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Examining the impact of joint brand advertising on perceived destination brand authenticity

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ABSTRACT

Meeting visitors' demand for authentic tourism experiences is challenging, but joint brand advertising can enhance the perceived authenticity of destination brands, making them more appealing and trustworthy. Drawing on signalling theory and using an experimental approach, this research examines the impact of joint (vs. single) brand advertising on the perceived authenticity of a destination brand and tourists' behavioural intentions toward that destination. Additionally, the study explores whether tourists' regulatory focus moderates these effects. A field experiment using the Google Display Network ($n_1 = 663,704$ impressions) and two online experiments ($n_2 = 166$, $n_3 = 248$) indicate that joint brand advertising featuring an authentic partner brand has a positive influence on the perceived authenticity of relatively less authentic brands and the associated behavioural intentions. Nevertheless, these positive effects dissipate when tourists exhibit a weak prevention orientation.

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Joint brand advertising; brand authenticity; regulatory focus theory; destinations; click-through behaviour

1. Introduction

Authenticity is a cornerstone of advertising and marketing communications in general. By presenting messages that are genuine and transparent, authentic advertising can significantly reduce consumer scepticism (Becker, Wiegand, and Reinartz 2019), leading to more positive attitudes and stronger purchase intentions (Cornelis and Peter 2017). Beyond advertising campaigns, authentic brands can foster trust and loyalty while enriching the overall consumer experience (Goulding and Derbaix 2019; Portal, Abratt, and Bendixen 2019). Furthermore, advertising effectiveness is greatly enhanced when consumers perceive the brand's messages as authentic, resulting in more favourable responses (Loebnitz and Grunert 2022).

In the tourism industry, brands play a crucial role in shaping a destination's reputation (Hitz, Schwaiger, and Gabel 2024) and serve as key facilitators in building

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meaningful connections with tourist (Zhang and Su 2023). Authentic brands, in particular, can play a pivotal role in promoting tourism development in destinations that could offer authentic experiences, but struggle to attract tourist flows. Joint Brand Advertising (JBA), a collaborative strategy that showcases multiple brands within a single advertisement, can accelerate this process by alleviating travellers' uncertainty or scepticism toward lesser-known destinations. Despite its relevance, however, this topic remains under-researched in both tourism marketing and the broader field of marketing communications.

JBA can enhance destination brand authenticity – meaning the extent to which travellers perceive a destination brand as genuine in fulfilling its promises and authentically representing its values and origins (Kumar, Kaushal, and Kaushik 2023; see also Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink 2008; Napoli et al. 2014). Recent surveys highlight that 75% of tourists seek authentic experiences that represent local culture (Sustainable Travel Report 2003; see also Forbes 2024). This trend underscores the importance of destination brands delivering genuine and culturally reflective experiences to match traveller expectations. Consequently, to meet the rising demand for authentic tourism experiences (Lichrou and O'Malley 2021; Souza and Kastenzholz 2022), many destinations – including both popular mass tourism sites and emerging locations – have sought to cultivate authentic brands by replicating iconic cultural artifacts, embracing traditional rituals, or utilizing evocative advertising strategies. However, this approach has faced criticism for commodifying cultural elements, leading to negative perceptions among travellers. Many view it as a superficial attempt to commercialize authentic experiences, resulting in 'staged' or artificial representations (Chhabra, Healy, and Sills 2003) that fail to capture a destination's true essence and authentic attributes (Hughes et al. 2021; Moosa 2016).

This critique raises an important question: Can advertising enhance destination brand authenticity and effectively attract authenticity-seeking tourists? If so, how might this be achieved? In this study, we hypothesize that destination brand authenticity can be enhanced when tourists perceive the partner brand involved in JBA as honest and genuine in delivering on its promises (Chen et al. 2020; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and Campo 2020) and as staying true to its values and origins (Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink 2008; Napoli et al. 2014). This strategy may prove particularly valuable for destination brands with low perceived authenticity that aim to attract authenticity-seeking tourists.

Building on recent studies (Ren, Lee, and Chun 2023), this research further proposes that tourists' regulatory focus shapes their responses to JBA strategies. Regulatory focus is a psychological trait describing how individuals pursue their goals, whether through a 'promotion' or 'prevention' orientation. Promotion-oriented tourists typically seek novel and adventurous experiences, set ambitious travel goals, and enthusiastically embrace opportunities for exploration. In contrast, prevention-oriented tourists prioritize safety, carefully plan to avoid travel disruptions, and prefer well-established, secure destinations for a worry-free vacation (Ahmad and Guzmán 2021). Understanding how tourists with different regulatory focuses respond to JBA strategies is crucial, as it enables marketers to finely tailor their JBA messages, ensuring they resonate with their target audience. Despite its significance, regulatory focus remains a largely under-investigated concept in tourism branding (Jiang et al. 2020).

Our findings contribute, firstly, to the literature on consumer reactions to JBA. Previous studies suggest that JBA can enhance the appeal of emerging brands (Can, Ekinci, and Pino 2021) and that joint branding initiatives can be useful for tourism destinations (Dioko and So 2012; Kim, Chen, et al. 2019). However, this body of work has yet to explore JBA's potential to impact brand authenticity. Specifically, there is a lack of research demonstrating JBA's effectiveness in elevating the perceived authenticity of destination brands.

Secondly, this research contributes to the broader literature on brand authenticity by illustrating that authenticity can spill over from an authentic brand to a less authentic one through advertising communication. Past research highlighted that marketing communications can lead consumers to associate brands with specific meanings or qualities relating to other objects (Bergkvist and Taylor 2016). Accordingly, scholars have shown that authenticity can be transferred from persons (e.g. endorsers, influencers) to brands (Chan-Olmsted and Wang 2020; Tian et al. 2022) or from a place to a branded product (Newman and Dhar 2014). However, such investigations have overlooked authenticity transfer among brands.

Thirdly, the study reveals that regulatory focus moderates the relationship between JBA, brand authenticity, and consumers' behavioural responses. Although previous research has highlighted that prevention-oriented individuals highly value service providers' authenticity (Yu et al. 2020) and prioritize information authenticity in online reviews (Ahmad and Guzmán 2021), the literature has yet to examine whether consumer reactions to branding strategies differ based on their regulatory focus. The subsequent sections delineate the theoretical underpinnings of this research and our hypotheses.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Destination brand authenticity

Brand authenticity is a key driver of consumer behaviour (Södergren 2021) and advertising research has highlighted its persuasive power across various contexts, such as content marketing (Lou and Xie 2021), influencer marketing (Mucundorfeanu, Balaban, and Mauer 2024; Shoenberger and Kim 2023), and brand activism (Chu, Kim, and Kim 2023; Verlegh 2024). Despite its importance, brand authenticity remains a somewhat elusive concept, lacking a universally accepted definition, and fueling a debate on its core dimensions (Shi et al. 2022). Some scholars suggest that brand authenticity is the degree to which consumers perceive the brand as being faithful and true to itself, real to its customers, and supportive of their identities (e.g. Morhart et al. 2015). It is reputed that brand authenticity encompasses features like sincerity, heritage, and quality commitment (Napoli et al. 2014) as well as continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness (Bruhn et al. 2012).

