The Mediating Role of Tourist Satisfaction in the Relationship between Destination Authenticity and Destination Loyalty: the Case of Machu Pichu

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Abstracts: Machu-Pichu (MP) has gained notable attention worldwide, attracting tourists from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this study focuses on MP to review the influence of destination authenticity on loyalty. The study is based on quantitative research approach, where a questionnaire survey used and distributed among two hundred and fifty (250) tourists who had recently visited MP. The responses were then analysed using the SMART PLS structural equation modelling (SEM) technique with confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis. The findings of this reveal that destination authenticity is highly correlated with destination loyalty. However, this study found that tourist satisfaction significantly enhances the effect of destination authenticity on destination loyalty.

Keywords: Destination Authenticity; Existential Authenticity; Satisfaction; Loyalty; MP.

INTRODUCTION

Tourist satisfaction is considered an important factor with which the perceived legitimacy of the destination influences tourists' intentions and loyalty (Jeong & Kim, 2020). There exists a potential gap in understanding the perception of authenticity. In general, past research studies have not analysed the influence of destination on the satisfaction and loyalty of tourists. Conversely, considerable research has been conducted on authenticity in tourism (Moore et al., 2021; Rickly, 2022; Ahmed et al 2024; Shabbir et al 2023; Takata & Hallmann, 2021). Most of this research, though, lacks a focus on particular destinations. From the findings of the above research studies, it seems prevalent that research advocates for detailed and location-specific investigations. These studies have called for more nuanced approaches toward loyalty, satisfaction, and genuineness in specific contexts.

Destination authenticity in the current context relates to how tourist destinations generally preserve their unique historical, cultural, and natural attributes, providing a genuine and unaltered experience (Yi et al., 2016; Nawaz et al 2023; Rawoof et al 2023;). The authentic destination appeal lies in the ability to offer the tourist a meaningful and more profound experience of travelling, promoting a sense of satisfaction and connection (Raggiotto & Scarpi, 2021). The tourism industry is experiencing a considerable shift with the growing focus on destination authenticity, a key driver for loyalty and satisfaction (Kumar et al., 2022; Qing et al 2024;).

Similarly, past research have examined the impact of authenticity on loyalty and satisfaction separately (Chen et al., 2020; Nguyen & Cheung, 2016). In order to investigate comprehensively how the sub-factor of destination accuracy interacts in the realm of destination experiences. Another gap found in

the existing studies that shows limited focus on the destination, such as MP, in the broader credibility framework. While several studies have focused on satisfaction, loyalty and authenticity (Chathoth et al., 2016; Li et al 2024; Liang et al 2023; Mughal et al 2023; So et al., 2016), there is limited research on iconic destinations such as MP. It is observed that existing gap toward the generalised approach while neglecting the lessons learned that specific iconic destinations can provide. This gap is bridged by exploring the relationship between authenticity and loyalty to the destination and the mediating role of tourist satisfaction in the context of MP in Peru.

The study holds significance from theoretical as well as practical perspectives. In theoretical perspective, the paper contributes to fill the gap and acknowledge by focusing on specific destinations, such as MP, to review the mediating role of tourist satisfaction, considering the relationship between variables. It is noted that dynamic effect of tourist's behaviours have significant impact and they should have more specific toward tourist points. On the other hand, from a practical perspective, the research has direct importance for the tourism sector in MP, Peru, and other similar destinations. Destination marketers and managers can use these research insights to design more effective strategies focusing on genuineness and increasing tourist loyalty and satisfaction. Under the competitive landscape, these strategies are likely improve the destination appeal.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

This section discusses previous literature accumulation while considering the relationship between destination authenticity and loyalty.

2.1 Destination authenticity and loyalty

Destination authenticity become vital aspect for destination management and its marketing strategies to enhance the tourist loyalty. The concept of deeply rooted in preserving the destination's distinctive historical, cultural, and other attributes are authentic and unaltered manner (Lu et al., 2015). Destination authenticity have high scale influence on tourist loyalty, experience and perception and several previous researches shows the importance of destination authenticity towards loyalty. As Tian et al. (2020) study reveals, authenticity concerns the satisfaction of tourists and its positive perception. The authentic destination offers a pure and genuine experience to its visitors, fostering towards deep connection. These encounters include natural, historical, and cultural elements, often lead to increased tourist satisfaction.

The literature reveals the connection, focusing on tourist loyalty for destination, offering a meaningful and authentic experience (Chen & Rahman, 2017). According to the research of Jiang et al. (2017), destination credibility significantly influences the tourist's emotional connection. When tourists engage with the destination's authentic aspect, they develop connections and bonds that transcend the nature of tourism. The research reveals, authenticity allow tourist to explore destination's history, culture, and natural beauty more profoundly, leading to emotional attachment. These emotional connections are closely tied as they evoke nostalgia and positive feelings about the destination, make revisiting possible (Akgün et al., 2020; Xue et al 2024; Wang et al 2023;). Sustainable tourism is highly dependent on destination authenticity. In modern eras tourism authorities are focusing on purity by preserving natural environment and local culture to attract more tourist.(Larson & Poudyal, 2012;).

