

Destination personality of Labuan Bajo, Indonesia: Local and foreign tourists' perspectives

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to identify the personality of Labuan Bajo and then compare the personality perceptions between local and foreign visitors. Labuan Bajo is one of the priority destinations designated by the Indonesian government located in East Nusa Tenggara. This paper adopted the brand personality construct from Aaker (1997), which has five basic dimensions, namely sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. A total of 200 valid responses were obtained in this study and then analyzed using descriptive statistic. Independent t-test was also employed to unravel significant differences in local and foreign perceptions about the destination. The findings revealed that both local and foreign respondents perceived Labuan Bajo as ruggedness, sincerity, and excitement. Local visitors more portrayed the destination with ruggedness personality, while foreign visitors were on sincerity. The dimension personality of competence was perceived to be the least by the two cohorts. Among the five dimensions of destination personality, the two groups were significantly different particularly in their perception of sincerity, excitement, and sophistication. The results of the study may assist destination providers building appropriate branding and positioning strategies for Labuan Bajo.

Keywords: destination personality, local tourists, foreign tourists, Labuan Bajo

1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the growing industries in Indonesia in recent years and has become the country's source of foreign-currency income. Indonesia has an extraordinary natural resource; thus, the government has been confident to set a target to attract 20 million tourists by 2019 from almost 14 million in 2017 (Ollivaud & Haxton 2019). Indonesian government has prioritized four destinations to be "New Bali," and one of them is Labuan Bajo. Labuan Bajo is the capital city of West Manggarai Regency with a strategic geographical position in the west of Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara Province. The city of Labuan Bajo itself is surrounded by small islands with sea waters and coastal views, which is very popular by tourists. One of the advantages of Labuan Bajo is the existence of the Komodo National Park, which was inaugurated as a finalist of the Seven New Natural Wonders by UNESCO in 1986. This is because the largest Komodo in the world is only found in the Komodo National Park, surrounded by remarkable natural beauty (Remmer 2017).

As one of the prioritized destinations in Indonesia, government should put some attempts to attract more visitors by strengthening its destination branding to create a positive image of Labuan Bajo. Brands can be considered as a reflection of the quality and popularity of a product or service so that destination branding reflects the quality and popularity of a tourist destination (Bilim & Bilim 2014). Dickinger & Lalicic (2015) stated that destination personality is a form of branding strategy, which is a concept originated from the development of the brand personality theory proposed by Aaker (1997), which is a set of human characteristics associated with a brand. According to Aaker (1997), brand personality can be described into five main characters, namely, sincerity,

excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. The assessment of the destination personality is strongly influenced by the character of individuals (Lee et al. 2015). Individual perceptions in assessing the destination personality are mainly affected by how the local government develops the concept of personality of a tourist site.

Pong and Noor (2015) define destination personality as a set of human characteristics associated with a destination. Destination personality is also defined as a series of characters chosen to communicate with tourists about destinations (Suleman et al. 2016). Destinations can be linked to human nature and personality and are considered as independent factors for tourists (Huong & Huy 2014). Aaker (1997) suggests that personality traits can be directly linked to destinations through several factors, such as infrastructure, hotels, hotel and restaurant staff, and residents. Destination personalities can be built indirectly through marketing programs such as communication strategies, pricing strategies, and infrastructure development. Destination personality is a metaphor that is appropriate to understand perceptions of someone who will visit a tourist destination and to uniquely manage the identity of the destination. In addition, identifying perception of destination personality may emotionally connect tourists to the destination (Kim & Stepchenkova 2017).

Destination personality is a character that is assessed subjectively by an individual or a group that has a similar background. Styliadis et al. (2014) in their study added that in the assessment of destination personality, attributes and images of a tourist destination may differ according to domestic and foreign tourists. Ayyildiz and Turna (2013) with a similar study also showed that there were differences in the assessment of the attributes and images of tourist destinations from tourists from different countries. Lee et al. (2015) also examined the destination personalities of various tourist destinations in various countries. The results showed that even though the tourist destinations studied were similar (natural attractions and city views), the results can be different. Of the three selected countries (China, the United States, and France), all have different personality characteristics. Dickinger and Lalicic (2015) in their study also examined the destination personality of tourist destinations in Vienna, Austria. The results of the study found that the most prominent character of the destination personality in Vienna, Austria, is the dimension of sincerity.

