



# Foreign tourists' experience: The tri-partite relationships among sense of place toward destination city, tourism attractions and tourists' overall satisfaction - Evidence from Shiraz, Iran

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## ABSTRACT

Tourism is born of attractions, is experienced by tourists, and ends with a specific level of tourists' satisfaction. Taking into consideration the importance of the quality of tourists' experiences in boosting tourism industry, and regarding the importance of the mechanism of the effect of attractions on tourist satisfaction, this paper proposes and examines a structural model that depicts the tri-partite relationships among sense of place, attractions and satisfaction using the data of experiences of a sample of 396 foreign tourists in Shiraz city, Iran. The findings support the positive influence of attractions on sense of place toward the host city, and also the positive effect of place attachment and place dependence on satisfaction. The mediating role of the two dimensions of sense of place in association between attractions and satisfaction was also demonstrated. Surprisingly, the direct effect of attractions on satisfaction was not authenticated. The implications of the findings are discussed.

## Author statement

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## 1. Introduction

International tourism is of critical importance for both tourists and host destinations. Foreign tourism provides an opportunity for tourists, through visiting and attending new environments, to explore some aspects of their identity that they do not find in ordinary life (White & White, 2004). The entry of foreign tourists into countries is also important for the governments and policymakers in many ways, especially economically. It can play an effective role in increasing foreign exchange revenue, creating new and more employment opportunities, and fertilizing tourism industry, and accordingly, can promote inhabitants' quality of life and accelerate the development process of the country (Tiwari, Dash, & Narayanan, 2018). Due to these and other outcome benefits of international tourism, attracting foreign tourists is now in the spotlight of countries' attention and, accordingly, this market is becoming more and more competitive. An important fact here is that achieving success in any competitive market, especially the competitive

global tourism market, is largely dependent on the provision of unique products for customers and satisfying their needs and expectations in the best way possible.

Attractiveness of the tourism destinations plays a pivotal role in their ability to compete (Castellano et al., 2019). Many experts consider the satisfaction of tourists as a determining factor in the success of the tourism industry (Cole & Scott, 2004), in so far as some researchers such as Song, Van der Veen, Li, and Chen (2012) equated 'success' in tourism industry with 'to have satisfied tourists', and hence, emphasized the crucial importance of assessing tourist satisfaction in destination management and tourism development. Due to the increasing significance of the role that foreign tourists can play in national economies (Castellano et al., 2019; Hui, Wan, & Ho, 2007; Tiwari et al., 2018), their satisfaction with destinations raises as a key subject that needs more in-depth investigations, especially considering that the two main factors that contribute to increase of tourism demand for a specific destination, i.e. repeat visits and word-of-mouth, are highly influenced by tourist satisfaction (Cole & Scott, 2004; do Valle, Silva, Mendes, & Guerreiro, 2006; Hui et al., 2007; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Saayman, Li, Uysal, & Song, 2018; Sarra, Di Zio, & Cappucci, 2015; Song et al., 2012).

What drives tourists to a specific destination is the tourism attraction (Bhati & Pearce, 2017). In fact, without tourism attractions, tourism will not come into being (Gunn, 1972; Lew, 1987). So, attractions are prime

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requirements for formation of tourism systems. Evidently, the existence of tourists and tourism activities is completely dependent on existence of attractions (Richards, 2002). Edelheim (2015) considers attractions as 'heart of tourism'. Each tourism attraction is usually found along with some other attractions in a touristic area. These attractions, each with different attributes, make up a set, and often the combination of attractions plays a role in motivating tourists to travel and visit, rather than does each of them separately (Edelheim, 2015). Tourism and visiting attractions puts individuals in a physical and symbolic encounter with new places and environments (McCabe & Stokoe, 2004), through which an emotional bond toward host destination is created. Although one's continuous and long-term interaction with an environment usually acts as an effective factor in developing feeling of attachment, individuals may also be attached to places other than their residential areas, such as tourism sites (Suntikul & Jachna, 2016). These emotional bonds that people develop toward places and environments have been conceptualized through several different concepts such as sense of place, place attachment, place bonding, etc (Fu, Yi, Okumus, & Jin, 2019; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013b). Regardless of the variety of vocabulary suggested for person-place emotional relationship, this relationship can yield various positive outcomes for communities (Fu et al., 2019; Shaykh-Baygloo, 2020). Taking this into consideration, some tourism researchers have been encouraged to carry out studies on sense of place in tourism context. The term 'sense of place' has been widely used in the tourism context to describe the tourist-destination ties. Tourists' sense of place toward destinations plays a significant role in their evaluation on the quality and richness of their trip experiences (Abou-Shouk, Zoair, El-Barbary, & Hewedi, 2018). Because of the substantial benefits associated with and resulting from tourists' sense of place, investigation and exploration of the level of tourists' feelings of attachment toward destination raises as an important issue for tourism planners and decision makers (Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010).

Attractions as the most important factor in giving birth to tourism, and tourist satisfaction as ultimate goal of tourism market have a pivotal role to play in promoting the tourism industry. Taking this into consideration, and regarding the potential role of sense of place - as outcome of visiting attractions and antecedent of tourist satisfaction - in tourism experience quality, the present study examines the association between foreign tourists' overall evaluation on attractions and their satisfaction with the trip to current destination, in such a way that the mediating role of 'sense of place toward host city' in this relationship is also explored. Foreign tourists' experiences in various tourism destinations have been examined by some researchers; e.g. Chaudhary (2000): India; Hui et al. (2007): Singapore; Bashar and Abdelnaser (2011): Jordan; Amuquandoh (2011): Ghana; Sarra et al. (2015): Portugal; Albaity and Melhem (2017): the United Arab Emirates; Lyu and Noh (2017): Korea; Chavarria and Phakdee-auksorn (2017): Thailand; Ramires, Brandao, and Sousa (2018): Portugal; López-Guzmán, Torres Naranjo, Pérez Gálvez, and CarvacheFranco (2019): Ecuador; Santa Cruz, Tito, Pérez-Gálvez, and Medina-Viruel (2019): Bolivia; Martin, Saayman, and du Plessis (2019): South Africa; Ragavan, Subramonian, and Sharif (2014): Malaysia; Castellano et al. (2019): Italy; Yuksel et al. (2010): Turkey; and Xu and Zhang (2016): China. Except for the last two articles that have adopted to some extent a similar approach with that of the present study, the association between foreign tourists' sense of place, attractions and satisfaction has received far less attention in tourism researches. In order to fill this research gap, and considering the importance of exploring the various aspects of foreign tourists' attitudes toward host destinations, this paper, using the data of experiences of a sample of 396 foreign tourists in Shiraz city, Iran, examines the tri-partite relationships among sense of place, attractions and satisfaction.

A world-famous city, Shiraz, is the capital of Fars province and epitome of the treasure trove of Iran's history and culture, which is evidenced by the numerous exquisite ancient relics and architectural

masterpieces. Fars province since over 2500 years has been the heartland of Persian culture. The two UNESCO world heritage sites, Persepolis and Pasargad, are located in this region, near the city of Shiraz. Shiraz is known as the city of history, culture and art, as well the city of flowers and splendid gardens. Shiraz is the cradle of Persian poetry, and is famous as the city of poets and literature, wherein the tombs of Hafez and Sa'di, the famous poets of Iran, are located. Exquisite mosques, bazaars and major pilgrimage sites are other attractions of the city. These great features besides kind and hospitable local people have made Shiraz one of the most important tourist destinations in Iran, so that visiting Shiraz is the main motivation for many foreign tourists who travel to Iran.

