


## Article

# A Tourist's Gaze on Local Tourism Governance: The Relationship among Local Tourism Governance and Brand Equity, Tourism Attachment for Sustainable Tourism

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**Abstract:** Taking note of the role played by local tourism governance as viewed from the tourist's gaze, this study examined the effects of local tourism governance on the awareness of local tourism brand equity and local tourism attachment as perceived by tourists. This study also attempted to identify the role and importance of externally-expressed local tourism governance. In total, 439 samples were collected from tourists who had recently experienced local tourism in South Korea; these samples were analyzed using SPSS. The implications derived from the results of the analysis are as follows. First, regarding the effects that the operation of local tourism governance have on brand equity, it was identified that the factors of partnership and institutionalization had significant positive effects on both brand images and brand awareness, where the effect of partnership was the strongest, and where participation only had a significant positive effect on the brand images. Second, regarding the relationship between the operation of local tourism governance and brand equity, it was found that, from the viewpoint of tourists, the governance support system negatively affects brand equity. Lastly, as has been shown in previous studies, both brand images and brand awareness—which are two core sub-factors of local tourism-brand equity—had significant effects on local tourism attachment; of them, brand awareness played a stronger role in the formation of local tourism attachment. Future studies should examine the functional role of local tourism governance based on field investigations at multiple destinations, checking the actual effects of local tourism governance while focusing on the associations between the role of local tourism governance and actually measurable indicators, such as revitalization of the local industrial economy, increases in income, performance in terms of attracting tourists, and improved satisfaction with local tourism.



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**Keywords:** local tourism; governance; brand equity; tourism attachment

## 1. Introduction

Tourists aim to experience the external environments of destinations—such as their society, culture, and nature—that are novel to them with curiosity and interest, and they integrate the social, cultural, natural, and artificial attributes of the destinations to comprehensively compose notional and visual images of the destinations through what is called the tourists' gaze [1]. In the past, tourists simply focused on diverse attractive points of destinations, such as their natural beauty and their historical and cultural values; however, tourists have recently begun to show increasing interest in the operation systems of destinations, their communities, and the roles and attitudes of their members. From this viewpoint, the establishment of local governance to facilitate the cooperation of various stakeholders has already been achieved as a major task in revitalizing local tourism [2]. Local tourism governance is a public-private joint decision-making and operation system to solve tourism issues, and it provides many implications for the activation of local tourism, as it judges the cooperative relationships between actors as a central element [3]. Beyond the fact that local tourism governance can be simply understood as a result of consultations

with the government rather than official guidelines set by the government at the network level (i.e., viewpoint in a narrow sense), local tourism governance should be understood as the role and function of social adjustment in the tourism region from a broad perspective (i.e., viewpoint in a broad sense).

In the context wherein the natural environment, culture, and cultural sentiments in a region, which are what comprise the background of tourism, are not sufficiently understood, the problems involved in conflicts with local residents and stakeholders are expressed as problems of regional development [4]. Therefore, to foster development possibilities, it is very important to reconcile the interests of the involved parties, such as private activists, local merchants, and local residents [5], and since local tourism governance provides a mechanism for resolving conflicts between stakeholders [6] in situations where conflicts may occur in the region, local tourism governance for the establishment of a sustainable development policy for local tourism is becoming increasingly important [7]. A representative operation case is in the form of a destination management organization (DMO), which is attracting attention by securing regional competitive advantages, establishing sustainable plans, executing the plans, strengthening governance, preventing overlapping and gaps, constructing a tourism culture in the tourism region, improving tourism productivity, building a strong brand identity, etc. [8].

In particular, since many leading tourist destinations have reached the stage of providing the best accommodation, attractive elements, and various high-level services in recent years, the differentiation of tourist destinations through the formation of a special brand identity should be considered more important than tourist-destination marketing efforts.

Regional tourism governance, including the regional DMO, can promote the core functions of organic combination and rational decision making of stakeholders in the region, and eventually become a criterion for the evaluation of the tourist destination and region for brand equity and identity in the gaze of tourists visiting for the purpose of regional tourism.

Unlike other industries, in the case of tourism products, the formation of a strong brand is an important factor for decision making among visitors of regions and destinations due to the complexity of the composition system and the necessity of linked services, and it is important for the management of destinations to secure visitors who have established brand equity and formed attachment to local tourism, because such visitors do not change their preferred destinations easily, despite the services provided by competing destinations [9].

This study focused on the formation of brand equity in the process of the formation of tourists' attachment to the destination while centering on the importance of the formation of tourists' attachment to the destination. In general, brand equity is formed by consumers as a result of various marketing efforts and product values, and many researchers, including Aaker (1992), have verified the roles and influences of various variables on brand equity [10]; however, there have been no recent attempts to find a connection point with local tourism governance in consideration of the tourist's gaze, such as brand equity and local tourism resulting from the role of local tourism governance, which has recently been receiving attention through ESG (Environment, Social, Governance) management, etc. Therefore, this study intends to verify the fact that local tourism governance not only plays roles in diverse networks related to convergent linkages with the community and the government and local tourism, but that it can also contribute to the evaluation of the tourism region and destination based on its positive functional role as shown to tourists by examining the effect of the tourist's gaze regarding the functional role of local tourism governance on the formation of local tourism brand equity and local tourism attachment.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Local Tourism Governance

In the case of the concept of governance, the value to pursue, the mode of system operation, and the mutual relationship between the subjects are often defined differently depending on one's perspective. This is because the concepts of governance that have

been magnified due to the increase in the perceived importance of participation in civil society since the 1990s have not been unified, so the scopes of their application remain quite diverse [11]. Despite the theoretical ambiguity of governance, its importance and necessity will contribute to the structuralization of a new social order [12]. Researchers have discussed the notion that governance should be conceptualized as a horizontal complex organization among mutually dependent actors in the organization aspect [13] or act as an institution and procedure for citizens' presentations of opinions and decision making regarding public concerns as an aspect of the decision-making process [14]. The governance of tourist destinations has complex and diverse roles, and as it has begun to perform the function of a network between members, it has sometimes developed into the form of a DMO [15].

