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## **THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF PLACE ATTACHMENT ON INTENTION TO VISIT AMONG VISITORS TO JAZAN PROVINCE, SAUDI ARABIA**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the complex relationship among place attachment, visitor attributes, destination attributes, and intentions to revisit, providing valuable insights into the intricacies of sustainable tourism. Place attachment, which refers to the dynamic connections that are developed with particular destinations, significantly influences the likelihood that tourists will choose to revisit those locations. This research examines the above correlation in the tourism domain, specifically emphasising the function of place attachment as a mediating factor. Incorporating tourist attributes, destination attributes, and place attachment, the research forecasts travellers' likelihood of returning. The data was gathered utilising quantitative techniques, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM-PLS) was employed for the analysis. The results of this study offer significant contributions to our understanding of the complex ways in which visitors make decisions and the impact that emotional connections have on their intentions to return to particular locations. By illuminating the interdependencies among these variables, the research makes a valuable contribution to the progression of sustainable tourism practices.

**Keywords:** Place Attachment, Revisit Intention, Tourist Behaviour, Tourist Attributes, Destination Attributes

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism dynamics are shaped by an intricate web of factors that influence tourists' decision-making processes, thereby determining their choices of destination, length of stay, expenditure, and propensity to return (Kozak, 2001). Among these are tourist-related factors, specifically social ones such as family and friends, psychological elements like feelings and mood, and personal factors encompassing preferences and interests (Kozak, 2001). Furthermore, general marketing studies have highlighted the role of demographic attributes in shaping consumer decisions. For instance, gender, level of education, age, and marital status have been considered pivotal determinants (Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel, 2006; Chong, Chan, and Ooi, 2012; Rani, 2014; Wang et al., 2004).

In addition to these, other factors that significantly influence tourist choices revolve around the attributes of the destination itself. Examples include its image, attractions, natural environment, location, and culture (Wang and Chen, 2015; Mittal, 2013). Predominantly, these factors play a crucial role in the selection of destinations. Another noteworthy factor is place attachment, which profoundly impacts revisit intention (Blackwell, et al., 2006). Place attachment, as a concept, encapsulates the emotional bonds that individuals form with specific locations. This, in turn, deeply influences their behaviours, attitudes, and preferences toward those places (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). This psychological construct seamlessly bridges the realms of a location's physical, social, and cultural aspects, fostering a profound sense of belonging and identity. Significantly, researchers have underscored a robust link between strong place attachment and tourists' intention to revisit a place, affirming place attachment's pivotal role in championing sustainable tourism practices (Ramkissoon, Weiler, & Smith, 2012).

Furthermore, revisit intention stands as a cornerstone in the discourse of sustainable tourism. The rise of tourism as a pivotal contributor to global economic performance has sparked an abundance of studies examining the sector's connection to the idea of sustainability (Azinuddin et al., 2022). This concept captures a tourist's inclination to return to a previously explored destination (Oppermann, 2000). Delving deeper into revisiting intention and its myriad determinants offers invaluable insights for destination marketers and tourism stakeholders. This is especially true given that repeat tourists often bring forth benefits like elevated spending and positive endorsements (Kozak, 2001, Shehab et al., 2023). With the evolving landscape of tourism, there's a palpable shift in tourist behaviours. The current trend leans heavily towards authentic experiences and genuine emotional connections to destinations (Hau, and Tuan, 2017). As a result, the nexus between tourists' and destinations' attributes, place attachment, and revisit intention has become paramount. While studies, such as those by Prayag & Ryan (2012), have initiated discussions on this

interconnectedness, a comprehensive understanding of their intricate interplay is still pending. Therefore, there is a pressing need for increased collaboration between the community and tourism stakeholders (Azwar et al., 2023). This necessity arises from the interdependency of actors within the tourism system, as they must work collectively to produce cohesive tourism products and services (Azinuddin et al., 2023).