Since 2011, the annual number of visits to the tourism attractions of Fars province has varied between 5.2 million person-visit to about 6.5 million person-visit, which reflects the attractiveness and desirability of tourism attractions of this region for tourists and visitors. Specifically, the number of foreign tourists' visits to the attractions has continuously increased, in such a way that during the period 2011–2017, it has grown from 85,668 person-visit to 425,191 person-visit; in fact, an increase of close to 5 times. A glance at the number of incoming tourists to Shiraz over a ten years period, from 2009 to 2018, reveals that the city's role as an attractive tourist destination has been maintained and even strengthened. During this period, the number of both inbound foreign and domestic tourists increased, although the increase of the foreign tourists was more dramatic. Based on data published in the Shiraz annual report, 46,674 foreign tourists arrived in the city in 2009 and visited the tourism attractions. Experiencing a decreasing trend, the number of foreign tourists fell into 29,387 in 2011; But since then, it increased continuously. There has been a sharp increase in foreign tourist arrivals in the period of 2013–2014 which grew from 53,537 to 110,322, in fact, an increase of over one hundred-percent. Between 2014 and 2018, the number of international tourists gradually increased and reached to 135,433 persons. It is noteworthy that totally 841,911 tourists arrived in Shiraz in 2018, including 83.9% domestic and 16.1% foreign (Shiraz Municipality, 2019). Regarding the increasing popularity of Shiraz as a unique destination for international tourists, investigation of the tourists' evaluation on attractions, their satisfaction level, and the mechanism of the effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on overall satisfaction is of great importance to tourism development planning.

The present study contributes in some ways to the development of the tourism theoretical and empirical studies as follows. First, the study hypothesizes and empirically tests an aggregated approach in establishing the criteria set for constructs of attractions and satisfaction, in such a way that tourists' overall evaluation on attractions and their overall satisfaction with the trip is considered, rather than their detailed judgment about trip conditions and each of attractions. Second, in this study, tourists' sense of place to the destination city is examined. While the dominant approach in tourism studies has been examining the individuals' attachment toward a specific attraction. This paper suggests that when tourists experience a set of different attractions located in a definite geographical area, their attitudes toward visited attractions may be generalized into the whole area, and hence, a sense of place to the wider space (e.g. city, region, and country) may be formed. Third, this paper seeks to find out if tourists' sense of place can mediate the attractions-satisfaction relationship, the hypothesis that has been given little attention in previous tourism studies. Finally, this paper can contribute to the tourism literature via broadening the concept of sense of place to non-residential areas, and especially through focusing on experiences of foreign tourists, whose geographical, historical, social and cultural backgrounds are often different from the destination context.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Tourism attractions: definitions and evaluation approaches

Tourism attractions play a decisive and undeniable role in tourism systems. Pearce (1991) defined an attraction as “a named site with a specific human or natural feature which is the focus of visitor and management attention” (p. 46). Similarly, Jerab, Alper, and Baslar (2011) defined tourism attraction as “a place of interest where tourists visit, typically for its inherent or exhibited cultural value, historical significance, natural or built beauty, or amusement opportunities” (p. 1). This definition has also been confirmed and presented by Yang (2018). According to Erislan (2016), tourism attraction refers to all types of natural and man-made resources with unique and aesthetic values that tourists are encouraged and motivated to visit them. Some tourism attractions are of such quality that attract a flow of tourists even from long distances. Johns (1999) has pointed out the hedonic, aesthetic and emotional content of tourism attractions. Nuclei, i.e. the central elements of tourist attraction systems, are those attributes of destination that stimulate and encourage individuals to decide to travel and visit. Tourists sometimes travel to a place only to visit a single specific attraction; but more commonly, tourists' itinerary is planned for visiting or experiencing a set of attractions, i.e. a nuclear mix (Leiper, 1990). Reviewing the existing tourism literature, it is revealed that researchers have adopted the different approaches to evaluate tourism attractions. These approaches are distinct from each other in terms of: evaluation approach, the way of examining the role/effect of attractions, and the way of treating tourism attractions in the evaluation framework.

*Evaluation approach (objective or subjective):* The appropriate monitoring and evaluation of a tourism destination is essential to achieve sustainable tourism (Deng, King, & Bauer, 2002). In fact, how well a destination/an attraction creates a valuable experience for tourists, is a key factor in destination marketing and tourism management, because the tourists' satisfaction is largely related to their evaluation of attractions. There are two general approaches to evaluate tourism attractions: objective and subjective. The objective approach relies mainly on the tangible and measurable criteria, while the focus of the subjective evaluation is on the individuals' perceptions of the quality and value of visited/experienced attractions and destinations. Each of these two approaches has its own significance. However, the latter is considered in this study.

Gaining insight into the tourists' perceptions about attractions and services offered in tourism destinations is a decisive factor in successful destination marketing (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). These perceptions imply the interpretations that visitors attribute to what they experience (Arabatzis & Grigoroudis, 2010). Tourists' perceptions are, to some extent, influenced by comparing current experience with their previous experiences in other destinations (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). However, by experiencing an attraction, tourists/visitors perceive its inherent quality and comparative value that leads to a judgment about that. This evaluation about attractions' overall excellence or superiority has been termed the 'perceived quality' (Yuan & Jang, 2008) or 'perceived value'. Perceived value or quality is a subjective concept (Calver & Page, 2013) and an appraisal construct (Yuan & Jang, 2008), which, in tourism context, can be defined as the overall assessment of the value and quality of visited attractions (Calver & Page, 2013). Some previous studies have demonstrated the positive effect of perceived value and quality on satisfaction (Calver & Page, 2013; Castellanos-Verdugo, Oviedo-García, & Martín-Ruiz, 2011; Chen, Lee, Chen, & Huang, 2011; Yuan & Jang, 2008).

Referring to the definitions and previous empirical studies, it is revealed that the criteria of uniqueness, quality and aesthetic values of attractions have been emphasized as competitive attributes of tourism attractions that are considered in the present study as well. Uniqueness of a destination is one of the main criteria for tourists to choose the destination to visit or revisit and, consequently, can create economic

value for tourism destinations (Erislan, 2016). Bagri and Devkant (2015) in their study on a sample of 200 tourists who had visited Trijuginarayan, located in Garhwal Himalaya in Uttarakhand state of India, found uniqueness of the destination as an important factor that influences tourists' satisfaction. Vengesayi, Mavondo, and Reisinger (2009), and Schmidt (1979) considered unique attractions as a main factor for attractiveness of a destination. As well, the attribute of beauty and aesthetic value of attractions has been noted by several researchers (e.g. Erislan, 2016; Hui & Ryan, 2012; Jerab et al., 2011; Yang, 2018). In the present study, the tri-criterion construct - including uniqueness, quality and/or beauty, and worth visiting - was established to evaluate tourism attractions based on the tourists' perceptions and subjective judgments.

*The way of examining the role/effect of attractions (separately or synergistically):* Each tourism destination, regardless of its geographical scale (country, region, city, resort, etc), provides some kinds of attractions and experiences for tourists (Barros, Botti, Peypoch, Robinot, & Solonandrasana, 2011). These attractions are not all of the same importance for visitors. In fact, among various attractions offered in a tourist destination, some play a core role in motivating the tourists to choose that specific destination. Experiencing these attractions are often the main purpose of the tourists' trip (Botti, Peypoch, & Solonandrasana, 2008), so that almost all individual and group tours try to include visiting them within their itinerary, as much as possible. However, depending on its value and richness, each of tourism attractions has its own specific priority and importance for tourists to visit. In this respect, and based on the importance of attractions, Leiper (1990) classifies tourism attractions into three categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary nuclei. Although this classification can provide a useful overview of attractions of tourist destinations in terms of their level of significance, it may not be confirmed completely by all tourists. As also argued by Botti et al. (2008), same attractions may not have the same significance for all tourists. Because, the level of importance of some attractions is largely related to the individuals' personal interests and preferences. Accordingly, one attraction may be of high significance for some visitors, while may be less consequential for some others.

