



Journal of Environmental and Development Studies - JEDS

Journal homepage: <https://talenta.usu.ac.id/jeds>



Brand Authenticity and Community-Based Tourism: A Systematic Literature Review in the Context of Socio-economic Sustainability

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 June 2026

Revised 11 September 2026

Accepted 30 September 2026

Available online 01 October 2026

E-ISSN: [2745-4592](https://doi.org/10.32734/jeds.v7iSP101.25977)

How to cite:

Rahayu, E. (2026). Brand Authenticity and Community-Based Tourism: A Systematic Literature Review in the Context of Socio-economic Sustainability. Journal of Environmental and Development Studies, 07(Special Issue 1), 103-112



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<http://doi.org/10.32734/jeds.v7iSP101.25977>

ABSTRACT

This study examines how brand authenticity and community-based tourism (CBT) intersect in supporting socio-economic sustainability. We conducted a systematic literature review of Scopus-indexed English-language journal articles published between 2015 and 2026. Database filtering retained 1,430 records; after removing two duplicates, we screened 1,428 records, assessed 30 full-text articles, and included 20 studies in the thematic synthesis. We also analyzed the broader dataset of 1,430 records using VOSviewer to map keyword co-occurrence. With a minimum occurrence threshold of 10, the analysis generated 239 items grouped into five clusters. The findings indicate that brand authenticity in CBT forms through alignment among destination promises, local culture, community identity, and tourists' experiences. Its potential contribution to socio-economic sustainability may arise through tourist trust and loyalty, community participation, local value creation, and livelihood opportunities. However, the bibliometric network reveals that brand-authenticity research remains predominantly oriented toward tourists and branding outcomes, whereas CBT research focuses on participation, local resources, and community development. This review bridges these fragmented perspectives and positions authenticity as a community-centered strategic resource rather than merely a marketing attribute. The findings highlight the importance of participatory governance, cultural preservation, local capacity building, and responsible destination communication in developing authentic and sustainable CBT.

Keywords: Brand Authenticity, Community-based Tourism, Socio-economic Sustainability, Destination Branding, & Community Participation.

1. Introduction

Tourism can generate employment, income, and opportunities for local enterprise, particularly in rural and developing destinations. However, these benefits do not automatically produce socio-economic sustainability. Their continuity depends on whether local communities participate meaningfully in tourism decisions, retain influence over how their culture is represented, and receive an equitable share of the value created. Community-based tourism (CBT) addresses these concerns by positioning residents as participants, decision makers, and beneficiaries rather than merely as objects of tourism development (Giampiccoli, 2020; Zielinski et al., 2021). At the same time, increasingly competitive destination markets require communities and destination organizations to communicate identities that visitors perceive as credible and consistent with local realities. This requirement brings brand authenticity into direct contact with CBT principles.

Brand authenticity, cultural authenticity, destination image, and authentic tourism experience are related but conceptually distinct. Brand authenticity concerns the perceived credibility, integrity, and consistency of a destination's identity and promises. Cultural authenticity refers more specifically to the perceived genuineness

of traditions, heritage, cuisine, and local practices. Destination image reflects the cognitive and affective impressions a place evokes. In contrast, an authentic tourism experience is the visitor's subjective experience of meaningful contact with the destination and its community. Clarifying these boundaries matters because evidence of destination image or memorable experience may contextualize brand authenticity without directly evidencing the construct.

Research on destination branding has largely examined tourist-facing outcomes. Destination brand authenticity has been associated with destination brand engagement and tourist loyalty (Chen et al., 2020), while perceived authenticity and sustainability can strengthen rural destination image and behavioral intentions (Fandos-Herrera et al., 2026). Related research shows that memorable culinary and tourism experiences, destination image, and user-generated representations are associated with revisit intention and tourists' interpretations of places (Hurdawaty et al., 2025; H. Zhang et al., 2018). Collectively, these studies explain how authenticity-related perceptions may enhance differentiation, trust, engagement, and loyalty. However, they provide less direct evidence on whether, and through what community mechanisms, such market outcomes translate into durable local livelihoods, empowerment, or equitable benefit distribution.

