

# Tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO world heritage sites in a developing nation: Investigating the mediating role of place dependence

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## Abstract

The purpose for this study is to examine the factors affecting tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a developing nation. Additionally, the mediating role of place dependence on this relationship is also inspected. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire from 300 foreign tourists visiting heritage sites in Penang, Malaysia, and were analysed via the Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach. Empirical results revealed that emotion of joy, love, and positive surprise, and place dependence affect tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a developing nation. Furthermore, the indirect influence of the emotion of positive surprise on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites via place dependence was the strongest, with the emotions of joy and love ranking behind. The findings suggest that tourism authorities, tourism practitioners, and tourism managements should actively engage with existing tourists and potential tourists via digital marketing platforms and social media marketing tools in order to create long-term engagement and promote the connection of heritage tourism to personal feelings in a memorable way. This permits gathering of high volumes of information from other tourists who share their exciting travel-related details of their visits to UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This study adds the current body of knowledge by furnishing a better empirical understanding of the significant evidence to support the notion that returning tourists (i.e. repeaters) are heavily influenced by emotional aspects and bonding arising from their positive memory during the visit. Directions for future research are also offered.

## Keywords

Place dependence, PLS-SEM, revisit intention, tourism, travel, UNESCO

## Introduction

As tourists' have more opportunities to visit United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites around the world, they may develop various forms of emotional experiences like joy, love, and positive surprise, and place dependence in

respect of these sites. A place that fulfils a visitor's expectation typically produces a more

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embedded, extensive and deeper dependence on that place as compared to a place that does not meet the tourist's expectation (Isa et al., 2019). Indeed, festivals and events that encourage social relationships have been found to enhance place dependence (Prayag and Grivel, 2018), which is accepted as an important indicator linking the apprehension of place suitability and its features to bonding to physical setting as well as to revisit intention (Isa et al., 2019).

Place dependence is built upon a psychological perspective concerned with the achievement of goal satisfaction from underlying outdoor activity choices. It is similar to tourists' engagement in leisure activities and in particular place, to be underpinned by the 'known, expected and valued' outcomes this will bring. The findings of past literature suggesting place dependence as the outcome of subjective tourist judgement of the physical performance of a place. There is also an element of subjective comparison between expectation and perception in place dependence, as argued by Prayag and Grivel (2018), denoting assurable level of place goal attainment. Taking into account the fundamental arguments in favour of the idea of dependence on a particular setting for goal attainment, and that this scenario offers opportunities for stronger bonding among tourists, it becomes crucial to examine the interplay of place dependence between experience and revisit intention.

This study employs the Goal-Interference Theory of Conflict presented by Jacob and Schreyer (1980) as guiding principle because it offers important insights in respect of the meaning of place, visitors' search for goal attainment, and the quality of activities and uniqueness of experience as essential aspects of recreation behaviour and intention to revisit. These considerations are reflected in the concept of place dependence in the present study. Besides, earlier research by Prayag et al. (2013) limit their research exploration by inspecting the role of tourists' emotional experiences and satisfaction in understanding tourist intention to visit Petra, a UNESCO world heritage site in Jordan. In a similar tandem, Hosany et al. (2017) have empirically tested the relationships among emotion, place attachment and behavioural intention. However, these scholars have been skewed towards examining intention to visit and have yet to explore on tourists' revisit intention and mediating role of place dependence on this relationship. What's more, there is limited explanation in the literature of how the emotions generated from a vast array of

tourism experiences can lead to intention to revisit a place (Muskat et al., 2019; Prayag and Grivel, 2018). This include Hosany et al. (2015, 2017) whom have examined emotion as having a discrete intention to recommend or not to recommend but does not account for destination-specific emotion and revisit intention.

Based on the aforementioned limitations, revisit intention is deemed necessary to be further explored beyond intention to visit due to it is associated with 'repeat consumers of tourism services whom had previously encounter satisfaction with the actual delivery of the service' (Huang and Hsu, 2009; Um et al., 2006). Consequently, this study aims to examine the factors affecting tourists' revisit intentions to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a developing nation. Additionally, the mediating role of place dependence on this relationship is also inspected. There is minimal current evidence in terms of this research attempts. Thus, the present empirical findings advance the extant body of knowledge by discovering that tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a developing nation is strongly predicted by place dependence, followed by the emotions of joy, love, and positive surprise. Another significant contribution is that the indirect influence of the emotion of positive surprise on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites via place dependence was the strongest, with the emotions of joy and love ranking behind. That mediation has not been explored in previous studies, such as those for example, by Hosany and Prayag (2013), Lee and Kyle (2013), and Prayag and Del Chiappa (2016) which are restricted to considering intention to recommend and intention to visit apart from tourists' revisit intention. Vacation destination marketers are looking forward on tourists' revisit intention as compared to intention to visit as the cost of retaining re-visitors is much lower than the cost of attracting new visitors (Um et al., 2006).