Governance is a new way to solve social problems that emphasizes cooperation between organizations and transcends existing organizational boundaries and policies to create new public values through interactions between autonomous actors and organizations [16]. Governance should be accompanied by transparency, efficiency, and accountability [17], and it includes concepts such as principled engagement, shared motivation, and securing the capacity for joint action in a cooperative model [18]. Cooperative governance is defined as the government's ability to exercise political power in the public policy decision-making process and its organizational structure, thus transcending the boundaries of government, public institutions, the private sector, the civic sphere, and the political service of the infra-based power [19]. It breaks away from the practice of rule by the central government to pursue a joint problem-solving method in which stakeholders cooperate with each other, and network governance is explained as a way of ruling by the network of the public and private sectors and the third sector [20], or as an assembly of coordinating and surveillance activities that allows governments to survive through various cooperative partnerships [21]. In other words, governance means a state in which various actors in the region build a network and jointly participate in decision making and execution at a horizontal level through interactions based on trust and cooperation, and the actors include members such as related organizations in the region, expert groups such as universities, and interest groups [22]. In addition, it should not be understood as a simple process, and the necessity of a policy based on a cooperative understanding achieved through diverse and wide-ranging participation has been explained [23].

Hilliard and Norman (1999) pointed out that openness and transparency are structural devices for desirable governance; they argued that they are alternatives to secure openness and transparency, and that dialogues with the public on issues such as public education and policy making, and general citizens' participation in policy formation and publication processes, are important [24]. Newman (2001) pointed out social adjustment by network, autonomy, the general public's participation, and democracy as normative values for realizing desirable governance; in the same context [25], Lynn and Hill (2001) presented social adjustment by voluntary cooperation as an important factor [26]. In general, three perspectives are presented for the concept of governance: First, the perspective that explains governance as a network between the government and society explains governance as a network in which the government, the market, and civic groups interact [3,13]. Second, the perspective that explains governance as a collective decision-making method between the government and society considers governance to be a cooperative decision-making method in which governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations participate [27–29]. Third, the perspective that explains governance as a public operating system defines governance as a joint operating system between the government and society [3,12]. That is, the logic that the traditional government bureaucracy alone can hardly adapt to the changed tourism environment and should have limitations in solving the problems of cultural tourism, which has a particularly convergent character, is the core of governance theory [30], and governance can be defined as a structure in which various stakeholders efficiently coordinate the political decision-structure and management in a self-organizing network management manner [31],

thereby increasing the interactions between citizens and the government and mitigating social conflicts [32].

In particular, to successfully coordinate and manage the connection with the interests of the local community in the field of tourism, it is important to understand the formation factors for local tourism governance [33,34]. Although local tourism governance is based on the tourist industry, it basically plays the role of local community governance in which local residents take the lead in solving various local problems. In a study of community governance, Curtis (1999) presented the elimination of the concentration of power, decentralized power structure, guaranteed participation of interest groups, empowerment of local residents, and willingness to actively participate as formation factors for governance [35], and Stoker (1998) mentioned that interdependence, exchange of resources, game rules, autonomy, and networks between organizations are necessary for the formation of community governance and presented openness, participation, and mutual cooperativeness as factors in the proper formation of local governance. Among them, openness includes the presentation of opposing opinions, expansion of participation by the underprivileged, and an increase in opportunities for community actors to participate; participation refers to publication and discussion in the overall policy processes through the participation of members as important; and mutual cooperativeness means that autonomous and continuous mutual cooperation among members is realized for regional decentralization [25]. Since the cooperation plan of the local community and the formation of organic networks around the conservation and development of tourism resources that can realize the effect of local economy by constructing harmony between the protection of physical resources and tourism culture and industries are important as main keys to solve the obstacles to local tourism governance that affect the execution of the development of the region through a theoretical and empirical approach [36], then to maintain social continuity of the development of local tourism, continuous cooperation and coordination are required in various fields, such as related policies and systems, planning and implementation, and evaluation, including local residents, local governments, tourism companies, local experts, and interest groups [37].

That is, local tourism governance is a network system in which various actors related to local tourism voluntarily participate in a process in order to solve the problems facing local tourism through communication and cooperation in horizontal relationships, and it includes decision making in which multiple stakeholders related to issues involved in local tourism participate and exercise influence.

## 2.2. Local Tourism Brand Equity

Tourists perceive destinations and regions per se as brands, and they ultimately determine their tourism destination by evaluating the value of the assets of the brand as such [38]. Therefore, the importance of regions and destinations in tourism explains the necessity of brands for the role of commodities in general industries. Basically, the concept of regional places includes the physical environment and activities that involve social and mental processes [39], and a brand of a regional place is a social network, which is the visual, verbal, and behavioral expectations or expressions of the place based on the minds of those who consume the place or those who live in that place [40]; moreover, it is expressed as an assembly of the meanings, knowledge, attachment, commitment, and satisfaction associated with the particular place [41]. Regional place brands are used to inform regions and places through comprehensive branding strategies across the economy, politics, society, and culture [42]. They also represent an important material for tourism marketing, in that not only can geographical locations be distinguished from each other, a series of expectations or images for places can be created through place brands made through the active participation of local residents [43,44]. Furthermore, brand equity should be understood as a concept of local identity formed based on the experience of visitors, and therefore should be viewed as a dimension of long-term loyalty formed as good memories accumulate, rather than familiarity formed in a short time [45].

Studies related to brand equity have been conducted as part of brand building based on relationships with customers [46]; consequently, brand equity means intangible values formed based on the mindsets of customers in terms of factors such as brand awareness, attitudes toward brands, preference for brands, brand loyalty, and subjective quality perceived by customers [47]. From a marketing perspective, brand equity means the total combination of personal beliefs such as brand association and images [48], and as it is conceptualized as amounts of money at the level of brand values, brand equity means the monetary value that can be paid as a price to buy a certain brand in comparison with other brands that have similar functions [49]; this can also be said to be the overall brand preference according to favorable customer attitudes when customers know the brand well and have positive images about the brand [50].

First, among the components of brand equity, brand awareness is an essential dimension that constitutes brand equity. This is because brand awareness is the process that comprises the first step for the formation of and increase in brand value, and the destination must be recognized to some extent by the customer prior to a potential decision [51]. Brand awareness reflects a consumer's ability to recognize a particular brand in many different situations [10], and it means the strength of a remembered brand [52].

Second, among the components of brand equity, brand images mean the attributes expected by tourists to be possessed by the destination [53]. Brand images are defined as the perception of a brand as reflected by the associations in consumers' memory [54], and this perception is a rational or emotional one held by consumers about a particular brand [55]. That is, the brand images of a destination represent a series of associations or impressions given to the destination. They are composed of various forms of individual perceptions according to various properties of the destination, and they can be said to be the sum of accumulated impressions, beliefs, thoughts, expectations, and feelings about the destination formed based on experience [56].