CBT research, by contrast, has primarily examined community-facing conditions and outcomes. Participation, inclusive governance, local capacity, knowledge sharing, social capital, and community ownership repeatedly matter for livelihood sustainability and community resilience (Abreu et al., 2024; Poo-Udom, 2025; Pramono & Juliana, 2025; Y. Zhang et al., 2021). From a stakeholder perspective, these outcomes depend on interactions among residents, tourism enterprises, destination managers, government institutions, and visitors. Local communities are especially important because they are not only beneficiaries of tourism but also custodians and co-producers of the cultural meanings on which authentic destination brands depend. Accordingly, authenticity should not be treated solely as a promotional attribute; it also reflects whose identity is represented, who participates in its production, and who captures the resulting value.

Existing reviews have advanced understanding of CBT businesses, sustainable livelihoods, participation, and the factors influencing CBT across different development contexts (Acharya et al., 2025; Zielinski et al., 2021). Bibliometric research has also mapped tourism themes related to destination representation and cultural products (Bernardo et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these streams remain fragmented. CBT reviews do not systematically explain how brand-authenticity mechanisms link tourist responses to community outcomes, while destination-branding research rarely treats community participation, ownership, and value distribution as conditions of authenticity. Consequently, the literature still lacks an integrated account of how authentic destination branding and CBT may jointly support socio-economic sustainability.

This review addresses that gap by integrating two largely separate bodies of research: destination brand authenticity, which predominantly explains tourist perceptions and behavioral responses, and CBT, which emphasizes participation, empowerment, resilience, and local livelihoods. Its theoretical novelty lies in treating community participation as a constitutive, linking mechanism rather than background context. The proposed logic connects an outward-facing pathway, authentic destination identity, tourist trust and engagement, and loyalty-related outcomes, with an inward-facing pathway, local participation and ownership, preservation of cultural meaning, capacity development, and socio-economic benefits. The review also distinguishes direct evidence on brand authenticity from indirect or contextual evidence concerning cultural authenticity, destination image, and authentic tourism experiences, thereby avoiding the assumption that these constructs are interchangeable.

Accordingly, this study critically synthesizes the literature on brand authenticity and CBT in the context of socio-economic sustainability. It makes three contributions. First, it clarifies the conceptual boundaries among closely related authenticity and destination constructs. Second, it comparatively examines the tourist- and community-facing mechanisms through which authenticity may be associated with sustainable outcomes. Third, it develops an integrative, stakeholder-based framework and identifies evidence gaps to guide future research, destination governance, and community-centered branding practice. The review is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How is brand authenticity conceptualized and distinguished from related constructs in the context of community-based tourism?

RQ2: Through what tourist- and community-related pathways is brand authenticity associated with socio-economic sustainability in community-based tourism?

RQ3: What practices and governance strategies strengthen brand authenticity in community-based tourism while supporting socio-economic sustainability?

RQ4: What theoretical, empirical, and methodological gaps remain in research integrating brand authenticity, community-based tourism, and socio-economic sustainability?

2. Methods

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) reported in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). We selected Scopus as the bibliographic database because it provides broad multidisciplinary coverage of tourism, marketing, community development, and sustainability research. We conducted the updated search on 8 September 2026 in the title, abstract, and keyword fields using the following Boolean expression: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("brand authenticity" OR "community-based tourism" OR "socio-economic sustainability").

Studies were eligible when they: (1) examined tourism, destinations, hospitality, rural tourism, or community-based tourism; (2) addressed brand authenticity, destination authenticity, cultural authenticity, authentic tourism experience, or a clearly defined CBT mechanism; and (3) provided evidence relevant to tourist trust, engagement, loyalty, destination image, community participation, empowerment, livelihood, resilience, local economic development, or socio-economic sustainability. We excluded studies when CBT referred to cognitive behavioral therapy, the setting was unrelated to tourism, authenticity or community participation was mentioned only incidentally, or the study did not provide evidence relevant to any review question.

Title and abstract screening excluded 1,398 records, leaving 30 reports for full-text retrieval. We retrieved and assessed all 30 reports. We excluded 10 at the full-text stage because their conceptual focus or reported outcomes did not sufficiently address the review questions; we included the remaining 20 studies in the qualitative synthesis. To avoid treating adjacent constructs as equivalent, we coded included studies as direct brand-authenticity-CBT evidence, brand-authenticity evidence, CBT-sustainability evidence, or indirect/contextual evidence. Figure 1 shows the complete selection process.

