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# Unpacking Destination Brand Equity: The Influence of Brand Familiarity and Perceived Quality Through Brand Image

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between destination brand familiarity, perceived quality, destination brand image, and overall brand equity using the customer-based brand equity framework. Employing a quantitative approach with partial least squares structural equation modeling, data were collected from 271 respondents using a convenience sampling technique. The findings indicate that brand familiarity and perceived quality significantly influence destination brand image, which positively affects overall brand equity. In addition, destination brand image mediates the effects of brand familiarity and perceived quality on brand equity. The findings underscore the critical role of branding elements in shaping consumer perceptions and loyalty. This study contributes to the existing literature related to destination brand equity by offering empirical evidence from an emerging tourism market and provides practical insights for destination marketers and policymakers to enhance branding strategies and strengthen competitive positioning.

## 1 | Introduction

Destination branding has gained significant attention from both academics and practitioners over the past few decades, driven by the need to establish effective branding strategies that enhance tourism growth and competitiveness (Chi et al. 2024; Tasci and Back 2025). As tourism has become a vital economic driver for many countries, governments, and tourism boards have actively invested in branding initiatives to differentiate their destinations and attract visitors (Magdy 2024). Tourist destinations are not merely tangible products; they are multidimensional constructs capable of providing diverse experiences

to travelers (Chi et al. 2020; Tasci and Back 2025). Indeed, Chi et al. (2020) have emphasized that tourist destinations are intangible service products that rely on tourists' subjectivity, which is in turn shaped by travel routes, culture, purpose of visit, educational background, and past experiences. The concept of destination branding extends beyond mere promotion: it involves a strategic process of creating a distinctive identity that resonates with target audiences and fosters long-term associations with the destination (Ripoll González et al. 2025). Effective branding not only enhances a destination's image but also strengthens its positioning in an increasingly competitive global market (Tasci and Back 2025). Destination branding plays a crucial role in

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influencing travelers' perceptions, decisions, and experiences, making it a central focus in contemporary tourism research (Tasci and Back 2025).

Popular travel destinations employ branding strategies to improve their competitiveness, and these go beyond showcasing natural attractions by incorporating unique cultural, experiential, and emotional elements to create a differentiated market positioning (Eshuis and Ripoll González 2025). Recent studies emphasize that a strong and well-executed branding strategy not only enhances destination image but also fosters visitor loyalty and influences the intent to visit (Tasci and Back 2025). One of the key indicators in evaluating branding effectiveness is visitors' perception, which encompasses familiarity, perceived quality, and overall image of the destination (Pongoh and Mandagi 2025). Greater familiarity and positive perceived quality are both believed to contribute to a stronger destination image, directly impacting tourists' behavioral intentions and revisit likelihood (Tasci and Back 2025). In addition, understanding visitors' perceptions enables tourism stakeholders to refine branding strategies and optimize marketing efforts through targeted communication and experience design (Eshuis and Ripoll González 2025; Ripoll González et al. 2025). Past studies underscore the need for a more nuanced exploration of destination branding's impact on tourism dynamics, emphasizing the role of brand equity in shaping visitor experiences and maintaining long-term competitiveness (Chi et al. 2020; Ding et al. 2022).

To ensure conceptual clarity and terminological precision within this study, the key constructs are defined as follows in the specific context of destination branding. "Destination brand familiarity" refers to tourists' level of awareness, knowledge, and recognition of a destination, reflecting their prior experiences and cognitive presence during travel decision-making (Tasci and Back 2025; Chi et al. 2020). "Destination perceived quality" denotes tourists' evaluative judgments regarding the overall excellence or superiority of a destination's tangible infrastructure and intangible service experiences (Aaker 1991; Tasci 2021). "Destination brand image" encompasses the aggregate of cognitive and affective associations that tourists hold about the destination, including both rational perceptions and emotional responses stored in memory (Keller 1993; Tasci and Back 2025). "Overall brand equity," grounded in the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) framework, represents the strength, favorability, and uniqueness of brand associations that influence tourists' loyalty and behavioral intentions (Aaker 1991; Keller 2003; Tasci 2021). The CBBE model, as a multidimensional construct, explains how brand knowledge differentially affects consumer responses, integrating cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions that collectively shape brand equity in tourism contexts (Tasci 2021; Tasci and Back 2025). This theoretical foundation enables the study to examine how destination brand familiarity and perceived quality influence brand image and, ultimately, overall brand equity, providing a clear and coherent framework tailored to the tourism sector to avoid ambiguity and guide subsequent analysis.

Indeed, in adopting the theoretical lens of CBBE, research on destination branding has increasingly emphasized brand equity as a critical indicator of a brand's success (Tasci 2021; Tasci and Back 2025). Overall brand equity is shaped significantly by

destination brand familiarity and perceived quality as well as shaping a destination's image (Huang 2025). Destination brand familiarity, meanwhile, is understood to enhance tourists' confidence in choosing a destination and fosters stronger emotional connections (Tasci and Back 2025). Likewise, destination perceived quality has been found to be a determinant of destination brand loyalty and competitiveness (Magdy 2024). Higher perceived quality not only strengthens positive word-of-mouth and revisit intentions but also enhances the perceived brand equity of a destination (Ding et al. 2022). Moreover, the synergy between brand familiarity and perceived quality has been found to significantly influence tourists' long-term attachment and advocacy for the destination (Tasci and Back 2025). These findings highlight the need for tourism stakeholders to integrate these dimensions into branding strategies, ensuring a comprehensive approach to building sustainable competitive advantages through enhanced destination brand equity (Eshuis and Ripoll González 2025; Tasci 2021).

While destination brand equity has been increasingly recognized to be a fundamental aspect of tourism marketing, significant research gaps remain, particularly in the context of developing economies (Pongoh and Mandagi 2025). For example, Pike and Bianchi (2016) highlighted that destination brand equity requires further exploration, specifically in assessing re-positioning and re-branding strategies beyond conventional destination image studies. However, empirical and conceptual tourism studies have primarily focused on destination image alone (e.g., Casali et al. 2021; Kim et al. 2018, 2019; Šerić and Mikulić 2023). Chi et al. (2020) have also emphasized that while destination images are integral to brand measurement, a more holistic approach is necessary to capture the complexities of destination brand equity. In the same vein, Tasci (2021) asserts that destination images contribute to brand equity, while other studies argue that additional dimensions must be incorporated for a comprehensive evaluation (Chi et al. 2020; Pongoh and Mandagi 2025).

