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Brand gestalt scale development and validation: A takeoff from tourism destination branding

Deske W. Mandagi^{a,b}, Dave D.G. Centeno^{b,*}, Indrajit^c^a School of Economic and Business, Telkom University, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia^b Cesar E.A. Virata School of Business, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines^c Unklab Business School, Universitas Klabat, Manado, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop and validate a multidimensional measurement scale for brand gestalt. Following a systematic scale development procedure, a highly representative pool of scale items describing brand gestalt of tourism destinations was derived from relevant literature, on-site interviews, and website analyses. The dimensionality of the brand gestalt scale was confirmed using data from a sample of 366 tourists of North Sulawesi, Indonesia. The resulting brand gestalt scale is a product of the synergy of four interrelated dimensions, namely: stories, experiences, environments, and stakeholders. The scale was validated using an independent sample of 343 respondents. The proposed 19-item brand gestalt scale demonstrated good fit, reliability, and validity. Implications on collective and multi-dimensional co-creative brand scale were discussed.

1. Introduction

A brand is believed to be multidimensional and extraordinarily complex (Baker, 2007; Diamond et al., 2009) as it ideally conveys more than an identity and personality but a totality that defines its value. Despite the recent shift towards a more holistic brand concept, a full understanding of the brand as a complex social phenomenon has been elusive because branding knowledge accumulates in a piecemeal way (Diamond et al., 2009). Meanwhile, Keller (2003) argues that to advance branding theory and practice, it is imperative to adopt broader and perspectives that cover the multidimensionality of brand concept.

The present study intends to contribute to the multidimensional brand view by offering the idea of brand gestalt and developing a scale to operationalize it. Brand gestalt denotes that a brand is a multidimensional object whose parts are continuously interconnected with each other to perform a higher function as a system more than just the sum of its parts (Diamond et al., 2009). The concept postulates that the brand as a product of a complex system is best studied in its totality instead of individual parts. The power of a brand lies in its gestalt — the synergy among its components and the environment where it resides.

Brand gestalt refers to the embodiment of combinative and elemental influences enabling consumers to perceive a sense of wholeness from the brand. From the literature of the concept of a gestalt (i.e., Diamond

et al., 2009), this paper proposes that brand gestalt can be defined as a representation of a totality of how a brand is constructed, construed, and represented in the perceptions of consumers. Its main nature comes from a co-creative environment, both physical and social, wherein various creators are responsible for its construction in turn, the way the brand's totality is perceived is a reflection on how it is constructed by multiple sources of creation. Brand gestalt is operationalized through the sensations, perceptions, and socio-cultural semantics wherein descriptions of a brand are construed singly but from many actors and codes (Centeno & Wang, 2017; Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka, 2008; (Von Wallpach et al., 2017).

Intensive academic work has been devoted to develop measurement scale for various brand construct such as brand personality (Aaker, 1997), brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantello 2009), brand trust (Delgado and Alemán, 2001), and brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee; 2000). However, there has been a dearth of academic work that measures brand gestalt except for a few related explorations on it (i.e., Chernatony & Riley, 1998; Martin & Woodside, 2011b; Tierney, Karpen, & Westberg, 2016). Thus, building from a seminal work by Diamon and colleagues (2009), this study advances the notion of brand gestalt, as well as develop a measurement scale for this holistic brand construct.

Brand gestalt's conceptual definition of a brand being constructed by

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: dmandagi@up.edu.ph (D.W. Mandagi), ddcenteno@up.edu.ph (D.D.G. Centeno), indrajit@unklab.ac.id (Indrajit).

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a sociocultural backdrop consisting of narratives and multi-layered meanings through a holistic and experiential perception that creates a sense of collaboration can be differentiated from other branding concepts previously explored on in destination marketing. For example, brand image as a “mental construct based on a few impressions chosen from a flood of information” (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007, p. 15) is an intrinsic characterization of destination branding that might be selective and piecemeal salience of concepts associated with the brand. Brand gestalt, meanwhile, is conceptualized as a manifold with elements interacting with one another where the destination brand can reside. Furthermore, compared with brand identity, as how Konecnik and Go (Konecnik and Go, 2008) define it to be a brand’s aspirations, roles, and associations created by the marketer, brand gestalt’s meanings are interactions of many players both from the supply and demand side, as well as the sociocultural elements and milieu that surround the tourism destination. Similarly, brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009) refers to sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli. Finally, brand essence (Kelly, 2003) is defined as the brand’s fundamental cognitive characteristic that separates a brand from its competitors as perceived by the consumers. All these related branding concepts center on the intrinsic and symbolic nature of brands.

While these existing brand concepts, similar to brand gestalt, have been used to explain how a brand is constructed in the consumer’s mind, brand gestalt differs from these brand concepts in three important ways. First, brand gestalt takes a more comprehensive and holistic approach by considering the interrelation among the brand’s intrinsic elements and the external environment. Furthermore, brand gestalt accounts for the crucial role of storytelling which facilitates consumers to make sense of their brand experience and provide meaning to a brand. Lastly, brand gestalt considers the active role of multiple brand stakeholders in co-creating and co-constructing a brand representation in consumers’ minds.

The present study explores and develops a measurement scale of brand gestalt from the demand-side, that is, how brand gestalt is delivered to and experienced by the travelers and visitors of destinations. Coming from the definition of gestalt — whole rather than the sum of its parts — brand gestalt can intuitively take off from the customers’ point of view as they are the main processors of the matrix of multi-stakeholder interplay. In other words, travelers and visitors create the sense of wholeness, interrelatedness, and co-creation as part of the tourism experience.