Even though several studies have been conducted to identify destination personality of several tourist destinations, such as Istanbul (Unurlu & Küçükkanca 2013), Vienna (Dickinger & Lalicic 2015), China, the United States, France (Lee et al. 2015), Bunaken National Park and Wakatobi (Suleman et al. 2016), most studies focused on destinations in big and popular cities. Thus, this study attempted to identify destination personality of Labuan Bajo as one of the prioritized destinations selected by the Indonesia government. Local and foreign tourists' perspectives are also examined as highlighted by Styliadis et al. (2014) and Ayyildiz and Turna (2013), that domestic and foreign visitors might have different views on how they perceive personality of a destination. The result of this study may provide the local government as well as destination marketers a better understanding how tourists portray Labuan Bajo and then provide marketing strategies to attract more local and foreign tourists to visit Labuan Bajo. As stated by Sahin and Baloglu (2011), the identifying personality of a destination from the perception of visitors will help destination providers capture personality traits to be highlighted into their marketing efforts to enhance tourists' experience and increase their satisfaction.

2 METHOD

This study adopted brand personality construct from Aaker (1997) with five main dimensions, namely, sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness to identify destination personality of Labuan Bajo using 42 indicators on a five-Likert scale. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each item within the five dimensions of destination personality is perceived to be suitable for Labuan Bajo ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). As all items in the questionnaires were adopted from Aaker (1997) and then translated into Indonesia, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of 30 to evaluate the reliability and internal consistency of destination personality attributes. Cronbach alpha value is generally accepted with a scale

above 0.7 (DeVellis 2003). The results revealed that the alpha coefficients for all personality traits were ranging from 0.723 to 0.787 above the minimum value of 0.7. Therefore, all the dimensions of destination personality developed by Aaker (1997) were applicable to the Indonesia context as the results revealed a satisfactory level of internal consistency.

Quantitative study with descriptive and comparative approach were employed in this study using non-probability sampling design with convenience method. Domestic and foreign visitors who were visiting Labuan Bajo were chosen for sampling purposes. A total of 200 self-administered questionnaires were collected in November 2019 at SkyBajo Hotel in Labuan Bajo with 100 questionnaires for each domestic and foreign visitor. Mean and standard deviation were utilized to portray the data dispersion and to identify central tendency of each personality perceived by the two cohorts. The result of descriptive statistics from this study can be used to identify the main personality of Labuan Bajo perceived by local and foreign travelers. Moreover, statistical comparison was also employed in this study using independent sample t-test for continuous variables to examine whether there are any significant mean differences of personality perceived by local and international tourists who were visiting Labuan Bajo.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Profile of the respondents*

The profile of the respondents can be seen in Table 1. The gender of the respondents was 41% male and 59% female for domestic respondents and for foreign respondents were 47% male and 53% female. The majority of both respondents were 28 to 37 years old (55% for locals and 51% for foreigners), followed by the age range of 17–27 years old (36% for locals and 32% for foreigners). Most of the local respondents were students (54%) and private employees/entrepreneurs (63%) for foreign respondents with the educational level of undergraduate degree (46% for locals and 45% for foreigners). Some of the domestic respondents were from Jakarta (40%), and the international respondents mostly were from Europe (65%), who came to Labuan Bajo often with their friends/colleagues. More than half of the two group of respondents were first-time visitors, which accounted for 56% and 88% for locals and foreigner, respectively.

