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Exploring local friendliness, perceived discrimination, and brand love's mediation on tourist behavior in Tangkahan, North Sumatra

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Abstract: This study explores the impact of local hospitality and perceived discrimination on tourist behavior, with brand love as a mediating variable, in the context of Tangkahan tourist attractions in North Sumatra. We collected data from a survey of 237 tourists visiting Tangkahan and analyzed it using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The analysis shows that local friendliness positively and significantly affects brand love. In contrast, perceived discrimination has no significant effect on brand love. In addition, local friendliness also has a positive and significant effect on tourist behavior, while perceived discrimination has no significant impact on tourist behavior. Furthermore, brand love has a positive and significant influence on tourist behavior. Brand love indirectly mediates the relationship between local friendliness and tourist behavior. However, brand love does not significantly mediate the relationship between perceived discrimination and tourist behavior. The practical implications of this study suggest the need for a more holistic strategy to improve the tourism experience, including addressing discrimination and strengthening the positive elements that influence brand love.

Keywords: brand love, local friendliness, perceived discrimination, tourist behavior, Tangkahan tourism

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Introduction

Tourist sites are essential for travelers since they offer enriching experiences and serve as venues for recreation, education, and respite from everyday life (Rehman et al., 2024). The diverse tourism alternatives, encompassing natural beauty, cultural richness, and contemporary attractions, enable tourists to tailor their visit to their interests (Zhang, 2021). Furthermore, the tourism sector fosters local economic development by generating business opportunities for the adjacent community (Sultan et al., 2021). Effective management enables tourist places to sustain growth and deliver enduring advantages for both visitors and local populations (Naeem et al., 2024).

The sector can develop innovative new products and services by analyzing traveler patterns and preferences (Tuan et al., 2021). This may encompass the creation of novel tourist attractions, exclusive travel packages, or supplementary services that augment the overall visitor experience (Su et al., 2020). Furthermore, knowledge regarding tourist behavior is crucial in the strategic design and implementation of suitable infrastructure, including transportation, lodging, and public amenities, which contribute to enhancing the overall comfort and satisfaction of tourists (Kitsios et al., 2022).

Brand love is a sentimental notion that signifies a robust connection between consumers and a specific brand (Zhang et al., 2020). Brand love plays a crucial role in the tourism business as it directly influences tourist loyalty, enhances the sense of quality, and boosts the intention to visit a specific destination (Attiq et al., 2022). Tourists who have a strong affection for a tourist

site are more likely to be loyal and frequently suggest it to others (Wu, 2021). Increasing visitation and revenues, as well as enhancing the destination's market image, can positively influence the tourist industry (Azzahra & Fachira, 2022). Prior research findings demonstrate that brand love significantly contributes to the support of the sustainable tourism business (Yasa et al., 2022). One technique for creating brand love in tourists is for managers to possess the skill of delivering a genuinely authentic and irreplaceable experience (Dwita & Budiarti, 2022).

The presence of a friendly local environment might help foster an atmosphere that is favorable for debate and communication (Nguyen, 2022). Tourists are more inclined to engage with people, exchange tales, and get insights into local everyday life and cultural values when they feel welcomed (Lin et al., 2021). This conversation facilitates mutual comprehension of each party's viewpoints and life encounters, hence diminishing any preconceived notions and generalizations that could be present (Bahja & Hancer, 2021).

Furthermore, amicable exchanges might foster the development of reciprocal confidence between tourists and Indigenous inhabitants (Silva et al., 2024). Tourists who are treated well are more inclined to have trust in the positive intentions of local inhabitants, and the opposite is also true (Park et al., 2022). Establishing mutual trust is crucial for fostering a secure and pleasant atmosphere for all individuals involved (Chancellor et al., 2021). Tourists' likelihood of fully enjoying their visit and considering a return in the future is increased when they feel secure (Nofiyanti et al., 2021).