Diamond and colleagues’ (2009) recent work situated the idea of gestalt in tackling sociocultural foundations of branding in their immersive and qualitative approach. Meanwhile, Martin and Woodside (2011b) explored on the sense-making of visitors using psychological concepts and mapped grounded theory propositions of tourists’ journey in a given destination. This study takes on an operational level of brand gestalt wherein a measurement scale that captures its dimensions is constructed and parsimoniously transformed into useful instrument both for theoretical development and practical utility in tourism marketing. There had been no recent attempts to operationalize brand gestalt through a measurement scale, even in the consumer agency perspective (demand-side). Furthermore, this measurement development supports and extends the seminal works mentioned above, as well as the idea of brand manifold by Berthon, Holbrook, Hulbert, and Pitt (2007) by addressing gaps in understanding tourism branding and management as called for by Keller and Lehmann (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Moreover, the interrelatedness of destination branding elements is captured in a holistic view from the perspective of the tourism wherein both the intrinsic, extrinsic, and the interactions between the two (i.e., sense-making) are all holistically combined in the visitors’ overall construction of an experience in a destination.

This study sets the context of exploration in the tourism destination branding. The tourism destination is highly experiential in nature which facilitates a special emotional bond and perception-rich connection

between the visitors and the place they visit (Baker, 2007). Therefore, assessing the gestalt of a destination will better explain this visitor-destination bonding. Also, a tourism destination composed of multi-stakeholders with various interests that may work with or against one another (Fyall, Garrod, & Wang, 2012). However, it should be noted that the aims and output of the research is to create a scale that can be tested and employed into other domains of consumptions such as products, services, among many entities in the marketing practice.

Understanding the synergy between destination stakeholders and other components is essential to enhance a tourism destination. In addition, the tourism destination brand is a multi-dimensional and complex entity (Barnes, Mattsson, & Sørensen, 2014; Pike, 2005) and should be studied in its totality (Diamond et al., 2009). Brand gestalt provides a better understanding a destination as a complex system by looking at each dimension and their continuous interaction to perform a function more than the sum of each part. In sum, this research develops a theoretical framework of the destination brand gestalt by identifying the dimensions of brand gestalt and producing a reliable valid measurement scale.

The need for a brand gestalt scale as an operationalization of a concept that has yet received much attention comes in twofold. One, the brand gestalt idea is a theoretical elaboration of gestalt in applied social sciences such as in marketing and brand management. Also, managerially, the idea of brand gestalt aids marketing and brand managers to provide insight tools for synergistic and complementary brand analytics where managers are “orchestrators and conductors, composers, to coordinate and synchronize as well as to create” (Diamond et al., 2009, p. 131). Brand gestalt is essentially a systematic concept to capture collective co-creation of brand meanings and perceptions.

1.1. Tourism destinations and brand gestalt

This study extends the concept of brand gestalt in the tourism destination context for several reasons. First, although destination and product are identical, a tourism destination is far more complex and multi-faceted compared to products or services (Pike, 2005). The destination is a complex system made up of individual products and services that can be challenging to unify (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2002). Second, the tourism product, being highly experiential, may elicit a variety of experiences from customers due to different variables involved. Third, a tourist destination has constant variables that cannot be modified to cater to consumer demands, such as the climate, the geographical location, and the social demographics of the place. Thus, destination branding needs to be differentiated from consumer branding.

Furthermore, the interests of the destination stakeholders are more heterogeneous compared to general products or services (Pike, 2005). In contrast with the orientation or the products in which more designed to meet market needs, tourism destination as a complex service must be designed to target a wider geographic market to attract a wider range of potential segments. As the consequence, the interaction of interest groups involved in the tourism stakeholder’s system must be coordinated in evaluated continuously, which in turn, contributes to the complexity of the destination development approach (Weaver & Oppermann, 2000). In addition, stakeholders have different interests and approach to initiate tourism growth, in particular, they could have different goals, strategies, visions, resources, competencies and knowledge base to tourist destination marketing.

Lastly, while there is a broad range of meaningful literature on the brand theory, there has been relatively little attention capturing the complexity involved in the essence of a multi-elements of brand destination (Pike, 2005).

The following sections provide a review of the related works on gestalt, followed by the methodology employed in constructing the proposed brand gestalt scale.

2. Literature review

2.1. Gestalt and gestalt theory

Gestalt, by definition, refers to the organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its elements (Koffka, 1935). Gestalt theory originated from psychology postulates that the true meaning of an object or scene lies in the combination of its part which creates synergy. Gestaltists believe that the human brain does not interpret things as individual items but as a combination of all its components that perform a function as a system. Likewise, gestalt deals with identifying the way people make sense and organize their perceptions. This concept postulates that one's perceptions can be influenced by various factors, such as memories, expectations, values, assumptions, and emotions, among other things (Koffka, 1935). Thus, this concept allows having a better understanding of how the human brain perceives a complex system in terms of the way perception informs the vision and the other senses (Wertheimer, 1945).

Gestalt emphasizes the importance of perception, cognition, thinking, learning, memory, and consciousness (Wertheimer, 1945). Likewise, gestalt deals with identifying the way people make sense and organize their perceptions, considering that people view the world rather subjectively than objectively. This means that one's perceptions can be influenced by various factors, such as memories, expectations, values, assumptions, and emotions, among other things (Koffka, 1935). Thus, this concept allows having a better understanding of how the human brain perceives a complex system in terms of the way perception informs vision and the other senses (Wertheimer, 1945).

While there are many principles surrounding gestalt theory, there are several principles relevant to the context of this study, particularly on how the consumer will interpret the brand as a complex object. First, a key point to understanding gestalt theory is that the human mind is capable of organizing small parts to form a global whole. The human brain interprets a complex system more than the sum of its components. This configuration operates by a set of interdependent components, rather than a random combination. Second, each whole complex system can be deconstructed and perceived as its individual parts and vice versa. Third, the structure of a gestalt refers to a network of relationships whose individual parts are interacting and working continuously to achieve a higher function. The organization and the structure of the whole form the relations and interaction between the parts. Fourth and last, a good gestalt refers to the condition wherein its components are well-organized, and the structure is complex and complete. Harmonious interaction is evident in its parts, and the integration of all parts creates a meaningful whole. Applying gestalt theory in brand context can inform one's understanding of the concept of the brand as a complex and dynamic system.