## Literature review

### *Revisit intention*

Tourists' revisit intention refers likelihood of tourist returning to a site or destination another time, and is a form of their post-consumption behaviour (Hallak et al., 2018; Roustana and Jamshidi, 2020). On the other hand, behavioural intention is defined as 'the person's subjective probability that he or she will perform the

behaviour in question' (Venkatesh et al., 2003: 451). Both are different from one to another. Although behavioural intention has been widely used in past studies to indicate intention to visit and recommend to others, owing to variety seeking nature of tourist, it limitedly accounts proportion of revisit and actual decision on future travel behaviour. Moreover, in tourism studies recommending to other does not indicate intention to travel to same destination in future which contradicts with the idea of revisit intention. Furthermore, the use of revisit intention exhibits discriminant approach to address variety seeking nature as well as switching behaviour of tourists to precisely account proportion of travellers from repeaters. After a visit to a particular attraction, tourists are inclined to reflect on their experience and make an evaluation of it (Muskat et al., 2019). Preceding research clearly demonstrates the potential of this tourist reflection on the visit experience to elicit emotional outcomes (Carreira et al., 2014; Che-Ha et al., 2016). The strength of that reflection depends upon destination elements having attractive, functional attributes, and appealing effect, all of which combine to generate wholesomeness of the visit experience (Baloglu et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). This post-consumption evaluation of the visits has the potential to elicit emotional responses, and attachment, and in turn leads to revisit intention (Hosany et al., 2015). Ensuing to that, aspects of emotional experience and place dependence are described next.

### *Emotional experience*

Emotion in tourism experience refers to an elusive process encompassing subjective feelings, expression, physiological arousal, appraisal and behavioural tendency of human response, gained from the evaluation or appraisal of specific events (Moyle et al., 2019). Emotional experience is found to be a sufficient predictor of revisit intention by (Hosany et al., 2017). Likewise, Su et al. (2016), working with Chinese hotel guests, also found that emotional experience leads to positive revisit intention. Argan et al. (2014) use emotional experience dimensions focusing on independent responses such as joy, love, positive surprise, anger, and fear.

In another study, Zheng et al. (2019) examined the nature of individual emotional experience, suggesting that emotions need to be understood beyond hedonic enjoyment, and in the wider context where broader implications

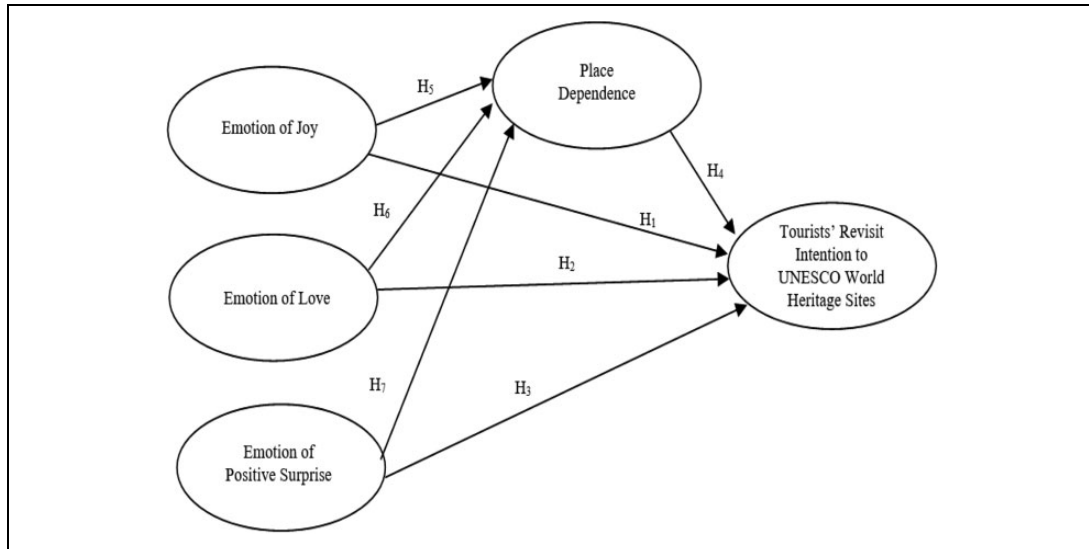
on the quality of life and individual well-being are considered. Moreover, Prayag et al. (2017) use a three-dimensional destination-related emotional experience (joy, love, and positive surprise) to show the influence of intention to recommend among domestic tourists visiting sun and sand tourism spots in Sardinia, Italy. The findings evidenced strong influence between this factors and tourists revisit intention. Previous studies also employed these three-dimensional emotional experiences and found analogous significant results (Lee and Kyle, 2013; Prayag et al., 2013). Thus, the following hypotheses can be drawn from the discussion above.