Prior research findings demonstrate that the level of friendliness exhibited by locals has a substantial impact on a traveler's inclination to revisit a tourist site (Liew et al., 2021). When promoting a destination to their families, tourists often take into account the friendliness of the local people (Szromek et al., 2022). The failure of the tourism industry is closely linked to the local hospitality industry's failure to engage with tourists (Chebby et al., 2024). To guarantee that all tourists feel accepted and appreciated during their journeys, it is crucial to tackle any instances of perceived prejudice (Russen et al., 2021). When travelers encounter actual or perceived discrimination while traveling, it can have a detrimental effect on their travel experience and diminish their contentment with the location (Ro & Olson, 2020). Tourism service providers must prioritize fair and transparent treatment of all clients, ensuring that rates and offers are equitable and consistent without any form of discrimination based on national origin or appearance (Lim, 2020). Destinations can establish trust, cultivate strong connections with tourists, and promote return visits and favorable referrals (Qu et al., 2020).

Encountering discrimination can result in significant psychological strain and have adverse effects on the mental well-being of travelers (Leng et al., 2024). When travelers experience unjust or prejudiced treatment while on a journey, they frequently experience unease and apprehension, which can have an impact on their overall emotional state and welfare (Verhaeghe & De Coninck, 2022). This emotional stress not only diminishes the present experience but also diminishes the pleasure and contentment of the trip (Carden et al., 2022).

Research findings have demonstrated that perceived prejudice directly influences the level of brand love and loyalty among visitors (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2023). Tourists encounter perceived discrimination after their initial visit to a location (Qu et al., 2020). Perceived prejudice is viewed as a customary or cultural practice among local individuals in their pursuit of personal gain (Lim, 2020). Prior studies indicate that perceived bias can directly influence visitors' affection and allegiance toward a brand or destination they frequent (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2023). Travelers encounter discriminatory treatment during or following their visit to a location, adversely affecting their perception of the area and diminishing the probability of return visits or referrals to others (Qu et al., 2020). Perceived bias may manifest not just through individual behaviors but also as cultural or customary practices employed by local groups to secure personal advantages (Lim, 2020). This indicates that tourists' experiences are shaped not only by the sights and services provided but also by the social interactions encountered during their journey.

Nonetheless, studies that expressly investigate the interaction between local hospitality and perceived discomfort in influencing visitor behavior remain scarce. In ecotourism locales like Tangkahan, North Sumatra, renowned for its community-based tourism model, a deeper comprehension is required regarding how local hospitality influences tourists' affinity for the destination, alongside the role of perceived discomfort as a barrier to establishing an emotional

bond with the locale. Moreover, several research studies continue to emphasize the mediation function of brand love in the interplay between local hospitality, perceived discomfort, and visitor behavior. Studies have demonstrated that brand affection markedly increases passengers' allegiance to a particular tourism destination. This study seeks to address the literature gap by examining the mediating role of brand love in elucidating the effects of local hospitality and felt discomfort on visitor behavior in Tangkahan Visitor Attraction, North Sumatra. Consequently, the findings of this study are anticipated to furnish destination managers and stakeholders with enhanced insights for formulating more effective strategies to augment attractiveness and deliver a more favorable tourist experience.

Theoretical Review

Tourist Behavior

The behavior of tourists is crucial in the process of tourism planning, as it plays a significant role in the promotion and sale of tourism products (Rong et al., 2024). Important elements in the study of customer behavior in the tourism industry are decision-making, values, motivation, self-concept, personality, expectations, attitudes, perceptions, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty (Wijaya et al., 2023). By emphasizing the diffusion of negative consequences and promoting sustainable tourism practices, we have made significant progress in managing disruptive visitor behavior (Wu et al., 2024).

Tourist expenditure on lodging, meals, recreational pursuits, and mementos creates substantial economic benefits for local communities and proprietors (Hussain et al., 2024). When tourists visit a destination, they allocate funds across several sectors, immediately augmenting the revenue of local businesses (Wu et al., 2022). Furthermore, this economic stimulus contributes to enhancing the quality of life for local inhabitants, as the supplementary revenue enables tourists to avail themselves of superior services and enhance their living conditions (Omidvar & Deen, 2024). Tourists' presence has a substantial impact on the economic development and well-being of local communities (Pratminingsih et al., 2022).