2.2. Brand gestalt

The concept of brand gestalt has not received much attention both in the marketing and tourism literature. The most notable empirical work on brand gestalt is the landmark study of Diamond et al. (2009). The authors posit that a brand is a product of a complex system. While the component of the brand itself is complex, the brand is also located within a complex environment. They further argue that a combination of elements and the influences between and among them forms the gestalt of brands. This brand gestalt is not solely found in any of its constituent parts. Instead, it is a result of the dynamic synergy between the brand attributes and the environment. Exceptionally powerful brand gestalt according to Diamond et al. (2009), are not necessarily the ones with the most captivating identity, the most significant number of associations, the largest and most interactive stakeholders, or the most opportunities for co-creation. Instead, these brands are characterized by components that exude the best synergy and elements that best complement and enhance one another.

Supporting the view of the brand as synergy among its elements, Mühlbacher et al. (2006) re-conceptualizes the brand as a complex, social phenomenon by proposing an integrated view of brands that consist of three closely interconnected elements: brand interest groups, brand meaning, and brand manifestations. According to the authors, the brand interest groups are formed by people and organizations interested in a brand. These interest groups then engage in a continuous discourse on a brand, which therefore creates, reinforces, or modifies the brand meaning. Brand manifestation is the tangible appearance of the brand which is created by manufacturers, retailers, consumers, and other brand interest groups.

Another holistic brand concept in line with the concept of brand gestalt is brand synthesis as introduced by Keller (2003). It suggests that the brand is a multidimensional construct composed by person, place, and thing. Integrating brands and other elements (e.g. stakeholder or the environment) in a highly competition marketplace is critical (Keller, 2003).

Based on these relevant holistic brand conceptualizations discussed above, this study conjecture that brand is a multidimensional construct and composed of interrelated and interdependent performing each function and forming a complex brand system, or gestalt. Brand gestalt is the manifestation of its components that continuously interacts with one another.

2.3. The brand gestalt construct

Since the literature on brand gestalt is limited, the previous work of Diamond et al. (2009) on brand gestalt was primarily used. They postulate that brand gestalt firmly grounded in its story and the interaction with its environment and is then presented to the stakeholders. Therefore, three broad hypothetical brand gestalt dimensions were considered for this study. These three dimensions are the 'story', 'environment' and 'stakeholder'.

2.3.1. Story

A brand story is much larger than just past history or experience; it is viewed as the presentation of events, myths, and narratives (Hopkinson & Hogarth-Scott, 2001). According to Fog, Budtz, Munch and Yakoboylu (2010), the story comprises various components, whether real or fictional, such as the brand's heritage, founder, highlights and crises, and core values, among others. Just like literary work, brand stories include plots, characters, and outcomes (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). A brand story qualifies as good if these four elements are present: authenticity, conciseness, reversal, and humor (Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012). It was noted that for experience products, authenticity and reversal are crucial, while for service products, conciseness and humor are imperative (Chiu et al., 2012).

In general, a story is closely related but a distinct concept from experience. Bruner (1990) argues that stories organize experience, systematize ideas, explain events, and put things into perspective. Stories guides one's thinking and aids in processing events and experiences into smaller and more meaningful chunks (Herman, 2001). People are likely to express their experience through story or narration because people's attention gravitates more easily towards the story-formed situation (Loebbert, 2003). A story or narrative processing allows consumers to interpret their brand experiences (Granitz, 2015). It creates a shared emotional experience that can create a bond between a brand and its consumers. Stories transmit pertinent information about the brand and inform the consumer's way of organizing and processing input (Pennington & Hastie, 1992); inform consumers' view of the brand and their potential actions (Keller, 2003); drive and persuade consumers (McKee, 2003); design a systematic and sequential network of perceptions and feelings about a brand (Desai & Keller, 2002; Huang, 2010); stimulate consumer awareness, empathy, meaning, comprehension, and recall (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012); enable consumer interaction by integrating consumer's experience into the brand story and strengthen

self-brand connections (Escalas, 2004).

2.3.2. Stakeholders

In the creation of brands, the active role of brand stakeholders has become a key focus of contemporary consumer research (Diamond et al., 2009). Mühlbacher et al. (2006) call this brand stakeholder as the brand interest group. This consists of people and organizations engaging about brand-related ideas through various modes, such as physical or virtual, and is done whether direct or indirect and verbal or nonverbal. Although brand stakeholders may change over time, their continuous interaction evolves the brand and contributes to brand development through the dissemination of knowledge, expectations, ways of usage, among others (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). These brand stakeholders are identified as the product suppliers or service providers, intermediaries and their staff, customers and sympathizers, or journalists.

McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) found that brand owners help the stakeholder form a brand community through the creation of a network of customers, the formation of a relationship among network members, and the reinforcement of existing ones. A brand community is composed of stakeholders who are bound together according to a set of norms that brand admirers agree upon (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Brand communities consist of 'active loyalists,' brand users who show passion for and commitment to the brand (Gruen & Ferguson, 1994). A brand is the center of this community that bonds the members together and enables them to share a system of values, beliefs, traditions, and a sense of responsibility (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Furthermore, the brand community plays an important role in the creation and maintenance of brand loyalty (McAlexander et al., 2002), effect brand commitment, and brand equity (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

A tourism destination's stakeholders consist of various groups, but these are mainly the local residents, the business people, and the tourists (García, Gómez, & Molina, 2012). Various marketing and management challenges of destinations motivate these stakeholders to engage in collaboration (Wang, 2008a, 2008b). While the strategic collaboration and synergy between destination stakeholders and other components facilitate the formation of brand gestalt, Fyall et al. (2012), meanwhile argue that the various interest of destination stakeholders can trigger a major challenge of how to aligned and be brought together to perform collaboration in a most effective way.