In some cases, they can be understood as a holistic perception of cognitive and emotional evaluation [57]. While the cognitive element represents the beliefs and information that tourists have about the properties of the destination, the emotional element means the emotional feeling or reaction to the various characteristics of the destination [58].

### 2.3. Local Tourism Attachment

Given that the target of local tourism is a combination of various tourism factors including the environment, local tourism attachment has a morphological characteristic that is similar to place attachment. Place attachment is a concept that arises when people come to know a certain place and give their own value to that place, and it refers to people's emotional connection and solidarity with a certain place, while also referring to the emotional attachment that people come to have to a meaningful place [59]. It is sometimes defined as the emotional bond people have to a region where they can feel safe and comfortable [60]. Because place attachment is a concept in which the aspect of the environment of the place and the human aspect are combined, and because places show deep association with the formation of the identity of a human, place attachment can be said to be the state of dependence on the environment, human, and the place perceived by a person, and when seen from the perspective of a causal relationship between environments and human behaviors, place attachment can be said to be humans' response to the environment, where the two sides of the recognition of the environment and tangible actions are combined and expressed individually or collectively [61].

Place attachment is expressed in diverse ways, such as through place dependence, place identity, and local attachment. Here, attachment refers to people's emotional connection to and solidarity with a certain object (region), and people with greater attachment to a region exhibit increased happiness, satisfaction with life, and optimistic views compared to those with less attachment [62]. The attachment was introduced as a concept of attachment to spatial places such as family and hometown as well as the sympathy, respect, gratitude, and interest that humans show to a certain place while examining the relationship between



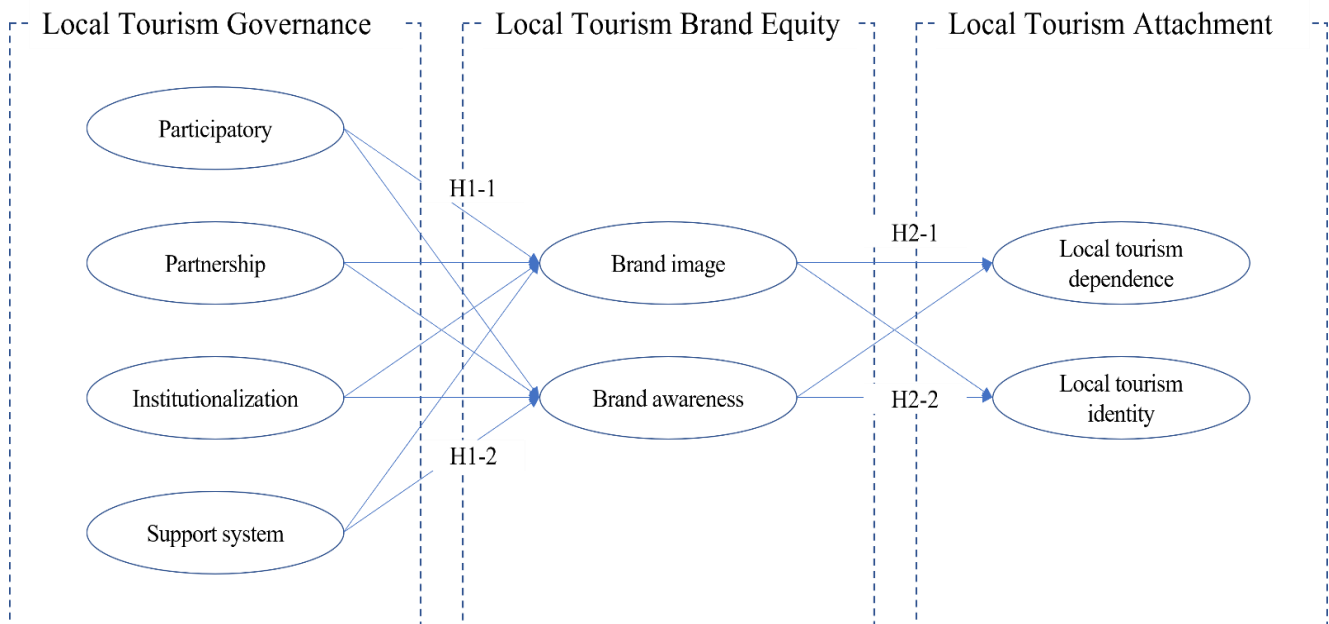
humans and the environment through the value of place [63]. In general, people visit various places in their daily life to experience different associations, and the degrees of attachment to places appear differently due to differences in perceptions of places and emotional bonds to places [64]. As such, place attachment is a concept in which place, in the form of the environments surrounding individuals, and human communion, in its emotional aspect, are combined, and it is not formed automatically at places per se but is closely related to individuals' consciousness, experience, psychological responses, and symbolizing actions [65].

From a multidimensional perspective, place attachment is sometimes categorized into place identity, place dependence, and place rootedness [66]. Here, place identity means an individual's emotional immersion into a place based on the purpose, meaning of life, and emotion of the individual [67]; place dependence means an individual's attachment to a place and an action-oriented attitude [68]; and place rootedness means the recognition of emotions that have settled in one's unconscious while staying in one place for a long time [69]. Although multilateral approaches to measuring the concept of place attachment more comprehensively have been presented, place attachment has mainly been composed of two areas: place identity and place dependence [70]. Whereas place dependence can be seen as the perception of a place as a means to achieve a purpose [57], place identity can be defined as a meaningful connection existing between an individual and a target of identity such as a place, and the connection as such means the synchronization of the attributes of the place—which is the target of identity—with one's concept [71]. The concept of identity means the tendency of the true shape possessed by individuals or groups existing in the human environment, and it can be largely divided into the sameness of correlational commonality and individuality according to exclusive uniqueness [63]. Further, according to the social identity theory, individuals can strengthen their self-awareness when they are identified with a social category by integrating the positive characteristics of that social category within their perception [38]. Therefore, identity refers to continuity that is not to be fundamentally changed even with time, a sense of belonging and 'getting along well' with the surrounding environment as a citizen, and identity, in having a feeling of identification with the region; at the same time, it also includes the uniqueness, in that the unique self-identity of the region is differentiated from other regions, and excellence or individuality, in that this differentiation has an element that is superior to those of other cities.