Although tourism attractions are generally single units with definite geographical areas (Swarbrooke, 2002), but because of increasing demand for package holidays in recent decades, tourism destinations have become more important than individual attractions (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). In fact, synergistic effect of a combination of attractions provides a more effective incentive for travel demand in comparison to a single tourism attraction (Edelheim, 2015; Leiper, 1995). As well, tourists' satisfaction depends mainly on their evaluation on a whole destination area, rather than on a one specific attraction (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). However, travelling to a tourism destination area which offers a series of tourism attractions, provides an opportunity for tourist to visit and experience more than one specific attraction (Deng et al., 2002) and consequently, creates an overall perception in the minds of tourists (Yang, 2018). Taking this into consideration, in the present study tourists' overall evaluation on all visited attractions was considered, rather than on one specific attraction or on some limited number of famous attractions.

*The way of treating tourism attractions in the evaluation framework (as a distinct construct or as a part/subset of another construct):* Regardless of the evaluation method, researchers have treated 'attractions' in different ways, depending on the purpose and proposed evaluation framework of the study. Some researchers such as Vengesayi et al. (2009), Vittersø, Vorkinn, Vistad, and Vaagland (2000), and Oriade and Schofield (2019) assumed it as a separate and distinct construct; while, some scholars considered attractions as a part/subset of another construct. For example, Bagri and Devkant (2015) evaluated the attributes of tourism attractions through seven criteria within a construct named 'uniqueness of destination'. Erislan (2016) developed a construct comprising 13 indicators to assess attractiveness of tourism attractions according to tourists' perceptions. Calver and Page (2013) investigated the hedonic and perceived values of historic attractions through two distinct

constructs. [Chen and Chen \(2013\)](#) conceptualized and examined the experiential value of Alishan Heritage Forest Railway via a two-dimensional construct including intrinsic and extrinsic values. In their study on six protected areas on the Northern Tourist Circuit of Tanzania, [Okello and Yerian \(2009\)](#) conceptualized attractions as part of the cognitive construct, and explored its relationship with tourist satisfaction. In the way of examining the effect of tourist experience on overall satisfaction and behavioral intentions, conducted by [Su and Hsu \(2013\)](#), assessment of attractions was implicitly carried out as part of evaluation of service fairness. The present study established a tri-criterion construct of tourism attractions, based on which the participants were asked to evaluate the quality & value of visited attractions.

## 2.2. Sense of place: definition, dimensionality, and evaluation approaches

Sense of place, a dynamic and ongoing phenomenon ([Lengen & Kistemann, 2012](#)), is one of the legitimate and widely accepted terms for person-place emotional relationships that implies the significance, meaning and emotional value of a place for individuals ([Abou-Shouk et al., 2018](#); [Jepson & Sharpley, 2015](#)). In a similar vein, [Lengen and Kistemann \(2012\)](#) defined sense of place as individuals' emotional ties with places and with the values and meanings inferred from them. [Jorgensen and Stedman \(2001\)](#) described sense of place as "the meaning attached to a spatial setting by a person or group" (p. 233). Sense of place can be raised and discussed in a wide variety of fields, including recreation and tourism. In the tourism context, it has been widely used to describe the tourist-destination links ([Abou-Shouk et al., 2018](#)). Individuals' sense of place toward tourism destinations can act as a potential factor for tourism demand ([Jepson & Sharpley, 2015](#)).

In tourism research, sense of place has been theorized also as place attachment ([Ramkissoon, Mavondo, & Uysal, 2018](#)). In fact, among the plethora of terms used to describe person-place bonds, 'sense of place' ([Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001](#)) and 'place attachment' ([Fu et al., 2019](#); [Ramkissoon et al., 2013b](#)) are the most popular and general, which imply various aspects of person-place tie such as emotions, beliefs and behaviors ([Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001](#); [Ramkissoon, Weiler, & Smith, 2012](#)). A review of the extant literature reveals that these two concepts are very similar ([Williams & Vaske, 2003](#)) and overlap both theoretically and methodologically, in so far as some researchers (e.g. [Abou-Shouk et al., 2018](#); [Ram, Björk, & Weidenfeld, 2016](#)) considered them to be synonymous with each other. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of researchers operationalized the both as multidimensional constructs, although there are differences in the hypothesized number of dimensions, among which the two, three and four dimensions have been more common. However, a comparative review of the proposed structures and criteria for conceptualization of the place attachment and sense of place shows a high conformity between the two concepts. Those researchers who considered two dimensions for place attachment as well as those who treated sense of place as a two-dimensional structure, established their hypothesized models based on place identity and place dependence (e.g. [Abou-Shouk et al., 2018](#); [Gross & Brown, 2008](#); [Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005](#); [Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004](#); [Williams & Vaske, 2003](#)). In the tri-dimensional conceptualization of the place attachment, researchers have generally established the model structure based on three pillars of place identity, place affect/affective attachment, and place dependence, which is in accordance with the attitudinal framework comprising cognitive, affective and conative components. In a similar vein, some studies have proposed the three-dimensional structure for sense of place consisting of place identity, place attachment, and place dependence. In actual fact, there is no especial conceptual difference between tripartite structure of place attachment and that of sense of place, except only a subtle difference related to the naming of the affective component, that is, 'place affect/affective attachment' as a sub-dimension of 'place attachment' vs. 'place attachment' in the 'sense of place' structure (e.g. [Jorgensen &](#)

[Stedman, 2001, 2006](#); [Walker & Chapman, 2003](#); [Yuksel et al., 2010](#)). Overall, regardless of some slight differences, the two notions of 'sense of place' and 'place attachment' have been conceptualized in previous studies in a similar way.

Different researchers have treated 'sense of place/place attachment' within their hypothesized models in different ways, which can be categorized into three groups as follows. (a) Some scholars assumed the sense of place/place attachment as a unidimensional construct (e.g. [Abou-Shouk et al., 2018](#); [Lewicka, 2010](#); [Walker & Chapman, 2003](#); [Zenker & Rütter, 2014](#)). In fact, in their conceptual model, the main components - e.g. affective, cognitive and conative dimensions - have not been represented as distinct constructs, so that all sub-criteria have been arranged together in a single-factor model without conceptual categorizing. Accordingly, in such models, because of indistinguishable borders of dimensions of sense of place/place attachment, it is not possible to explain their discrete role in relationships with other variables. (b) Some have operationalized sense of place/place attachment as a second-order multi-dimensional construct in such a way that the higher-level latent variable displays the collective effect of its subsets in the model, rather than each dimension associating with other variables directly and separately (e.g. [Hwang et al., 2005](#); [Ramkissoon et al., 2013b](#); [Ramkissoon et al., 2018](#); [Shaykh-Baygloo, 2020](#); [Xu & Zhang, 2016](#)). (c) Another group of researchers has also considered sense of place/place attachment to be a multi-dimensional scale, but with the difference that each dimension plays a distinct role in the hypothesized model (e.g. [Brown & Raymond, 2007](#); [Gross & Brown, 2008](#); [Jiang, Ramkissoon, Mavondo, & Feng, 2017](#); [Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006](#); [Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004](#); [Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004](#); [López-Mosquera & Sánchez, 2013](#); [Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015, 2017](#); [Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013a](#); [Raymond, Brown, & Robinson, 2011](#); [Raymond, Brown, & Weber, 2010](#); [Shamsuddin & Ujang, 2008](#); [Tsaur, Liang, & Weng, 2014](#); [Williams & Vaske, 2003](#); [Woosnam et al., 2018](#); [Yuksel et al., 2010](#)). As pointed out by [Jorgensen and Stedman \(2001\)](#) and [Ramkissoon et al. \(2012\)](#), the rationale for constructing such models is exploring the separate behavior of each dimension in relation to other variables, especially when it is likely that individuals' feelings of place identity, place attachment and place dependence are not convergent.