2.3.3. Environment

This study views brand environment as the tangible or physical aspect surrounding a brand as well as the social elements that activate the physicality of the environment. It is similar to what Diamond et al. (2009) refer to as material environment and what Keller (2003) views as places as one of the secondary sources of brand knowledge. Existing literature in marketing and branding documented the important role of the physical environment on consumers. It is found to have a significant impact on customers' perceived value and purchase intentions (Lai, Griffin, & Babin, 2009; Ryu, Lee, & Kim, 2012); customer pre- and post-purchase decision quality evaluation and satisfaction with products and services (Bitner, 1992); and inducing emotional responses that influence consumer behavior (Hoffman & Turley, 2002). A tourism destination is a large area consisting of a mix of material and non-material elements (Florek, 2005). Such material elements are complex because elements of nature, such as fresh air, vast land, pristine water, verdant trees, and others, have increasingly become an extraordinary experience for consumers (Arnould & Price, 1993). Hence, tourism destinations, in general, highlight areas that are comparable to others, like accommodation, restaurants, amenities, and other public spaces (Baker, 2007). Similarly, Qu, Kim, and Im (2011) distinguished destination environments into tangible and intangible elements. Under tangible elements are geographical features, like beaches or mountains, historical sites, and attractions. Intangible elements, on the other hand, might include culture, customs, and history.

The physical environment is a crucial element that helps build a

brand image and sets apart a service provider from its competitors (Ryu, Lee, & GonKim, 2012). It facilitates the creation of a brand virtual image (Bitner, 1992). It because a brand with an attractive physical environment can stand out against its rivals and create a distinct mental picture in consumers' minds (Koshki, Esmaeilpour, & Ardestani, 2014). Thus, as part of their branding strategies, many destination managers pay significant attention to the layout of design and ambiance to build strong brand associations in consumers' minds (Joseph & Flynn, 2015).

3. Methodology

This study followed the best practices of measurement scale development in order to produce a reliable, valid and generalizable scale for destination brand gestalt (Churchill, 1979; DeVellis, 2003; Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). The measurement scale development processes in this study consist of five stages (Fig. 1). Stages one to three address the external validity, face validity and content validity of the scale while stages four and five deal with the reliability, construct validity and nomological validity.

3.1. Destination selection

The study was conducted in the province of North Sulawesi, Indonesia. This vibrant province in the eastern part of Indonesia has been recognized as 'the rising star' tourism destination by the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia in 2019. The province has been able to achieve significant growth in its tourism sector performance by more than 400 percent in the last four years. As an emerging tourism destination, North Sulawesi offers a wide variety of tourism object from a breathtaking marine park to panoramic volcanic mountains. This tourist destination is also rich in culinary and cultural heritage.

To obtain robust result as well as enhance the external validity and scope of the scale, a representative and comprehensive set of destination objects were used. In this destination selection, 128 tourists familiar with the tourism destination in North Sulawesi were selected randomly and asked to name three specific destination places in the North Sulawesi that they visited. Destination places were then ranked according to the frequency of mention and classified into four categories: (1) Beach & sea (2) Mountain & nature (3) Festival & culinary (4) Monument & historical place. The most frequently mentioned destinations were presented in Table 1. The most popular tourist destination places each category (i.e. Bunaken National Park, Linow Lake, Tomohon Extreme Market, and Waruga Sawangan) were used as the data collection site in the item generation stage, pretest study and the exploratory study. While the second most popular destination place in each category (i.e. Lembeh Strait, Tangkoko National Park, Wakeke Food District, and Christ Blessing Monument) was used as the data collection site for the confirmatory study and nomological validity.

3.1.1. Item generation

Multi-source approaches were utilized in this study to generate the initial pool of items. A multi-source approach allows production of a comprehensive assortment of information and a highly representative pool of items (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993).

First, an intensive literature review in the fields of marketing was conducted to identify words, key phrases, or adjectives used to describe a destination brand gestalt and its components. The following previous works on branding were utilized: brand personality (Aaker, 1997), brand knowledge (Keller, 2003), service brand creation (Berry & Seltman, 2007), sociocultural branding and brand gestalt (Diamond et al., 2009), brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009; Dagger & O'Brien, 2010), and brands as complex social phenomenon (Mühlbacher et al., 2006). Furthermore, branding literature in the tourism marketing were revisited and included in the pooling of items: tourism destination image (Govers & Kumar, 2007), destination brand personality (Ekinci, Hosany, 2006; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), brand equity and loyalty (Nam, Ekinci, &

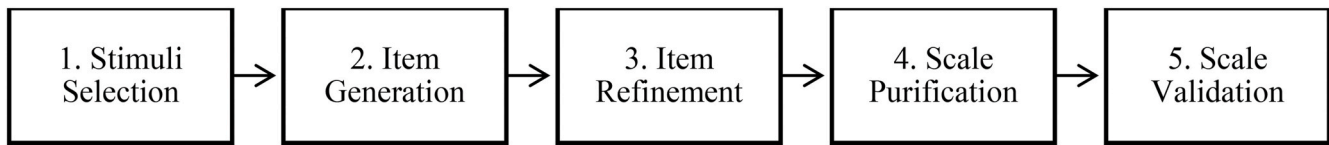


Fig. 1. Scale development stage.

Table 1
Most mentioned local tourism destination.

Beach & Sea	Mountain & Nature	Festival & Culinary	Monument & Historical Place
Bunaken National Marine Park	Linow Lake	Tomohon Extreme Market	Waruga Sawangan
Lembeh Strait	Tangkoko National Park	Wakeke Food District	Christ Blessing Monument
Nain Island	Mahawu Volcano	Tomohon International Flower Festival	Bukit Kasih
Jahir Dive Site	Lokon Volcano	Tondano Culinary Boulevard	Watu Pinawetengan
Gangga Island	Bogani Nani Wartabone National Park	Bunaken Festival	Hin Kiong Tire Temple

Whyatt, 2011), and dimensional qualitative gestalt modeling in international tourism for visitors' plans, motivations, choices, and consequences (Martin & Woodside, 2011a).