2.2 The direct influence of Destination authenticity on loyalty and satisfaction

Destination authenticity is one of the important elements for shaping satisfaction and loyalty. The concept is recognised as the extent to which the destination maintains its historical, cultural, and natural features to impact visitors' experiences and perspectives. (Fu, 2019). Travellers in these days are primarily looking for experiences that allow them to establish a stronger emotional connection with the location. It is thought to have a major and direct impact on travellers' satisfaction and loyalty to the destination. According to Teng and Chen (2020), the tourist generally perceives the destination as authentic when it improves their satisfaction and experience. Authenticity offers meaningful encounters and promotes emotional connection and memories with destination. The research of Kladou et al. (2017), on the other hand, added that the impact linked with destination authenticity goes beyond destination loyalty and satisfaction. Hence, tourists who have experienced authentic destinations generally develop loyalty toward them. They prefer to visit and recommend the destination, which significantly contributes to loyalty. It is crucial to remember that loyalty usually leaves a lasting impact and increase the visitor-destination relationship.

2.3 Role of destination authenticity for deriving loyalty mediated by satisfaction

Authenticity and destination loyalty are often connected to satisfaction through the mediation of brand credibility. It describes how destination use branding and other marketing strategies, to successfully convey tourists its true qualities. (Raggiotto & Scarpi, 2021). Effective branding generally aligns with the destination promises and the visitor experience and reinforces the perception of the destination's authenticity. As per Chen et al. (2020), when the brand communicates authentic and unique aspects of the destination, it tends to set the right expectations for the tourist. When tourist experience destination authenticity according to its expectation, it improves satisfaction. Therefore, the authenticity of the destination affects a visitor's level of satisfaction with their overall travel experience.

In addition, brand authenticity also plays a critical role in the creation of credibility and trust. Trust play an important role towards tourist satisfaction as they feel more confident about the destination. When the tourist finds destination matches their trust and expectation their level of satisfaction increases. As a result tourist is likely to trust an authentic brand. (Ratnasari et al., 2020). The association between satisfaction, authenticity, and loyalty is an important part. Satisfaction acts as a bridge between destination and loyalty linked with the brand. When travellers are satisfied with the experience of authentic destination that brand offers, they are more likely to become a loyal customers (Kim et al., 2013). According to Wang et al. (2017) positive memories and emotional connection are linked with the brand loyalty. Which encourage tourists to revisit and recommend the destination to others. Thus, the authenticity of the destination probably affects loyalty and satisfaction.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Destination-based authenticity, Satisfaction and Loyalty

The first factor of destination authenticity is Destination-based authenticity. Destination-based authenticity is a measurable and tangible element that contributes toward an unaltered and authentic portrayal of cultural, natural, and historical attributes linked with the destination (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). The destination-based authenticity includes factors such as historical, cultural, and natural authenticity.

Destination-based authenticity is one of the potential factors influencing satisfaction and perception throughout the visit. Hence, preserving natural, historical, and cultural authenticity improves tourist experience and promotes loyalty and attachment to the destination.

On the bases of these studies. We state the first Research hypothesis (H1):

H1: There is a significant relationship between Destination-based authenticity and destination loyalty.

3.2. Existential authenticity

Existential authenticity highlights the experiential and intangible aspects linked with destination authenticity. It considered as a psychological and emotional connection that the tourist commonly develops with the destination by focusing on their subjective experience and personal connection with the destination (Yi et al., 2016). In terms of existential authenticity, the destination's atmospheric and immerser features are likely to be determinants of customer loyalty.

As Fu (2019) suggested, existential authenticity generally goes beyond the measurable and tangible aspects that delve into the tourist experience. The ambience and atmosphere linked with destination are critical in creating existential authenticity. The physical and sensory elements comprise the aesthetics, sounds, smells, and architecture that influence the visitor's emotional reaction. Existential authenticity thus indicates the importance of experiential and emotional aspects for shaping the tourist's perception toward a destination, which are also complemented by other tangible elements.

On the bases of these studies second hypothesis (H2) formulated:

H2: There is a significant relationship between existential authenticity and destination loyalty.

3.3 Satisfaction and Loyalty

Tourists' Satisfaction plays a vital role in shaping the loyalty for destination. The concept of satisfaction is noteworthy because it captures the general level of satisfaction that tourists have with their travel experience, taking into account various aspects of the trip like accommodations and attractions (Stylidis et al., 2022). Satisfied tourist is generally more inclined toward destination loyalty by showing their intention to revisit the destination and by positive word-of-mouth (Al-Msallam, 2020).