This study aims to address this gap by examining the role of destination brand familiarity and perceived quality in shaping destination brand image and overall brand equity, specifically within Indonesia's tourism sector. Given that empirical studies on this topic have focused on developed countries, further studies are necessary to examine how these branding elements influence tourism marketing in developing economies (Chi et al. 2020; Pongoh and Mandagi 2025). By examining these factors in the context of Indonesia, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on destination branding and provide actionable insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders in emerging tourism markets (Pongoh and Mandagi 2025; Wilopo and Nuralam 2025).

## 2 | Literature Review and Formulation of Hypotheses

### 2.1 | CBBE in Tourism Context

The CBBE framework was introduced by Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2003), who defined CBBE as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, affective, and conative

responses of consumers to branding activities. Aaker (1991) introduced a brand equity model consisting of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other proprietary assets, while Keller (1993) developed the brand resonance model, emphasizing brand knowledge as a key driver of consumer-based brand equity. These conceptualizations have significantly influenced branding research across various domains, including hospitality and tourism (Dedeoğlu et al. 2019; Ekinci et al. 2023; Huang 2025; Tasci 2021). The relevance of CBBE to tourism and destination branding has led to numerous studies exploring perception-based measures of brand equity (Matiza and Slabbert 2024). Specifically, the application of CBBE in tourism contexts has been extensively examined in the branding of destinations, hotels, events, and restaurants (Ding et al. 2022; Magdy 2024; Tasci 2021). Despite its theoretical advancements, the measurement and conceptualization of destination brand equity remain highly fragmented (Pongoh and Mandagi 2025).

Some studies have undertaken literature reviews of CBBE components and proposed refinements (Ekinci et al. 2023; Huang 2025). For example, Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010) analyzed direct and indirect measures of CBBE, while Tasci (2016) examined consumer value as an integral component of CBBE rather than evaluating CBBE holistically. In another study, Ekinci et al. (2023) posited that destination brand equity consists of value-driven assets or liabilities influencing visitors' perceptions of a destination's brand image. Their study further examined the applicability of Aaker's (1991) CBBE model from a tourist's perspective, reinforcing the need for a more refined conceptualization of destination brand equity. Given that tourism destinations function as complex, multidimensional products, it can be argued that existing brand equity models are likely to require adaptation to accommodate destination-specific attributes (Hyun and Kim 2020).

The challenge of integrating diverse branding elements within a unified framework has driven researchers to propose destination-specific brand equity models (Ekinci et al. 2023). Furthermore, Ekinci et al. (2023) examined the adaptability of the CBBE model in the context of tourism, highlighting the interconnections between brand associations, perceived quality, and consumer loyalty in destination branding. These findings align with existing studies that emphasize the role of destination brand familiarity and perceived quality as determinants of brand image and overall brand equity (Chi et al. 2020; Casali et al. 2021; Shi et al. 2022). For instance, Chi et al. (2020) demonstrated that familiarity positively moderates the relationship between brand awareness, perceived quality, and travel intentions in the context of Vietnam, highlighting its significance in strengthening destination brand equity. Examining the emerging destination of Molise, Italy, Casali et al. (2021) further confirmed that familiarity influences affective and cognitive images differently for residents and visitors, with visitors being more responsive to emotional messaging, thereby shaping intentions to visit and recommend. More recently, Shi et al. (2022) found that destination familiarity positively moderates the direct influence of brand equity on revisit intention, while also underscoring the role of authenticity and satisfaction in strengthening brand equity in

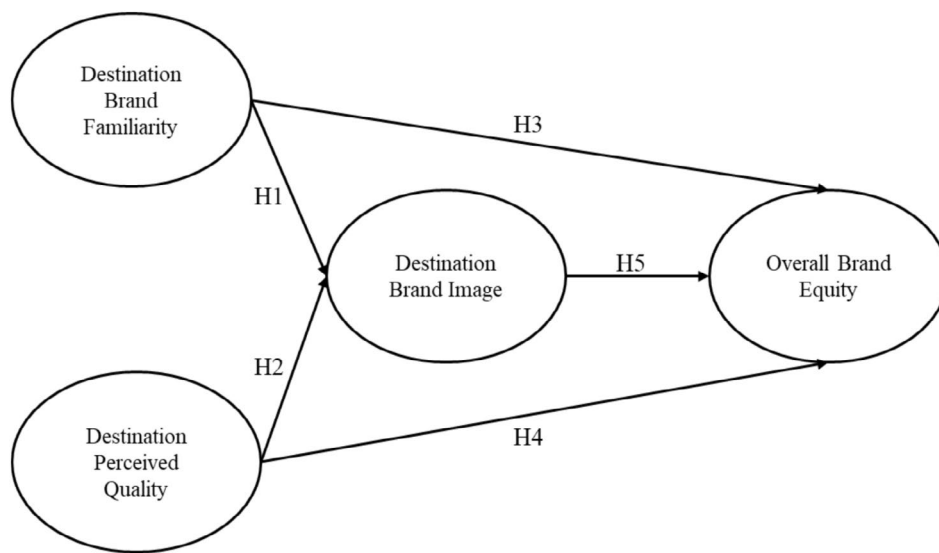
Chinese destinations. Despite these contributions, conceptualizations and measurements of destination brand equity remain inconsistent across studies (Tasci and Back 2025). Some researchers suggest the need for a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates both cognitive and experiential dimensions of branding (Ding et al. 2022; Hyun and Kim 2020). In the context of emerging tourism markets, particularly developing countries such as Indonesia, further empirical studies are required to explore how destination branding elements shape brand equity (Wilopo and Nuralam 2025).