In the second process, an in-depth interview was conducted to 18 tourists from July to August 2019. The number of interviewees is based on the saturation of the information, until no more new information could be obtained from the research. Domestic, foreign, first-time, and repeat visitors participated in this study. Informants were interviewed at the end of their visits and were selected purposively based on the inclusion criteria: (i) they are visiting North Sulawesi for vacation; and (ii) they are fluent in Bahasa Indonesia or English.

The interviews last about 15–30 min. The research team approached the potential informants on the tourism spot randomly. After asking some prescreen questions about their purpose of visit and their willingness to participate in an interview, participants were then asked to describe their experience visiting the tourism destination place by answering the following questions: (i) When you visited this place, what comes to your mind? What does that place mean to you? (ii) What do you know, or have heard about the place? (iii) Among the elements that you see in this destination place, which elements are most meaningful? What do you think these elements mean to the tourist and the destination place?

Finally, additional items derived from user-generated information on the TripAdvisor website were added to the pool of items. TripAdvisor is a famous travel site with the largest number of discussions, forums, and reviews (comScore, 2018). The analysis was conducted by looking into the user-generated comments and reviews and discussion of each of the four most popular destination places (Table 1). These user-generated content function as the electronic version of word-of-mouth marketing (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2012). The purpose was to obtain as much detail as a possible description of the tourism destination brand and its components. These three-item generation processes resulted in 78 adjectives, word, or parses used in describing the brand gestalt of the destination place in North Sulawesi. These initial pool items were further trimmed down to 51 items candidates after removing inappropriate and repetitive items.

3.1.2. Item refinement

The second stage of the item development process is item refinement. The purpose of this process is to obtain feedback from the respondents

and the experts regarding the appropriateness and representativeness of the measurement items. In this stage, 51 candidate items from the item generation stage were converted into questionnaires with a seven-point Likert scale (1 = not at all descriptive, 7 = extremely descriptive).

The questionnaire was pre-tested using a convenience sample of visitors to the most popular destinations generated in the previous stage (i.e. Bunaken National Park, Linow Lake, Tomohon Extreme Market, and Waruga Sawangan). In this pre-test study, the surveyor intercepted tourists randomly on each of the four tourist sites. From 153 respondents, 81 were male (53%), most were in the age between 20 and 29 (37%), 84% were first-time visitors, and more than half of them were domestic tourists (Table 2).

Concerns regarding the wording, clearness, and length of the questions were addressed, and feedback from three experts with research expertise in marketing and tourism were incorporated to enhance the face and content validity of the measurement scale.

3.2. Scale purification

After the final revision, the questionnaire consisting of 51 proposed items generated in the previous stage was used in the first study. This seven-point Likert scale questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section indicated the purpose of the study. The second section consists of some demographic information of the respondent. The third section, asking respondents to rate how descriptive the 51 items were of the tourism destination. The survey questionnaire was presented in both English and Bahasa Indonesia. The translation of the items into Bahasa Indonesia was done by a professional translator and the items were checked and back-translated to verify accuracy.

The survey questionnaire was distributed to 512 respondents from June to September 2019. Respondents are tourists who stopped by at Bunaken National Park, Linow Lake, Tomohon Extreme Market, and Waruga Sawangan. This multi-site data collection utilized a convenience sampling method, which refers to nonprobability sampling whereby members of the target population meet specific practical criteria, such as those who were most conveniently available at a given time, easily accessible, geographically proximal, or willing to participate in the study (Dörnyei, 2007). The surveyor intercepted the tourists randomly at the tourism destination after asked some prescreen questions about their purpose of visit and their willingness to participate in the survey; they were requested to fill out the questionnaire.

After further checking and data cleaning, there were 366 usable

Table 2
Demographic of the respondents in pre-test study.

Characteristic	Category	Pre-test	
		N = 153	%
Gender	Male	81	53
	Female	72	47
Age	Under 20	43	28
	20–29	57	37
	30–39	8	5
	40–49	22	14
	50 and above	23	15
Frequency of visits	First time	128	84
	Repetitive	25	16
Country of domicile	Domestic	88	58
	International	65	42

questionnaires with a response rate of 71%. More than half of the respondents were male (55%). Most of the respondents were in the age between 20 and 29 (36%) with an average age of 34. Most of them were first-time visitors (83%). In terms of the originating country, more than half are local visitors. From the 160 foreign visitors, most of them are Chinese (58.9%), followed by Japanese (21.1%), European countries (9.3%) and other countries (6.9%). See Table 3.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was examined for the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis. The recommended value of KMO should be higher than the cutoff value 0.5 and the Bartlett spherical value should be significant with a p-value less than 0.5% (Field, 2009). The result showed that the KMO value was 0.92, higher than the cut of value 0.5 indicating the sampling is adequate. The Bartlett spherical value was significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating acceptable correlations between all items.

To verify the dimensionality of brand gestalt construct, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with principal components analysis, followed by a varimax rotation, was performed on the 51 items measurement for the brand gestalt. Items with low factor loading (<0.60) and high cross-loadings (>0.40) were removed (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). After careful theoretical consideration, 15 items (see Appendix A) were removed one at a time due to factor loading lower than the threshold value and high-cross loading on two factors. This procedure resulted in four factors consisting of items with a factor loading above the threshold.

Thus, the EFA produced 36 items remained in the brand gestalt scale as listed in Table 4. These item loaded on four factors which meet the following criteria: (i) Eigenvalues of each factor is greater than one (ii) All items have high factor loadings (iii) The factors are accounted for most (66.59%) of the variance (iv) The factors are the most meaningful and interpretable. These four factors to represent the best of dimensions brand gestalt was labeled: 'story', 'experience', 'environment' and 'stakeholders'. These dimensions of factors are based on the literature related to the prior discussion of brand gestalt as presented in the preceding sections and from the interviews with local and foreign tourists during the item generation stage. Thus, the dimensions and the items presented in the proposed scaled are informed by and based on both the theoretical development from the literature and qualitative investigation through the field interviews.