Other scholars argue that brand authenticity revolves around three main perspectives: 'objectivist', 'constructivist', and 'existentialist' (Khan and Fatma 2021). The objectivist perspective postulates that authenticity is a measurable entity based on tangible properties of an authentic object (i.e. goods or services) that are universally verifiable through scientific measurements or historical artefacts (Mkono 2012; Wang 1999).

In contrast, the constructivist perspective states that authenticity is the subjective evaluation of the properties of an object based on cultural, social, or religious practices (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and Campo 2020). Finally, the existentialist perspective asserts that authenticity is a subjective assessment deriving from an individual's physical or symbolic interaction with the authentic object (Chen et al. 2020).

The literature also distinguishes between 'indexical' and 'iconic' authenticity (Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn 2017). In the branding context, indexical authenticity refers to consumers perceiving a brand as possessing objective and measurable attributes that can be authenticated, akin to the objectivist perspective. This may include features like labels indicating original manufacturing or designation of origin. On the other hand, iconic authenticity has a sociological nature, representing an object's alignment with consumers' cognitions and expectations. It embodies consumers' beliefs about how a brand should appear and is shaped by their emotions and imagination, rather than being solely based on evidence (Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink 2008).

In the tourism context, authenticity is shaped by tourists' evaluations of their experiences with a particular site, culture, object, or destination (Kolar and Zabkar 2010). For example, filming locations (e.g. Harry Potter-themed sites) can foster a sense of immersion and authenticity in the story world. Destinations that cannot offer authentic experiences may attempt to stage them by creating replicas of authentic attractions; however, these facsimiles may not appeal to authenticity-seeking tourists. For this reason, consumers generally perceive theme parks lacking connections to actual filming sites as artificial landscapes that offer substitutes for 'real' experiences. This makes these places less suitable for authentic engagement (Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018).

Branding plays an important role in this context. Although brand authenticity is a relatively unobservable feature, it can influence tourists' social and cultural expectations (He, Ma, and Zhang 2023) and authentic brands offering an honest portrayal of a destination's identity can foster strong connections with tourists.

2.2. Joint brand advertising in tourism

JBA offers partner brands the chance to leverage positive brand associations through a single advertisement that promotes multiple brands, allowing them to share both costs and the marketing message for a specific campaign. This approach, for instance, can strengthen consumer confidence in product quality (Aujla and Kaur 2017). JBA differs from co-branding (cf. Bergkvist and Taylor 2016), which generally involves developing a new product or service that combines the strengths and identities of the participating brands, resulting in a more integrated and often longer-term partnership. Co-branding takes different forms, such as ingredient branding, co-development, and endorsement (Washburn, Till, and Priluck 2000; d'Astous, Colbert, and Fournier 2007; Geylani, Inman, and Hofstede 2008; Turan 2020). Although both JBA and co-branding aim to expand reach and enhance brand value, they differ in terms of execution and depth of collaboration.

JBA can positively impact consumers' overall evaluations of the partnering brands and yield mutual benefits for them. This happens because the positive associations of highly reputable partner brands extend to lesser-known ones due to a spillover

process (Can et al. 2020). In the tourism field, JBA initiatives can promote the development of a unified marketing vision among tourist brands and foster loyalty to hotels and restaurants (Lin 2013). Collaborations between international hotel brands and renowned destinations can enhance tourists' behavioural intentions significantly more than solo branding efforts (Dioko and So 2012). Furthermore, joint branding initiatives can facilitate the transfer of brand equity from well-established entities (e.g. UNESCO) to lesser-known destination brands (as exemplified by Jeju Island in South Korea; Kim, Chen, et al. 2019), and increase consumer willingness to visit emerging tourist destinations (Can, Ekinci, and Pino 2021).

Although these findings highlight the perceived advantages of joint branding efforts within the tourism industry, we are unaware of empirical studies that investigated the effect of JBA with respect to destination brand authenticity.

2.3. Signalling theory, JBA and destination brand authenticity

Signalling theory is one of the primary theoretical frameworks utilized to elucidate the impacts of JBA (Connelly et al. 2011). According to this theory, when individuals have limited information about products or services, they depend on 'signals' – such as product attributes or brand characteristics (e.g. quality, reputation) – to form judgments and make decisions (Can, Ekinci, and Dilek-Fidler 2023; Erdem, Swait, and Valenzuela 2006; Pinello, Picone, and Li Destri 2022; Rao and Ruekert 1994). These signals help reduce uncertainty and foster trust between parties, facilitating smoother transactions and yielding more favourable outcomes.

JBA with an authentic partner brand generates positive signals, which can help address consumers' limited information about the authenticity of lesser-known brands. This information asymmetry is central to signalling theory, as consumers rely on external cues, such as brands featured in JBA, to mitigate uncertainty around relatively less authentic brands. Within this framework, brands act as signalling instruments, conveying relevant information about products or services (Herbig and Milewicz 1994).

While previous research has shown that individual brands involved in joint-branding initiatives can shape the perceived authenticity of the partnership (Charlton and Cornwell 2019), the present study proposes that JBA strategies featuring authentic partner brands emit signals that positively influence tourists' perceptions of a partnering destination brand with lower perceived authenticity. Potential visitors, might struggle to form positive judgments about such a brand, but JBA can facilitate the transfer of authenticity from the more authentic partner brand to the less authentic one. This transfer, in turn, can foster favourable behavioural intentions toward the latter brand, enhancing its appeal.

2.4. Effect of JBA on tourists' behavioural responses

Authentic brands can increase tourists' intentions to visit destinations (e.g. Kumail et al. 2022), encourage recommendations (Chen et al. 2020; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, and Campo 2020), and enhance overall loyalty (Kumar, Kaushal, and Kaushik 2023). Additionally, joint branding with authentic partner brands may exert a positive influence on consumers' behavioural intentions. For instance, previous studies found that

JBA with authentic partner brands can positively impact tourists' intentions to visit emerging tourism destinations (Can, Ekinci, and Pino 2021).

Building on these empirical findings, we propose that JBA involving authentic partner brands not only enhances the perceived authenticity of destination brands that are perceived as less authentic but also positively influences tourists' behavioural intentions toward these destinations. Specifically, we hypothesize that JBA with authentic partner brands (acting as signals of authenticity) exerts both a direct and an indirect effect on tourists' behavioural intentions, where the indirect effect stems from an increased perception of authenticity for the less authentic brand. We formally structure our hypotheses as follows:

H1a (Direct Effect): JBA with authentic partner brands positively influences tourists' behavioural intentions toward destinations with less authentic brands.

