s (2014) research on fast food and beer brands also demonstrated that brand authenticity had a positive and significant impact on brand trust. Thus, this paper suggests the following hypothesized relationship:

H3: Destination brand authenticity (*consistency, credibility, originality*) has a positive impact on brand trust.

E. Destination loyalty, perceived value, and brand trust

Loyalty is an essential factor in creating destination performance and profits from a long-term perspective and is recognized as the most crucial destination marketing concept (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020). Consumer loyalty generally includes the willingness to revisit, positive word-of-mouth communication, and willingness to recommend manifestations of tourists' attitudes

and behaviors (Lin et al., 2017). Destination factors could contribute to tourist experience quality (Barnes et al., 2014), perceived value or brand trust, and ultimately destination loyalty.

Jeong and Kim's (2019) research on sports tourists indicated that perceived value mediated the relationship between event quality and destination loyalty. Also, the study showed that perceived value has a significant direct effect on tourist loyalty (Keshavarz & Jamshidi, 2018). So the perceived value is a powerful predictor of destination loyalty. Besides, brand trust is an important driving factor of consumption loyalty (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Brand trust positively impacts hotel consumers' purchase intentions (Lien et al., 2015). Kwon et al. (2020) demonstrated that customer brand trust played a key mediating role in the relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty in the tourism social media context. Hence, this study puts forward the following hypothesis:

H4: Perceived value has a significant positive impact on destination loyalty.

H5: Brand trust has a significant positive impact on destination loyalty.

In summary, based on previous literature, this study examined the causal relationship between relevant variables empirically, and this paper deduced a simplified conceptual model as follows (shown as Figure 1).

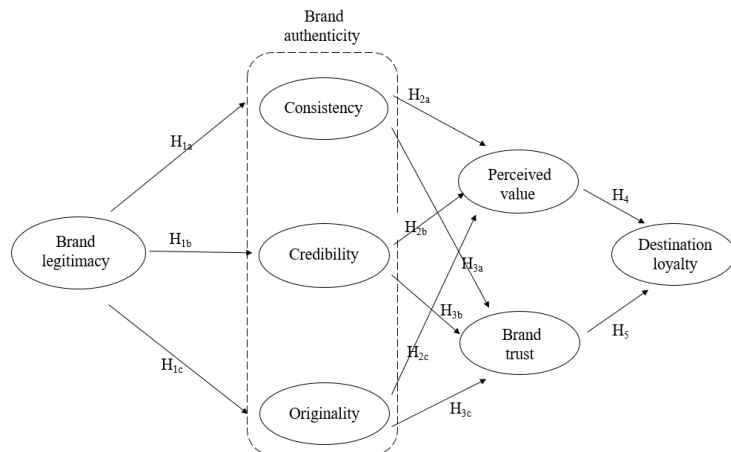


Figure 1. The Research Model

III. Methods

A. Survey instrument

Based on the literature review, the survey instrument was developed. This paper's questionnaire involves brand legitimacy, brand authenticity (consistency, credibility, originality), brand trust, perceived value, destination loyalty, demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, income, education). This study uses a 5-point Likert scale. One indicated "strongly disagree," and five is "strongly agree." This study measures brand legitimacy by four scales from Fritz et al. (2017) and Guo et al. (2017), including "This destination brand is congruent with the moral principles of the culture I feel close to.", "This destination brand fits well with my cultural views.", "This destination brand is compatible with the values and norms of the community I belong to." and "The brand's performance is appropriate.". The nine items measurement for brand authenticity depends on Jiménez-Barreto et al.'s (2020) structure with three dimensions: consistency, credibility, and originality (see Table 2). Similarly, brand trust with four items mainly refers to Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), with the following items: "I trust this destination brand.", "I rely on this destination brand", "This is an honest brand." and "This brand is safe.". And perceived value evaluation is accomplished with the following four items from Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis (2019), including "Visiting this destination is a good choice.", "Visiting this destination is very valuable.", "It's worth the cost you paid" and "This destination brand can be considered a favorable purchase.". Four items from Lin et al. (2017) were designed to measure destination loyalty.