Table 4 displays the variance explained and the Eigenvalue of these factors.

To check the potential differences in the meaning of brand gestalt between the foreign and local tourists, the response of these two groups in each item were compared. Table 5 shows a comparison between foreign and local tourists for each first item in each factor. A one-factor ANOVA test was performed to check whether there were significant differences between the two groups. The result shows that there are no significant differences between foreign and local tourists.

Table 3
Demographic of the respondents in main study.

Characteristic	Category	Study 1		Study 2	
		N=366	%	N=343	%
Gender	Male	203	55	189	55
	Female	163	45	154	45
Age	Under 20	120	33	113	33
	20–29	133	36	126	37
	30–39	25	7	23	7
	40–49	47	13	45	13
	50 and above	41	11	36	10
Frequency of visits	First time	304	83	285	83
	Repetitive	62	17	58	17
Country of domicile	Domestic	206	56	190	55
	International	160	44	153	45

Table 4
Dimension of Brand Gestalt with 36 items.

	Factor Loadings	Eigen Values	Variance Explained (%)
Factor 1: Story ($\alpha = 0.94$)		10.28	27.04
The story of this destination is an important part of its brand.	0.92		
The story of this destination makes it more attractive.	0.84		
The story of this destination affects me emotionally.	0.83		
The story of this destination brings back memories.	0.81		
The story of this destination enables me to immerse in different cultures.	0.81		
This destination has an authentic story.	0.78		
This destination has a vibrant story.	0.75		
The story of this destination makes me feel connected with it.	0.72		
The story of this destination is appealing.	0.71		
The story of this destination is credible.	0.71		
The story of this destination is prestigious.	0.70		
Factor 2: Experience ($\alpha = 0.95$)		6.16	16.19
This destination is refreshing.	0.94		
This destination offers diversity in terms of attractions	0.92		
This destination satisfies my adventure needs.	0.92		
This destination creates a feeling of youth.	0.88		
This destination makes a strong impression.	0.88		
This destination puts me in a good mood.	0.81		
This destination is relaxing.	0.78		
I feel connected with this destination	0.73		
This destination offers novel experiences.	0.67		
Factor 3 Environment ($\alpha = 0.95$)		4.99	13.13
There is warm ambience and atmosphere.	0.90		
The overall landscape is good.	0.89		
The location has well-maintained physical infrastructure.	0.89		
The location has attractive aesthetic appeal.	0.88		
The location is convenient.	0.83		
The location is clean.	0.83		
There is comfortable overall temperature in the place.	0.76		
The location of the destination is accessible.	0.75		
I feel safe and secure in this place.	0.70		
Factor 4: Stakeholder ($\alpha = 0.94$)		3.88	10.2
The local resident is an important part of this destination brand.	0.90		
Other tourists' recommendation is an important part of this destination.	0.89		
Local government promoting the destination is an important part of this destination brand.	0.89		
Celebrity visiting this place is an important part of this destination brand.	0.88		
The collaboration among destinations is an important part of this brand.	0.83		
Involvement of environmentalist is an important part of this destination brand.	0.83		
Social media influencer is an important part of this destination brand.	0.76		
Total variance explained			66.59

Table 5
Local and foreign tourist descriptive statistics and one-factor ANOVA test.

Factor	Group*	Descriptive Statistic		ANOVA Test	
		Mean	St. Dev	F Statistic	p
1	Group 1	4.27	1.106	1.291	0.26
	Group 2	4.14	1.021		
2	Group 1	3.93	1.204	3.010	0.08
	Group 2	3.72	1.117		
3	Group 1	4.59	1.044	0.097	0.75
	Group 2	4.56	1.062		
4	Group 1	4.38	1.207	3.097	0.08
	Group 2	4.16	1.189		

* Group 1 Local tourist (n = 206). Group 2 Foreign tourist (n = 160)

3.3. Scale validation

In the validation stage, a different survey was carried out from independent subjects in different tourism sites: Lembeh Strait, Tangkoko National Park, Wakeke Food District, and Christ Blessing Monument. These sites are the second popular tourist destination in North Sulawesi generated in the destination selection stage (Table 1). Following the same sampling technique and data collection procedure in the exploratory survey, the questionnaires were distributed to 343 respondents from December 2019 to February 2020. More than half the respondents were male, most were young people between age 20–29, 55% are domestic tourists and 83% first-time visitors (see Table 2).

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to confirm the dimensional structure of brand gestalt and to further test for the reliability and validity of the proposed scale. After careful theoretical consideration (i.e., gestaltic axiology and epistemology stated in the above theoretical foundations, as well as the items universal appeal to marketing domain), 17 items were removed one by one due to factor loading below the threshold 0.60 (see Appendix B). The procedure was repeated until all the items meet the criteria. This resulted in a parsimonious four-dimension model with 19 items (see Table 6).

The overall fit of the constraint model to the data was also assessed with the most commonly used goodness-of-fit indicator as recommended by Bentler (1990): chi-square (χ^2), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and root mean square residual (RMR). An overall good-fit model should have CFI > 0.95, RMSEA < .06, GFI > 0.90, and RMR < 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Result indicates an acceptable model-fit where most of the measurement is better than the recommended cutoff value ($\chi^2 = 345.85$, $p = 0.000$, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = 0.97, GFI = 0.91, RMR = 0.03). Although the χ^2 was statistically significant, the rest fit indices met the acceptable values indicating adequate goodness-of-fit of the model to the data.

