



## Shaping destination marketing with norms and personality

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### ABSTRACT

This research applies a multiple perspective approach to examine how norms, personal characteristics, and destination preference affect a tourist's place attachment to a chosen tourism destination. This paper also investigates the level of attachment based on the characteristics of a destination. Two studies involving experimental and survey-based methods were undertaken to examine these relationships. Study 1 was conducted with tourists in Australia. The results show that subjective and descriptive norms have significant direct and indirect effects on place attachment. In contrast to previous research, cultural norms were insignificant in predicting place attachment. Destination preference and tourist personality played significant mediation and moderation roles respectively in the relationship between the proposed antecedents and place attachment. An eye-tracking experiment in Study 2 was conducted to understand what type of destinations were more appealing to tourists. Results of Study 2 reveal that tourists are more interested in, and attached to, destinations with heritage attributes. The findings from the two studies have implications for destination marketing and the management literature and has relevance for tourism practitioners.

### 1. Introduction

Place attachment, characterized by an emotional and cognitive bond with physical environments, plays a pivotal role in shaping tourist experiences and behaviors (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). A tourism destination with cultural heritage often becomes a favourable or preferred place for tourists to attach to or future patronage. Defined as official locations preserving pieces of history for their cultural heritage values (Othman and Heba, 2018, p. 1704), heritage tourism has demonstrated its worth through improved destination management and increased revenue (J. Zhang et al., 2022). Destination preference, denoting a tourist's decision among multiple alternatives, stands as a key factor in the overall development of heritage tourism (Liu, 2014). While prior studies have delved into factors influencing tourists' preferences and attachment to heritage places, a crucial dimension remains overlooked—the normative influences on heritage destination preference and attachment (see Fig. 1).

Norms, encapsulating the standards, expectations, and rules within a group, hold profound influence over what is deemed normal and appropriate in feeling, thinking, and doing (Stok and de Ridder, 2019, pp. 95–110). Despite their importance in behavioral science, scant

attention has been given to understanding how norms may affect place attachment and destination, with limited exploration under the umbrella of the theory of planned behavior (Lewicka, 2011). The absence of research in this realm is striking, given the extensive citation of norms in behavioral science. Concurrently, the impact of a tourist's personality and its role as a filter in perceiving and evaluating heritage destinations has been underexplored, despite indications that it significantly influences decision-making processes and subsequent destination attachment (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999; Su and Huang, 2018; Moghavvemi et al., 2021).

Consistent with the foregoing discussion, the study aims to examine the intricate relationships between a tourist's norms and personality with destination preference and attachment to a cultural tourism destination. Drawing on social congruity theory (Klipfel et al., 2014) and the focus theory of normative conduct (Cialdini et al., 1991), we delve into these relationships, aiming to provide insights with implications for tourism marketers, destination management, and the broader tourism literature. The subsequent sections of this paper present a comprehensive literature review, articulate study hypotheses, outline the methodology employed for hypothesis testing, and present the results. The paper concludes with a discussion of findings and their implications for

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the field of tourism.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social congruity theory and the focus theory of normative conduct

A social congruity model is a framework that aims to predict the behavior of consumers based on the attributes of a product or service (Islam et al., 2019) (i.e., destination offers). The model can also identify the factors that influence decision-making (Sirgy, 1982). These may include the type of destination the tourist is visiting, their intentions, and attachment. Various types of congruities are typically used to describe the differing aspects of an individual’s self-perception, such as their social self-esteem, self-confidence, and social consistency (Clairborne et al., 1991). When an individual experiences actual self-congruity, they are more likely to visit a place that will satisfy their own needs. On the other hand, when they experience the ideal self-perception, they are more likely to visit a place that will satisfy their social approval, and self-esteem needs (Beerli et al., 2007). The selection of a destination can fulfil various needs, such as social approval, self-esteem, and consistency. This is expected to increase a tourists’ attachment to a place (Moons et al., 2020).

A focus theory of normative conduct identifies the importance of the norms shaping human behavior (Cialdini et al., 1991). Several types of norms can be used to guide an individual’s behavior. For example, subjective social norms, cultural norms, and personal norms. Subjective social norms are used to describe the expectations of others, while personal norms or characteristics are used to describe the behavior of an individual (Cialdini et al., 1991). The focus theory of normative conduct informs the perception of how others may approve of an individual’s actions, while controlling for personal features. Even where other norms may dictate differently, an individual will still follow the dictates of the norm that is most familiar (Park et al., 2022). Therefore, given an understanding of the power of norms, researchers have highlighted the importance of normative conduct and social congruity theories in developing tourism-related behaviors (Wasaya et al., 2022).

2.2. Norms and place attachment

In this study, place attachment is conceptualized as a combination of two dimensions of the heritage destination: place dependence and place identity (Williams and Vaske, 2003). The concept of place attachment emerged within the social sciences during the 1960s with the development of new theoretical elements in geography, sociology, and

psychology (Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2013). Researchers created a framework to better understand the various facets of place attachment (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). This framework consists of three dimensions: person, place, and process (See Fig. A1 in Appendix). The person dimension examines the experience and collective meanings of attached people, while the process dimension explores the actions and cognition used to express attachment (Scannell and Gifford, 2017). The place dimension looks at the destination to which people become attached (Scannell and Gifford, 2017). The current study consists of some factors from all the three dimensions (e.g., personality from person dimension, destination preference from the process dimension and showing physical attributes of heritage places in eye-tracking experiment).

The influence of social norms on human behavior is widely acknowledged. In psychology, it is regarded as one of the main drivers of human behavior (Berkowitz, 1972). For example, social norms (e.g., descriptive and cultural norms) have been used in various theories and models to predict human behavior (Stern et al., 1999) and are often used in conjunction with normative concepts. However, scholars have raised doubts about their usefulness in relation to positive behavior change. It is claimed that the concept is too vague and can lead to extrapolation and may decrease the intensity of a well-established behavior (Marini, 1984). For instance, Hansmann and Binder (2021) found that subjective social norms may cause individuals to travel less to certain destinations. For example, there has been a call to boycott of travel to Russia due to the Russia-Ukraine war (Siyamiyan Gorji et al., 2022). However, studies have also indicated the power of norms in changing human behavior. Cialdini et al. (1990) refined the concept of descriptive and social norms and the way they affect human behavior. They developed the focus theory of normative conduct and properly defined the concept of subjective social norms, which aimed to shed light on their influence on an individual’s behavior.

