

Parallel Mediators of Place Attachment and Tourist Motivation in Involvement and Destination Loyalty: A Conceptual Model

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Abstract *The study's primary objective is to propose and validate a conceptual model that examines the relationship between involvement, place attachment, tourist motivation, and destination loyalty. This study focuses on the tourists from China, and self-administered questionnaires will be distributed among international tourists at the departure hall of Kuala Lumpur International Airport. The respondents will be chosen using purposive sampling and a simple random sampling method. The interrelationships among multiple variables in the research model was tested using Structural Equation Modelling. The roles of parallel mediators will be examined simultaneously using the Phantom Model approach. This study reveals the positive impacts of involvement on place attachment, tourist motivation, and destination loyalty. The study identifies and compare the size of the effects of the two parallel mediators: place attachment and tourist motivation using the phantom approach model. The study suggested a new conceptual framework to scholars and practitioners to better understand the concept of involvement, tourist motivation, and place attachment to enhance Chinese tourists' loyalty to Malaysia's tourism destination.*

Keywords: *Involvement, Place Attachment, Tourist Motivation, Destination Loyalty, Phantom Model*

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry comprises several industries that provide services and products for domestic and international tourists' needs on vacation, business, and other related tourism characterized travel trips. Some of these industries are accommodation, food and beverage, air, water, road passenger transport, and travel agencies. Tourists' expenditure on the consumption of these products and services creates revenues for the industry. Hence, the tourism industry is considered one of the pillars of global economic growth. Evidently, in 2019, 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals were recorded globally (UNWTO, 2020). The movements of billions of tourists worldwide initiate the purchase and consumption of tourism and hospitality products in a particular destination. Consequently, the tourism industry contributed US \$8.9 trillion to the world's GDP and allocated 330 million jobs to the people (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020).

In the 1990s, the tourism industry has been known as a key

economic stimulant in developing nations (Marzuki, 2008), including Malaysia. Malaysia is considered one of the prominent tourist destinations in South East Asia. Malaysia comprises two main parts: West Malaysia and Borneo (an island shared with Brunei and Indonesia), which provides international tourists with two very distinct experiences. West Malaysia is a combination of an efficient and modern capital like Kuala Lumpur and Malay, Indian and Chinese flavours. Otherwise, Malaysian Borneo consists of Sabah, and Sarawak features some of most of Malaysia's exciting places with granite peaks, wild jungle, and remote tribes. Malaysia's tourism industry is well endowed with an abundance of natural resources such as beautiful beaches and islands and unique flora and fauna particularly suitable for sustainable tourism. For instance, Malaysia has several outstandingly beautiful islands in the world, such as Perhentian, Redang, Langkawi, Kapas, Tioman, Sipadan, and Pangkor (Mapjabil et al., 2017). This attraction initiates the interest of international tourists to visit this country. In

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2018, Malaysia's tourism industry positioned itself as the second rank in South East Asia. Three cities: Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bharu, and Penang, were among the top 100 most popular destinations worldwide (World Data Info, 2020).

However, Malaysia's international tourist arrivals demonstrate an unstable and sluggish growth rate pattern from 2016 until 2019 (Tourism Malaysia, 2020). This situation should not happen to a popular tourism destination like Malaysia. Besides, this study focuses on international tourists from China since it is listed among the top three international tourist arrivals in this country, as reported by (Tourism Malaysia, 2020). Nevertheless, tourists from China are less interested in revisiting this country since the number of repeat visits is lower than the first visit from 2016 until 2019 as illustrated in Fig. 1 (Tourism Malaysia, 2020). This situation has explained that tourists from China have a problem in terms of loyalty to Malaysia since destination loyalty can be manifested by the number of repeat visits of tourists, as suggested by (Chi & Qu, 2008).

