AUTHENTICITY AND NOVELTY ON BALI'S CULTURAL TOURIST LOYALTY: MEDIATING ROLE OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE QUALITY

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Abstract

Purpose – This research examines the impact of authenticity and novelty perception on tourist loyalty, focusing on the role of Aesthetic Experience Quality (AEQ) as a mediating variable. The study applies the Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT) framework and focuses on cultural tourism in Bali, Indonesia.
Methodology/Design/Approach – A descriptive research design was employed, with data collected through traditional paper-based surveys and digital forms using Google Forms. Respondent selection was conducted via purposive sampling, and the data were analysed using PLS-SEM.
Findings – The results reveal that authenticity and novelty significantly enhance Aesthetic Experience Quality (AEQ). While novelty directly fosters tourist loyalty, authenticity does not exert a direct effect. Instead, AEQ mediates both authenticity and novelty, underscoring its pivotal role in strengthening loyalty towards cultural destinations.
Originality of the research – This study offers an advanced contribution by developing a tourist loyalty model based on authenticity and novelty in cultural tourism destinations, with AEQ as a mediator from the CAT perspective. It addresses research gaps and inconsistencies in previous studies on the relationship between authenticity and tourist loyalty. The findings strengthen the theoretical understanding of how authenticity shapes tourist loyalty within the context of cultural tourism destinations.
Keywords Authenticity, Novelty, Aesthetic Experience Quality, Loyalty, Cultural Tourism

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a crucial role in national development, providing an effective platform for promoting cultural, environmental, and social elements domestically and internationally and supporting other industries (Lim et al., 2017). As a multifaceted sector, tourism relies on several key components, including accommodation, transportation, supporting infrastructure, food and beverages, attractions, cultural entertainment, and security (Gidey & Sharma, 2017). These interconnected elements collectively shape the tourism experience.

Indonesia's tourism sector has shown signs of recovery following the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Indonesian government faces numerous challenges, particularly in tourism marketing. This happens due to the country's lack of competitiveness in the tourism industry and the relatively low tourist satisfaction rates. This issue warrants further attention, as tourism is crucial for economic development, especially in underdeveloped countries (Dreshaj et al., 2024).

As a global tourism icon, Bali consistently attracts international attention and is a benchmark for the national tourism industry. Recognized as the world's second-best destination in 2023 by the Traveller's Choice Award (Dewanto & Almas, 2023), Bali's cultural allure is undeniable. Based on processed data from Statistics Indonesia of Bali Province, domestic and international tourist arrivals reached 16.45 million in 2024, reflecting its sustained appeal. Notably, around 35% of all foreign tourists who arrive in Indonesia choose Bali as their destination. However, this popularity does not necessarily equate to tourist loyalty, a pivotal element of destination marketing that ensures long-term economic sustainability and competitive advantage. Therefore, studying and enhancing tourist loyalty in Bali is essential to sustaining its global prominence while fostering a resilient and sustainable tourism industry.

Bali's enduring appeal as a premier tourist destination lies in its rich cultural and spiritual heritage, shaped by Hindu traditions and reflected in iconic temples such as Pura Agung Besakih, Tanah Lot, and Uluwatu, where the *Tari Kecak* performance mesmerises visitors at sunset. Traditional villages like Panglipuran and Trunyan, along with the island's distinctive culinary heritage, further reinforce its cultural authenticity. Cultural tourism plays a central role in fostering meaningful visitor experiences and preserving local identity (Artal-Tur, 2017), encompassing engagement with customs, ceremonies, arts, and historical narratives (Tjokrosaputro, 2023). Indeed, it has emerged as a highly sought-after segment, with 46% of international travellers in 2023–2024 expressing a preference for cultural experiences, according to the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. Consequently, cultural tourism warrants greater attention for its potential to stimulate local economies while safeguarding authenticity, cultural heritage, and traditions.

Equally important in sustaining Bali's appeal is the element of novelty, which complements authenticity by offering emotionally engaging and unfamiliar experiences. Novelty in tourism, such as unique rituals, unexpected cultural encounters, and interactions with locals, stimulates curiosity and enhances Aesthetic Experience Quality (AEQ) through heightened emotional and sensory involvement (Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018; Zhang & Yin, 2020). These novel experiences create lasting memories and strengthen tourist loyalty through repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth (Skavronskaya et al., 2020b). As such, the interplay between authenticity and novelty becomes crucial in delivering holistic and impactful cultural tourism experiences.

While perceived authenticity is often cited as a key driver of tourist loyalty in cultural destinations (Bryce et al., 2015; Dai et al., 2021; Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2020; Genc & Genc, 2023), findings remain inconclusive. Some studies suggest that authenticity perceived as staged or commodified may weaken affective engagement and reduce loyalty (Atzeni et al., 2022; Vidon et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2014; Fu, 2019). Moreover, contextual and cultural differences may moderate this relationship (de Andrade-Matos et al., 2022; Guerra et al., 2022), indicating that authenticity alone may not consistently predict loyalty across settings. Such discrepancies raise critical questions about the sufficiency of authenticity as a standalone predictor and call for an examination of underlying mechanisms that may influence this relationship.