For each included study, we extracted data on author, publication year, country or study context, research design, sample or data source, theoretical perspective, focal constructs, key findings, evidence category, and relevance to RQ1-RQ4. Findings were synthesized thematically and comparatively. The analysis identified convergent and divergent findings and separated evidence concerning brand authenticity from evidence concerning destination image, authentic experience, tourist responses, and broader tourism sustainability. Causal wording was reserved for studies with designs capable of supporting causal inference.

We evaluated methodological quality using a structured appraisal matrix suitable for heterogeneous evidence. We assessed six criteria: clarity of the research objective, appropriateness of the design, adequacy of the sample or data source, transparency of measurement and analysis, alignment between evidence and conclusions, and relevance to the review questions. Each criterion was scored 0 (not met), 1 (partly met), or 2 (fully met), producing a maximum score of 12. We classified scores of 9-12 as high quality, 5-8 as moderate quality, and 0-4 as low quality. Quality scores informed the weight given to each study in the synthesis rather than serving as the sole basis for exclusion.

We conducted bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer on the 1,430 records retained after database filtering. We analyzed keyword co-occurrence with a minimum occurrence threshold of 10. We normalized the 239 selected keywords using the association-strength method and grouped them into five clusters. We standardized

equivalent terms and removed generic and method-related terms. The map described the broader research landscape, whereas the thematic synthesis focused on the 20 studies included in the systematic review.

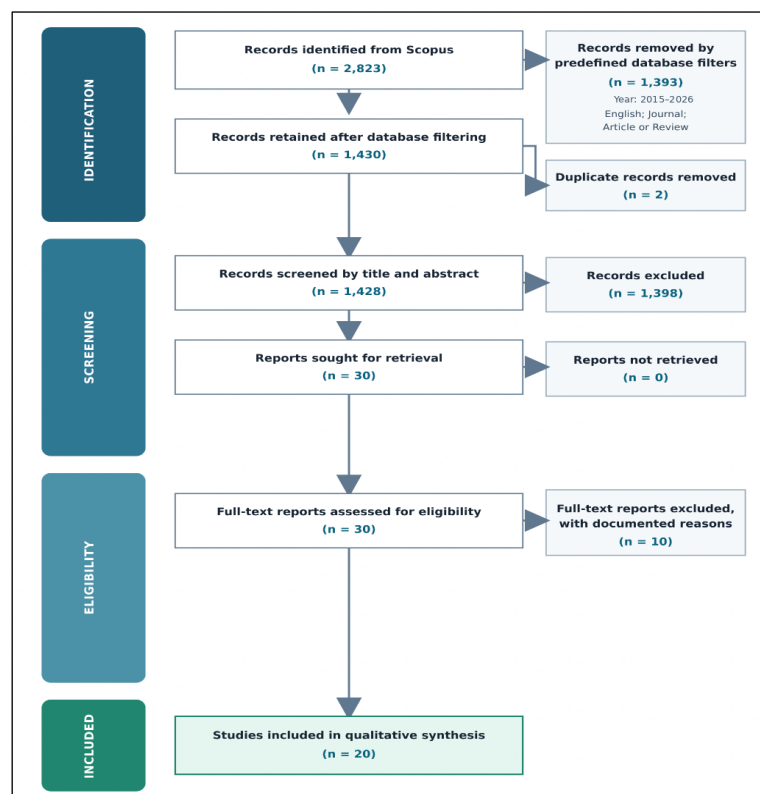


Figure 1. A Systematic Literature Review Using PRISMA

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Summary of selected articles in the systematic literature review