- H1: The emotion of joy has a positive effect on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- H2: The emotion of love has a positive effect on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- H3: The emotion of positive surprise has a positive effect on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

### *Place dependence*

Place dependence portrays how well a place setting contributes towards the visitor's attainment of a functional goal or instrumental value (Jiang et al., 2017; Prayag and Grivel, 2018). It is considered as one of the fundamental antecedents of tourist revisit intention (Abou-Shouk et al., 2018; Hosany et al., 2017). Indeed, the heritage of a place is a pivotal factor in tourists developing place dependence as the appealing features in the heritage environment can promote positive emotion such as joy, love and positive surprise (Lee and Kyle, 2013). At the same time, the tourist experience is influenced by the place dependence (Allan, 2016; Ujang and Zakariya, 2018; Woosnam et al., 2018)

Tourists are known to develop an affective connection to a particular setting when they find some attraction in the activities, culture, people, and buildings associated with that setting (Zheng et al., 2019). Similarly, when tourists stay in a particular place over some period, they often develop feelings of affection such as joy, love, and positive surprise, which lead eventually to a sense of belonging, and place dependence (Isa et al., 2019). Previous studies have offered positive evidence of the predictive ability of the emotions of joy, love and positive surprise on



**Figure 1.** Proposed theoretical framework.

revisit intention, and have consequently confirmed the predictive ability of place dependence on revisit intention (Abou-Shouk et al., 2018; Hosany et al., 2017; Jiang et al., 2017). Therefore, based on the discussion above, it is hypothesized that:

- H4: Place dependence has a positive effect on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- H5: Place dependence mediates the relationship between the emotion of joy and tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- H6: Place dependence mediates the relationship between the emotion of love and tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- H7: Place dependence mediates the relationship between the emotion of positive surprise and tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The proposed theoretical framework through which to study the factors affecting tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, with place dependence as mediator, is illustrated in Figure 1.

## Methodology

### *Participants and procedure*

This study was carried out in George Town, the capital city of the Malaysian State of Penang, which has been conferred a listing as a UNESCO

World Heritage Site. George Town is an exceptional example of a multi-cultural town locked in a time zone by itself with unique characteristics in term of objects, places and social practices. It has overseen the urban development around it comprising various well-preserved heritage buildings and pre-war buildings, and the unique attractions of a living cultural heritage that is most frequently visited by foreign tourists (Azmi and Ismail, 2016). George Town's obvious strengths in this respect, plus its prestigious UNESCO heritage listing make it an excellent site for the study. Using a non-probability judgmental sampling technique, 300 self-administered questionnaires were distributed among foreign tourists visiting heritage sites in George Town like well-preserved heritage buildings, pre-war buildings, unique living cultural heritage and shop houses in Love Lane, Armenian Street, Lebuh Melayu, Penang Peranakan Mansion, and Dato Koyah Shrine.

From the total responses, 287 valid and usable questionnaires were received, yielding a response rate of 95.66%. This sample size is adequate to perform Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). As a rule of thumb, a subject-to-item ratio ranging from 5:1 (Hatcher and O'Rourke, 2013) or 10:1 (Nunnally, 1978) is required to achieve a 5% significance level. In order to ensure that there was no common method variance in the survey that utilized single sourced data, the Harman's single factor test was administered, and this confirmed that none of the generated factors explained more than 50% of the variance (Podsakoff et al., 2012)

### Questionnaire development and instrument

The questionnaire was designed in English and was divided into three sections. Section A comprised information about respondent's travel behaviour such as number of past visits, length of stay, past visiting experience to heritage sites, purpose of visit and travel companion. Section B recorded the respondent's perceptions in respect of 25 measurement items. Section C requested demographic profiles including gender, age, marital status, and education level. Three academic experts in tourism and two from marketing were approached to confirm the validity of the questionnaire. All items used to measure the study variables were adapted from the literature, with minor modification being made to the wording to custom suit the research context.

Appendix 1 details the measurement of instruments for this study. The construct representing emotional experience was adapted from the Destination Emotion Scale (DES) devised by Hosany and Gilbert (2010), and which consists of the three dimensions of joy, love, and positive surprise. Emotion of joy was measured using five items (cheerful, delight, enthusiasm, joy, and pleasure); emotion of love was captured with five items (caring, affection, love, tenderness, and warm hearted); and emotion of positive surprise was measured using five items (amazement, fascinated, astonishment, inspired, and surprise). Four items were adapted from Prayag and Ryan (2012) to measure place dependence, and six items were borrowed from Wu et al. (2018) and Chen et al. (2017) to measure revisit intention. All major scales were anchored by a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 for 'strongly disagree' and 7 for 'strongly agree'.

### Statistical technique

The Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach was employed in the data analysis via SmartPLS version 3.2.8 computer software. The rationale to opt for this approach is that it has the technical advantage of being able to assess the inter-relationship among factors simultaneously (Hair Jr et al. 2019).