Similarly, destination novelty, which is characterized by exploration, excitement, and cognitive stimulation, has been identified as a relevant driver of tourist experience and loyalty (Blomstervik et al., 2021 Breiby & Slåtten, 2018a) (Blomstervik et al., 2021 ; Breiby & Slåtten, 2018). However, existing studies tend to examine novelty in isolation or position it in opposition to authenticity, rather than recognising their potential complementarity (Lee & Phau, 2018; Kirillova, 2023). While some scholars contend that novelty may compromise perceptions of cultural authenticity, others argue that it can enrich the travel experience and amplify emotional engagement, particularly when mediated by AEQ (Zhang & Xu, 2020; Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2020). Despite these insights, research integrating authenticity and novelty within a single model remains scarce, resulting in a fragmented and partial understanding of their combined influence on tourist loyalty. As Albaity and Melhem (2017) highlighted, a more holistic and integrative framework is essential to advance theoretical development in loyalty formation within tourism.

To address these theoretical inconsistencies and practical gaps, the primary objective of this study is to develop a comprehensive model of tourist loyalty by examining the combined influence of authenticity and novelty within cultural tourism destinations, with AEQ as a mediating variable. Grounded in Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1991), this study introduces a novel contribution by positioning AEQ as a central explanatory mechanism that reconciles conflicting findings and elucidates how tourists cognitively and emotionally evaluate cultural experiences. The state-of-the-art contribution of this research lies in its integrative framework, which captures the dynamic interplay between authenticity and novelty constructs that have traditionally been treated in isolation, and examines their indirect effects through AEQ.

This study advances theoretical understanding and offers a replicable empirical model for cultural tourism management. By integrating cultural authenticity with engaging and interactive experiences, destination managers can enhance visitor satisfaction, encourage repeat visits, and foster positive word-of-mouth. Additionally, the research provides insights into developing culturally immersive yet intellectually stimulating tourism products, strengthening tourists' emotional attachment, and fostering long-term loyalty. Given that sustained tourist loyalty is instrumental in preserving the viability of cultural destinations, it also serves as a crucial driver of long-term economic sustainability and competitive advantage. Ultimately, this study contributes to the enduring competitiveness of cultural tourism destinations, ensuring their continued relevance and appeal in a dynamic global market.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Cognitive Appraisal Theory

Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT) provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals evaluate and respond emotionally to stimuli. Lazarus (1991) posits that emotions are shaped by cognitive interpretations rather than external events alone. This appraisal process involves innovations, goal relevance, and expected outcomes, influencing emotional and behavioural responses (Prayag et al., 2022). Within a marketing context, CAT addresses three main issues: identifying the core characteristics of an appraised occurrence, understanding emotion resulting from the cognitive evaluation process, and analysing consumer behavioural responses to elicited emotions (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Watson & Spence (2007) further emphasize that CAT includes the desirability, attention, and unexpectedness of an experience. Therefore, CAT emphasises that emotional responses are shaped more by an individual's interpretation of an event than by the event itself (Skavronskaya et al., 2020a). Liu et al. (2022) support this perspective, demonstrating that appraisal processes significantly shape tourist satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty.

This study employs Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT) to examine tourist perceptions of cultural destinations, specifically focusing on novelty perception, authenticity, AEQ, and tourist loyalty. While previous research has utilised tourist satisfaction as a mediator (Jebbouri et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2018), this study emphasises AEQ due to its distinct role in shaping emotional engagement with tourism experiences. This research underscores how cognitive evaluations influence emotional responses and subsequent behavioural intentions by incorporating CAT into the theoretical framework.

The integration of appraisal dimensions provides a comprehensive perspective on how tourists interpret and emotionally connect with cultural tourism settings, reaffirming the significance of CAT in tourism research.

1.2 Authenticity, Aesthetic Experience Quality, and Loyalty

Authenticity is a fundamental aspect of cultural tourism, driven by tourists' curiosity for genuine and meaningful cultural experiences at heritage sites (Moore et al., 2021), which attract global visitors (Kim & Lee, 2020). It is a subjective and socially constructed through personal values, emotions, and cultural context, emerging from interactions that connect people, places, and experiences, rather than from the inherent objects qualities (Moore et al., 2021; Nunes et al., 2021). From historical landmarks to traditional art forms, these sites shape tourists' knowledge and offer authentic encounters with preserved practices (Hillman, 2007). By preserving cultural integrity and creating immersive settings, authenticity enhances aesthetic experience quality (AEQ), evoking positive emotions, attachment, and a strong sense of place (Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2021).

H1: Authenticity positively and significantly affects aesthetic experience quality in cultural tourism.

Authentic destinations foster emotional attachment and elevate the overall experience quality, strengthening loyalty by enhancing visitor engagement and creating memorable experiences (Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2021). However, authenticity is a dynamic attribute that evolves with societal changes and external developments, which may influence tourists' perceptions and reshape their expectations (Park et al., 2019). Consequently, maintaining and adapting authenticity is essential for delivering high-quality aesthetic experiences, sustaining long-term tourist loyalty, and ensuring competitive advantage in cultural tourism.

H2: Authenticity positively and significantly affects loyalty in cultural tourism.