Study and Context	Design, Data and Theory	Focus and Key Evidence	Evidence/RQ
Hurdawaty et al. (2025) Indonesia	Survey; n=400; SEM; SOR; consumer behavior; brand equity	Food authenticity and social-media exposure are associated with memorable experience, destination image, and revisit intention.	D2; RQ1–RQ3
Poo-Udom (2025) Thailand	Participatory action research; one rural community; ISSECI knowledge-management framework	Community leadership, knowledge integration, youth engagement, and cultural assets support post-crisis resilience.	D3; RQ2–RQ3
Fandos-Herrera et al. (2026) Spain	Online survey; n=320; PLS-SEM; NR	Perceived authenticity and sustainability are associated with rural destination image, visit intention, and recommendation.	D2; RQ1–RQ2
Zhu et al. (2025) 10 global destinations	Image analytics; GenAI images; Destination-stereotype perspective	GenAI produces homogenized destination images that may reinforce stereotypes and obscure local diversity.	C; RQ1, RQ4
Setiawan et al. (2025) Indonesia	Descriptive quantitative; surveys, GIS, observations, interviews; NR	Carrying-capacity and beach-quality evidence supports visitor limits and community-based coastal management.	D3; RQ2–RQ3
Nugraha et al. (2025) Indonesia	Qualitative case; 14 informants; Public–Private–People Partnership	Low participation constrains CBT; the 4P model emphasizes collaboration, capacity building, and inclusive regulation.	D3; RQ2–RQ3

Study and Context	Design, Data and Theory	Focus and Key Evidence	Evidence/RQ
Pramono & Juliana (2025) Indonesia	Comparative qualitative cases; three villages; Community-resilience framework	Inclusive governance, leadership, and equitable benefit sharing are associated with stronger socio-economic resilience.	D3; RQ2–RQ3
Acharya et al. (2025) Global	SLR; 32 studies; Sustainable-livelihood perspective	CBT supports livelihoods and empowerment, but evidence on long-term sustainability remains limited.	D3; RQ2, RQ4
Asyraff et al. (2024) Malaysia	Survey; n=402; PLS-SEM; SOR	Cognitive, affective, and unique destination images are associated with future revisit intention.	C; RQ1–RQ2
Bernardo et al. (2023) Global dataset	Bibliometric review; 282 studies; NR	Authenticity, symbolic value, destination image, and tourist experience are major themes in souvenir research.	C; RQ1, RQ4
Wattanawaraporn & Manosuthi (2025) Thailand	Experiment; n=294; Signaling; cognitive coherence	Authenticity and fairness support CBT engagement, whereas suspicion of greenwashing weakens it.	D1; RQ1, RQ3
Abreu et al. (2024) Brazil	Qualitative multiple cases; three communities; SDG framework	Community self-governance and local participation contribute directly to seven SDGs and indirectly to two.	D3; RQ2–RQ3
Vongvisitsin et al. (2024) Thailand	Ethnography; three Bangkok communities; Networked social-capital model	Positive and negative social capital shape cooperation and collaboration in urban CBT development.	D3; RQ2–RQ4
Arefieva et al. (2021) Austria	Machine learning; 101,870 posts from 27,261 tourists; Semiotics	Instagram imagery reveals destination-image clusters, tourist preferences, and underrepresented attractions.	C; RQ1, RQ4
Zielinski et al. (2021) 85-country comparison	Directed content analysis; 48 developing and 37 developed countries; CBT framework	Collective ownership, participatory management, and local control facilitate broader benefit distribution.	D3; RQ2–RQ4
Zhang et al. (2021) China	Resident survey; n=430; scale development; Social-capital theory	CBT-related social impacts comprise cohesion, belonging, networks, competence, efficacy, and social regulation.	D3; RQ2
Giampiccoli (2020) Global conceptual study	Conceptual analysis; literature and documents; CBT principles and development strategy	Community control, participation, and local ownership underpin genuine CBT development.	D3; RQ2–RQ4
Manosuthi et al. (2025) Thailand	Mixed methods; n=1,022, including 340 ecotourists; Motivational crowding; service-dominant logic	Community-oriented incentives enhance engagement through authenticity; tourist incentives may create moral dissonance.	D1; RQ1–RQ3
Chen et al. (2020) China	Quantitative tourist survey; SEM; Destination-brand engagement framework	Brand authenticity is associated with engagement, revisit intention, and recommendation; engagement mediates key relationships.	D2; RQ1–RQ2
Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis (2018) China	Survey; n=261 Korean tourists; PLS-SEM; Means–end chain; CAB	Country and destination images are associated with revisit intention through memorable tourism experiences.	C; RQ1–RQ2

Quality appraisal results. The appraisal found no critical methodological deficiency requiring exclusion. Empirical studies generally reported their designs and data sources more clearly than conceptual or contextual studies. Consequently, studies with more transparent methods and closer alignment with the review questions received greater interpretive weight, while indirect evidence was used cautiously to support context.

