

## Accelerating Tourism Recovery Through Brand Attachment and Loyalty: Case of Danau Toba

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### Abstract

*As a sector that greatly affected by COVID-19, we must recover tourism sector immediately. In 2020, there was a significant decline in employment from the tourism sector. The level of hotel business visits as one of the main sectors of tourism has not been optimal. Tourist visits to tourist destinations are also still not much, especially for foreign tourists who almost never visit Indonesia again. The purpose of this study is to build visitor attachment to the tourist destinations of Lake Toba. Sampling in this study used a convenience sampling technique which was followed by 385 visitors. Data collection in this study used a structured interview method assisted by the use of research questionnaires given to visitors. The data analysis technique used in this study is inferential statistics which are structurally evaluated using SmartPLS 3.0. The results show that efforts to increase visitor loyalty can be done by preparing self-congruency from visitors to tourist destinations. This directly makes consumers interested in making repeat visits. On the other hand, brand attachment also needs to be achieved from the tourist experiences carried out by tourist visitors through brand relationship quality activities that occur. If tourism activities are not able to leave a good image, this loyalty will not be realized..*

*Keywords: Brand Attachment, Brand Relationship Quality, Loyalty, Self-Congruence Tourism.*

### 1. Introduction

Indonesia sees the tourism sector as a sector that has a major role in increasing state income and opening up many jobs around the tourism area (Mudrikah, Sartika, Yuniarti, & Satia, 2014). Indonesia has a diversity of tribes, cultures and even beautiful landscapes that stretch

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out in various regions which make the tourism sector an attraction for connoisseurs of tourist destinations (Kristin & Salam, 2016). Visitors can enjoy various forms of tourism, not only the natural beauty but also the culture and even the authentic art of the local area. These advantages have made the government launch the "visit Indonesia" program which aims to optimize tourism potential not only for foreign visitors but also domestic visitors (Lumbanraja, Lubis, & Hasibuan, 2018).

The development of the tourism sector experienced obstacles in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic which entered Indonesia in the first half of 2020. In an effort to break the chain of spread of COVID-19, the Indonesian government and the world adopted new habits that limit various social and economic activities (Muhyiddin, 2020). The tourism sector experienced a major setback with the adaptation of these new habits. For more than a semester, tourist visits in various tourism sectors experienced a rapid decline, including in the Lake Toba Tourism Area which effectively stopped various tourist destination activities (Djalante et al., 2020).

The tourism sector has begun to reopen after the implementation of the policy relaxation policy and vaccination program as an effort to save the national economy. In this case, an effort is needed to accelerate the revitalization of the tourism sector so that it can again support the economic growth of the community (Anastasiadou, Chrissos Anestis, Karantza, & Vlachakis, 2020; Satuan Tugas Penanganan Covid-19, 2020). In the Lake Toba Tourism Area, the tourism sector will re-open in early 2021. For the record, during 2020 the tourism sector closed various businesses and resulted in 409 thousand workers in the tourism sector losing their jobs. In this revitalization effort, the government is taking steps to gradually open tourism by implementing the cleanliness, healthy, safety, and environmental sustainability (CHSE) protocols.

In order to accelerate the revitalization of the tourism sector, it was suggested to rebuild brand attachment in the tourism sector (Whan Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Lacobucci, 2010). A tourist who has a brand attachment to the tourism sector will provide positive behavior that provides benefits for the tourist spot in the future. The research literature indicates that brand attachment plays an important role in building the loyal behavior of a tourist. Therefore, the focus of this study aims to evaluate the factors that influence brand attachment which are reviewed through brand relationship quality and self-congruence theory.

The tourism revitalization approach through brands is based on the important role of a brand as a mediator between the market and visitors or potential visitors or prospect customers. As a measure of the strength of the bond between consumers and these tourist

destinations, brand attachment is an important note to realize the acceleration of the revitalization of tourist destinations.

## **2. Literature Review**

The concept of loyalty from a marketing point of view has been widely discussed and shows an attitude or consumer behavior that leads to the willingness of customers to always use a company's products for a long period of time, even using them exclusively, recommending these products to others (Kotler and Keller 2012). In the context of tourist destinations, this loyalty shows a willingness to revisit, review positively the tourist experience and want to recommend tourist attractions to others.