AEQ refers to the subjective and emotional response to aesthetic stimuli, distinguishing it from ordinary experiences (Zhang & Yin, 2020). Within marketing literature, aesthetic quality has gained increasing attention, particularly regarding the experiential aspects of products and services (Breiby & Slåtten, 2015) and consumer behaviour (~~Das et al.,~~) (Das & Mukherjee, 2016) Rohman et al. (2023) and Voon et al. (2022) identified quality experience as a key antecedent of cultural tourist loyalty. Recent tourism research has emphasised aesthetic quality as a central theme, highlighting its role in shaping consumer experiences (Hosany et al., 2021). In cultural tourism, AEQ is influenced by the harmony between natural beauty, historical architecture, and cultural preservation efforts (Genc & Genc, 2023). Destinations that offer authentic cultural experiences enhance tourists' perceived AEQ, fostering greater loyalty.

H5: Aesthetic Experience Quality positively and significantly affects loyalty in cultural tourism.

1.3 Novelty, Aesthetic Experience Quality (AEQ) and Loyalty

Novelty serves as a key motivator in tourism that prompting tourists to pursue unique and diverse experiences beyond their daily routines (Lee & Crompton, 1992; Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018), which can be found in unfamiliar environments, cultural practices, and local interactions (Skavronskaya et al., 2020b). By stimulating emotional and sensory engagement, novelty enhances AEQ (Zhang & Yin, 2020), thereby generating memorable encounters that strengthen destination attachment and ultimately foster loyalty through repeat visitation and positive recommendations (Skavronskaya et al., 2020a). Thus, it is posited that:

H3: Novelty positively and significantly affects Aesthetic Experience Quality in cultural tourism.

Novelty significantly contributes to tourist loyalty by sparking excitement, curiosity, and a sense of discovery, which keeps tourists engaged and eager to return (Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018). It evokes emotions like joy and intrigue, creating lasting peak experiences (Skavronskaya, Moyle, & Scott, 2020a). Emerging from cultural settings, objects, and social interactions, it strengthens emotional connections and enhances destination experiences, thereby encouraging repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H4: Novelty positively and significantly affects loyalty in cultural tourism.

1.4 AEQ as a Mediator between Authenticity, Novelty, and Loyalty

Authenticity reflects tourists' perceptions of cultural originality and heritage integrity, enhancing AEQ through deeper emotional and sensory engagement during cultural visits (Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2020; Genc & Genc, 2023). A strong AEQ fosters satisfaction and attachment, which underpin loyalty expressed through revisits, recommendations, and positive word-of-mouth (Akroush et al., 2016; Gidey & Sharma, 2017). In this study, loyalty is viewed from an attitudinal lens, as it better captures tourists' emotional commitment and future behavioural intentions (Azis et al., 2020; Genc & Genc, 2023). AEQ bridges authenticity and loyalty, helping translate meaningful cultural experiences into lasting tourist attachment.

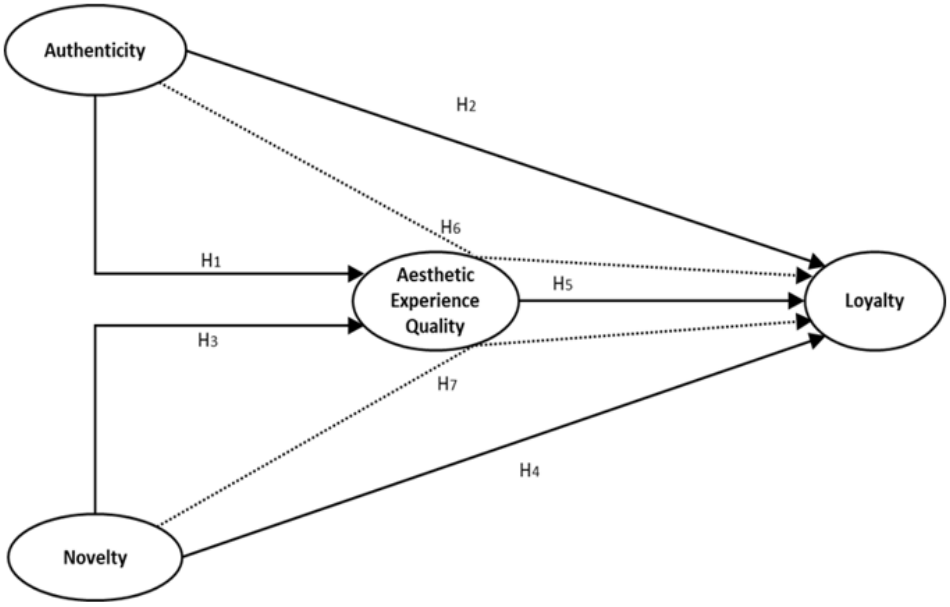
H6: Authenticity positively and significantly affects Loyalty with Aesthetic Experience Quality as a mediator in cultural tourism

Similar to authenticity, novelty significantly influences loyalty. Tourists are often motivated by the excitement and enjoyment of discovering new experiences, encouraging them to revisit destinations offering novel features (Skavronskaya et al., 2020a). Novelty creates emotional arousal and peak experiences, leaving lasting impressions that inspire tourists to return and recommend the destination (Lee & Crompton, 1992). AEQ strengthens this relationship by enriching tourists' emotional responses to novel stimuli, increasing fulfilment, and reinforcing loyalty (Zhang & Yin, 2020). Therefore, AEQ mediates the relationship between novelty and loyalty by transforming novel experiences into emotionally fulfilling and memorable ones.