The conceptual distinction between brand awareness and brand familiarity has been increasingly emphasized in recent tourism branding literature. Brand awareness refers to the consumer's ability to recall or recognize a brand, serving as an initial step in brand knowledge formation (Tasci 2021). However, brand familiarity extends beyond mere recognition to include the depth of consumer experience and knowledge acquired through repeated exposure and interaction with the destination (Casali et al. 2021; Tasci and Back 2025). Empirical studies have shown that brand familiarity shapes tourists' cognitive and affective images more profoundly than brand awareness, influencing behavioral intentions and brand equity outcomes (Chi et al. 2020; Tasci 2021). This study, therefore, adopts brand familiarity as a key antecedent within the CBBE framework, aligning with perspectives that highlight its critical role in explaining variations in tourist perceptions and loyalty in emerging tourism markets.

This study takes up this challenge. The conceptual framework adopted for this study is shown in Figure 1.

## 2.2 | Destination Brand Familiarity and Destination Brand Image

The concept of brand familiarity has been discussed and examined prior to the emergence of the CBBE framework and is recognized as a reflection of the consumer's level of experience and knowledge about a brand (Tasci and Back 2025). As stated by Im et al. (2012) and later confirmed by Tasci (2021), an elevated level of familiarity enables consumers to process information more efficiently, reduce perceived risk and uncertainty, and foster positive attitudes toward the brand. Familiarity also applies within the context of destination brand image, as demonstrated by existing studies that indicate a positive and significant relationship between familiarity and image (Casali et al. 2021; Kim et al. 2019; Tasci and Back 2025). The nexus between familiarity and image in tourism settings is highly relevant, underscoring that brand familiarity shapes tourists' perceptions and expectations of a destination (Casali et al. 2021; Chi et al. 2024). Although destination brand familiarity is often operationalized using brand awareness (Tasci 2021), other studies have emphasized conceptual distinctions between the two constructs (Casali et al. 2021; Tasci 2021; Tasci and Back 2025). In addition, familiarity is conceptually considered a key element in explaining behavioral variations between repeat and first-time tourists (Tasci 2021). While some studies have conceptualized destination brand familiarity as a moderating variable (Chi et al. 2020; Shi et al. 2022), others have treated it as an exogenous factor influencing destination brand image (Dedeoğlu et al. 2019). Conforming to these perspectives, Preko et al. (2022) found that brand familiarity



**FIGURE 1** | Conceptual framework.

has a positive and significant effect on brand image, thereby reinforcing its significance within the CBBE framework. Accordingly, this study adopts the following hypothesis:

**H1.** *Destination brand familiarity is significantly and positively related to destination brand image.*

### 2.3 | Destination Perceived Quality and Destination Brand Image

Perceived quality plays a crucial role in the CBBE framework by shaping brand associations and consumer brand perceptions (Shi et al. 2022; Ekinici et al. 2023). In the context of destination branding, perceived quality is often intertwined with destination brand value, destination image, and destination personality, forming a comprehensive construct that defines the overall brand perception (Kotsi et al. 2018). Aaker (1991) defines perceived quality as the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority, which reflects the brand's image and reputation. Accordingly, in destination branding, the perceived quality of a destination's products and services serves as a key determinant of its image. Perceived quality is essential in assessing whether consumers derive expected benefits from a destination's offerings (Preko et al. 2022). According to Dedeoğlu et al. (2019), the quality of tourism products and services significantly influences tourists' evaluations and satisfaction, subsequently shaping their perception of the destination's brand image. In addition, the service quality literature distinguishes perceived quality into two dimensions: physical quality (i.e., the perceived quality of tangible aspects such as infrastructure and facilities) and service interaction quality (i.e., the perceived quality of intangible aspects such as hospitality and service experience) (Tasci 2021; Ekinici et al. 2023). Both dimensions contribute significantly to the overall brand image of a destination, reinforcing its perceived value and attractiveness in the eyes of potential visitors (Jeong and Kim 2020; Tasci and Back 2025). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2.** *Destination perceived quality is significantly and positively related to destination brand image.*

### 2.4 | Destination Brand Familiarity and Overall Brand Equity

Brand familiarity can reinforce the CBBE framework, as it plays a vital role in shaping consumer decision-making processes and influencing overall brand equity (Tasci 2021; Preko et al. 2022). Brand familiarity serves as a guiding factor in tourists' decision-making, who often rely on previous knowledge and past experiences when choosing a destination (Chi et al. 2020; Casali et al. 2021; Shi et al. 2022). Past studies indicate that brand familiarity can increase the likelihood of developing positive attitudes toward the brand (Park et al. 2019; Tasci and Back 2025), while simultaneously strengthening a destination's contribution to brand equity formation (Casali et al. 2021; Dedeoğlu et al. 2019; Tasci 2021). Although brand awareness and brand familiarity are often combined in the conceptualization of brand equity, their impacts are closely interrelated in shaping consumer perceptions (Tasci and Back 2025). In this way, repeated positive interactions with a destination enhance brand familiarity, which can lead to stronger brand associations and increased loyalty (Tran et al. 2019). This suggests that brand familiarity reinforces its role as a key determinant of brand loyalty and contributes to long-term engagement within the CBBE framework. Particularly in the context of hospitality and tourism, brand familiarity is widely recognized as a core component of CBBE, functioning as a primary dimension (Kim et al. 2019; Tasci and Back 2025). This is further supported by findings from Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020), who emphasized that brand familiarity represents tourists' knowledge and perceptions of a destination, as well as its cognitive presence during travel decision-making processes. Brand familiarity can thus enhance overall brand equity by fostering trust, positive associations, and stronger emotional connections with the destination. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:



**H3.** *Destination brand familiarity is significantly and positively related to overall brand equity.*

## 2.5 | Destination Perceived Quality and Overall Brand Equity

In the destination branding literature, perceived quality has been linked to brand equity, as tourists' direct experiences with a destination shape their overall brand perception (Tasci 2021). As one of the fundamental dimensions of brand equity, perceived quality has been widely cited and applied in destination branding research (Dedeoğlu et al. 2019), following Aaker's (1991) conceptual framework. Destination brand quality is a core dimension of brand equity, significantly influencing tourists' evaluations of a destination's overall brand value (Tran et al. 2019; Chi et al. 2020; Ekinci et al. 2023). When visiting a destination, tourists evaluate various attributes, including physical infrastructure and service quality, which contribute to their perception of the destination's brand (Tasci 2021). These perceived quality attributes, whether related to tangible facilities or intangible service experiences, become ingrained in tourists' minds, forming lasting brand associations. Higher perceived quality not only enhances destination attractiveness but also strengthens brand loyalty and repeat visitation intentions (Dedeoğlu et al. 2019). The strong correlation between perceived destination quality and brand equity underscores its critical role in destination branding strategies (Huang 2025; Tasci and Back 2025). In addition, past studies have demonstrated that as tourists perceive higher levels of quality in a destination's offerings, their overall brand equity evaluations increase accordingly (Ekinci et al. 2023; Tran et al. 2019). This suggests that perceived quality acts as a key determinant in the formation of destination brand equity. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H4.** *Destination perceived quality is significantly and positively related to overall brand equity.*