3.1 Conceptualizing brand authenticity in community-based tourism (RQ1)

Brand authenticity in community-based tourism (CBT) refers to tourists' perception that destination communication is credible, consistent with lived local culture, and supported by meaningful community participation. Evidence links destination brand authenticity with engagement, revisit intention, and recommendation (Chen et al., 2020). In CBT, authenticity is also associated with fairness, reduced suspicion of greenwashing, and community-oriented engagement (Manosuthi et al., 2025; Wattanawaraporn & Manosuthi, 2025). This construct differs from food or rural authenticity, which concerns the genuineness of local products and places, and from destination image or memorable experience, which reflects tourists' impressions (Fandos-Herrera et al., 2026; Hurdawaty et al., 2025; H. Zhang et al., 2018). CBT research further emphasizes participation, ownership, and benefit distribution (Abreu et al., 2024; Giampiccoli, 2020; Zielinski et al., 2021). Therefore, RQ1 defines brand authenticity in CBT as congruence among destination claims, tourist experience, and community-grounded cultural identity, assessed through credibility, consistency, and fairness.

3.2. Pathways from brand authenticity to socio-economic sustainability (RQ2)

The evidence indicates a tourist-facing pathway in which credible and consistent destination claims strengthen engagement, revisit intention, and recommendation (Chen et al., 2020). In CBT, perceived authenticity and fairness also support engagement, whereas suspicion of greenwashing weakens it (Manosuthi et al., 2025; Wattanawaraporn & Manosuthi, 2025). Related evidence on culinary and rural authenticity suggests similar associations with destination image and behavioral intentions (Asyraff et al., 2024)(Asyraff et al., 2024; Fandos-Herrera et al., 2026; Hurdawaty et al., 2025). These responses may help sustain tourism demand, but they do not by themselves ensure benefits for residents

A community-facing pathway determines whether tourism value becomes a socio-economic outcome. Participation, local ownership, collective governance, capacity building, and equitable benefit distribution are associated with empowerment, livelihoods, and resilience (Abreu et al., 2024; Giampiccoli, 2020; Pramono & Juliana, 2025; Zielinski et al., 2021). Thus, RQ2 is answered through a mediated pathway: brand authenticity may stimulate tourist trust and demand, while community governance converts that value into local benefits. Because direct longitudinal evidence connecting both pathways remains limited, these relationships should be interpreted as associations rather than confirmed causal effects.

3.3 Practices and governance strategies for authentic and sustainable CBT (RQ3)

The evidence identifies community participation as the foundation of authentic CBT. Relevant practices include local ownership, participatory decision-making, fair benefit sharing, capacity building, knowledge exchange, and protection of cultural and natural assets. These practices appear in the 4P development model, inclusive village governance, community self-governance, and knowledge-management initiatives (Abreu et al., 2024; Nugraha et al., 2025; Poo-Udom, 2025; Pramono & Juliana, 2025). Social capital and local control support collaboration and wider benefit distribution, while carrying-capacity evidence can guide visitor limits and community-based coastal management (Setiawan et al., 2025; Vongvisitsin et al., 2024; Zielinski et al., 2021)

Brand communication should therefore be co-created with residents and supported by credible local stories, products, and experiences. Fairness and transparency matter because suspicions of greenwashing can weaken engagement (Wattanawaraporn & Manosuthi, 2025). Digital content may strengthen authentic representation, but standardized or artificial imagery can obscure local diversity (Hurdawaty et al., 2025; Zhu et al., 2025). Accordingly, RQ3 is answered through an integrated strategy: community governance protects ownership and equitable benefits, while responsible storytelling communicates a destination identity grounded in lived culture. Evidence for the long-term effects of these practices remains limited.

3.4 Research gaps and future directions (RQ4)

Three major gaps remain. Theoretically, brand-authenticity and CBT research remain fragmented: tourist-oriented studies emphasize engagement and loyalty, while CBT studies focus on participation, livelihoods, and resilience. Few studies explain how community governance connects these outcomes, and related constructs such as destination image, cultural authenticity, and authentic experience are sometimes treated as equivalent.

Empirically, direct evidence on brand authenticity and CBT is scarce, geographically concentrated, and dominated by cross-sectional or single-site studies; longitudinal evidence on income, employment, benefit distribution, and resilience is particularly limited. Existing bibliometric work maps broad thematic patterns but offers limited evidence on the mechanisms linking authenticity to community outcomes (Bernardo et al., 2023).