H1b (Indirect Effect): JBA with authentic partner brands enhances tourists' behavioural intentions toward destinations with less authentic brands indirectly, through an increase in the perceived authenticity of the less authentic destination brand.

As explained in the following section, the effects hypothesized above can particularly apply to tourists who typically seek to avoid risks due to their prevention-oriented regulatory focus.

2.5. Moderating effect of the regulatory focus orientation

Regulatory focus theory delineates two distinct motivational orientations that steer consumers in the pursuit of their goals and shape their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours: prevention-orientation and promotion-orientation (Higgins 1997). Prevention-oriented individuals tend to be cautious, to avoid negative outcomes and losses, and to prioritize safety and stability in their decisions. They exhibit vigilance, meticulousness, and a penchant for maintaining the status quo to forestall mistakes. In contrast, promotion-oriented individuals pursue positive outcomes, gains, and personal aspirations. They embrace risk-taking, set ambitious goals focused on achievement and growth, and eagerly seize opportunities for novelty and advancement. These motivational orientations profoundly influence how individuals confront challenges, make decisions, and navigate different facets of their lives (Lee and Higgins 2009).

Consumers' regulatory focus orientations also shape their responses to marketing strategies. For instance, prevention-oriented consumers typically exhibit lower intentions to purchase new products compared to their promotion-oriented counterparts, particularly when they perceive risks or lack adequate information (Herzenstein, Posavac, and Brakus 2007). Moreover, prevention-oriented consumers display greater receptivity to messages geared towards risk avoidance, whereas promotion-oriented consumers prefer messages focused on success and goal achievement (Kees, Burton, and Tangari 2010). The former group tends to approach online reviews sceptically (Ahmad and Guzmán 2021) and perceives service experiences as more authentic when service providers, such as ethnic restaurants, convey authenticity through signals such as handwritten menus (Yu et al. 2020).

In essence, prevention-oriented consumers demonstrate heightened sensitivity to authenticity and cues associated with it (Ren, Lee, and Chun 2023). Thus, it is plausible that the effects of JBA involving authentic tourism brands on consumers' perceptions of relatively less authentic destination brands and their behavioural intentions may be particularly pronounced for individuals exhibiting a strong prevention orientation but not for those with a weak prevention orientation. Stated formally:

H2: Prevention-oriented focus moderates the direct (H2a) and indirect (H2b) effects of JBA with an authentic partner brand on tourists' behavioural intentions. These effects are significant only for tourists who have a prevention-oriented focus.

2.6. Overview of studies

We conducted a field experiment and two between-subject online experiments to empirically test the research hypotheses depicted in Figure 1.

In Study 1, our goal was to establish the impact of JBA on click-through behaviour (H1a) through a field experiment conducted in collaboration with a UK-based online travel agency named holidaysturkiye.co.uk. This study focused on Mersin, an industrial port city in Turkiye whose destination brand, as ascertained by a pre-test described below, is perceived as low in authenticity and not representative of a traditional cultural and seaside Turkish destination. The study tested whether a JBA strategy pairing the Mersin brand with a partner brand perceived as authentic (i.e. 'Turkiye' which is Turkiye's national tourism brand) is more effective in stimulating potential visitors' interest for Mersin as a holiday destination than a strategy featuring only the Mersin brand. To test this effect (H1a), we published a Google advert that randomly displayed either the single brand or the JBA with the selected authentic partner brand (Figure 2).

The selected destination helped to control for any potential influence of familiarity on perceptions of the selected tourist destinations.

Study 2 aimed to validate the direct effect of JBA on tourists' behavioural intentions (H1a) by focusing on Kocaeli, a Turkish city with a predominantly industrial economy whose brand is perceived as low in authenticity. This study preliminarily assessed that the 'Kocaeli' brand is perceived as relatively less authentic compared to well-established Turkish destination brands, such as 'Turkiye'. Additionally, it examined the indirect effect of JBA on tourists' behavioural intentions (H1b).

To assess the external validity and generalizability of the research findings, we conducted a third study that further investigated the influence of JBA on tourists' online behavioural responses, albeit with different participants and destination brands. This study aimed to replicate Study 2 findings and also test new hypotheses (H2a and H2b). The study focused on Rimini, a coastal city in Northern Italy, whose marketing strategies highlight attributes typical of a coastal resort. As a result, most tourists perceive Rimini as a mass-tourism destination that lacks authenticity. Our preliminary assessment confirmed that the city's brand ('VisitRimini') is perceived as relatively less authentic compared to other prominent Italian tourism brands known for cultural richness and historical depth.

