The Effect of Destination Image on Destination Loyalty Through Authenticity as a Mediator

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of destination image on destination loyalty, with authenticity as a mediator, in the Lon Malang Beach tourism, Sampang. The method used in this study is quantitative. The data collection technique used a questionnaire with 97 respondents, all of whom were tourists who had visited Lon Malang Beach, Sampang. The data analysis technique used is structural Equation modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS 4.1.1.5 software. The study found that destination image significantly influences destination loyalty through authenticity. This finding underscores the importance of managing destination image and authenticity to strengthen destination loyalty and support sustainable tourism development.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh citra destinasi terhadap loyalitas destinasi melalui authenticity sebagai mediator pada wisata Pantai Lon Malang, Sampang. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kuantitatif. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan kuesioner dengan 97 responden, yang semuanya merupakan wisatawan yang pernah berkunjung ke wisata Pantai Lon Malang, Sampang. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan adalah pemodelan persamaan struktural (SEM) dengan software SmartPLS 4.1.1.5. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa citra destinasi berpengaruh signifikan terhadap loyalitas destinasi melalui authenticity. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya pengelolaan citra destinasi dan authenticity untuk memperkuat loyalitas destinasi serta mendukung pengembangan pariwisata berkelanjutan.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has developed into one of the world's strongest industries, significantly impacting a country's economy (Yulistira & Fathor, 2024). This industry not only drives economic development and growth but also creates jobs and reduces poverty across regional and international boundaries (Webster & Ivanov, 2015). Technological innovation, demographic changes, and socioeconomic improvements are key drivers of increased tourist participation in various destinations. Therefore, the tourism sector is a crucial channel for economic development, with a multiplier effect that can stimulate other sectors (Kanwel et al., 2019). In Indonesia, attention to sustainable, community-based tourism continues to grow, along with efforts to diversify tourism products and enhance global competitiveness (Cholifah & Fathor, 2023). Post-COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia's tourism sector experienced a strong recovery, with international tourist visits reaching 13,9 million in 2024, approaching pre-pandemic levels in 2019 (Arief et al., 2022).

Madura Island, particularly Sampang Regency, boasts significant coastal tourism potential, as evidenced by a post-pandemic surge in tourist visits, from 71,253 in 2020 to 573,013 in 2024 (Syarif & Fathor, 2023). One of Sampang Regency's leading destinations is Lon

Malang Beach, boasting natural beauty and opportunities for local economic development. Lon Malang Beach boasts a unique contrast between blue seawater, fine white sand, and green pine trees, creating a stunning view, especially at sunset. Lon Malang Beach faces several weaknesses, including a lack of extensive accommodation facilities, inadequate promotion, and limited access at certain times. The number of visitors per month is around 8,000, with an average of 100 on weekdays and 300-400 on weekends. Despite fluctuating visitor numbers due to the pandemic, this destination demonstrates stability and continued growth potential. Tourist visits increase significantly during holidays such as Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and New Year, but then decline again after the holiday period ends (Aprilia & Idialis, 2023). Given these issues, the managers of the Lon Malang Beach tourist destination need to develop effective promotional strategies to increase visitation. Some strategies that can be employed include creating a destination image that aligns with tourist expectations and maintaining the authenticity of the destination's surroundings, with the long-term goal of fostering tourist loyalty (Widiastini & Made, 2015).

Understanding the image of a tourist destination is very important because it shapes how tourists view and decide to visit a location. According to Fkeye & Crompton (1991), destination image is a reflection of thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions about a destination (Fahmi et al., 2022). Destination image does not always originate from direct experience or facts, but can be formed and become a strong source of motivation for tourists to visit a tourist location (Yuliana et al., 2023). Therefore, destination image is the perception tourists have of a destination based on their experiences there (Zheng & Rahman, 2025). From all these explanations, it can be concluded that destination image is the totality of information and perspectives a person has about a location, whether it has been visited or is intended to be visited in the future (Wati & Wantara, 2024). According to Gustia & Putra (2021), the image of a tourist destination can be measured through three indicators: Cognitive image (cognitive destination image), Unique image (unique destination image), and Affective image (affective destination image).

The concept of authenticity in tourism is a dynamic and evolving topic, reflecting diverse views that influence how tourist perceives destinations. According to Mckercher & du Cros (2015: 77), authenticity is a constantly evolving and debated area, generating a significant diversity of perspectives. The concept of authenticity is worth preserving in changing circumstances (Anjani & Pujiastuti, 2024). According to Cohen (2021), authenticity in tourism is a State in which a tourist destination or experience offers qualities that visitors appreciate. This includes having resources that are special, unique, or different from their everyday experiences. Cohen emphasizes that the concept of authenticity in tourism is a process that can change and depends on context. Destinations that are considered authentic can change over time and during interactions with visitors (Chorisolekah et al., 2024). According to Chorisolekah et al., (2024), three leading indicators for assessing authenticity are proposed: Objective authenticity, Constructive authenticity, and Existential authenticity.