Brand Love

Brand love is shaped by factors such as the distinctiveness of a brand's features and sensory appeal, customer happiness, alignment with one's identity, and individual experiences. This ultimately results in brand loyalty, a readiness to spend more for the brand, plans to spread positive word-of-mouth, and the ability to forgive the brand for any missteps (Ali, 2023). Researchers have identified three distinct forms of destination brand love. By comprehending these forms, marketing firms may effectively cultivate and enhance brand love among tourists, leading to higher levels of visitation and income (Nasib et al., 2023). Brand love comprises seven fundamental components that are more effective in predicting loyalty, word-of-mouth, and resistance to bad information compared to a single overall assessment (Joshi & Garg, 2021).

Tourist loyalty is greatly influenced by brand affection (Ahuvia et al., 2020). Tourists who have a strong affinity for a destination are more likely to exhibit loyalty and have a higher inclination to revisit (Bae & Kim, 2023). Brand identity, brand image, and tourist satisfaction are significant factors that influence the development of brand love (Hamdy et al., 2024). Furthermore, the utilization of celebrity endorsements and social media platforms can enhance the emotional connection between tourists and the site (Huang & Liu, 2021).

Prior research findings indicate that brand affection has a direct and substantial impact on tourist behavior (Morando & Platania, 2022; Prihatini et al., 2023; Rianthomy et al., 2023). Brand affinity is believed to enable a tourist to choose a tourist destination based on both intellectual and emotional factors to experience a feeling of safety and comfort (Junaid et al., 2020). Brand affinity enables tourists to overlook minor flaws and instead concentrate on the appealing features that they like (Robertson et al., 2022).

H1: Brand love has a direct and significant influence on tourist behavior.

Local Friendliness

Local hospitality can be demonstrated through a range of uncomplicated yet significant behaviors (Szromek et al., 2022). Local hospitality encompasses various acts of kindness and generosity, ranging from friendly greetings and assistance with directions to engaging in conversations and exchanging stories about the local culture and traditions (Silva et al., 2024). In certain cultures, it may extend to inviting outsiders to participate in family or community events and offering them local food and beverages (Recuero-Virto & Arróspide, 2024).

The impact of local hospitality in shaping a favorable initial impression for travelers is significant (Chebby et al., 2024). Tourists who feel welcomed and valued are more likely to have a pleasant and memorable experience (Park et al., 2022). This not only enhances tourists' contentment during their visit but also motivates them to endorse the place to their acquaintances and contemplate revisiting in the future (Ahmad et al., 2022).

Positive social exchanges might mitigate potential cultural clashes between tourists and local inhabitants, fostering a peaceful and courteous atmosphere (Savelli et al., 2022). Upon arrival at a destination, travelers bring their own set of values, norms, and customs, which may vary from the local culture (Nofiyanti et al., 2021). Unfamiliarity with local customs can lead travelers to unintentionally breach social standards (Ahmad et al., 2022). Nevertheless, by fostering a cordial and empathetic demeanor among the local populace, such circumstances can be effectively resolved, circumventing discord and fostering enhanced comprehension (Chancellor et al., 2021).

Conversely, travelers who are shown local hospitality are more likely to show a positive and respectful attitude toward the local culture (Nowacki et al., 2021). Tourists are inclined to exert effort in comprehending and valuing local traditions and practices (Park et al., 2022). Engaging in this practice not only enhances the tourist's personal experience but also demonstrates a sense of regard for the local community being visited (Ren et al., 2021).

Prior studies have demonstrated that the level of friendliness exhibited by locals has a direct and substantial impact on a tourist's affinity for a certain brand (Linderová et al., 2021; Tarinc et al., 2023; Weaver et al., 2022). Moreover, this influence has the potential to cultivate favorable attitudes and behaviors among tourists, especially those who are inexperienced in visiting tourist destinations (Liew et al., 2021).