Following the evaluation of goodness-of-fit, the reliability, discriminant and convergent validity were examined. Reliability is achieved if Cronbach’s alpha is higher than the cutoff value of 0.70 (Cronbach, 1970). Regarding discriminant validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was compared to the square of the correlation coefficient between the two factors. Discriminant validity is satisfied if the AVE values were greater than the square of the correlation coefficient (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, the convergent validity was tested by examining the significance of the factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE) and construct reliability (CR). Convergent validity is satisfied if factor loading ≥ 0.5 (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Hair et al., 2009), AVE ≥ 0.5 , and CR ≥ 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). After the deletion of poor factor loading items, the results showed that the Cronbach’s alpha, AVE, and CR of each construct were higher than the cutoff value (see Table 6). These results confirmed the discriminant and convergent validity of the brand gestalt scale. In addition, the square root of AVE in the diagonal matrix was greater than the corresponding correlation coefficient (Table 7), showing that the discriminant validity of all factors was achieved.

For the final stage, the nomological validity of the brand gestalt scale

Table 6
Confirmatory Factor Analysis results (19-item Brand Gestalt).

Scale items	Factor loading	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Factor 1: Story		0.95	0.95	0.80
The story of this (destination) is an important part of its brand.	0.97			
The story of this (destination) makes it more attractive.	0.80			
This (destination) has authentic stories.	0.86			
The story of this (destination) affects me emotionally.	0.90			
The story of this (destination) makes me feel connected with it.	0.92			
Factor 2: Experience		0.96	0.96	0.81
This (destination) offers novel experiences.	0.96			
This (destination) puts me in a good mood.	0.89			
This (destination) gives me pleasure.	0.91			
This (destination) satisfies my adventure needs.	0.82			
This (destination) makes a strong impression.	0.93			
Factor 3 Environment		0.96	0.96	0.81
There is warm ambience and atmosphere.	0.91			
The (location) is clean.	0.83			
There is comfortable overall temperature in the place.	0.90			
The location of the (destination) is accessible.	0.90			
I feel safe and secure in the (place).	0.95			
Factor 4: Stakeholder		0.93	0.94	0.79
The local (resident) is an important part of this (destination) brand.	0.98			
The recommendation of other (tourist) is an important part of this (destination) brand.	0.87			
The involvement of local government in promoting this (place) is an important part of this (destination) brand.	0.85			
The collaboration among (destinations) is an important part of this brand.	0.83			

Note: Words in parentheses () can be replaced with appropriate entities in future investigations on brand gestalt to be applicable in product or service categories.

Table 7
Correlation matrix with square root of AVE in the diagonal.

	Environment	Story	Experience	Stakeholder
Environment	0.90			
Story	0.34	0.89		
Experience	0.08	0.30	0.90	
Stakeholder	0.12	0.23	0.04	0.89

was assessed by investigating the possible relationship of brand gestalt construct with another brand construct (i.e. brand trust, brand attachment, and brand loyalty). Nomological validity is satisfied if the suggested relationships between constructs are empirically supported (Peter, 1981). The data used for nomological validity analysis were collected using the 19 items measurement scale of brand gestalt along with measurement items of brand trust, brand attachment, and brand loyalty. Brand trust was measured using four items derived from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). Measurement for brand attachment consisted of four items scale adapted from the work of Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, and Iacobucci (2010). Brand loyalty was measured using eight items adapted from previous studies (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001 and Ha et al., 2011). Furthermore, 219 independent sample

collected in the same tourism site with study two (i.e. Lembeh Strait, Tangkoko National Park, Wakeke Food District, and Christ Blessing Monument) were used to support the generalizability of the scale. As displayed in Table 8, Pearson correlation coefficients (r^2) between each of the four brand Gestalt dimension and the three brand constructs are significant which indicate the nomological validity of the brand gestalt scale.

4. Discussion and conclusion

A destination brand is a complex entity (Barnes et al., 2014). Despite the wealth of literature of brand conceptualization, empirical work that measures destination brand complexity is sparse. This study is an attempt to develop and validate a multidimensional measurement instrument for brand gestalt. Based on the previous work of Diamond et al. (2009), the brand gestalt construct was specified. Item candidates were generated from multi-sources producing a comprehensive and highly representative pool of items. Results generated from the exploratory study confirmed the multidimensionality of the brand gestalt construct. Four dimensions of brand gestalt namely, story, experience, environment, and stakeholder were identified. All these four dimensions are viewed as interrelated and interconnected elements of brand gestalt. Furthermore, 19 items indicators were used to develop a valid and reliable measurement scale. The confirmatory study reveals that the brand gestalt scale demonstrates a high degree of reliability and validity. Moreover, the nomological validity of the scale is confirmed through the high correlation with destination brand trust, attachment, and loyalty. The nomological test provides a ground that the proposed brand gestalt scale has nomological connections to related concepts, while preserving its unique ontology by it being a multi-perspective from the elements of gestalt.

The complete list of items (in Table 4) can be fairly utilized in a destination brand assessment as these items are directly obtained from this specific context. Nonetheless, the deletion of the 17 items has a considerable theoretical basis apart from the statistical evidence of having low factor loadings. For example, the applicability of the items in other domains such as a tangible product or a perceptible service is highly taken into consideration. More importantly, the gestaltic appeals of the deleted items are aesthetically lower than the selected items.

This study aims to contribute to the literature by enriching the limited discussion concerning the complexity and multidimensionality of brand concepts, particularly in the tourism environment. Furthermore, this study fills a significant gap in the brand gestalt by proposing a reliable, valid, and generalizable measurement instrument of destination brand gestalt. Researchers can have a valid assessment of the complexity of a destination brand and the impact of each component of brand gestalt.

The identified dimensions of brand gestalt also function as clues for the enhancement of the tourist-destination relationship. Therefore, practitioners should consider the destination brand (and any other brands) as a complex system and be conscious of the interaction of each dimension when planning or executing strategies in order to enhance the destination brand gestalt. In addition, destination management organizations could use the proposed measurement instrument as a benchmarking tool for a brand gestalt of a particular destination with other destination.