However, a glaring gap persists in the literature, especially concerning the specific context of Jazan Province in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Most extant research either offers a panoramic view of Saudi domestic tourism or delves into the country's attractions from a broader perspective. In light of this, this study explores the nuanced role of place attachment. Specifically, it examines its mediating effect on the relationship between tourist-related attributes, destination-related attributes, and revisit intention, focusing on visitors to Jazan province, Saudi Arabia. The province lies in the southwest corner of Saudi Arabia, situated on the coast of the Red Sea and serves a large agricultural heartland that has a population of over 1.4 million as of 2022 (Wikipedia, 2024). Refer Map 1 below of Jazan Province, highlighted in red.



**Figure 1:** Jazan Province in Saudi Arabia (Wikipedia, 2024)

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

An advantageous conceptual structure for comprehending the intricacies of your research model is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen 2011). As per TPB, three primary factors influence the behavioural intentions of individuals, including the intention to revisit a tourist destination: their attitudes toward the

behaviours, subjective norms (which represent social influences), and perceived behavioural control (which pertains to the perceived ease or difficulty of carrying out the behaviours). The attitudes of visitors are directly influenced by the "Destination Attribute" and "Tourist Attribute" in this model, as these attributes shape their perceptions of the destination (Kim, Penny Wan, and Pan 2015). These characteristics are crucial in ascertaining whether travellers hold favourable attitudes toward returning (Hau and Tuan, 2017). "Place Attachment" is an emotional attachment that tourists develop to a location, which can be impacted by the viewpoints and experiences of others (Dwyer, Chen, and Lee 2019). As such, it is intricately linked to the notion of subjective norms in TPB. Ultimately, the behavioural intention is denoted as "Revisit Intention" in TPB, which signifies the probability of a return visit to a particular location (Luo, Lam, and Wang 2021). Intentions that are robust, and are supported by favourable attitudes, societal conventions, and a sense of authority, are more inclined to follow through with. Within this particular framework, "Place Attachment" functions as a mediating variable, elucidating how the sentimental affinity towards a location significantly impacts the correlation between its attributes and the inclination to revisit. In its entirety, TPB furnishes a strong basis for comprehending the psychological underpinnings that shape the intentions and choices of travellers as they pertain to the research (Lewicka, 2011).

#### *Tourists' Attributes and Revisit Intention*

Tourists' attributes have been a focal point in tourism research, given their profound influence on travel behaviours and decisions. These attributes, which encompass a range of social, psychological, and personal factors, play a pivotal role in shaping revisit intentions (Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013). Social attributes, such as influences from family and friends, often act as catalysts, nudging tourists towards revisiting destinations based on shared experiences or recommendations (Smith, 2010). Psychological elements, including feelings and mood, further modulate this intention. A positive emotional experience during a trip can create a lasting impression, making revisiting more appealing (Brown, Assaker, & Reis, 2018). Moreover, personal factors, which include individual preferences and interests, are instrumental in this context. Tourists with specific interests, be it cultural, adventure, or leisure, may be inclined to revisit destinations that cater to these preferences (Liu & Wall, 2006). These attributes collectively weave a complex tapestry of factors determining whether a tourist will consider returning to a destination. Given the multifaceted nature of these attributes and their evident influence on revisit intention, it becomes imperative to delve deeper into their interplay.

**Hypothesis 1:** Tourists' attributes, encompassing social, psychological, and personal factors, have a significant positive relationship with their intention to revisit a destination.

#### *Destination Attributes and Revisit Intention*

Destination attributes, comprising a destination's tangible and intangible features, have been a focal point in tourism studies due to their profound influence on revisit intentions. Tangible attributes such as infrastructure, accessibility, and amenities play a pivotal role in shaping a tourist's experience and, consequently, their intention to return (Li, et al., 2018). Intangible attributes, on the other hand, encompass elements like cultural richness, local hospitality, and the overall ambiance of a destination. These have been identified as significant determinants in evoking emotional connections and influencing tourists' revisiting decisions (Chen & Phou, 2013). Moreover, the unique selling propositions of a destination, such as its natural beauty, heritage sites, or culinary experiences, can serve as compelling pull factors, enhancing the likelihood of repeat visits (Bieger & Laesser, 2014). Given the multifaceted nature of destination attributes and their evident influence on revisit intention, understanding their interplay is paramount in tourism research.