H2: Local friendliness has a direct and significant effect on brand love.
H3: Local friendliness has a direct and significant effect on tourist behavior.
H4: Local friendliness has an indirect and significant effect on tourist behavior through brand love.

Perceived Discrimination

Perceived discrimination refers to a tourist's subjective experience of perceiving unfair or differential treatment based on variables such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, nationality, or other personal qualities (Lin et al., 2022). This form of discrimination can manifest either directly or indirectly and can take place in various situations throughout the trip, such as encounters with local inhabitants, providers of tourism services, or fellow travelers (Verhaeghe & De Coninck, 2022).

At times, travelers may think that their nationality or physical appearance results in increased fees or less advantageous agreements (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2023). This scenario has the potential to evoke emotions of inequity and disillusionment, compromising the overall quality of the travel encounter (Leng et al., 2024). Tourists may have a sense of exploitation due to their status as "outsiders" or the perception that they have more financial means (Carden et al., 2022). The inequitable pricing not only diminishes the level of pleasure among tourists but also has the potential to harm the global reputation of the location (Jamaludin et al., 2024).

Previous research findings indicate that the perception of prejudice has a direct and negative effect on tourists' affection for tourist locations (Runtunuwu & Husen, 2023; Shang et al., 2022). Discrimination fosters the inclination of travelers to communicate their negative encounters with others (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2023). Enacting and ensuring the implementation

of unambiguous anti-discrimination rules across all facets of the tourism sector is a crucial measure towards establishing an inclusive and equitable environment for all visitors (Ulinnuha, 2021). These regulations should encompass diverse sectors, such as lodging, transportation, and tourism destinations, to guarantee the equitable and courteous treatment of all customers, irrespective of their race, religion, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or appearance (Min & Joireman, 2021).

H5: Perceived discrimination has a direct significant effect on brand love.
H6: Perceived discrimination has a direct significant effect on tourist behavior.
H7: Perceived discrimination has an indirect significant effect on tourist behavior through brand love.

Methodology

This research employed a quantitative methodology using survey-based techniques. We chose this methodology to assess the correlation between the variables under study, specifically local hospitality, perceived discrimination, brand love, and visitor behavior at the Tangkahan tourist destination in North Sumatra. The target population and sample of this study consisted of tourists who have visited the Tangkahan tourist attraction at least twice a year. The sampling technique used in this study is random sampling. Through the purposive random sampling technique, we obtained 237 tourists who were willing to participate in the data collection of this study. Then, we collected research data sourced from primary data, which was obtained through the distribution of research questionnaires that were prepared based on the indicators of the research variables.

Additionally, local friendliness can be assessed by indicators such as LF1 (friendly attitude), LF2 (local assistance), LF3 (positive engagement), and LF4 (openness). The variable of perceived discrimination is measured by indicators of injustice (PD1), social exclusion (PD2), variations in treatment (PD3), stigma (PD4), and sentiments of non-acceptance (PD5). The variables of brand love are measured by indicators of liking, emotional attachment, satisfaction, self-identification, and intention to revisit. Indicators such as intention to revisit (BT1), recommendations (BT2), good reviews (BT3), social involvement (BT4), and loyalty (BT5) are used to quantify tourist behavior. Ultimately, data analysis employs SEM (structural equation modeling) with Smart PLS.

Results and Discussions

Results

Measurement Model Analysis (Outer Model)

The measurement model analysis (outer model) employs two tests: (1) construct reliability and validity and (2) discriminant validity. The following are the test results:

Table 1. Outer model results

Code	Indicators	Loading Factor
LF1	The local people at this tourist destination are very friendly	0.974
LF2	I felt like I got a lot of help from the local people when I visited	0.957
LF3	I frequently engage in positive interactions with local residents	0.910
LF4	The locals here are very open to visitors	0.938
PD1	I feel treated unfairly by the local people	0.876
PD2	I feel excluded from social activities by local residents	0.818
PD3	I feel there is a significant difference in treatment among the local population	0.858
PD4	I feel stigmatized by local residents because of my status as a visitor	0.812
PD5	I felt unwelcome by the locals during my visit	0.835
BE1	I really like this tourist destination	0.796
BE2	I feel a strong emotional attachment to this destination	0.719
BE3	I was very satisfied with my experience at this destination	0.707