## 2.6 | Destination Image and Overall Brand Equity

Brand image plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' perceptions of a brand, serving as a foundational component in the conceptualization of CBBE (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993). Specifically, destination brand image has been extensively studied in the context of tourism, with studies examining its definitions, measurements, antecedents, and consequences (Tasci 2016; Tasci and Back 2025). Numerous studies have concluded that destination brand image is one of the most influential elements in determining the overall brand equity of tourism destinations (Chi et al. 2020; Preko et al. 2022; Sthapit et al. 2025; Tasci and Back 2025). Brand image includes both the rational and emotional perceptions consumers associate with a specific brand (Keller 2010). It consists of a series of unique brand-related connections stored in the consumer's memory (Tran et al. 2019). According to Salehzadeh et al. (2016), brand equity is cultivated when customers retain strong, unique, and favorable associations with a brand, reinforcing the significance of brand image as a primary driver of brand equity (Dedeoğlu et al. 2019; Ekinci et al. 2023). A well-established destination brand image elicits its emotional responses, whether positive or negative, which

directly impact overall brand equity (Tran et al. 2019; Hyun and Kim 2020; Sthapit, Ji, et al. 2024; Sthapit, Yang, et al. 2024). A positive brand image offers substantial benefits to destination brands, with marketers emphasizing its pivotal role in enhancing destination brand equity (Hyun and Kim 2020). Past studies indicate a positive influence of destination brand image on brand equity (Kotsi et al. 2018; Tran et al. 2019; Šerić and Mikulić 2023). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H5.** *Destination brand image is significantly and positively related to overall brand equity.*

## 2.7 | Mediating Roles of Destination Image

Destination brand familiarity can be said to serve as a crucial determinant in shaping overall brand equity as it enhances tourists' knowledge, recognition, and associations with a destination (Tasci 2021; Tasci and Back 2025). However, its impact on overall brand equity is not always direct (Magdy 2024). Destination image can play a significant mediating role in this relationship by influencing how tourists perceive and evaluate the destination brand (Chi et al. 2020; Hyun and Kim 2020). The more familiar tourists are with a destination, the more they develop cognitive and affective associations that shape their image of the destination, which subsequently affects their brand equity perceptions (Casali et al. 2021; Ekinci et al. 2023). Some studies indicate that tourists with higher familiarity tend to construct stronger and more positive destination images, which in turn lead to greater brand attachment and overall brand equity (Dedeoğlu et al. 2019; Tran et al. 2019). Destination image not only serves as a cognitive filter but also enhances the perceived value and credibility of a destination, reinforcing its brand equity (Kotsi et al. 2018; Šerić and Mikulić 2023). Given this perspective, the present study hypothesizes that destination image mediates the relationship between destination brand familiarity and overall brand equity, emphasizing the necessity of a strong and favorable destination image in fostering brand equity within tourism branding strategies.

In addition, destination perceived quality also plays a fundamental role in shaping tourists' evaluations and experiences with a destination, directly influencing overall brand equity (Tasci 2021; Ekinci et al. 2023). However, some studies suggest that this relationship is often mediated by destination image, which serves as an intermediary construct linking tourists' quality perceptions to brand equity outcomes (Tran et al. 2019; Chi et al. 2020). When tourists perceive a destination to have high-quality infrastructure, services, and experiences, they tend to form a more favorable image of the destination, which in turn enhances their overall brand equity perceptions (Kotsi et al. 2018; Šerić and Mikulić 2023). Studies have also demonstrated that destination image functions as a cognitive and emotional framework through which tourists interpret perceived quality, thereby reinforcing their brand evaluations (Dedeoğlu et al. 2019; Hyun and Kim 2020). A well-developed destination image strengthens consumer trust, loyalty, and emotional connections to the brand, leading to increased overall brand equity (Keller 1993; Huerta-Álvarez et al. 2020; Ding et al. 2022). Given this perspective, the present study hypothesizes that destination

image mediates the relationship between destination perceived quality and overall brand equity, highlighting the need for destination marketers to enhance both perceived quality and image to build a competitive and sustainable destination brand. Accordingly, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

**H6.** *Destination image mediates between destination brand familiarity and overall brand equity.*

**H7.** *Destination image mediates between destination perceived quality and overall brand equity.*

### 3 | Methods

#### 3.1 | Research Setting and Sample

This study selected Batu City, East Java Province, Indonesia, as the research setting due to its rapidly growing tourism industry and its position as the most popular destination for domestic tourists in the region. Moreover, East Java Province has recorded the highest growth in tourist arrivals compared to other provinces in Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik 2025), making Batu City a good strategic location for this study. A convenience sampling method was applied to collect survey data from tourists, following the approach recommended by Šerić and Mikulić (2023). This method is widely used in similar existing studies (e.g., Dedeoğlu et al. 2019; Jeong and Kim 2020). It is classed as a non-probability sampling technique, where researchers do not have access to a complete list of the target population (Bougie and Sekaran 2019). Surveys were conducted using self-administered questionnaires between October and November 2024. The lead investigator and three trained research associates directly approached tourists as they were leaving the destination through different exit points, following best practices for tourism survey research (Šerić and Mikulić 2023).