### Results

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are reported in Table 1. Of 287 respondents, females outnumbered males (56:44). In terms of age, more than half of the participants

**Table 1.** Demographics characteristics of the respondents.

Characteristics	Frequency (n = 287)	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	127	44.3
Female	160	55.7
<i>Age (year)</i>		
20 years and below	21	7.3
21–30 years	126	43.9
31–40 years	87	30.3
41–50 years	21	7.3
51–60 years	20	7.0
61 years and above	12	4.2
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	205	71.5
Married	81	28.2
Widowed	1	0.3
<i>Education level</i>		
Junior high school	8	2.8
Senior high school	33	11.5
College/University	150	52.3
Postgraduate	96	33.4

(51%) were aged less than 30 years old, 38% were aged 31–50 years old, and 11% were aged more than 51 years old. In terms of marital status, 71.5%, 28.2% and 0.3% of respondents respectively, were single, married, and widowed. Also, more than half of the respondents had attended college/university.

### Partial least square-structural equation modelling

The PLS-SEM approach was analysed via a two-stage process: (i) assessing the measurement model; and (ii) assessing the structural model. The following sections present the assessment at these stages.

### Measurement model assessment

The measurement model was assessed through reliability analysis, convergence validity, and discriminant validity. **Reliability analysis** was tested via Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Table 2 depicts the readings of Cronbach's alphas ranging between 0.79 and 0.931, and composite reliability falling between 0.863 and 0.947. These results topped the cut-off level of 0.70, indicating existence of high internal consistency among construct items (Kline, 2010; Nunnally, 1978).

**Table 2.** Descriptive, reliability and validity of measurement model.

Variables	Item	Loadings	M	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Emotion of joy	EJ1	0.870	5.46	1.198	0.931	0.947	0.782
	EJ2	0.881					
	EJ3	0.863					
	EJ4	0.899					
	EJ5	0.909					
Emotion of love	EL1	0.888	4.958	1.292	0.923	0.942	0.763
	EL2	0.855					
	EL3	0.871					
	EL4	0.872					
	EL5	0.883					
Emotion of positive surprise	ES1	0.846	5.098	1.26	0.909	0.932	0.734
	ES2	0.866					
	ES3	0.862					
	ES4	0.870					
	ES5	0.839					
Place dependence	PI_Dep1	0.791	5.152	1.329	0.790	0.863	0.612
	PI_Dep2	0.764					
	PI_Dep3	0.783					
	PI_Dep4	0.792					
Revisit intention	RI_1	0.818	4.440	1.534	0.913	0.932	0.697
	RI_2	0.840					
	RI_3	0.851					
	RI_4	0.859					
	RI_5	0.825					
	RI_6	0.815					

Notes: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

**Table 3.** Fornell–Larcker criterion.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Emotion of joy	<b>0.885</b>				
(2) Emotion of love	0.644	<b>0.874</b>			
(3) Emotion of positive surprise	0.640	0.700	<b>0.857</b>		
(4) Place dependence	0.631	0.626	0.741	<b>0.783</b>	
(5) Revisit intention	0.356	0.638	0.619	0.717	<b>0.835</b>

Next, **convergent validity** was evaluated via factor item loadings, and average variance extracted values (AVE). In this study, the factor item loadings of the measurement model ranged between 0.764 and 0.909 (see Table 2), i.e. greater than the threshold value 0.70, indicating the associated indicators show a common basis within the constructs. Furthermore, the AVE values fell in-between 0.612 and 0.782, surpassing the suggested value 0.50 (Hair Jr et al., 2019). Consequently, convergent validity of the measurements is attained, inferring that the measure connects positively with alternative measures of the same construct.

**Discriminant validity** was evaluated using two criteria: the Fornell–Larcker criterion, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratios (HTMT). The

Fornell–Larcker criterion in Table 3 shows that the square roots of the AVEs (as depicted in bold) were bigger than the off-diagonal correlation values, denoting strong correlations among constructs within the model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Henseler et al. (2014) suggested using an alternative technique to the Fornell–Larcker criterion, known as the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations based on the multitrait-multimethod matrix. Kline (2010) asserted that when the HTMT value exceeds 0.85, the discriminant validity has a problem. As for the present research, all HTMT values are found to be below than this recommended value, as specified in Table 4. Again, discriminant validity was confirmed.