In the concept of brand attachment, tourist destinations have a psychological role to their visitors who form a place attachment, namely a psychological attachment to a tourist visit (Huang, Zhang, & Hu, 2017). This concept is widely discussed in psychology (Huber, Eisele, & Meyer, 2018; Xu, Zhang, & Zhao, 2020) and marketing (Huang et al., 2017) which indicates that psychological attachment to a tourist destination will shape loyalty behavior towards a tourist destination. . However, the existence of brand attachment from a marketing point of view is still relatively rare. In the marketing literature, brand attachment is defined as how big the level of connectedness between consumers and a brand. This relationship is subjective, which is an individual's assessment of a brand. In the context of tourist destinations, this attachment reflects the emotional feelings of each individual towards a tourist destination he has visited.

This study uses an attachment theory approach, the attachment between consumers and tourist destinations is built by the mental state of a tourist visitor related to positive opinions and feelings about the tourist destination. The connection is in line with the self of each individual. Two dimensions in brand attachment that will be used in measuring this context are brand-self connection and brand prominence. The concept of brand-self connection relates the condition of the tourist destination to the cognitive feeling of the tourist destination. Brand prominence is related to positive feelings towards tourist destinations that are related to memories and experiences about the tourist destination. When individuals tell stories about tourist destinations, those destinations immediately appear in the minds of consumers.

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 a tourist destination. When someone already has a strong emotional bond with a tourist

destination, it is likely that that person will make a repeat visit or report positive things about the tourist destination. Therefore,

H1 Brand Attachment has a positive effect on brand loyalty to visitors of Lake Toba

By referring to self-congruence theory (Kim, 2015; Mahjoub, KordNaeij, & Moayad, 2015), an individual makes a match between the suitability of a brand to his personality and values. Before product consumption is carried out, this condition is referred to as self-identification (Alrawadieh, Prayag, Alrawadieh, & Alsalamien, 2019) and is then confirmed when consumption becomes actual self-congruence (Huber et al., 2018) i.e. the extent to which the suitability is perceived by consumers. In this concept there are four self-identifications that are evaluated by consumers, namely the ideal self-concept, actual self-concept, ideal social concept, and actual social concept (Wille, Van Hove, Weijters, Rangarajan, & Carpentier, 2018). Consumers will continue to evaluate not only from themselves but also from a social point of view. In other words, consumer behavior from this concept is formed based on self-view and social view of a product. This concept shows the relationship between self-congruence with the concept of brand attachment. In evaluating self-concept towards tourist destinations, the suitability that occurs can increase a positive impression and form good memories in the minds of consumers. This suitability will also make the assessment of tourist destinations more suitable for consumers. Therefore;

H2 Self-congruence has a positive effect on brand attachment to visitors of the Lake Toba  
H3 Self-congruence has a positive effect on brand loyalty to visitors of the Lake Toba

The literature on brand relationship quality refers to the context of interpersonal relationships. In its context, brand relationship quality refers to three elements, namely cognition, affection, and behavior. The cognition dimension is the basis of a relationship between tourists and tourist destinations; the affection dimension relates to the core of the relationship, how visitors feel about the tourist destination; and behavioral dimensions that show individual commitment to the tourist destination. These three dimensions are suggested by various studies as the basis for assessing the quality of brand relationships.