BE4	I feel that this destination reflects me	0.723
BE5	I feel that this destination reflects me	0.728
BT1	I intend to visit this destination again	0.946
BT2	I would recommend this destination to others	0.927
BT3	I will give a positive review of this destination	0.953
BT4	I participate in social activities around this destination	0.971
BT5	I feel loyal to this tourist destination	0.956

Table 2. Composite reliability

Variables	Composite reliability
Local Friendliness	0.865
Perceived Discrimination	0.850
Brand Love	0.866
Tourist Behavior	0.826

Table 1 demonstrates that all indicators satisfy the loading factor's threshold of 0.5, indicating that the indicators in this study have successfully fulfilled it. The composite reliability test in Table 2 indicates that if the value is more than 0.6, all variables may be considered trustworthy. For this study data to be deemed suitable for the subsequent data testing phase.

Table 3. Discriminant validity results

	Tourism Behavior	BrandLove	Local Friendliness	Perceived Discrimination
LF1	0.393	0.387	0.752	0.571
LF2	0.444	0.441	0.851	0.654
LF3	0.441	0.442	0.841	0.663
LF4	0.427	0.428	0.820	0.648
LF5	0.445	0.442	0.854	0.655
PD1	0.425	0.416	0.730	0.955
PD2	0.434	0.424	0.687	0.935
PD3	0.472	0.475	0.607	0.885
PD4	0.433	0.438	0.623	0.883
PD5	0.472	0.468	0.636	0.913
BE1	0.861	0.842	0.427	0.603
BE2	0.860	0.841	0.458	0.623
BE3	0.856	0.836	0.437	0.607
BE4	0.863	0.850	0.447	0.621
BE5	0.854	0.833	0.438	0.609
BT1	0.837	0.851	0.430	0.595
BT2	0.830	0.856	0.421	0.608
BT3	0.841	0.858	0.434	0.607
BT4	0.831	0.852	0.471	0.626
BT5	0.835	0.854	0.438	0.606

The study variable's indicators exhibit the highest cross-loading value on the variable they represent, as seen in Table 3. The findings demonstrate that the indicators utilized in this study possess strong discriminant validity in aggregating their corresponding factors.

Structural Model Analysis (Inner Model)

R-Square

The data processing of the Smart PLS 3.0 software produces the R-Square value as follows:

Table 4. Determination coefficient (R-square)

	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Brand Love (Y1)	0.585	0.579
Tourist Behavior (Y2)	0.554	0.551

(Source: SmartPLS 3.3.3)

The data from Table 4 indicates that the R-squared adjusted value for the brand love variable is 0.579, which corresponds to 57.9%. The remaining 42.1% is attributed to other factors that were not included in this study. The R-squared value of the tourist behavior variable is 0.551, which represents 55.1% of the variation. The remaining 44.9% is attributed to other factors that were not included in this study.

Predictive Relevance (Q2)

The Q2 value is synonymous with the coefficient of determination (R-square). A Q-square value (Q2) of 0 indicates that the model has predictive relevance. Conversely, a Q2 value less than 0 indicates that the model has less predictive relevance. In other words, higher Q2 values indicate that the model is more suitable for the data. To determine the Q2 value, you may utilize the following method:

$$Q2 = 1 - (1 - R^2)(1 - R^2) \dots (1 - R^2) \quad (1)$$
$$Q2 = 1 - (1 - 0.579)(1 - 0.551)$$
$$Q2 = 1 - (0.664)(0.696)$$
$$Q2 = 1 - 0.462$$
$$Q2 = 0.537$$