### 3. Study Method

#### 3.1. Study Hypothesis Setting and Study Model

Although the importance of sustainable development in the tourism sector is emphasized and cognitively generalized in relation to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), evidence of progress toward implementation is hard to find [72]. This study aimed to figure out the role of regional tourism governance for a sustainable tourism model for regional tourism and verify the effect of the role of regional tourism governance on brand equity and regional tourism attachment to identify its importance. In order to achieve the study purpose, a causal relationship between local tourism governance, brand equity, and local tourism attachment was established, and a research model as shown in Figure 1 was established.



**Figure 1.** Research Model.

### 3.1.1. Functions of Local Tourism Governance and Local Tourism Brand Equity

When seen from the perspective of institutionalism, governance can be understood as a sort of institution, and since it is based on the government's operating system, governance follows the government's management system and the code of conduct of policy actors [73]. However, as with a system in general system theory, which affects output through continuous interactions with the external environment [74], governance as an extended operating system comes to show results through interactions with the environments surrounding policies. In this process, the composition and network of governance can act as a major factor in determining the outcome of major policies in the region, and a series of structural relationships between the policy environment, governance, and policy performance is formed [23]. As such, the system may cause effects that differ from those of simple government policies. In particular, regarding local brands, the formation of partnerships with stakeholders plays an important role in relation to major decision making in the process of the establishment of brand policies in the region [75]. The brand of the region can be established according to the results of stakeholder networks and partnerships based on local residents' participation and vision sharing. Eventually, the lack of coordination or partnership between stakeholders, which is the basis of governance, increases the gap between consumers and brands, thereby negatively affecting the development of a friendly brand image [41]. Therefore, local tourism governance is expected to have a significant effect on the formation of local tourism brand equity depending on the role it plays. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were established.

**H1.** *The operation of local tourism governance will have a positive effect on local tourism brand equity.*

**H1-1.** *The operation of local tourism governance will have a positive effect on local tourism brand awareness.*

**H1-2.** *The operation of local tourism governance will have a positive effect on the local tourism brand image.*

### 3.1.2. Local Tourism Brand Equity and Local Tourism Attachment

When a specific target is regarded as a brand, high brand equity can be said to be a strong motivator that attracts visitors [76]. Brand experience comes to form brand

attachment or loyalty based on the consumer's ultimate reaction to the brand [77]. When consumers feel positive emotions such as pleasure and joy, they experience emotional attachment to the brand and in turn continue to purchase the brand [78]. Even in the context termed a place instead of a product, place attachment is formed on the premise of long-term repetitive activities or time, but even when the experience is for a short time, if the experience is meaningful to the person, the attachment can be formed naturally [79]. It can be seen that brand attachment to a general product conceptualizes a relationship with that brand through emotional stability in experiencing the particular brand for a long time [80]; attachment to destination can also be seen to be formed based on the formation of the relevant local tourism brand equity. Local tourism attachment is positively formed only when the social and physical resources of the local environment are satisfactory for the needs and preferences of tourists, and in drawing tourists' support in place marketing is a very important factor [81], as well as a major attribute that affects the attitudes and behaviors of tourists toward local tourism [82]. Therefore, this study focused on the relationship between local tourism brand equity and local tourism attachment, and it accordingly established the following hypotheses.

**H2.** *Local tourism brand equity will have a positive effect on local tourism attachment.*

**H2-1.** *Local tourism brand equity will have a positive effect on local tourism dependence.*

**H2-2.** *Local tourism brand equity will have a positive effect on local tourism identity.*

### 3.2. Study Procedure and Sampling

This study focused on the role of governance in revitalizing local tourism, and it attempted to identify its role through the effect of the operation of governance on the formation of local tourism brand equity and local tourism attachment. Therefore, theoretical concepts were established based on previous studies on local tourism governance, brand assets, and local tourism attachment, and models and hypotheses were structured based on the derived factors and detailed measurement indicators in the empirical process.

The population in this study for empirical analysis was limited to South Koreans traveling to domestic destinations because they were defined as subjects who can intuitively judge the destination's operating system and operating body and can therefore judge the functional role of governance pursued by this study. To extract samples that can represent the characteristics of the population, among tourists who have experienced domestic travel at least once within the last year, those who indicated that they could recall the destinations experienced during the travels and the operators of the tourism targets were selected with selective questions asking about the foregoing. The questionnaire survey in this study was conducted in the form of an online survey through a specialized research company for about 5 days from 4 July to 8 July 2022. Only the tourists who met the conditions were selected using a form of preliminary questions (to select samples that meet the reference conditions, such as experience in domestic travel), and a questionnaire was distributed along with information on how to respond and how to fill in the questionnaire (in this process, quotas were divided based on gender and age groups (with a total of 10 groups) to compose the respondents). Following this, the responded and returned questionnaire sheets were collected and used as survey samples. Among the respondents that met the suitability of survey subjects, 450 questionnaires sheets were collected in total through the process of removing subjects with defects in the samples (cases where responses were consistent, missing responses were found, etc.), and 439 of them were ultimately used in the main analysis as samples.

### 3.3. Measurement Tools and Analysis Methods

Local tourism governance can be defined as "a decision-making system and operating network composed of various stakeholders including the government and local govern-



ments, private companies and academic organizations for the purpose of revitalizing local tourism". Regarding the standards and characteristics of governance construction and operation, many scholars have suggested various classification systems, which have been reduced and organized to derive four components in total: participation, partnership, institutionalization, and support system. Among the measurement tools, first, participation was composed of four variables, which are voluntary participation, a sense of community, professionalism, and networks; second, partnership was composed of four variables, which are reliability, cooperation and conflict management, accountability, and communication; third, institutionalization was composed of three variables, which are role division, norms (participation guarantee and operation standards), and independence; and finally, the support system was composed of three variables, which are institutional support, administrative support, and financial support. (See Table 1)

Local tourism brand equity was defined as "the intangible value of a destination that can gain an advantage over other competitive destinations with the differential effects of the destination perceived by tourists made as a result of various tourism marketing communications", and it was composed of two subfactors which are judged to be core values of local tourism—that is, brand image and brand awareness—and commonly used by many researchers including Aaker (1992) to explain brand equity [10]. The local tourism brand image was composed of four variables: differentiated individuality, familiar image, brand trust, and unique characteristics, while local tourism brand awareness was composed of three variables: destination association, recognition level, and destination reputation.

Local tourism attachment was defined as "the degree of emotional, dependent, and functional attachment to places, local residents, and society perceived by individuals occurring in the overall experiencing processes of tourism activities". Local tourism attachment was subdivided into two subfactors by judging local tourism dependence as the degree of perception of the degree of functional attachment to the destination as a place for concrete tourism activities, while judging local tourism identity as the degree of perception of the degree of the symbolic or emotional attachment to the tourist destination as a place for tourism activities [83]. Local tourism dependence was composed of three variables, i.e., selection priority, repeatability of visits, and continuity of stay time, and local tourism identity was composed of four variables, i.e., special differentiation, emotional bond, sympathetic sensibility, and regional attachment.

