

THE INFLUENCE OF AUTHENTICITY ON TOURIST LOYALTY AT LAUT TAWAR LAKE

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ABSTRACT

Tourism destination management is crucial for ensuring visitors feel comfortable and are interested in returning. This study aims to analyze the influence of authenticity on tourist loyalty. The analysis method used is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS. The sample was calculated using the Slovin formula, resulting in 470 respondents. The analysis results show that authenticity also has a direct influence on tourist loyalty (Y), with positive coefficients of 0.195, 0.219, and 0.196, respectively. Overall, these findings contribute to the understanding of the influence of digital and cultural elements on tourist loyalty and emphasize the important role of social media in influencing tourist decisions. In addition, the authenticity of a tourist area must be maintained to ensure loyal tourists return to Lake Lau Kawar.

Keywords: Authenticity, Tourist Loyalty, Lake LauTawar.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's diverse tourism potential needs to be developed, particularly given the intense competition to attract tourists. One such destination in Indonesia that needs development is Lake Laut Tawar, located in Central Aceh. The growth of tourist visits to this region still faces challenges in increasing visitor numbers. One of the most significant threats to Lake Laut Tawar is the shrinking water level caused by reduced flow from rivers that originate in the lake. Pollution from household waste, accommodation waste, and the use of agricultural chemicals around the lake is a serious problem. Furthermore, plastic waste and water hyacinth, which have begun to cover the lake's surface, are also disrupting the ecosystem. Forest destruction around Lake Laut Tawar due to illegal logging contributes to the reduced water flow.

In the context of Laut Tawar Lake in Central Aceh Regency, the issue of authenticity is highly relevant because this destination possesses a strong combination of natural attractions, culture, and local identity. Laut Tawar Lake is not only a natural tourist destination, but also a cultural space for the Gayo people, rich in unique characteristics, such as local traditions, distinctive culinary delights, religious values, and a relatively pristine mountainous landscape. This potential makes Laut Tawar Lake a strong asset for building tourist loyalty based on authentic experiences. However, on the other hand, challenges also arise when destination development has the potential to diminish authenticity, for example through excessive commercialization, homogenization of tourist facilities, spatial

changes that are insensitive to local culture, or overly generic tourist experiences that diminish the unique impression.

Research by Octaviani & Roostika (2021) explains that authenticity provides tourists with a unique experience unlike any other destination. When tourists can experience elements of native culture, local traditions, or distinctive scenery, they feel more connected to the destination. This powerful and memorable experience is a key reason for tourists to return or consider the destination special. Lake Laut Tawar and its surroundings have rich cultural heritage potential, but often this heritage is underutilized in tourism development.

While Laut Tawar Lake has the potential to build emotional connections with tourists, it may not yet have succeeded in establishing a strong and widely recognized brand. A lack of effort in creating memorable travel experiences and building positive memories can lead to tourists feeling less connected to the destination, which in turn reduces loyalty and repeat visits. To increase the number of visitors to Laut Tawar Lake, promote authenticity and create experiences that can build tourist loyalty, researchers aimed to examine the effect of authenticity on tourist loyalty at Laut Tawar Lake.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist Loyalty (Y)_a

Tourist attractions aim to satisfy tourists. Tourist satisfaction is a crucial factor, particularly in increasing revenue for tourism operators. Tourist loyalty is a benchmark for a company's success in providing services to consumers. Loyalty or dissatisfaction is a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment stemming from comparing their impressions of the actual performance of a tourism product with their expected performance (Sangadji & Sopiah, 2015; Jawabreh et al., 2024). According to Valerie A. Zeithmal et al. (1998), consumers who are satisfied with a product or service purchased and used will return to use the service or product offered, this will build customer loyalty. According to Lesmana et al. (2020), loyalty is the extent to which a product's perceived performance meets tourist expectations. Kotler and Keller (2011) state that tourist loyalty is a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment arising from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) to their expectations. Consumer satisfaction is a post-purchase evaluation, where the purchased alternative at least matches or exceeds consumer expectations (Rangkuti, 2013; Luo et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Muis et al. (2020) said that loyalty is the level of a person's feelings after comparing product performance or perceived results with their expectations.