The relationship between satisfaction and destination loyalty is documented well in tourism literature. This relationship highlights the significance of delivering satisfying and exceptional tourist experiences by promoting loyalty and contribution to destination's success and sustainability.

Third hypothesis (H3):

H3: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between destination-based authenticity and existential authenticity influencing the destination loyalty.

3.4 Research Model

Our study has focused on the conceptual framework shown below to achieve the aim and objectives of the research.
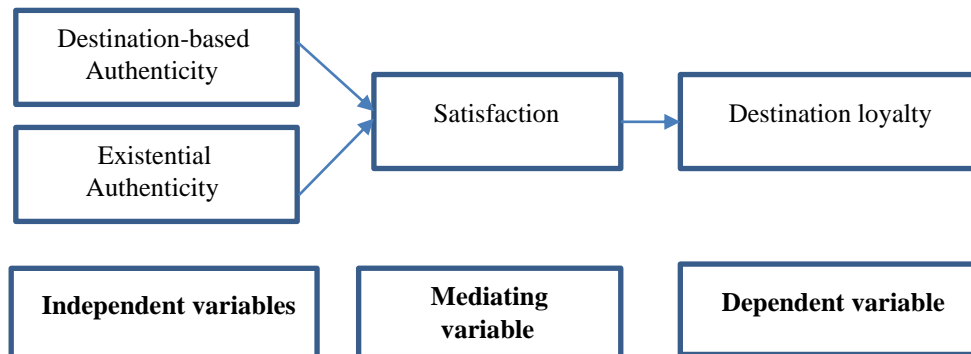

Figure 1: Model variables

The conceptual framework from Figure 1 has been developed to understand the significance of destination authenticity for increasing destination loyalty, along with the analysis of the mediating role of tourist satisfaction. The framework showcases the proposed model's independent, dependent, and mediating variables. The independent variables are factors of the destination, i.e., destination-based authenticity and existential authenticity. The dependent variable is destination loyalty, while the mediating variable is the satisfaction linked with the destination.

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Data collection and sample

Data collection approach

Studies on destination authenticity have been conducted mostly with a generalised approach and not emphasising specific destinations such as MP. Considering our research aim, we have opted quantitative design approach. Quantitative design includes investigating the data from an eminently numerical perspective. Quantitative design is characterised by systematic analysis and collection considering the numerical data for uncovering the association, patterns, and other causal associations (Sorde Marti & Mertens, 2014). The complexity of the research questions calls for the adoption of a structured approach to analysis and understand the interplay between satisfaction, authenticity, and loyalty. The data collection method helps to determine sources of the research data. Data collection is an important part of research process (Johnston, 2014).

Data Collection Source and Sample

Two potential sources exist for data collection are primary and secondary sources (Alsayed et al., 2016). The primary data are collected through interviews, surveys and experiments, while the secondary data are gathered mostly through journals, articles, and other books. The present research have used a primary data collection method for attaining first-hand insights into destination authenticity, satisfaction, and loyalty. Data has been collected from different tourists who had visited MP recently. The questionnaire survey was distributed to two hundred and fifty respondents by using convenience sampling.

4.2 Measurement scales

The method uses for primary data collection was a survey questionnaire including 5-point Likert scale. The Survey provides a standardised and structured approach for data collection. It was developed to gather details about tourist's demographic information and their perspectives on destination authentication, satisfaction, and loyalty. This survey contains four sections: the first section include gathering of essential details about the demographic profiles of the respondents; the second section focused on destination authenticity, Third section focused on satisfaction, and the last section focused on destination loyalty.

RESULTS

4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

In order to confirm the factor structure while taking convergent validity and discriminant reliability into account, confirmatory factor analysis was used. Cronbach alpha and composite reliability were computed in order to assess the latent construct reliability (Brown, 2015).

Table & Diagram 1 shows the result of internal consistency and reliability.

Table 1: Construct reliability and validity

	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Avg. variance extracted (AVE)
Destination Loyalty	0.902	0.908	0.939	0.836
Existential Authenticity	0.880	0.883	0.926	0.807
Destination-based authenticity	0.800	0.819	0.882	0.714
Satisfaction	0.910	0.911	0.943	0.848