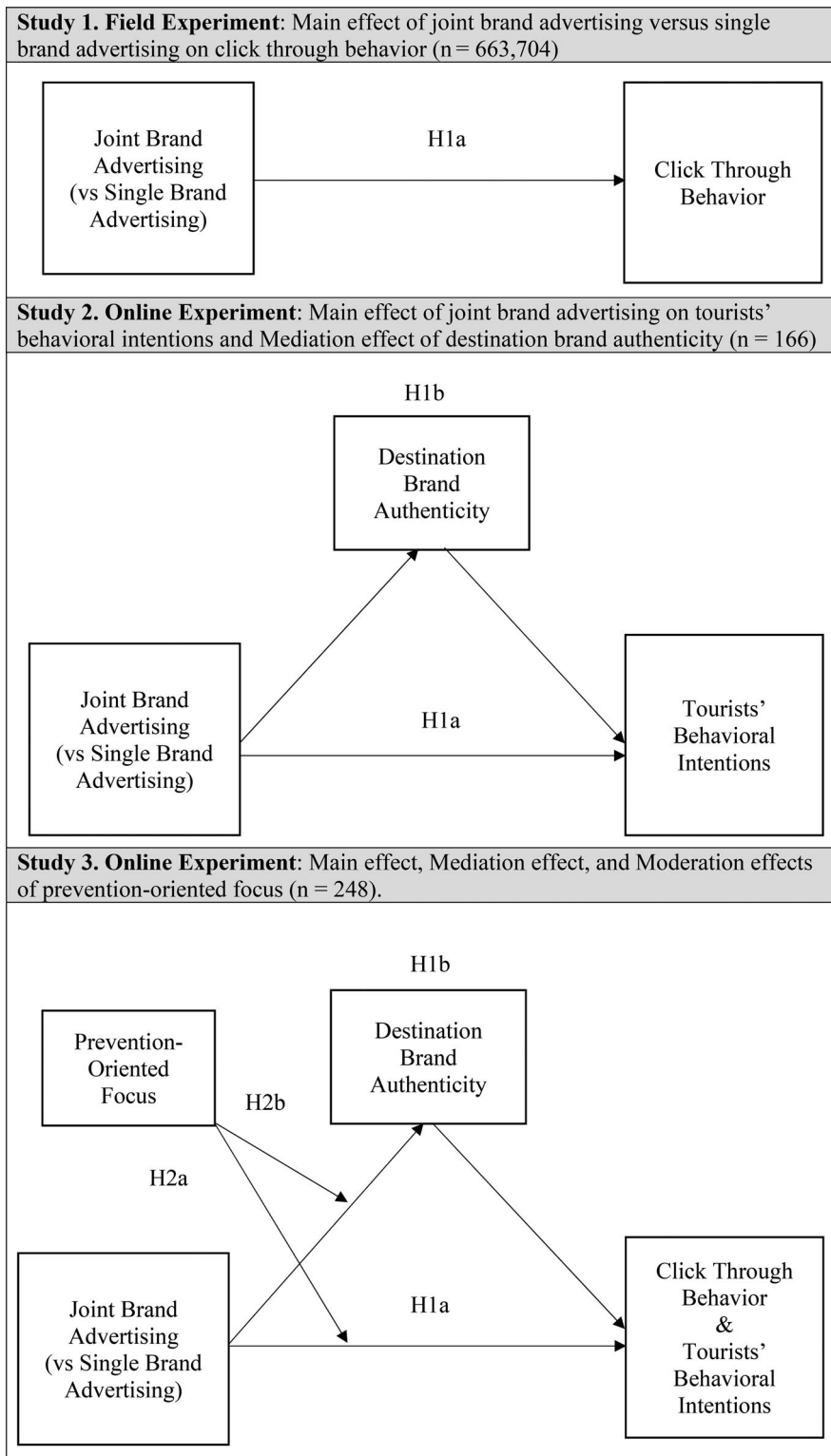


Figure 1. Overview of the studies.

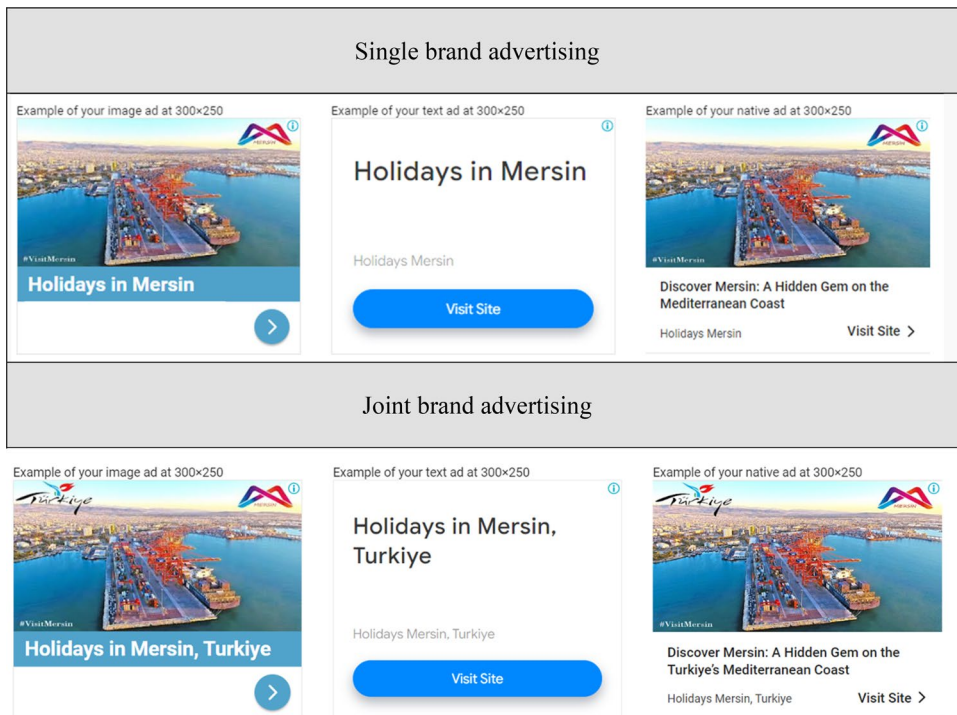


Figure 2. Banner advertisements used in Study 1.

To verify that JBA can increase the perceived authenticity of a less authentic brand only when it involves an authentic partner brand, the study considered two potential partner brands: 'ITALIA', Italy's national tourism brand, known for its long-standing authenticity, and 'ITA Airways', an airline brand introduced in Italy in 2022, as an example of less authentic partner brand. We posited that tourists would perceive 'ITALIA' as relatively more authentic than 'ITA Airways', due to the recent inception and commercial nature of the latter brand. Furthermore, we expected that the JBA with the 'ITALIA' brand evoking inherent characteristics of Italy as an authentic destination (Gilley 2014) increases the perceived authenticity of VisitRimini significantly more than the JBA with the ITA Airways brand.

Our results support this conclusion, demonstrating that only JBA with the 'ITALIA' brand positively influences tourists' behavioural intentions toward Rimini by enhancing the perceived authenticity of the 'VisitRimini' brand. Finally, the study tested whether individuals' regulatory focus orientations moderated these effects, as predicted by H2a and H2b. This approach allowed us to investigate the nuanced role of personal factors in shaping responses to JBA, thereby enriching our understanding of the complex dynamics involved in tourism marketing.

3. Study 1

Study 1 examines the effect of JBA on click through behaviour in a real-world setting. This study used a Google Display banner advertisement – a visually engaging ad published through the Google Display Network, enabling businesses to reach a broad

online audience. To test the effect of JBA, we created two versions of the advert. The version in the single-brand advertising condition featured only the logo of Mersin, while the version in the treatment condition included both the Mersin and Turkiye logos. The text in both versions remained identical, with the addition of the word 'Turkiye' in the treatment condition (see [Figure 2](#)). When clicked, the advertisement redirected users to the website of *holidaysturkiye.co.uk*, which provided information about Mersin.

3.1. Pretesting

A pre-test with 50 UK participants (Female: 52%, M_{age} : 39.70) recruited from Prolific.com, an online crowdsourcing platform widely used for social science experiments (Palan and Schitter 2018), assessed the perceived authenticity of the Mersin brand compared to the Turkiye brand. The pre-test results confirmed that the former brand ($M=2.91$, $SD = 1.15$) is perceived as less authentic than the Turkiye brand ($M=5.32$, $SD = 1.10$, $t(98) = -10.66$, $p < .001$). Since this outcome validated the suitability of Mersin as the target brand, we proceeded with launching a display banner ad campaign through the Google Display Network. The campaign aimed to enhance the perceived authenticity of the Mersin brand and to influence potential visitor's click through behaviour.

3.2. Main study

In the main study we employed an image representative of Mersin's commercial port (commerce is the mainstay of this city's economy) and included a #VisitMersin hashtag. This image also featured the Mersin logo in the Single Brand Advertising (SBA) condition and both the Mersin and Turkiye logos in the JBA condition. We used an identical text in the two conditions while incorporating 'Turkiye' in the JBA condition (see [Figure 2](#) for a visual representation).