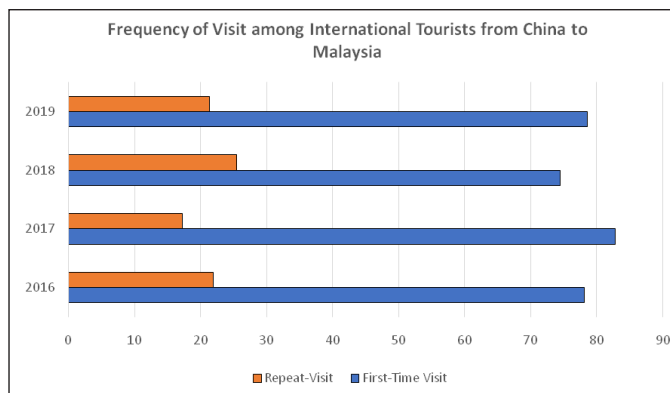


Fig. 1: Frequency of Visit among International Tourists from China to Malaysia

It is vital to enhance the level of loyalty among international tourists to increase tourist arrivals. Hence, the more tourist arrivals to this country, the more the income can be generated from their expenses. Hence, reviewing the concept of destination loyalty has been the focus of many experts and scholars for the past few decades to set a benchmark for developing workable business strategies (Opperman, 2000). It is essential to identify the predicting factors that could enhance destination loyalty to facilitate greater repeat tourist activity to Malaysia's tourism destinations. In other words, the level of destination loyalty can be increased through its predicting factors. Past studies reported that involvement (Japutra, 2020), place attachment (Mohamad et al., 2019), and tourist motivation (Seyitoglu, 2020) have causes and effects on destination loyalty.

Several researchers have also tested and investigated these factors in different tourism contexts. Studies propose that involvement has a significant relationship with place attachment (Yuan et al., 2019; Chen, 2018; Xu & Zhang, 2016; and Lee & Shen, 2013), tourist motivation (Gurbaskan Akyuz, 2019), and destination loyalty (Japutra, 2020; Gurbaskan Akyuz, 2019; and Lee & Shen, 2013). Further to this, some studies illustrate that place attachment (Nasir et al., 2020; Liu, Fu & Li, 2019; and Mohamad et al., 2019) and tourist motivation (Gurbaskan Akyuz, 2019; and Xu & Zhang, 2016) predict destination loyalty. Lee and Shen (2013) postulate that place attachment is the mediator between involvement and destination loyalty. Gurbaskan Akyuz (2019) found that tourist motivation mediates the relationship between involvement and destination loyalty.

However, a limited number of studies investigated and integrated these constructs: involvement, place attachment, tourist motivation, and destination loyalty simultaneously in one research model (Model). Moreover, none of the previous studies has compared the effects size of parallel mediators of place attachment and tourist motivation in the relationship between involvement and destination loyalty using Phantom model approach (Methodology). Therefore, this research intends to achieve several research objectives:

- To examine the effects of involvement on place attachment, tourist motivation, and destination loyalty.
- To determine the effects of place attachment and tourist motivation on destination loyalty.
- To ascertain the parallel mediating effects of place attachment and tourist motivation on the relationship between involvement and destination loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination Loyalty

The tourists' loyalty should be maintained since it could create enormous income for businesses and destination tourism (Nasir et al., 2020). Loyalty can generate a sustainable income for destinations through positive word-of-mouth and lesser marketing costs (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018). In short, tourism management must retain destination loyalty among visiting tourists since loyal tourists will act as a free marketing agent by sharing positive word-of-mouth with their families, colleagues, and friends (Nasir et al., 2021). Besides, tourism management does not need to do aggressive marketing to loyal tourists since they had a valuable experience visiting the destination, reducing advertising and marketing costs. Therefore, loyal tourists will help in the growth of tourism destinations.

Several authors define destination loyalty differently. Rodger, Taplin, and Moore (2015) claimed that destination loyalty

refers to the level of commitment visitors display towards a destination. This definition's key feature is "commitment," which relates to tourists' belief in maintaining a relationship that tends to offer them benefits. Gok and Sayin (2015) believe that destination loyalty relates to tourists' intentions to revisit and willingness to recommend the destination. Based on these two definitions, this study defines destination loyalty as the tourists' commitment to revisit and willingness to recommend the destination to their families, colleagues, and friends.

Destination loyalty is divided into three types, namely, attitudinal, behavioural, and composite (Suhartanto & Triyuni, 2016). Attitudinal loyalty refers to an intention to revisit or recommend to other tourists about the destination. Meanwhile, behavioural loyalty focuses on the behavioural outcome, such as repeat visits (Senarath & Ranasinghe, 2019). Meanwhile, composite loyalty is a mix of attitudinal and behavioural loyalty (Lv & McCabe, 2020).