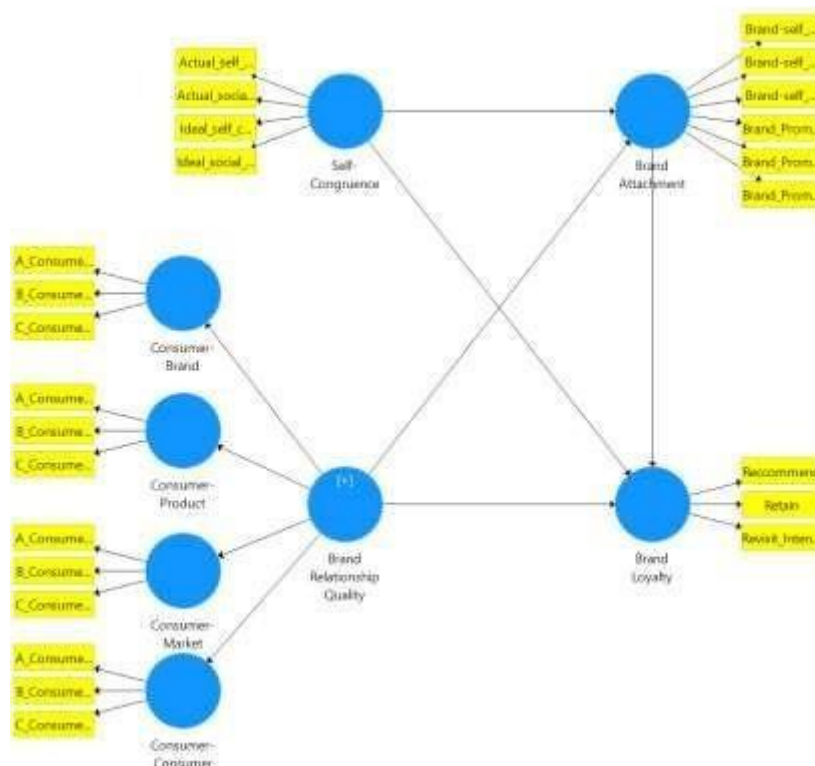
In evaluating a brand relationship, there are four assessments that need to be considered, namely the relationship that occurs between consumers and the brand (Lake Toba tourism area); consumers with products (tourist destinations); consumers with marketers; and consumers with other consumers. Brand relationship as a perception of brand attributes is a form of attitude from visitors to tourist destinations. This attitude evaluates the values of the brand attribute perceived by visitors based on their travel experience. This influence

is cognitively felt 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 relationship can increase emotional attachment to a brand. A positive attitude towards the brand can also shape behavior towards tourist destinations. Visitors who perceive the positive value of a well-delivered tourist destination will have an impact on positive behavior shown in tourist destination loyalty (Anisimova, 2007; Moretta Tartaglione, Cavacece, Russo, & Granata, 2019). Therefore, H4 Brand Relationship has a positive effect on brand attachment to visitors of the Lake Toba H5 Brand Relationship has a positive effect on brand loyalty to visitors of the Lake Toba.

### 3. Methodology

This research was conducted using a structured interview method assisted by the use of research questionnaires as a guideline for field enumerators to measure the condition of the consumers who participated in this research. This study uses four research variables, namely self-congruence and brand relationship quality as independent variables, brand attachment as a mediating variable and brand loyalty as the dependent variable. This research model is described as follows:

**Figure 1 – Research Model**



Due to the absence of an accurate database about visitors to the Lake Toba tourist area, especially individuals who visit these tourist attractions, the sampling method in this study uses the convenience sampling method which is under the umbrella of non-probability sampling. In an effort to obtain a representative sample, data collection was carried out at the tourist sites of Lake Toba and Samosir Island which are popular tourist destinations in the area. Data collection was carried out by complying with health protocols by maintaining distance and minimizing contact with research respondents. Although this study discusses loyalty, there is no intervention on the number of visits made by visitors because this study measures the level of loyalty to the visits made.

This study involved 385 respondents obtained based on the representation of the infinite population with a maximum distribution. The respondent's willingness to participate in this study was asked before the data was obtained from the respondent.

**Table 1 – Description of Research Participant**

Variable	Participant Structure
Gender	Male, 212; Female 173
Visit Intention	Recreation, 301; Water Attraction, 277; Cultural Attraction, 102; Other, 5
Origin	Within the City, 0 Within Region 0; Within Provincy374; Other country, 0

Source: Author

Table 1 showed that our participats were mostly come from within provincy. The main reason for this visit was recreation. There were 212 male participants and 173 female participants in this research. There were still limitation for tourism in addition with new norma that hinder tourism growth.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

The analysis was carried out by evaluating the structural model of this study. The analysis was carried out using structural equations with the Partial Least Square method. The tool used in this research is SmartPLS 3 (Ringle,

C. M., Wende, S., and Becker, 2015). Structural model assessment is carried out using two stages. The first stage evaluates the measurement model (outer model analysis) to find out whether the research model carried out has met a valid and reliable research model in measuring all of the research variables. The fit of the model) is also

evaluated at this stage. If all of them have been met, the analysis continues to the next stage, namely model assessment (inner model analysis) which predicts the influence between research variables and uses the bootstrap method to see the significance and generalize the sample to the population..