A review of the literature revealed that attitude theory has been widely used by researchers for operationalizing the 'sense of place' and 'place attachment' terms. Attitude has affective, cognitive and behavioral domains. On the other hand, places are the locales of manifestation of people's emotions, cognition and actions. Accordingly, place attachment in the framework of attitudinal approach can be conceptualized as a construct with cognitive, affective and conative components. In the place attachment literature, these components have been termed 'place identity', 'place affect', and 'place dependence', respectively. Recently, 'place social bonding' has also been considered by researchers as a cognitive dimension of place attachment. Although, the one-to-one correspondence between attitude aspects and place attachment dimensions does not matter. Instead, exploring the contribution and separate role of each of place attachment dimensions in relationship with outcome variables can be useful for better understanding the mechanism of this association ([Ramkissoon et al., 2012](#)). Based on attitude theory, which considers sense of place as a combination of cognitive, affective and conative traits of person-place relationships, and in congruent with conceptualization of sense of place in environmental psychology, [Jorgensen and Stedman \(2001\)](#) established the construct of sense of place based on three pivotal elements including: place attachment, place identity, and place dependence. In line with those researchers who considered sense of place - and as well, place attachment - an attitudinal concept with multi-dimensional construct, the present study represents the sense of place as a three-factor model comprising place attachment, place identity and place dependence, where each factor appears as a distinct construct in the structural model. The rationale for this approach, as mentioned earlier, is that, in some cases

the feelings of attachment, identity and dependence to the place may be non-convergent. Accordingly, positioning them in separate constructs can be more efficient in exploring their self-specific function in the structural model and in association with other constructs.

### 2.2.1. Place attachment

In recent decades, the relationship between human and environment/place has been conceptualized using attachment theory, and in this vein, some researchers has termed the person-place bonding 'place attachment'. However, there is no integration and convergence in application of the terms using to describe this phenomenon (Ramkissoon et al., 2012). Some researchers conceptualized 'sense of place' as a wide notion and multi-dimensional construct in such a way that it covers the various aspects of person-place relationships, one of which is the place attachment (McKercher, Wang, & Park, 2015; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). People's interactions with places may result in formation of an emotional bond between them. This person-place affective tie, which is termed 'place attachment' (Ramkissoon et al., 2012), would be fostered and strengthened through revisiting and spending more time in the locale (Davis, 2016). In short, place attachment is the person-place emotional connection and interdependence (Han, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2019; Yi, Fu, Jin, & Okumus, 2018). It can also be described as a process of formation of emotional relationship between people and places (Yuksel et al., 2010). After visiting places, even for once, people may feel strong attachment to them. It is also possible that people develop a sense of attachment toward places which they have never seen (Moore & Graefe, 1994). Strong sense of attachment toward places is considered as a significant phenomenon because of its positive outcomes for individuals, groups and communities (Davis, 2016).

Place attachment was introduced into the tourism literature since the 1980s (Hwang et al., 2005). The place attachment studies have been focusing mainly on residential areas heretofore. Gradually researchers in other fields (e.g. recreation, tourism, leisure, events, etc) also showed an interest in conducting studies on attachment, whose study cases were not permanent residence places (Brown, Smith, & Assaker, 2016). Accordingly, application and conceptualization of this term was broadened into various fields of research such as geography, environmental psychology, tourism, etc (Han et al., 2019; Lee, Kyle, & Scott, 2012; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Yi et al., 2018). Place attachment has been conceptualized in tourism context as tourists' perceptions and feelings about destination environment (Han et al., 2019), which is termed 'destination attachment' (Suntikul & Jachna, 2016). Place attachment can improve tourists' place loyalty and their satisfaction with host destinations (Davis, 2016). In this study, tourists' feeling of attachment toward destination city is examined through seven attachment items extracted from previous researches.

### 2.2.2. Place identity

Identity is one of the main components of the places (Stedman, 2002). Identity of a place makes it distinguishable from other places (Lynch, 1960), although different people may derive various meaning from it (Stedman, 2002). Experiencing a place is usually associated with the formation and development of meanings and identity (Larson, De Freitas, & Hicks, 2013). In fact, after visiting a place and perceiving its symbolic meanings, people may feel a link between the place and their identity via which develop their identification in relation to the place (Han et al., 2019). In other words, place identity contributes to individuals' self-identity (Gu & Ryan, 2008; Halpenny, 2010). The identity characteristics that are shared between persons and places, evoke in one's mind a sense of closeness with the place, and through which her/his identity is strengthened. So, place identity can be interpreted as individuals' identity in relation to the places, which gives them a sense of acquaintance, commitment and connection with the past (Lalli, 1992). Physical and symbolic characteristics of places (Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010) along with their cultural and functional values (McCabe & Stokoe, 2004) contribute to the formation of place identity.

As mentioned, symbolic meanings of places may associate with individuals' identity. In the tourism context, the perception of this association can act as a motivational factor for tourists to develop their stewardship intentions and/or actions for preserving valuable places (Tan, Tan, Kok, & Choon, 2018). In fact, place identity is one of the phenomena that connects tourists to the touristic environments (Davis, 2016). Tourists may develop sense of place identity toward natural settings and tourist destinations (Ramkissoon et al., 2013b), because they are in symbolic and physical contact with destinations (McCabe & Stokoe, 2004). The present study examines the foreign tourists' sense of place identity to Shiraz city via three most-suggested place identity criteria.

### 2.2.3. Place dependence

In the tourism literature, place dependence can be defined as tourists' sense of functional attachment to the place and acknowledgment of the uniqueness of the destination in meeting tourists' goals, needs and expectations related to their trip and visiting experience (Ramkissoon et al., 2013b). Many researchers have dealt with place dependence as a permanent fixture in the sense of place construct (e.g. Abou-Shouk et al., 2018; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Walker & Chapman, 2003). Place dependence has been conceptualized by researchers through various propositions, among which following are more common: The perfect (Han et al., 2019; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Lee et al., 2012; Qian, Zhu, & Liu, 2011; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Stedman, 2002; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Yuksel et al., 2010) and exclusive (Graham Brown et al., 2016; Han et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2012; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Yuksel et al., 2010) performance of the place in providing facilities; Being more enjoyable than other alternatives (Gross & Brown, 2006; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Yuksel et al., 2010); Capability of the place in meeting the individuals' demanded functions (Han et al., 2019; Qian et al., 2011); Better performance of the place, compared to other alternatives, in providing the desirable activity environment (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Lee et al., 2012; Stedman, 2002, 2003); Unique and irreplaceable attribute of the place (Gross & Brown, 2006; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Xu & Zhang, 2016). In this study, all above-mentioned criteria were included in establishing the place dependence construct.

### 2.3. Tourist satisfaction

Satisfaction is "the consumer's fulfillment response" (Oliver, 2014, p. 8) that plays a decisive role in the success of each business (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Yuksel et al., 2010). Satisfaction has been defined as a post-choice cognitive judgment or emotional response about purchased and/or consumed products (Graham Brown et al., 2016; Fu et al., 2019; Hui et al., 2007) or about physical environments such as tourism destinations (Lee et al., 2012). Satisfaction is highly dependent on the one's overall judgment about different attributes and emotional values of a product, and in general, it is achieved when an individual's expectations of a specific product are really fulfilled. (Vittersø et al., 2000). So, satisfaction can be determined based on the perceived quality and the level of meeting the expectations/needs (Graham Brown et al., 2016; Song et al., 2012; Stedman, 2002). Accordingly, place satisfaction can be defined as individuals' judgment about the quality of a specific place and its achievement in meeting needs and expectations (Fu et al., 2019; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b).