Based on the results, the Q2 value is 0.537. Therefore, it can be concluded that all the factors examined in this study, i.e., local friendliness, perceived discrimination, brand love, and tourist behavior, significantly impacted the authenticity data in the current structural model, accounting for 53.7% of the variance. We should individually make the other 46.3% without relying on research factors.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 5. Hypothesis testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Local Friendliness (X1) → Brand Love (Y1)	0.573	0.617	0.391	2.163	0.000
Perceived Discrimination (X2) → Brand Love (Y1)	0.455	0.521	0.317	1.751	0.426
Local Friendliness (X1) → Tourist Behavior (Y2)	0.627	0.718	0.154	2.267	0.001
Perceived Discrimination (X2) → Tourist Behavior (Y2)	0.374	0.392	0.118	1.592	0.814
Brand Love (Y1) → Tourist Behavior (Y2)	0.502	0.561	0.283	2.147	0.001
Local Friendliness (X1) → Brand Love (Y1) → Tourist Behavior (Y2)	0.563	0.556	0.249	2.217	0.000
Perceived Discrimination (X2) → Brand Love (Y1) → Tourist Behavior(Y2)	0.253	0.262	0.269	1.615	0.175

Table 5 above directly states that local friendliness significantly influences tourist brand love. However, perceived discrimination does not affect the love of the tourist brand. Then, local friendliness has a significant direct effect on tourist behavior. However, perceived discrimination does not affect tourist behavior. Finally, indirectly, brand love has a significant role in mediating local friendliness in tourist behavior. However, brand love does not have a role in mediating perceived discrimination in tourist behavior.

Discussions

The Influence of Local Friendliness on Brand Love

The findings of the hypothesis test demonstrate that the level of friendliness exhibited by locals substantially impacts the extent to which tourists develop a strong affection for the Tangkahan tourist destination. The study's findings indicate that the amicability of local inhabitants towards tourists can enhance their overall experience by offering diverse information about the Tangkahan tourist site. Nevertheless, tourists find the disorganized selling practices of the local people in the Tangkahan region to be disruptive. The region has seen a transformation from a cozy spot to a commercial site.

The findings of this study are consistent with prior research, which indicated that being friendly toward local customers can enhance their affinity toward a company (Chebby et al., 2024; Recuero-Virto & Arróspide, 2024; Satrya & Susanto, 2023). As stated by Szromek et al. (2022), when tourists experience acceptance and appreciation from the local community, they are more likely to develop a strong connection with the place, which is a crucial factor in developing brand loyalty. An essential element of brand love is when visitors not only have a positive opinion of the place but also develop a strong emotional attachment to it. This emotional connection leads to increased loyalty and a desire to visit the destination again in the future (Silva et al., 2024).

The Influence of Perceived Discrimination on Brand Love

The data analysis findings suggest that there is no substantial influence of directly perceived prejudice on the brand love of visitors in the Tangkahan tourism region. The findings of this study suggest that food sellers in the Tangkahan tourism region frequently increase prices for tourists who are not from outside Langkat Regency.

The findings of this study contradict the findings of prior studies, which indicated that perceived discrimination has a notable impact on brand affection (Ngarbingan & Suryantari, 2022; Rahmiati, et al., 2023; Russen et al., 2021). In the long term, the image of a resort might be negatively impacted by perceived prejudice (Lim, 2020). This image is essential for cultivating brand affinity, as tourists frequently prefer places that they see in a good light (Qu et al., 2020). However, discrimination might result in a negative perception, which can weaken the emotional connection required to cultivate strong brand loyalty (Le Hong & Hsu, 2024).

The Influence of Local Friendliness on Tourist Behavior

The findings of the hypothesis test indicate that there is a notable impact of local friendliness on visitor behavior in the Tangkahan tourism region. The outcomes of this study suggest that the community's attitude towards foreign tourists is still suboptimal. The neighborhood typically lacks in providing international tourists with a warm and welcoming reception. This discovery demonstrates that the current community lacks proficient English communication abilities.