B. Data Collection

This research is for adults over 18 years of age who have visited cultural heritage tourism destinations in the past year. The survey first conducted 60 preliminary surveys for undergraduates and graduate students majoring in tourism management from

several Chinese universities in the same WeChat (an Chinese social media channel) group. These students have rich tourism experience and are familiar with the interpretation of tourism terms in English. This questionnaire was from literature written in English. Using back-translation, the researchers identified and revised some of the Chinese items in translations that did not express their true meaning. Subsequently, the formal survey was conducted using the online platform "Sojump" (www.sojump.com) between November 20 and 23, 2020. Sojump is a leading professional survey tool often chosen by scholars because of their wide distribution of samples in China (Chen et al., 2020). Sojump system would randomly send a survey link invitation to registered members via email or official account. Each respondent who received the invitation can participate in the study via the click-through link. And when collecting questionnaires, participants were asked whether they had visited a cultural heritage destination during the past year, and respondents who gave affirmative answers were asked to provide the names of that cultural heritage tourism destination. Then, they could continue the questionnaire. To increase the response rate, valid respondents were compensated with 6 yuan (\$ 1.00) monetary rewards. Then it is necessary to reject unqualified questionnaires in the following situations: (1) All the options are the same; (2) If the completion time of the questionnaire is less than 60 seconds, these questionnaires are considered to be not sincere answers and need to be eliminated.

C. Data analysis

A total of 436 valid questionnaires were collected for statistical analysis. This article analyzed the collected data through SPSS 25.0 and AMOS 22.0 software. Specific analysis methods are as follows. First, the frequency statistical analysis was conducted to check the respondent's population characteristics and general data description. Second, this study used SPSS software to carry out the data's reliability and validity purification test. At the same time, the

research model fit was verified via the SEM by the AMOS software, and finally, the path relationship was tested to verify the hypothetical relationship between different variables. Third, according to Preacher & Hayes (2008), this study performed a mediation analysis using the AMOS bootstrapping approach. The indirect effect of brand legitimacy on the outcome variables was verified.

IV. Results

A. Overview of the sample population

The survey data of respondents is shown in Table 1. From the perspective of the essential characteristics of tourists, the overall distribution is relatively balanced. In terms of age, 26-30 years (22.7%) were dominant, followed by age groups of 21-25 years (18.6%) and 31-35 years (13.3%). The distribution of these age groups is almost consistent with a statistical report of a popular tourism website in China (Liu, 2018), which showed that among China's domestic tourists in 2017, tourists aged 23-32 accounted for 45%, and tourists aged 33- 37 accounted for 33%, leading other age groups with absolute advantage (Liu, 2018). Also, 180 (41.3%) were with a monthly income of 5001-10000 RMB yuan, followed by 26.1% (114) of less than 5000 RMB yuan groups. On the whole, 53.9% (235) of the respondents have a high academic background with university graduates. Female respondents (213, 48.9%) were slightly less than male respondents (223, 51.1%) were found a relatively larger proportion of respondents than female (213, 48.9%).

B. Validity and Reliability test for measures

436 valid data were tested for internal reliability by SPSS 25.0 (shown as Table 2). The Cronbach coefficients of the seven latent variables are between 0.651 and 0.768, which exceeds the 0.60 standards.

Table 1. Overview of the total sample size (n = 436)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	223	51.1
Female	213	48.9
Age		
18-20 years	57	13.1
21-25 years	81	18.6
26-30 years	99	22.7
31-35 years	58	13.3
36-40 years	39	8.9
41-50 years	36	8.3
Over 50 years	44	10.1
Education		
Finished middle school	21	4.8
High school graduate	50	11.5
College student	107	24.5
University graduate	235	53.9
Graduate school or above	23	5.3
Income		
less than 5000 yuan	114	26.1
5001-10000 yuan	180	41.3
10001-15000 yuan	82	18.8
15001-20000 yuan	47	10.8
20001-30000 yuan	7	1.6
above 30000 yuan	6	1.4