Every planning for tourism development is somehow related to the satisfaction of tourists (Castellano et al., 2019; Sarra et al., 2015; Song, Li, van der Veen, & Chen, 2011; Song et al., 2012). Cole and Scott (2004) defined 'satisfaction' as "the aggregate feeling that one derives as a result of visiting a tourist attraction" (p. 81). Success of tourism attractions is generally known to be dependent on tourists' satisfaction (Nowacki, 2009). Satisfaction with a tourism destination can influences the tourists' desire to revisit, or to prefer it to the other alternatives (Lee

et al., 2012). One important factor for tourists' feeling of satisfaction with a tourism trip is that the trip be worthy of their expenses and time (Vittersø et al., 2000). Tourist satisfaction is generally assessed in two ways: (1) Transaction specific approach, in which the level of satisfaction with specific objects, attractions or encounters is examined; (2) Overall satisfaction approach in which all features and characteristics of the destination are considered together. Given that the latter approach has been considered to be more stable (Prayag & Ryan, 2012), and considering that the accuracy of this measurement has been confirmed in previous researches (Lee et al., 2012), the present study examines tourists' satisfaction through three questions concerning their overall satisfaction with tourism experience in Shiraz city.

### 3. Research hypotheses and proposed model

#### 3.1. Association between perceived quality & value of attractions and sense of place

Being in a place and perceiving it, creates a special meaning and feeling that influences the person's evaluation of that place (Fu et al., 2019). As such, a sense of belonging to the place and being identified with it, can positively influence evaluation of the environment (Yuksel et al., 2010). Among the plethora of previous tourism researches, very few studies were found that explored the association between attractions and tourist-destination link. An example in this vein is the study conducted by Gross and Brown (2008) that hypothesized and examined the effect of attractions on place attachment dimensions, i.e. place dependence and place identity, for tourists attended in the five South Australian tourism regions. Adopting a similar approach, although with some differences in conceptualization of the constructs, the present study hypothesizes that tourists' sense of place toward host destination is associated with their evaluation of attractions. The rationale for this suggestion is that, the judgment and perceived quality of attractions in the minds of tourists can be generalized to a wider space that attractions - places or objects - located in, and accordingly, can create a sense of place toward host city. In previous researches, little attention has been paid to this transition of feeling from attractions to their wider background area, i.e. the host city, and thus there is a research gap in this respect. The present study contributes to the tourism literature by examining the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>1a,b,c</sub>:** *Perceived quality & value of attractions directly and significantly influences sense of place dimensions including place attachment, place identity and place dependence.*

#### 3.2. Association between sense of place and tourist satisfaction

Although, for a long time, several studies have been carried out on sense of place (sometimes termed place attachment) and its relationship with satisfaction in recreation and residency literature, it hasn't been long that the place attachment-satisfaction association was introduced into the tourism literature (Yuksel et al., 2010), among which the study on foreign tourists have received far less attention. It is often thought that there is a positive relationship between sense of place and satisfaction. But this is not always the case; One may be satisfied with a place, while not having a sense of attachment toward it (Lee et al., 2012; Stedman, 2002, 2003). However, the association between sense of place and tourist/visitor satisfaction has been examined in previous studies, some of which dealt with satisfaction as predictor of sense of place/place attachment (e.g. Lee, 2012; Ramkissoon, 2015), while some others have assumed sense of place/place attachment to be the antecedent of satisfaction (e.g. Abou-Shouk et al., 2018; Fu et al., 2019; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Yuksel et al., 2010), each of them has presented its own justifications and reasons in support of the selected approach. However, as Yuksel et al. (2010), Prayag and Ryan (2012), Ramkissoon and Mavondo (2015) have also stated, there is still an ambiguity in this regard. This dual approach has been considered also by Fu et al. (2019). They

pointed to a third approach, that is when place attachment is considered as a mediator between satisfaction and other outcome variables. The hypothesized model in the present study is in line with the second approach and to some extent with the third, that is, sense of place is examined as the predictor of satisfaction, and also as the mediator between attractions and satisfaction. Accordingly, this study suggests the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>2a,b,c</sub>:** *Sense of place dimensions including place attachment, place identity and place dependence directly and significantly influence tourist satisfaction.*

#### 3.3. Association between perceived quality & value of attractions and tourist satisfaction

Visiting tourism attractions is usually the ultimate goal of tourists' trip to their intended destinations, and accordingly, their satisfaction with their trip is highly associated with their evaluation on visited attractions. Some researchers indicated that tourists' evaluation of attractions influences - whether directly or indirectly - their satisfaction. For example, Kyle, Graefe, and Manning (2003) reported a relationship between attractions and satisfaction. The direct effect of attraction on satisfaction has been somehow suggested previously by Oriade and Schofield (2019) within the context of UK visitor attractions. They found the paths of perceived value of attractions → satisfaction, and perceived quality of attractions → satisfaction to be statistically significant. The present study contributes to revealing the direct and indirect association between tourists' overall evaluation on the visited attractions and satisfaction in a specific tourism context, i.e. international tourism. In this way, the two following hypotheses are proposed:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *Perceived quality & value of attractions directly and significantly influences tourist satisfaction.*

**H<sub>4</sub>:** *Perceived quality & value of attractions indirectly influences tourist satisfaction through sense of place dimensions.*

#### 3.4. Mediating role of sense of place toward destination city in relationship between perceived quality & value of attractions and satisfaction

Various approaches have been taken to deal with 'sense of place' in previous tourism studies: (1) Sense of place as a result of tourist operations; (2) Sense of place as a predictor of place loyalty; (3) Sense of place as a mediator between tourism-related variables (Abou-Shouk et al., 2018). Adopting the last approach, the present study examines the mediating role of sense of place in the relationship between attractions and satisfaction. This approach was also noted by Fu et al. (2019) in such a way that place attachment can be considered as a mediator between satisfaction and other outcome variables. Given that the investigation of the role of mediators in the relationship between predictors and outcome variables can aid researchers in better understanding of the mechanism of this relationship (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015), this study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>5</sub>:** *Sense of place dimensions mediate the relationship between perceived quality & value of attractions and satisfaction.*

The hypothesized structural model of relationships between constructs of place attachment, place identity, place dependence, attractions, and satisfaction is depicted in Fig. 1.

## 4. Study area

Shiraz, the fifth most populous city of Iran, is located south of the country. According to the Iran's last national census of population and housing, the city had a population of 1,565,572 in 2016. Shiraz is one of the main and world-famous touristic cities in Iran. Having a variety of unique historical, cultural and natural tourism attractions, Shiraz has become a popular tourism destination for domestic and foreign tourists. Some of the most famous tourism attractions of the city include Eram

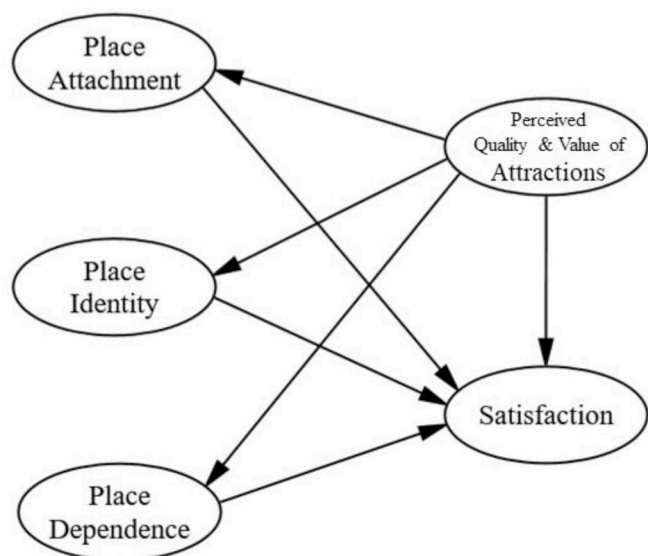


Fig. 1. Hypothesized structural model.