In general, visitor loyalty can be defined as a person's devotion to a product, whether a specific good or service. Loyalty is a behavioral response, expressed over a long period of time, and resulting in commitment. Another opinion states that loyalty is a function of customer satisfaction, switching barriers, and customer complaints. Satisfied customers will be more likely to make repeat purchases in the future and tell others about their feelings

(Hermawan, 2017). Loyalty describes a visitor's willingness to consistently visit a tourist attraction over the long term and voluntarily recommend the attraction to others. This loyalty will attract many visitors to the tourist attraction.

Authenticity (X)

According to the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary, authenticity is defined as "the quality of being genuine or true." Since its introduction by MacCannell in 1973 (Vidon & Rickly, 2018), the concept of authenticity has sparked a long and intense debate among researchers. Grayson and Martinec (Liang et al., 2018) define authenticity as a public perspective that can change due to perceptions and interpretations of places, situations, other individuals, or objects. Steiner and Reisinger (Zoubi et al., 2019) consider authenticity to be more about the experience felt during travel.

In their research, Yan et al. (2024) state that Perceived Authenticity is subjective and is assessed directly by tourists. Similarly, X. Zhang et al. (2024) define Perceived Authenticity as the degree to which an individual feels and assesses authenticity. Theodora & Felicia (2020) state that perceived authenticity means authenticity that can be accepted, seen, felt, and assessed by an individual. Through the definition outlined, researchers understand Perceived Authenticity as a view or feeling regarding the authenticity of an object, whether seen or experienced by tourists when visiting a tourist destination.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research method is included in the category of associative or causal research, which aims to reveal the relationship and influence between variables. According to Rusiadi, Nur Subianto (2014) associative research aims to determine the degree of relationship and pattern or form of influence between two or more variables. The population in this study were tourists who came to Laut Tawar Lake in 2023 with a total of 15,887 visitors according to the Central Aceh Regency Tourism Office. The sampling technique in this study used non-probability sampling with the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on certain considerations or criteria set by the researcher in accordance with the research objectives. The calculation of the number of samples was carried out using the Slovin formula, so that in this study the number of samples was 470 visitors who became the sample in this study. The respondent criteria in this study were tourists who had visited Laut Tawar Lake at least once, were at least 17 years old, were willing to be respondents, and had direct experience in enjoying the tourist attractions, atmosphere, culture, and facilities available in the Laut Tawar Lake area.

The data collection technique used was the questionnaire method. The measurement scale in this study was a gradation Likert scale from the lowest to the highest. The data analysis technique for this study used statistical analysis, namely the partial least squares - structural equation model (PLS SEM) which aims to conduct path analysis with latent variables. Based on the conceptual

framework explained above, as well as the formulation and objectives of the research, the hypothesis of this research is that there is an influence of authenticity on tourist loyalty at Laut Tawar Lake.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis

Authenticity Variable (X)

The description of the frequency of answers from respondents for the Authenticity variable (X) based on the indicators that have been described in the form of statements is as follows:

Table 1. Authenticity Variable Questionnaire Scores (X)

Answer	AT1	AT2	AT3	AT4	AT5	AT6	AT7	AT8	AT9
STS	2	1	4	25	1	1	2	1	1
%	0.4	0.2	0.9	5.3	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.2
TS	50	45	44	25	42	47	43	48	23
%	10.6	9.6	9.4	5.3	8.9	10	9.1	10.2	4.9
S	48	52	55	75	59	55	59	49	76
%	10.2	11.1	11.7	16	12.6	11.7	12.6	10.4	16.2
SS	211	208	208	197	199	199	227	213	224
%	44.9	44.3	44.3	41.9	42.3	42.3	48.3	45.3	47.7
SSS	159	164	159	173	169	168	139	159	146
%	33.8	34.9	33.8	36.8	36	35.7	29.6	33.8	31.1
Total	470	470	470	470	470	470	470	470	470