Then this study used the CFA method to test the model fit. As shown in Table 2, $\chi^2(389) = 486.889$, CFI = 0.924, TLI = 0.910, RMSEA = 0.046, All fitting indicated supports a satisfactory research model. Factor loading (25 items in the scale) were all between 0.524 and 0.736, all exceeded 0.5 standard

The composite reliability (CR) values of 7 variables were all greater than 0.8, which met the criterion of exceeding 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). Simultaneously, convergent validity was also tested. The AVE values of all variables are between 0.528 and 0.665, all exceeding the standard of 0.50. In addition, the AVE values of the seven variables in this survey questionnaire are all greater than the square of the correlation coefficient (as shown in Table 3), that is, the scale

Table 2. Overview of constructs and items in the measurement model

Item	Factor loading	Mean	SD
Brand legitimacy (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.660$, CR =0.817, AVE =0.528)			
This destination brand is congruent with the moral principles of the culture I feel close to.	0.624	4.133	0.654
This destination brand fits well with my cultural views.	0.524	4.172	0.650
This destination brand is compatible with the values and norms of the community I belong to.	0.554	4.126	0.667
The brand's performance is appropriate.	0.597	4.133	0.694
Consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.661$, CR =0.823, AVE =0.609)			
This destination stands out as a tourist destination because of its history.	0.612	4.181	0.619
This destination's history makes the place attractive as a tourist destination.	0.593	4.099	0.669
This destination has a historical heritage that is always interesting to visit.	0.672	4.163	0.649
Credibility (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.651$, CR =0.825, AVE =0.612)			
I believe this destination meets the expectations as a tourist destination.	0.675	4.061	0.633
This destination is realistic in terms of the tourist experience that it promises to tourists.	0.565	4.113	0.624
This destination is an honest destination in terms of the tourist experiences advertised.	0.641	4.081	0.681
Originality (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.690$, CR =0.856, AVE =0.665)			
This destination is an original tourist destination to visit.	0.650	4.111	0.619
This destination can be defined as an authentic tourist destination.	0.604	4.047	0.663
This destination clearly distinguishes itself from other tourist destinations.	0.733	4.108	0.614
Perceived value (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.741$, CR =0.876, AVE =0.639)			
I think visiting this destination is a good choice.	0.626	4.255	0.652
I think visiting this destination is very valuable.	0.611	4.167	0.685
I think it's worth the cost you paid.	0.672	4.167	0.652
I think this destination brand can be considered a favorable purchase.	0.712	4.237	0.624
Brand trust (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.710$, CR =0.851, AVE =0.589)			
I trust this destination brand.	0.617	4.016	0.726
I rely on this destination brand.	0.533	3.991	0.662
This is an honest brand.	0.675	4.104	0.585
This brand is safe.	0.642	4.124	0.659
Destination loyalty (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.768$, CR =0.884, AVE =0.656)			
In the following years, I may travel to this destination again for tourism.	0.623	4.187	0.641
In the following years, I plan to travel to this destination again for tourism.	0.659	4.165	0.691
I would still consider a trip to this destination even if the travel cost increased.	0.692	4.165	0.650
I would recommend this destination to someone who seeks my travel advice.	0.736	4.163	0.696

Note: CFA: $\chi^2(472) = 486.889$, CFI = 0.924, TLI = 0.910, RMSEA = 0.046

has passed the discriminative validity test (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

C. Structure model and hypothesis testing

In this research, all the model fit indices (χ^2 (110)

=539.049, CFI = 0.910, GFI = 0.910, TLI = 0.898, RMSEA = 0.049) meet the recommended standards (Hair et al., 2010). Next, the path analysis was performed with the significance $p < 0.05$ as the standard, and the hypothesis test results were obtained (see Table 4). Brand legitimacy has a positive influence on brand authenticity, including consistency

Table 3. AVE and inter-construct correlations of the constructs from second order factors

Construct	Brand legitimacy	consistency	credibility	originality	Brand trust	Perceived value	Destination loyalty
Brand legitimacy	0.528						
consistency	0.407	0.609					
credibility	0.433	0.287	0.612				
originality	0.281	0.520	0.240	0.665			
Brand trust	0.389	0.410	0.497	0.420	0.589		
Perceived value	0.276	0.352	0.453	0.284	0.305	0.639	
Destination loyalty	0.237	0.348	0.346	0.364	0.289	0.521	0.656

Note: Diagonal values (bolded) are AVE values.