**Table 4.** Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Emotion of joy					
(2) Emotion of love	0.691				
(3) Emotion of positive surprise	0.693	0.761			
(4) Place dependence	0.742	0.727	0.870		
(5) Revisit intention	0.381	0.695	0.678	0.827	

**Table 5.** Hypotheses testing and structural assessment results.

Relationships	Std Beta	Std Error	t-value	p-value	BC 95% Bootstrap Confidence Interval		Decision	
					LL	UL		
<b>Direct effects</b>								
H1	EJ → RI	-0.366*	0.226	3.836	0.000	0.107	0.335	Supported
H2	EL → RI	0.420*	0.052	2.385	0.017	0.021	0.230	Supported
H3	ES → RI	0.116*	0.072	9.017	0.000	0.398	0.616	Supported
H4	PD → RI	0.599*	0.057	25.602	0.000	0.655	0.766	Supported
<b>Mediating effects of place dependence</b>								
H5	EJ → PD → RI	0.135*	0.039	3.943	0.000	0.080	0.238	Supported
H6	EL → PD → RI	0.074*	0.031	2.333	0.020	0.015	0.169	Supported
H7	ES → PD → RI	0.305*	0.042	8.114	0.000	0.276	0.457	Supported

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ , EJ = Emotion of joy, EL = Emotion of love, ES = Emotion of positive surprise, RI = Revisit intention, PD = Place dependence, LL = Lower level, UL = Upper level.

By having a satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, the study does not suffer from common method bias. Hence, the next stage of PLS-SEM was executed.

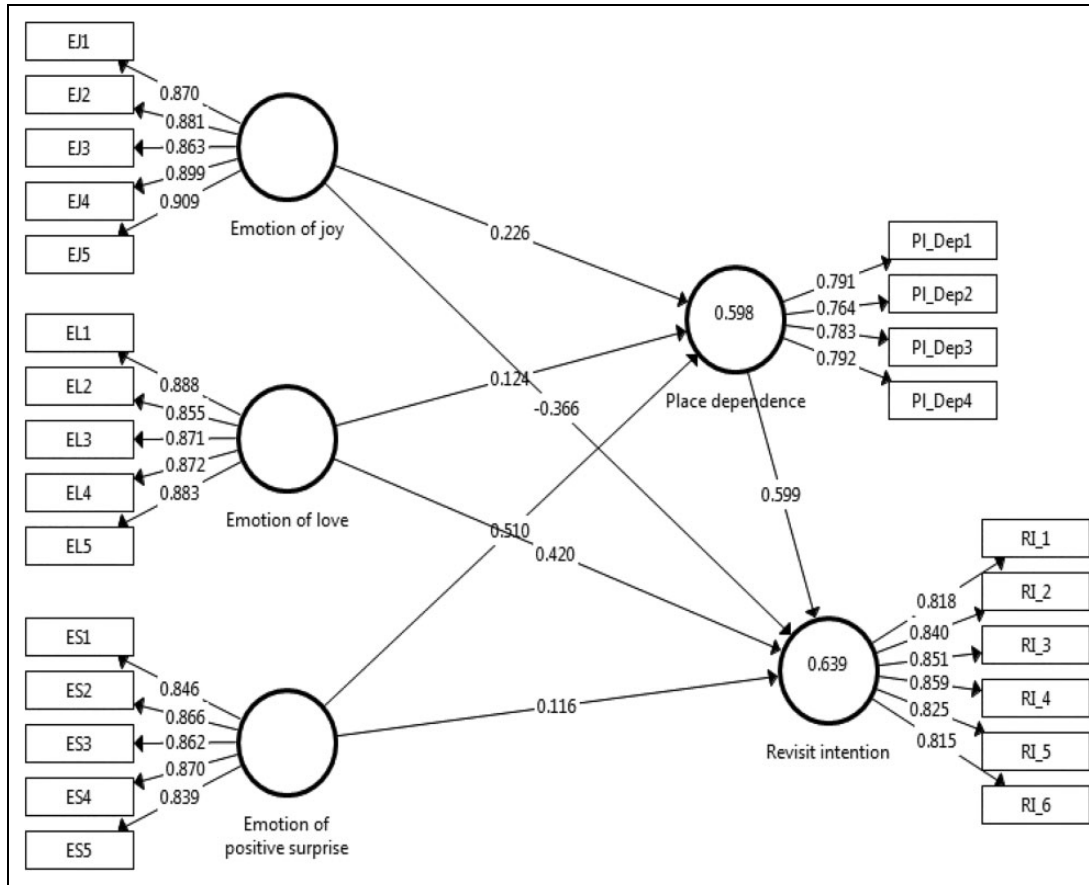
### Structural model assessment

The structural model was evaluated through computation of standardized beta coefficients,  $R^2$ , and  $t$ -values with 95% bias-corrected and the accelerated bootstrap confidence interval technique, according to a resampling of 5,000. Precisely, in this study, four factors (i.e. emotions of joy, love, and positive surprise, and place dependence) embodied the exogenous variables, with the endogenous variable represented by tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Table 5 shows that the emotion of joy has a significant effect on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites ( $\beta_1 = 0.226$ ,  $t$ -value = 3.836,  $p < 0.005$ ). Thus, H1 is supported. Likewise, the emotion of love significantly influences tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites ( $\beta_2 = 0.124$ ,  $t$ -value = 2.385,  $p < 0.05$ ), thus reinforcing H2. In addition, tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites is also significantly affected by the emotion of positive surprise ( $\beta_3 = 0.510$ ,  $t$ -

value = 9.017,  $p < 0.05$ ), and place dependence ( $\beta_4 = 0.599$ ,  $t$ -value = 25.602,  $p < 0.05$ ). Hence, the postulated H3 and H4 are sustained.