**Hypothesis 2:** Destination attributes, both tangible and intangible, have a significant positive relationship with tourists' intention to revisit a destination.

#### *Tourist Attributes and Place Attachment*

The nexus between tourists' attributes and place attachment has garnered significant attention in contemporary tourism research. Tourists' attributes, which encompass social influences such as family and friends, psychological elements like feelings and mood, and personal factors including preferences and interests, have been posited to play a pivotal role in fostering place attachment. Social influences, for instance, can amplify the sense of belongingness to a destination, especially when shared experiences or recommendations from close acquaintances are involved (Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013). Psychological elements, particularly emotions evoked during a trip, can deepen the bond tourists feel with a place, making them more attached (Hau and Tuan, 2017). Furthermore, personal factors, such as individual interests in cultural or adventure experiences, can enhance the affinity tourists feel toward destinations that cater to these preferences (Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013). Given the intricate relationship between these attributes and place attachment, it becomes imperative to further explore how these individual attributes collectively influence the depth of attachment tourists feel towards a destination.

**Hypothesis 3:** Tourists' attributes, including social, psychological, and personal dimensions, are positively correlated with the degree of place attachment experienced by tourists.

*Destination Attributes and Place Attachment*

Destination attributes, encompassing both the tangible and intangible features of a location, have been recognised as critical determinants in shaping place attachment in the domain of tourism research. Tangible attributes, such as the physical infrastructure, amenities, and natural landscapes, provide the foundational experiences that can either enhance or diminish a tourist's sense of attachment (Lewicka, 2011). On the other hand, intangible attributes, which include cultural experiences, local traditions, and the overall ambiance, play a pivotal role in evoking emotional connections and fostering a deeper sense of belonging to a destination (Ramkissoon, Weiler, & Smith, 2012). For instance, a destination's cultural richness or unique traditions can resonate with tourists, creating a heightened sense of attachment (Tonge, Ryan, Moore, & Beckley, 2015). Furthermore, a destination's overall perceived image and reputation can significantly influence the depth of attachment tourists develop (Zenker & Rütter, 2014). Given the multifaceted nature of destination attributes and their profound influence on place attachment, a comprehensive exploration of their interrelationship is essential in advancing tourism studies.

**Hypothesis 4:** Destination attributes, both tangible and intangible, exert a significant positive influence on the development of place attachment among tourists.

*Place Attachment and Revisit Intention*

Place attachment, characterised by the emotional and psychological bonds individuals form with specific locations, has been extensively studied for its potential influence on revisit intentions in the tourism sector (Chen & Phou, 2013). The depth of attachment tourists feel towards a destination often translates into a desire to relive experiences, thereby influencing their intention to return (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). A profound sense of belonging and identity stemming from place attachment can be a compelling motivator for tourists to revisit destinations, seeking familiarity and emotional resonance (Lewicka, 2011). Moreover, the memories and positive associations cultivated during initial visits can enhance the allure of a destination, making the prospect of revisiting more appealing (Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010). Research has consistently underscored the robust link between strong place attachment and revisit intentions, suggesting that destinations evoking stronger emotional connections are more likely to witness repeat visits (Ramkissoon, Weiler, & Smith, 2012).

Given the evident interplay between place attachment and revisit intention, understanding this relationship is crucial for destination marketers aiming to foster sustainable tourism practices.

**Hypothesis 5:** Place attachment mediates the relationship between tourists' attributes, destination attributes and tourists' intention to revisit a destination.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employs quantitative research utilizing a survey that involves a systematic collection and analysis of numerical data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon. A survey, typically a structured questionnaire, is administered to a sample of participants chosen to represent a larger population. The study's target population consists of individuals (aged 18 and older) who possess previous experience in the tourism industry within the region. The participants comprising the sample are 384 to guarantee a group that is adequately representative for significant analysis, while also taking into account the practicality of data collection within the scope of the study. Following data cleansing, 384 responses were evaluated in total. Incomplete and biased responses were eliminated from the data analysis. The sampling technique utilized in this study is simple random sampling.

