




# “The effect of perceived eco-support and need for uniqueness on eco-destination image and eco-destination identification”

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# THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED ECO-SUPPORT AND NEED FOR UNIQUENESS ON ECO-DESTINATION IMAGE AND ECO-DESTINATION IDENTIFICATION

## Abstract

The present study attempts to bring up eco-destination which is until now still under-researched. Especially, it puts interest in the relationship between image and identification, which is absent in tourism literature. Combined together and tailored to its purpose, it develops new constructs, that is eco-destination image and eco-destination identification. In order to represent the real nature of Wakatobi as eco-destination, it also develops another two constructs as the antecedents of eco-destination image and eco-destination identification, that is perceived eco-support and need for uniqueness. By doing so, it puts together interactively some theories that previously stand mutually-exclusive, especially those of image, uniqueness, subjective norm, and social identity theories. This mixture becomes its conspicuous novelty. The population covers domestic and international tourists over 25 years old. It applies convenience sampling for questionnaire distribution. It applies SPSS for data analysis. The results would be that perceived eco-support has significant effects on destination image and eco-destination identification, while destination image has a significant direct effect on eco-destination identification, which makes destination image only serve as a partial mediator in the relationship between perceived eco-support and eco-destination identification. Need for uniqueness should have an insignificant effect on eco-destination identification, but significant effect on destination image. It means that destination image serves as a full mediator in the relationship between need for uniqueness and eco-destination identification.

## Keywords

eco-awareness, eco-destination identification,  
destination image, uniqueness

**JEL Classification** M310, Z3

## INTRODUCTION

Wakatobi has a strong image as an eco-destination site. It is a destination in South-East Sulawesi, Indonesia, well-known for its natural wealth. On July 11, 2012, UNESCO officially recognizes Wakatobi as world biosphere reserve and is included within World Network Biosphere Reserve (WNBR). In 2002, Indonesian forestry minister also declared Wakatobi region as national park, which is the second largest in Indonesia after Lorentz national park in Papua, Indonesia, which is the largest in South-East Asia. Its underwater world contains at least 942 fish and 750 coral reef species, which accounts for 90% of the world coral reefs. It clearly outperforms Red Sea and Caribbean Sea – two famous diving centers, which only contain 50 fish and 300 coral reef species. This biological richness has driven World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to participate in the management and preservation of Wakatobi natural resources. With this on the horizon, Wakatobi offers heaven for diving tourism, and represents

eco-concern. The study observes this as the role of Wakatobi in precious nature preserve and is represented by perceived support.

Beside under water heaven, Wakatobi has coastal reef area with the width of 118,000 ha. Wakatobi also has atoll reef, which is 49 km in length, that makes it the longest reef in the world. Wakatobi with its reef resource accounts for world reef triangle, supplementing reef resource centers in Solomon Islands and the Philippines. Other natural, cultural, social, and heritage resources significantly add remarkable flavor that sets Wakatobi apart from other tourism sites available domestically and internationally. Mangroove forest in Kaledupa Island and turtle sighting in Anano Island in Wakatobi, which is the location for green turtle and scale turtle to lay eggs, offer other memorable experiences. Wakatobi is also rich with attractive local wisdoms. One of these is the way society interacts with forests. They manage balanced take-and-give pattern in making use of the nature. Bajoe tribe, for instance, who built their homes in the middle of the sea, attracts tourists' attention of local people's culture, customs, art work, way of life and history. Heritage relics disclose the complete picture of Wakatobi. Fortresses of Patua and Suo-Suoin Tomia Island, Togo Molengo in Kapota Island, Ollo in Kaledupa Island, Tindoi, Liya and Mandati Tonga in Wangi-Wangi Island, with old mosques (Keraton Liya) in Wangi-Wangi and (Onemay) Tomia islands blend the heritage and cultural resources in Wakatobi. All of these make Wakatobi as a unique destination that no other destinations might be able to resemble. The present study applies a need of uniqueness as variable in the research model.