Note: Off-diagonal values (plain) are squared inter-construct correlations.

Table 4. Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	β	p-value	Result
H _{1a} = Brand legitimacy → Consistency	0.704	< 0.001	Supported
H _{1b} = Brand legitimacy → Credibility	0.771	< 0.001	Supported
H _{1c} = Brand legitimacy → Originality	0.675	< 0.001	Supported
H _{2a} = Consistency → Perceived value	0.242	0.004	Supported
H _{2b} = Credibility → Perceived value	0.433	< 0.001	Supported
H _{2c} = Originality → Perceived value	0.207	0.005	Supported
H _{3a} = Consistency → Brand trust	0.209	0.013	Supported
H _{3b} = Credibility → Brand trust	0.428	< 0.001	Supported
H _{3c} = Originality → Brand trust	0.336	< 0.001	Supported
H ₄ = Perceived value → Destination loyalty	0.616	< 0.001	Supported
H ₅ = Brand trust → Destination loyalty	0.222	0.003	Supported

Note: $\chi^2_{(541)} = 539.049$, CFI = 0.910, GFI = 0.910, TLI = 0.898, RMSEA = 0.049

Note: R² for Consistency = 0.594; Credibility = 0.495; Originality = 0.456; Brand trust = 0.647; Perceived value = 0.540; Destination loyalty = 0.589

($\beta=0.704$, $P < 0.001$), credibility ($\beta=0.771$, $P < 0.001$), and originality ($\beta=0.675$, $P < 0.001$). So hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c are all supported. Then, brand authenticity has positive and significant effects on perceived value with the order of originality ($\beta=0.207$, $P < 0.005$), consistency ($\beta=0.242$, $P < 0.005$), and credibility ($\beta=0.433$, $P < 0.001$).

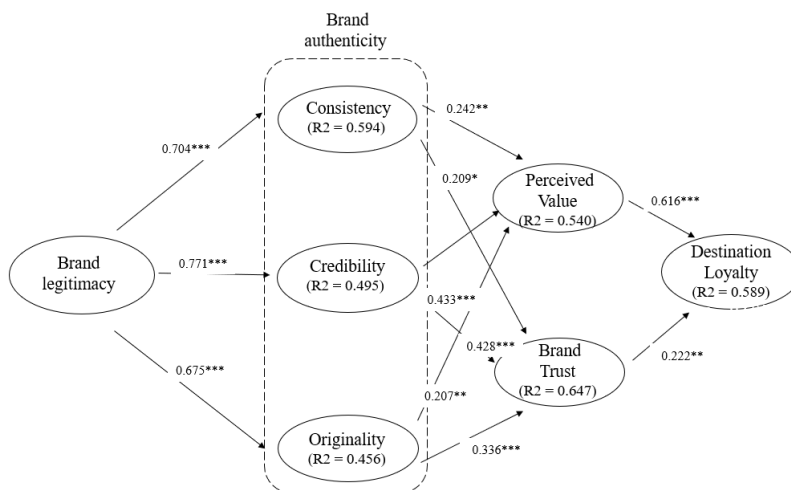
And, brand authenticity has a positive impact on brand trust with the order of consistency ($\beta=0.209$, $P < 0.05$), originality ($\beta=0.336$, $P < 0.001$), and credibility ($\beta=0.428$, $P < 0.005$). So H₂ and H₃ were both accepted. Moreover, perceived value ($\beta=0.616$, $P < 0.001$) and brand trust ($\beta=0.222$, $P < 0.005$) have a significant positive impact on the loyalty of

tourist destinations. Besides, through the analysis of R² value, this research indicated that brand legitimacy is a significant antecedent variable of brand authenticity and has good explanatory power for all dimensions of authenticity. For example, the variance of consistency is explained by 59.4%, credibility is by 49.5%, and originality is by 45.6%. Similarly, the degree to which tourist destination loyalty is explained by perceived value and brand trust is 58.9%. The related results are shown in Table 4 & 5 and Figure 2.