Norms play an important role in changing an individuals’ place attachment behavior by influencing attitudes, a sense of belonging, and behaviors towards a specific place (Escalera-Reyes, 2020). Norms act as unwritten rules dictating expected and acceptable behavior within society (Sachs, 2019). If norms are associated with the customs and values of a specific place, they may strengthen an individuals’ attachment to the place (Brink and Wamsler, 2019). For example, if there are norms promoting heritage activities in a society and the society values heritage conservation, individuals living and visiting the destination may develop a stronger sense of attachment to that place (Taher Tolou Del et al., 2020). However, if norms conflict with an individual’s attachment to a place, it may create feelings of disconnection and discomfort (Flett

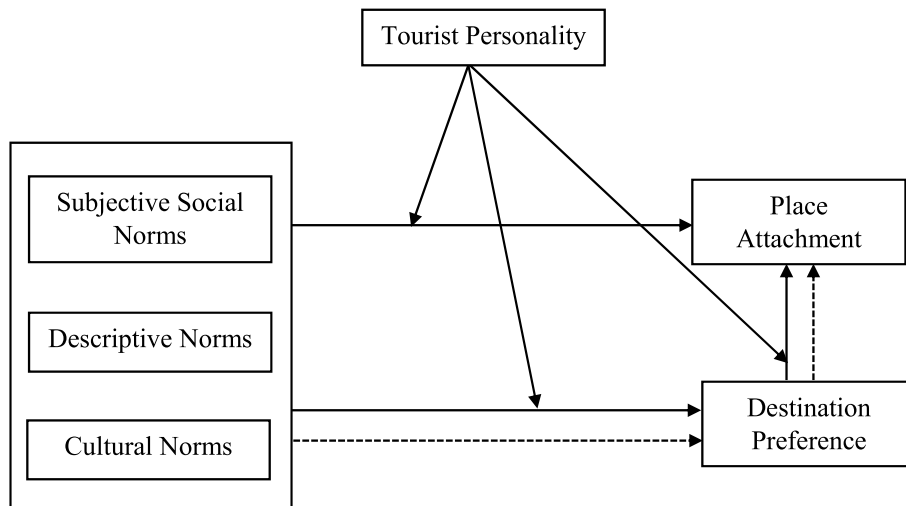


Fig. 1. The proposed model of this study. Dotted lines represent indirect effects.

and Hewitt, 2020). Therefore, critically analyzing and understanding the relationship between place attachment and norms is crucial for positive place connections and experiences for all.

Subjective social norms and heritage place attachment are closely related (Wu et al., 2023). Subjective norms refer to an individual's perception or belief about what others think they should or should not do in a given situation (Ham et al., 2015). Place attachment is an emotional bond that people have to a particular place (e.g., heritage destination), which can be based on feelings of familiarity, comfort, and security (Wang, 2023). Thus, subjective norms can influence the strength of an individual's attachment to heritage destinations because behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs may be shaped by the beliefs and values of those around them (Noel Biseko Lwoga, 2017). Based on the above discussion, it can be hypothesized that:

**H1.** Subjective social norms are positively related to attachment to a heritage destination.

According to Lewicka's two-path model (Lewicka, 2005), cultural capital and descriptive norms are important factors that can influence the willingness of individuals to perform place-related activities and attachment. Similarly, Damanik and Yusuf (2022) studied the influence of descriptive norms on the choice of a heritage destination. It was revealed that the expectations of authority figures influenced the choice of a heritage destination. It was also found that the manipulation of descriptive norms could affect tourists' intention to visit a heritage destination (See and Goh, 2019). Although it is not possible to confirm how many factors influence heritage destination attachment or loyalty, normative appeals (e.g., descriptive norms) are valuable evidence that help to explain tourist attachment (Jin et al., 2020).

Descriptive norms affect the way individuals feel attachment to a heritage place (Prince, 2022). Descriptive norms refer to an individual's perception or belief about what others actually may do in a given situation (Ajzen, 1991). These expectations can be based on previous experience or societal expectations, and they can influence how individual's feel about a place (Gauld and Reeves, 2023). For example, individuals may feel greater attachment to a heritage place with positive or accepted descriptive norms than they would to a place with negative or less accepted norms. Heritage place attachment, on the other hand, is a feeling of connection and emotional attachment to a heritage place (Vong, 2015). It is based on the experiences and memories individuals have of a heritage place and can be influenced by the descriptive norms that are associated with the place. Therefore, it can be proposed that:

**H2.** Descriptive norms are positively related to attachment to a heritage destination.

Cultural values are considered to be powerful influencers of tourists' behavior (Wasaya et al., 2022). Cialdini et al. (1990) found that various cultural norms can influence an individual's behavior, such as decision-making (Allameh et al., 2015). Allameh et al. (2015) found that the beliefs and cultural values of tourists can influence the decisions of those who visit the country. It is important to note that because cultural norms can have a significant influence on the decisions of tourists, they can also help influence tourists' choices and attachment behaviors. For example, Lee et al. (2009) explored the idea that cultural values can influence the decisions of customers when it comes to a certain product or service. They found that norms can help influence the overall level of positive feedback that customers provide about a particular product or service and can influence the selection process. In a similar way, these norms can influence the process of destination selection and attachment. For example, Halonen (2020) found that cultural norms can help guide tourist recommendations related to a tourist destination. Tourists generally see marketing campaigns through a cultural lens, and cultural norms influence the selection of a destination. A culture is comprised of various characteristics that individuals share with one another, leading to attachment to a location (Tylor, 1871). Culture can influence the way individuals make travel decisions (choosing a destination; Triandis,

1994).

Shared cultural values can form a strong sense of belonging and attachment to a heritage place (Wang, 2023). Cultural norms help to define a place and shape the experiences of those who live there. Those who share the same values and culture are more likely to form a strong sense of attachment to their environment. This connection can create a sense of community and identity and provide an emotional connection to the place (e.g., heritage place) they live in (Gustafson, 2001). Hence, it can be hypothesized that:

**H3.** Cultural norms are positively related to attachment to a heritage destination.

### 2.3. The role of destination preference

Tourism has been regarded as a strategy for regional development in many countries (Pan et al., 2021). It is, therefore, important that policies and strategies that promote tourism are well researched. In addition to a destination's physical characteristics, other factors, such as tourists' motivational factors, should also be considered to determine tourist choice (Battour et al., 2017), as tourist choice influences tourist behavior both directly and indirectly. For example, Lupu et al. (2021) found that heritage destination preference was a strong mediator for behaviors such as electronic word of mouth and heritage destination attachment. Understanding the various factors that influence a tourist's destination preference is also important to tourism marketers because preferences influence behavior or attachment with the place (Lupu et al., 2021). Destination preference is a selection criterion that influences the likelihood of a behavioral decision (e.g., revisiting a place; Ebrahim et al., 2016) based on the ranking of attributes such as normative and cognitive components (Ramsøy et al., 2019).

Researchers have highlighted several factors that affect tourists' heritage destination preferences, such as age, gender, and social normative factors (Remoaldo et al., 2014), first impressions (Deng and Chen, 2022). Cooper and Buckley (2022) also suggested that tourists' mental health, marketing, and the destinations capacity to match with the individual's personality drive heritage destination preference. Wong et al. (2016) have also suggested that destination preference depends upon a tourist's socio-cultural and psychological characteristics. Researchers have also argued that destination preference plays a role as a mediator among different relationships (e.g., Su and Huang, 2018). Destination preferences were found to be shaped through social factors and positively influence place attachment. It has also been posited that there is a positive link between place attachment and destination preference (Stylos et al., 2016). As tourists' destination choice tends to reflect preferred activities and hobbies (Scannell and Gifford, 2017) therefore, it can be hypothesized that:

**H4a/b.** Destination preference mediates the relationship between subjective social norms / descriptive norms and attachment to a heritage destination.