Garden, Vakil Bazaar, Nasir-ol-Mulk Mosque, Shah-e-Cheragh Mausoleum, Tomb of Hafez, Narenjestan Garden (Qavam House), Tomb of Sa'di, Zinat-ol-Mulk House, and Karim Khan Citadel, to name just a few examples. It is noteworthy that Persepolis, Iran's unique world heritage site, is located 60 km northeast of Shiraz. In 2018, a total of 841,911 tourists entered in Shiraz, 135,433 of whom were foreign (16.1%). Most of these tourists arrived during late March, April and May that can be due to good weather. The average length of stay of foreign tourists in the city was 2.78 days (Shiraz Municipality, 2019).

## 5. Methodology

This paper examines the relationships between sense of place dimensions, perceived quality & value of attractions, and overall satisfaction by studying a sample of 396 foreign tourists, who, at the time of filling in the questionnaire, had stayed in Shiraz city at least for 2 days and nights, and had visited the tourism attractions of the city within this time period. Using Structural Equation Modelling, the hypothesized measurement model and structural model of relationships between constructs are evaluated.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is one of the most widely used multivariate statistical analysis methods in the field of social sciences and tourism studies (do Valle & Assaker, 2016; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, & Gursoy, 2013). It "is a technique to specify, estimate, and evaluate models of linear relationships among a set of observed variables in terms of a generally smaller number of unobserved variables" (Shah & Goldstein, 2006, p. 149). Based on a fundamental assumption in SEM, all hypothesized relationships between and among variables should have theoretical support (Byrne, 2001; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012). Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2012) pointed out some of the advantages of applying SEM method, as follows. First, this method makes it possible to model the measurement errors and unexplained variances; Second, simultaneous examination of multiple regression equations can be conducted by applying SEM method; Third, it makes it possible to link 'micro' and 'macro' perspectives, and consequently to interpret each finding within a systemic framework; Finally, the SEM method helps the researcher to explore the best-fitting model and in some cases leads to the theory development. These attributes of the model on the one hand, and dominant feature of many tourism studies that is investigation of complex and multidimensional issues, on the other hand, allows and encourages tourism researchers to conduct analyses using structural equation modelling.

The present study develops a theory-based multidimensional model comprised of five latent variables and several regression paths relating them. Accordingly, the model involves a number of dependent and independent variables, and hence a multivariate statistical analysis method is required to be capable of examining the proposed relationships simultaneously, the feature that the univariate and bivariate statistical techniques lack (Crowley & Fan, 1997). The data, sample size, attributes of variables, and underlying conceptual framework of this study meet the assumptions and necessary prerequisites for the use of SEM method. A detailed explanation of measures, data collection, and data analysis process is provided as follows.

### 5.1. Questionnaire design and measures

A two-partite survey questionnaire was developed to gather needed data. First part of the questionnaire consisted of some questions about socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second part was comprised of a set of questions related to the studied constructs. In fact, after extensive and in-depth literature review on the concepts of sense of place and its dimensions, tourism attractions and tourist satisfaction, a set of 23 variables, adopted from previous studies, was constructed. All these variables were presented in the questionnaire in the form of positive sentences with the 5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree (Table 1). The questionnaire was originally prepared and finalized in English; it was then translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, and Spanish by some bilingual academic researchers and using back-translation method.

### 5.2. Data collection

The survey fieldwork was carried out in March and April 2019 within Shiraz city. The questionnaire, prepared in seven languages, was completed in 20 hotels. In this way and after making the necessary arrangements for completion of the questionnaire in hotels, during in-person meetings the goals and process of the survey was explained to the participants. Foreign tourists - who, in their current trip, had stayed in Shiraz city at least for 2 days and nights - were requested to fill in the questionnaires. All foreign tourists were welcomed to participate in the survey, and there was no restriction in the number and nationality of tourists to participate in the study. In total, 413 questionnaires were filled in, of which 17 questionnaires were discarded because of missing or invalid data. Overall, 396 valid questionnaires were confirmed for conducting analyses.

### 5.3. Analysis methods and processes

Analysis of the survey data was conducted using SPSS software (V. 23) and Amos software (V. 23). Confirmatory factor analysis and SEM method were conducted to assess the measurement model. To examine how the proposed model fits the data, the calculated values of goodness of fit indices - including: normed chi-square ( $\chi^2/df$ ), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), parsimonious goodness of fit index (PGFI), and parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) - were compared with recommended values. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was presented as the indicator of internal consistency of constructs. Factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated for examining the convergent validity. After ensuring the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the structural equation method with maximum likelihood estimation and bootstrap technique - with  $n = 5000$  bootstrap resamples - was conducted to examine hypothesized regression paths.

**Table 1**  
Constructs and respective items.

Constructs	Items	Descriptions of items, and supporting literature
Place identity	PI1	I feel visiting Shiraz is part of me (Han et al., 2019; Qian et al., 2011; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Yi et al., 2018; Yuksel et al., 2010)
	PI2	I identify strongly with Shiraz (Gross & Brown, 2006; Han et al., 2019; Kyle et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2012; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Yi et al., 2018; Yuksel et al., 2010)
	PI3	Visiting Shiraz says a lot about who I am (Han et al., 2019; Qian et al., 2011; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Walker & Chapman, 2003; Yi et al., 2018; Yuksel et al., 2010)
Place attachment	PA1	I miss it when I have left Shiraz (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Stedman, 2002, 2003; Walker & Chapman, 2003)
	PA2	I am very attached to Shiraz (Gross & Brown, 2006; Han et al., 2019; Kyle et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2012; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Shamsuddin & Ujang, 2008; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Yuksel et al., 2010)
	PA3	I feel strong sense of belonging to Shiraz (Lee et al., 2012; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Yuksel et al., 2010)
	PA4	I love to visit Shiraz (Qian et al., 2011)
	PA5	Shiraz is my favorite tourist destination to visit (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001)
	PA6	Visiting Shiraz makes me happy and pleased (Qian et al., 2011; Stedman, 2002)
	PA7	I would prefer to spend more time in Shiraz if I could (Moore & Graefe, 1994; Shamsuddin & Ujang, 2008)
Place dependence	PD1	For the activities that I enjoy most, the settings and facilities provided by Shiraz are the best (Han et al., 2019; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Lee et al., 2012; Qian et al., 2011; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Stedman, 2002; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Yuksel et al., 2010)
	PD2	For what I like to do, I could not imagine anything better than the settings and facilities provided by Shiraz (Brown et al., 2016; Han et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2012; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Yuksel et al., 2010)
	PD3	I enjoy visiting Shiraz and its environment more than any other tourist destinations (Gross & Brown, 2006; Kyle et al., 2003; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Yuksel et al., 2010)
	PD4	My demands for leisure and entertainment can be met through activities here (Han et al., 2019; Qian et al., 2011)
	PD5	For doing the things that I enjoy most, no other place can compare to Shiraz (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Lee et al., 2012; Stedman, 2002, 2003)
	PD6	For me, Shiraz cannot be substituted by other tourist destinations (Gross & Brown, 2006; Kyle et al., 2003; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Xu & Zhang, 2016)
	PD7	I like visiting Shiraz more than any other city (Xu & Zhang, 2016)
Perceived quality & value of attractions	AT1	Overall, tourism attractions of Shiraz are very unique (Bagri & Devkant, 2015; Schmidt, 1979; Vengesai et al., 2009)

**Table 1 (continued)**

Constructs	Items	Descriptions of items, and supporting literature
Satisfaction	AT2	Overall, tourism attractions of Shiraz are very rich in quality and beauty (Chen & Chen, 2013; Erislan, 2016; Hui & Ryan, 2012; Jerab et al., 2011; Yang, 2018)
	AT3	Overall, tourism attractions of Shiraz are worth visiting (Castellanos-Verdugo et al., 2011)
	SA1	Overall, I am satisfied with my trip to Shiraz (Albaity & Melhem, 2017; Brown et al., 2016; Cole & Scott, 2004; do Valle et al., 2006; Fu et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2012; López-Guzmán et al., 2019; Oriade & Schofield, 2019; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Ramkissoon et al., 2013b; Song et al., 2011; Song et al., 2012; Vittersø et al., 2000; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Yuksel et al., 2010)
	SA2	This trip to Shiraz met my expectation (do Valle et al., 2006; Hui et al., 2007; Oriade & Schofield, 2019; Song et al., 2011; Song et al., 2012; Vittersø et al., 2000; Xu & Zhang, 2016)
	SA3	This trip to Shiraz is worthy of my expenses and time (Kyle et al., 2003; Vittersø et al., 2000; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Zeithaml, 1988)

All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale as follows: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree/nor disagree), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree).