H7: Novelty positively and significantly affects loyalty with aesthetic experience quality as a mediator in cultural tourism.

Based on the hypotheses above, Figure 1 depicts the relationship of each hypothesis.

Figure 1: **Research Model**



2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach, facilitating the systematic measurement and analysis of abstract and subjective phenomena through validated scales and numerical data. By turning each variable into a measurable variable, quantitative techniques enable the assessment of intensity, variability, and relationships among constructs across a broader population, thereby supporting hypothesis testing and statistical inference with replicable and objective procedures (Lim, 2024).

This study targeted tourists who had visited cultural destinations in Bali, Indonesia. Although the population was huge, its exact size was unknown. A mixed sampling approach was adopted: purposive sampling for the online survey and convenience sampling for the on-site survey. Data were collected between June and August 2024 via online questionnaires distributed through social media and direct surveys at cultural sites. A screening question ensured participants had relevant cultural tourism experience, and the questionnaire used explicit language to minimise misinterpretation. Given Bali's prominence as a cultural destination, participant recruitment was relatively straightforward, and invitations were extended to over 1,000 individuals through both online and on-site channels.

Of the 257 tourists who completed the survey, 238 valid responses were retained for analysis. This sample exceeds the minimum requirement for PLS-SEM, which recommends at least ten times the highest number of indicators (9) or structural paths (3), totalling a minimum of 90 observations (Hair et al., 2017; Guenther et al., 2023). Furthermore, the sample was sufficient to detect small effect sizes (≥ 0.05) and ensure predictive validity with R^2 values of at least 0.3 (Rahman, 2023; Kock, 2025). Respondents represented a diverse group of general tourists who had experienced rituals, traditional ceremonies, and iconic Balinese performances.

The data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0. The decision to employ PLS-SEM was driven by its ability to handle complex models comprising multiple constructs, even when confronted with relatively small sample sizes and non-normal data distributions (Sarstedt, Ringle, & Hair, 2021). The analysis process began with demographic analysis, followed by validity and reliability testing, adhering to the guidelines of Kock (2018) and Hair et al. (2022).

Subsequently, structural model evaluation was performed, including the R-squared and f-squared tests. Hypothesis testing was then conducted using t-tests and p-value analysis. Additionally, mediation effects were examined using the bootstrapping method.

Measurement instruments were adapted from prior studies to ensure validity and reliability. Authenticity was measured using nine indicators from Genc & Genc (2023), novelty with five items reflecting adventure and uniqueness from Blomstervik et al. (2021) and Assaker et al. (2011), AEQ with 13 indicators covering environmental ambience, architectural coherence, and cultural integration from Breiby and Slåtten (2018), and loyalty using three indicators related to revisit intention, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth from Azis et al. (2020). A double translation method ensured semantic accuracy, and a pre-test with 36 respondents was conducted to refine clarity and eliminate ambiguity. During the pre-test, participants were guided by the researcher to confirm that their interpretations aligned precisely with the intended constructs.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Demographic analysis

All the respondents visited Bali, met all the criteria for research subjects, and were analysed further. The respondents were divided into five categories: gender, age, monthly income, monthly expenditure, and occupation. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 1: **Respondent demographic data**

Characteristic	Respondent	%
Gender		
Man	104	44%
Woman	134	56%
Age		
18–21 years	123	52%
22–30 years	56	24%
31–40 years	6	3%
41–55 years	25	11%
Above 55 years	28	12%
Monthly Income		
Under IDR 5 million	133	56%
IDR 5 million - IDR 10 million	47	20%
IDR 10 million - IDR 15 million	22	9%
IDR 15 million - IDR 20 million	12	5%
Above IDR 20 million	24	10%
Monthly Expenditure		
Under IDR 3 million	124	52%
IDR 3 million – IDR 6 million	61	26%
ID 6 million - IDR 10 million	26	11%
Above IDR 10 million	27	11%
Occupation		
Student	143	60%
Employee	51	21%
Self-employed	18	8%
Professionals	10	4%
Homemaker	16	7%
Total	**238**	**100%**

Source: own elaboration from data gathered.

The demographic analysis of the 238 respondents reveals a predominant representation of young, budget-conscious tourists. The majority are female (56%) and aged between 18 and 21 years (52%), suggesting that a significant proportion of visitors comprises students or individuals in the early stages of their careers. This is further corroborated by the occupational distribution, with 60% of respondents being undergraduate or postgraduate students.

Most respondents were young, price-sensitive travellers, with 56% earning below IDR 5 million and 52% spending under IDR 3 million monthly. Despite limited income, they actively engaged with Bali's cultural heritage, reflecting a genuine interest in cultural experiences. In Indonesia's collectivist society, such engagement is often facilitated by continued parental support, which enables independent travel among emerging adults (Aditaputri et al., 2024). This behaviour aligns with broader shifts in youth travel trends prioritising authenticity and immersive cultural connection over material consumption.