Answer	AT10	AT11	AT12	AT13	AT14	AT15	AT16	AT17	AT18
STS	3	3	2	42	2	2	2	45	2
%	0.6	0.6	0.4	8.9	0.4	0.4	0.4	9.6	0.4
TS	46	42	47	42	43	44	24	45	44
%	9.8	8.9	10	8.9	9.1	9.4	5.1	9.6	9.4
S	50	58	54	55	58	54	79	56	54
%	10.6	12.3	11.5	11.7	12.3	11.5	16.8	11.9	11.5
SS	218	196	214	218	237	230	204	223	218
%	46.4	41.7	45.5	46.4	50.4	48.9	43.4	47.4	46.4
SSS	153	171	153	155	130	140	161	146	152
%	32.6	36.4	32.6	33	27.7	29.8	34.3	31.1	32.3
Total	470	470	470	470	470	470	470	470	470

Mean interval score : STS = 0,00 - 1,80 TS = 1,81 - 2,60 N = 2,61 - 3,40 S = 3,41 - 4,20 SS = 4,21 5,00

From the table above, it can be explained as follows:

1. Statement 1: "I feel that the experience of traveling to Laut Tawar Lake gave me a real and sincere impression." Of the 470 respondents, 2 people (0.4%) answered Strongly Disagree, 50 people (10.6%) answered Disagree, 48 people (10.2%) answered Somewhat Agree, 211 people (44.9%) answered Agree, and 159 people (33.8%) answered Strongly Agree. The average value shows a positive tendency, with the majority of respondents feeling that the experience of traveling to Laut Tawar Lake gave me a real and sincere impression.
2. Statement 2: "My visit created a feeling of authenticity and met my personal expectations." Of the 470 respondents, 1 person (0.2%) answered Strongly Disagree, 45 people (9.6%) answered Disagree, 52 people (11.1%) answered Agree, 208 people (44.3%) answered Strongly Agree, and 164 people (34.9%) answered Strongly Agree. The mean scores showed a positive trend, with the majority of respondents feeling that their visit created a feeling of authenticity and met their personal expectations.
3. Statement 3: "I feel the authenticity of the experience at this destination is different from just ordinary entertainment." Of the 470 respondents, 4 people (0.9%) answered Strongly Disagree, 44 people (9.4%) answered Disagree, 55 people (11.7%) answered Agree, 208 people (44.3%) answered Strongly Agree, and 159 people (33.8%) answered Strongly Agree. These results indicate that the majority of respondents feel the experience they had at this destination has an authenticity that is different from ordinary entertainment.
4. Statement 4: "I think Laut Tawar Lake has a uniqueness that is difficult to find in other destinations." Of the 470 respondents, 25 people (5.3%) answered Strongly Disagree, 75 people (16.0%) answered Disagree, 197 people (41.9%) answered Agree, and 173 people (36.8%) answered Strongly Agree. The majority of respondents agreed that Laut Tawar Lake has a uniqueness that is difficult to find in other destinations.
5. Statement 5: "The cultural and natural values offered by this destination make it very special." Of the 470 respondents, 1 person (0.2%) answered Strongly Disagree, 42 people (8.9%) answered Disagree, 59 people (12.6%) answered Agree, 199 people (42.3%) answered Strongly Agree, and 169 people (36.0%) answered Strongly Agree. This shows that the majority of respondents feel that the cultural and natural values of this destination make it very special.
6. Statement 6: "I think the experience here provides unique added value compared to other tourist destinations." Of the 470 respondents, 1 person (0.2%) answered Strongly Disagree, 47 people (10.0%) answered Disagree, 55 people (11.7%) answered Agree, 199 people (42.3%) answered Strongly Agree, and 168 people (35.7%) answered Strongly Agree. This shows that the majority of respondents feel that the experience at this destination provides unique added value.