**Table 1.** Measurement items.

| Factor                     | Sub-Factor           | Variable  | Reference             |
|----------------------------|----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Local tourism governance   | Participatory        | Voluntary participation, a sense of community, professionalism, and networks          | [3,22,25,26,33,84–90] |
|                            | Partnership          | Reliability, cooperation, accountability, and communication                           |                       |
|                            | Institutionalization | Role division, norms, and independence  |                       |
|                            | Support system       | Institutional support, administrative support, and financial support                  |                       |
| Local tourism brand equity | Brand image          | Differentiated individuality, familiar image, brand trust, and unique characteristics | [10,44,91–95]         |
|                            | Brand awareness      | Destination association, recognition level, and destination reputation                |                       |

Table 1. Cont.

| Factor                   | Sub-Factor               | Variable  | Reference  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|------------|
| Local tourism attachment | Local tourism dependence | Selection priority, repeatability of visits, and continuity of stay time                  | [55,63,64] |
|                          | Local tourism identity   | Special differentiation, emotional bond, sympathetic sensibility, and regional attachment |            |

The questionnaire sheets collected in the process of statistical analysis were subjected to data coding and cleaning using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)/WIN ver.26.0 statistical program (11 questionnaires were removed in this process, and 439 samples were ultimately established). A frequency analysis was conducted to identify the demographic characteristics of the survey subjects and thus evaluate the adequacy of the samples. To understand the adequacy of the measurement tools, basic data were reviewed through reliability analysis and validity analysis. The correlations between the constructs were identified through correlation analysis, and the hypotheses were tested through multiple regression analysis based on the regression coefficients estimated by the causal relationship established in each hypothesis.

#### 4. Analysis Results

##### 4.1. Demographic Analysis

The results of the frequency analysis conducted to identify the demographic characteristics of the survey subjects were checked. According to the results, overall, the adequacy of the survey subjects as survey samples of this study conducted with domestic tourists with domestic tourism experience was identified, and all the items for understanding the characteristics of the survey samples—i.e., other income levels, marital status, education level, occupation and residence, and behavioral characteristics during travel (frequency of travel, stay, expenditure)—showed generalized distributions. It was therefore judged that samples with characteristics very similar to the characteristics of the population of the survey subjects had been extracted. (See Table 2)

Table 2. Demographic analysis (N = 439).

| Characteristic |                               | N   | Ratio (%) | Characteristic             |                 | N   | Ratio (%) |
|----------------|-------------------------------|-----|-----------|----------------------------|-----------------|-----|-----------|
| Gender         | Male                          | 203 | 46.2      | Education level            | High school     | 79  | 18.0      |
|                | Female                        | 236 | 53.8      |                            | College         | 48  | 10.9      |
| Age            | 20–29                         | 94  | 21.4      |                            | University      | 258 | 58.8      |
|                | 30–39                         | 98  | 22.3      |                            | Graduate school | 54  | 12.3      |
|                | 40–49                         | 94  | 21.4      | Marriage                   | Married         | 242 | 55.1      |
|                | 50–59                         | 80  | 18.2      |                            | Single          | 176 | 40.1      |
|                | Over 60                       | 73  | 16.6      |                            | Others          | 21  | 4.8       |
| Career         | Office worker                 | 208 | 47.4      | Personal Income (KRW 1000) | Below 10,000    | 70  | 15.9      |
|                | Self-employed                 | 30  | 6.8       |                            | Below 20,000    | 27  | 6.2       |
|                | Professional                  | 51  | 11.6      |                            | Below 40,000    | 134 | 30.5      |
|                | Student                       | 39  | 8.9       |                            | Below 60,000    | 106 | 24.1      |
|                | Housework                     | 58  | 13.2      |                            | Below 80,000    | 44  | 10.0      |
|                | Unemployed (Leave of absence) | 14  | 3.2       |                            | Below 100,000   | 35  | 8.0       |
|                | Retired                       | 19  | 4.3       |                            | Below 200,000   | 21  | 4.8       |
|                | Other                         | 20  | 4.6       |                            | Over 200,000    | 2   | 0.5       |

Table 2. Cont.

| Characteristic            |                           | N   | Ratio (%)     | Characteristic                   |                  | N    | Ratio (%) |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----|---------------|----------------------------------|------------------|------|-----------|
| Residence                 | Seoul                     | 150 | 34.2          | Length of stay when traveling    | A day            | 16   | 3.6       |
|                           | Gyeonggi (Incheon)        | 128 | 29.2          |                                  | 1 night, 2 days  | 189  | 43.1      |
|                           | Gangwon                   | 12  | 2.7           |                                  | 2 nights, 3 days | 177  | 40.3      |
|                           | Chuncheon (Daejeon)       | 38  | 8.7           |                                  | 3 nights, 4 days | 34   | 7.7       |
|                           | Gyeongsang (Daegu, Busan) | 81  | 18.5          | At least one week                | 23               | 5.2  |           |
|                           | Jeolla (Gwangju)          | 27  | 6.2           | Travel expenses per person (KRW) | Below 100,000    | 23   | 5.2       |
|                           | Jeju                      | 1   | 0.2           |                                  | Below 200,000    | 27   | 6.2       |
| Other                     | 2                         | 0.5 | Below 300,000 |                                  | 67               | 15.3 |           |
|                           |                           |     | Below 500,000 |                                  | 115              | 26.2 |           |
| Number of times of travel | 1                         | 241 | 54.9          | Below 1,000,000                  | 135              | 30.8 |           |
|                           | 2–3                       | 173 | 39.4          | Below 2,000,000                  | 59               | 13.4 |           |
|                           | 4–5                       | 12  | 2.7           | Over 2,000,000                   | 13               | 3.0  |           |
|                           | At least 6                | 13  | 3.0           |                                  |                  |      |           |

#### 4.2. Reliability and Validity Analysis

To judge the reliability and validity of this study, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted for the purpose of determining the validity of the scale for constructs, such as local tourism governance operation, local tourism brand equity, and local tourism attachment, for which statistical scales are not fully established; moreover, the adequacy of the scales was identified through reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