Involvement

Tourist involvement can be defined as the meaning tourists ascribe to a destination and how it offers a central aspect of their lives, providing both hedonic and symbolic value (Filo et al., 2013). Meanwhile, Kyle et al. (2007) claimed that tourist involvement demonstrates how a person and the external stimulus are associated. Based on these two definitions, involvement is about individuals' participation in local activities, consumption of tourism products and services, which could develop positive or negative perceptions on their overall trip experiences.

It is extremely crucial to have a better understanding of an individual's connection with a destination for long-term tourism businesses' success. Different authors manifest tourist involvement differently. Kim, Woo, and Uysal (2015) claimed that tourist involvement consists of risk probability and self-identity. Risk probability refers to the risk encountered by tourists whenever they purchase tourism products and services. In contrast, self-identity relates to the importance and enjoyment the tourists would earn from the vacation. Meanwhile, Xu and Zhang (2016) claimed that involvement comprises importance, enjoyment, self-expression, and centrality. Firstly, the importance relates to the perceived importance level of a product and activity. Secondly, enjoyment refers to the specific pleasure resulting from tourist participation. Thirdly, self-expression relates to feelings of freedom from everyday life's role constraints that let the tourists be themselves. Lastly, centrality means the priority level of the activity in the tourist's daily life.

A better understanding of a tourists' involvement in a particular destination would help the tourist destination change tourists' mindsets and behaviour in the future.

Activities, products, and individual characteristics make the individual's level of involvement vary (Gursoy & Gavcar, 2003; and Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Several researchers working in tourism research found that involvement has a significant impact on place attachment (Yuan et al., 2019; Chen, 2018; Xu & Zhang, 2016; and Lee & Shen, 2013), tourist motivation (Gurbaskan Akyuz, 2019), and destination loyalty (Japutra, 2020; Gurbaskan Akyuz, 2019; and Lee & Shen, 2013). Hence, the following hypotheses are developed:

H1: Involvement has a significant impact on place attachment.

H2: Involvement has a significant impact on tourist motivation.

H3: Involvement has a significant impact on destination loyalty.

Place Attachment

The concept of place attachment has been broadly studied across disciplines and applied to tourism studies to comprehend individual-place relationships and, subsequently, to effectively manage and promoting tourism destinations (Dwyer, Chen & Lee, 2019). Suntikul and Jachna (2016) claimed that place attachment refers to a personal connection that an individual feels with a particular destination. In contrast, a more comprehensive definition (Scannell & Gifford, 2017) suggests that place attachment is defined as a cognitive-emotional bond that forms between individuals and their environments. This definition indicates that affective bond (emotional feeling) is built right after one specific destination can meet the tourist's perception (cognitive).

Several authors (Kim et al., 2017; and Woosnam et al., 2018) claimed that place attachment comprises of place identity and place dependence. Place identity refers to any destination that is able to portray an individual's identity that would significantly contribute to the development of a strong relationship between tourists and a destination. Meanwhile, place dependence is related to the destination's capability to offer facilities that meet the tourist's needs and wants. Otherwise, several other authors, Xu and Zhang (2016); Silva, Kastenholtz and Abrantes (2018); and Chow et al. (2019), found that place attachment consists of place identity, place dependence, place affect, and place social bonding. These studies include another two components of place attachment. Place affect is related to someone's feeling of visiting a particular destination that could arouse a sense of positive well-being. Place social bonding occurs when the destination settings shape tourists' personal value through continuous personal interaction between the visitors and the destination.

Some studies found that place attachment predicts destination loyalty (Nasir et al., 2020; Liu, Fu & Li, 2019;

and Mohamad et al., 2019). Place attachment also mediates the relationship between involvement and destination loyalty (Lee & Shen, 2013). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Place attachment has a significant impact on destination loyalty.

H5: Place attachment mediates the relationship between involvement and destination loyalty.

Tourist Motivation

Based on several theories, motivation can be defined as individual psychological and biological needs (Leong, Yeh, Hsiao & Huan, 2015). However, to be more specific into the scope tourism research area, tourist motivation has been defined by (Dann, 1981) as a meaningful state of mind that sufficiently disposes of an individual or a group of people to travel. This study concludes that tourist motivation refers to internal feelings, desires, and thoughts that an individual has, influencing the tourists to travel.

