



# The influence of leisure involvement and place attachment on destination loyalty: Evidence from recreationists walking their dogs in urban parks

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines a behavioral model using latent variables of leisure involvement, place attachment, and destination loyalty among recreationists walking their dog in urban parks. A total of 928 usable questionnaires were collected. The confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling were analyzed using LISREL 8.70 for Windows. Empirical results indicate that leisure involvement (i.e., attraction and self expression) and place attachment (i.e., place identity and place dependence) accurately predict the destination loyalty of recreationists walking their dogs in urban parks. Findings of this study demonstrate that the proposed behavioral model is a highly effective means of examining the causal relationships among leisure involvement, place attachment, and destination loyalty. A series of managerial implications and recommendations for further studies are drawn.

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## 1. Introduction

While seeking the intrinsic value (e.g., entertainment, aesthetics, spiritual satisfaction, and human health) of a park by engaging with its natural environment, recreational users also strive to create extrinsic value (e.g., social gains, rewards, and friendship) via recreational activities (Gross & Brown, 2008). Such recreationists are often attached to a specific place (Kyle, Bricker, Graefe, & Wickham, 2004). Place attachment consists of three elements: cognition, affection, and conation-related attitudinal factors (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). Linking a place with an individual's cognition of place leads to place dependence. Of the various places available to an individual, that person ultimately forms an emotional bond with a specific place (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004).

Parks provide urban dwellers with a convenient space for leisure and recreation (Gobster, 2002). Dog owners engage in a leisure activity when walking their dogs in parks. Walking a dog is considered an important recreational activity among park users, especially for dog owners enjoying their recreation and leisure time (Gobster, 2002).

As for place loyalty, recreationists develop cognitive loyalty by associating a specific place with the leisure or recreation experiences that it offers. Recreationists enjoying a particular place

develop affective loyalty for such a place and revisit it, subsequently leading to conative loyalty (Oliver, 1999; Yüksel, Yüksel, & Bilim, 2010). Attitudinal loyalty allows these recreationists to develop behavioral loyalty toward a particular place (Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2007; Oliver, 1999). Consequently, place attachment is a major precedent of loyalty (Yüksel et al., 2010).

Leisure and recreation studies focus primarily on how place attachment and recreation involvement are related (Kyle, Bricker, et al., 2004; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003, 2004a). Some studies have examined recreationists' loyalty toward particular trails and forests they have visited by measuring activity involvement (e.g., Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004b; Lee et al., 2007). However, exactly how leisure involvement and place attachment are related has not yet been determined thus remains a hotly debated subjects in reexamining the linear relationships among these two latent variables (Kyle et al., 2003; Kyle & Mowen, 2005). Moreover, exactly how leisure involvement, place attachment, and loyalty are related has seldom been examined.

Additionally, although walking a dog represents a particular form of leisure or recreation activity in urban parks that is an integral feature of the leisure style of dog owners, a recreation behavior model for dog owners walking their pets has not yet been developed.

Therefore, this work presents a behavioral model that examines how leisure involvement and place attachment foster destination loyalty among recreationists walking their dogs in urban parks in Taiwan. Theoretical and practical implications of this study are also discussed.

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## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Brief introduction

This study provides an overview of the concept of orientation-related destination loyalty. The precedents of destination loyalty in relation to both place attachment and leisure involvement and their relationship is then discussed. Finally, empirical studies examining their relationships are reviewed, followed by a hypothesized model for this study.

### 2.2. Destination loyalty

Consumer loyalty is defined as the commitment to re-buy a product or service in the future (Oliver, 1999). Scholars have incorporated loyalty into their analyses of tourism/leisure products (Harris & Goode, 2004), destinations (Lee et al., 2007; Yüksel et al., 2010), and leisure activities (Backman & Shinn, 1994; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004).

Loyalty encompasses behavioral, attitudinal, and composite approach-related concepts. In the behavioral approach, loyalty is regarded as the sequential purchasing of a brand or product over a certain time period (Russell-Bennett, McColl-Kennedy, & Coote, 2007). As for the attitudinal approach, attitudinal loyalty is thought to originate from a consumer's attitude and behavioral intentions, which psychologically contributes to repeat purchases (Lee et al., 2007; Russell-Bennett et al., 2007). Attitudinal loyalty includes cognitive (loyalty to information and knowledge), affective (loyalty to one's own preferences), and conative loyalty (loyalty to action inertia) (Oliver, 1999). Dick and Basu (1994) indicated that loyalty consists of both attitudinal and behavioral constructs. Loyalty thus consists of attitudinal loyalty that includes cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions as well as behavioral loyalty that represents the actual behavior of a brand or destination.