The operationalization of variables and the selection of measurement instruments in this study were meticulously planned to ensure accurate and dependable data collection (Jain 2021). The study employed Likert scale-based structured questionnaires to operationalise the independent variables (Destination Attribute and Tourist Attribute), mediating variable (Place Attachment), and dependent variable (Revisit Intention), with respondents rating on a scale from 1 to 5. The analysis was conducted using SEM-PLS software, which similar to SmartPLS, incorporated validation tests that enhanced the overall assurance of data quality. The combined endeavours in verifying the data and assessing its dependability served to fortify the integrity and credibility of the dataset utilised in the SEM-PLS analysis (Brown and Ochoa 1998).

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The statistics generated in the context of a measurement model in Smart PLS are used to evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs. The reliability of a construct is assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values (ranging from 0.795 to 0.911) and composite reliability values (ranging from 0.803 to 0.913) demonstrate a high level of internal consistency within the latent constructs. This suggests that the items within each construct consistently measure the same underlying concept. Construct validity is evaluated by employing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The AVE

values, which range from 0.708 to 0.849, demonstrate a strong convergent validity. This means that a significant amount of the variability in the concept is accurately represented by its indicators. These statistics essentially verify that the measurement model is dependable and accurate in expressing the intended concepts, guaranteeing the strength and precision of the analysis in Smart PLS.

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion is employed to evaluate the discriminant validity of constructs within a structural equation model (Afthanorhan, Ghazali, and Rashid 2021). The diagonal values exhibit larger values compared to the off-diagonal correlations across constructs. These diagonal values indicate each construct's square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). This demonstrates robust discriminant validity, suggesting that the categories, specifically "Destination Attribute," "Place Attachment," "Revisit Intention," and "Tourist Attribute," are clearly defined and do not have substantial overlap in their measurement. Put simply, the model effectively differentiates between both concepts, hence confirming the dependability of the measurement approach.

**Table 1:** R Square Overview

|                   | R-square | R-square adjusted |
|-------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Place Attachment  | 0.830    | 0.829             |
| Revisit Intention | 0.550    | 0.546             |

The R-squared values presented in Table 1 provide a measure of the degree to which the regression models for "Place Attachment" and "Revisit Intention" accurately represent the data. The high R-squared value of 0.83 for "Place Attachment" and its modified R-squared value of 0.829 indicates that the model successfully accounts for roughly 83% of the variability in this construct, indicating a solid match. In contrast, the "Revisit Intention" model has an R-squared value of 0.55, suggesting that it accounts for around 55% of the variability. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.546 suggests a decent level of fit. However, this also suggests that unidentified factors might affect "Revisit Intention," emphasising the necessity for future research into additional variables that could influence this concept.

**Table 2:** F- square list

|  | f-square |
|--|----------|
| Destination Attribute -> Place Attachment  | 0.652    |
| Destination Attribute -> Revisit Intention | 0.080    |
| Place Attachment -> Revisit Intention      | 0.000    |
| Tourist Attribute -> Place Attachment      | 0.618    |
| Tourist Attribute -> Revisit Intention     | 0.118    |