Kim, Chiang and Tang (2017) believe that tourist motivation comprises four crucial components: prestige and luxury, novelty and knowledge, self-development, and relation and escape. Prestige and luxury are related to excellence, expensive and superior quality of products/services and also happiness, personal rewards and emotional benefits a person gains from his/her trip to a particular destination. Novelty and knowledge refer to tourists seeking new information and observing recent occurrences at a specific destination. Self-development refers to a tourist achieving personal growth

through host-site involvement during their trip to a particular destination. Relation and escape describe tourists’ needs for relaxation and escape from the daily routine, work pressure, and doing something with family/friends during their visit to a specific destination. However, Li and Cai (2012) argued that there are five components of tourist motivation, namely, prestige and luxury experience, novelty and knowledge, self-development, exciting experience, and escape and relationship. This study includes one additional component compared to Kim, Chiang and Tang (2017), namely exciting experience. Exciting experience refers to the excitement feels by the tourists from their visit to a destination like meeting the locals and participating in adventurous activities.

Further to this, Gurbaskan Akyuz (2019) and Xu and Zhang (2016) found that tourist motivation significantly affects destination loyalty. Tourist motivation also acts as the mediator in the relationship between involvement and destination loyalty in the study (Gurbaskan Akyuz, 2019). Therefore, the following hypotheses are constructed:

H6: Tourist motivation has a significant impact on destination loyalty.

H7: Tourist motivation mediates the relationship between involvement and destination loyalty.

Table 1 summarises several studies in the scope of a tourism destination and highlights the research gap addressed by this research. This study proposes a research model that simultaneously integrates the relationships between involvement, place attachment, tourist motivation, and destination loyalty.

Table 1: Summary of Studies on Involvement (INV), Place Attachment (P), Tourist Motivation (TM) and Destination Loyalty (DL)

Sr. No.	Researchers	Research Hypotheses						
		H1 INV → P	H2 INV → TM	H3 INV → DL	H4 P → DL	H5 INV → P → DL	H6 TM → DL	H7 INV → TM → DL
1.	Lee and Shen (2013)	/	X	/	/	/	X	X
2.	Xu and Zhang (2016)	/	X	X	/	X	/	X
3.	Song et al. (2017)	X	X	X	/	X	X	X
4.	Hosany et al.. (2017)	X	X	X	/	X	X	X
5.	Chen (2018)	/	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.	Yuan et al. (2019)	/	X	X	X	X	X	X
7.	Mohamad et al. (2019)	X	X	X	/	X	X	X
8.	Liu, Fu & Li (2019)	X	X	X	/	X	X	X
9.	Gurbaskan Akyuz (2019)	X	/	/	X	X	/	/
10.	Japutra (2020)	X	X	/	X	X	X	X
11.	Nasir et al. (2020)	X	X	X	/	X	X	X
12.	Di-Clemente et al. (2020)	X	X	/	X	X	X	X
	Current study	/	/	/	/	/	/	/

*Note: (X)= Did not test the relationship, (/) = Test the relationship.

Theory of Behaviour

It is essential to understand the term consumer behaviour or commonly known as tourist behaviour in tourism. Horner and Swarbrooke (2016) claimed that tourist behaviour refers to when and why tourists choose to buy or use a tourism product or service. In other words, the study of tourist behaviour is to comprehend the main reasons or factors that influence visitors to buy tourism products and services. Moreover, it is also to understand how they make decisions to buy those tourism products and services.

Therefore, this study chooses Oliver's (1997) Four Stage Loyalty Theory to explain the relationship among the latent constructs in this study. This theory consists of four stages and two phases: cognitive loyalty (stage 1), affective loyalty (stage 2) and conative loyalty (stage 3). These three stages are under the first phase, called attitudinal. The last stage is behavioural loyalty which is under the second phase called behavioural. Based on this theory, tourists initially become cognitively loyal based on the information about a tourist destination. This refers to the involvement construct

whereby when the tourists participate in the activities at the destination, and they tend to gain experience and knowledge, which develops a perception about a destination. The second stage is affective loyalty, whereby it involves the emotional feelings of tourists towards the destination. Hence, the second stage refers to tourist motivation and place attachment. Motivation involves tourists' desire to travel, and place attachment relates to a strong connection between tourist and destination. The third stage is conative loyalty, whereby this refers to tourists intention to repeat visit and intention to spread positive word of mouth. Hence, this stage refers to the destination loyalty construct. The final stage is behavioural loyalty, whereby the tourists takes action such as repeat visit to the destination and recommend to other potential tourists about the destination. This refers to the actual action of tourists. Hence, this theory is used to support the model. The model consists of one independent construct: involvement, two mediators: place attachment and tourist motivation, and one dependent construct: destination loyalty as depicted in Fig. 2. Moreover, the stages in the model supported by the theory are highlighted in the model below.