Destination loyalty is an important concept in tourism marketing because it provides destinations with a competitive advantage by enabling them to retain loyal tourists (Oppermann, 2000). Destination loyalty emphasizes a long-term perspective, namely repeat tourist visit behavior, not just visits unrelated to previous experiences. Destination loyalty is the willingness of visitors to return to a place and to recommend it to others (Yuliana et al., 2023). These positive experiences then encourage tourists to return and recommend the destination to others, thereby strengthening destination loyalty (Fristiandi et al., 2025).

Indicators of destination loyalty according to Campon et al., (2016): intention to revisit, recommendations to others, promotion of positive experiences (WOM), and making the destination a primary choice.

This research gap stems from the lack of empirical studies examining the influence of destination image and authenticity on tourist loyalty in areas with limited facilities and promotional support, such as Lon Malang Beach, Sampang. This research is important because it is relevant to sustainable tourism destination development strategies in coastal areas and because it examines unique local contexts that have not been widely explored before (Widiastini & Made, 2015). Destination authenticity is tested as a mediator that can strengthen the influence of destination image on loyalty, providing an original contribution to the field of tourism management and destination marketing (Anggraini et al., 2024). The hypotheses in this research are:

H1: Destination image significantly influences authenticity.

H2: Authenticity significantly influences destination loyalty.

H3: Destination image significantly influences destination loyalty.

H4: Destination image significantly influences destination loyalty through authenticity.

The problem-solving approach in this study uses a quantitative method, specifically SEM-PLS, to examine the relationships among destination image, authenticity, and destination loyalty. By examining the role of authenticity as a mediator, this study is expected to provide a deeper empirical understanding of how destination image can be transformed into tourist loyalty through perceptions of authenticity, while also providing strategic recommendations for Lon Malang Beach managers in increasing the number of tourist visits (Anggraini et al., 2024). This study also aims to provide strategic recommendations for Lon Malang Beach managers to enhance promotion, maintain the destination's authenticity, and ultimately increase the number of tourist visits and local economic development.

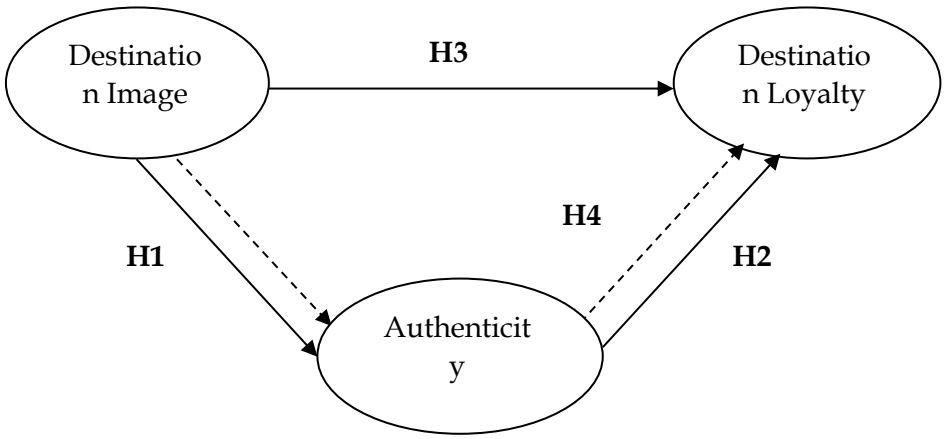

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

The object of this research is the Lon Malang Beach tourist attraction. The location of this research is a tourist village on Jl. Raya Batu Lengger, Bira Tengah Village, Sokobanah District, Sampang Regency. This research uses a quantitative approach. In the context of this study, the population is all visitors to Lon Malang Beach, Sampang. Because the exact number of visitors

is unknown, this population is categorized as an infinite population (Sugiyono, 2023). In this study, the population size was large and unknown, so the sample size was determined using the Cochran formula, resulting in a sample size of 96.04. Because the sample size must be an integer and to facilitate sample determination, it was rounded up to 97 respondents (Cochran, 1977). In this study, the sampling technique used was nonprobability purposive sampling, which involved establishing criteria to ensure the selected respondents met the required characteristics, thereby ensuring that the collected data aligned with the research objectives (AS & Fatmariyah, 2024). In this research, the criteria for sample selection are as follows:

1. Tourists aged 17 to 60 years
2. Tourists willing to complete the questionnaire
3. Tourists currently visiting the site for research data collection

The type of data used in this study is quantitative. The data sources are primary and secondary (Sugiyono, 2023). In this study, the independent variable is Destination Image (X), the dependent variable is Destination Loyalty (Y), and the mediator variable is Authenticity. The data collection techniques in this study were questionnaires and observations. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) strongly. The data obtained from the questionnaire were then processed using the SEM-PLS analysis technique in SmartPLS 4.1.1.5 (Ghozali & Kusumadewi, 2023). The explanation about the operational definition is listed in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Operational Definition of Variables

Variables	Operational Definition	Indicators	Measurement Tools	Measuring Scale
Destination Image (X)	Destination image is the picture that someone has in their mind about a location or place.	- Cognitive Destination Image - Unique Destination Image - Affective Destination Image (Gustia & Putra, 2021)	Questionnaire	Likert Scale (1-5)
Authenticity (Z)	Authenticity refers to the unique aspects of a tourist destination that make it different from other places.	- Objective Authenticity - Constructive Authenticity - Existential Authenticity (Hyojin & Bonn, 2015)	Questionnaire	Likert Scale (1-5)
Destination Loyalty (Y)	Destination loyalty is the willingness of visitors to return to a place and to recommend it to others.	- Intention to revisit - Recommendation to others - Promotion and sharing of positive experiences - Selecting the destination as a primary travel choice (Campón et	Questionnaire	Likert Scale (1-5)

Variables	Operational Definition	Indicators	Measurement Tools	Measuring Scale
		al., 2016)		

Source: Data Result 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model Analysis (Outer Model)

In SmartPLS 4.1.1.5, outer model analysis is used to evaluate the relationships between latent variables and their constituent indicators, also known as the measurement model. The main objective of outer model analysis is to ensure that the indicators used truly reflect the constructs being measured validly and reliably. Outer model testing is conducted in several stages: convergent validity (assessed by factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values), discriminant validity (assessed using cross-loadings and the Fornell-Larcker criteria), and reliability (assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values). If all criteria are met, the measurement model is considered good and can proceed to the inner model analysis stage to examine the relationships between latent constructs (Ghozali & Kusumadewi, 2023).

Convergent Validity Test

Convergent validity is used to ensure that indicators within a construct are mutually reinforcing and mutually weakening. According to Ghozali & Kusumadewi, (2023), the loading factor for a reflective construct must be > 0.70. This value indicates how well each indicator accurately and consistently represents the construct being measured. Therefore, ensuring a loading factor value > 0.70 is a crucial step in the instrument validation stage to ensure the data obtained is truly accurate and in line with the construct theory used, allowing further analysis to be conducted with confidence in the data quality. The results of the convergent validity test in this study are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Loading Factor Tes Result

	Destination Image (X)	Authenticity (Z)	Destination Loyalty (Y)	Information
X1	0.962			**Valid**
X2	0.971			**Valid**
X3	0.968			**Valid**
X4	0.958			**Valid**
X5	0.941			**Valid**
X6	0.970			**Valid**
X7	0.976			**Valid**
X8	0.971			**Valid**
X9	0.963			**Valid**
X10	0.969			**Valid**
X11	0.945			**Valid**
X12	0.973			**Valid**
Z1		0.952		**Valid**
Z2		0.929		**Valid**
Z3		0.931		**Valid**
Z4		0.942		**Valid**

	Destination Image (X)	Authenticity (Z)	Destination Loyalty (Y)	Information
Z5		0.949		**Valid**
Z6		0.953		**Valid**
Z7		0.957		**Valid**
Z8		0.968		**Valid**
Z9		0.956		**Valid**
Z10		0.940		**Valid**
Z11		0.942		**Valid**
Z12		0.952		**Valid**
Y1			0.972	**Valid**
Y2			0.941	**Valid**
Y3			0.960	**Valid**
Y4			0.950	**Valid**
Y5			0.976	**Valid**
Y6			0.949	**Valid**
Y7			0.958	**Valid**
Y8			0.959	**Valid**
Y9			0.949	**Valid**

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Based on Table 4.10, the results of the loading factor test indicate that all indicators representing the variables of destination image (X), authenticity (Z), and destination loyalty (Y) have loading factor values above 0.90, ranging from 0.929 to 0.976. This indicates that each indicator has a very high level of validity in measuring its respective construct. This high loading factor value indicates that all statement items in the questionnaire have the strength to measure each variable. In other words, all statements in the questionnaire have been shown to accurately and consistently represent the research variables. Because all indicators exceed the minimum threshold of 0.70, it can be concluded that this research instrument is suitable for further analysis.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

An Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of > 0.50 indicates that the construct can directly explain more than 50% of the indicator variance. An AVE value below 0.50 indicates that the indicator is still significantly influenced by error variance or by other variables outside the construct, thereby underestimating the construct's convergent validity. Therefore, an AVE > 0.50 indicates that the indicators are truly representative and relevant in describing the construct, and provide good measurement quality in structural analysis.