#### 3.2 | Participant and Procedure

Before conducting the survey, respondents were informed of the study's aims and their right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any time. The authors confirm that this study adheres to the ethical guidelines for human subjects and that the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were ensured throughout the study. In addition, this study's procedures were reviewed and approved by the lead university's ethics review board. To ensure appropriate targeting of potential respondents, screening questions were included, such as "Are you familiar with destinations in Batu City, East Java Province?" and "Have you ever visited any destination in Batu City, East Java Province?" These questions, as well as the main questionnaire, were piloted in Bahasa, Indonesia to ensure clarity and comprehension by respondents. Respondents who provided affirmative answers to the screening questions and fully completed the questionnaire received a souvenir of Batu City as a token of appreciation. All questionnaires were thoroughly screened to identify careless or invalid responses, which were subsequently excluded from the dataset. A total of approximately 302 surveys were initially collected from October to November 2024. Due to some respondents not meeting the set criteria (i.e., nonfamiliarity with

or no prior visit to Batu City), providing incomplete answers, or showing careless or invalid response patterns, 33 questionnaires were excluded. This left a final sample of 271 valid responses for analysis. This process was necessary to maintain the integrity, reliability, and validity of the dataset, ensuring that only responses from appropriately targeted and attentive participants were analyzed.

#### 3.3 | Measurement

The questionnaire adopted established and validated scales from existing studies. It consisted of three sections. The first provided an explanation of the research objectives and requested the participants' voluntary consent to serve as respondents, ensuring the confidentiality of personal data as part of research ethics. The second contained demographic variables and travel characteristics, such as gender, age, frequency of visit, and tourist expenditure. The third comprised measurement items related to the seven key constructs presented above. All items were adapted from previous studies and modified to fit the context of the present research.

Specifically, the destination brand familiarity construct was measured using four items adapted from Chi et al. (2020). The destination perceived quality construct incorporated four items from Tran et al. (2019). The destination brand image construct was assessed using three items from Tran et al. (2019). In this study, the construct of "overall brand equity" implicitly captures aspects of brand loyalty, as it reflects the strength, favorability, and uniqueness of brand associations that influence tourists' loyalty and behavioral intentions (Aaker 1991; Keller 2003; Tasci 2021). The measurement items for overall brand equity, adapted from Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020), include dimensions related to loyalty and commitment, thereby subsuming brand loyalty within this broader construct. The decision to focus on four key constructs—destination brand familiarity, perceived quality, brand image, and overall brand equity—was made to maintain a parsimonious and theoretically coherent model consistent with prior empirical research in emerging tourism markets (Chi et al. 2020; Tasci and Back 2025). All items in the questionnaire were adapted from existing literature and measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = *Completely disagree* and 5 = *Completely agree*. This measurement approach helps ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, aligning with previous empirical studies in the field.

#### 3.4 | Data Analysis

To validate the research model and examine the proposed hypotheses, this study employs partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), as recommended by Hair et al. (2016), using SmartPLS 3 software. Given the characteristics and sample size of this study, PLS-SEM is deemed suitable for analysis. SmartPLS constitutes a robust method for estimating structural models, particularly in cases where traditional parametric assumptions may be violated (Hair et al. 2014). SmartPLS utilizes a non-parametric multivariate approach to estimate pathway models with latent variables (Hair et al. 2019). The analytical process in SmartPLS involves simultaneously evaluating both the measurement model

and the structural model. To assess the measurement model, the study examines internal consistency reliability (using composite reliability), convergent validity (evaluating factor loadings and average variance extracted [AVE]), and discriminant validity (Hair et al. 2019). Following the guidelines provided by Hair et al. (2019), the reliability assessment ensures that Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability exceed the threshold of 0.7, while validity is determined based on the AVE, which must be greater than 0.5. The results of this study confirm that all construct measurements meet these requirements, with reliability values surpassing 0.7 and AVE values exceeding 0.5.

## 4 | Results

### 4.1 | Profile of Respondents

As Table 1 shows, the gender distribution indicates that female respondents (53.9%) marginally outnumbered male respondents (46.1%). In terms of age distribution, most respondents were under 30 years old (54.61%). Regarding visit frequency, the largest group was those who had visited the destination twice (40.2%). In terms of tourist expenditure per visit, the largest group of respondents was those who spent IDR 250,001 to IDR 500,000 (36.5%). These figures suggest that most tourists fall

**TABLE 1** | Demographic profile of respondents ( $N=271$ ).

Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	125	46.1
	Female	146	53.9
Age	30 years or less	148	54.61
	31–40 years	71	26.19
	41–50 years	37	13.65
	More than 50 years	15	5.53
Frequency of visit	Once	75	27.7
	Twice	109	40.2
	Three times	43	15.9
	Four times	7	
	Five times or more	37	13.7
Tourist expenditure	IDR 250,000 or less	77	28.4
	IDR 250,001 to IDR 500,000	99	36.5
	IDR 500,001 to IDR 750,000	42	15.5
	IDR 750,001 to IDR 1,000,000	32	11.8
	IDR 1,000,001 or more	21	7.7

within the moderate spending category, reflecting their budget preferences during their visits.

Visit frequency was measured among respondents to capture their travel behavior, with the largest group having visited the destination twice (40.2%). However, visit frequency was not included in the structural model analysis to preserve model parsimony and focus on the primary theoretical constructs. While this decision allowed for a clearer examination of the relationships among brand familiarity, perceived quality, brand image, and overall brand equity, it is recognized that visit frequency could influence these relationships by reinforcing tourists' loyalty and brand evaluations. The potential impact of visit frequency on the model's estimates is acknowledged as a limitation, and future studies are encouraged to incorporate this variable to enhance model accuracy and explanatory power.

The measurement of research constructs followed the guidelines for outer model evaluation in PLS-SEM (Table 2) as recommended by Hair et al. (2017). In addition, Hair et al. (2016, 2014) recommend that the outer loading values should meet the required threshold of 0.7 for indicator reliability: a condition that is almost fully met in the present study. One item in the outer loading values produced a value of less than 0.7 (that being DBF5). According to the recommendations of Hair et al. (2017), however, values between 0.4 and 0.7 can still be considered acceptable provided that the composite reliability and AVE meet the necessary criteria for validity and reliability (Hair et al. 2019). At the construct level, Hair et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha in confirming measurement reliability, with a minimum threshold of 0.70. The results demonstrated that all variables exceeded this threshold, indicating strong internal consistency. To confirm validity, the AVE and the correlation coefficients between variables were analyzed (Hair et al. 2014, 2019). All variables had AVE values greater than 0.50, fulfilling the validity criterion.

The heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was used to assess discriminant validity (Table 3). This method is advocated by Henseler et al. (2015) for variance-based PLS-SEM. Compared to the traditional Fornell and Larcker criterion, the HTMT approach offers a more robust and precise assessment of discriminant validity, as it evaluates the ratio of between-trait correlations to within-trait correlations (Hair and Alamer 2022). According to Henseler et al. (2015), discriminant validity is confirmed if HTMT values remain below a 0.90 threshold. In the present study, all HTMT values met this criterion, indicating that the constructs maintain adequate discriminant validity without excessive conceptual overlap. This finding suggests that each construct is theoretically distinct, reinforcing the validity of the measurement model. Moreover, Hair and Alamer (2022) emphasized that HTMT provides a more reliable method for detecting discriminant validity concerns in PLS-SEM, making it preferable to traditional techniques. Due to its greater accuracy, HTMT was selected as the primary approach in this study. By confirming that the constructs remain sufficiently independent, this study strengthens the reliability and validity of its structural equation model, ultimately supporting the integrity of the theoretical framework.

At the bootstrapping stage, model fit and path coefficients were analyzed to assess the overall relationships within the

**TABLE 2** | Construct measurement.

Variable	Item	Mean	Outer loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Destination brand familiarity	DBF1	4.19	0.847	0.872	0.909	0.667
	DBF2	4.23	0.859			
	DBF3	4.17	0.841			
	DBF4	4.22	0.857			
	DBF5	4.08	0.663			
Destination perceived quality	DPQ1	4.38	0.813	0.850	0.898	0.688
	DPQ2	4.30	0.880			
	DPQ3	4.30	0.884			
	DPQ4	4.22	0.732			
Destination brand image	DBI1	3.91	0.907	0.886	0.929	0.814
	DBI2	3.88	0.913			
	DBI3	3.86	0.885			
Overall brand equity	OBE1	4.22	0.958	0.813	0.895	0.745
	OBE2	4.33	0.633			
	OBE3	4.23	0.958			

**TABLE 3** | Discriminant validity.

	Destination brand familiarity	Destination brand image	Destination perceived quality	Overall brand equity
Destination brand familiarity				
Destination brand image	0.317			
Destination perceived quality	0.414	0.516		
Overall brand equity	0.534	0.533	0.459	

model and to test the proposed hypotheses (Figure 2). The application of a partial sequential model in the statistical analysis yielded the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), which indicates the explanatory power of the model.  $R^2$  is commonly used to evaluate the strength of endogenous constructs within structural models, providing insights into their predictive relevance (Hair et al. 2022). In the present study, the  $R^2$  for destination image was 0.221, while the  $R^2$  for overall brand equity was 0.337. These results meet the threshold level of 0.100, as suggested in prior literature (e.g., Šerić and Mikulić 2023), confirming that the model possesses acceptable explanatory power (Hair et al. 2017, 2022).

The bootstrapping stage analyzed the hypothesis testing of the proposed model (Table 4). The findings of this study indicate that destination brand familiarity has a positive and significant effect on destination brand image ( $\beta=0.118$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ), thus H1 was accepted. Similarly, destination perceived quality has a positive and significant effect on destination brand image ( $\beta=0.411$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ), thus H2 was accepted. Destination brand familiarity ( $\beta=0.301$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ), destination perceived quality ( $\beta=0.147$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ), and destination brand

image ( $\beta=0.311$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ) all positively and significantly influence overall brand equity, thereby confirming H3–H5. Destination brand image mediates the relationship between destination brand familiarity and overall brand equity in a positive and significant manner ( $\beta=0.037$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ), leading to the acceptance of H6. Destination brand image also mediates the relationship between destination perceived quality and overall brand equity positively and significantly ( $\beta=0.128$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ), confirming H7. These findings provide empirical evidence to support the hypothesized relationships, reinforcing the role of destination brand familiarity, perceived quality, and destination image in shaping overall brand equity within the tourism sector.

## 5 | Discussion

The findings of this study align with past studies confirming the essential role of destination brand familiarity and perceived quality in shaping destination brand image and overall brand equity (Chi et al. 2020; Tasci 2021). Consistent with Ekinci et al. (2023), this study demonstrates that destination brand