##### 4.2.1. Reliability and Validity of the Scale for Local Tourism Governance Operation

The reliability and validity of the factors of local tourism governance operation were verified through the interpretation of Cronbach's alpha and factor analysis; the results showed that the factors converged on four factors consistent with previous studies: "participation", "partnership", "institutionalization", and "support system". The total variance explained by the factor analysis was identified as 64.93%, thus confirming the validity of the overall model. Regarding the reliability of each scale, the reliability of "participation" was 0.806, that of "partnership" was 0.775, that of "institutionalized" was 0.646, and that of "support system" was 0.799, and the analysis indicated that when the items of individual measurement scales by factor were removed, the reliability coefficient did not exceed the overall reliability. Therefore, the reliability of the entire measurement scales by factor was also verified. (See Table 3)

Table 3. Results of Local Tourism Governance factor reliability and validity analysis.

| Factor        | Item  | Component      |             |                       |                  |
|---------------|---|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|               |   | Factor Loading | Eigen Value | Variance (Cumulative) | Cronbach's Alpha |
| Participatory | Members participate voluntarily.                          | 0.715          | 2.677       | 19.122                | 0.806            |
|               | Members have a sense of community.                        | 0.755          |             |                       |                  |
|               | The governance members are professional.                  | 0.770          |             |                       |                  |
|               | Governance has built a seamless network.                  | 0.812          |             |                       |                  |
| Partnership   | The operation of governance gives trust.                  | 0.773          | 2.393       | 17.091<br>(36.212)    | 0.775            |
|               | The members of governance organically cooperate.          | 0.807          |             |                       |                  |
|               | The members of governance have a sense of responsibility. | 0.662          |             |                       |                  |
|               | The members of governance communicate smoothly.           | 0.710          |             |                       |                  |

Table 3. Cont.

| Factor   | Item  | Component      |             |                       |                  |
|--|---|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|  |   | Factor Loading | Eigen Value | Variance (Cumulative) | Cronbach's Alpha |
| Institutionalization   | The members of governance share their respective roles. | 0.833          | 1.873       | 13.376<br>(51.549)    | 0.646            |
|  | Governance is operating stable norms.                   | 0.747          |             |                       |                  |
|  | Governance operates independently.                      | 0.665          |             |                       |                  |
| Support system   | The institutional support of governance is reasonable.  | 0.820          | 2.147       | 15.337<br>(64.926)    | 0.799            |
|  | The administrative support of governance is systematic. | 0.847          |             |                       |                  |
|  | The financial support of governance is stable.          | 0.712          |             |                       |                  |
| KMO = 0.823, Bartlett's sphericity test: 2100.307, df = 91, $p = 0.00$ |   |                |             |                       |                  |

#### 4.2.2. Reliability and Validity of the Scale for Local Tourism Brand Equity

The reliability and validity of the factors of local tourism brand equity governance operation were verified through the interpretation of Cronbach's Alpha and factor analysis; as a result, the factors converged on two factors consistent with previous studies: "brand image" and "brand awareness". The total variance explained by the factor analysis was identified as 65.95%, thus confirming the validity of the overall model. Regarding the reliability of each scale, the reliability of "brand image" was shown to be 0.761, and that of "brand awareness" was shown to be 0.819, meaning that the reliability of the entire measurement scale by factor was verified. (See Table 4)

Table 4. Results of local tourism brand equity factor reliability and validity analysis.

| Factor   | Item  | Component      |             |                       |                  |
|--|---|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|  |   | Factor Loading | Eigen Value | Variance (Cumulative) | Cronbach's Alpha |
| Brand Image  | Local tourism has a differentiated individuality.                   | 0.695          | 2.418       | 34.536                | 0.761            |
|  | Local tourism represents a familiar image.                          | 0.781          |             |                       |                  |
|  | The local tourism brand is reliable.                                | 0.738          |             |                       |                  |
|  | Local tourism has unique characteristics.                           | 0.693          |             |                       |                  |
| Brand Awareness  | The region and the destination are associated.                      | 0.861          | 2.199       | 31.417<br>(65.953)    | 0.819            |
|  | The level of awareness of the regions and the destinations is high. | 0.905          |             |                       |                  |
|  | The reputation of the region and destination is pretty good.        | 0.642          |             |                       |                  |
| KMO = 0.819, Bartlett's sphericity test: 1152.125, df = 21, $p = 0.00$ |   |                |             |                       |                  |

#### 4.2.3. Reliability and Validity of the Scale for Local Tourism Attachment

The reliability and validity of the factors of local tourism attachment were analyzed. According to the results, the factors converged on two factors consistent with the findings of previous studies, which are "local tourism dependence" and "local tourism identity". The total variance explained by the factor analysis was identified as 64.95%, thus confirming the validity of the overall model. Regarding the reliability of each scale, the reliability of "local tourism dependence" was shown to be 0.681 whereas that of "local tourism identity" was shown to be 0.811; therefore, the reliability of the entire measurement scale by factor was verified. (See Table 5)

**Table 5.** Results of local tourism attachment factor reliability and validity analysis.

| Factor   | Item   | Component      |             |                       |                  |
|--|--|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|  |  | Factor Loading | Eigen Value | Variance (Cumulative) | Cronbach's Alpha |
| Local Tourism dependence   | When I decide to travel, I consider this region first. | 0.681          | 2.147       | 30.677                | 0.681            |
|  | I tend to visit this region repeatedly.                | 0.630          |             |                       |                  |
|  | I stay relatively longer in this region.               | 0.855          |             |                       |                  |
| Local Tourism Identity   | This region is specially differentiated.               | 0.726          | 2.399       | 34.272<br>(64.950)    | 0.811            |
|  | I can feel an emotional bond in this region.           | 0.640          |             |                       |                  |
|  | I can empathize with the sensitivity of this region.   | 0.721          |             |                       |                  |
|  | I tend to have an attachment to this region.           | 0.838          |             |                       |                  |
| KMO = 0.875, Bartlett's sphericity test: 1127.787, df = 21, $p = 0.00$ |  |                |             |                       |                  |

#### 4.3. Hypothesis Verification

In this study, the hypotheses were evaluated through multiple regression analysis. In interpreting the regression model derived through the analysis, the significance was reviewed by checking  $R^2$ , which is the explanatory power of the model, along with the significance level derived from the F function, through an analysis of variance, and the influence of the factors of independent variables in each regression model was checked based on the significance level according to the t function. Moreover, the Durbin–Watson index was used to check the independence of the residuals, and the VIF value was checked to identify the multicollinearity of the independent variables in the multiple regression analysis.