Table 3. Loading Factor AVE Test Result

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)		
Destination Image (X)	0.929	Valid
Authenticity (Z)	0.898	Valid
Destination Loyalty (Y)	0.916	Valid

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Based on Table 3, the results of the *Average Variance Extracted* (AVE) calculation show that all variables are valid because the AVE value is greater than the minimum limit of 0.50. The destination image variable (X) has an AVE value of 0.929, authenticity (Z) of 0.898, and

destination loyalty (Y) of 0.916. These very high values indicate that most of the indicator variance can be explained by the constructs of each variable, ranging from 89% to 92%. Thus, the instrument used has robust convergent validity, so that each indicator truly reflects the constructs being measured and can be relied upon in research analysis.

Discriminant Validity Test

The discriminant validity test aims to ensure that each construct in the model is empirically distinct from the other constructs. Ghozali & Kusumadewi, (2023) explain that discriminant validity can be tested using cross-loadings, in which each indicator must have the highest loading on its own construct.

Table 4. Cross Loading Value Results

	Destination Image (X)	Authenticity (Z)	Destination Loyalty (Y)
X1	0.962	0.595	0.662
X2	0.971	0.619	0.702
X3	0.968	0.617	0.695
X4	0.958	0.560	0.635
X5	0.941	0.546	0.651
X6	0.970	0.631	0.712
X7	0.976	0.605	0.695
X8	0.971	0.618	0.695
X9	0.963	0.555	0.647
X10	0.969	0.622	0.700
X11	0.945	0.600	0.688
X12	0.973	0.593	0.668
Z1	0.547	0.952	0.806
Z2	0.626	0.929	0.798
Z3	0.591	0.931	0.787
Z4	0.610	0.942	0.811
Z5	0.600	0.949	0.809
Z6	0.586	0.953	0.793
Z7	0.602	0.957	0.817
Z8	0.601	0.968	0.819
Z9	0.576	0.956	0.782
Z10	0.549	0.940	0.750
Z11	0.545	0.942	0.760
Z12	0.610	0.952	0.830
Y1	0.688	0.802	0.972
Y2	0.686	0.814	0.941
Y3	0.680	0.960	0.960
Y4	0.667	0.950	0.950
Y5	0.683	0.976	0.970
Y6	0.670	0.949	0.949
Y7	0.694	0.958	0.958
Y8	0.644	0.959	0.959
Y9	0.663	0.949	0.949

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Table 4 shows cross-loadings used to test the discriminant validity of each indicator relative to its variable. Each indicator is considered valid if it has the highest loading value on

its variable compared to other variables. Based on the results of these values, the indicators in variables X1-X12 have the highest loading value on variable X with a range of 0.941-0.976 compared to variables Z and Y, likwise the variable indicator Z1-Z12 show the highest value in column Z with a range of 0.929-0.968, as well as variable indicators Y1-Y9 which have the highest value on variabel Y with a range of 0.941-0.971. This indicates that all indicators have good discriminant validity because they more strongly reflect the constructs they measure, than other constructs in the research model.

Reliability Test

Reliability indicates the consistency of respondents' answers to construct indicators. According to Ghozali & Kusumadewi (2023), a construct is considered reliable if Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability rho_a, and composite reliability rho_c values are all > 0.70.

Table 5. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability Results

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reability (rho_a)	Composite Reability (rho_c)	Information
Destination Image (X)	0.993	0.994	0.994	Reliabel
Authenticity (Z)	0.990	0.990	0.991	Reliabel
Destination Loyalty (Y)	0.989	0.989	0.990	Reliabel

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Based on 5 Shows the results of the construct reliability test using three measures: Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (rho_a), and composite reliability (rho_c). A high Cronbach's alpha value indicates internal consistency among indicators within a variable, while composite reliability indicates the overall reliability of the construct being tested. Based on the results in the table above, all variables, namely X, Z, and Y, have a Cronbach's alpha above 0.70 and composite reliability values (rho_a and rho_c) above 0.70, approaching 1.00. This indicates that all variables in the research model have very high reliability, meaning each indicator consistently measures the same construct, and the research instrument is deemed reliable.