With these two variables above, the present study intends to find out their effects on eco-destination identification and destination image. Relationship between eco-destination identification and destination image is also explored. Relationship between image and identification is an area a little research has explored. According to the author's knowledge, it is the first study which applies eco-destination coined to refer the sense of belonging to a destination due to its importance in terms of natural reserves that its damage is conceived as the disadvantages to themselves. Several researchers have applied identification in tourism sector. They include Alexander and Hamilton (2016), Mak (2011), Garrido (2011), among others.

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## 1. THEORETICAL REVIEW

### 1.1. Destination image

Destination image covers visitors' ideas, beliefs, and feeling of a tourism destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Its importance lies on its determining role in visitors' decision making process (King, Chen, & Funk, 2015). It is what makes destination image interesting subject in tourism literature. Cognitive and affective images make up the whole image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004). Visitors' knowledge of a destination is called cognitive image, and their feeling about the destination is called affective image (Chew & Jahari, 2014). Cognitive image pertains to physical aspects (landscape, cultural attraction, natural scenery or others) or psychological aspects (the grasp of atmosphere and hospitality). Emotional images encapsulate feelings or emotions that represent a destination.

The present study follows the above categorization of destination image into cognitive and affective dimensions. Some adaptations should be made to accommodate the object of this study that is eco-destination. Accordingly, cognitive and affective dimensions take in attributes of Wakatobi eco-destination. The representation might differ from one destination to another. Wakatobi has its own characteristics that makes it different from other destinations. Care should be taken in framing Wakatobi's typical characteristics from which visitors' image of Wakatobi would be derived.

### 1.2. Social identity

Identification is a part of social identity theory. It is driven by the need for affiliation, self-extension, and self-esteem that are achievable by means of identifying oneself with an object considered as having capacity to do so (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). These motivations are encouraged by congruence,

reputation or overwhelming attraction of the object concerned. At this point, individuals have interest in maintaining and making sure of object's growth (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). In this way, they make a strong relationship to the object.

Identification leads to categorization, which takes form when individuals form a certain social group that makes them have clear separation from others. Members with the same concerns and interests bound by as social group are categorized as in-group, while others who lack these interests are categorized as out-group.

The formation of social identity and the resulting categorization are cognitive in nature. It means that individuals' decision of making identification is based on the thinking process of the importance of the doing. Congruence in interests and concerns are the ground for individuals to exert their capacity to gather to make them achievable.

### 1.3. Subjective norm

Subjective norm refers to social influences, which motivate individuals' behaviors. It is the norm that important people form which certain effect to individuals' attitudes and behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). It is the degree to which an individual perceives that people who are important to him/her (significant others) believe that he/she should have a given attitude or perform a certain behavior (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Several studies document that relationship between subjective norm and attitude that can take the forms of trust (Moorman et al., 1993, Morgan & Hunt, 1994), attachment (Park et al., 2010), or identification (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010).

Common or social supports to a common cause might serve as subjective norm as long as people see them as a driving force for others to do the same, or as a moral force that what they do is a moral right that requires further support for others to achieve its complete goal. In this study, perceived support is assumed to have an effect to attitude, which is represented by identification.

### 1.4. Uniqueness theory

People naturally compare themselves with others on terms such as opinions, physical appearances, what

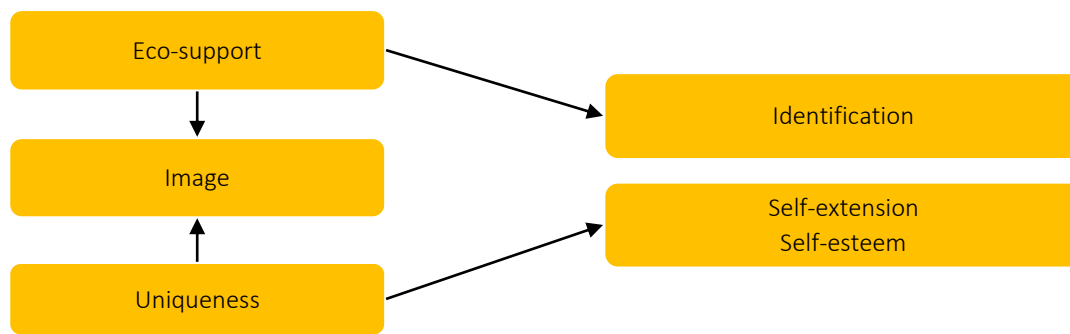
to consume, or even behaviors. According to Snyder and Fromkin's uniqueness theory, people tend to seek a moderate degree similarity or dissimilarity to others. A moderate degree of similarity is to maintain normality or common acceptability that are important to avoid conflict, refusal or even denial. A moderate degree of dissimilarity is to maintain self-identity that represent self-uniqueness.