3.2 Validity and Reliability Test Result

Certain indicators were excluded from further analysis through an iterative refinement process. As presented in Table 2, several indicators demonstrated outer loadings below the recommended threshold of 0.60, warranting their removal to enhance the robustness and reliability of the measurement model.

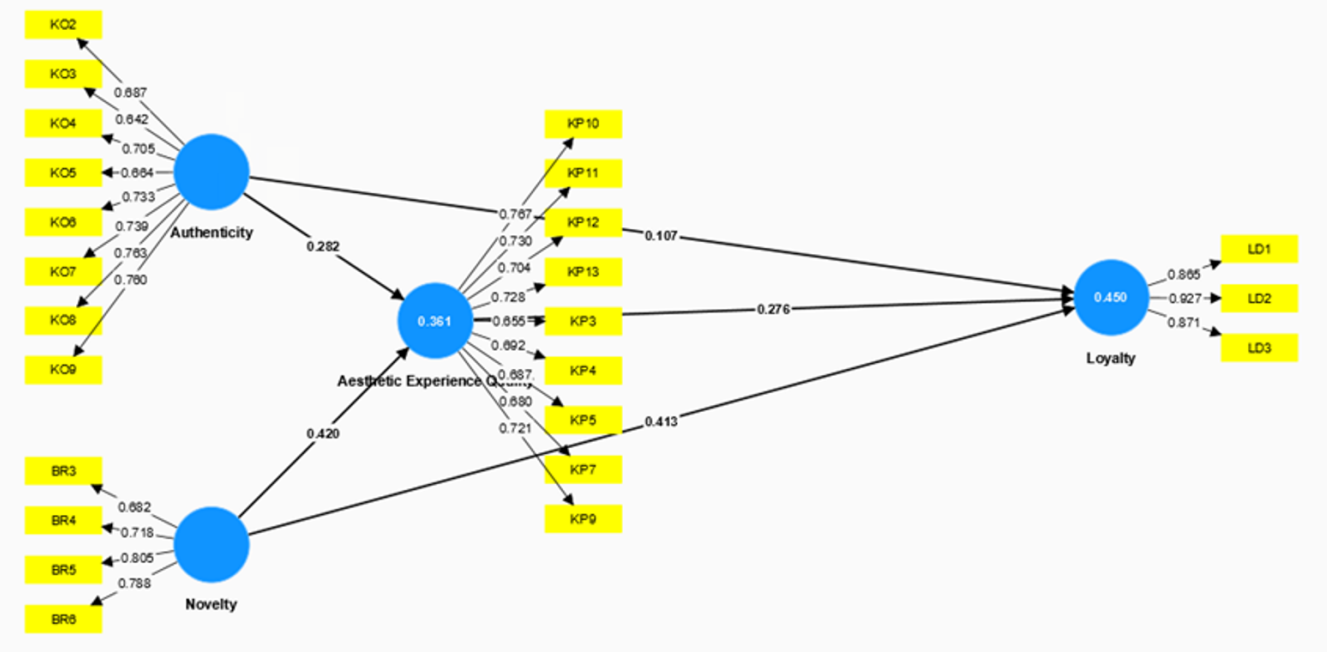
Table 2: **Excluded Indicators**

Variable	Excluded Indicator	Loading Factor
Authenticity	KO1. Architecture and structures authentically reflect their historical form	0.599
Novelty	BR1. Sense of adventure	0.584
	BR2. Fulfillment of curiosity	0.591
Aesthetic Experience Quality	KP1. Natural environment	0.528
	KP2. Absence of visible waste	0.063
	KP6. Scenic beauty of cultural sites	0.249
	KP8. Quiet and comfortable atmosphere	0.597

Source: Data Analysis Result using SmartPLS 4.0

The structural model presented in Figure 2 was refined through an iterative process to enhance its validity and reliability. The updated model demonstrates improved construct validity and measurement reliability, providing a robust foundation for analysing the relationships among authenticity, novelty, AEQ, and tourist loyalty.

Figure 2. **The Structural Model**



Source: Data Analysis Result using SmartPLS 4.0

The data analysis using SmartPLS 4.0 summarises the reliability and validity assessments, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: **Validity and Reliability Test Result**

Construct / Item Code	Loading factor	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Authenticity				
KO2: Seeing the original architecture of the period	0.687	0.864	0.892	0.509
KO3: Gain information on conditions and culture of the period	0.642			
KO4: Impressive architecture and structure	0.705			
KO5: Provide historic insights	0.664			
KO6: Genuine and authentic experiences	0.733			
KO7: Gain a sense of local culture from the site	0.739			
KO8: Enjoy unique traditions and experience	0.763			
KO9: Enjoy the unique spiritual experience	0.760			
Novelty				
BR3: Unique	0.682	0.738	0.836	0.562
BR4: Once-in-a-lifetime experience	0.718			
BR5: Experience and learn about different cultures	0.805			
BR6. Unique local food and crafts	0.788			
Aesthetic Experience Quality				
KP3: Clean environment	0.655	0.876	0.900	0.501
KP4: Beautiful landscape	0.692			
KP5: Viewpoints along the way	0.687			
KP7: Uncrowded and comfortable space	0.680			
KP9: Architecture compliments the surrounding scenery	0.721			
KP10: Interior design compliments the surrounding environment.	0.767			
KP11: Lots of green spaces	0.730			
KP12: Local food availability	0.704			
KP13: Businesses reflect local culture	0.728			
Loyalty				
LDW1: Willingness to return	0.865	0.866	0.918	0.789
LDW2: Willingness to recommend the site to peers	0.927			
LDW3: Making positive remarks about the destination	0.871			