Measurement Model Analysis (Inner Model)

Inner-Model analysis in SmartPLS 4.1.1.5 is used to test the relationships among latent variables or constructs defined in the research structural model. The inner model describes the direct and indirect influences between latent variables that act as independent, dependent, and mediating variables. Inner model testing is conducted to assess the predictive power and significance of relationships between constructs, using R-square (R^2), F-square (F^2), Q-square (Q^2), path coefficients, mediation (bootstrapping), and hypothesis testing (bootstrapping). Thus, inner model analysis is a crucial step in determining the extent to which the research model has predictive power and statistically significant relationships (Ghozali & Kusumadewi, 2023). The explanation is as follows:

R-Square Test (R^2)

The (R^2) value indicates the extent to which exogenous variables can explain endogenous variables. R^2 values are categorized as weak (0.19), moderate (0.33), and strong

(0.67). The higher the R^2 value, the better the model's explanatory power for the dependent variable (Ghozali & Kusumadewi, 2023).

Table 6. R-Square Test Results

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Authenticity (Z)	0.385	0.378
Loyalitas Destinasi (Y)	0.763	0.758

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Based on 6 shows, the results of the R-Square and R-Square Adjusted tests are used to assess the ability of the independent variables to explain the dependent variable in the research model. The R-Square value for variable Z of 0.385 indicates that 38.5% of the variation in variable Z can be explained by the independent variables that influence it. In comparison, the remaining 61.5% is explained by other factors outside the model. The R-Square value for variable Y of 0.763 indicates that 76.3% of the variation in variable Y can be explained by the variables that influence the model, with the remaining 23.7% explained by other factors. The R-Square Adjusted value, which is slightly lower than R-Square, indicates an adjustment to the number of predictors in the model. However, the difference is slight, so the model still has good predictive ability. The image showing the output of the PLS-SEM Algorithm is as follows:

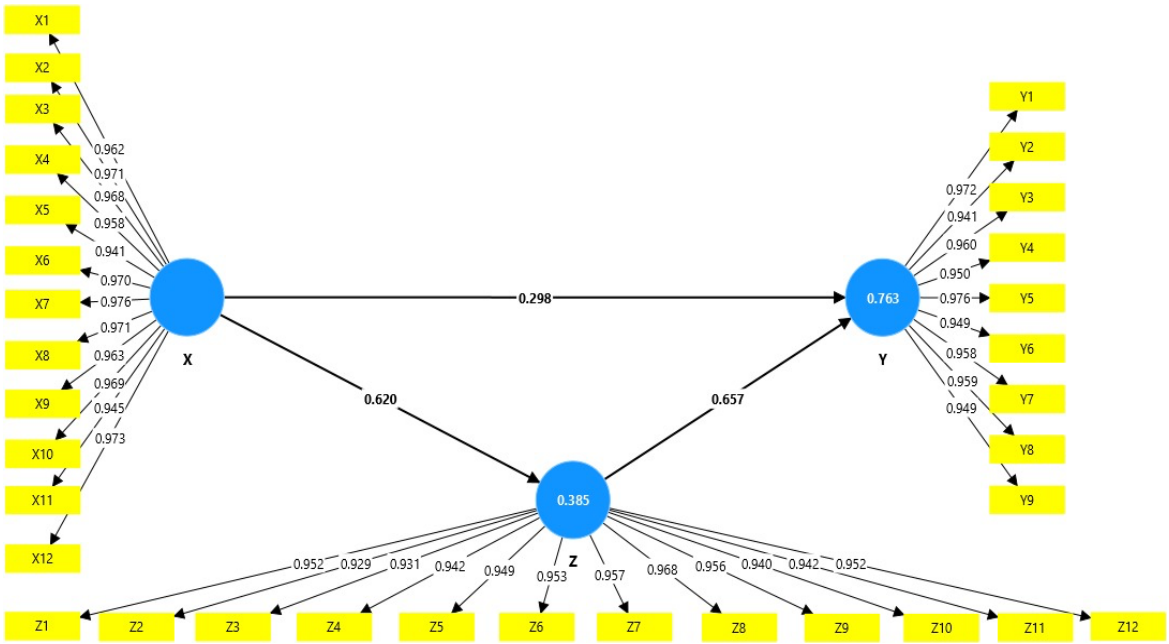

Figure 2. PLS-SEM Algorithm Output

F-Square Test (F^2)

The F^2 test measures the magnitude of each exogenous construct's influence on the endogenous construct. Ghozali & Kusumadewi, (2023) states that the F^2 value is interpreted as: 0.02 (small), 0.15 (medium), and 0.35 (large).