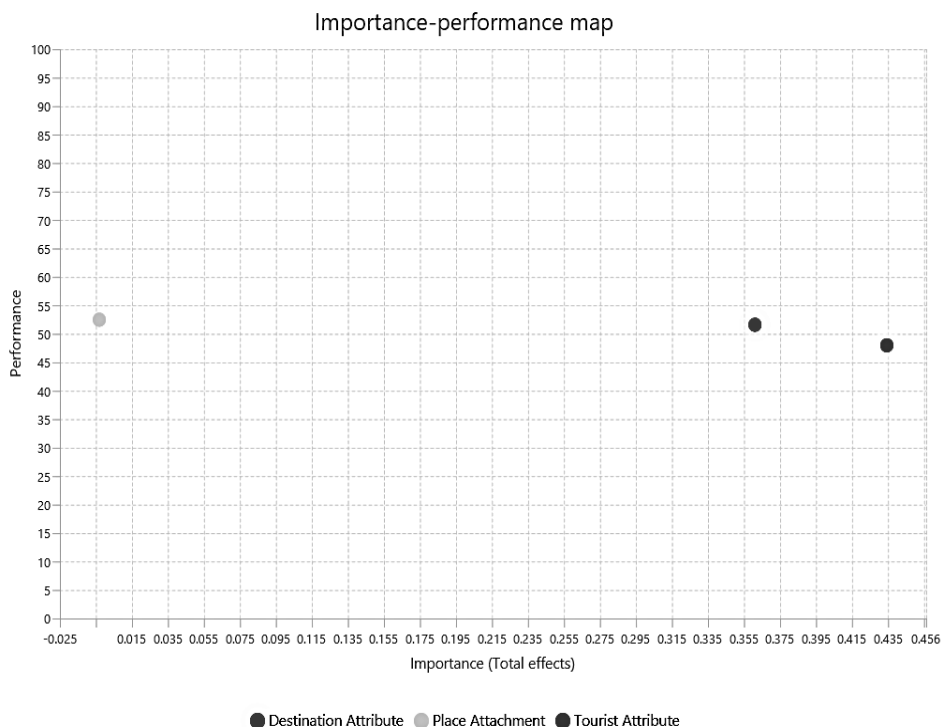
The F-square values, which indicate the extent to which one variable influences another in your structural equation model, are presented in Table 2. These values facilitate the assessment of the strength of the relationships between the variables. "Tourist Attribute -> Place Attachment" and "Destination Attribute -> Place Attachment" each have F-square values of 0.652 and 0.618, respectively. This suggests that the attributes "Destination Attribute" and "Tourist Attribute" exert a substantial impact on the quality "Place Attachment." This implies that "Place Attachment" fluctuations can be predominantly explained by modifications in the aforementioned attributes. On the contrary, "Tourist Attribute -> Revisit Intention" and "Destination Attribute -> Revisit Intention", each has F-square values of 0.08 and 0.118, respectively. The relatively small magnitudes of these values indicate that they have a comparatively lesser influence on the variable "Revisit Intention." Conversely, an F-square value of 0.000 indicates that the relationship between "Place Attachment" and "Revisit Intention" is not statistically significant. As a result, the variable "Place Attachment" does not significantly contribute to the explanation of the fluctuations observed in "Revisit Intention." The results of this study provide valuable insights into the interrelationships among the components in your model, underscoring the strength of these connections. Furthermore, they can guide subsequent research endeavors or efforts to enhance the model.

The study's hypothesis testing results are displayed in Table 3, illustrating the influence of individual factors on one another. The T statistics and p-values are employed for the assessment of hypotheses, while the sample mean and standard deviation offer contextual information. The hypotheses H4, H2, H3, and H1 are confirmed. These findings indicate that the "Destination Attribute" has a substantial influence on "Place Attachment," "Revisit Intention," and "Tourist Attribute," whereas the "Tourist Attribute" has a large impact on "Place Attachment" and "Revisit Intention." The high T statistics and p-values of 0.000 imply robust and statistically significant associations. Nevertheless, Hypothesis H5, which suggests that "Place Attachment" influences "Revisit Intention," is disproven. The T statistic has a relatively small value of 0.038, and the p-value of 0.970 indicates that it is not statistically significant. These findings suggest that "Place Attachment" does not substantially influence "Revisit Intention" in this study. In a nutshell, the study offers robust empirical evidence for most of the proposed connections, except for the minimal influence of "Place Attachment" on "Revisit Intention." These findings enhance comprehension of the links between the variables being studied in the research.