Source: Data Analysis Result using SmartPLS 4.0

The measurement model's reliability, validity, and discriminant validity were assessed using multiple statistical tests to ensure the robustness of the constructs. Table 2 presents the outcomes of these tests, including loading factors, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted. The reliability assessment confirms that all constructs meet the required threshold, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.7 and ensuring internal consistency. Authenticity, novelty, AEQ, and loyalty exhibit Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.864, 0.738, 0.876, and 0.866, respectively, while Composite Reliability scores range from 0.836 to 0.918, further reinforcing the robustness of the measurement model.

Convergent validity was evaluated using Average Variance Extracted, with values above 0.5 indicating that a construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators (Hair, Jr., 2015). The findings confirm that all constructs exceed this threshold, supporting convergent validity. Moreover, the loading factors of all indicators surpass the acceptable threshold of 0.6, ensuring that each item reliably represents its corresponding construct.

Table 4: **Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Test Result**

Variable	AEQ	Authenticity	Loyalty	Novelty
AEQ				
Authenticity	0.508			
Loyalty	0.610	0.453		
Novelty	0.660	0.536	0.762	

Source: Data Analysis Result using SmartPLS 4.0

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), as presented in Table 4. This measure ensures that each construct is conceptually distinct from others within the model (Hair et al., 2022). The results indicate that all HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.9 (Hair & Alamer, 2022), confirming satisfactory discriminant validity. Specifically, the highest HTMT value is 0.762, demonstrating that no two constructs exhibit excessive correlation, thereby establishing the distinctiveness of the measured constructs.

These findings validate the measurement model's reliability and construct validity, ensuring the subsequent structural model analysis is based on a sound theoretical and empirical foundation. The results confirm that the constructs used in this study effectively capture the intended theoretical dimensions, allowing for a robust examination of the relationships between authenticity, novelty, AEQ, and tourist loyalty.

3.3 Structural Model Result

The structural model evaluation was conducted to assess the explanatory power and effectiveness of the proposed framework in predicting tourist loyalty. This evaluation included an analysis of the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and hypothesis testing to determine the significance and strength of the relationships among the constructs.

Table 5: **Determinant Coefficient (R^2) and Cross-Validated Redundancy (Q^2) Analysis Result**

Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Q Square
AEQ	0.361	0.355	0.168
Loyalty	0.450	0.443	0.343

Source: Data Analysis Result using SmartPLS 4.0

The coefficient of determination (R^2) shows how well authenticity and novelty, mediated by AEQ, explain tourist loyalty (Cheung et al., 2020). As shown in Table 5, authenticity and novelty account for 35.5% of AEQ's variance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.355$) and 44.3% of loyalty's variance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.443$), with the rest influenced by other unexamined factors.

In addition to R^2, the predictive relevance assessed via the cross-validated redundancy measure (Q^2), yielded values of 0.168 for AEQ and 0.343 for loyalty, indicating satisfactory predictive power (Hair, Jr., 2015; Hair & Alamer, 2022). These results confirm the model's strength in both explanatory and predictive power. Additionally, effect size (f^2) analysis, following Sarstedt et al. (2021), highlights the relative impact of each predictor, offering deeper insight into how authenticity and novelty shape AEQ and loyalty in cultural tourism

Table 6: **Effect Size (f^2) Analysis Result**

Variable	AEQ	Authenticity	Loyalty	Novelty
AEQ			0.089	
Authenticity	0.100		0.015	
Novelty	0.221		0.204	

Source: Data Analysis Result using SmartPLS 4.0

As shown in Table 6, the relationships between novelty and AEQ ($f^2 = 0.221$) and tourist loyalty ($f^2 = 0.204$) exhibit moderate effect sizes, reinforcing novelty's significance in shaping these constructs. In contrast, the relationships among the remaining variables demonstrate weak effect sizes, with values below 0.15, suggesting relatively lower contributions to the model. These results establish the structural relationships among the variables and form the basis for subsequent hypothesis testing.

3.4 Hypothesis Testing

The purpose of hypothesis testing in this study was to determine whether the proposed hypotheses should be accepted or rejected. Using the bootstrapping method, this was achieved by evaluating the original sample values and p-values associated with the path coefficients and specific indirect effects.