3.2 *Destination personality of Labuan Bajo*

Table 2 shows the findings of means and standard deviation of destination personality perceived by both local and foreign visitors. Among five dimensions of personality, ruggedness (overall Mean = 3.93) was perceived the most by domestic respondents to describe Labuan Bajo, followed by sincerity (3.75), excitement (3.75), sophistication (2.72), and competence (1.88), meaning that Indonesian tourists consider Labuan Bajo as a tough and masculine personality with attractive and genuine natural sceneries. Meanwhile, foreign tourists portray Labuan Bajo more on its sincerity (overall Mean=4.03), followed by ruggedness (4.01), excitement (3.97), sophistication (2.55), and competence (1.80). Sincerity personality was acknowledged the most by foreigners to best describe Labuan Bajo with the perception that the destination was more family-oriented with its real and original natural landscape. Even though the two cohorts had slightly different tendencies in describing Labuan Bajo, overall, they portrayed the destination similarly with the three highest personality of Labuan Bajo as ruggedness, sincerity, and excitement. In other words, Labuan Bajo can be personalized as a person who has strong and attractive outdoorsy activities with beautiful natural landscape. It is unsurprising because the biggest attraction of Labuan Bajo is Komodo National Park, which was declared as a world heritage site by UNESCO in 1991 (UNESCO 2011). In addition, unique breathtaking sceneries are also found in Labuan Bajo, such as amazing 360-degree incredible views from Padar Island, which is the top place to see Labuan Bajo, with four small islands, trekking on Komodo and Rinca Islands, which are

Table 1. Profile of the respondents.

Variable	Locals (n = 100)		Foreigners (n = 100)	
	n	%	n	%
Age range				
17–27 years	36	36	32	32
28–37 years	55	55	51	51
38–48 years	7	7	11	11
49–58 years	2	2	6	6
Gender				
Male	41	41	47	47
Female	59	59	53	53
Occupation				
Students	54	54	19	19
Entrepreneurs	44	44	31	31
Employees	21	21	32	32
Professional (teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc.)	2	2	18	18
Others	2	2	0	0
Educational Level				
Junior/Senior high school	38	38	22	22
Diploma degree	15	15	18	18
Bachelor's degree	46	46	45	45
Post-doctoral degree	2	2	15	15
Origin				
East Java	20	20		
Central Java	9	9		
West Java	7	7		
Jakarta	40	40		
Outside Java	24	24		
Asia			15	15
Europe			65	65
America			2	2
Australia			18	18

home to the world's largest lizard, and pink beach as one of the seven pink beaches in the world (trip101, 2020).

Personality dimension of competence was ranked the lowest among the five dimensions by both locals and foreigners. This might be due to lack of awareness of the local community in disposing of waste, which has been one of the problems encountered by Labuan Bajo until now (Agmasari 2018). Labuan Bajo also has several issues such as lack of a clean water supply, inadequate facilities and services, and waste problems, which is unsurprising to be perceived negative by visitors. These problems must be acknowledged by the stakeholders of Labuan Bajo including local government and proper solutions and actions must be taken seriously to promote Labuan Bajo as one of the prioritized destinations.

The Independent sample t-test was deployed to compare the mean score and to identify whether there is a significant difference with the two groups of tourists (locals versus foreigners) regarding their perception about the personality of Labuan Bajo. As appeared in Table 3, it is interesting to find out that all the mean scores of foreign travelers were higher than domestic travelers, suggesting that foreign travelers perceived that Labuan Bajo has stronger personality compared to domestic travelers. From the results, there were significant differences between the two groups in the dimension personality of sincerity, excitement, and sophistication. But there were no significant differences in their perception about ruggedness and competence personality. Meaning that the two cohorts acknowledge that Labuan Bajo offers rugged and masculine activities such as trekking through the

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of destination personality of domestic and foreign tourists.