People have a need to protect self-uniqueness. If they think that they are too similar to other people, they will feel that their sense of uniqueness is threatened. At this point, they will feel the importance of forming their self-uniqueness, either by reducing the similarity to others, or by diverging from mainstream practice. This idea is derived from Fromkin laboratory study (1972) testing regarding the feelings of uniqueness. The study that involved two different groups showed that two groups avoided the sense of too similarity to each other in making options.

### 1.5. Eco-destination identification

Tajfel and Turner (2004) assert that individual has an underlying need to maintain self-esteem and that need is linked to identity. He or she would seek affiliation and make a membership to an organization or destination he or she considers having potential to uplift his or her self-esteem. According to Tajfel (1981), individuals maintain or seek out memberships in social groups if these groups represented by organization or destination provide a positive aspect to the individual's self-esteem, an individual may leave a group if otherwise. Self-esteem is positive recognition of one's identity made possible by the membership, while self-extension is self's identity representation in an organization or destination made possible by the membership and linked by perceived similarity and reputation.

Identification is individual's act to make a close relationship to an organization or destination, in order to enhance his/her esteem and image, by making membership to it, based on its attraction, good image, congruence in concept and goal or reputation that allow for self-extension, which leads to sense of belonging or oneness (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). For this study, the researchers make definition of eco-identification, that is, individual acts to make a close, committed, and meaningful relationship to organization, brand or destination, based on con-



**Figure 1.** Relationship between research's factors

gruence in eco-goal or interest, that intensifies the sense of oneness and belonging. The eco-goal or interest involves the organization's or destination's image and reputation or role in eco-sustainability as an effort to maintain its existence that also means individual's persisted eco-related interest and identity.

Beside eco-identification, the study also puts forward new variable, so-called eco-support. Different from perspective that mostly views support within social exchange, the present study relates support to image, in the sense that domestic and international supports to Wakatobi should increase its image. The supports indicate the importance and value of the destination. National support would bring the class regional destination to national level, and international support and recognition would bring it to international level. While uniqueness that Wakatobi possesses attracts domestic and international interests, which further increases its image, need for uniqueness is motivation that drives some people to visit destinations based on their unique attributes. For this type of visitors, Wakatobi is the good chance not to miss for its internationally-known uniqueness.

Altogether, relationship of these factors are described in Figure 1.

## 2. PROPOSITIONS

### 2.1. Perceived eco-support and eco-destination identification

Some works in various contexts have confirmed the relationship between perceived support and identification. Tartakovsky (2011) in his study con-

cerning relationship between social support and national identity found that high-school Ukraine adolescents in Russia during Perestroika period have stronger national identity (Russia) affected by social support from peer support, but not by social support from parents and teachers. Ghosh (2016) in Indian organizational context revealed that organizational support leads to organizational identification. It holds true for other works such as Zagenczyk et al. (2011). In this study, Wakatobi, in which national government through National Park Program, and international organizations such as UNESCO and WWF through World Biosphere Reserve and World Network Biosphere Reserve status actively participate in keeping Wakatobi natural reserve, is viewed as providing support to universe natural sustainability in general and to Wakatobi natural sustainability itself in particular.