Furthermore, in order to test the mediating effect of authenticity, perceived value, and brand trust between brand legitimacy and loyalty of tourist destination, this study adopted bootstrapping method

proposed by Preacher & Hayes (2008) to test the mediating effect. As a more effective and reasonable method to test the mediating effect, according to the convention of the bootstrapping method, this study

set the resamples size to 500 and made model estimation under 95% confidence interval. The data analysis results were shown in Table 5. Therefore, it is proved that brand authenticity (consistency, credibility,



Note: ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Figure 2. The Structural model.

Table 5. Results of mediating effect analysis

	Construct	Brand legitimacy	Originality	Consistency	Credibility	Brand trust	Perceived value
Standardized Total Effects	Originality	0.675**	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Consistency	0.771**	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Credibility	0.704**	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Brand trust	0.689**	0.336	0.209*	0.428**	N.A.	N.A.
	Perceived value	0.631**	0.207*	0.242**	0.433**	N.A.	N.A.
	loyalty	0.542**	0.202	0.195**	0.362**	0.222**	0.616**
Standardized Direct Effects	Originality	0.675**	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Consistency	0.771**	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Credibility	0.704**	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Brand trust	N.A.	0.336**	0.209*	0.428**	N.A.	N.A.
	Perceived value	N.A.	0.207*	0.242**	0.433**	N.A.	N.A.
	loyalty	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	0.222**	0.616**
Standardized Indirect Effects	Originality	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Consistency	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Credibility	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Brand trust	0.689**	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Perceived value	0.631**	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	loyalty	0.542**	0.202**	0.195**	0.362**	N.A.	N.A.

originality) had full mediating effects on the relationship between brand legitimacy and perceived value and the relationship between brand legitimacy and brand trust. And the indirect statistical influence of brand legitimacy on perceived value was $\beta = 0.631$ ($p < 0.05$), on brand trust $\beta = 0.689$ ($p < 0.05$), and on destination loyalty was $\beta = 0.542$ ($p < 0.05$).

V. Discussions and Implications

A. Summary of the findings

This study explores the concept of brand legitimacy in heritage destination context. It explains how brand legitimacy motivates perceived value and brand trust through the mediating role of brand authenticity. There are several main findings in this article. First, the brand authenticity in this research adopts the three dimensions of Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2020), namely consistency, credibility, originality. Also, it shows how the brand legitimacy of cultural heritage tourism destinations positively affect brand authenticity. This result is partially consistent with Fritz et al.'s (2017) research outcome that showed brand legitimacy is one of the antecedents of brand authenticity. However, the difference is that this research is aimed at cultural heritage tourism. Therefore, this research adopts the brand authenticity measurement dimensions that are more suitable for the tourism context.

Second, brand authenticity positively affects the perceived value and brand trust. This result is partly consistent with the results in the field of traditional commodity marketing (Schallehn et al., 2014), It indicates that the positive causality between brand authenticity and perceived value is established in different situations. Third, perceived value and brand trust positively affect cultural heritage destination loyalty. Fourth, The mediating effect analysis result confirms that brand legitimacy could, directly and indirectly, affect the perceived value, brand trust, and destination loyalty. Based on these findings, this study provides some theoretical support for a more

comprehensive understanding of the cultural heritage tourism destination branding. It gives strategic suggestions for the brand management and marketing of cultural heritage tourism destination in practice.

B. Theoretical implications

Above all, this paper's first contribution concerns the introduction of the concept of brand legitimacy into research on destination brands. This research examines the causal relationships between brand legitimacy and the three dimensions of perceived brand authenticity from a marketing perspective. Wuestefeld et al. (2012) suggested that the use of the brand's historical heritage can be through a three-stage approach: 'uncover and understanding,' 'activate,' and 'protect.' This requires stakeholders first to find the brand's origin and study its brand legitimacy or historical influence. So this study contributes to the theoretical research of brand management.