Methodologically, studies use heterogeneous measures and rarely combine perspectives from tourists, residents, businesses, and government. Digital evidence from social media and Gen AI remains mainly contextual and does not directly establish community-level effects (Arefieva et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2025). The role of younger people in knowledge sharing and digital engagement is emerging but remains insufficiently tested (Poo-Udom, 2025). Therefore, RQ4 indicates a need for clearer construct measurement, multi-stakeholder and cross-cultural designs, and longitudinal or mixed-method studies that test the complete pathway from authentic branding through tourist responses and community governance to socio-economic outcomes.

3.5 Bibliometric Analysis

The keyword co-occurrence analysis identified 239 interconnected terms grouped into five clusters. The red cluster was dominated by brand authenticity, together with brand identity, transparency, originality, trust, and brand equity. The green and blue clusters represented community-based tourism through terms such as CBT, community, ecotourism, social capital, village, cultural preservation, and local community. Meanwhile, the yellow cluster emphasized policy, resources, capacity, resilience, and economic development, whereas the purple cluster connected destination-related and marketing concepts.

The network indicates that brand-authenticity research remains concentrated on consumer and branding outcomes, while CBT research primarily addresses community participation, local resources, and development. Although connections exist through destination, trust, economic, and sustainability-related concepts, the two knowledge domains remain only partially integrated. This supports the need for a framework that explains how brand authenticity can strengthen the socio-economic sustainability of community-based tourism.

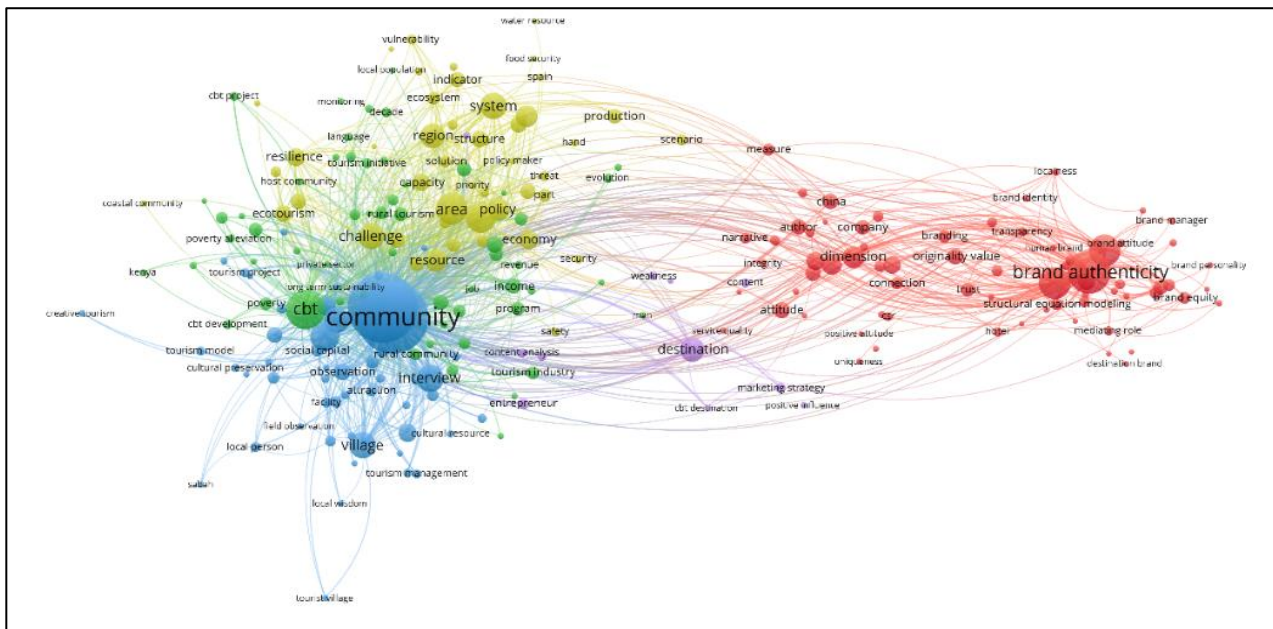


Figure 2. Keyword co-occurrence network related to community-based tourism and brand authenticity (minimum occurrence = 10).