The advert received a total of 993 clicks – 330 in the SBA (control group), and 663 in the JBA (treatment group). These clicks were obtained from 663,704 views, with viewership being fairly evenly distributed between the SBA group ($n=331,557$) and the JBA group ($n=332,147$) over two consecutive weeks. We used click-through rate as the dependent variable instead of the raw number of clicks, as recommended by Winterich, Nenkov, and Gonzales (2019). A Chi-square analysis confirmed our hypothesis: the click-through rate was significantly higher for the JBA (0.20%) compared to the SBA condition (0.10%; $\chi^2 = 992.576$, $p < .0001$).

4. Study 2

4.1. Method

Study 2 was a single-factor between-subjects online experiment aimed to investigate the impact of JBA on tourists' perceptions of brand authenticity and their behavioural intentions. In this study, half of the participants were exposed to SBA. This advertisement

featured a picture, a brief description of Kocaeli, and its logo. The remaining half of the participants saw an identical advertisement, encompassing the same textual and visual elements as for the first group. However, the advertisement also featured a brief description of Türkiye, along with the Türkiye brand logo, as visually illustrated in Figure 3.

4.2. Pre-testing

Prior to conducting Study 2, a pre-test involving 60 UK participants was carried out to assess the perceived authenticity of the selected destination brands. These participants were recruited through the Prolific.com. The same image was shown to all participants, but they were split into two groups: one group was shown the Kocaeli brand logo (representing a low-authenticity brand), while the other group was shown the Türkiye brand logo (representing a high-authenticity brand). After viewing the brand's logo, all participants rated their perceptions of the brand's authenticity. The results revealed that participants perceived the Türkiye brand ($M=4.48$, $SD = 2.13$) as significantly more authentic than the Kocaeli brand ($M=3.14$, $SD = 1.19$, $t(58) = -2.99$, $p < .05$). Thus, the pre-test outcomes validated the effectiveness of the manipulation.

4.3. Main study

The main study involved 170 UK participants recruited through Prolific.com. We followed Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko (2009) and incorporated an instructional check (i.e. attention check question) to identify satisfying participants. After excluding


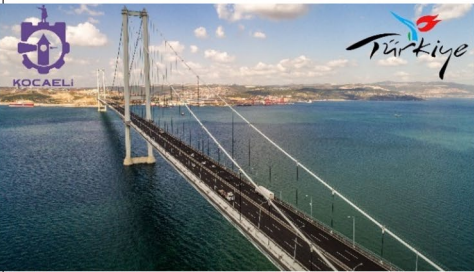
Single brand advertising: Less authentic destination brand	Joint brand advertising: Less authentic & authentic destination brand
	
<p><u>About Kocaeli</u> Kocaeli, known as “Türkiye's industrial center”; has become a center of attraction with its historical monuments, museums, mosques, natural beauties, plateaus, and hiking trails. It is bordered by the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea.</p>	<p><u>About Kocaeli and Türkiye</u> Kocaeli, known as “Türkiye’s industrial center”, has become a center of attraction with its historical monuments, museums, mosques, natural beauties, plateaus, and hiking trails. It is bordered by the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea. Türkiye is one of the world top ten tourism destinations in terms of international tourist arrivals. It has many resorts and tourist cities offering exceptional tourist landmarks, natural scenery as well as a rich history and culture.</p>

Figure 3. Study 2 stimuli.

four participants who were not able to recall the advert's logo(s), the experiment proceeded with a total of 166 participants. The participants were British residents aged 18 and above ($M_{\text{age}} = 39$) and spoke English as first language. Among the participants, 49.4% were male, 48.8% female, and 1.8% did not disclose their gender. Regarding annual household income, 36.7% fell within the £20,000 to £39,999 range, 25.9% earned less than £19,999, and 23.5% reported between £40,000 and 49,999, 7.2% reported between 60,000 and 79,999, while 6.6% earned £80,000 or more.

In the initial phase of the study, participants were presented with a brief description of the destination(s), specifically Kocaeli in the SBA condition and both Kocaeli and Turkiye in the JBA condition (Figure 3). Subsequently, all participants rated their visit and recommendation intentions using 7-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (Extremely disagree) to 7 (Extremely agree), across six statements (Can, Ekinci, and Dilek-Fidler 2025; $\alpha = .92$). They also rated the authenticity of the Kocaeli brand with three statements ($\alpha = .95$; Moulard, Garrity, and Rice 2015) and assessed their familiarity with Kocaeli as a tourist destination ($\alpha = .95$; Mikhailitchenko et al. 2009). A description of the statements used to measure participants' intentions and authenticity perceptions can be found in Table A1 of the appendix.

4.4. Main study results

On average, participants' familiarity with Kocaeli was low ($M=1.58$; $SD = .91$; 98% of the sample had never visited it). An independent sample t-test with the type of advertisement (SBA vs. JBA) as the grouping variable revealed that participants who were exposed to the JBA condition exhibited significantly stronger behavioural intentions toward Kocaeli ($M=4.34$, $SD = 1.01$) compared to those exposed to the SBA condition ($M=3.64$, $SD = 1.15$) ($t(164) = -4.01$, $p < .001$). This finding provides support for H1a. Then, to assess the mediated relationship, we conducted a mediation analysis using the SPSS PROCESS macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes 2018). The findings indicated that the indirect effect of JBA on participants' behavioural intentions through the mediation of the Kocaeli brand's perceived authenticity was statistically significant ($b = .36$, 95% CI: .13, .61), thus validating H1b. To ensure the robustness of our results, we tested the same model by introducing perceived familiarity with Kocaeli as a covariate. However, this variable did not significantly influence the results, confirming the validity of our findings.

5. Study 3

5.1. Method

Study 3 aimed to examine whether regulatory focus orientation moderates the direct and indirect effects of JBA on tourists' behavioural intentions. This study focused on a different destination and used tourists' click-through behaviour as the primary dependent variable to provide further support for the results obtained in Study 1 and Study 2. It employed a between-subjects multi-categorical experimental design, encompassing a control condition (i.e. SBA: 'VisitRimini') and two treatment conditions: (1) JBA between the focal brand and a relatively less authentic partner brand (i.e.

VisitRimini & ITA Airways); and (2) JBA between the focal brand and a more authentic partner brand (i.e. VisitRimini & ITALIA) as shown in Figure 4.

5.2. Pre-testing

Before commencing the main study, we conducted a pre-test involving 77 UK participants recruited online to verify the success of the brand authenticity manipulation. Participants were assigned to one of the three possible brands considered in the study, namely VisitRimini, ITA Airways, and ITALIA. Each participant was shown one of those three brands and rated its authenticity. The results of this pre-test revealed that participants perceived VisitRimini ($M=4.53$, $SD = 1.39$) as less authentic than ITALIA ($M=5.82$, $SD = .72$, $p < .001$), whereas the perceived brand authenticity of VisitRimini ($M=4.53$, $SD = 1.39$) and the perceived authenticity of ITA Airways ($M=3.82$, $SD = 1.18$) were not significantly different from each other ($p = .07$). As anticipated, participants also judged ITA Airways as less authentic than ITALIA ($p < .001$). Hence, these results confirmed the success of our manipulation.




