

An Analysis of Local Product Authenticity and Customer Attachments

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ABSTRACT: When traveling, tourists do not mind to spend more money to buy local products in the destinations they visited. Finding authentic local products when traveling is considered as providing crucial social identity as local products is unique and cannot be found in other tourist places. This study is aimed to analyze tourist shopping behaviors for local products that have authentic values. The quantitative research method was conducted to examine tourists' purchases on local batik when visiting Yogyakarta and Surakarta. A total of 189 respondents were analyzed using SEM-PLS. The results revealed that 1) Product authenticity is built by five dimensions, namely quality commitment, heritage, uniqueness, continuity, and consistency. 2) Product authenticity and product attachment positively influence behavior intention. 3) Product attachment mediates product authenticity and behavioral intention relationship. This study is important for understanding the role of local product authenticity to increase tourist spending, and for local industries to consider the business value of authenticity.

Keywords: Product authenticity, product attachment, behavioral intentions

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to get an authentic product, some people are traveling around the world to satisfy their needs. In the tourism industry, authenticity becomes one important aspect that tourists seek from the destination. This means that tourists are not only spending time for leisure but also finding authentic local products for important symbols and status-seeking. Travelers perceive, the more unique the place and the more difficult the local products to be found, the more valuable the local product.

Nowadays, the demand for authenticity is getting more persistent with the increase of people's welfare (Assiouras et al. 2015, Okumus, et al. 2007). People are no longer shop only for the utilitarian function. The retail world has noticed this trend as a new opportunity that must be utilized. Authenticity has been searched in many sectors such as electronics, accessories, cosmetics, decorations, music, costumes, tourism and hospitality, etc. Marketers in the tourism and hospitality context have been incorporating the concept of "authenticity" into their marketing strategies (Sedmak & Mihali, 2008). Assiouras et al. (2015) acknowledged that "authenticity has overtaken quality as the prevailing purchasing crite-

riion, just as quality overtook cost, and as cost overtook availability." The current competitive market should be translated into different marketing strategies, where the drivers and consequences for authenticity should be carefully managed. Both academics and practitioners agree on the importance of authenticity impact on consumer behavior (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Newman & Dhar, 2014). A study relating to authenticity in the marketing sectors is thus needed to be further explored.

Other than authenticity, consumers tend to establish links that connect the brand, the product, the place, and themselves. Assiouras et al. (2015) study argued that the more persistent the demand for authenticity, the more the consumers will be willing to build emotional attachment. The growth of the tourism industry has indeed influenced the demand for authenticity in the offerings. One of the important aspects of tourism is shopping. Tourists commonly relate the destination with the local products or local way of life. Visitors prefer to buy authentic local products, which they rarely find in their hometowns. Authenticity is matters, particularly in the tourism sector, since the local products represent the symbol of the destination's reputation. Among the many iconic products from Indonesia, batik is one of the

most searched by global tourists. Particularly in Java, batik is one of the most important tourism products and strongly related to the Indonesian people. The objective of this study is to address the research gap by identifying the consumers' authenticity perceptions influence on product attachments and behaviors for local batik shoppers. In more detail, authenticity is explored in terms of quality commitment, heritage, continuity, consistency, and uniqueness. The contributions of this study are to better understand the role of the authenticity of local products in the tourism industries either in theoretical development or the tourism industry applications.

The word authenticity originally came from the Greek word "authentikos" (Assiouras et al. 2015). The Latin word uses *authenticus*, with meaning as trustworthy. Today, authenticity is commonly used to explain the genuineness, reality, or truth of something (Lu et al. 2015). Authenticity has also been defined as sincerity, innocence, and originality. Others translated authenticity as being natural, honest, and simple (Assiouras et al. 2015). In business, consumers experience authenticity differently according to their interests.

Some scholars have conceptualized authenticity as "genuineness". Authenticity is also referred to as "timeless and tradition" in the marketing context (Groves, 2001). Morhart et al. (2015) developed an integrative framework that describes the antecedent and consequences of product-brand authenticity. Their work was expected to provide a theoretical foundation of how consumers perceive a brand or product as authentic. The brand authenticity measurement scale has been built by Napoli et al. (2014). This measurement scale consists of three dimensions that include: the quality commitment, the sincerity, and the heritage.