##### 4.3.1. Correlation

Before testing the hypotheses, the correlations between all factors were analyzed. As a result, all factors showed correlations with each other at a significant level ( $p < 0.01$ ), but no significant correlation was found in the two pathways between the support system, brand awareness, and local tourism identity. The details are listed in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Results of All-Factors Correlation Analysis.

| Factor                      | Local Tourism Governance |          |          |          | Brand Equity |          | Attachment |       |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|----------|------------|-------|
|                             | a                        | b        | c        | d        | e            | f        | g          | i     |
| a. Participatory            | 1.000                    |          |          |          |              |          |            |       |
| b. Partnership              | 0.314 **                 | 1.000    |          |          |              |          |            |       |
| c. Institutionalization     | 0.312 **                 | 0.274 ** | 1.000    |          |              |          |            |       |
| d. Support system           | 0.390 **                 | 0.455 ** | 0.238 ** | 1.000    |              |          |            |       |
| e. Brand Image              | 0.409 **                 | 0.345 ** | 0.366 ** | 0.143 ** | 1.000        |          |            |       |
| f. Brand Awareness          | 0.147 **                 | 0.350 ** | 0.314 ** | 0.091    | 0.556 **     | 1.000    |            |       |
| g. Local Tourism Dependence | 0.337 **                 | 0.292 ** | 0.430 ** | 0.137 ** | 0.771 **     | 0.547 ** | 1.000      |       |
| i. Local Tourism Identity   | 0.255 **                 | 0.296 ** | 0.416 ** | 0.067    | 0.662 **     | 0.550 ** | 0.630 **   | 1.000 |

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

##### 4.3.2. Regression for Hypothesis Verification

###### Effects of Local Tourism Governance on Brand Equity

Multiple regression analysis was performed to verify the effect of local tourism governance on brand equity.

First, regarding the effect on brand image, a sub-factor of brand equity, the explanatory power of the entire model was identified to be at the level of 28.0% ( $R^2$ : 0.280), and the F value was 42.093 ( $p$ -value: 0.000), thus indicating that the statistical significance was verified. In terms of the detailed causal relationships of the independent variables, the analysis indicated that the factors of participation, partnership, and institutionalization had significant positive (+) effects on the local tourism brand image, which is a dependent variable, and the factor support system had a negative (−) effect. (See Table 7)



**Table 7.** Results of regression analysis between local tourism governance on brand image.

| Independent Variable | Non-Standardization |       | Standardization | Significance |         | Multi-Collinearity |       |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------|-----------------|--------------|---------|--------------------|-------|
|                      | $\beta$             | S.E   | B               | t            | p-Value | Tolerance          | VIF   |
| (constant)           | 1.497               | 0.206 |                 | 7.267        | 0.000   |                    |       |
| participatory        | 0.310               | 0.045 | 0.316           | 6.869        | 0.000   | 0.784              | 1.275 |
| partnership          | 0.210               | 0.039 | 0.249           | 5.304        | 0.000   | 0.752              | 1.330 |
| institutionalization | 0.190               | 0.036 | 0.235           | 5.354        | 0.000   | 0.865              | 1.157 |
| support system       | −0.114              | 0.037 | −0.150          | −3.126       | 0.002   | 0.722              | 1.385 |

$R^2 = 0.280$  (adj  $R^2 = 0.273$ )  $F = 42.093$  ( $p$ -value: 0.000) Durbin-Watson: 2.019

Next, with regard to the effect on brand awareness, another sub-factor of brand equity, the explanatory power of the entire model was identified to be at the level of 18.5% ( $R^2$ : 0.185), and the F value was 24.706 ( $p$ -value: 0.000), meaning that the statistical significance was verified. Regarding the detailed causal relationships of the independent variables, the analysis indicated that the factors of partnership and institutionalization had significant positive (+) effects on the local tourism brand awareness, and the effect of the factor support system was not identified. (See Table 8)

**Table 8.** Results of regression analysis between local tourism governance on brand awareness.

| Independent Variable | Non-Standardization |       | Standardization | Significance |         | Multi-Collinearity |       |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------|-----------------|--------------|---------|--------------------|-------|
|                      | $\beta$             | S.E   | B               | t            | p-Value | Tolerance          | VIF   |
| (constant)           | 1.740               | 0.278 |                 | 6.267        | 0.000   |                    |       |
| participatory        | 0.018               | 0.061 | 0.014           | 0.291        | 0.771   | 0.784              | 1.275 |
| partnership          | 0.357               | 0.053 | 0.335           | 6.698        | 0.000   | 0.752              | 1.330 |
| institutionalization | 0.255               | 0.048 | 0.248           | 5.315        | 0.000   | 0.865              | 1.157 |
| support system       | −0.122              | 0.049 | −0.126          | −2.467       | 0.014   | 0.722              | 1.385 |

$R^2 = 0.185$  (adj  $R^2 = 0.178$ )  $F = 24.706$  ( $p$ -value: 0.000) Durbin-Watson: 2.066

#### Effects of Local Tourism Brand Equity on Attachment

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to verify the effect of local tourism brand equity on local tourism attachment.

First, according to the results of the regression analysis on local tourism dependence among the subfactors of local tourism attachment, the explanatory power of the entire model was identified to be at the level of 61.5% ( $R^2$ : 0.615), and the F value was 348.305 ( $p$ -value: 0.000), meaning that the statistical significance was verified. In terms of the detailed causal relationships of the independent variables, the analysis results indicated that all independent variables, such as brand image and brand awareness, had significant positive (+) effects on local tourism dependence, which is a dependent variable, and that the effect of brand awareness among them was identified to be very strong. (See Table 9)

**Table 9.** Results of regression analysis between local tourism brand equity and dependence.

| Independent Variable | Non-Standardization |       | Standardization | Significance |         | Multi-Collinearity |       |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------|-----------------|--------------|---------|--------------------|-------|
|                      | $\beta$             | S.E   | B               | t            | p-Value | Tolerance          | VIF   |
| (constant)           | 0.591               | 0.125 |                 | 4.717        | 0.000   |                    |       |
| Brand Image          | 0.703               | 0.037 | 0.676           | 18.901       | 0.000   | 0.691              | 1.447 |
| Brand Awareness      | 0.141               | 0.029 | 0.172           | 4.811        | 0.000   | 0.691              | 1.447 |

$R^2 = 0.615$  (adj  $R^2 = 0.613$ ),  $F = 348.305$  ( $p$ -value: 0.000), Durbin-Watson: 2.329