**6. Results**

*6.1. General characteristics of the respondents*

Of the 396 participants, 207 were female (52.3%) and 189 were male (47.7%). 0.8% of the respondents were under 20 years of age; 25.5% were between ages of 20 and 34; participants in the age group of 35–49 accounted for 12.6% of the sample; 26.5% fell into the 50–64 age group, and more than one-third (34.6%) were 65 years of age or older. Most respondents were currently married (60.1%) and the rest were single. The vast majority of participants (91.2%) were first-time tourists. Slightly over two-third of the attendees (68.9%) had stayed 2 days in the city, followed by 29.1% who had stayed in the city for 3 days. The length of stay of remaining 2.0% was 4 days or more. The countries of origin of the respondents were as follows: Germany (32.1%), France (21.0%), Italy (8.6%), Switzerland (5.1%), the Netherlands (4.5%), China (2.0%), Poland (2.8%), Spain (2.5%), Hong Kong (2.3%), Tunisia (2.3%), USA (1.8%), Australia (1.8%), Belgium (1.3%), England (1.3%), Hungary (1.3%), the Czech Republic (1.3%); Other participants were from Slovakia, Sweden, Scotland, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Romania, Norway, Canada, Turkey, Portugal, Azerbaijan, Japan, Jordan, Lithuania, New Zealand, Indonesia, Greece, and Austria.

*6.2. Measurement model*

The measurement model (Fig. 2) is comprised of five latent variables including place attachment (7 items), place identity (3 items), place dependence (7 items), perceived quality & value of attractions (3 items), and satisfaction (3 items). Confirmatory factor analysis and SEM method were conducted to assess the model. The goodness of fit indices for measurement model are as follows:  $\chi^2 = 566.606$ ,  $df = 217$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.611$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.064$ ,  $GFI = 0.885$ ,  $CFI = 0.943$ ,  $NFI = 0.911$ ,  $PCFI = 0.809$ ,  $PNFI = 0.782$ . Comparison of these fit indices with related acceptable ranges recommended by Kline (2005), Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010), and Hu and Bentler (1999) revealed that the hypothesized measurement model fits the data well.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to evaluate the reliability and internal consistency of the constructs. The calculated coefficients were ranged from 0.81 to 0.92, greater than the acceptable threshold value of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978); So, the reliability of scales is



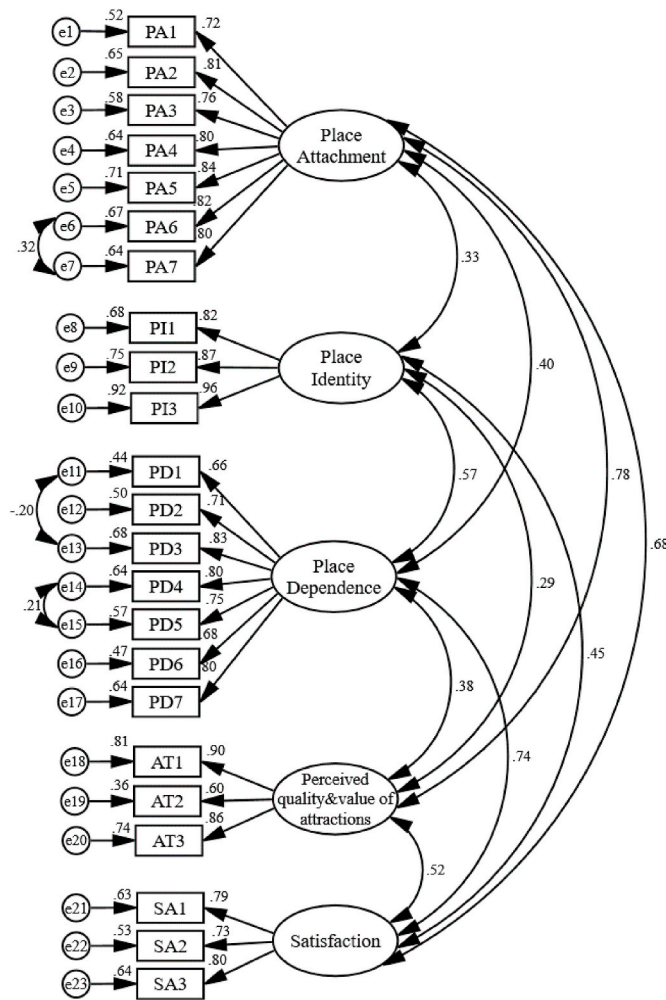


Fig. 2. Measurement model.

confirmed. As previously mentioned, convergent validity was evaluated through comparing the calculated values of factor loading, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) with related recommended values. All factor loadings were greater than the cut-off values of 0.4 and 0.5 suggested by Cabrera-Nguyen (2010) and Hair et al. (2010) respectively; They ranged from 0.60 to 0.96 and were statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Composite reliability ranged from 0.82 to 0.92, which corresponds to the suggested value of greater than 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The range of AVE was 0.56–0.79, satisfying the acceptable cut-off value of greater than 0.5 (Bagozzi, 1994). Accordingly, convergent validity of the constructs of the model is ascertained. Table 2 indicates the CFA results for constructs participated in the measurement model.

Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing inter-construct correlations with the recommended cut-off value of 0.85 (Brown, 2006; Yuksel et al., 2010), and examining the three propositions including:  $MSV < AVE$ ;  $ASV < AVE$ ; squared inter-construct correlations  $< AVE$  (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010). The correlations between constructs ranged from 0.29 to 0.78, all below 0.85. As shown in Table 3 and Table 4, average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than average shared squared variance (ASV), maximum shared squared variance (MSV), and squared inter-construct correlations. So, the measurement model is valid in terms of all mentioned propositions. As indicated, the measurement model meets all the validity and reliability requirements and is accordingly confirmed to be the basis for the structural model.

Table 2  
CFA results for measurement models of constructs.

Constructs	Item No.	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Place attachment			0.92	0.92	0.63
	PA1	0.72			
	PA2	0.81			
	PA3	0.76			
	PA4	0.80			
	PA5	0.84			
	PA6	0.82			
Place identity			0.90	0.92	0.79
	PI1	0.82			
	PI2	0.87			
Place dependence			0.90	0.90	0.56
	PD1	0.66			
	PD2	0.71			
	PD3	0.83			
	PD4	0.80			
	PD5	0.75			
	PD6	0.68			
Perceived quality & value of attractions			0.82	0.83	0.63
	AT1	0.90			
	AT2	0.60			
Satisfaction			0.81	0.82	0.60
	SA1	0.79			
	SA2	0.73			
	SA3	0.80			

### 6.3. Structural model results

After confirming the validity and reliability of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated. As mentioned before, this structural model implies five hypotheses as follows: (1) significant direct effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on sense of place dimensions; (2) significant direct effect of sense of place dimensions on tourist satisfaction; (3) significant direct effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on satisfaction; (4) indirect effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on tourist satisfaction through sense of place dimensions; (5) mediating role of sense of place dimensions in the relationship between perceived quality & value of attractions and satisfaction. The fit indices of the structural model indicated the acceptable results:  $\chi^2 = 666.446$ ,  $df = 220$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.029$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.072$ ,  $GFI = 0.867$ ,  $CFI = 0.927$ ,  $NFI = 0.896$ ,  $PCFI = 0.806$ ,  $PNFI = 0.779$ . These results suggest that the sample data support the hypothesized model. Fig. 3 illustrates the results of hypothesized structural model.