**Table 3: Results of Hypothesis Testing**

| Hypothesis Testing                            | Original sample (O) | Sample mean (M) | Standard deviation (STDEV) | T statistics (O/STDEV) | P values |           |
|---|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------------|----------|-----------|
| H4 Destination Attribute -> Place Attachment  | 0.495               | 0.497           | 0.032                      | 15.476                 | 0.000    | Supported |
| H2 Destination Attribute -> Revisit Intention | 0.362               | 0.368           | 0.085                      | 4.279                  | 0.000    | Supported |
| H5 Place Attachment -> Revisit Intention      | -0.004              | -0.008          | 0.094                      | 0.038                  | 0.970    | Rejected  |
| H3 Tourist Attribute -> Place Attachment      | 0.482               | 0.48            | 0.036                      | 13.546                 | 0.000    | Supported |
| H1 Tourist Attribute -> Revisit Intention     | 0.436               | 0.435           | 0.067                      | 6.463                  | 0.000    | Supported |

The statistics generated in the context of a measurement model in Smart PLS are used to evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs. The reliability of a construct is assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values (ranging from 0.795 to 0.911) and composite reliability values (ranging from 0.803 to 0.913) demonstrate a high level of internal consistency within the latent constructs. This suggests that the items within each construct consistently measure the same underlying concept. However, construct validity is evaluated by employing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The AVE values, which range from 0.708 to 0.849, demonstrate strong convergent validity. This means that a significant amount of the variability in the concept is accurately represented by its indicators. These statistics essentially verify that the measurement model is dependable and accurate in expressing the intended concepts, guaranteeing the strength and precision of the analysis in Smart PLS.



**Figure 1: Importance – Performance Map**

Within the framework of an Importance-Performance Map (Ringle and Sarstedt 2016) study illustrated in Figure 1, the precise values linked to "Revisit Intention" concerning the qualities are of utmost significance. The "Destination Attribute" with a score of 0.361 is of moderate importance and somewhat favourable influence on revisit intentions, indicating that it has a significant role. Conversely, the result of -0.004 for "Place Attachment" suggests that it has minimal or no effect on the likelihood of revisiting, and may even have a slightly negative impact. The "Tourist Attribute" has a score of 0.434, indicating its significant importance and a powerful positive impact on the intention to revisit, making it a critical factor. Hence, it is imperative for stakeholders and decision-makers to give precedence to enhancing the "Tourist Attribute" and "Destination Attribute" since these aspects have significant importance and exert a favorable influence on the likelihood of revisiting. The impact of "Place Attachment" seems to be limited and may not be a top priority for enhancement in this particular circumstance.

## CONCLUSION

A multitude of factors exert a profound influence on the dynamics of tourism, shaping the decisions, actions, and likelihood of travellers to revisit particular destinations. These comprise attributes associated with the destination as well as those related to the tourists themselves, including personal, social, and psychological factors, as well as tangible and intangible characteristics of the locations. The notions of place attachment and revisit intention, which are widely acknowledged as crucial determinants in the field of sustainable tourism, are at the heart of this intricate interplay.

The literature review furnished an all-encompassing foundation for the research, emphasising the complex network of elements that impact the choices made by visitors. Remaining intention has been found to be significantly influenced by tourist-related characteristics, including personal preferences and interests and social influences such as recommendations from family and friends. In the same way, the return decisions of visitors are significantly influenced by destination-related tangible and intangible qualities, including infrastructure, natural beauty, cultural diversity, and atmosphere. Scholarly literature emphasizes the critical significance of place attachment in influencing intentions to revisit. Place attachment, distinguished by the development of emotional connections with particular destinations, cultivates a deep sense of identity and affiliation, thereby impacting the conduct and perspectives of visitors. A high degree of place attachment has been consistently associated with a larger inclination to revisit, underscoring the importance of this attribute in advancing sustainable tourism.

This study fills a significant void in the existing body of literature by concentrating on the particular circumstances of Jazan Province, Saudi Arabia. Previous studies have offered a more comprehensive perspective on domestic tourism in Saudi Arabia. However, this study focuses on the intricate function of place attachment as a mediator between attributes associated with the destination and visitors, which influences their inclination to revisit.

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