Table 7: **Hypothesis Test Summary**

	Description	Original Sample	t-Stat	p-Value	Result
H1	Authenticity → AEQ	0.279	4.488	0.000	Accepted
H2	Authenticity → Loyalty	-0.021	1.408	0.159	Rejected
H3	Novelty → AEQ	0.413	6.033	0.000	Accepted
H4	Novelty → Loyalty.	0.224	4.901	0.000	Accepted
H5	AEQ → Loyalty	0.183	4.122	0.000	Accepted
H6	Authenticity → AEQ → Loyalty	0.051	3.258	0.001	Accepted
H7	Novelty → AEQ → Loyalty	0.076	3.066	0.002	Accepted

Source: Data Analysis Result using SmartPLS 4.0

The results in Table 7 confirm that authenticity and novelty significantly enhance AEQ, reinforcing their role in shaping tourists' aesthetic perceptions of cultural tourism. However, while novelty directly bolsters loyalty, authenticity does not significantly affect tourist commitment. Instead, AEQ plays a crucial mediating role, fully bridging the relationship between authenticity and loyalty and partially mediating the link between novelty and loyalty. These findings underscore the importance of AEQ in transforming authenticity and novelty into sustained tourist loyalty.

3.5 Discussions

The demographic analysis reveals that a significant proportion of respondents are Generation Y and Z travellers, with many young adults under 30 earning below IDR 10 million per month. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that younger generations seek cultural experiences for personal enrichment and self-development (Popșa, 2024). Consequently, cultural tourism providers should adopt experience-driven strategies that cater to the preferences of younger travellers by offering immersive activities, interactive storytelling, and opportunities to engage with local traditions.

The findings reveal that authenticity significantly enhances AEQ, indicating that preserving and presenting cultural authenticity deepens tourists' aesthetic appreciation. This supports Yi et al. (2016), who identify authenticity as key to shaping aesthetic experience in cultural tourism. Respondents reported strong emotional and sensory engagement with rituals, customs, and heritage sites. However, authenticity alone does not directly foster loyalty. This pattern is consistent with studies from China (Zhang et al., 2019), Korea (Park et al., 2019), and Egypt (Al-Azab & Abulebda, 2023), where authenticity improved experience quality but did not guarantee repeat visits. These results highlight AEQ's role as a crucial mediator that converts authentic experiences into attitudinal loyalty, especially for younger travellers who seek depth over routine revisitation.

The absence of a direct relationship between authenticity and loyalty can stem from tourists' varied perceptions of authenticity, shaped by personal expectations and cultural backgrounds (Novello & Fernandez, 2014; T. Zhang et al., 2019). This suggests that cultural tourism should integrate interactive storytelling and participatory elements. Active engagement, such as joining rituals or reenactments, can foster deeper emotional connections and long-term loyalty. Ultimately, AEQ mediates the authenticity–loyalty relationship by shaping how authenticity is aesthetically experienced, influencing tourists' intent to revisit or recommend the destination.

Novelty is identified as another critical driver of AEQ, corroborating the findings of Skavronskaya et al. (2020). Integrating elements of novelty into cultural tourism enhances aesthetic experiences by introducing aspects of surprise, adventure, and creativity. Tourists value destinations that offer unique and distinctive experiences that deviate from routine activities. In this context, AEQ encompasses visual appeal, cultural uniqueness, and sensory engagement, collectively enriching the tourism experience. The interplay between novelty and AEQ confirms that while tourists seek familiarity with cultural traditions, they also desire innovative elements that render their experiences more immersive and memorable.

Furthermore, novelty significantly impacted tourist loyalty, supporting previous findings by Blomstervik and Olsen (2022). Novel experiences stimulate curiosity and engagement, fostering stronger emotional bonds with a destination. The juxtaposition of familiar cultural heritage and innovative tourism offerings such as interactive exhibits, contemporary performances of traditional arts, or augmented reality experiences could create excitement that enhances destination loyalty. Skavronskaya et al. (2021) noted that novelty triggers emotional responses that make experiences more memorable, increasing the likelihood of repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. These results emphasise the need for tourism providers to maintain cultural integrity while introducing innovative attractions that sustain visitor interest and engagement.

AEQ is confirmed as a critical determinant of tourist loyalty, consistent with the findings of Al-Azab and Abulebda (2023) in Egypt and Lin and Hsu (2022) in Taiwan. High-quality aesthetic experiences, characterised by well-preserved heritage sites, environmental cleanliness, and cultural authenticity, contribute to positive tourist perceptions and long-term commitment to a destination. Respondents in this study emphasised the significance of green spaces, well-maintained facilities, and visually appealing settings, reinforcing the role of AEQ in shaping tourism experiences. This outcome aligns with research indicating that aesthetically pleasing environments enhance emotional engagement and visitor enjoyment, ultimately leading to higher levels of loyalty.

The mediating role of AEQ further strengthens the relationship between authenticity and loyalty, confirming the hypothesis that AEQ enhances tourists' emotional attachment to a destination. This finding is in line with prior studies by Kirillova and Lehto (2015), Zhou et al. (2022), and Al-Azab and Abulebda (2023), which suggest that authenticity fosters loyalty through enriched aesthetic experiences. Similarly, AEQ's mediation between novelty and loyalty underscores the importance of aesthetic engagement in shaping long-term tourist behaviour. As shown by Yusof et al. (2021), novelty leaves a lasting impact when delivered through visually and emotionally engaging experiences. Tourism providers can foster stronger emotional bonds by providing unique and aesthetically enriching experiences, encouraging repeat visits and positive recommendations.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of balancing authenticity and novelty in cultural tourism to optimise AEQ and foster long-term loyalty. Tourism stakeholders should prioritise the preservation of cultural heritage while simultaneously introducing innovative elements that enhance destinations' aesthetic appeal. By strategically integrating these factors, cultural tourism destinations can create compelling experiences that attract tourists, encourage repeat visits, and promote positive word-of-mouth advocacy.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion and Implications

This research demonstrates that authenticity and novelty significantly enhance AEQ, which is crucial in fostering tourist loyalty. Although novelty directly influences loyalty, authenticity does not exert a significant direct impact. However, when mediated by AEQ, authenticity becomes a key driver of loyalty and reinforces the importance of high-quality aesthetic experiences in shaping tourists' long-term commitment to a destination.