In terms of investigation of the mediating role of place dependence, PLS-SEM bootstrapping procedures was executed to test the significance of the path coefficients in accordance with the Preacher and Hayes (2008) methods of bootstrapping indirect effects. Henseler et al. (2014) highlighted that PLS-SEM bootstrapping procedures produce better results than the Sobel test which only works well in large samples. Empirically, the indirect influence of the emotion of joy on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites via place dependence and with  $\beta_5 = 0.135$  is significant with its  $t$ -value equalling 3.943 (see Table 5). With 0.135, 95% Boot CI: [LL = 0.080, UL = 0.238], the trend shows an absence of zero in 95% bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap confidence intervals, implying the presence of mediation towards the dependent variable. It was determined that place dependence has a mediating effect between the emotion of joy and tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and hence, that H5 was supported.

As for the subsequent hypothesis, H6, the indirect influence of the emotion of love on



**Figure 2.** PLS algorithm results.

tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, based on place dependence with  $\beta_6 = 0.074$  is meaningful, with its  $t$ -value equal to 2.333. With 0.074, 95% Boot CI: [LL = 0.015, UL = 0.169], the confidence intervals do not contain the value zero, deducing the existence of a mediating effect for the relationship between constructs. The mediating role of place dependence therefore has a significant association between the emotion of love and tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and consequently, H6 is also upheld.

The final hypothesis, H7 determined whether place dependence mediates the relationship between the emotion of positive surprise and tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The results revealed the indirect influence of the emotion of positive surprise on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites via place dependence where  $\beta_7 = 0.305$ , to be significant with its  $t$ -value = 8.114. With 0.305, 95% Boot CI: [LL = 0.276, UL = 0.457], the trend shows the non-appearance of

zero between the confidence interval values, which indicate a mediating effect between the links. The mediating influence of place dependence thus has a significant relationship with the emotion of positive surprise, and impacts on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This outcome endorses H7.

Figure 2 illustrates the PLS algorithm results showing the proposed model to possess good explanatory power for place dependence and tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The model explained 60% of place dependence variance, and 64% variance in tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, respectively. This predictive power surpassed the 25% benchmark for large effects (Cohen, 1988), indicative of the model's high degree of usefulness.

Furthermore, as the  $p$ -value only indicates the existence of the effect and not the size of effect, it is important to furnish results like the effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), and the predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ). The advice by Gefen et al. (2011) was followed to



**Table 6.** Effect size and predictive relevance assessment.

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>		Q <sup>2</sup>
		Place dependence	Revisit intention	
Emotion of joy		0.065		
Emotion of love		0.017		
Emotion of positive surprise		0.291		
Place dependence	0.598		1.06	0.338
Revisit intention	0.639			0.326

examine the effect sizes. The  $f^2$ -value = 0.065 denotes the presence of small effect size on the strength of the relationship between the emotion of joy and place dependence (see Table 6). Analogous discoveries occur on the strength of relationship between the emotion of love and place dependence with  $f^2$ -value = 0.017. In addition, the effect size of 0.291 on the strength of the relationship between the emotion of positive surprise and place dependence denotes a medium effect. On the other hand, place dependence shows large effects on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Next, the assessment of predictive relevance was undertaken via blindfolding techniques based on the guidance of Henseler et al. (2014) and Hair Jr et al. (2019). These scholars noted that endogenous constructs possess predictive relevance when the values of  $Q^2$  exceed zero. In this study, the results of the blindfolding techniques show  $Q^2$  values for place dependence and revisit intention falling between 0.338 and 0.326, respectively, signifying that the proposed model embodies acceptable predictive relevance as the value is non-zero.

## Discussion

This study examined the factors affecting tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a developing nation. Additionally, the mediating role of place dependence on this relationship was also inspected. Altogether, seven hypotheses were assessed in the structural model. The results of PLS-SEM approach unveiled that the emotion of joy significantly affects tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and thus, H1 is sustained. The results indicate that the greater development

of the emotion of joy, the more likely tourists will incline to revisit UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Baloglu et al. (2019) asserted that element of joy is closely related to state of mind of being happy upon experiencing stories of the past in heritage sites leading to appreciation in the form of closeness between people and place.