7. Statement 7: "I find the authenticity of the tourist attractions at Laut Tawar Lake to be true to their original form." Of the 470 respondents, 2 (0.4%) answered Strongly Disagree, 43 (9.1%) answered Disagree, 59 (12.6%) answered Agree, 227 (48.3%) answered Strongly Agree, and 139 (29.6%) answered Strongly Agree. The majority of respondents felt that the authenticity of the tourist attractions at Laut Tawar Lake is true to their original form.
8. Statement 8: "This destination showcases cultural and natural heritage that is well-preserved." Of the 470 respondents, 1 (0.2%) answered Strongly Disagree, 48 (10.2%) answered Disagree, 49 (10.4%) answered Agree, 213 (45.3%) answered Strongly Agree, and 159 (33.8%) answered Strongly Agree. Most respondents felt that this destination showcases a well-preserved cultural and natural heritage.
9. Statement 9: "The authenticity of the tourist attraction makes me more confident in the attractiveness of this destination." Of the 470 respondents, 1 person (0.2%) answered Strongly Disagree, 23 people (4.9%) answered Disagree, 76 people (16.2%) answered Agree, 224 people (47.7%) answered Strongly Agree, and 146 people (31.1%) answered Strongly Agree. This indicates that the authenticity of the tourist attraction increases respondents' confidence in the attractiveness of this destination.
10. Statement 10: "Authentic experiences at this destination influence my views on tourism." Of the 470 respondents, 3 (0.6%) answered Strongly Disagree, 46 (9.8%) answered Disagree, 50 (10.6%) answered Agree, 218 (46.4%) answered Strongly Agree, and 153 (32.6%) answered Strongly Agree. The majority of respondents felt that authentic experiences at this destination influenced their views on tourism.
11. Statement 11: "I feel that the authenticity of the destination has a positive impact on my perception as a tourist." Of the 470 respondents, 3 (0.6%) answered Strongly Disagree, 42 (8.9%) answered Disagree, 58 (12.3%) answered Agree, 196 (41.7%) answered Strongly Agree, and 171 (36.4%) answered Strongly Agree. This indicates that destination authenticity has a positive impact on tourist perceptions.
12. Statement 12: "The authentic experience here encourages me to visit again." Of the 470 respondents, 2 (0.4%) answered Strongly Disagree, 47 (10.0%) answered Disagree, 54 (11.5%) answered Agree, 214 (45.5%) answered Strongly Agree, and 153 (32.6%) answered Strongly Agree. This indicates that the authentic experience at this destination encourages the majority of respondents to visit again.
13. Statement 13: "The structure and governance of the destination reflect the authenticity of local culture." Of the 470 respondents, 42 (8.9%) answered Disagree, 55 (11.7%) answered Agree, 218 (46.4%) answered Strongly Agree, and 155 (33.0%) answered Strongly Agree. Most respondents felt that the structure and governance of the destination reflect the authenticity of local culture.

14. Statement 14: "Tourism facilities are built while maintaining authentic cultural and environmental values." Of the 470 respondents, 2 (0.4%) answered Strongly Disagree, 43 (9.1%) answered Disagree, 58 (12.3%) answered Agree, 237 (50.4%) answered Strongly Agree, and 130 (27.7%) answered Strongly Agree. The majority of respondents felt that tourism facilities are built while maintaining authentic cultural and environmental values.
15. Statement 15: "I think the management of this destination supports maintaining authenticity." Of the 470 respondents, 2 people (0.4%) answered Strongly Disagree, 44 people (9.4%) answered Disagree, 54 people (11.5%) answered Agree, 230 people (48.9%) answered Strongly Agree, and 140 people (29.8%) answered Strongly Agree. This indicates that the management of this destination supports maintaining authenticity.
16. Statement 16: "Compared to other destinations, Lake Laut Tawar feels more authentic." Of the 470 respondents, 2 (0.4%) answered Strongly Disagree, 24 (5.1%) answered Disagree, 79 (16.8%) answered Agree, 204 (43.4%) answered Strongly Agree, and 161 (34.3%) answered Strongly Agree. Most respondents felt that Lake Laut Tawar was more authentic than other destinations.
17. Statement 17: "I felt the experience at this destination was more authentic than similar tourist attractions." Of the 470 respondents, 45 (9.6%) answered Disagree, 56 (11.9%) answered Agree, 223 (47.4%) answered Strongly Agree, and 146 (31.1%) answered Strongly Agree. The majority of respondents felt the experience at this destination was more authentic than similar tourist attractions.
18. Statement 18: "The authenticity of Laut Tawar Lake sets it apart from other destinations I have visited." Of the 470 respondents, 2 people (0.4%) answered Strongly Disagree, 44 people (9.4%) answered Disagree, 54 people (11.5%) answered Agree, 218 people (46.4%) answered Strongly Agree, and 152 people (32.3%) answered Strongly Agree. This shows that the authenticity of Laut Tawar Lake sets it apart from other destinations that the respondents have visited.