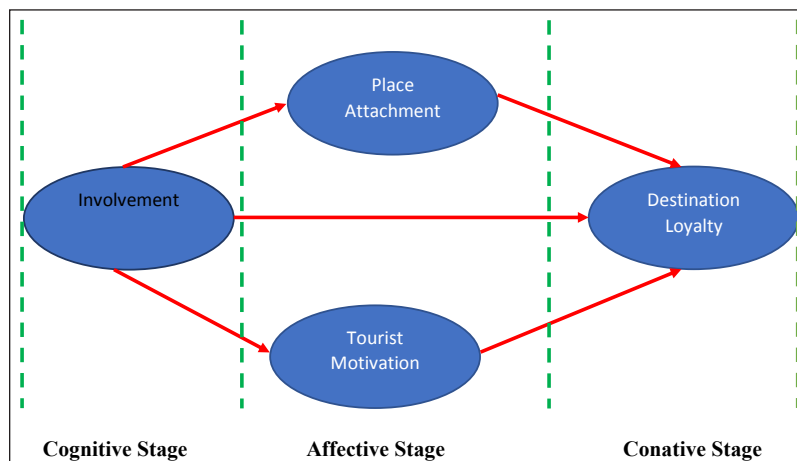


Fig. 2: Proposed Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study uses a cross-sectional causal research design, specifically aimed to determine the influence of involvement, place attachment and tourist motivation on destination loyalty.

Target Population and Questionnaire Design

The target population for the study is international tourists from China. The main criterion this population was selected

because it is among the top international tourists visiting this country, yet this group of tourists experienced a lower repeat visit than the first-time visit for four consecutive years (2016–2019) (Tourism Malaysia, 2020). Self-administered questionnaires will be distributed at the departure hall of Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). The departure hall of KLIA was selected since it is the main exit gate for international tourists visiting Malaysia. Furthermore, the tourists who are eligible to answer the questionnaire stay for more than 24 hours and not more than one year in any state of this country. Hence, they would have sufficient experience to respond to the questionnaire.

The structured questionnaire is designed using a 10-point Likert scale for each construct, consisting of five sections. The first section contains involvement items, consisting of

twelve items and four dimensions: importance, enjoyment, self-expression, and centrality adapted from (Xu & Zhang, 2016). The second section contains place attachment items, which consists of seventeen items and four dimensions: place identity, place dependence, affective attachment, and social bonding adapted from (Xu & Zhang, 2016). The third section encompasses tourist motivation items, which comprises twenty-three items and five dimensions: prestige and luxury experience, novelty and knowledge, self-development, exciting experience and escape and relationship adapted from (Li & Cai, 2012). The fourth section includes destination loyalty items, including six items and one dimension adapted from (Sun, Chi & Xu, 2013; and Mohamad, Ali & Abdul Ghani, 2011). The final section is related to the respondents' tourist profile, which is essential to provide insights into their backgrounds and travelling information.

Pre-Test and Pilot Test

Pre-test and pilot test are conducted before the field study. The pre-test is undertaken to ensure the respondents could understand the questionnaires used in the research survey. A pilot survey is performed to examine the underlying structure among latent constructs using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and assess instruments' consistencies in measuring the latent construct using Reliability Analysis. In EFA, several requirements need to be met such as KMO > 0.50, Barlett's test of Sphericity < 0.001, factor loadings > 0.60, Eigen value > one and Total variance explained > 0.60. Furthermore, to ensure a high degree of internal consistency between multiple measurements of a variable, the Cronbach's alpha > 0.70.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedure

The questionnaires will be distributed at the departure hall of Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) after receiving approval from Malaysia Airline Holding Berhad (MAHB). The questionnaires will be circulated to the respective tourists by identifying them through the departure gates. The tourists from China who experience visiting this country for more than 24 hours and less than one year are eligible to respond to questionnaires. They will be identified by asking them their country of residence and will be given 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires. The collected questionnaires will be checked to ensure the respondents answer all items. The present study created a sampling frame from data collected in an actual survey, as suggested by (Burn et al., 2017) since accurate data on this population's size is not available. Then, the simple random sampling will be executed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)

software to select the samples using "Random Sample of Cases" based on the study's required sample size.