Diagram 1
Construct reliability and validity
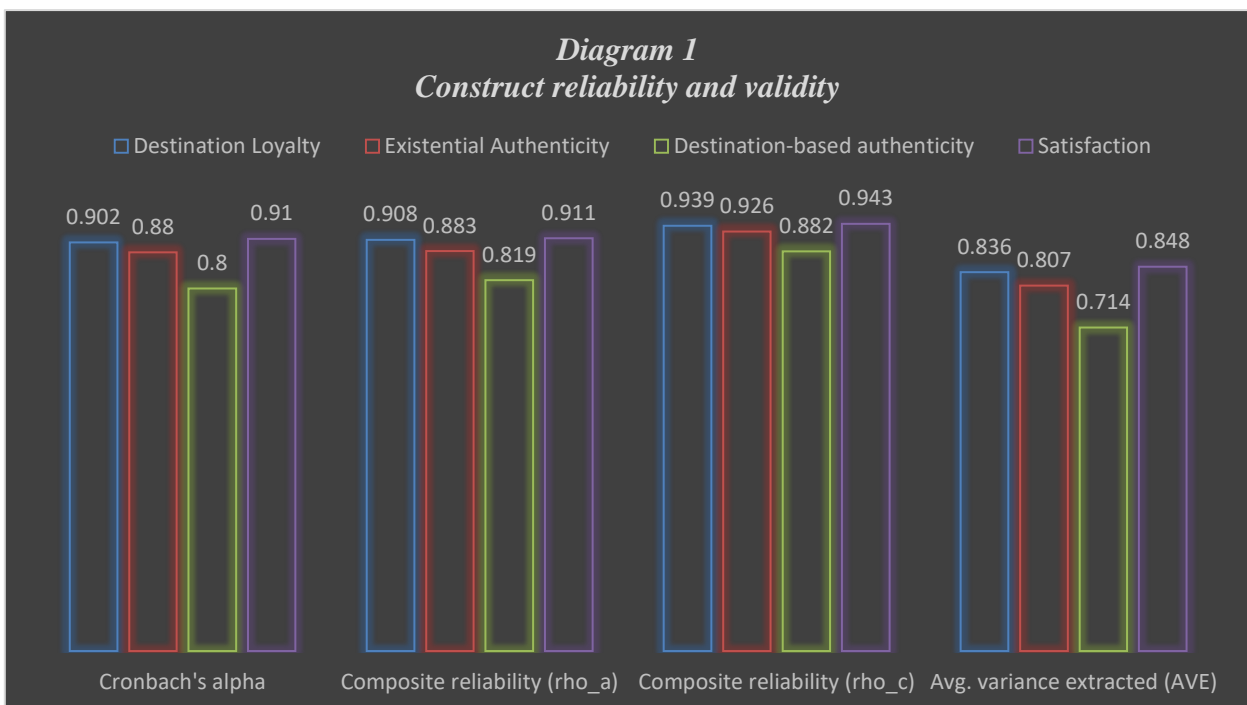
It is commonly accepted that the composite reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values should be above 0.7 (Kline, 2016). Table 1 evidences that this is the case for all constructs: destination loyalty (0.939), Existential authenticity (0.926), destination-based authenticity (0.882), and satisfaction (0.943). The composite reliability statistics for each of the variables is above 0.7. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the constructs are acceptable and reliable.

On the other hand, higher internal consistency confirms higher reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values for destination loyalty (0.902), existential authenticity (0.880), destination-based authenticity (0.800), and satisfaction (0.910) are also well above 0.7. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct must be above 0.5 to be deemed acceptable. Again, our AVE values are all well above that threshold [destination loyalty (0.836), existential authenticity (0.807), destination-based authenticity (0.714), and satisfaction (0.848)].

Table & Diagram 2 presents the discriminant validity result through the HTMT ratio. The table showcases that the values calculated are below the threshold. Therefore, the data passed the discriminant validity assumptions.

Table 2: Discriminant validity

	Destination Loyalty	Existential Authenticity	Destination-based authenticity	Satisfaction
Destination Loyalty				
Existential Authenticity	0.458			
Destination-based authenticity	0.285	0.414		
Satisfaction	0.450	0.696	0.378	