The cultural influence on destination preference and behavior has also been discussed (Filimonau and Perez, 2018). Culture can influence decision-making processes (e.g., deciding on a destination) and can affect the actions and thoughts of individuals (i.e., tourist) and groups (Lehman et al., 2004). As cultural practices and norms change, these changes can influence the way individuals think and act (Lehman et al., 2004). Cultural values are related to tourists' attitudinal factors (e.g., heritage destination preferences) and behavior (Filimonau and Perez, 2018). Therefore, understanding the length of stay in relation to heritage destination preferences helps to attract the right customers and develop long-term relations or attachment (Hassan, 2000). This can be achieved through the development of strategies that include supply-side (e.g., destination or local cultural values) and demand factors (Mussalam et al., 2016). The indirect impacts of personal factors and cultural values on tourists' destinations choices and attachment behavior are clear and

it can be hypothesized that:

**H5.** Destination preference mediates the relationship between cultural norms and attachment to a heritage destination.

#### 2.4. The role of tourist personality

Personality is “the individual’s characteristic styles of thought, feeling, and behavior, demonstrating stability as lifelong styles of relating, coping, behavior, thinking, and feeling,” forming five personality factors (Costa and McCrae, 1986, p. 408). These factors are openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (OCEAN) (Costa and McCrae, 1986). In this study, the five dimensions are utilized as moderators of the relationships between different norms, destination preference, and place attachment.

Personality influences individual behavior and has been discussed extensively within the literature (Camoiras-Rodriguez and Varela, 2020). Given the value of personality features in relation to behavior change, these concepts have been applied in hospitality and tourism where it was found that a strong relationship exists between an individual’s personality traits and behavior (Woosnam et al., 2022). For example, Settembre Blundo et al. (2017) found that personality traits and personal values were good predictors of heritage destination preference.

Similarly, it was found that people who were more likely to have an extraverted personality were more likely to go on adventurous trips to novel destinations (Settembre Blundo et al., 2017). Those with neurotic tendencies are prone to experiencing feelings of fear, anxiety, worry, and uncertainty. This condition makes them feel like they are dependent on others, and they would rather be attached to places with others rather than try new things (Kahle et al., 2005). Scannell and Gifford (2017) claim that place attachment has some benefit for all tourists (no matter their personality type). Fig. A2 (See Appendix) shows common benefits of place attachment as reported by tourists, presented as a percentage of the tourists who voted for each benefit. As place attachment has many of the benefits desired by tourists, understanding the factors of heritage place attachment is crucial for heritage tourism development.

Personality influences how an individual lives their life (Kersting, 2003). It plays an important role in the selection of destination and developing feelings and emotions for it (Hiebler-Ragger et al., 2018). Individuals become attached to objects or places that match with their own personality (Usakli and Baloglu, 2011). Kroneisen and Heck (2020) indicated that there is a strong correlation between the personality of tourists and different norms and behaviors. Similarly, Harman (1976) proposed that personality factors play a crucial role in predicting pro-environmental behavior and in the sustainable development of tourism (Kim et al., 2018). Because of the relationship between tourist personality, different norms, and behavior, we assume the following hypotheses:

**H6a.** Tourist personality moderates the relationship between subjective social norms, destination preference, and attachment to a heritage destination.

**H6b.** Tourist personality moderates the relationship between descriptive norms, destination preference, and attachment to a heritage destination.

**H6c.** Tourist personality moderates the relationship between cultural norms, destination preference, and attachment to a heritage destination.

### 3. Methods

Given the limitations of a single study in drawing broad conclusions about tourist behavior and preferences, two studies with a mixed method were undertaken to examine the proposed relationships and provide a more comprehensive understanding of place attachment. Hence, Study 1 employed a quantitative method involving a

questionnaire-based survey through self-reporting that addressed the study’s hypotheses. An experimental design (eye-tracking) was then undertaken in Study 2 to investigate what attributes of a destination were appealing to tourists. The eye-tracking experiment determined if participants exhibited signs of genuine attachment to heritage destinations (e.g., showing excitement, looking happy, or emotional and attentive when heritage destination pictures were shown to them). While eye-tracking data can provide insights into participants’ visual focus and engagement, it is important to note that interpreting these patterns as indicating excitement or happiness is subjective and requires careful analysis. The two studies are related and triangulates the data to explore aspects of a single phenomenon (heritage place attachment) using two different methods (Heale and Forbes, 2013).

#### 3.1. Study 1

The target population of the empirical study were national and international tourists who had visited an Australian heritage site in the last three years. The minimum age was set to 18 years with no upper age limit. A non-probability sampling technique (purposive sampling) was deemed to fulfill the study’s objectives. For example, tourists’ availability and motivation to participate and subjective judgement. Also, a non-probability sampling technique can be cost-effective and speedy with high accessibility (Tse and Tung, 2022). The data was collected using an online platform (LimeSurvey) during the summer of 2022. A survey link was created using the LimeSurvey platform and distributed to potential respondents across various platforms. The link was shared in Facebook and Instagram groups associated with Australian tourism. Additionally, it was sent to electronic mail groups and Facebook groups of randomly selected Australian universities from all the states. The LimeSurvey platform provided the details of survey responses to determine the eligibility (Bentler and Chou, 1987).

Bentler and Chou’s (1987) sample size guidelines were followed. These guidelines recommend 5–10 observations for each free parameter estimated, establishes a suitable sample size for structural equation modelling (SEM). The sample for the study was 453 ( $44 \times 10 = 440$ ). All responses were retained as no responses had missing values due to the LimeSurvey setup which required respondents to answer the question before moving on to the next or offering an option to quit the survey. The respondents were allowed to quit the survey at any time to ensure that only interested candidates participated in the study. The survey took approximately 8–10 min to complete. SPSS and AMOS were employed to perform various analyses, such as factor analysis, validity and reliability tests, and hypothesis testing.

#### 3.2. Measures

The current study adapted existing scales with high reliability and validity from the literature to measure the constructs. Place attachment was adapted from Williams and Vaske (2003). Subjective social norms were adapted from Han and Kim (2010). Descriptive norms were measured using a 4-item adapted scale from Moons and De Pelsmacker (2015). Cultural values were adapted from Choi et al. (2007). To measure tourist personality, a 10-item scale assessing the big five personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness were adapted from Rammstedt et al. (2013). Destination preference was adapted from Mukherjee et al. (2018).