Tourist Loyalty Variables (Y)

The description of the frequency of answers from respondents for the tourist loyalty variable (Y) based on the indicators that have been described in the form of statements is as follows:

Table 3. Tourist Loyalty Variable Questionnaire Score (Y)

Answer	LW1	LW2	LW3	LW4	LW5	LW6	LW7	LW8	LW9
STS	6	6	5	4	6	7	5	6	14
%	1.3	1.3	1.1	0.9	1.3	1.5	1.1	1.3	3
TS	32	34	36	37	31	29	32	32	27
%	6.8	7.2	7.7	7.9	6.6	6.2	6.8	6.8	5.7

S	55	50	50	47	52	52	52	52	47
%	11.7	10.6	10.6	10	11.1	11.1	11.1	11.1	10
SS	238	249	244	229	242	247	212	241	227
%	50.6	53	51.9	48.7	51.5	52.6	45.1	51.3	48.3
SSS	139	131	135	153	139	135	169	139	155
%	29.6	27.9	28.7	32.6	29.6	28.7	36	29.6	33
Average (%)	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.7
Percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total (N)	470	470	470	470	470	470	470	470	470

Mean interval score : STS = 0,00 - 1,80 TS = 1,81 - 2,60 N = 2,61 - 3,40 S = 3,41 - 4,20 SS = 4,21 5,00

From the table above, it can be explained as follows :

1. Statement 1: "I intend to return to Laut Tawar Lake, Central Aceh in the future." Of the 470 respondents, none answered Strongly Disagree (STS), 6 people (1.3%) answered Disagree (TS), 32 people (6.8%) answered Agree (S), 55 people (11.7%) answered Strongly Agree (SS), and 238 people (50.6%) answered Strongly Agree (SSS). The average value of 4.3, classified as Strongly Agree (SS), indicates that the majority of respondents intend to return to Laut Tawar Lake in the future.
2. Statement 2: "I felt satisfied and would like to visit Laut Tawar Lake again." Of the 470 respondents, none answered Strongly Disagree (STS), 6 people (1.3%) answered Disagree (TS), 34 people (7.2%) answered Agree (S), 50 people (10.6%) answered Strongly Agree (SS), and 249 people (53.0%) answered Strongly Agree (SSS). The average score of 4.4, classified as Strongly Agree (SS), indicates that the majority of respondents were satisfied and would like to visit Laut Tawar Lake again.
3. Statement 3: "I prefer Laut Tawar Lake to other tourist destinations for my next visit." Of the 470 respondents, none answered Strongly Disagree (STS), 6 people (1.3%) answered Disagree (TS), 50 people (10.6%) answered Agree (S), 47 people (10.0%) answered Strongly Agree (SS), and 244 people (51.9%) answered Strongly Agree (SSS). The average score of 4.3, categorized as Strongly Agree (SS), indicates that the majority of respondents prefer Lake Laut Tawar to other tourist destinations.
4. Statement 4: "I would still choose Lake Laut Tawar even if there were offers of other tourist destinations." Of the 470 respondents, none answered Strongly Disagree (STS), 4 people (0.9%) answered Disagree (TS), 37 people (7.9%) answered Agree (S), 47 people (10.0%) answered Strongly Agree (SS), and 229 people (48.7%) answered Strongly Agree (SSS). The average score of 4.2 is classified as Strongly Agree (SAS), indicating that the majority of respondents would still choose Laut Tawar Lake even if other tourist destinations were available.
5. Statement 5: "I feel that Laut Tawar Lake meets my expectations as a tourist."