Single brand Advertising (n = 83)	Joint brand advertising with a less authentic brand ("ITA Airways"; n = 82)	Joint brand advertising with an authentic destination brand ("ITALIA"; n = 83)
		
<p><u>About Rimini</u> Rimini is a tourism destination on Italy's Adriatic coast. It is known for its seaside resorts, nightclubs and well-equipped beach clubs. In Rimini, all roads lead to the seafront. If you wish to get more information about Rimini, please click https://www.visitrimini.com/en/</p>	<p><u>About Rimini & ITA Airways</u> Rimini is a tourism destination on Italy's Adriatic coast. It is known for its seaside resorts, nightclubs and well-equipped beach clubs. In Rimini, all roads lead to the seafront. ITA Airways is an airline company that has been active since November 2021. It aims to provide effective air transportation between Italy and international destinations. ITA seeks, in particular, to encourage foreign trade and tourism development in Rimini. If you wish to get more information about Rimini, please click https://www.visitrimini.com/en/</p>	<p><u>About Rimini & ITALIA</u> Rimini is a tourism destination on Italy's Adriatic coast. It is known for its seaside resorts, nightclubs and well-equipped beach clubs. In Rimini, all roads lead to the seafront. Italy is one of the world's top ten tourism destinations in terms of international tourist arrivals. It offers its visitors exceptional tourism experiences through popular landmarks, a wide range of accommodation, both local and international cuisine, entertainment, activities and tourist destinations as well as a rich history and culture. If you wish to get more information about Rimini, please click https://www.visitrimini.com/en/</p>

Figure 4. Study 3 stimuli.

5.3. Main study

For the main study, we recruited 253 UK participants through Prolific.com. However, we proceeded with the analysis using the data from 248 participants as five participants failed an attention check (they did not remember the advertised destination). Of these, 83 were assigned to the control group (VisitRimini), 82 to the first treatment group (VisitRimini & ITA Airways), and 83 to the second treatment condition (Visit Rimini & ITALIA). The participants were British residents aged 18 and above ($M_{\text{age}} = 38$) and spoke English as first language. In terms of gender, 50.4% of participants were male, 49.2% female, and 0.4% did not disclose their gender. Regarding annual net household income, 32.3% reported between £20,000 and £39,999, 25.8% between £40,000 and £59,999, 20.6% less than £19,000, 10.9% between £60,000 and £79,999, and 10.1% £80,000 or more.

Participants began the study by reading a description of the focal destination brand, VisitRimini, which was presented consistently across all conditions. Those assigned to the two treatment conditions received additional information: they either read a description of ITA Airways or of the ITALIA brand (see [Figure 4](#)). Subsequently, participants evaluated their behavioural intentions using the same measurement scale as in Study 2. Additionally, we tracked their click-through behaviour (Japutra, Can, and Alphon 2024). Participants then rated their behavioural intentions toward Rimini ($\alpha = .93$), the perceived authenticity of VisitRimini ($\alpha = .91$), and their familiarity with Rimini ($\alpha = .93$). They also indicated whether they had previously visited Rimini by answering a multiple-choice (Yes/No) question. Additionally, participants rated their regulatory focus orientations, covering both prevention-oriented ($\alpha = .77$) and promotion-oriented focus ($\alpha = .87$), using, for each orientation, four statements adapted from Jung and Yoon (2015) (see [Appendix Table A1](#)).

Following Kim and Park (2019), we calculated the net prevention focus by subtracting the mean value of the four promotion-oriented statements from the mean of the four prevention-oriented statements. This method allowed us to determine whether participants exhibited a predominantly prevention-oriented or promotion-oriented regulatory focus.

5.4. Main study results

On average, participants' familiarity with Rimini was low ($M = 2.26$; $SD = 1.60$; 93% of the sample had never visited it). A one-way ANOVA with post hoc comparisons indicated that participants in the SBA (VisitRimini) and the JBA with a less authentic partner brand condition (VisitRimini & ITA Airways) did not significantly differ in their perceived brand authenticity of VisitRimini ($M_{\text{SBA}} = 4.00$, $SD = 1.07$; $M_{\text{VisitRimini \& ITA Airways}} = 4.20$, $SD = 1.11$; $p = .53$). Thus, in participants' view, VisitRimini does not represent authentic characteristics of Italy and Italian holiday destinations. Participants in the SBA condition rated the authenticity of VisitRimini significantly lower than participants exposed to the JBA condition with the more authentic partner brand ($M_{\text{VisitRimini \& ITALIA}} = 4.62$, $SD = 1.18$, $p = .04$). Additionally, the latter participants rated VisitRimini authenticity significantly higher than those assigned to the JBA condition with the less authentic partner brand ($M_{\text{VisitRimini \& ITA Airways}} = 4.20$, $SD = 1.11$, $t(245) = 2.44$, $p = .01$).

Regarding the effects on click-through behaviour, the click-through rates for both the JBA with a less authentic partner brand (ITA Airways = 11%) and the JBA with a more authentic partner brand (ITALIA = 19%) were higher than the SBA (10%). A binary logistic regression analysis revealed that, compared to the SBA, the JBA with an authentic brand was more effective in eliciting participants' click-through behaviour ($b = .95$, Wald $\chi^2 = 4.35$, $p = .04$). In contrast, compared to SBA, the JBA with a less authentic partner brand (ITA Airways) did not influence click-through behaviour ($b = .26$, Wald $\chi^2 = .28$, $p = .60$).

Subsequently, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using the SPSS PROCESS macro (Model 8) with 5,000 bootstrap samples to examine the direct effect of JBA on click-through behaviour and the indirect effect of JBA through destination brand authenticity. This analysis also investigated whether regulatory focus orientations moderated these effects. The results revealed that JBA with an authentic partner brand (ITALIA) had a marginally significant influence on participants' click-through behaviour ($p = .05$). However, when the JBA featured a less authentic partner brand (ITA Airways), this effect was no longer statistically significant ($p = .26$) (Table 1).

In line with H2a and H2b, the findings indicated that the direct and indirect effects of JBA with an authentic partner brand were statistically significant for prevention-oriented individuals (see Table 2). However, these effects were not statistically significant when JBA featured a less authentic partner brand: the index of moderated mediation was significant for JBA with an authentic brand (ITALIA; $b = .12$, 95% CI: .00, .33), but not for JBA with a less authentic brand (ITA Airways; $b = .05$, 95% CI: -0.06 , .20).