Modifications were performed to ensure scale alignment before proceeding to the next step of the assessment (e.g., normality estimations, factor analysis, multicollinearity and discriminant validity verifications, and structural equation modelling [SEM] for hypotheses testing). All latent constructs were measured through a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., ranging from 1 = “strongly agree” to 5 = “strongly disagree”).

3.3. Common method bias

To mitigate common method bias, various measures were implemented. The questionnaire design prioritized simplicity and clarity by avoiding complex language and unfamiliar terms. Additionally, checks for consistency involved the incorporation of negative items corresponding to positive ones, with no significant discrepancies found. Statistical remedies, such as Harman’s single factor test and partial correlation were applied following Podsakoff et al., 2003 recommendations. Harman’s (Harman, 1976) single factor test revealed that the first factor accounted for 25.68% of the variance. The partial correlation procedure confirmed the stability of the hypothesized relationships. Multicollinearity diagnosis using the variance inflation factor (VIF) demonstrated no issues, as all VIFs remained below 2.0 and Tolerance greater than 0.1 (Johnson and LeBreton, 2004) (see Table 1).

4. Analysis and results of study 1

4.1. Confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to check the factor loadings (see Table 2) and to verify the structure of the observed variables highlighting the relationship between these variables and their underlying constructs. Researchers (e.g., Suh, 2006) recommend conducting this procedure before the hypothesis testing is carried out.

The Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to assess the normal distribution of the data. The results ( $p > 0.05$ ) indicated that there is not enough evidence to conclude that the data significantly deviates from normality (Shapiro and Wilk, 1965). Additionally, an overall model fitness test was

Table 1 Respondents’ profile.

Variable	Category	Distribution	
		Frequency	Percentage
Age (Years)	18–25	421	92.9
	26–35	22	04.9
	36–45	7	01.5
	46–55	1	0.20
	≥56	2	0.40
Gender	Male	314	69.3
	Female	137	30.2
	Other	2	0.40
Education	Secondary School	73	16.1
	Diploma/trade certificate	37	1.50
	Bachelor’s degree	294	64.9
	Postgraduate degree	48	10.6
	Graduate diploma	12	2.60
Occupation	Other	19	4.20
	Company employee	83	18.3
	Own business	30	6.60
	Sales/service	1	0.20
	Student	326	72.0
	Housewife	4	0.90
	Not employed	3	0.70
Income (AUD)	Other	6	1.30
	\$0-\$29,999	386	85.2
	\$30,000-\$60,000	34	7.50
	\$61,000-\$90,000	11	2.40
	\$91,000-\$120,000	8	1.80
	\$121,000-\$150,000	5	1.10
Marital Status	≥\$150,000	9	2.00
	Single	429	94.7
	Married without children	10	2.20
	Married with children	14	3.10
Purpose of visit	Business	29	6.40
	Tourist	192	42.4
	Visiting family/friends	77	17.0
	Education	124	27.4
	Other	31	6.80
Nationality	Australia	416	91.8
	Oversea	37	8.20

Table 2 Confirmatory factor analysis, Cronbach’s alpha, and composite reliability.

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	α	CR
Subjective	Most people who are important to me like heritage places.	.780	0.885	0.787
	Norms	The people whose opinion I value, identify themselves with heritage places.		
Descriptive Norms	The people who are important to me are attached to heritage place.	.803	0.738	0.809
	I believe that most people who are important to me are involved in tourism activities at heritage destinations.	.771		
	I believe that most people who are important to me show interest in tourism related activities at heritage destinations.	.822		
	I believe that most people who are important to me want me engaged in tourism activities at heritage destinations.	.849		
Cultural Norms	I believe that most people who are important to me think it would be a good idea to engage in tourism activities at heritage destinations.	.532	0.763	0.825
	Cultural heritage must be a part of our life.	.735		
Tourist	We need to conserve more cultural heritage for future generations.	.811	0.709	0.872
	The present cultural heritage should be available for my children’s children.	.787		
	Culture helps us to live with people of different backgrounds.	.844		
Personality	I see myself as someone who tends to find fault with others.	.536	0.764	0.793
	I see myself as someone who is generally trusting.	.510		
Destination preference	I see myself as someone who is relaxed, handles stress well.	.551	0.920	0.941
	I see myself as someone who has few artistic interests.	.576		
	I see myself as someone who does a thorough job.	.536		
	I see myself as someone who gets nervous easily.	.506		
Attachment	Heritage destination is exactly what I actually look for.	.691	0.920	0.941
	I choose a heritage destination with which my memories are associated.	.672		
Attachment	I choose heritage destination which is distinctly different over other preferred destinations.	.662	0.920	0.941
	I choose heritage destination which possess many specialties.	.660		
	I choose heritage destination which refreshes my mind.	.709		
Attachment	I choose heritage destination which I want to visit for a long time.	.675	0.920	0.941
	I feel heritage destination is a part of me.	.825		
Attachment	Heritage destination is very special to me.	.786	0.920	0.941
	I identify strongly with heritage destination.	.818		
	I am very attached to heritage destination.	.826		
Attachment	Living at heritage destination says a lot about who I am.	.668	0.920	0.941

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	$\alpha$	CR
	Heritage destination means a lot to me.	.788		
	Heritage is the best destination for what I like to do.	.842		
	I get more satisfaction out of living at heritage destination than any other destination.	.811		
	Doing what I do at heritage destination is more important to me than doing it at any other destination.	.747		
	I would not substitute any other area for doing the types of things that I do at heritage destination.	.652		

performed, and all values fell within acceptable thresholds:  $\chi^2/d.f.$  = 3.453, GFI = 0.902, IFI = 0.924, TLI = 0.912, and CFI = 0.903, as recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999).

The values in Table 3 reflect the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs. The minimum recommended average variance extracted (AVE) was  $\geq 0.5$  (Hair et al., 2021), suggesting adequate convergent validity. Furthermore, if the value of mean square variance (MSV) is less than the average variance extracted for a particular construct, it indicates good discriminant validity between that construct and the other constructs in the model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results of this study were within the acceptable threshold levels for validity.

4.2. Hypothesis testing

Table 4 shows direct relationships among the independent variables and place attachment (dependent variable) including mediator. It also presents the impact of destination preference on place attachment. Table 5 presents the indirect relationships between subjective norms, descriptive norms, cultural norms, tourist personality, and place attachment mediated by destination preference.

Subjective norms were positively associated with place attachment ( $\beta = 0.136, p < 0.05$ ) and destination preference ( $\beta = 0.183, p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, descriptive norms were also positively related to place attachment ( $\beta = 0.162, p < 0.01$ ) and destination preference ( $\beta = 0.166, p < 0.01$ ). However, cultural norms showed a negative, but insignificant direct impact on place attachment ( $\beta = -0.054, p > 0.05$ ). Prior studies had shown a positive significant relation between these two variables (e.g., Tylor, 1871). The remaining hypotheses were supported. However, cultural norms has a positive significant impact on destination preference ( $\beta = 0.224, p < 0.01$ ). Destination preference was found to be the strongest determinant of place attachment ( $\beta = 0.639, p > 0.01$ ).