DIAGRAM 2
DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

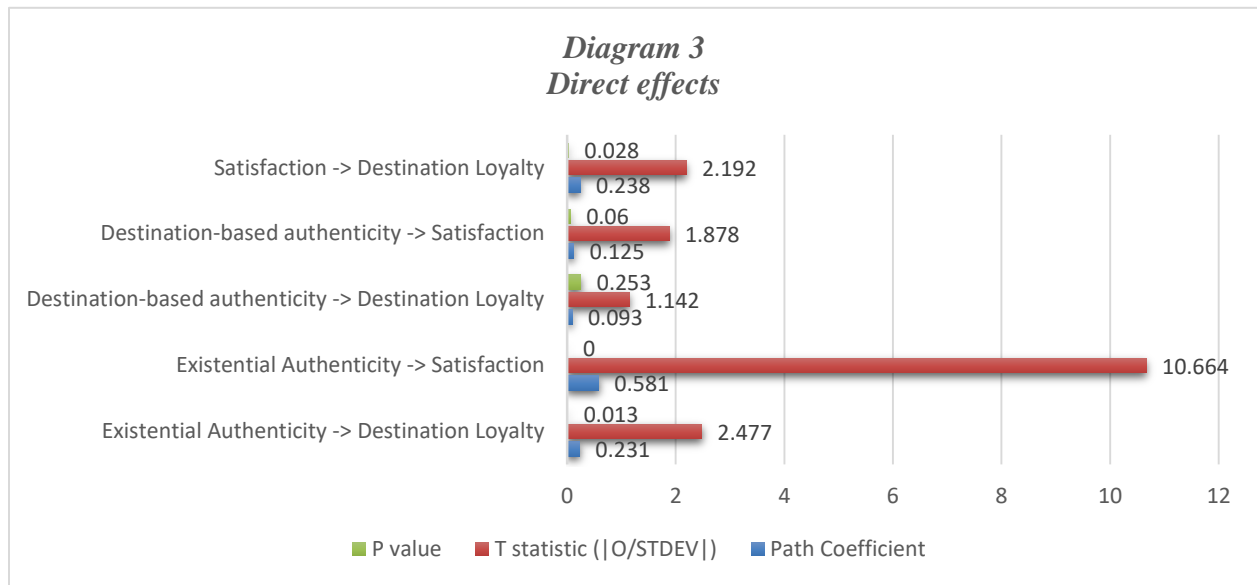|	Destination Loyalty	Existential Authenticity	Destination-based authenticity	Satisfaction
■ Destination Loyalty				
■ Existential Authenticity	0.458			
■ Destination-based authenticity	0.285	0.414		
■ Satisfaction	0.45	0.696	0.378	
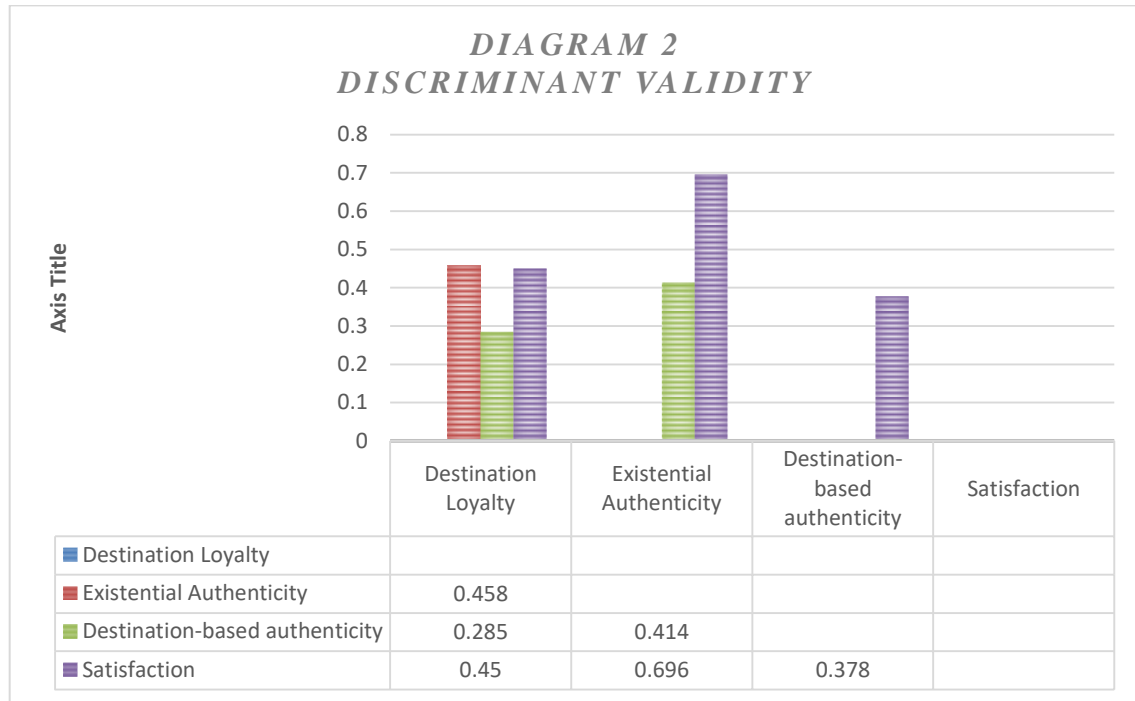
4.2 Paths assessment

We resorted to bootstrapping after carefully assessing the research model's reliability and validity. Bootstrapping is a re-sampling technique that assesses the variables' path significance (Sarstedt et al., 2022).

Table & Diagram 3 below demonstrates the significance level and path coefficients showing influence of existential and destination-based authenticity over destination loyalty by understanding the mediating role of satisfaction. The path coefficients measure the existence of a relationship strength among variables.