Dimension	Locals		Foreigners		Cronbach's Alpha
	Mean	StDev	Mean	StDev	
Ruggedness	3.93	0.44	4.01	0.40	0.787
Tough	4.28	0.72	4.24	0.71	
Rugged	4.22	0.67	4.36	0.71	
Outdoorsy	4.20	0.68	4.35	0.73	
Masculine	4.11	0.63	4.44	0.74	
Western	2.84	0.37	2.68	0.73	0.723
Sincerity	3.75	0.36	4.03	0.28	
Honest	4.28	0.72	4.24	0.71	
Down-to-earth	4.23	0.69	4.32	0.72	
Sincere	4.22	0.67	4.36	0.71	
Small-town	4.18	0.75	4.19	0.76	
Cheerful	4.13	0.72	4.27	0.77	
Family-oriented	4.11	0.63	4.44	0.74	
Real	4.07	0.67	4.36	0.78	
Original	4.05	0.79	4.32	0.82	
Friendly	3.86	0.77	4.00	0.87	
Wholesome	3.72	0.78	3.84	0.88	
Sentimental	2.14	0.77	2.00	0.87	
Excitement	3.75	0.36	3.97	0.43	0.730
Exciting	4.22	0.67	4.36	0.71	
Daring	3.91	0.66	4.28	0.86	
Young	3.83	0.75	4.03	0.89	
Unique	3.82	0.78	3.95	0.88	
Up-to-date	3.82	0.78	3.95	0.88	
Imaginative	3.79	0.65	4.19	0.91	
Spirited	3.75	0.77	3.90	0.89	
Independent	3.72	0.78	3.84	0.88	
Cool	3.68	0.72	3.91	0.92	
Trendy	3.48	0.59	3.81	0.96	
Contemporary	3.22	0.56	3.44	1.12	
Sophistication	2.72	0.40	2.55	0.52	0.752
Charming	3.87	0.67	4.23	0.88	
Good looking	3.70	0.74	3.89	0.90	
Glamorous	2.47	0.66	1.94	1.31	
Upper class	2.35	0.52	1.70	1.03	
Feminine	2.09	0.66	1.72	0.86	
Smooth	1.81	0.76	1.82	0.75	
Competence	1.88	0.40	1.80	0.51	0.729
Intelligent	2.30	0.46	1.60	0.92	
Leader	2.23	0.42	1.46	0.84	
Confident	2.22	0.59	1.71	0.91	
Secure	1.81	0.76	1.82	0.75	
Successful	1.81	0.91	2.21	0.65	
Reliable	1.68	0.72	1.77	0.69	
Technical	1.64	0.71	1.78	0.67	
Corporate	1.64	0.78	1.93	0.67	
Hard working	1.56	0.74	1.89	0.63	

forests of Komodo, swimming with mantas, and snorkeling at the pink beach. Additionally, both local and foreign visitors agreed that Labuan Bajo has a low-level competence as perceived by the tourist. As stated by Remmer (2017) that infrastructure in Labuan Bajo is considered poor with the

Table 3. Independent sample t-test results of destination personality.

Dimension	Tourists	Mean	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Ruggedness	Locals	3.93	-1.395	0.164
	Foreigners	4.01		
Sincerity	Locals	3.75	-2.658	0.008*
	Foreigners	4.03		
Excitement	Locals	3.75	-3.905	0.000**
	Foreigners	3.97		
Sophistication	Locals	2.72	2.484	0.014**
	Foreigners	2.55		
Competence	Locals	1.88	1.251	0.212
	Foreigners	1.80		

**represents significant levels <0.01

common problem of power shortages. The water pipes installed by the local government do not function well, and compared to other urban areas in Flores, the roads in Labuan Bajo are not in good conditions. Waste problems also contribute to a negative perception of the destination. These issues should be put into account

4 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study may provide useful insights for destination marketers to have better understanding about Labuan Bajo's personality from the views of domestic and foreign travelers. Among the five dimensions of destination personality, ruggedness, sincerity, and excitement had the highest score in representing Labuan Bajo. Local visitors were more likely to perceive Labuan Bajo with ruggedness personality, while foreign visitors were higher on sincerity. The personality dimension of competence was perceived to be the lowest by the two group visitors. Thus, the local government needs to put more emphasis on the improvement of infrastructure such as roads and transportation in order to improve tourists' experiences during their stay in Labuan Bajo.

From the study, it can be concluded that domestic and foreign tourists have difference perceptions on how they portray the personality of Labuan Bajo. Both cohorts perceived Labuan Bajo significantly with difference in the dimension of sincerity, excitement, and sophistication. Destination personality is crucial to build positive image of a destination. Thus, destination marketers and providers need to put more attempts on how they promote and build positioning strategies for both groups in order to attract more tourists to visit to Labuan Bajo. For local tourists, it might be interesting to offer some activities which are challenging and fun with more outdoorsy attractions, as for foreign visitors are more family-friendly and attractive natural attractions. This paper only discusses the destination personality of Labuan Bajo using a quantitative approach; therefore, qualitative method needs to be considered to explore deeper why and how visitors perceive the personality of Labuan Bajo. Other destinations prioritized by the Indonesian government such as Borobudur, Mandalika, and Toba Lake may be worth to be investigated in order to assist tourism agencies to create a better positive destination image.

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