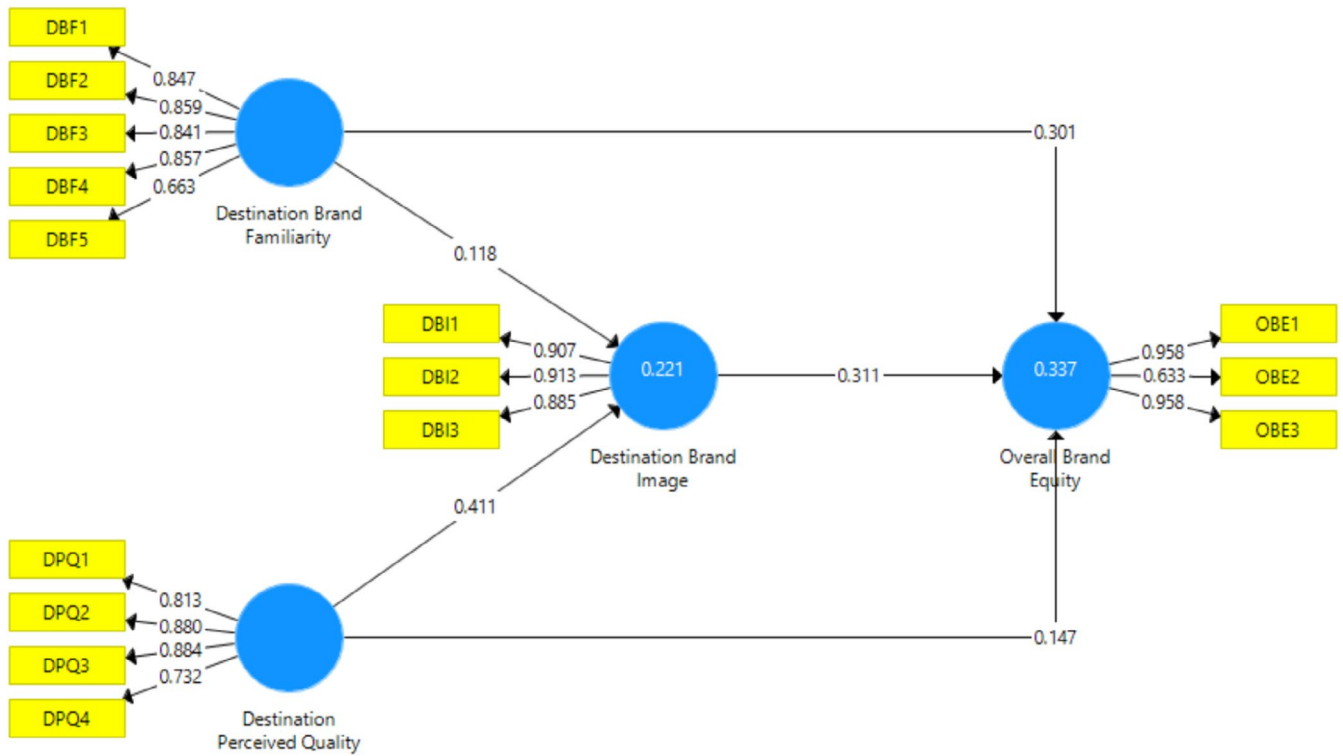


FIGURE 2 | Structural model output.

TABLE 4 | Hypotheses testing.

Hypotheses	Original sample	T statistic	p	Conclusion
H1 Destination brand familiarity → Destination brand image	0.118	1.980	0.048	Accepted
H2 Destination perceived quality → Destination brand image	0.411	7.713	0.000	Accepted
H3 Destination brand familiarity → Overall brand equity	0.301	5.750	0.000	Accepted
H4 Destination perceived quality → Overall brand equity	0.147	2.575	0.010	Accepted
H5 Destination brand image → Overall brand equity	0.311	6.155	0.000	Accepted
H6 Destination brand familiarity → Destination brand image → Overall brand equity	0.037	1.978	0.048	Accepted
H7 Destination perceived quality → Destination brand image → Overall brand equity	0.128	4.787	0.000	Accepted

equity comprises value-driven assets influencing visitors' perceptions. In addition, the results concur with studies indicating that destination brand familiarity and perceived quality significantly contribute to brand image formation, which in turn enhances overall brand equity (Tasci and Back 2025; Wilopo and Nuralam 2025). Beyond reinforcing existing evidence, this study contributes by clarifying the interplay between familiarity, perceived quality, and brand image in shaping destination brand equity. By highlighting these interconnections, the study provides theoretical refinement to destination branding literature and offers practical guidance for destination marketers seeking to strengthen competitive positioning and ensure long-term sustainability.

The study findings also confirm and extend past studies demonstrating that destination brand familiarity and destination

perceived quality significantly influence destination brand image. The results indicate that destination brand familiarity has a positive and significant effect on destination brand image, aligning with existing studies that emphasize the role of familiarity in shaping consumer perceptions and brand associations (Tasci 2021; Tasci and Back 2025). This finding reinforces the argument that tourists rely on their level of experience and knowledge about a destination to form their brand image (Chi et al. 2020; Eshuis and Ripoll González 2025; Magdy 2024). Furthermore, and consistent with the extant literature, this study supports the assertion that familiarity reduces uncertainty, enhances information processing, and fosters stronger affective connections to the brand (Im et al. 2012). Similarly, destination perceived quality is found to have a strong positive influence on destination brand image ( $\beta=0.411$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ), corroborating previous research that identifies perceived quality as a

crucial component of CBBE (Ekinci et al. 2023; Shi et al. 2022). This study supports Aaker's (1991) definition of perceived quality as consumers' judgments regarding a brand's overall excellence, which is reflected in their evaluations of tourism products and services. Moreover, the findings align with research that differentiates perceived quality into physical and service interaction dimensions, both of which significantly impact destination image (Tasci 2021; Dedeoğlu et al. 2019). The results underscore the importance of destination marketers improving both tangible infrastructure and service quality to enhance destination brand image, further strengthening the competitive positioning of tourism destinations.

The findings of this study reinforce and extend previous research by confirming the significant influence of destination brand familiarity, destination perceived quality, and destination brand image on overall brand equity. The results demonstrate that destination brand familiarity positively and significantly affects overall brand equity ( $\beta=0.301$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ), aligning with previous studies that highlight the role of familiarity in consumer decision-making and brand attachment (Chi et al. 2020; Tasci 2021). Familiarity enhances tourists' trust, reduces uncertainty, and strengthens their emotional connection to the destination, further contributing to brand equity formation (Shi et al. 2022). This supports the notion that repeated positive interactions with a destination build strong brand associations and revisitation intentions (Tran et al. 2019). Similarly, destination perceived quality is found to have a positive and significant effect on overall brand equity ( $\beta=0.147$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ), confirming its role as a fundamental dimension of CBBE (Tasci 2021; Ekinci et al. 2023). Tourists' evaluations of both tangible infrastructure and service quality contribute to their perception of brand excellence, strengthening destination loyalty and brand equity (Dedeoğlu et al. 2019). This finding is consistent with research that establishes perceived quality as a key driver of destination competitiveness and long-term brand value (Kotsi et al. 2018; Tran et al. 2019). Moreover, the study confirms that destination brand image has the strongest positive impact on overall brand equity ( $\beta=0.311$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ). These findings align with prior research that emphasizes the role of destination image in shaping brand equity (Chi et al. 2020; Tasci and Back 2025). As a core component of brand equity, a strong and favorable destination image enhances tourists' brand associations, fosters positive emotions, and solidifies long-term brand loyalty (Hyun and Kim 2020). Thus, this study contributes to the growing body of literature by empirically validating the relationships between destination brand familiarity, perceived quality, brand image, and overall brand equity, reinforcing their importance in tourism branding strategies.