Of the 470 respondents, none answered Strongly Disagree (SAS), 6 (1.3%) answered Disagree (DS), 31 (6.6%) answered Agree (SAS), 52 (11.1%) answered Strongly Agree (SSS), and 242 (51.5%) answered Strongly Agree (SSS). The average score of 4.3 is classified as Strongly Agree (SS), indicating that Laut Tawar Lake has met tourist expectations.

6. Statement 6: "I would like to make Laut Tawar Lake one of my top choices for my travels." Of the 470 respondents, none answered Strongly Disagree (STS), 7 people (1.5%) answered Disagree (TS), 29 people (6.2%) answered Agree (S), 52 people (11.1%) answered Strongly Agree (SS), and 247 people (52.6%) answered Strongly Agree (SSS). The average score of 4.4, classified as Strongly Agree (SS), indicates that the majority of respondents want to make Laut Tawar Lake one of their top choices for their travels.
7. Statement 7: "I am willing to recommend Laut Tawar Lake to friends or family." Of the 470 respondents, none answered Strongly Disagree (STS), 6 people (1.3%) answered Disagree (TS), 32 people (6.8%) answered Agree (S), 52 people (11.1%) answered Strongly Agree (SS), and 241 people (51.3%) answered Strongly Agree (SSS). The average score of 4.4, categorized as Strongly Agree (SS), indicates that many respondents are willing to recommend Laut Tawar Lake to others.
8. Statement 8: "I will tell others about my positive experience traveling to Laut Tawar Lake." Of the 470 respondents, none answered Strongly Disagree (STS), 6 people (1.3%) answered Disagree (TS), 32 people (6.8%) answered Agree (S), 52 people (11.1%) answered Strongly Agree (SS), and 139 people (29.6%) answered Strongly Agree (SSS). The average score was 4.3, classified as Strongly Agree (SAS), indicating that many respondents wanted to share their positive experiences with others.
9. Statement 9: "I would encourage others to visit Laut Tawar Lake." Of the 470 respondents, none answered Strongly Disagree (SAS), 6 (1.3%) answered Disagree (DS), 32 (6.8%) answered Agree (SAS), 52 (11.1%) answered Strongly Agree (SSAS), and 139 (29.6%) answered Strongly Agree (SSAS). The average score was 4.3, classified as Strongly Agree (SSAS), indicating that many respondents encourage others to visit Laut Tawar Lake based on their positive experiences.

Requirements Analysis Test Results

Measurement Model Analysis

Based on the results of the outer loading validity test, all outer loading values are greater than 0.7, indicating that the model has met the requirements for convergent validity based on the outer loading value. This means that each indicator in the measurement model has a significant contribution to the construct being measured. After meeting the requirements for outer loading validity, the next stage is to test the construct validity based on the average variance extracted (AVE) value. The AVE test aims to ensure that the variance explained by the indicators in the construct is sufficiently high, with an

expected AVE value greater than 0.5, indicating a good quality measurement model. In addition, Composite Reliability (CR) is used to measure the internal consistency of indicators in each variable. A construct is said to have good reliability if its composite reliability value is greater than 0.6. Thus, the higher the CR value, the stronger the indicators are in representing the latent variables measured in this research model.

Table 4. Validity Testing based on Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Authenticity (X)	0.783
Tourist Loyalty (Y)	0.784

The recommended Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value should be greater than 0.5. In this study, all AVE values were greater than 0.5, indicating that the model has met the validity requirements based on AVE. This indicates that the constructs in the model can adequately explain the variance of the indicators that form it. After meeting the validity requirements, the next step is to test the model's reliability based on the composite reliability (CR) value. CR testing aims to assess the internal consistency of indicators in each variable, where a higher CR value indicates better reliability in representing the latent variable.

Table 5. Reliability Testing Based on Composite Reliability (CR)

	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Authenticity (X)	0.985
Tourist Loyalty (Y)	0.970

The recommended Composite Reliability (CR) value is greater than 0.7. In this study, all CR values were above 0.7, indicating that the constructs met the reliability requirements based on CR. This indicates that the indicators in each variable have good internal consistency and can reliably represent the latent variables. After ensuring reliability through CR, the next step is to test the model's reliability using Cronbach's Alpha (CA). This test aims to assess the extent to which indicators within a construct are consistent with each other, thus supporting the overall reliability of the research model.