When faced with products or services, the customer may build emotional attachment. To some specific extent, after finding a favorite product/ service, people tend to emotionally attach to products/services and build a feeling of connection with the products/services to some specific extent (Thomson et al., 2005). Product attachment is an emotional-laden bond or an emotional link between a person and a product (Didier & Lombart, 2010; Thomson et al. 2005). By other academics, product attachment is also translated as maintaining closeness, which is typically reflecting a fundamental characteristic of emotional attachment (Assiouras et al. 2015). The attachment also builds psychological closeness between consumers and the product (Assiouras et al. 2015). Regional or local products typically have a

long history. They also have a strong emotional value related to the original geographical location where this product or service is produced (Roostika, 2019).

Assiouras et al. (2015) argued that some various factors could predict emotional attachment for a product/service. Personal situations such as the past experience, the ideal of what someone wants to be or already attained, may create strong emotional product attachment (Park et al. 2006). There is a possibility that the consumer's past experience may be strongly related to the company. For example, the relationship between someone and the place image. Place image may be in the forms of one's city, state, or country of origin, or college (Oswald, 1999). People are commonly attached to their place of birth, the place they were studying, and the place where they were growing up with the family. Product attachments may also exist because of the product that was used by one's parents (Oswald, 1999). People buy products/ services because possessing the product/ service may represent a person's ideal self, reflecting an individual's hopes and aspirations (Park et al. 2006). Consumers tend to be attached to the product when the product can represent their selves (Malar et al. 2011). A study by Morhart et al. (2015) and Assiouras et al. (2015) showed that the relationship between product authenticity and product attachments. Therefore, this study proposes this following hypothesis:

H1. Product authenticity has a positive impact on product attachment.

According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), behavioral intentions refer to people's beliefs about anything that people want to do in a specific situation. Zeithaml et al. (1996) stated that favorable behavioral intentions are associated with service providers' ability to make their customers say positive things, remain loyal, recommend to other customers, spend more with the organization, and pay price premiums. Word-of-mouth communication is also one of the positive behavioral intentions expressed by satisfied consumers. The theory of attachment suggests that the level of individual emotional attachment for a product may predict further individual interaction with the product (Bowlby, 1979 in Assiouras et al. 2015). Consumers who are attached to a product will carry out some efforts to build a relationship with the product. When someone is attached, one will tend to be loyal. Product attachments to person behaviors may also be in the form of strong commitment and loyalty (Thomson et al., 2005). A loyal customer may also because of the product that can be trusted. Morhart et al. (2015) and Zhou et al. (2015) have found that product authentic-

ity positively impacts on behavioral intentions. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2. Product attachment has a positive impact on behavioral intentions.

H3. Product attachment mediates product authenticity and behavioral intentions.

Overall, the proposed research framework is presented in Figure 1 below:

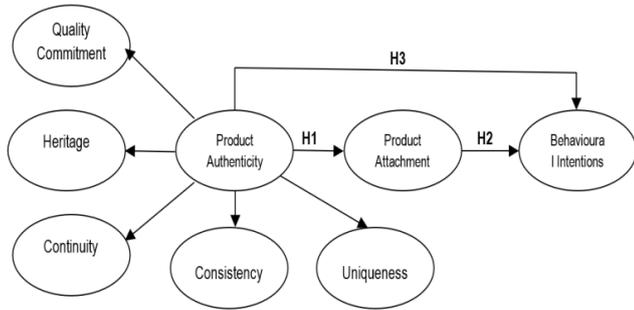


Figure 1. Research Framework

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The respondents of this study were batik shoppers who bought hand-painted and stamped batiks in Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Both cities are the center of the Indonesian batik. Purposive sampling method was chosen since respondents must be those who have purchased batik hand-painted and stamped batiks in Yogyakarta more than once over the past two years. The questionnaires were mostly adapted from Assiouras et al. (2015) and Scallehn et al. (2014) using a Likert scale with 1 very disagree to 5 very agree. Out of 250 questionnaires distributed, 189 were valid for statistical analysis. The challenge for data collection was finding respondents who have purchased hand-painted and stamped batik over the past two years.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Data Analysis