The study findings also confirm the mediating role of destination brand image in the relationship between destination brand familiarity and overall brand equity, as well as between destination perceived quality and overall brand equity. The results indicate that destination brand image significantly mediates the relationship between destination brand familiarity and overall brand equity ( $\beta=0.037$ ;  $p$  value  $<0.05$ ), aligning with prior research that highlights the importance of familiarity in shaping destination image, which in turn enhances brand equity (Tasci 2021; Tasci and Back 2025). Tourists with greater familiarity develop stronger cognitive and affective associations

with a destination, reinforcing positive perceptions that enhance brand equity (Casali et al. 2021; Kim et al. 2019; Tasci and Back 2025). This finding supports previous studies suggesting that familiarity-driven destination image plays a pivotal role in fostering brand attachment and strengthening overall brand equity (Dedeoğlu et al. 2019; Tran et al. 2019). Moreover, destination brand image significantly mediates the relationship between destination perceived quality and overall brand equity. This finding corroborates existing studies suggesting that tourists' evaluations of perceived quality contribute to their overall brand perceptions via destination image (Chi et al. 2020; Tran et al. 2019). Higher perceived quality enhances the image of a destination, reinforcing trust, credibility, and long-term brand loyalty (Kotsi et al. 2018; Šerić and Mikulić 2023).

## 5.1 | Theoretical Implications

This study offers several important theoretical contributions to the understanding of destination brand equity within the CBBE framework. First, it advances the literature by empirically clarifying the integrated mechanism through which destination brand familiarity and perceived quality jointly influence destination brand image, which subsequently drives overall brand equity. Unlike previous studies that often examine these constructs separately, our research situates them within a coherent, sequential framework, providing a more nuanced explanation of brand equity formation in tourism contexts (Chi et al. 2020; Tasci 2021). This framework highlights destination brand image not merely as a mediating statistical variable but as an active transformative mechanism that converts tourists' prior knowledge (brand familiarity) and evaluative judgments (perceived quality) into both cognitive and affective brand equity outcomes (Hyun and Kim 2020). By emphasizing the dual cognitive-emotional nature of brand image, the study extends the CBBE theory beyond passive brand associations to an active process of brand equity development. Second, the study refines the CBBE framework by contextualizing these dynamics within an emerging tourism market characterized by relatively limited destination exposure and fragmented visitor experiences. While much prior research has focused on mature destinations, our findings demonstrate that destinations with lower familiarity levels can still leverage perceived quality and positive image management to build strong brand equity (Tasci and Back 2025). This insight broadens the applicability of the CBBE framework, acknowledging that the pathways to brand equity formation may differ depending on a destination's developmental stage and market positioning. Third, the empirical confirmation of destination brand image as a mediator linking brand familiarity and perceived quality to overall brand equity reinforces its critical role in destination branding strategies (Tran et al. 2019). Finally, the study contributes to theoretical clarity by operationalizing overall brand equity in a manner that implicitly encompasses brand loyalty, reflecting tourists' commitment and behavioral intentions (Huerta-Álvarez et al. 2020). This parsimonious model balances complexity and coherence, providing a solid foundation for future research to explore additional constructs, such as explicit loyalty or visit frequency, as moderating variables. Collectively, these contributions enrich theoretical understanding and provide a comprehensive framework for destination brand equity research in emerging markets.

## 5.2 | Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable and actionable insights for a broad spectrum of tourism stakeholders in Indonesia, including government agencies, destination managers, marketers, and small enterprises. For policymakers, the results underscore the importance of adopting integrated branding strategies that simultaneously enhance destination brand familiarity, perceived quality, and destination brand image. The strong influence of perceived quality on brand image and overall brand equity suggests that strategic investments in upgrading tangible infrastructure—such as accessibility, facilities, and physical environment—and intangible service quality—such as hospitality and visitor experience—should be prioritized to strengthen the destination's competitive positioning. These improvements not only elevate tourists' quality perceptions but also reinforce positive brand associations that foster loyalty and repeat visitation. Destination marketers are encouraged to leverage digital platforms, storytelling, and visitor engagement initiatives to translate brand familiarity into a compelling and memorable destination image. Ensuring that service delivery consistently meets or exceeds quality expectations is critical to sustaining these positive brand perceptions. The study's empirical evidence, showing that destination brand familiarity positively influences brand image and overall brand equity, highlights the need to build sustained awareness and knowledge among tourists through targeted communication and experiential marketing. For small enterprises and family businesses, which often operate with limited financial and intellectual resources, the study highlights cost-effective strategies to contribute to destination branding. Building local partnerships and community networks can amplify word-of-mouth promotion and visitor engagement, effectively increasing brand familiarity at relatively low cost. Emphasizing authentic local culture and personalized hospitality—delivered consistently and promoted through affordable digital and social media channels—can significantly enhance perceived quality and destination image, as these factors directly influence tourists' evaluations and emotional connections. Such grassroots participation enables small-scale operators to actively engage in destination branding efforts, fostering competitive advantage despite resource constraints. In general, the study provides a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing destination brand equity in emerging tourism markets by combining experiential knowledge, quality perceptions, and image management into cohesive marketing and development strategies. This balanced approach supports sustainable competitiveness by aligning strategic investments with community-driven initiatives, ultimately maximizing destination appeal and visitor loyalty. These practical insights are particularly pertinent for Batu City and similar emerging destinations seeking to strengthen their brand positioning in a highly competitive global tourism environment.

## 5.3 | Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the findings cannot be applied directly to other tourism destinations within Indonesia or to international contexts. Variations in local characteristics—such

as cultural heritage, socio-economic conditions, governance structures, and policy frameworks—can substantially shape the formation and perception of brand equity. Second, as this study is situated within the context of an emerging tourism market, caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings to mature or well-established destinations. Third, the study employs a cross-sectional research design, which limits its capacity to capture the dynamic and evolving nature of brand equity over time. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs (Cha et al. 2024; Heinonen and Sthapit 2024; Hosany et al. 2022; Jieyao et al. 2025; Liang et al. 2025) to observe how destination branding strategies, perceptions, and performance indicators transform in response to policy shifts, market trends, or global tourism disruptions. Fourth, comparative analyses across diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts, coupled with multi-method approaches, would strengthen the theoretical understanding of destination branding but also offer actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to enhance destination competitiveness. Future research should explore different geographical contexts and conduct comparative analyses across diverse tourism destinations to enhance the generalizability and robustness of the CBBE framework (Sthapit et al. 2025). Lastly, although visit frequency data were collected as part of the demographic and travel characteristics, this was not incorporated into the structural model. Future research should consider including visit frequency as a moderating or control variable to better isolate its effects and provide a more nuanced understanding of how repeated visitation shapes destination brand equity. Incorporating visit frequency could also help clarify the role of loyalty development in destination branding dynamics.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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