Subjective norms were found to have a positive significant indirect relation with place attachment mediated by destination preference ( $\beta = 0.117, p < 0.05$ ). In addition, descriptive norms had a positive indirect relation with place attachment ( $\beta = 0.106, p < 0.05$ ). The indirect impact of cultural norms on place attachment was also significant and

Table 3 Results for correlations, means and SD among study variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	MSV	VIF	SN	DN	CN	TP	DC	PA
SN	2.682	.643	0.487	1.729	<b>0.566</b>					
DN	2.436	.670	0.510	1.792	0.576**	<b>0.585</b>				
CN	2.076	.710	0.107	1.414	0.301**	0.365**	<b>0.543</b>			
TP	2.423	.477	0.510	1.809	0.517**	0.532**	0.434**	<b>0.774</b>		
DP	2.294	.593	0.497	1.979	0.523**	0.539**	0.510**	0.582**	<b>0.569</b>	
PA	2.475	.714	0.611	NA	0.528**	0.547**	0.357**	0.540**	0.713**	<b>0.641</b>

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The values in bold represent average variance extracted (AVE). \*\* $p < .01$ . SN: Subjective Norms; DN: Descriptive Norms; CN: Cultural Norms; TP: Tourist Personality; DP: Destination Preference; PA: Place Attachment.

positive ( $\beta = 0.143, p < 0.05$ ).

Table 6 presents the results of the moderation analysis. Tourist personality significantly moderated most of the paths. Subjective norms, descriptive norms, and cultural norms had a positive significant relation with destination preference ( $\beta = 0.203, p < 0.05, \beta = 0.336, p < 0.05$ , and  $\beta = 0.588, p < 0.05$  respectively). However, the moderated effects of subjective norms, destination preference, and place attachment were negative and insignificant ( $\beta = -0.020, p > 0.05$  and  $\beta = -0.008, p > 0.05$  respectively). The moderated path of descriptive norms with place attachment was significant but negative ( $\beta = -0.182, p < 0.05$ ). In addition, the moderated relationship between cultural norms and place attachment was positive but insignificant ( $\beta = 0.030, p > 0.05$ ). A detailed explanation and application of these results is provided in the discussion section.

5. Study 2

An eye-tracking experiment was conducted to test tourists' attention and emotions relating to notable Australian heritage destinations. Heritage destinations were selected based on the number of visitations and the amount of revenue generated in a year. The data for the Australian heritage destinations was obtained via the World Tourism Organization and Tourism Australia websites and annual reports. The main purpose of the experiment was to analyze and compare tourist attachment levels with heritage and non-heritage places. An eye-tracking technique can be used to measure heritage place attachment (Doğan, 2022), as it can measure eye movements as they see pictures of various places. The tracker monitors the length of time spent looking at certain features. This can provide insight into how people feel about a place and how attached they are to it. Therefore, eye-tracking was the most suitable technique to test place attachment for this study.

The experiment aimed to test attention levels and emotions that respondents could not express in the first survey-based study. Attention is a key component of tourist behavioral decisions. However, it is taken for granted in many applications and has not been adequately studied to date (Babakhani et al., 2020). Eye-tracking as a research method is uncommon in heritage research, however, recording eye movements can provide valuable information and insights about an individual's interests and focus of attention (Doğan, 2022). This study fills this gap by utilizing eye-tracking technology to test the attachment levels of tourists towards heritage destinations.

5.1. Participants

Twenty tourists were approached following snowball sampling via an electronic mail request to individuals who had visited an Australian heritage place, at least once, in the last three years. The minimum age was set at 18 years with no upper age limit. Twelve males (avg. age = 32.16) and eight females (avg. age = 31.62) agreed to participate in the experiment. They understood that their information would be used only for the purpose of this study and would not be shared with any third party. Participants were required to have compatible devices, and they received instructions on how to remotely calibrate their eye trackers. The tasks and objectives of the experiment were clearly communicated

**Table 4**  
Direct effects of structural model.

Predictor (X)	Outcome (Y)	Beta-value	SE	T	P-value	Result
Subjective Norms	Place Attachment	0.136	0.045	2.983	0.031**	Supported
Descriptive Norms	Place Attachment	0.162	0.044	3.642	0.007*	Supported
Cultural Norms	Place Attachment	-0.054	0.037	-1.464	0.250	Not Supported
Subjective Norms	Destination Preference	0.183	0.040	4.588	0.001*	Supported
Descriptive Norms	Destination Preference	0.166	0.039	4.251	0.001*	Supported
Cultural Norms	Destination Preference	0.224	0.031	7.069	0.001*	Supported
Destination Preference	Place Attachment	0.639	0.052	12.128	0.001*	Supported

\*Supported at  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*Supported at  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 5**  
Indirect effects of the structural model.

Predictor	Consequent		$\beta$	Boot SE	95% confidence interval		Status <sup>a</sup>
	Mediator	Dependent variable			LLCI	ULCI	
Subjective Norms	Destination Preference	Place Attachment	0.117	0.039	0.275	0.427	Supported
Descriptive Norms	Destination Preference	Place Attachment	0.106	0.038	0.268	0.417	Supported
Cultural Norms	Destination Preference	Place Attachment	0.143	0.039	0.296	0.445	Supported

<sup>a</sup> Mediated paths are supported at  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 6**  
Conditional direct effects of the structural model.

Predictor (X)	Moderator	Outcome (Y)	Beta-value	SE	P-value	Result <sup>a</sup>
Subjective Norms	Tourist Personality	Destination Preference	0.203	0.042	0.00	S
Descriptive Norms	Tourist Personality	Destination Preference	0.336	0.044	0.00	S
Cultural Norms	Tourist Personality	Destination Preference	0.588	0.035	0.00	S
Subjective Norms	Tourist Personality	Place Attachment	-0.020	0.058	0.73	NS
Descriptive Norms	Tourist Personality	Place Attachment	-0.182	0.063	0.00	S
Cultural Norms	Tourist Personality	Place Attachment	0.030	0.060	0.61	NS
Destination Preference	Tourist Personality	Place Attachment	-0.008	0.064	0.89	NS

<sup>a</sup> Moderated paths are supported at  $p < 0.05$ . S = Supported; NS = Not Supported.

to the participants.

5.2. Measures and procedure

Participants were seated at different locations in Australia and participated in the experiment online. They were requested to turn their computer or device camera on, and eye movements were recorded using The RealEye, an online research platform that offers webcam eye-tracking. The display resolution was 1366 × 768 px, average Eye-Tracking data grade = perfect, and average “Gaze vs Click” accuracy = 70 %. The calibration process lasted ~30 s for each participant, and it used 40 calibration dots displayed on various backgrounds to provide the highest accuracy. After initial instruction, the experiment started and continued for 60 s for each participant.