Table 3: Direct effects

|	Path Coefficient	T statistic ($|O/STDEV|$)	P value
Existential Authenticity -> Destination Loyalty	0.231	2.477	0.013
Existential Authenticity -> Satisfaction	0.581	10.664	0.000
Destination-based authenticity -> Destination Loyalty	0.093	1.142	0.253
Destination-based authenticity -> Satisfaction	0.125	1.878	0.060
Satisfaction -> Destination Loyalty	0.238	2.192	0.028

Diagram 3
Direct effects

Above results shows that the path coefficient value for existential authenticity is 0.581 (see the second row of Table 3), and the p-value for existential authenticity is 0.000 (last column). This means that existential authenticity strongly influences satisfaction with a very high level of confidence. The path coefficient for destination loyalty and satisfaction is 0.238, and the p-value is 0.028, indicating a moderate but significant association. The remaining paths can be evaluated analogously.

Table & Diagram 4 below showcases the indirect effects after considering the measurement errors in the constructs.

Table 4: Indirect effects

	Path Coefficient	T statistic (|O/STDEV|)	P value
Existential Authenticity -> Destination Loyalty	0.138	2.152	0.031
Destination-based authenticity -> Destination Loyalty	0.030	1.247	0.213

Diagram 4
Indirect effects
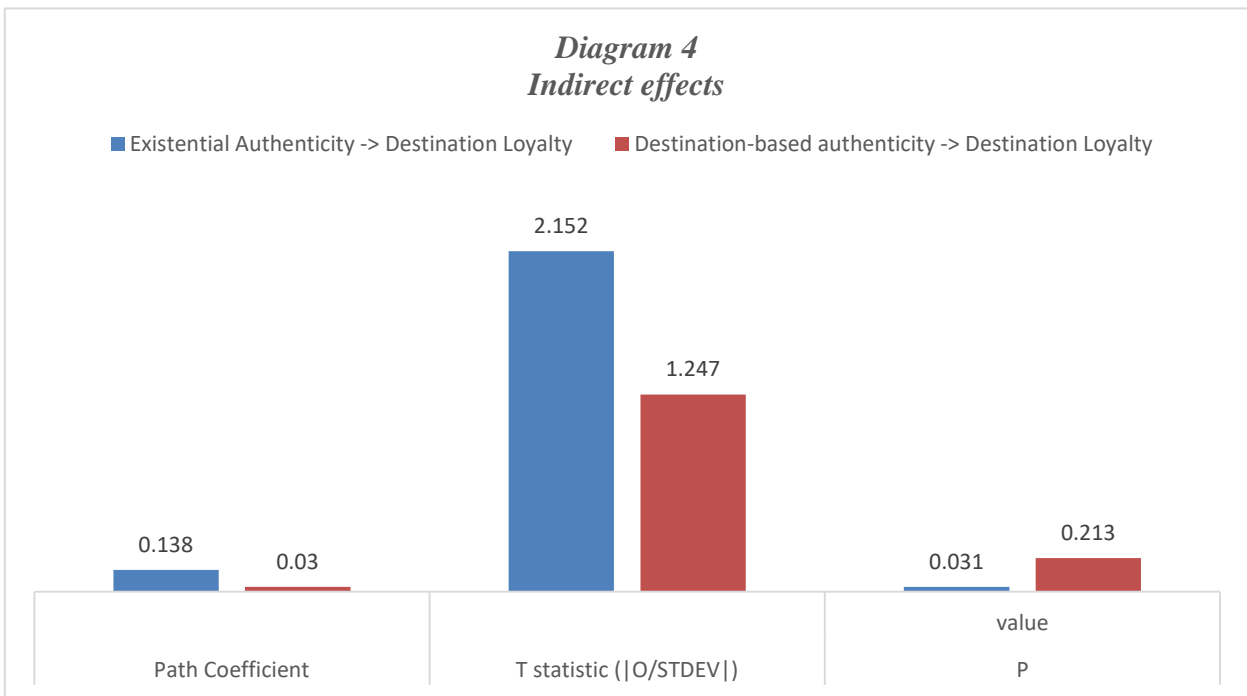
In above table it is found that the path coefficient value for existential authenticity is 0.138. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the association between existential authenticity and destination

loyalty is moderate. On the other hand, the p-value for existential authenticity is 0.031<0.05, which showcases that existential authenticity indirectly affects destination loyalty.

Regarding destination-based authenticity, the path coefficient is 0.030, showing a weak association.This showcases that destination-based authenticity has a weak indirect effect on destination loyalty. Subsequently, the p-value for the construct is 0.23, which is higher than the threshold, showing that the second constructs indirect effect on loyalty is not statistically significant. Precisely, the result showcases that existential authenticity moderates loyalty. Whereas destination-based authenticity indirect effect on loyalty is statistically insignificant.