Tourism industry stakeholders should prioritise the preservation of authenticity to sustain and enhance tourist loyalty. Authenticity is evident in the architectural integrity, cultural traditions, and immersive experiences that enable visitors to engage with a destination's historical and spiritual essence. Maintaining the original structure and design of cultural sites allows tourists to connect with the past, fostering a deeper appreciation of the region's heritage. Furthermore, allowing visitors to participate in traditional practices strengthens their emotional attachment to the destination and increases loyalty.

While preserving authenticity, tourism providers should also incorporate novelty to complement cultural heritage. Unique experiences, such as local culinary offerings, interactive storytelling, and innovative tourism products, can enhance visitors' sense of discovery while upholding cultural integrity. Novelty is not solely about entertainment; it enriches tourists' experiences through mindfulness, creativity, and emotional engagement. For instance, Bali's distinctive cultural activities contribute to positive emotional experiences that, in turn, boost destination loyalty. By strategically integrating novelty into cultural tourism, stakeholders can create enduring impressions that encourage repeat visits and stimulate positive word of mouth.

AEQ is a critical determinant of loyalty. This finding highlights the need for cultural destinations to focus on environmental aesthetics, cleanliness, accessibility, and cultural integration. Tourists value green spaces, well-maintained facilities, and immersive design elements that reflect local heritage. Ensuring that these factors are harmoniously combined enhances the overall experience and fortifies visitors' emotional connection to the destination. Additionally, providing opportunities for tourists to co-create their experiences fosters deeper engagement, reinforcing their sense of belonging and attachment, further enhancing AEQ (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016).

These findings offer practical insights for tourism practitioners, particularly in cultural destinations. Loyalty can be fostered through a balanced approach that combines authenticity and novelty to enhance AEQ. Destination managers are encouraged to preserve authentic elements such as historical architecture and traditional practices, while integrating novel, interactive experiences that deepen emotional engagement without undermining cultural integrity. For instance, interactive storytelling in traditional performances, such as bilingual narratives on the cultural meaning of Balinese dances like Barong or Kecak, can preserve authenticity and introduce novelty by deepening understanding through modern presentation methods. Such visually and emotionally impactful experiences foster satisfaction, repeat visitation, and positive word-of-mouth, supporting long-term competitiveness in global tourism. The study also refines Cognitive Appraisal Theory by demonstrating AEQ's mediating role in perceived authenticity, novelty, and loyalty. Emotional responses arise from sensory input, cognitive evaluations of culturally rich and novel experiences, affirming the theory's view that emotions shaped by environmental appraisal influence tourist behaviour. Importantly, as most respondents are young travellers, the findings should be interpreted as primarily reflecting younger segments. Hence, providers are encouraged to adopt experience-driven strategies that cater to these cohorts' pursuit of cultural enrichment through immersive and participatory activities.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. Firstly, it focuses solely on cultural tourism in Bali, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other tourism sectors. Future research could extend the scope to different regions, such as Prague or Rome, where historical heritage plays a central role, or Brazil's Carnival, which offers a vibrant cultural experience. Additionally, subsequent studies could explore nature-based, culinary, and adventure tourism to assess whether similar patterns emerge across varied contexts (Ghanem & Ghanem, 2019; Zhang & Xu, 2020).

Moreover, this study primarily examines novelty, authenticity, AEQ, and loyalty. Future research could integrate additional factors such as aesthetic expectations, destination image, and visitor satisfaction, which have been recognized as key determinants of tourist loyalty (Kahraman & Cifci, 2023; Jee et al., 2019; Lestari et al., 2019; Wen et al., 2024). Finally, most respondents in this study were young travellers with limited financial independence, some of whom still rely on parental support. Future studies could focus on older age groups to provide comparative insights and enhance the applicability of the findings across different demographic segments.

Future studies might also explore the roles of service quality, memorable tourism experiences, and emotional attachment in shaping loyalty (Jiang et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2022). These variables could offer deeper insights into tourist behaviour's psychological and experiential aspects. Moreover, considering the impact of cultural background on tourists' perceptions of authenticity and novelty would provide a more nuanced understanding of how different visitor segments interact with cultural destinations. Addressing these areas in future research will provide a more comprehensive framework for developing sustainable and competitive tourism strategies.

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DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In preparing this paper, the author(s) utilised ChatGPT to enhance the clarity and readability of the English language and condense the manuscript to meet the required word limit. Following the use of this tool/service, the author(s) have thoroughly reviewed and edited the content as necessary and assumed full responsibility for the final published article.

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