5.3. Experiment content

A total of 13 pictures of leading Australian tourist destinations were used in the experiment. These pictures showed the destinations with and without tourists’ activities. One picture was comprehensive containing a group of pictures from nine destinations, including leading heritage places and non-heritage places. The pictures were presented to the participants in a random manner. Participants were asked to click on the destination they like the most in the comprehensive picture. Tourists were also asked whether they found the place they liked the most in the given pictures or if their favorite place was missing. All participants answered that their favorite place was present in the pictures.

5.4. Analysis and results of study 2

Participants’ focus point and attention levels were observed for each

destination image. For example, it was noted at which part of the destination the observer spent more time and what their facial expression suggested (whether the tourist was excited, looked satisfied, neutral etc.). It was also noted if participants looked at the complete image or just parts of the image. In pictures that showed both the destination and activity, participants’ focus on the activity and the destination were observed. The purpose was to detect if the tourist was interested in the activities or the destination itself or if the tourist was interested in activity at that specific destination. Results for attention and emotions are provided below.

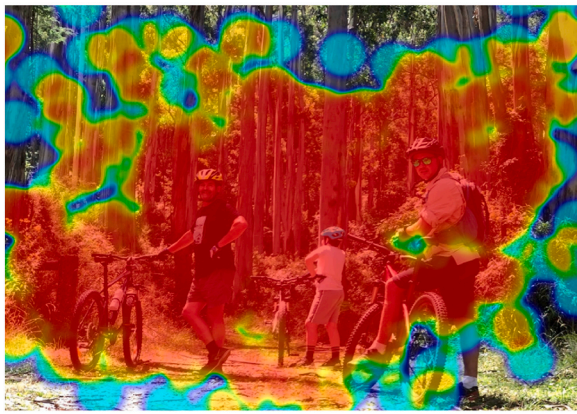
5.5. Attention

It was observed that most of the participants focused more on the destinations where activities occurred. The majority liked heritage destinations for these activities (see Picture a, b, c, & d for heat maps showing attention points).

The red shaded area demonstrates the attention point of the participants. It can be observed that they focused more on the activity area within the picture. Focus also drifted away from the activity to the background. This suggests the participants were also interested in the destination, not just the activities. In the main picture, most of the participants demonstrated some attention towards the heritage sites (see Picture e, f, g, h), particularly the blue spots on Picture e).

5.6. Emotions

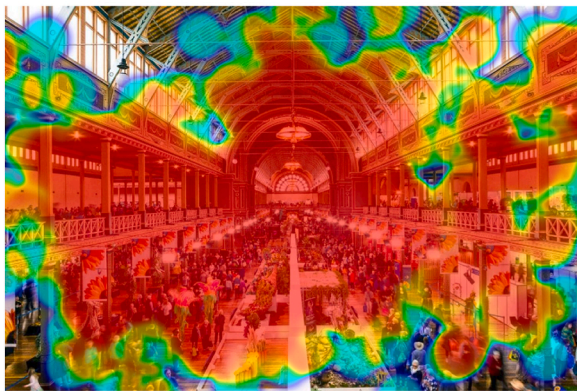
Facial analysis was performed to check excitement and emotion levels while being shown different tourist destinations. Four different emotional states (happy, surprise, neutral, and attention) were provided in the graph during the experiment for each participant and destination



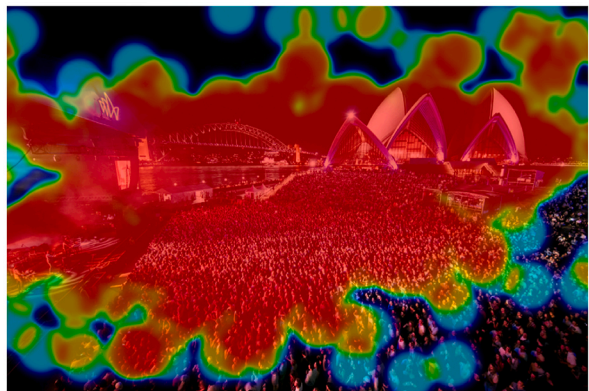
a



b



c



d

Picture a, b, c and d.

picture.

The highest wave shows the attention level of the participant while looking at the specific side of the destination, while fluctuations in the waves and color represents the other three emotional states (e.g., see Graphs 1 & 2).

Similar to the heat maps, tourists looked more attentive and emotional while looking at the heritage places, especially those where activity was occurring. This tends to confirm that tourists prefer activity-oriented destinations more than simple destinations (Woosnam et al., 2018). Some participants looked excited while watching a group of people had a get together at Uluru (a sacred heritage place for Indigenous Australians). Very few participants preferred other than heritage places for their tourism-related activities. Therefore, results of the two studies are integrated as the factors identified in the quantitative study, such as personal norms, cultural norms, tourist personality, and subjective norms, helped us in the selection and design of the place stimuli (heritage places pictures) used in the experimental study.

The quantitative study (Study 1) identified subjective norms, cultural norms, and descriptive norms, which guided the selection and design of place stimuli (heritage place pictures) used in the eye-tracking experiment (Study 2). The results from both studies reinforce the preference for activity-oriented destinations, especially heritage places. The quantitative study (Study 1) and the eye-tracking experiment (Study 2) provide complementary insights into tourist behavior and preferences. Study 1 reveals the direct and indirect relationships between various factors and tourist outcomes, such as place attachment and destination preference. It identifies the influence of subjective norms and

descriptive norms on destination preference, while cultural norms appear to have a limited impact. Subjective norms, descriptive norms, and cultural norms had significant positive relationships with destination preference, moderated by tourist personality. This indicates that the effect of norms on destination preference varies depending on an individuals' personality traits. However, some of the moderated direct relationships with heritage place attachment were insignificant.

Study 2 captured tourists' attention and emotional responses through eye-tracking and demonstrated that tourists are particularly drawn to activity-oriented destinations, especially within heritage places. The integration of the two studies emphasizes the significance of activity-based experiences and the role of heritage sites in attracting tourists' attention and evoking positive emotions. Together, these findings shed light on the multifaceted aspects of tourist decision-making and highlight the importance of considering both social influences and sensory experiences in destination management and marketing strategies.