Table 6. Reliability Testing Based on Cronbach's Alpha (CA)

	Cronbach's alpha
Authenticity (X)	0.984
Tourist Loyalty (Y)	0.965

The recommended Cronbach's Alpha (CA) value should be greater than 0.7. In this study, all CA values were greater than 0.7, indicating that the model met the reliability requirements based on Cronbach's Alpha. This indicates that the indicators within the constructs have good internal consistency. Next, discriminant validity testing was conducted using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) approach. Table 4.5 presents the results of the discriminant validity test, which indicates the extent to which the constructs in the model can be significantly differentiated.

Table 7. Discriminant Validity Testing : HTMT

	Authenticity (X)
Tourist Loyalty (Y)	0.562

Based on the results of the discriminant validity test using the HTMT approach, all values were found to be <0.9 , which means that the discriminant validity requirements based on the HTMT approach were met. After evaluating the discriminant validity, an examination was conducted to determine whether multicollinearity problems occurred in the latent variables Authenticity (X) and Tourist Loyalty (Y). Multicollinearity problems can be examined using the variance inflation factor (VIF) value approach.

Structural Model Analysis (Inner Model)

The measurement of the inner model is explained by the results of the path coefficient test, goodness of fit test and hypothesis test.

R Square

Based on the data processing that has been carried out using the smart PLS 4.1 program, the R-Square value obtained is as follows:

Table 8. R-Square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Tourist Loyalty (Y)	0.839	0.837

The R-Square value for Tourist Loyalty (Y) is 0.839, which means that the independent variable is able to explain or influence Tourist Loyalty by 83.9%.

Predictive Relevance (Q²)

The Q² value has the same meaning as the coefficient of determination (R-Square). A large Q-Square (Q²) value of 0 indicates the model has predictive relevance. Conversely, a Q² value less than 0 indicates the model has less predictive relevance. In other words, the higher the Q² value, the better the model can be considered to fit the data.

Table 9. Q-Square

Variabel	Q ²
Tourist Loyalty (Y)	0.839

The known Q² value of Tourist Loyalty (Y) is 0.839 > 0, which means that the variable in this model, namely authenticity (X), has a very strong predictive relevance to Tourist Loyalty (Y). This means that this model has a very good ability to predict variations in tourist loyalty. Although this Q² value shows predictive relevance, its level of predictability is lower compared to Tourist Loyalty (Y). However, this Q² value shows lower predictive relevance compared to Tourist Loyalty (Y), which has a higher Q² value, indicating that this model is more effective in predicting Tourist Loyalty (Y).

Statistic test (Bootstrapping)

Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted by observing the probability value (p-value) and the level of significance of the relationship between the variables analyzed. The decision-making criteria used were: if the probability value (p) is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), then the relationship between the variables is declared statistically significant, thus worthy of further analysis. Conversely, if the p-value exceeds 0.05, then the relationship is considered insignificant. In addition to the p-value, significance can also be determined through the t-statistic value, with the provision that the t-value must be greater than the t-table at a significance level of 5% (i.e. > 1.98). Therefore, the influence path between variables in the model is said to be significant if the calculated t-value is greater than 1.98, or if the standardized coefficient value exceeds the same threshold. Details of the complete results of the hypothesis testing are presented in the following table.

Table 10. Path Coefficient Test & Significance of Direct

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Authenticity (X) -> Tourist Loyalty (Y)	0.219	0.220	0.027	7.988	0.000

Based on the results in Table 10, the following results were obtained: Authenticity (X) has a positive effect on Tourist Loyalty (Y), with a coefficient value (Original Sample column) of 0.219 and a significant T-statistic of 7.988 > 1.96 and a P-value of 0.000 < 0.05 (Hypothesis Accepted). This indicates that Authenticity (X) also has a significant positive effect on Tourist Loyalty (Y).