Table 7. F-Square Test Results

	Destination Image (X)	Authenticity (Z)	Destination Loyalty (Y)
Destination Image (X)		0.625	0.231

	Destination Image (X)	Authenticity (Z)	Destination Loyalty (Y)
Authenticity (Z)			
Destination Loyalty (Y)		1.119	

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Table 7 presents the results of the F^2 test, which assesses the magnitude of each exogenous variable's influence on the endogenous variable in the PLS-SEM model. Based on the table, the F^2 value of 0.625 for X and Z indicates a strong influence, as it exceeds the limit of 0.35. This means that variable X makes a substantial contribution to the change in variance in Z. Meanwhile, the F^2 value between X and Y of 0.231 shows a moderate influence, because it is between 0.15 and 0.35, which means that X still plays a significant role in Y. Furthermore, the F^2 value between Z and Y of 1.119 shows a considerable influence, so it can be concluded that Z makes the most dominant contribution in explaining variance in Y compared to the influence of other variables.

Predictive Relevance Test (Q Square (Q^2))

Q square (Q^2) is used to assess a model's predictive ability. According to Ghozali & Kusumadewi, (2023) a Q^2 value > 0 indicates that the model has good predictive relevance to the observed data, while a $Q^2 \leq 0$ indicates that the model has no predictive power.

Table 8. Q-Square Test Results

	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
Authenticity (Z)	1164	779.585	0.330
Destination Loyalty (Y)	873	270.187	0.691

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Table 8 shows the results of the Q-square test used to assess the predictive relevance of the PLS-SEM model. The Q^2 value is calculated using the formula $Q^2 = 1-(SSE/SSO)$, where SSO is the number of initial observations, and SSE is the prediction error value. Based on the table, construct Y has a Q^2 value of 0.691, indicating high predictive relevance, as the value is far above 0. This value means that the model can explain appoximately 69.1% of the variability of indicators in construct Y. Meanwhile, construct Z has a Q^2 value 0.33, which is included in the moderate predictive relevance category, meaning that the model is still quite good at predicting variable Z. Overall, the positive Q^2 value in both constructs indicates that the model has good and relevant predictive ability, so it is suitable for use to explain the relationship between variables in this study.

Path Coefficient Test

This test measures the direction and strength of the relationship between the latent construct in the structural model. The path coefficient (β) can be positive or negative, and significance is tested using the bootstrap method with a t-statistic > 1.96 (for $\alpha = 0.05$) or a p-value < 0.05.

Table 9. Path Coefficient Test Results

	Destination Image (X)	Authenticity (Z)	Destination Loyalty (Y)

	Destination Image (X)	Authenticity (Z)	Destination Loyalty (Y)
Destination Image (X)		0.620	0.298
Authenticity (Z)			0.657
Destination Loyalty (Y)			

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Table 9 shows the results of the path coefficient test, which describes the magnitude of the direct influence between latent variables in the PLS-SEM model. Based on the table, the path coefficient value between X and Z of 0.620 indicates that variable X has a positive and strong influence on Z. Furthermore, the value of X against Y of 0.298 also shows a positive influence, but with a lower strength than the influence of X on Z, so that it can be categorized as a moderate influence. Meanwhile, the value of Z against Y of 0.657 indicates a strong positive influence, suggesting that Z plays an important role in explaining variable Y. Overall, these results indicate that the relationship between the variables in the model is positive, with Z exerting the most significant influence on Y.

Hypothesis Test (Bootstrapping Direct Effect)

A hypothesis test was conducted using (bootstrapping direct effect) to determine the significance of the relationship between variables. The hypothesis was accepted if the t-statistic was > 1.96 or the p-value was < 0.05, indicating that the relationship between the constructs was statistically significant.

Table 10. Hypothesis Test Result (Boostrapping Direct Effect)

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Information
X -> Z	0.620	0.621	0.071	8.761	0.000	Proven
Z -> Y	0.657	0.651	0.058	11.364	0.000	Proven
X -> Y	0.298	0.303	0.057	5.241	0.000	Proven

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Table 10 presents the results of the bootstrap test used to assess the significance of the relationship between latent variables (hypothesis test) in the PLS-SEM model. All paths had t-statistics greater than 1.96, and p-values less than 0.05, thus, all relationships were declared significant. The explanation is as follows:

a. The effect of Destination Image (X) on Authenticity (Z) has a coefficient of 0.620, a t-statistic of 8.761, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating that Destination Image (X) has a positive and significant effect on Authenticity (Z).
b. The effect of Authenticity (Z) on Destination Loyalty (Y) has a coefficient value of 0.657, a t-statistic of 11.364, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating that Authenticity (Z) had a positive and significant effect on Destination Loyalty (Y).
c. The effect of Destination Image (X) on Destination Loyalty (Y) has a coefficient value of 0.298 with a t-statistic of 5.241 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating that Destination Image (X) has a positive and significant effect on Destination Loyalty (Y). Thus, the results of this bootstrapping test prove that all hypotheses proposed in the research model are

accepted.