Additional analysis was then executed to check the mediating role of place dependence on this relationship. The postulated H5 was also supported, meaning that the connection between the emotion of joy and tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites was significantly mediated by place dependence. The results reflected that tourists tend to feel uplifted and cheerful when in the various settings of this UNESCO World Heritage Sites as it constitutes a unique architectural and cultural townscape. Indeed, they are enthusiastic about wanting to learn more about this place for their next visits. These results substantiate those found in previous studies (Argan et al., 2014; Prayag et al., 2017). They also complement the scholarly works of Hosany and Prayag (2013). Indeed, similar discoveries also found in research works of Lee and Kyle (2013), and Prayag et al. (2017) that tourists with past visit experiences instilled more emotion of joy as compared to those who had no previous visit.

Further inspection of whether the emotion of love has a positive effect on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites is conducted in testing H2. This empirical research revealed that the emotion of love significantly influenced tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and consequently, H2 was retained. The results conclude that the more of the emotion of love that tourists experience, the greater their intention to revisit UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Next, the mediating role of place dependence on this relationship was inspected in H6. The PLS-SEM bootstrapping procedures revealed that place dependence has a significant mediating effect between the emotion of love and tourists' revisit intention in respect of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, hence sustaining H6 as predicted. The reason for this significant connection is that tourists feel a sense of love (passion) towards the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a developing nation that they have visited. They tend to feel warm-hearted while visiting this place because it has a multicultural appeal which is reflected in its architecture, festivities and food, and this arouses tourists' interest in wanting to make repeat visits.

This result echoes the findings reported by Hosany and Prayag (2013). Indeed, some countries like Albania even use ‘A new Mediterranean love’ as a promotional tagline. Likewise, scholars like Lee and Kyle (2013), Prayag et al. (2017) also had comparable findings.

The consequent hypothesis H3, surmises that the emotion of positive surprise has a positive effect on tourists’ revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The analytical results depict that the emotion of positive surprise significantly influences tourists’ revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Therefore, H3 is supported. Positive surprise is part of intrinsic arousal that amplifies affective reaction, which was elicited by consumption of experience which in turn enhances revisit intention. To advance the depth of quantitative analysis, the mediating effect of place dependence was then examined on this relationship, which was put forward in H7. The PLS-SEM bootstrapping procedures demonstrate that place dependence had a significant mediating effect on this relationship, in this manner endorsing H7. This is analogous with the encounters of Hosany and Prayag (2013), Lee and Kyle (2013), Prayag et al. (2017).

The aforesaid significant linkages portray that as tourists instil more emotion of positive surprise, their intention to revisit UNESCO World Heritage Sites becomes stronger. George Town features residential and commercial buildings that represent the British era from the end of the 18th century. This architectural and cultural heritage encompasses shophouses, churches, mosques, government offices, and monuments. Upon visiting the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, tourists tend to experience surprise, and amazement towards the place in some unique way which leads them to always be keen to return for another visit.

Additionally, this study assesses whether tourists’ revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites is dependent upon place dependence, and this was tested in H4. Upon closer inspection of the standardized beta coefficients of the structural model, H4 was supported, thereby deducing that tourists’ revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites is influenced by place dependence. This finding corresponds with the outcomes of past studies (Stylidis, 2018; Ujang and Zakariya, 2018). Tourists reported that they enjoy visiting the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a developing nation as compared to other places because this is the best place for what they like to do during vacation.

Moreover, they cannot imagine anything better than the settings and facilities provided by this place. Indeed, they would not substitute any other destination for this one because of the many things that they did during their visits. In other words, spatial settings, touristic attractiveness and various of the destination’s physical elements all combine to influence tourists’ revisit intention (Brown et al., 2016; Ghosh and Sarkar, 2016; Prayag and Grivel, 2018). Interestingly, of the four direct relationships examined, place dependence was the strongest significant predictor of tourists’ revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a developing nation.

## Conclusion

The discoveries made in this empirical study offer essential practical and research implications.

### Practical implications

In practical terms, the study’s findings inform tourism authorities, tourist practitioners, and tourism management about the importance of tourists’ emotions (i.e. emotion of joy, love, and positive surprise) and place dependence in underpinning revisit intentions to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a developing nation, in particular George Town, the capital city of the Malaysian State of Penang. Precisely, this study proposed joy and positive surprise as important elements of the strategy to create engagement and promote the connection of heritage tourism to personal feelings in a memorable way. One way of strengthening these emotions within visitors is for tourism authorities, tourism practitioners, and tourism management to actively engage with existing tourists and potential tourists via digital marketing platforms and social media marketing tools in order to entice the revisit intention.

The incorporation of interactivity, infographics, and attractive photographs, together with engaging, entertaining, and informative videos on the cultural, historical and archaeological detail of UNESCO World Heritage Sites would permit existing and potential tourists to discover where such sites are, how to reach them, what they would find, and when; and using digital marketing and social media, would allow these discoveries to be made with least cost, time and effort. Moreover, leveraging these channels would expand tourists’ emotions of joy and positive surprise as they would gather a high volume

of input and knowledge from other tourists' contributions regarding their experiences at UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Such a strategy also provides a good opportunity to develop person-place bonding, which is known to evolve through emotional connections.