Second, this research establishes a framework of drivers and consequences of brand authenticity, focusing on the cultural destination brand. Unlike several kinds of research that only focus on brand authenticity's consequences (Park et al., 2019), this paper proposed the role of brand legitimacy in creating authenticity. In brand management, legitimacy is an important concept related to the brand's history and inherent character (Fritz et al., 2017). Previously, there were only a few research pieces on brand legitimacy in marketing research (Guo et al., 2017). There were even fewer studies on brand legitimacy in tourist destinations. So this paper enriches the study on destination branding from a new research perspective.

Third, this study assesses the outcomes of brand authenticity. It demonstrates that perceived value and brand trust play a significant mediating role in the effect of authenticity on tourist destinations' loyalty. Moreover, the degree of interpretation at 54.0% and 64.7% once again illustrated the critical influence of brand authenticity on them. Research on brand

authenticity is a hot topic in heritage tourism research. Scholars have also put forward various hypothetical relationships to explain the relationship between authenticity and loyalty to tourist destinations (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). So, all the findings in this research contribute to the growing body of tourism literature which examines the brand authenticity in cultural heritage destination branding.

C. Practice Implication

First, our results show that brand legitimacy will affect consumers' brand authenticity. Besides, brand legitimacy is an essential driving force of customer perceived value and brand trust. In terms of the future development of the heritage tourism industry, the concept of brand legitimacy reflects the direction of the practice of heritage tourism. Efforts should be made to maintain the legitimacy of the existing traditional brands. Inheriting the brand's past is of great significance for building and maintaining a meaningful brand. Stakeholders should carry out related marketing activities based on better understanding the destination's history to be sure to prevent over-commercialization. That is to say; we should respect the history of the tourist destination and protect the brand inheritance. For instance, tourist destination developers can specifically restore traditional architectural arts more authentically. This requires more investigation and evidence collection instead of fixing the so-called ancient architecture style uniformly.

Second, legitimacy is closely related to shared social values and cultural inheritance. Traditional cultural heritage tourism products mainly rely on tickets to obtain income, and the profit channel is a single transaction. Historic legitimacy highlights the tourist destination's cultural value. Also, it expands diversified value growth points based on brand legitimacy. For example, heritage scenic spots can extend comprehensive cultural experience space around the same tourism brand. There is value in developing an extensive cultural tourism town by integrating its museum exhibitions, leisure vacations,

shopping, sightseeing, or theme tour education. It is also possible to develop cultural and creative industries with the concept of tourism destination brand as the core. For example, in developing tourist souvenirs, practitioners can integrate innovative local design, adopt local handicraft skills, and strengthen regional cultural characteristics. These measures can utilize the inheritance and innovation guided by the brand legitimacy of tourist destinations.

Third, this study demonstrates that perceived value directly affects the loyalty behavior of tourists. Existing historical heritage tourism sites have shown that perceived value is a crucial determinant. This work convinces that tourism management attention must focus on tourists' tangible and intangible benefits. Therefore, destination managers should pay full attention to the creation and transmission of perceived value. Based on fully understanding tourist destinations' authenticity, they should improve the perceived value in a targeted manner. For example, in the tourism product planning, practitioners need to utilize authentic historical and cultural exhibitions and interactive game projects. Also, they must improve the service level so as to enhance the tourists' trust in that brand. This results in increased tourist loyalty behavior.

D. Limitations and further studies

First, this study's legitimacy measurement method comes from the marketing literature, which may not fully conform to the tourist destination situation. Hence, the tourism field's brand legitimacy measurement needs to be further standardized. Second, the evaluation of brand legitimacy would be influenced by one's historical knowledge and personality. So based on self-congruity theory, the matching of tourists' personalities and destination brands will also be an exciting topic. Or the future study could focus on the differences between tourists' and residents' perceptions (Martin & Capelli, 2017) of the brand legitimacy of the same tourist destination.

Moreover, the competition among heritage tourism

destinations is becoming increasingly fierce, mainly manifested in image convergence and weak brand personalization. The emotional attachment (Chen et al., 2020) to tourism destinations can be effectively highlighted by symbolizing the destination brand's authenticity. However, this research is limited to the research on the factors (brand legitimacy) that affect authenticity. Future research can focus on the emotional characteristics of destination brands and provide a reference value for the direction of destination marketing.

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