Mediation Test (Bootstrapping Indirect Effect)

The mediation test is conducted to assess whether the influence of the exogenous variable on the endogenous variable occurs directly or through a connecting variable. If, in the third stage, the direct relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variables is insignificant, but the mediator's influence on the endogenous variable is significant, then mediation is considered to have occurred.

Table 11. Mediation Test Results (Bootstrapping Indirect Effect)

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Information
X -> Z -> Y	0.407	0.403	0.048	8.472	0.000	Proven

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Based on 11 shows the results of the mediation test (bootstrapping indirect effect), aiming to determine whether variable Z mediates the relationship between variables X and Y in the PLS-SEM model. Based on the bootstrapping results, the Original Sample (O) value of 0.407 indicates that the indirect effect of X on Y through Z is positive, meaning that an increase in X will increase Y through the role of Z. The t-statistic value 8.472, which is far above the limit of 1.96, and the p-value of 0 (less than 0.05) indicate that the mediation effect is statistically significant. Thus, Z plays a significant role in strengthening X's influence on Y, thereby strengthening the relationship between X and Y.

DISCUSSION

The Influence of Destination Image (X) on Authenticity (Z)

The test results for H1, stating that "Destination Image (X) influences Authenticity (Z) among tourists visiting Lon Malang Beach", are accepted. Destination image can have a positive and significant effect on authenticity because it is influenced by one of the destination image indicators with the highest value among the others, namely the unique destination image indicator, which makes a significant contribution to shaping the perception of destination authenticity in the eyes of tourists. The authenticity indicator, namely constructive authenticity, is influenced by destination image and includes elements such as authentic experiences, preserved local culture, and unique impressions tourist deeply feel during their visit. This indicates that tourists' perceptions of a destination's uniqueness will increase the authenticity they feel during their visit. However, this study needs improvement, as some cognitive image indicators have low values, which may influence tourists' perceptions. Therefore, revising the cognitive image indicator instrument is crucial to ensure more representative and valid results in describing respondents' beliefs and knowledge of the destination. These findings emphasize the importance of managing a strong destination image to create authentic experiences that can, in turn, sustainably increase tourist loyalty.

The results of this study align with Wati & Wantara (2024), research, which shows that a strong destination image is characterized by positive perceptions of the destination's unique appeal, atmosphere, and character, thereby fostering a stronger sense of authenticity in among tourists. Similarly, research conducted by Velayuthan (2022), also found that image elements,

particularly those related to accurate impressions and information, as well as real-world experiences, contribute directly to the formation of high perceptions of authenticity. These findings reinforce research showing that when a destination successfully conveys identity, cultural values, and experiences that align with tourists' expectations, perceived authenticity increases, thereby strengthening the destination's credibility and attractiveness.

The Influence of Authenticity (Z) on Destination Loyalty (Y)

The test results for H2, stating that "Authenticity (Z) influences destination loyalty (Y) among tourists visiting Lon Malang Beach", were accepted. Authenticity can have a positive and significant effect on destination loyalty because it is influenced by one of the authenticity indicators, namely the constructive authenticity indicator, which reflects the authentic experience felt by tourists. This constructive authenticity creates the perception that the destination offers a unique, authentic experience, thereby increasing tourists' desire to revisit. Furthermore, the destination loyalty indicator, namely choosing a destination as a primary travel choice, which is influenced by authenticity, creates a perceived authentic experience that can make the destination more prominent and become a primary preference in tourists's decisions. Furthermore, it is important to consider objective indicators, although they have a lower value than constructive authenticity, they still play a role in strengthening tourists' trust in a destination's authenticity. Therefore, improving this indicator will further optimize the influence of authenticity on destination loyalty. Therefore, managing destination authenticity is a key strategy for building long-term relationships with tourists and maintaining the destination's attractiveness in the tourism market.

The results of this study align with research conducted by Anggraini et al., (2024) who found that the higher the perception of authenticity felt by tourists, both in terms of culture, environment, and local interactions, the greater their commitment to return and recommend the destination to others. Similarly, Luo et al., (2024) showed that authenticity can foster emotional attachment and trust among tourists, ultimately encouraging long-term loyalty. Both researchers emphasized that experiences perceived as genuine rather than artificial play an important role in strengthening tourists' relationships with destinations, thereby supporting this study's findings that authenticity is a key driver of destination loyalty.