Additional to this strategy is the use of more general communication such as advertisements about UNESCO World Heritage Sites in in-flight tv programmes, in-flight magazines or on boarding passes, and advertisements on seatback tray tables would be well-placed to catch the eye of potential visitors, and indeed those who had already visited. Taken together, this type of in-flight advertising is likely to arouse positive emotions and interest for revisit intention. Tourists appreciate not only the physical heritage sites themselves, but also the people, and associated objects such as local food and lifestyle. This strategy may contribute to the embedding of tourists' emotions of love, and place dependence in respect of heritage destinations like UNESCO World Heritage Sites and would bring greater sustainability in the heritage tourism business.

### *Theoretical implications*

Concerning the theoretical implications of the study's results, this study broadens the application of Goal-Interference Theory of Conflict in tourists' post-consumption behaviour literature, in particular revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in a developing nation context. Plus, this quantitative study contributes important insights to the literature in the field of travel, tourism, and vacation marketing research by examining the predictors of tourists' revisit intention which were evaluated via seven hypotheses and reveals significant relationships were found among these constructs based on the structural effect of the PLS-SEM approach. Of this, place dependence was the strongest significant predictor of tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in George Town, the capital city of the Malaysian State of Penang. Above and beyond, of the three emotions tested, this quantitative research uncovers emotion of love heavily influenced tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in George Town, the capital city of the Malaysian State of Penang.

What's more, further exploration on tourists' revisit intention and mediating role of place dependence intensify the discoveries of earlier tourism scholars that only put focus on tourist

intention to visit. This study differs than Hosany et al. (2017) and Prayag et al. (2013)'s works by replacing the mediator (place dependence rather than satisfaction) and test whether place dependence mediates the relationships between three emotions (i.e. emotion of joy, love, and positive surprise) and revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites in George Town, the capital city of the Malaysian State of Penang. To be specific, by checking the standardized path estimates of the PLS-SEM approach, the indirect effect of the emotion of positive surprise on tourists' revisit intention to UNESCO World Heritage Sites via place dependence has been shown to be the strongest, with the emotions of joy and love ranking lower. Henceforth, this study adds the current body of knowledge by furnishing a better empirical understanding of the significant evidence to support the notion that returning tourists (i.e. repeaters) are heavily influenced by emotional aspects and bonding arising from their positive memory during the visit.

### *Directions for future research*

Future studies are recommended to collect data from larger samples that can gather data from both domestic and foreign tourists who have visited UNESCO World Heritage Sites in various locations. Given that the present study was focussed on the heritage sites in a developing nation, the generalizability of its findings would be greater with the inclusion of other such sites in other countries that include both ASEAN and non-ASEAN markets. Further, since each and every UNESCO World Heritage Site varies in terms of culture, social structures, and uniqueness of its setting, comparisons in the relationship between emotional experience, place dependence, and revisit intention may well emerge. New studies should also consider expanding the current research framework by examining additional influencing factors of revisit intention such as trust, perceived value, flow experience, online word-of-mouth. This would expand the explanatory power of the dependent variable.


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## Appendix I. Measurement of instruments

Variables	Label	Statements
<b>Emotion of joy</b>		
	EJ1	I feel cheered by the settings of this place
	EJ2	I feel a sense of delight upon visiting this place
	EJ3	I feel enthusiastic to know more about this place
	EJ4	I feel a sense of joy (gladness) upon visiting this place
	EJ5	I feel a sense of pleasure upon visiting this place
<b>Emotion of love</b>		
	EL1	I feel care towards this place
	EL2	I feel a sense of affection towards this place
	EL3	I feel a sense of love (passion) towards this place.
	EL4	I feel a sense of tenderness towards this place
	EL5	I feel warm-hearted while visiting this place
<b>Emotion of positive surprise</b>		
	ES1	I feel a sense of amazement towards this place
	ES2	I feel a sense of astonishment towards this place
	ES3	I feel a sense of fascination about this place
	ES4	I feel a sense of inspiration upon visiting this place
	ES5	I feel a sense of positive surprise (unexpected fulfilment) upon visiting this place
<b>Place dependence</b>		
	PI_Dep1	This is the best place for what I like to do during vacation
	PI_Dep2	I enjoy visiting this place as compared to other places
	PI_Dep3	I could not imagine anything better than the settings and facilities provided by this place.
	PI_Dep4	I would not substitute any other destination for the things that I did during my visit in this place.
<b>Revisit intention</b>		
	RI_1	I would visit this place again in the near future.
	RI_2	I am interested in revisiting this place again.
	RI_3	I will come back again to this place.
	RI_4	There is a likelihood that I would visit this place in the future
	RI_5	I always consider this place to be the first choice for the next visit
	RI_6	I have a strong intention to visit this place again.