The profile of the respondents is described in Table 1, where the majority of the respondents were between 20-30 years old. The motif was the main reason for buying batik, followed by quality and originality.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

| Variable | Range | Percentage | Range | Percentage |
|---------------|---------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| Gender | Female | 55% | Male | 45% |
| Age | < 20 | 47.6% | 31-40 | 6.3% |
| | 21-30 | 32.3% | >40 | 13.8% |
| | High School | 24.3% | Post Graduate | 20.6% |
| Education | Bachelor | 54.5% | Other | 5% |
| | Students | 59.8% | Self employed | 7.9% |
| | Post grad | 20.1% | Other | 10.6% |
| | Private Civil | 1.6% | | |
| Reason to buy | Motif | 29.1% | Low price | 7.9% |
| | Quality | 25.9% | Color | 11.6% |
| | Originality | 25.9% | | |

3.2. Reliability and Validity Test Assessment of the Measurement Model

In the measurement model, PLS-SEM modeling was chosen to test the validity and reliability of the data. PLS has been increasingly popular as a statistical tool in marketing research, strategic management, as well as in the hospitality and tourism research (Ali et al. 2018). The main reason for adopting PLS was due to the second-order variable existence for product authenticity. This study adopts dimensions of product authenticity from Assiouras et al. (2015) and Scallehn et al. (2014) studies. The measurement model focuses on the analysis of the individual loading, composite reliability, AVE, and square root AVE.

The individual loadings from PLS have shown that all item measurements were loaded above 0.5. These item loadings can also be seen in Figure 2. The convergent validity was tested by checking the value of cross-loadings, average variance extracted, and composite reliability. The cross-loadings should show that the items measuring related variables should load higher than other items measuring other variables. The cross-loadings data from this study have satisfied the requirements, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Table 2 further shows the AVE, composite reliability, R-square, and Cronbach's Alpha. These data also measure of convergent validity. The composite reliability index for all key constructs was shown to have value above the minimum acceptable value of 0.7 (as suggested by Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In terms of Average Variance Extracted (AVE), all variables have value above 0.5, which means to have adequate convergent validity, according to Fornell & Larcker (1981). Internal composite reliability (ICR) also tests the convergent validity, where the result shows that ICR was all above 0.8.

Another reliability test was also provided with Cronbach's alpha with the values all above 0.7 as a threshold.

Table 2. Convergent Validity

| | AVE | Composite Reliability | R Square | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--------------------|--------|-----------------------|----------|------------------|
| Behavioral Int | 0.62 | 0.9472 | 0.719 | 0.9386 |
| Consistency | 0.8026 | 0.9242 | 0.7105 | 0.8771 |
| Continuity | 0.7219 | 0.8862 | 0.711 | 0.8076 |
| Heritage | 0.7308 | 0.9156 | 0.655 | 0.8772 |
| Product Attachment | 0.7098 | 0.9447 | 0.4934 | 0.9315 |
| Quality Comm | 0.7092 | 0.9446 | 0.822 | 0.9315 |
| Uniqueness | 0.7514 | 0.9234 | 0.7516 | 0.8885 |

Table 3 shows AVE square root as a test for discriminant validity. The bold diagonal value, which is the variance between the same variables, should have the square root value higher than the covariant (correlation between different variables). Next, discriminant validity was assessed.

Table 3. AVE Square Root

| | Behavioral Intentions | Heritage | Quality Commitment | Uniqueness |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Behavioral Intentions | 0.80399 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Heritage | 0.5342 | 0.8546 | 0 | 0 |
| Quality Commitment | 0.6787 | 0.6292 | 0.842 | 0 |
| Uniqueness | 0.6547 | 0.6145 | 0.7057 | 0.8677 |

Assessment of the Structural Model

The significance of the causal relationships was tested by running bootstrapping procedure after dropping two items measuring continuity dimensions due to problem with cross-loading, all valid and reliable data, then went to the analysis of the structural model. The structural model was evaluated by examining path coefficients, t-statistics, and r-squared value (Chin, 1998). According to Table 4, the value of t-statistics was all above 1.96. This means that all the proposed hypotheses were accepted. Hypothesis 1, where product authenticity has a positive impact on product attachment, is supported with a path coefficient of 0.702 (t-stat: 12.3247). Hypothesis 2, where product attachment has a positive impact on behavioral intentions, is supported by path coefficient 0.537 (t-stat: 5.743). Hypothesis 3, where product attachment mediates product authenticity, and behavioral intentions, is also supported. The non-direct in-

fluence of product authenticity to behavioral intentions is 0.3793 (t-statistic: 3.791).