Finally, Table & Diagram 5 shows the indirect effects of the constructs by studying the independent, mediated and dependent variables.

Table 5: Specific indirect effects

	Path Coefficient	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P value
Destination-based authenticity -> Satisfaction -> Destination Loyalty	0.030	1.247	0.213
Existential Authenticity -> Satisfaction -> Destination Loyalty	0.138	2.152	0.031

Diagram 5
Specific indirect effects
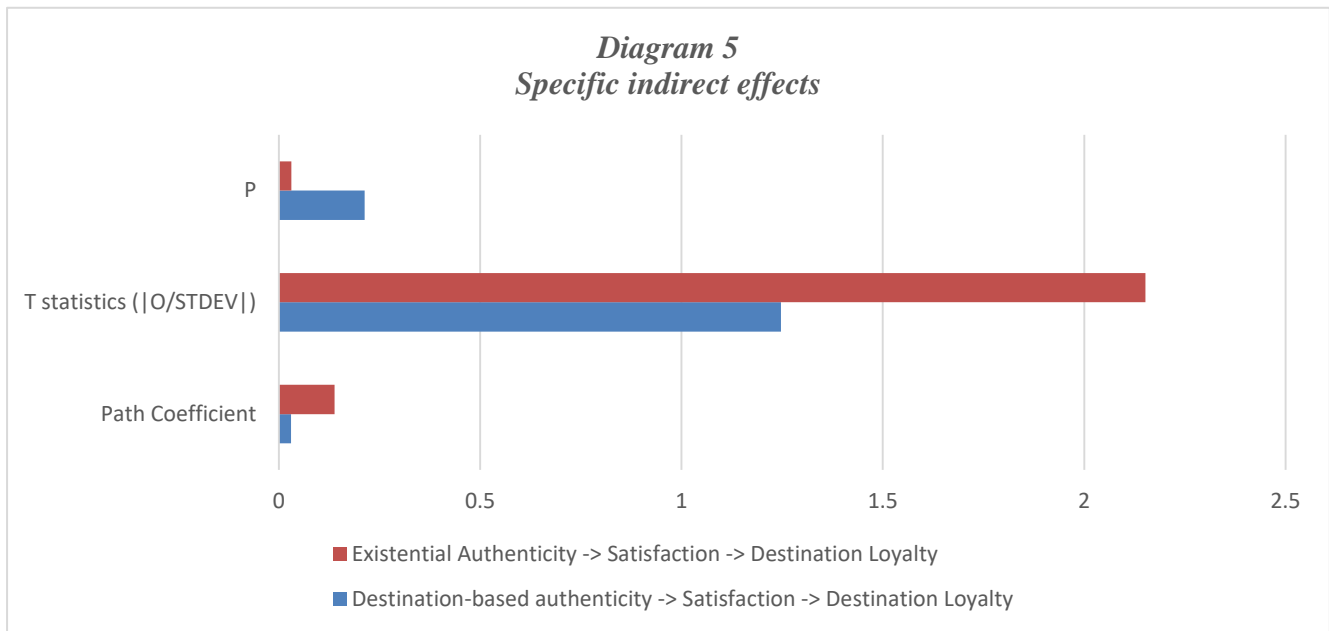
### 4.3 Predictive power and model quality

The path of existential authenticity, satisfaction and loyalty was studied, and its coefficient value was 0.138 (weak association). However, the p-value was 0.031, indicating a significant indirect effect. This means existential authenticity has a weak indirect but statistically significant effect on destination loyalty mediated by satisfaction. This is not the case for the remaining path. Hence, we can claim that destination-based authenticity has a weak and non-statistically significant association with loyalty when mediated by satisfaction.

Regarding destination-based authenticity, the path coefficient is 0.030, showing a weak association. It showcases that destination-based authentication has a weak indirect effect on destination loyalty.

Table & Diagram 6 shows the predictive relevance and quality of the model. We used the coefficients of determination (R^2 and adjusted R^2) values to evaluate both concepts.