The findings of this study corroborate the findings of prior studies, which indicated that the amicability of locals had a favorable impact on visitor conduct (Kepramareni et al., 2024; Linderová et al., 2021; Mazliza & Adiati, 2023). Research has also shown that the level of friendliness exhibited by locals has an impact on tourists' likelihood to suggest a place to others (Savelli et al., 2022). Tourists who experience acceptance and get assistance from local inhabitants are more inclined to share favorable tourist experiences with their acquaintances and relatives, both in person and via digital platforms such as social media and online reviews (Tarinc et al., 2023). This demonstrates that the friendliness of local people not only influences the personal experience of tourists but also has a ripple effect through word-of-mouth, which may enhance the reputation of the destination (Nguyen, 2022).

The Influence of Perceived Discrimination on Tourist Behavior

The findings of the hypothesis test suggest that there is no substantial impact of directly perceived prejudice on visitor behavior in the Tangkahan tourist region. The findings of this study suggest that visitors perceive discrimination while seeking information, leading to a decrease in

expenditure throughout their visit to the site. This can be demonstrated. This is demonstrated by the inclination to avoid purchasing local products, refrain from patronizing certain restaurants or motels, or even reduce the length of the tourist stay. Individuals who experience discrimination are more inclined to file official grievances with the administration of the tourist destination, tourism groups, or even law enforcement agencies. Written reviews or complaints on social media have the potential to harm the reputation of the location.

The findings of this study align with prior research, which indicated that perceived prejudice adversely impacts tourist behavior (Ismail & Sition, 2024; Verhaeghe & De Coninck, 2022). Moreover, experiences of prejudice might diminish the confidence of visitors in the local populace, service providers, and even the tourism authorities in the region (CardenCarden et al., 2022). This might instill a sense of caution or unease among visitors throughout their visit (Shang et al., 2022). Instances of discrimination reported by tourists might significantly harm the overall reputation of the area (Le Hong & Hsu, 2024). This may lead to a decline in future tourist numbers (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2023).

The Influence of Brand Love on Tourist Behavior

The hypothesis test findings indicate that brand love has a clear and substantial impact on visitor behavior in the Tangkahan tourism region. The findings of this study suggest that travelers who have a strong affinity for the Tangkahan tourist site are more likely to engage actively in online communities associated with the location. Tourists will furthermore exchange experiences, offer recommendations, or even advocate for the place in response to criticism.

The findings of this study align with prior research, which asserted that brand love serves as the primary foundation for cultivating robust visitor behavior within the tourism sector (Lv & Wu, 2021). Brand affinity may enhance the confidence of tourists in a place, especially the conviction that it will deliver a reliable and gratifying encounter (Shen et al., 2021). This sense of trust may instill a sense of calmness in travelers, allowing them to fully enjoy their vacation without any concerns or worries (Khalid et al., 2024). Tourists who have a strong affinity for a certain brand are often more accepting of small issues or unpleasant occurrences that may arise during their journey (Yadav et al., 2023). Tourists who have a strong affinity for a particular brand are more likely to have a good outlook on the many characteristics of a trip (Polat & Çetinsöz, 2021).

The Influence of Local Friendliness on Tourist Behavior Through Brand Love

The data test findings clearly indicate that the level of local friendliness in the Tangkahan tourism region is greatly influenced by brand love. The study's findings suggest that being kind to locals may enhance brand affinity, and the location has the potential to reinforce its identity among tourists. Tangkahan is renowned among tourists for its captivating natural beauty and its welcoming and amiable people, which fosters a strong sense of connection to the area. Brand affinity can motivate tourists to actively participate in events organized by the local community, such as festivals, cultural showcases, or environmental preservation initiatives. The establishment of a strong local rapport serves as a solid basis for this engagement, and the development of a deep affection for the brand reinforces it, leading to increased levels of participation.