## 6. Discussion and implications

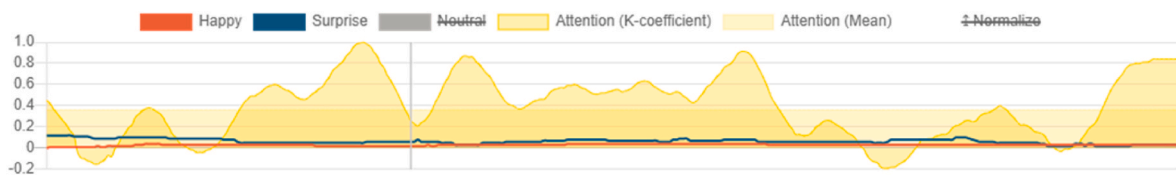
A favorite place to spend time can create a strong attachment within individuals (Vada et al., 2019), because it provides a sense of community and belonging. It is easier for destinations to retain visitors than to attract new ones, which is why developing strategies that help enhance place attachment can be beneficial for sustaining tourism for both current and future generations (Wilkins and de Urioste-Stone, 2018). This study achieved several objectives. An integrated model for place



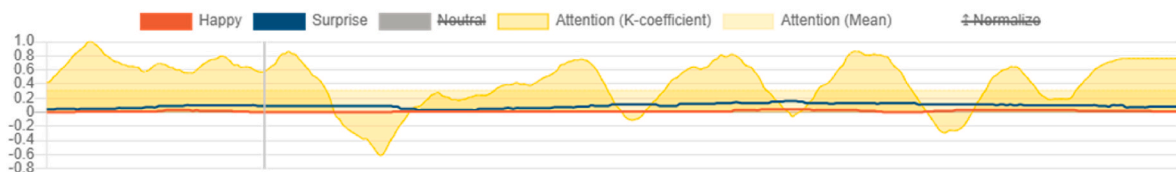


e

Picture e, f, g, and h.



1



2

Graphs 1 and 2.

attachment was tested applying social congruity theory. Focus theory of normative conduct was extended by the incorporation of personal factors. The findings demonstrate that: (a) subjective norms have a significant impact on place attachment and destination preference; (b) descriptive norms positively influence place attachment and destination preference; (c) cultural norms were insignificant in predicting place attachment directly although they have a significant and positive

indirect relation with place attachment mediated by destination preference; (d) destination preference emerged as the strongest predictor of place attachment and a significant mediator of all of the indirect paths; (e) tourist personality was found to be a significant moderator of the majority of hypothesized paths; and (f) results from the experiment show that tourists are more interested in destinations where some sort of tourism related activity is happening, especially within heritage places.

They view an ideal destination as one that has heritage features with added value through activities. A detailed discussion is presented below.

The study shows that subjective norms have a significant role in predicting place attachment. This finding indicates that one would be attached to a destination when he or she perceives that their friends, family, or significant others prefer or recommend a particular destination. This finding is consistent with that in Anton and Lawrence (2016). Similar to subjective norms, descriptive norms were also found to be significant predictors of place attachment. When individuals observe and mimic the behaviors of others, it can contribute to a sense of belonging and attachment to a particular place (Lewis et al., 2010).

On the other hand, the study found that cultural norms were not significant predictors of attachment behaviors. This finding contrasts with that in previous research which emphasizes the impact of cultural values on tourist attachment (e.g., Halonen, 2020). One possible explanation is that contemporary tourists may prioritize tourism-related activities over cultural values when forming attachments.

Nonetheless, all the norms used in this study, including subjective, descriptive, and cultural norms, were found to have a significant, direct relationship with destination preference. This suggests that the influence of social expectations, observed behaviors, and cultural values collectively shape individuals' preferences for specific destinations.

The results from the eye-tracking experiment reveal that contemporary tourists may be more interested in tourism-related activities at a destination with heritages. This finding suggests a shift in tourist preferences, where experiential and activity-based elements may play a more prominent role in forming attachments compared to traditional cultural values. It highlights the evolving nature of tourist motivations and interests.

The results from the mediation testing support the relationships between subjective norms, descriptive norms, cultural norms, and place attachment, except cultural values which were insignificant in a direct relationship with place attachment and were found significant in an indirect relation mediated by destination preference. This justifies the role of destination preference as a mediator. Previous studies have found that destination preferences depend upon the socio-cultural and psychological characteristics of the traveler and influence attachment behavior (Su and Huang, 2018). It means destination preference is a major factor which can turn a negative intention to positive in relation to behavior (e.g., attachment behavior). Within this study, destination preference was found to be the strongest predictor of attachment.

Tourist personality demonstrates a significant moderation effect in the proposed relationships. For example, all the direct paths of subjective, descriptive, and cultural norms with destination preference were positively and significantly moderated by tourist personality. However, moderated paths of subjective norms, cultural norms, and destination preference with place attachment were found to be insignificant. The moderated relationship of descriptive norms with place attachment was significant but negative. A possible explanation for this may be that tourists with a more individualistic personality have a lower inclination to follow what others do at a tourist destination. They might give more value to personal preferences and experiences over conforming to others' expectations or following what they do (S. Zhang et al., 2022), leading to a weaker attachment to the sites they visit. Cultural norms were found to be the strongest positive predictor of destination preference moderated by tourist personality. This seems logical as people prefer destinations with rich cultures and there is an increased likelihood of attachment to these destinations (Keese, 2011).

## 7. Implications

### 7.1. Theoretical contributions

The current study makes several contributions to the fields of tourism and hospitality research. First, unlike prior research that predominantly delved into socio-economic variables, demographic factors, and tourist

satisfaction levels, this study was the first to examine the normative determinants of place attachment (Dlamini et al., 2020). This study underscores the pivotal role of norms in shaping human behavior (Wasaya et al., 2022). The findings reveal that both subjective and descriptive norms emerge as influential predictors of tourists' attachment behaviors.

Second, this study enriches normative psychology literature by highlighting the significance of subjective personal factors in delineating place attachment and providing a holistic understanding of the multifaceted process of place attachment. The study encompasses various stages—from individual personality traits to decision-making aspects such as destination preference. By incorporating destination preference as a key attitudinal factor, the study acknowledges attitudes as potent mediators between behavior and its antecedents, echoing Ajzen's seminal work (1991). Additionally, the research introduces tourist personality as a moderator, acknowledging the impact of a tourist's self-concept and identity-related factors on attachment to heritage sites (Prayag et al., 2022).

Third, while earlier studies explored diverse factors in behavior analysis, including subjective, personal, and descriptive norms, this study introduces a novel dimension—attitude, specifically destination preference—as a mediator in the relationships between normative forces and place attachment. This integration showcases the interplay between normative forces and place attachment.

Fourth, this study contributes to personality research by modelling personal factors as moderators. This testing sheds light on the influence of normative forces on destination preference and, subsequently, place attachment. These additions not only enrich our understanding of the dynamics involved but also provide a framework for future studies in tourism and hospitality research.

### 7.2. Practical implications

This research delivers valuable insights into the factors influencing tourists' destination preferences and proposes strategies for leveraging these insights to support a business's competitive advantage. By delving into the external and internal motivations of travelers, as well as the drivers of place attachment, business owners gain a delicate understanding that can inform targeted approaches for both domestic and international markets. The study highlights the significance of tailoring strategies to align with the preferences of tourists, particularly the emphasis on activities within heritage places. To meet the expectations of the domestic market, it is imperative to carefully review and understand visitor experiences. Implementation of a comprehensive marketing and communication plan, incorporating modern tools such as QR codes, on-site displays, and knowledgeable tour guides, can seamlessly connect the site with its historical context, fostering a deeper engagement with heritage destinations. For domestic audiences, the key focus lies in creating a robust emotional connection between the site and its visitors through effective positioning and content strategies, celebrating the rich historical tapestry that inspired the destination.