The Influence of Destination Image (X) on Destination Loyalty (Y)

The test results for H3, stating that "Destination Image (X) influences Destination Loyalty (Y) among tourists visiting Lon Malang Beach", were accepted. Destination image can have a positive and significant influence on destination loyalty because it is influenced by one of the indicators with the highest value among others: a unique destination image, which can encourage tourists to feel more connected and form a strong impression of the destination. In addition, the destination loyalty indicator, namely choosing a destination as the leading travel choice, which is influenced by the destination image, creates a strong and unique image that makes the destination more prominent in the minds of tourists, so that the destination becomes a top priority in making travel decisions. However, this study still needs improvement because the cognitive image indicator has low values. Hence, improvements in this aspect are essential to ensure the influence of destination image on destination loyalty is more optimal and reflects authentic experiences that can strengthen tourists' positive impressions of the destination. Thus, tourists are not only satisfied with the experience they get, but also encouraged to make repeat visits and recommend the destination to others, which ultimately increases destination

loyalty.

The results of this study align with research by Kanwel et al., (2019) who explained that a strong destination image encompassing positive perceptions of beauty, facilities, safety, and cultural uniqueness can encourage tourists to build deeper emotional connections with the destination, thereby increasing their intention to return. Meanwhile, Zhang et al., (2018) also emphasized that a good destination image not only creates a positive initial perception but also plays a crucial role in maintaining tourist satisfaction and commitment to the destination. The consistency of the results of these two researchers strengthens the findings in this study that destination image is a crucial factor in shaping sustainable tourist loyalty.

The Influence of Destination Image (X) on Destination Loyalty (Y) Through Authenticity (Z)

The test results for H4, stating that "Destination Image (X) influences Destination Loyalty (Y) through Authenticity (Z) among tourists visiting Lon Malang Beach", were accepted. This indicates that the destination image not only directly influences destination loyalty but can also increase loyalty indirectly by enhancing authenticity or perceived authenticity among tourists. This means that a positive destination image not only creates an attractive impression for tourists but also increases perceptions of the destination's authenticity and uniqueness, ultimately encouraging tourists to be more loyal, through repeat visits and recommendations to others. This research needs improvement because several indicators have low values, including the cognitive image, objective authenticity, and revisit intention indicators. Therefore, improvements in important aspects are needed to optimize the influence of destination image on destination loyalty through authenticity. Thus, authenticity plays a vital role as a mediator linking destination image with destination loyalty, confirming that destination image management must focus on creating authentic experiences to achieve sustainable loyalty.

The results of this study are in line with research conducted by Isqorini et al., (2024) which revealed that a positive destination image can increase the perception of authenticity through experiences that are considered natural, unique, and reflect the original character of the destination, thereby encouraging tourists to form stronger bonds and commitment to the destination. In line with this, Yuliana et al., (2023) found that when the destination image is authentically reflected in the tourist experience, the resulting trust, satisfaction, and emotional attachment can strengthen loyalty. The consistency of these two findings supports the results of this study, which show that authenticity not only strengthens tourist perceptions but also plays an important role in bridging the influence of destination image on the formation of sustainable destination loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research results, which are supported by relevant theoretical studies, the "Influence of Destination Image on Destination Loyalty Through Authenticity as a Mediator (Study on Lon Malang Beach, Sampang)", it can be concluded that destination loyalty. The better destination image built through elements of natural attractions, culture, facilities, and reputation, the higher the level of tourist destination loyalty, as indicated by the intention to revisit and positive recommendations. In addition, the authenticity of the destination acts as a mediator, strengthening the relationship between destination image and destination loyalty. Managing authentic and unique destination authenticity can enhance the tourist experience, thereby significantly strengthening their emotional bond and commitment to the destination.

Thus, tourism development and marketing strategies that emphasize the authenticity and positive image of the destination are essential to encourage sustainable destination loyalty.

The recommendations in this study summarize the three main parties involved in developing the Lon Malang Beach destination. Managers need to improve the destination's image through digital promotion, maintaining cleanliness and comfort, and developing supporting tourism facilities. Local governments and tourism agencies need to strengthen community collaboration, provide training in destination management, and improve infrastructure leading to the destination. Furthermore, future researchers are advised to include additional variables, such as tourist satisfaction or perceived value, conduct comparative studies across destinations, and employ more diverse sampling techniques to ensure more comprehensive and generalizable research results.

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