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis, authenticity has a positive effect on tourist loyalty to tourist destinations, with a coefficient value (Original Sample) of 0.219, a T-Statistic of $7.988 > 1.96$, and a P-Value of $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating a significant relationship. This finding aligns with research (Xiao et al., 2025; Soonsan et al., 2025), which confirms that authenticity is a crucial factor in building emotional connections between consumers and brands, including tourist destinations. Authenticity in destination promotion, whether through visual content, narratives, or experiences, can strengthen tourists' emotional bonds with the promoted destination. By presenting honest and authentic information and experiences, destinations can foster a deeper sense of trust in tourists, which in turn increases tourist loyalty to the destination.

Meanwhile, Kusnayain et al. (2025) found that active tourist engagement in authentic experiences can accelerate the creation of lasting emotional connections with the destination. Direct participation in authentic, authentic experiences helps tourists feel more connected to the destination, strengthening their emotional bond. This engagement allows tourists to develop deeper affection for the places they visit, ultimately driving loyalty and intention to return. Deeper interaction with authentic experiences accelerates the formation of stronger and more lasting emotional connections between tourists and the destination. Furthermore, (Surya & Mesra, 2025; Abdelghani et al., 2025) stated that authentic content, depicting local culture and traditions, can strengthen tourists' bonds with the destination and encourage repeat visits.

These findings highlight the importance of authenticity in the marketing strategy of the Lake Laut Tawar tourist destination. Destination managers need to ensure that all promotional materials, including vlogs and other forms of marketing, reflect the local cultural diversity and natural beauty. Furthermore, destination managers need to partner with influencers who have a deep understanding of local culture, so that tourists can deliver authentic and transparent content. This collaboration should depict authentic experiences at Lake Laut Tawar, including tourism activities that involve the local community and tourists' culture, enabling tourists to feel more emotionally connected. It's also crucial to create opportunities for tourists to interact directly with the local community, which will enrich the traveler experience and strengthen loyalty. This way, the destination can maintain its long-term appeal and build a loyal following.

The findings of this study align with those of Candra et al. (2025), who found that destination authenticity significantly influences tourist loyalty, both directly and through tourist satisfaction as a mediating variable. This study demonstrated that authentic experiences such as engaging with local culture, unique architecture, and interacting with the local community can increase tourist satisfaction and ultimately drive loyalty. These results support this study because they both emphasize that destination authenticity is a crucial factor in building long-term relationships between tourists and destinations (Sjuhada &

Zulfa, 2024). At Lake Laut Tawar, the authenticity experienced by tourists can be seen in the pristine lake panorama, distinctive Gayo culture, the friendliness of the local community, and the experience of enjoying culinary delights and a regional atmosphere that differs from other destinations.

The results of this study also support the research of Anggraini et al. (2024), which found that authenticity positively influences destination loyalty in heritage tourism in Penang. The study confirmed that when tourists perceive the authenticity of a destination, they tend to have a stronger bond with the place they visit and demonstrate higher loyalty. Although the context of Putra et al. (2025) study was urban heritage tourism, while this study focuses on local nature and cultural tourism in Lake Laut Tawar, the direction of the relationship remains consistent. This indicates that authenticity is a cross-contextual factor in the tourism industry: whether in cultural, heritage, or nature tourism, authenticity remains a significant factor in shaping tourist loyalty.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion that have been presented previously, it can be concluded that Authenticity (X) has a direct positive effect on Tourist Loyalty (Y), with a coefficient value of 0.219, T-Statistic = 7.988 > 1.96, and P-Value = 0.000 < 0.05. This means that tourists will be more interested in visiting Lau Tawar Lake if the tourist location is more original compared to many that have been changed in a modern way. People prefer the authenticity of natural tourism compared to changes that are more towards modernization. Therefore, authenticity is very important to be implemented so that tourists are loyal to return to the freshwater lake. This study has limitations in the number of variables tested, therefore further research is needed to examine what causes increased tourist loyalty to Lau Tawar Lake. Further research is recommended to add a mediating variable in the form of tourist satisfaction. This recommendation is important because destination authenticity does not always directly influence tourist loyalty, but it can initially increase satisfaction, which ultimately drives revisit intentions and recommendations to others.

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