Loyalty has received considerable attention from diverse perspectives in the recreation and leisure literature (Lee, 2009a, 2009b; Lee et al., 2007; Pritchard & Howard, 1997). Some recreation and leisure studies have assessed loyalty by using activity (leisure) involvement (Kyle et al., 2004b) and place attachment (Yüksel et al., 2010) as precedent variables for loyalty. However, simultaneously assessing how leisure involvement, place attachment, and destination loyalty are related has rarely been performed.

### 2.3. Precedents of destination loyalty

#### 2.3.1. Place attachment

Place attachment is an affective bond or emotional linkage that ties an individual to specific environments such as buildings, homes, destinations, neighborhoods, places, and cities (Eisenhauer, Krannich, & Blahna, 2000; Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001; Yüksel et al., 2010). Sense of place is influenced by the different connections that individuals have with places in natural settings and the variety of individual perceptions of places (Brandenburg & Carroll, 1995). A place is considered special depending on the activities that an individual engages in at places they consider special, but not merely special place (Eisenhauer et al., 2000). Thus, place attachment has been extensively adopted to assess human behaviors such as leisure involvement (Kyle, Bricker, et al., 2004), loyalty (Yüksel et al., 2010), and environmentally responsible behavior (Lee, 2011). Place attachment represents the positive relationship that an individual has with a location. It is often a response generated by complex experiences that are associated with a place, ultimately resulting in an emotional bond with that place (Kyle et al., 2003; Manzo, 2005).

Some leisure studies have assessed place attachment as based on place identity and place dependence (Kyle et al., 2003, 2004a; Williams, Parrerson, Roggenbuck, & Waston, 1992). Place identity

reflects a personal identity in relation to the physical environment that occurs via a complex recreational experience (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). Place dependence represents an individual's functional attachment to a place, subsequently reflecting the importance of the place in providing the amenities that are necessary for specific activities (Kyle, Bricker, et al., 2004; Kyle et al., 2003). Therefore, a destination's value to an individual is based on specificity, functionality, and on-site satisfaction (Kyle et al., 2003). Some leisure scholars have established a measurement profile for place attachment (which includes place dependence, place identity, and lifestyle) to measure place attachment (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000). Meanwhile, place attachment includes the constructs of place dependence, place identity, affective attachment, and social bonding that is associated with the place (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004c; Kyle, Mowen, et al., 2004). Clearly, place attachment is a complex construct that warrants further study for its potential applications to various recreational research-related topics.

#### 2.3.2. Leisure involvement

Leisure involvement represents how an individual and the external stimulus are related (Kyle, Absher, Norman, Hammitt, & Jodice, 2007). Leisure involvement subsequently enhances not only individuals' sensitivity to certain activities and their perceptions of a particular activity's importance but also the individuals' commitments to specific services or places (McIntyre & Pigram, 1992). Therefore, leisure involvement can be considered the extent to which an individual is involved in leisure and recreational activities (Slama & Tashchian, 1985).

Leisure involvement is typically a multifaceted rather than a single faceted concept; in addition, each facet of the involvement should contain leisure/recreation experiences (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). Laurent and Kapferer (1985) assessed involvement based on the dimensions of importance, pleasure, symbolism, risk probability, and risk consequences. These five dimensions are regarded as important concepts that measure leisure activity involvement. McIntyre and Pigram (1992) assessed involvement as a function of attraction, self expression and centrality to one's lifestyle. Based on these three dimensions, many subsequent quantitative studies assessed individuals' involvement in leisure or recreation activities (e.g., Hung & Lee, 2012; Kyle et al., 2004b, 2004c; Kyle & Mowen, 2005; Lee, 2011). Attraction refers to the concepts of importance and pleasure, implying activities that are important to an individual. Self expression refers to personal impressions that individuals convey to others through their participation in leisure activities. Finally, centrality to life relates leisure participation to an individual overall lifestyle by judging the extent to which an individual's life is organized around that activity (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; McIntyre & Pigram, 1992).

### 2.4. Hypothesized model

Based on available product information for a customer, cognitive loyalty is largely influenced by the customer's perceived experience (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001). Affective loyalty, which deals with consumers' affection and commitment toward a particular product or service, establishes the relationship between a consumer and a product or service. Consumers exhibit affective loyalty toward a product or service when they have favorable attitudes toward it. Conative loyalty represents the behavioral intentions of a consumer to use a product in the future (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001). Action loyalty is defined as behavioral loyalty, which manifests as behavioral consistency in repurchasing a product/service or revisiting a destination. According to Pedersen and Nysveen (2001), conative loyalty more accurately predicts behavioral loyalty than cognitive or affective loyalty does. Yüksel et al. (2010) indicated that both

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