**Table 1** - Loading Factor Model Construct Measurement

	Self- Congruency	Brand Relationship Quality	Brand Attachment	Consumer Loyalty
Actual_self_concept	0,937			
Actual_social_concept	0,912			
Ideal_self_concept	0,708			
Ideal_social_concept	0,688			
A_Consumer-Brand		0,884		
A_Consumer-Consumer		0,870		
A_Consumer-Product		0,766		
A_Consumer-marketer		0,823		
B_Consumer-Brand		0,849		
B_Consumer-Consumer		0,821		
B_Consumer-Product		0,811		
B_Consumer-marketer		0,748		
C_Consumer-Brand		0,834		
C_Consumer-Consumer		0,834		
C_Consumer-Product		0,760		
C_Consumer-marketer		0,858		
Brand-self_Attachment1			0,755	
Brand-self_Attachment2			0,814	
Brand-self_Attachment3			0,826	
Brand_Prominence1			0,744	
Brand_Prominence2			0,859	
Brand_Prominence3			0,699	
Recommend				0,861
Revisit_Intention				0,906

Source: Author

Table 1 provides information that the factor loading of each constructor indicator has given good results with a general value above 0.7 (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014). Although there are two indicators that are marginal, the model will be evaluated further before making a decision to exclude these indicators from this study. Evaluation of the outer model is continued by evaluating the validity and reliability of the measurement model.

**Table 2.** Validity and Reliability of Measurement Model Constructs

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Attachment	0,875	0,887	0,905	0,616
Consumer Loyalty	0,721	0,737	0,877	0,781
Consumer-Brand	0,817	0,818	0,891	0,732
Consumer-Consumer	0,795	0,798	0,880	0,709
Consumer-Marketer	0,737	0,737	0,852	0,658
Consumer-Product	0,678	0,679	0,822	0,607
Self-Congruency	0,832	0,880	0,889	0,671

Table 2 provides information that in general the validity and reliability of the constructs have met the measurement criteria. All constructs have reliable measurements with a minimum reliability value of 0.7 either through Cronbach's alpha, rho\_A or composite reliability. For the record, the consumer-product construct has a Cronbach's Alpha level

< 0.7. The researcher decided to keep using the construct because the value was still in a good range according to the existing literature. Thus, the evaluation of this model suggests that the measurement model is reliable and can be forwarded to the assessment model stage. Validity using Average Variance Extracted shows that all data from the measurement indicators are valid for measuring all constructs with an AVE value > 0.5. Furthermore, it is continued with the Fornel-Lacker Criterion considerations to see the full validity of this measurement model.

**Table 3.** Fornel-Lacker Criterion

	Brand Attachment	Consumer Loyalty	Consumer-Brand	Consumer-Consumer	Consumer-Marketer	Consumer-Product	Self-Congruency
Brand Attachment	0,785						
Consumer Loyalty	0,203	0,884					
Consumer-Brand	0,471	0,183	0,856				
Consumer-Consumer	0,362	0,026	0,505	0,842			
Consumer-Marketer	0,292	0,086	0,436	0,530	0,811		
Consumer-Product	0,316	0,080	0,534	0,512	0,541	0,779	
Self-Congruency	0,062	0,550	0,046	-0,010	0,076	0,037	0,819

Table 3 provides information that the diagonal value (root of AVE) in each construct is greater than the correlation between each construct



so that it can be stated that the discriminant validity of this model has been fulfilled. For the record, consumer satisfaction in this study has a fairly strong correlation with consumer loyalty. Thus, all tests of construct validity and reliability conclude that this research model is valid and reliable based on several considerations and evaluations that have been carried out.

**Table 4. R-Square Model**

	<b>R Square</b>	<b>R Square Adjusted</b>
<b>Brand Attachment</b>	0,213	0,209
<b>Consumer Loyalty</b>	0,331	0,326

Table 4 provides information that the proposed model provides a relatively substantial R Square value. Predictions for consumer loyalty through this research model are explained by 33.1% of the influence of brand attachment, brand relationship, and self-congruency from Lake Toba. The formation of brand attachment in this model is predicted to be 21.3% through self-congruency and brand relationships.