Table 6: Fitness and relevance of the model

	R^2	R^2 adjusted
Destination Loyalty	0.216	0.207
Satisfaction	0.402	0.397

Diagram 6
Fitness and relevance of the model
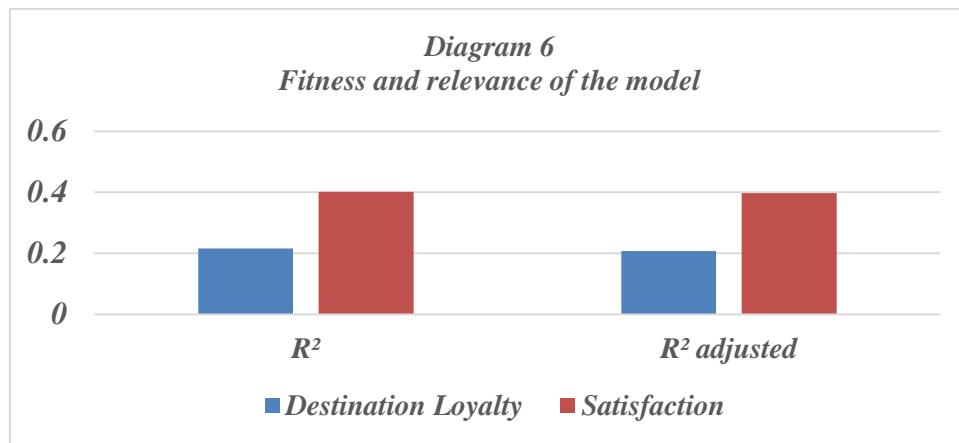
The R^2 value for destination loyalty and satisfaction was 0.216 and 0.402. This means that the variance of destination loyalty explains approximately 21% of the satisfaction variance. The R^2 for satisfaction indicates that variation of satisfaction approximately explains 40% of the satisfaction variance is through destination loyalty.

4.4 Hypotheses assessment

Table 7 shows whether the hypotheses are accepted or rejected on the bases of results and analyses.

Table 7: Hypotheses summary table

Hypotheses	Result
A significant relationship exists between destination-based authenticity, and destination loyalty is mediated by satisfaction.	Rejected
A significant relationship exists between existential authenticity and destination loyalty mediated by satisfaction.	Partially accepted
There is a significant relationship between satisfaction and destination loyalty.	Accepted

Table 7 showcases that hypothesis 1 is rejected. This is because the results showed that the indirect effect between destination-based authenticity, satisfaction, and loyalty was not statistically significant. On the other hand, the hypothesis 2 is partially accepted. This is because the indirect effect between the variables existential-based authenticity, satisfaction, and loyalty was significant but weak. Finally, hypothesis 3 has been accepted as previous results evidence that satisfaction has a statistically significant direct effect on destination loyalty.

DISCUSSION

In this section, we review the research objectives considering the analyses performed earlier.

The first objective of research was to illustrate how crucial destination authenticity is to enhancing tourist loyalty. The research conclusions highlight the importance of authenticity, which is most likely what motivates loyalty. The results have shown that visitor behaviour, perception, and loyalty are significantly influenced by the authenticity of the destination. The appeal of an authentic experience for tourists is highlighted in literature of tourism sector. It has been found in the research of Kim et al. (2013) that while visiting a place, travellers seek out authentic and culturally rich experiences, and their impression of the place probably affects their desire to revisit. The literature findings by Lu et al. (2015) emphasize the value of destination authenticity. It is important for destination management and other marketing strategies and it plays a vital role in increasing tourist loyalty. The foundation of the idea is to keep the destination's distinctive, historical, and cultural features intact.

In terms of existential authenticity, these findings echo past research suggesting that emotional resonance and the person's connection with the destination have a notable influence on the future behavior of the tourist (Teng & Chen, 2020; Yi et al., 2016). Our study findings also confirm that existential authenticity is a key driver of destination loyalty. Conversely, our research findings indicate that destination-based authenticity has a statistically insignificant impact on destination loyalty. These findings are not consistent with the literature. The literature suggests that when tourists experience the destination authenticity linked with culture, they gain insight into the tradition, promoting emotional well-

being and connection with the place. As a result, the tourists report high satisfaction and loyalty to the destination (Htet, 2023). In supporting the currently divergent results, the external research of Park et al. (2019) can be useful.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This research has offered valuable information about the complex relationship between destination authenticity, tourist satisfaction, and loyalty in MP. Findings of the research contribute to understanding how these constructs influence the intention and behaviour of the tourist. For this purpose, the tourist data was collected through a questionnaire survey and Smart PLS software was used to build and test and structural equation model. Regarding analysing the direct impact of authenticity on destination loyalty and satisfaction, our study provided evidence that destination authenticity (both destination-based and existential) significantly influences tourist satisfaction in MP. Hence, tourists who perceive destination as authentic report a higher satisfaction. This evidences a important role of shaping the tourist's experience. Regarding the direct impact, destination-based authenticity does not directly impact loyalty. However, destination authenticity may still have an indirect effect on loyalty.

Another objective of this research was to review the potential mediating role of satisfaction between authenticity and loyalty. Our results revealed that this is precisely the case. Namely, existential authenticity has a strong impact on loyalty and satisfaction. Similarly, destination-based authenticity may also play a relevant role, but it is weaker. This indicates that personal resonance and emotional connection are important drivers shaping the behaviour of tourists.

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