The SEM-AMOS 23 will execute the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the actual survey data. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is undertaken to validate the measurement model. The model is subjected to several tests such as unidimensionality, goodness-of-fit, reliability, validity (construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity) before conducting hypothesis testing. The unidimensionality is achieved when the factor loadings of the items are more than 0.60. The value of Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) have to be equalled or more than 0.7 and 0.5 respectively to achieve convergent validity. The construct validity is achieved when the values of several goodness-of-fit indexes meet its required values: absolute fit (RMSEA < 0.08), incremental fit (CFI > 0.90) and parsimonious fit (Chi-Square/df < 3.0). Discriminant fit is achieved when AVE's square root is greater than the correlation value between respective research constructs and the correlation values among the research constructs should be less than 0.85 to prevent from the arising of redundancy problem.

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is undertaken to test the interrelationships between the constructs in a structural model. The specific effects of two parallel mediators within the constructed and validated structural equation model can be tested and compared by adding the phantom model to the primary model suggested by Nasir et al. (2020) and Kline (2010).

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Theoretically, this study proposes seven hypotheses which consist of five direct and two parallel indirect paths to be tested simultaneously in one research model. Furthermore, the present study suggests future research examining and comparing the parallel mediator using the phantom model approach. This is a considered unique contribution because the researchers would be able to identify which mediator, either place attachment or tourist motivation, has a strong mediating effect among the international tourists from China visiting tourists destination in Malaysia. Furthermore, the proposed model is supported by Oliver's (1997) Four Stage Loyalty Theory, whereby involvement represents cognitive loyalty while two parallel mediators (place attachment and tourist motivation represent affective loyalty. Meanwhile, destination loyalty refers to conative loyalty. Lastly, whether the tourists repeat visits or recommend the others represents the fourth stage of this theory.

Practically, several entities would benefit from the study's findings, such as tourism management, tour operators, and

tourism businesses. For example, tourism management in Malaysia should organize various events such as cultural events and food festivals. These kinds of events would allow the tourists to be involved in the activity, making them enjoy and initiate feelings of freedom from everyday life's role constraints. In addition, it will create a strong connection between tourists and destinations. Furthermore, they will be more motivated to visit this country. Eventually, they will demonstrate their loyalty to this country by recommending to the other potential tourists and revisit the destination.

CONCLUSION

This study proposed a conceptual framework that investigates the relationships of involvement, place attachment, tourist motivation, and destination loyalty among foreign tourists in Malaysia's context of tourism destination. Most importantly, this study focuses on international tourists from China. To date, there have been no studies that empirically assessed the issue of a low level of destination loyalty among international tourists from China visiting tourist destination in Malaysia using the proposed research model consisting of these four constructs (involvement, place attachment, tourist motivation, and destination loyalty). Overall, the study proposed the involvement (importance, enjoyment, self-expression, and centrality), place attachment (place identity, place dependence, affective attachment, and social bonding), and tourist motivation (prestige and luxury experience, novelty and knowledge, self-development, exciting experience and escape and relationship) proposed in a conceptual framework of destination loyalty (willingness to recommend and revisit intentions). It is imperative to increase destination loyalty among this group of tourists since it is among the top three tourist arrivals in this country. Consequently, it could encourage them to spend on accommodation, transportation, food and beverages, and entertainment whenever they visit this country. Hence, it will help the country to generate income and stimulate national economic growth.

This study expects to reveal the positive impacts of involvement on place attachment, tourist motivation, and destination loyalty. Meanwhile, it is anticipated that place attachment and tourist motivation will mediate the involvement and destination loyalty relationships. Most importantly, this study intends to compare the effect size of parallel mediators of place attachment and destination loyalty using the Phantom approach. There were very limited studies that compare the parallel effect size of mediators using the Phantom approach, which significantly contributes to existing literature. It is hoped that it can help the tourism industry develop effective marketing communication and strategies to increase loyalty among international visitors from China. However, the paper presents a research project's

proposal into the effect of involvement, place attachment, and tourist motivation on destination loyalty to propose suitable strategies for Malaysia's tourism industry. The next step of this research is to conduct Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using Structural Modelling (SEM) to determine and validate the relationship through empirical data collection.

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