Other than the structural relationships among three key variables, PLS also shows the relationships between the five dimensions of product authenticity. Quality commitment to product authenticity is 0.9066. Heritage to product authenticity is 0.8093. Consistency to product authenticity is 0.8429. Continuity to product authenticity is 0.8432. Heritage to product authenticity is 0.8093. Uniqueness to product authenticity is 0.8669. This study combined product authenticity measures as developed by Assiouras et al. (2015) and Scallehn, et al. (2014).

Table 4. Significance of the Path coefficients

| | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Error | T -Statistics |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Prod Authentic -> Behavioral Int | 0.3793 | 0.3787 | 0.0999 | 3.7971 |
| Prod Authentic -> Consistency | 0.8429 | 0.8434 | 0.0323 | 26.1304 |
| Prod Authentic -> Continuity | 0.8432 | 0.8367 | 0.0516 | 16.3487 |
| Prod Authentic -> Heritage | 0.8093 | 0.8064 | 0.0426 | 18.9773 |
| Prod Authentic -> Product Attachment | 0.7024 | 0.6964 | 0.057 | 12.3247 |
| Prod Authentic -> Quality Comm | 0.9066 | 0.9061 | 0.0198 | 45.6842 |
| Prod Authentic -> Uniqueness | 0.8669 | 0.8636 | 0.0344 | 25.2217 |
| Product Attachment -> Behavioral Int | 0.5374 | 0.5429 | 0.0936 | 5.7438 |

Since all the hypotheses were supported, this study proves the importance of product authenticity in the Indonesian local product, in this case, is local hand-painted and stamped batik.

This study is intended to fill the gap where product authenticity has become a more important factor in winning customers. Assiouras et al. (2015) argued that authenticity had overtaken quality. This means that offering a quality product is not sufficient to influence positive behaviors. Particularly in the tourism and hospitality industry, where the emotional aspect is higher and tourists demand more than just quality and authenticity may fill the needs for acknowledgment and social status. Tourists spend lots of money to experience good destinations. As part of the traveling activities, they would love to shop local and authentic products offered in the destination areas. Product authenticity is a matter since it reflects the symbol from the location as well as the status of the buyers. Tourism and traveling are tertiary needs.

As people get wealthier, they tend to consider spending on traveling or leisure. Similarly, they will more appreciate the authentic product as compared to the fake product.

The spending on tourism and leisure is undoubtedly different from spending on daily life. Tourists would pay higher for authentic products. Particularly in Java, batik is one of the most important local products that have high meaning and provide quality and authenticity. In this study, the product authenticity of batik is indeed measured by five dimensions, namely quality commitment, heritage, continuity, consistency, and uniqueness. Tourists or customers also consider consistency in product quality. The quality should be consistently maintained. The value of uniqueness, heritage, and continuity have been some of the factors to build authenticity. In the batik industry, the uniqueness of design, color, and heritage enriches the level of authenticity. Authenticity should also be passed on from one generation to the future generation. The skills and expertise from the past should also be maintained as an important element of authenticity. Considering that product authenticity and product attachment are important predictors for positive behavior intentions, this finding should provide different insight for tourism and hospitality by offering not only quality products, but also authenticity that may emotionally affect the tourists.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this study is to examine the role of product authenticity in the hospitality and tourism industry, particularly considering local products. Hand-painted and stamped batiks were chosen as the object of the study. Shopping is an important part of tourism, and buying a local product when traveling signifies more than just quality. The authenticity of the local product symbolizes specific meaning and status for the buyers. This study further examines the effect of product authenticity on product attachment and behavioral intention. The statistical tool of PLS proved that all hypotheses were supported. Product quality influenced product attachment and behavioral intentions. Product attachment also mediated the relationship between product authenticity and behavioral intention. At the same time, five dimensions of product authenticity, namely quality commitment, heritage, consistency, continuity, and uniqueness, were valid second-order dimensions for product authenticity. These five dimensions of product authenticity should be translated into the products and services offering.

For academics, this study should enrich the literature on product authenticity in Indonesian tourism and hospitality discipline, whether authenticity may influence product attachment and then positive behavioral intentions. For practitioners, this study provides insights into the important elements that built product quality. Similarly, when building authenticity, managers should consider those five product authenticity elements. If managers were willing to build customer attachments and positive behavioral intentions, managers should not only consider quality but, more importantly, also product authenticity. The empirical study on hand-painted and stamped batiks provides evidence on the important role of product authenticity in the Batik industry. The study could also be improved by researching on different industries. The author would like to thank you, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in supporting this research.

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