Table 8
Nomological validity for brand gestalt scale.

Brand gestalt Dimension	Brand trust		Brand attachment		Brand loyalty	
	r^2	p	r^2	p	r^2	p
Story	0.52	0.00	0.71	0.00	0.66	0.00
Experience	0.11	0.00	0.42	0.00	0.42	0.00
Environment	0.38	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.43	0.00
Stakeholder	0.18	0.01	0.18	0.01	0.71	0.00

4.1. Brand gestalt and co-creation: a next research step

The proposed brand gestalt scale is connected to the idea of Tierney et al. (2016) on the brand meaning co-creation suggesting that systems are responsible for the constructed meanings of a brand. In the proposed scale, systems are manifested more directly in the environments and stakeholder-based perceptions of brand meanings. Meanwhile, Chernatony and Riley (1998) focused on the perspectives of the managers themselves in collating the components of brand complexity. All four dimensions offered in the brand gestalt scale in this paper are reflective of the perceived interplay and synergy among all possible players and actors surrounding the functions of the brand, albeit this present study takes off from the perspective of the tourists and visitors (i.e., demand side).

Martin and Woodside (2011b) used storytelling as a tool to construct dimensions of experiences and meaning-making among tourists which coincide with the experiences and story dimensions on the offered brand gestalt scale in this paper. Overall, the findings of the systematic scale development employed in this paper are theoretically consistent with recent studies and explorations on the notion of a brand gestalt, albeit this paper approaches the methodological and theoretical treatment of gestalt as a brand concept which scans the roles of many players and the perceived co-creation among them in the overall brand assessment. Nevertheless, brand gestalt can be used to assess the extent of co-creation of a destination brand from the perspective of the customers.

Fig. 2 illustrates the co-creative potential of brand gestalt as a holistic construction of collaborators or stakeholders. The figure also illustrates this study's purpose of taking into account the tourists or customers as part of the demand side as a starting point of the brand gestalt measurement development.

The necessary next step is to validate the constructed brand gestalt scale by involving other important stakeholders in the tourism space: local residents and tourism workers, local government tourism units, the media, travel agencies, and the like. This paper represents the tourists' side of brand gestalt conceptualization as manifested by the scale. However, by completing the sources of co-creation would develop the grand narratives, multiplicity of meanings, and the entirety of holistic experience of a destination brand.



Fig. 2. Brand gestalt co-creative view among stakeholders and this research's starting point with tourists.

5. Limitations and other extensions

The present study is subject to several limitations and their identification should help to refine future research efforts. First, while this study highlighted that the brand gestalt concept should account for the active role of multiple stakeholders in the brand co-creation process, the measurement scale for brand gestalt proposed in this study is looking from the consumers' point of views. It can be argued that brand gestalt essentially is how a brand is represented in the perceptions of consumers. Thus, measuring brand gestalt must start from the consumer's perspective as the central processors of multi-stakeholder interplay in brand and branding. Further study could integrate both supply and demand side of brand gestalt by tackling multi perspectives of the consumer and all possible players and actors surrounding the functions of the brand.

Secondly, the tourism destination is the basis of the scale development in this study. Although tourism destination is said to be more complex than a general product or service, they are somehow different in many ways. Tests on product or service domains may further validate the brand gestalt scale.

Also, the research context in this study took place only in one country. Comparisons and further improvement of the brand gestalt scale in different countries with unique destination branding are suggested. For instance, Indonesia can be seen as a tropical and distinctly

Asian destination. Other gestaltic features can be explored in other continents' tourism destinations.

Moreover, demographic differences on how brand gestalt dimensions are given emphasis. Also, it is interesting to find out how different tourism destinations match the gestaltic scores from different demographic segments (cf. Sharma & Gursosy, 2015). Meanwhile, brand gestalt's evolution over time can also inform how a tourism destination dynamically reconstructs its meanings and perceptible elements (e.g. Brouder et al., 2016; Pavlovich, 2014). Likewise, future studies may investigate the antecedents and consequences of brand gestalt. Moreover, it would be worthwhile to analyze the association between brand gestalt and other brand constructs, such as brand image, brand equity, brand attitude or merely intention to purchase. Furthermore, it is interesting to investigate whether investing in brand gestalt pays off for companies, or whether strong brand gestalt leads to superior financial performance.

Author statement

Deske Mandagi was responsible for: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Project administration. Dave Centeno: was responsible for: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision. Indrajit was responsible for: Methodology, Resources, Investigation

Appendix A

List of 15 items removed in the exploratory stage.

The story of this destination helps me appreciate my visit.

This destination makes me feels like home.
 The story of this destination is romantic.
 This destination is pure.
 This destination sets my mind at peace.
 The story evokes pleasant sensations of the destination.
 This destination makes me feel like exploring a new world.
 I consider this destination as a paradise.
 This destination makes me feels like escaping my daily routine.
 This destination has hotels and accommodations.
 This destination has restaurants.
 The story of this destination is fun.
 Local culinary is an essential part of this destination brand.
 The story of this destination helps me appreciate my visit.
 This destination makes me feels like home.

Appendix B

List of 17 items removed in the confirmatory stage.

This destination has a vibrant story.

The story of this destination brings back memories.
 The story of this destination enables me to immerse myself in different cultures.
 The story of this destination is appealing.
 The story of this destination is credible.
 The story of this destination is prestigious.
 This destination is refreshing.
 This destination offers diversity in terms of attractions.
 This destination creates a feeling of youth.
 This destination is relaxing.
 The overall landscape is good.
 The location has well-maintained physical infrastructures.
 The location has an attractive aesthetic appeal.
 The location is convenient.
 The involvement of environmentalists is an important part of this destination brand.
 Social media influencer is an important part of this destination brand.
 Celebrity visiting this place is an important part of this destination brand.

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