In social norm view, support from wider influential groups might serve as driver for certain individuals to make identification. Especially when the support is based on a great ideal such as environment concern or for the interest of society at large. Either reputation of groups that provide support or the ideal that they stand for, as well as agreement in value, might provide impetus for identification.

Individuals might relate certain attitude and behaviors into their identities, as they are socialized into a specific institutional context (e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Creed et al., 2010). In order to maintain positive self-concept, individuals tend to associate themselves to positive roles, occupations or categories (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Kreiner et al., 2006) or place that make it possible.

The study views that support from reputed organization such as UNESCO, WWF and regional government concerning eco-tourism in Wakatobi might serve as social norm that incite individual identification on Wakatobi as eco-destination. The social norm works to engender the sense of importance to associate oneself to the place, as it can strengthen self-esteem or self-value in the form of identification. This identification allows for positive identity through impression that one is a part of domestic or national identity, and that one is also a member of green-literate people. Relationship between social norm and identification has been documented by Jarvis (2016). Thus, it offers the following proposition:

*P1: Perceived eco-support has a significant effect on eco-destination identification.*

## 2.2. Perceived eco-support and eco-destination image

Works exploring relationship between eco-support and destination image are scant in management literature. According to George and Brief (1992), perceived support in organizational context would be beneficial to the organization itself. The support organization provides would bring positive feedback to the organization. The study views that perceived support in Wakatobi by national government and international organizations in natural sustainability would heighten Wakatobi image as a precious eco-destination. This support might serve as an incitement for individuals, including tourists, to do the same thing. They might think that their supports would strengthen further the support of government and international organizations. Tourists might think that their visit to Wakatobi would increase regional government's income from tourism sector that later would be useful to maintain natural resource in Wakatobi. With the increased income, living standards of local population would also be uplift, and utilization of natural resources for daily consumption would decrease as well. Thus, it makes the following proposition:

*P2: Perceived eco-support has a significant effect on eco-destination image.*

## 2.3. Need for uniqueness and eco-destination identification

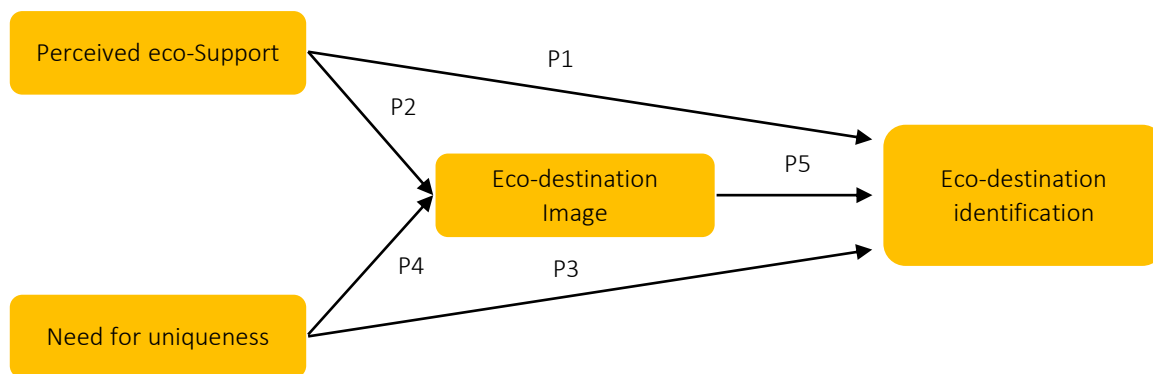
Some works reveal relationship between need for uniqueness and identification. López et al. (2017) in their study concerning the brand communities of Canon, Lomo and Leica confirm the relationship between need for uniqueness and identification through Twitter. Chan et al. (2010) found that uniqueness is a component of attractiveness that might lead to identification. However, this study observes that, though important, uniqueness does not necessarily lead to identification, as it relates to short-term hedonic motive. Eco-destination identification requires long-term relationship forged by self-concept (ideal) or interest congruence that requires commitment, devotion, and high eco-awareness. For eco-sustainability driven visitors, the study conceives that eco-sustainability concern might make them form identification to eco-destination. Thus, it makes the following proposition:

*P3: Need for uniqueness does not have a significant effect on eco-destination identification.*

## 2.4. Need for uniqueness and eco-destination image

Uniqueness is an important part of image. Uniqueness serves as differentiation that sets an organization or destination apart from others (Sufi & Lyons, 2003). The differentiation helps a destination to occupy position that others find difficulties to fill in. Uniqueness enables for memorability and sense of irreplaceability. The eco-destination and Wakatobi role as one of world's triangle biosphere with its longest atoll reef confer Wakatobi favorable image as an important region buffering world's biosphere and sustaining natural reserve. The uniqueness makes the image hard to follow or even to compete. The study on relationship between uniqueness and image is relatively scant. Wakatobi uniqueness creates a niche market of natural unique destination attracted uniqueness-driven people. Wakatobi uniqueness should engender favorable Wakatobi image among uniqueness-driven people. Thus, the present study makes the following proposition:

*P4: Need for uniqueness has a significant effect on eco-destination image.*



**Figure 2.** Conceptual model

### 2.5. Co-destination image and eco-destination identification

Several works have identified the relationship between image and identification. Fuller et al. (2006), for example, show that construed external image has a significant effect on organizational identification. Glavas and Godwin (2013) show that the image of organizational CSR has a significant effect on organizational identification. This study views that co-destination image significantly affects co-destination identification. According to Dutton et al. (1994), images might engender identification and represent individual's interest. Positive image relates to favorable identity, which in turn drives people viewing the identity as attractive to make identification:

*P5: Eco-destination image has a significant image on eco-destination identification.*

## 3. METHODS

The present study puts forward three constructs that are relevant for eco-destination context which, to author's best knowledge, are absent in management literature, that is, perceived eco-support, eco-destination identification, and eco-destination image. Therefore, it requires content validity and face validity to make sure their validity and reliability. Content validity should involve expert judgment for the evaluation of each construct. The results will further be presented to 30 respondents to see the match. After making sure of the math, pilot test will shortly follow to see construct reliability

and validity before proceeding to statistic analysis with data from whole respondents' responses.

It will apply convenience sampling method to distribute questionnaires to collect data from Wakatobi visitors. According to Zikmund (1996), convenience sampling is a method of obtaining information from the people who are available on the spot and close. Researchers generally use convenience method to gather a large sample in fast and cost efficient manner. The respondents could be foreign or domestic with eco-awareness identified with age over 25 years old and at least senior high school background. We use SPSS for quantitative analysis, which is standard and understood by the whole world.

## 4. RESULTS

The relationship between perceived eco-support and eco-destination identification should be significant. It is in line with previous research, including Tartakovsky (2011), Ghosh (2016), Zagenczyk et al. (2011), and many others. The same is true for its relationship to eco-destination image. There is hardly previous research ever exploring the relationship. However, the link between the three constructs lies on eco-activity. It explains the partial mediation eco-destination image might play in the relationship between perceived eco-support and eco-destination identification. It is obvious as perceived eco-support and eco-destination image has, respectively a direct significant effect on eco-destination identification.

The relationship between need for uniqueness and eco-destination identification is conceived to be

insignificant. It could be that uniqueness could be related to identity or esteem, and could be not. Instead, in tourism context, uniqueness might be related to hedonic purpose which is short-term in nature. It explain the full role the eco-destination might play in the relationship between need for uniqueness and eco-destination identification, as need for uniqueness has an insignificant effect on eco-destination identification, while eco-destination image has a direct significant effect on eco-destination identification.

Concerning significant relationship between eco-destination image and eco-destination identification, several previous works lend support. They include, but not exhaustive to, for example, Fuller et al. (2006), Glavas and Godwin (2013).