Effects of JBA on participants' behavioural intentions: A one-way ANOVA with Tukey post-hoc comparisons indicated that participants assigned to the SBA condition expressed weaker intentions to visit Rimini ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .89$) compared to participants assigned to the JBA with the more authentic brand ($M = 4.84$, $SD = .98$; $p < .001$). There was no significant difference between SBA and JBA with the less authentic partner brand ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.11$, $p = .68$). Furthermore, participants in the JBA with the more authentic partner brand (i.e. ITALIA) expressed stronger intentions to visit Rimini than participants assigned to the JBA with the less authentic partner brand (i.e. ITA Airways; $p < .001$).

The results indicated that the effect of JBA on participants' behavioural intentions was statistically significant only when JBA included the authentic partner brand ($p < .001$), whereas no significant effect was found when JBA involved the less authentic partner brand ($p = .24$) (see Table A2 in the appendix). The conditional direct effect of JBA on behavioural intentions, and the conditional indirect effect *via* destination brand authenticity were statistically significant for the JBA with the authentic partner brand (ITALIA), but only at medium and high levels of prevention-orientation (see Table A3 in the appendix). In contrast, the conditional effects were all insignificant for the JBA with a less authentic partner brand (ITA Airways). The index of moderated mediation was statistically significant for the JBA with an authentic partner brand ($b = .14$, 95% CI: .04, .26), but not significant for the less authentic partner brand ($b = .06$, 95% CI: -0.05 , .18). These findings further

Table 1. Study 3: Moderated mediation analysis model summary.

Antecedent	Consequent							
	M (Destination brand authenticity)				Y (Click-through behaviour)			
		<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>		<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>
X1 (Single brand vs. JBA with a less authentic brand)	a_1	.27	.18	.14	c_1'	.79	.69	.26
X2 (Single brand vs. JBA with an authentic brand)	a_2	.76	.18	<.001	c_2'	1.32	.67	.05
W (Prevention Focus)	a_3	−0.12	.09	.18	c_3'	−0.52	.32	.11
X1 × W	a_4	.13	.11	.25	c_4'	.56	.38	.14
X2 × W	a_5	.31	.11	.01	c_5'	.78	.37	.04
M (Destination brand authenticity)	–	–	–	–	<i>b</i>	.40	.18	.03
Constant	i_M	3.92	.14	<.001	i_Y	−4.48	.98	<.001

X1, X2: Independent multi-categorical variables, Y: Dependent variable, W: Moderator, M: Mediator.

Table 2. Study 3: Conditional direct and indirect effects of joint brand advertising on click through behaviour.

	X1 (SBA vs. JBA with a less authentic partner brand)			X2 (SBA vs. JBA with an authentic partner brand)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
Conditional direct effects of X on Y						
Low level of Moderator (−2.17)	−0.43	−1.79	.93	−0.37	−1.68	.94
Medium level of Moderator (−0.38)	.58	−0.63	1.79	1.02	−0.15	2.20
High level of Moderator (1.09)	1.40	−0.56	3.38	2.17	.27	4.08
Conditional indirect effects of X on Y	<i>b</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
Low level of Moderator (−2.17)	−0.00	−0.29	.34	.03	−0.24	.33
Medium level of Moderator (−0.38)	.09	−0.04	.32	.25	.02	.61
High level of Moderator (1.09)	.16	−0.02	.48	.04	.21	1.00
Index of moderated mediation	.05	−0.06	.20	.12	.00	.33

X: Independent multi-categorical variable, Y: Dependent variable (Click through behaviour), Moderator: Prevention Focus Orientation.

support H2a and H2b. The results did not change when we replicated the analysis including participants' familiarity with Rimini as a covariate in the model.

6. Discussion and Implications

In today's highly competitive tourism marketplace, joint branding has become essential for leveraging potential synergies among destination brands (Nguyen et al. 2018). In this context, selecting the suitable partner brand is critical for the success of this strategy. By highlighting the beneficial effects of JBA on tourists' perceptions of

destination brands characterized by low authenticity and the related intentions, this study makes three significant contributions to the literature.

First, it advances the emerging stream of research on JBA (Chan 2022; Pinello, Picone, and Li Destri 2022). Recent studies have examined how domestic, foreign, and global partner brands in joint branding influence consumer attitudes and behaviours through cognitive fit and holistic processing (Bauer and Johnson 2024). Other studies have highlighted that JBA can increase tourists' intentions to visit hotels and restaurants (Park and Nicolau 2015), as well as heritage sites, by enhancing brand credibility (Can, Ekinci, and Pino 2021). However, research on JBA's ability to signal authenticity is lacking, despite the widespread use of this advertising practice.

Second, our findings contribute to the broader literature on brand authenticity. This stream of research has highlighted that advertising can enhance brand authenticity (Becker, Wiegand, and Reinartz 2019; Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink 2008) and that authenticity can be transferred from one entity to another: for instance, from a production plant to a product (Newman and Dhar 2014) or from an influencer to a brand (Chan-Olmsted and Wang 2020) through associations. Additionally, authenticity can spillover from one context to another (e.g. from a working environment to a domestic environment; Zhang et al. 2020). Our study expands these findings by demonstrating that authenticity can be transferred from a more authentic partner brand to a less authentic brand. While previous studies demonstrated JBA's ability to signal product quality (Fang, Gammoh, and Voss 2013; Rao, Qu, and Ruekert 1999) and brand credibility (Can, Ekinci, and Pino 2021), our research indicates that JBA can signal relatively unobservable characteristics such as authenticity, and that it can affect individuals' perception of what is (or is not) authentic (Cornelis and Peter 2017).

Third, the present research is the first to reveal that regulatory focus moderates the effect of JBA on the perceived authenticity of destination brands and tourists' behavioural intentions: we found that JBA with authentic destination brands is appealing to prevention-oriented individuals, who prioritize safety, security, and reliability. These results corroborate the conclusion of previous research (e.g. Ren, Lee, and Chun 2023), which established that prevention-oriented individuals tend to perceive marketing communications, such as messages from non-celebrity influencers, as more authentic and trustworthy. Moreover, prevention-oriented consumers are more likely to trust non-celebrity endorsers due to their perceived intimacy and relevance. Therefore, in JBA, authentic partner brands can serve a similar role because they provide prevention-focused tourists with a sense of security that enhances their perception of brand authenticity.

6.1. Managerial Implications

Our results indicate that JBA with authentic partner brands can significantly boost the attractiveness of tourist destinations whose brands are perceived as low in authenticity. Therefore, such destinations can pair their brands with more authentic brands in order to implement a cost-effective strategy potentially able to attract authenticity-seeking tourists. This branding strategy capitalizes on the perceived genuineness of the more authentic partner brand, which can positively influence tourists' perceptions of the advertised destination. Such an approach can address any

scepticism or uncertainty tourists may have about destination brands perceived as low in authenticity and might be especially advantageous for destinations with relatively unknown authentic resources, as authentic partner brands can enhance these destinations' appeal.