Overall, the network visualization indicates that community-based tourism and brand authenticity constitute related but still relatively distinct knowledge domains. The CBT clusters emphasize community participation, social capital, local resources, resilience, and cultural preservation. In contrast, the brand-authenticity cluster is primarily associated with trust, originality, brand identity, brand attitude, and brand equity. Destination-

related concepts connect the two domains, but limited integration with socio-economic outcomes suggests the literature has not yet developed their relationship sufficiently.

The thematic findings complement this bibliometric pattern by indicating that culturally grounded tourism experiences can strengthen destination differentiation, tourist trust, and attachment. At the same time, participatory CBT governance supports local capacity and livelihood opportunities. Thus, authenticity should not be treated solely as a promotional attribute but as a community-centered strategic resource. This review contributes by bridging branding and community-development perspectives and explaining how authentic destination practices may support socio-economic sustainability without separating local identity from tourism development

3.6 Integrative Conceptual Framework

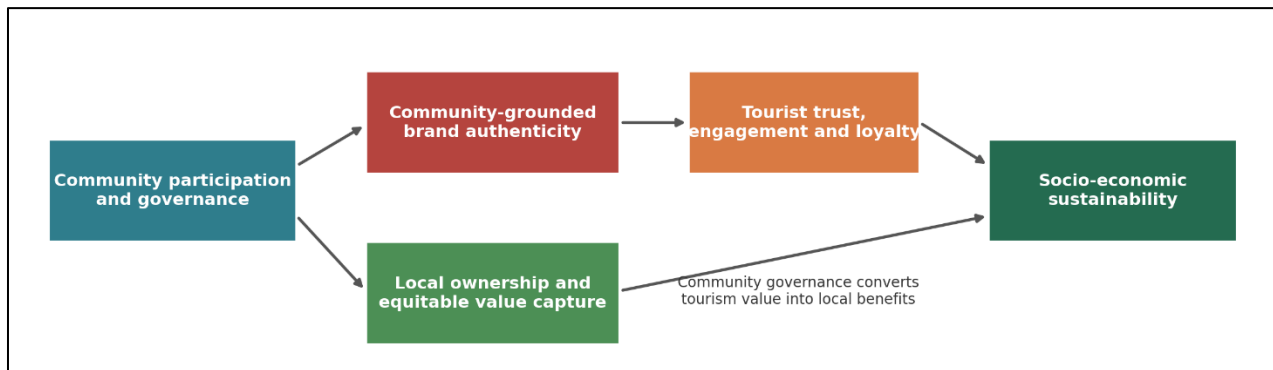


Figure 3. Integrative pathways linking brand authenticity, CBT governance, and socio-economic sustainability

The framework synthesizes the review's theoretical contribution. Community participation grounds destination brand authenticity and determines whether tourism value is captured locally and translated into socio-economic benefits.

4. Conclusion

This review shows that brand authenticity in community-based tourism forms through alignment among destination promises, local culture, community identity, and tourists' experiences. Its potential contribution to socio-economic sustainability operates through two complementary pathways: strengthening tourist trust, attachment, and loyalty, and supporting community participation, local value creation, and livelihood opportunities. Achieving these outcomes requires participatory governance, cultural preservation, local capacity building, and responsible destination communication. Nevertheless, the literature remains fragmented: brand-authenticity research focuses primarily on tourist and branding outcomes, while CBT studies emphasize participation and community development. This review therefore bridges these perspectives by positioning authenticity as a community-centered strategic resource rather than merely a destination-marketing attribute.

This review has several limitations. The search was restricted to English-language journal articles indexed in Scopus between 2015 and 2026, which may have excluded relevant evidence from other databases, languages, and publication types. Moreover, the thematic synthesis included only 20 studies with diverse contexts and research designs, while the VOSviewer analysis represents keyword co-occurrence rather than causal relationships among the focal concepts. Future research should use longitudinal, comparative, and mixed-method designs to examine how community participation and authentic destination practices influence measurable socio-economic outcomes across different CBT settings. Greater attention should also be given to digital storytelling, younger generations, power relations, and the community ownership of destination brands

5. Acknowledgments

The author thanks Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara and Universitas Royal for providing support and facilities during this research.

6. Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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