## 5. DISCUSSION

Need for uniqueness construct might not necessarily lead to eco-destination identification. Though several researches have confirmed the relationship between need for uniqueness and identification, it might not be the case for eco-context. Uniqueness seems to be rather distant from eco-destination. While uniqueness is related to hedonic, escape, and variety values, eco-destination is related to sense of significance on natural sustainability. Though somehow uniqueness might be the source of attractiveness (Chan et al., 2010), which has a close relation to identification

(Dutton et al., 1994), Chan et al. (2010) emphasize that uniqueness is one component of attractiveness, while some works have shown the relationship between attractiveness and identification (Dutton et al., 1994; Marin & Ruiz, 2007; Marín & de Maya, 2013).

Previous studies have demonstrated that tourists seek unique including unique, visiting destination (Lloyd et al., 2011). But in eco-destination context, the resulting attractiveness would not make the tourists to the point of identifying themselves with the identification. The attractiveness only endures to the extent of which the need is satisfied. While identification means self-extension, which means persist in long time as individuals concerned live, the latter only endure as long as they devour hedonic value, when joy and curiosity are satisfied to the point to which they have no motivation left to continue the relation.

Perceived eco-support has a direct effect on eco-destination identification. Tourists commonly perceive Wakatobi as natural reserve region and international park supporting world's natural sustainability. The identification could be stronger to either domestic tourists that feel increased pride and self-esteem or foreign tourists with high eco-awareness and accordingly place high value to destination dearly that relationship between them and destination is so close as if the harm to the destination is seen as parallel to the harm to them.

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## CONCLUSION

Perceived eco-support refers to tourists' perception regarding the Wakatobi's role to support natural sustainability. Not only national government has a considerable concern to natural reserve in Wakatobi through Wakatobi status as national park, but also international institutions such as UNESCO and WWF whose interventions in natural reserve in Wakatobi are undeniable, not to mention inherent Wakatobi role itself such as its population's local wisdom that emphasizes harmonious co-existence with natural reserve with resulting harmless natural reserves utilization and Wakatobi function as buffering world biosphere. Wakatobi is known as one of world's triangle biosphere, beside Solomon Islands and the Phillipines. Knowledge and relevant information might strengthen tourists' support perception. Combination of natural beauty and natural sustainability role is an advantage that Wakatobi possesses, but the study identifies that natural sustainability role dominates in most tourists' true intention in visiting Wakatobi as tourism destination. Accordingly, tourists equipped with high eco-awareness and motivated by natural sustainability issue in Wakatobi tend to identify themselves with Wakatobi destination. Harmful practice to natural reserve in Wakatobi is perceived to be harming them. It might explain a significant effect of perceived eco support and eco-destination identification, which makes



eco-destination image only serve as a partial mediation in the relationship between perceived eco-support and eco-destination identification.

For tourists whose intention in visiting Wakatobi is motivated by hedonic desire, enjoying the sceneries Wakatobi offers suffices to satisfy their desire, without concerning its future sustainability. This kind of tourists tend to lack of identification motive with eco-destination like Wakatobi. It might explain the insignificant effect of the need for uniqueness on eco-destination identification, and thus full role eco-mediation plays in the relationship between the need for uniqueness and eco-destination identification.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should explore constructs that might mediate the relationship between need for uniqueness and eco-destination identification. It might range from memorability to distinction, self-esteem, or self-congruence. Some works have confirmed the relationship between congruence and identification, for example, Gammoh et al. (2014), Xie et al. (2015). The insertion of new and more relevant construct might solve the issue of insignificant relationship between the need of uniqueness and eco-destination identification.

Comparative analysis between foreign and domestic tourists might also enrich knowledge of tourist's motivation in eco-destination context. Foreign and domestic tourists should have different degree of eco-awareness and accordingly different reasons of visiting Wakatobi. Thus, it can be argued that they have different degrees of relationships to Wakatobi such as identification, attachment, or commitment. Future research might apply the latter's as endogenous constructs in their models. Not to mention perceived constraints to get the place, where hot places for tourism sites are rather scattered, foreign and domestic foreign should have different impressions.

Constructs that might serve as moderators also deserve attention. For example, knowledge and information might strengthen perceived eco-support, thus, might moderate the relationship between perceived eco-support and eco-destination identification.

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