Next, according to the results of the regression analysis on local tourism identity among the subfactors of local tourism attachment, the explanatory power of the entire

model was identified to be at the level of 48.6% ( $R^2$ : 0.486), and the F value was 206.175 ( $p$ -value: 0.000), indicating that the statistical significance was verified. Regarding the detailed causal relationships of the independent variables, the analysis results indicated that all independent variables, such as brand image and brand awareness, had significant positive (+) effects on local tourism dependence, which is a dependent variable, and the effect of brand image among them was identified to be particularly strong. (See Table 10)

**Table 10.** Results of regression analysis between local tourism brand equity and identity.

| Independent Variable | Non-Standardization |       | Standardization | Significance |            | Multi-Collinearity |       |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------|-----------------|--------------|------------|--------------------|-------|
|                      | $\beta$             | S.E   | B               | t            | $p$ -Value | Tolerance          | VIF   |
| (constant)           | 0.494               | 0.164 |                 | 3.012        | 0.003      |                    |       |
| Brand Image          | 0.608               | 0.049 | 0.515           | 12.478       | 0.000      | 0.691              | 1.447 |
| Brand Awareness      | 0.246               | 0.038 | 0.264           | 6.384        | 0.000      | 0.691              | 1.447 |

$R^2 = 0.486$  (adj  $R^2 = 0.484$ ),  $F = 206.175$  ( $p$ -value: 0.000), Durbin-Watson: 1.915

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

### 5.1. Study Findings and Implications

Recently, the importance of ESG as a methodological concept for the realization of SDGs has come to the foreground in this rapidly changing business environment, and the role of governance among ESG factors is particularly interesting. In the field of tourism, the role of regional governance for the revitalization of tourism goes beyond the dimension of major decision making or networks in the region, and regional governance plays a major role in enhancing the rationality and fairness of the local tourism operating system and enhancing the local tourism brand. This study took note of the role of local tourism governance, which can be seen from the tourist's gaze, and it attempted to verify the effects of the operation of local tourism governance on the perception of local tourism brand equity and local tourism attachment by tourists. This study also attempted to identify the role and importance of local tourism governance, not only in the relationship between members, but also when it is expressed externally.

Samples were extracted from tourists who have experienced local tourism at least once within the last year, and the hypotheses according to the study model were tested using the 439 collected samples. The implications derived as a result are as follows.

First, regarding the effects of the operation of local tourism governance on brand equity, it was identified that the factors of partnership and institutionalization had significant positive effects on both brand images and brand awareness (of them, the effect of partnership was shown to be the strongest), and participation only had a significant positive effect on the brand images. This is a result that reinforces the importance of expanded policy networks argued for by Newman (2001), [25] and is interpreted as a result similar to the coordination of interests through governance and the relationship between partnerships and regional brand equity as in Hankinson's (2009) study [43]. What should be considered important in this part is the fact that the subjects of this study are tourists. In a positive dimension, the appearance that is visibly identified in the operating system, termed local governance, centering on the tourist's gaze means that the institutionalization centered on partnership among members and the rationality of operation is positively accepted. These results are considered to be academically meaningful as an attempt to identify the linkage with brand equity from the viewpoint of tourists visiting the area, breaking away from the previous perspective that judged the role of governance as a merely internal factor of the local community, and practically, the results are data explaining the importance of the cooperation system between the operating entities and operating standards in the operation of governance for local tourism.

Second, in terms of the relationship between the operation of local tourism governance and brand equity, the support system was identified to have a rather negative effect on brand equity from the viewpoint of tourists. It can be carefully predicted that this is a

problem of the negative dimension, where the fact that problems such as the deterioration of the local community, regional imbalance and concentration, over-tourism, and gentrification are caused by unclear and indiscriminate support from the central and local governments, as governance that has recently been constructed for the revitalization of communities is perceived even by the general public. The result is thus interpreted as the demands of tourists, who request a developmental review of the administrative agency's support system for governance, and it explains the necessity of an in-depth reconsideration of many tourism-related administrations that have recently been conducted for the purpose of fostering local tourism. In addition, the fact that problems that can be derived from financial, administrative, and institutional support for the purpose of fostering local tourism governance can instill rather a bad image and awareness among tourists in terms of local tourism should not be overlooked. In practice, this requires the concept of fair tourism, the importance of which has recently been magnified. Rational consumers have recently perceived repulsion regarding unreasonable economic values in relation to their consumption, and they feel uncomfortable about the cultural sense of distance caused by inconsistency with the local community. The role of local tourism governance should be to support the formation of positive images of the region in tourists based on a transparent and fair operation and support system.

Finally, as was the case in previous studies, it was identified that both brand image and brand awareness, two core sub-factors of local tourism brand equity, had significant effects on local tourism attachment, and the analysis indicated that the role of brand awareness was stronger for the formation of local tourism attachment. This is the result of confirming the significance of the relationship between brand equity and brand attachment in the same context as the study results of Brakus et al. (2009) [76]. In the domestic tourism market, various actors supporting the local tourism industry (for example, regional tourism organizations (RTOs) and DMOs) have until recently been focusing on attracting tourists to the region by continuously improving brand awareness through public relations and marketing, and this should explain that, rather than a service to improve tourists' perceptions based on the diversification of information and the expansion of the base, it is more important to magnify the original and unique image of the region. Unlike marketing in other fields, such as general manufacturing, local tourism involves the process of projecting a comprehensive image by providing tourists with various cognitive and emotional image clues, so the process or effort is a little more complicated and difficult. However, the image of the local tourism brand formed through this process can be judged to be a large and strongly attractive pull factor for tourists.

## 5.2. Limitations

Although this study is meaningful in that it attempted to understand the role and effects of local tourism governance, the importance of which is attracting attention linked with brand equity and brand attachment from the perspective of tourists, there are several limitations in this study.

First, the responses were based on recollections of the past. Therefore, there are some limitations in fully grasping the recognition and perception felt by the tourists, who are the subjects of the survey, at the moment of actual local tourism. It is judged that, if future studies examine the functional role of local tourism governance at the service encounter based on field investigations, slightly more meaningful results can be derived.

In addition, this study is somewhat unsatisfactory in that, when the operation of local tourism governance was analyzed together with brand equity and attachment, somewhat abstract concepts were connected from the tourists' point of view. It is believed that checking the actual effects of the role of local tourism governance in connection with associations with measurable indicators such as the revitalization of the local industrial economy, increases in incomes, achievement of attracting tourists, and improvement of satisfaction with local tourism will also deliver important implications.

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