**Table 5. Path Coefficient Analysis**

	<b>Original Sample (O)</b>	<b>T Statistics ( O/STDEV )</b>	<b>P Values</b>	<b>Hypothesis Testing</b>
<b>Brand Attachment -&gt; Consumer Loyalty</b>	0,159	3,797	<b>0,000</b>	<b>Supporte d</b>
<b>Brand Relationship -&gt; Brand Attachment</b>	0,457	5,579	<b>0,000</b>	<b>Supporte d</b>
<b>Brand Relationship -&gt; Consumer Loyalty</b>	0,022	0,469	<b>0,320</b>	<b>Rejecte d</b>
<b>Self-Congruency -&gt; Brand Attachment</b>	0,041	1,001	<b>0,158</b>	<b>Rejecte d</b>
<b>Self-Congruency -&gt; Consumer Loyalty</b>	0,539	13,252	<b>0,000</b>	<b>Supporte d</b>

Table 5 provides the research model used in evaluating the influence of brands on consumer loyalty. Brand relationship has no significant positive effect on consumer loyalty (Sig = 0.320 > 0.05). Brand relationship has more influence on brand attachment. Brand relationships have different impacts between one consumer and another so that it cannot be generalized that a good brand relationship will create visitor loyalty. However, brand relationships are very important in building brand attachments. Self-congruency and Brand Attachment have a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty (Sig = 0.000). Self-congruency has a very large influence on consumer

loyalty. Therefore, in realizing consumer loyalty, Lake Toba must be able to provide self-congruency to its visitors.

This research model evaluates the factors that influence visitor loyalty. This study shows that consumer loyalty is strongly influenced by self-congruency compared to brand relationships or brand attachments. Although Lake Toba tourism has a good image and has a binding impression on the minds of visitors, and provides positive value to visitors, this study suggests that the development of tourist destinations should be able to be built according to the visitor's self-reflection of the tourist attractions (Makarewicz, 2013). This suitability will provide positive things that are pleasant to visitors so that a feeling of wanting to return to visit the tourist spot arises. Thus the development of tourist areas needs to pay attention to the needs of visitors (Huber, Vollhardt, Matthes, & Vogel, 2010; Mahjoub et al., 2015). There is nothing wrong if the manager of a tourist place submits a survey or suggestion box to build a better tourist destination in the future. In an effort to build loyalty, brand attachment also plays an important role. When there is a strong bond between visitors and tourist destinations, they will prefer to make repeat visits or even tell positive things about their tourist experience. Unfortunately, this study shows that self-congruency does not help in building the brand attachment. In an effort to build brand attachment, the role of brand relationship quality is needed. Visitors can relate to four parts, be it between visitors and brands, with tourist destinations, with managers or with other consumers (Liu, Hultman, Eisingerich, & Wei, 2020; Zhou, 2007). Good relationships between consumers and other consumers have the strongest influence in explaining this brand relationship. Their experiences cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally will help in realizing brand attachment. The interaction of the visitors with the four parties will build strong memories in their minds so that they can create brand attachments. Unfortunately this interaction is not related to consumer loyalty. So, if the interactions that occur are not able to create brand attachments, the loyal attitude of visitors will not be realized. The interesting thing from this discussion is that tourism management must pay attention to the elements of self-congruency and brand relationships simultaneously. Both complement each other's efforts to increase visitor loyalty.

## **5. Conclusion**

In increasing visitor loyalty, building a good destination image is important. Image gives value to a destination to visitors and gives an impression that sticks in their minds. Based on the results of this study, there is the most important factor in increasing visitor loyalty, namely self-congruence. Self-congruence gives the most dominant influence

on visitor loyalty. If this Lake Toba destination matches the personality of the visitors, then psychologically, visitors will be very interested in the destination because the destination describes themselves so that they will recommend and revisit the tourist destination. Managers of Lake Toba tourist destinations must better understand their visitors so that visitor loyalty can be realized.

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