Because consumers often rely on brand associations to assess authenticity (Bruhn et al. 2012), the presence of a highly authentic partner brand can reinforce authenticity perceptions, thus serving as a powerful endorsement. Furthermore, authentic partner brands can help destinations to position themselves more competitively in the market: this synergy may allow them to overcome their limitations and create a more compelling value proposition for potential visitors. In this respect, our findings underscore the significance of selecting partner brands recognized as authentic to facilitate the formation of an authentic destination brand perceptions and promote favourable behavioural intentions. Therefore, it is important that destination managers responsible for the design and deployment of national or regional branding strategies assess the perceived authenticity of destination brands and support those brands perceived as low in authenticity with JBA strategies involving more authentic brands. Such strategies could be fruitful for those destinations that seek to position (or reposition) themselves as authentic in the tourism market.

Notably, the moderating effect of regulatory focus orientation suggests that JBA may particularly resonate with prevention-oriented tourists, who are more responsive to such advertising strategies. Consequently, JBA strategies could be targeted to prevention-oriented tourists who prioritize aspects like safety, security, unique traditions and value a destination's authentic characteristics. To identify such tourists, destination marketers can employ various methods, such as AI-based data mining techniques analyzing previous consumption choices, interests, and/or lifestyles. Subsequently, marketers can tailor advertising materials and create customized messages to cater to different regulatory focus orientations. JBA with authentic partner brands will help marketers to craft advertising messages instilling a sense of security, truthfulness, and authenticity in prevention-oriented individuals.

6.2. Limitations and future research avenues

The limitations of this research point to future research avenues. While we tested the hypothesized effects on three destination brands characterized by low authenticity, the results may not be the same for other brands perceived as less authentic. Additionally, all our studies tested JBA strategies with national tourism brands. However, future studies could focus on national or international non-commercial brands that consumers might perceive as authentic (e.g. UNICEF, the Worldwide Fund for Nature – WWF).

We also note the impact of media type on the effectiveness of JBA was not explicitly addressed in our study, as we used a Google display banner advert in our field study and online banner adverts in our online experiments. However, considering the different influence of media channels on consumer perceptions, future research could assess whether different media impact JBA strategies. Lastly, future research could

specifically focus on promotion-oriented individuals and further investigate how they react to SBA and JBA strategies.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available. However, they can be made available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Study 3: Measurements, descriptive statistics, reliability and factor loadings.

Item No.	Item description	Mean	S.D.	Skew.	Kurt.	α	AVE	FL
<i>Behavioural intentions</i>						.93	.76	
BI1	I would enjoy visiting X.	4.58	1.40	-0.59	-0.14			.85
BI2	X is worth visiting.	4.67	1.21	-0.49	.21			.88
BI3	I would like to visit X in the near future.	4.05	1.32	-0.20	-0.52			.85
BI4	I would say positive things about X to others.	4.29	1.11	-0.12	.28			.89
BI5	I would recommend X to others.	4.17	1.15	.03	.27			.88
BI6	I would encourage my friends to visit X.	4.13	1.15	.06	.16			.87
<i>Destination brand authenticity</i>						.91	.78	
DBA1	I believe that X is an authentic tourism destination.	4.23	1.33	-0.02	-0.36			.79
DBA2	I believe that X is a genuine tourism destination.	4.50	1.26	-0.39	-0.06			.76
DBA3	I believe that X is an original tourism destination.	4.11	1.17	-0.25	-0.03			.90
DBA4*	I believe that X is a unique tourism destination.	3.31	1.40	.01	-0.56			.47
<i>Promotion focus</i>						.87	.64	
PROF1	I frequently imagine how I will achieve my hopes and aspirations.	5.01	1.23	-0.65	.34			.87
PROF2	I typically focus on the success I hope to achieve in the future.	4.98	1.27	-0.62	.21			.88
PROF3	I often imagine myself experiencing good things that I hope will happen to me.	5.14	1.26	-0.77	.71			.81
PROF4	In general, I am focused on achieving positive outcomes in my life.	5.25	1.19	-0.76	.80			.84
<i>Prevention focus</i>						.80	.64	
PREF1	I frequently think about how I can prevent failures in my life.	4.75	1.34	-0.36	-0.33			.76
PREF2	I am anxious that I will fall short of my responsibilities and obligations.	4.74	1.57	-0.47	-0.54			.80
PREF3	I often imagine myself experiencing bad things that I fear might happen to me.	4.43	1.51	-0.33	-0.66			.82
PREF4	In general, I am focused on preventing negative events in my life.	4.75	1.36	.45	-0.25			.80

*Excluded from analysis due to low factor loading.

Table A2. The moderated mediation analysis model summary.

		Consequent						
		M (Destination brand authenticity)			Y (Behavioural intentions)			
		<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>		<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>
X1 (Single brand vs. JBA with Less authentic parent brand)	<i>a</i> ₁	.27	.18	.14	<i>c</i> ' ₁	-0.17	-0.14	.24
X2 (Single brand vs. JBA with an Authentic parent brand)	<i>a</i> ₂	.76	.18	<.001	<i>c</i> ' ₂	.52	.14	<.001
Prevention focus (W)	<i>a</i> ₃	-0.11	.09	.18	<i>c</i> ' ₃	-0.11	.07	.09
X1 × W	<i>a</i> ₄	.13	.11	.25	<i>c</i> ' ₄	.04	.08	.64
X2 × W	<i>a</i> ₅	.31	.11	.01	<i>c</i> ' ₅	.15	.09	.09
M (Destination's brand authenticity)	-	-	-	-	<i>b</i>	.47	.05	<.001
Constant	<i>i</i> _M	3.93	.14	<.001	<i>i</i> _Y	2.17	.22	<.001
<i>R</i> ² = .08 <i>F</i> (5,242) = 4.37, <i>p</i> <.001				<i>R</i> ² = .39 <i>F</i> (6,241) = 25.71, <i>p</i> <.001				

X1, X2: Independent variables, Y: Dependent variable, W: Moderator, M: Mediator.

Table A3. Study 3: Conditional direct and indirect effects of JBA on behavioural intentions.

	X1 (SBA vs. JBA with a less authentic partner brand)			X2 (SBA vs. JBA with an authentic partner brand)		
	<i>b</i>	LLCI	ULCI	<i>b</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Conditional direct effects of X on Y						
Low level of W (-2.17)	-0.25	-0.62	.12	.20	-0.18	.58
Medium level of W (-0.38)	-0.18	-0.44	.08	.46	.20	.73
High level of W (1.09)	-0.12	-0.50	.25	.68	.29	1.07
Conditional indirect effects of X on Y	<i>b</i>	LLCI	ULCI	<i>b</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Low level of W (-2.17)	-0.00	-0.30	.28	.04	-0.22	.30
Medium level of W (-0.38)	.10	-0.05	.26	.30	.14	.47
High level of W (1.09)	.19	.00	.40	.51	.29	.76
Index of moderated mediation	.06	-0.05	.18	.14	.04	.26

X: Independent multi-categorical variable, Y: Dependent variable (Behavioral intentions), W: Moderator.