Moreover, the location's offerings (e.g., heritage related activities) emerges as a paramount consideration for tourists when selecting a destination. To capitalize on this, it is crucial for the site to be well-equipped with essential resources and services as well activities aimed at attracting and retaining visitors. Marketing campaigns play a pivotal role in shaping visitor identities based on their tourist self-concept, while also fostering emotional connections through narratives rooted in history, ancestry, and local culture (Sestino et al., 2023; Ouyang et al., 2017). Destination managers can strategically market the proximity of the area to other attractions with heritage activities, presenting a compelling narrative that extends beyond the immediate heritage site. Crafting heritage visits to evoke positive experiences involves integrating storytelling elements that resonate with tourists' subjective social norms. For instance, reconstructions of daily life activities not only provide historical insights but also contribute to a sense of belonging

and connection to family and community norms from the past. These approaches are instrumental in creating a holistic heritage experience for visitors.

In conclusion, this study not only sheds light on the factors influencing tourist behavior but also provides actionable strategies for businesses and destination managers to enhance the overall visitor experience, whether catering to the domestic or international market. By seamlessly weaving together historical context, modern communication tools, and personalized narratives, businesses can establish a lasting and meaningful connection with their audience. Ultimately, fostering sustainable success in the competitive tourism landscape.

**8. Limitations and future recommendations**

Although this is a comprehensive study that discusses the forces shaping tourists' attachment behavior, it is not free from limitations, which can be addressed in future research. First, a purposive sampling (non-probability) technique was used to collect data which has implications for generalizability. Using random sampling methods will

increase the validity of the study. Second, place attachment was studied from a normative perspective while other norms were not discussed (e. g., religious norms, family norms) and may have some influence on behavior. Future studies are recommended to include these norms to enhance the applicability of the current study. Third, the measurement scales were presented in English language via online platforms, which could have limited the response rate. Future studies may aim to collect data using multiple languages to maximize participation. Data should also be collected at heritage sites to increase validity of the data as well as the model.

**Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest for this paper.

**Data availability**

Data will be made available on request.

**Appendix**

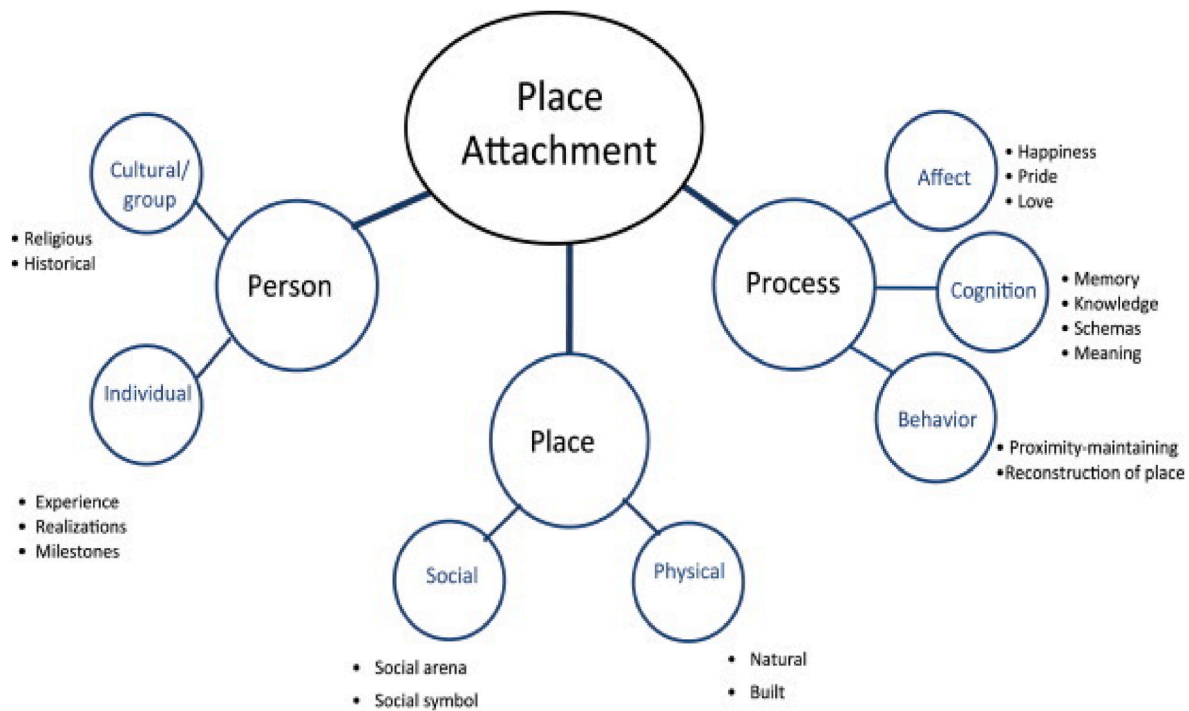


Fig. 1. The person-process-place framework of place attachment (Scannell and Gifford, 2010).

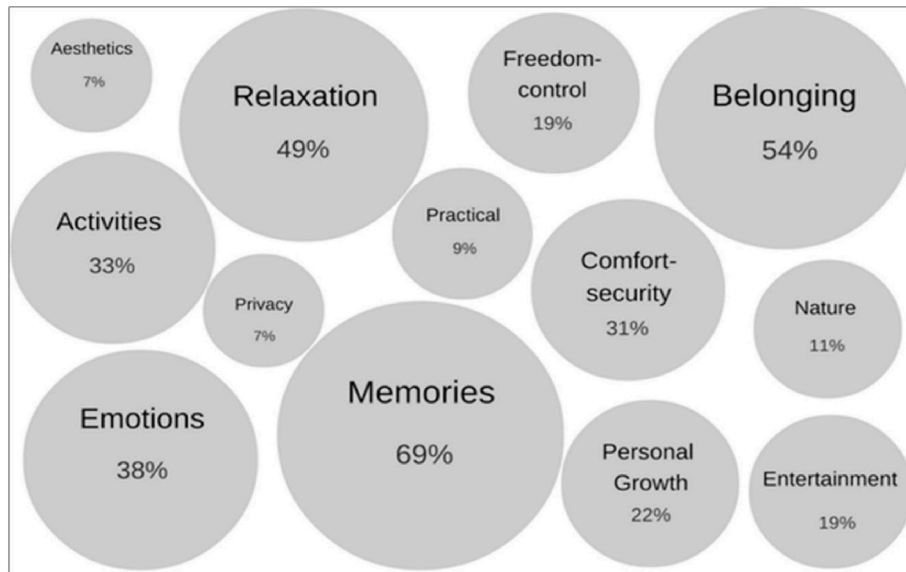


Fig. 2. Benefits of place attachment (Scannell and Gifford, 2017).

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