The findings of this study align with other research, which indicates that the brand has a crucial role in enhancing tourist behavior (Bahja & Hancer, 2021). Brand affection is also seen as a fundamental factor for tourist destination managers (Nguyen, 2022). Tourists who encounter genuine hospitality are inclined to actively pursue and derive more satisfaction from authentic encounters (Tarinc et al., 2023). The connection between visitors and the distinctiveness of local culture and customs is facilitated by brand love (Weaver et al., 2022). This can incentivize tourists to participate in more immersive activities, such as acquiring knowledge about indigenous crafts or embarking on a cultural excursion (Lin et al., 2021). When tourists develop a strong emotional attachment to a brand as a result of experiencing local friendliness, they become less responsive to the attractiveness of other travel locations (Nowacki et al., 2021). Therefore, even if other places have more appealing amenities or lower pricing, travelers would still opt for Tangkahan because of the emotional connection they have established (Ren et al., 2021).

The Influence of Perceived Discrimination on Tourist Behavior Through Brand Love

The results of the hypothesis testing suggest that brand love does not have a substantial impact on moderating perceived discrimination against tourist behavior in the Tangkahan tourist region. The outcomes of this study suggest that while visitors may perceive that the prejudice they encounter influences their behavior as tourists, brand affection does not play a substantial role in altering or reinforcing the connection. To clarify, brand love is ineffective in mitigating the adverse effects of perceived discrimination on tourist behavior, or it lacks the potency to transform unfavorable perceptions into more favorable conduct among visitors.

The findings of this study align with prior research, which indicated that decriminalization is a significant aspect for travelers to take into account when selecting tourism locations (Verhaeghe & De Coninck, 2022). Tourists will give higher importance to social justice and personal experiences rather than their emotional connection with the brand (Ro & Olson, 2020). Discriminatory events might diminish or eliminate the favorable impact of brand love, even if visitors initially have strong positive views towards a brand (Ulinnuha, 2021). Tourists choose the practical features of the tourist experience, such as comfort, pricing, and accessibility, over emotional considerations like brand loyalty (Leng et al., 2024). If visitors see these functional aspects as insufficient or encounter prejudice, their sense of brand affection may not have a substantial impact, thereby diminishing the importance of brand affection as a mediator (Le Hong & Hsu, 2024).

This research enhances the comprehension of visitor behavior by 53.7% through the variables of local hospitality, perceived prejudice, and brand affection. Additional factors affect 46.3% of the outcomes. In his 2019 study, Kim (2019) determined that tourist behavior may be anticipated with 41.6% accuracy by utilizing factors associated with various tourist destinations, social network analysis, degree centrality, and density. Mohammadi et al. (2023) assert that tourist behavior exhibits a coefficient of determination of 46.2% through factors such as destination evaluation, food requirements, satisfiers/dissatisfiers, and religious/medical/lifestyle dietary considerations. Consequently, the findings of this study present greater uniqueness compared to prior research, especially in the formulation of tourist behavior models.

Conclusions

The findings of this study show a clear and significant correlation between local hospitality and brand love and visitor behavior. However, perceived prejudice does not have a large impact on brand loyalty or traveler actions. Brand love indirectly influences the effect of local hospitality on visitor behavior. However, the concept of brand love does not play a role in moderating the impact of perceived prejudice on tourist behavior. The practical findings of this study suggest the need for more holistic strategies to improve tourism experiences, including addressing discrimination and reinforcing the positive elements that influence brand love.

Based on the results of the study, there are several recommendations for future research. First, future research could focus more on hospitality strategies, examine the role of communities in creating positive tourism experiences, and develop training for local residents to be more welcoming to tourists. Second, further exploration of brand love is needed, especially in understanding how the uniqueness of local culture, tourists' personal experiences, or destination storytelling can strengthen emotional bonds with the destination, increase loyalty, and encourage repeat visits. Third, since perceived discrimination does not have a significant effect on brand love and tourist behavior, future research can explore other factors, such as service satisfaction, tourist safety, and cultural values in shaping tourist perceptions and experiences. Fourth, to get a better idea of how different factors affect tourist behavior, future research can look at moderating or mediating variables like tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, or economic factors. Lastly, comparative studies across different tourist destinations, both domestic and international, can help identify best practices in tourism management, as well as understand whether local hospitality and brand love factors are universal or contextual.

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