After ensuring the reliability and validity of the measurement and structural models, the research hypotheses were examined as follows.

### 6.4. Hypotheses testing

$H_{1a,b,c}$  suggests direct paths from perceived quality & value of attractions to sense of place dimensions. The standardized direct effects for paths from perceived quality & value of attractions to all dimensions of sense of place, including place attachment, place identity and place dependence were statistically significant and positive ( $\beta = 0.788$ ,  $t = 13.171$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for place attachment with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [0.692, 0.858];  $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $t = 6.266$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for place identity with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [0.219, 0.458];  $\beta = 0.44$ ,  $t = 7.398$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for place dependence with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [0.324, 0.540]). Thus,  $H_{1a,b,c}$  is completely confirmed.

**Table 3**  
AVE and squared correlations.

	Place Attachment	Place identity	Place dependence	Perceived quality & value of attractions	Satisfaction
Place Attachment	<b>0.63</b>	0.11	0.16	0.60	0.47
Place identity		<b>0.79</b>	0.32	0.08	0.20
Place dependence			<b>0.56</b>	0.14	0.54
Perceived quality & value of attractions				<b>0.63</b>	0.27
Satisfaction					<b>0.60</b>

Values in bold indicate AVE, and off-diagonal elements represent squared correlation between constructs.

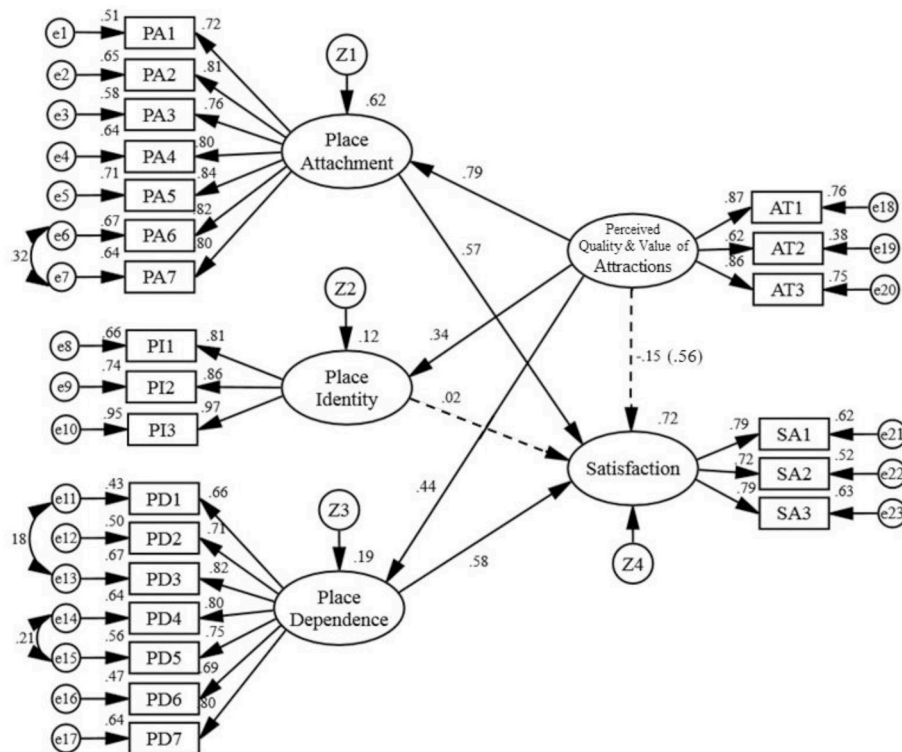
**Table 4**  
ASV and MSV vs. AVE.

	ASV	MSV	AVE
Place Attachment	0.33	0.60	0.63
Place identity	0.18	0.32	0.79
Place dependence	0.29	0.54	0.56
Perceived quality & value of attractions	0.27	0.60	0.63
Satisfaction	0.37	0.54	0.60

A limited number of previous studies explored the association between tourism attractions and sense of place/place attachment. Nonetheless their findings were different. Gross and Brown (2008) in their examination of the relationship between attraction and tourist' place attachment to some South Australian tourism regions found that the effect of attraction on place identity was not significant. They also demonstrated that attraction negatively influences place dependence. In their research on a sample of hikers along the Appalachian Trail, Kyle et al. (2003) explored the association between attraction and place attachment dimensions. Their findings revealed that the effect of attraction on place identity and also on place dependence was not statistically significant. Some researchers considered attractions as a criterion within the broader construct of 'destination image', and investigated its relationship with place attachment. For example, Jiang

et al. (2017) by studying a sample of 270 international visitors to two Australian popular nature-based tourism destinations found destination image to be a positive predictor of all dimensions of place attachment - including place dependence, place identity, place affect and place social bonding - through mediation of existential authenticity. The positive effect of destination image on destination attachment has also been reported by Veasna, Wu, and Huang (2013) in their research on a sample of 398 international tourists who visited the two famous tourism destination, Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Taipei 101 skyscraper in Taiwan. Another empirical support for the positive association between destination image and place attachment was found in Prayag and Ryan's (2012) study on international visitors to the island of Mauritius. It is mentionable that in the last two studies place attachment has been considered as a unidimensional construct. Given the limited number of researches dealing with the association between tourism attraction and sense of place/place attachment, and taking their divergent findings into consideration, it seems that more studies are needed to better elaboration of the subject, especially in international tourism context.

H<sub>2a,b,c</sub> proposes that each dimension of sense of place relates to tourist satisfaction via a direct path. The standardized direct effects for the paths of place attachment → tourist satisfaction and place dependence → tourist satisfaction were significant and positive ( $\beta = 0.573, t = 6.895, p < 0.001$  for place attachment with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [0.396, 0.771];  $\beta = 0.580, t = 9.508, p < 0.001$



**Fig. 3.** Estimated structural model. (Dashed lines: insignificant paths; Number in parenthesis: total effect)

for place dependence with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [0.461, 0.683]), where the path between place identity and tourist satisfaction was not supported ( $\beta = 0.018, t = 0.441, p = 0.717$  with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [-0.091, 0.134]). According to these estimates  $H_{2a}$  and  $H_{2c}$  are confirmed, where  $H_{2b}$  is rejected.

The differentiation of the behavior of dimensions of sense of place/place attachment in influencing the satisfaction has previously demonstrated by some researchers. For example, the findings of the study conducted by Kyle et al. (2003) on visitors to the Appalachian Trail showed an evidence of a positive association of place identity with satisfaction, while the effect of place dependence on satisfaction was not confirmed. A similar findings have been reported by Yuksel et al. (2010), who explored the role of destination attachment in predicting tourists' satisfaction with holiday in Didim, Turkey. Their findings showed that among three dimensions assumed for place attachment, affective attachment and place identity positively influenced satisfaction, while the effect of place dependence was not statistically significant. The research conducted by Ramkissoon et al. (2013a) revealed another different pattern of the effect of place attachment dimensions on satisfaction as follows. All dimensions played a statistically significant role in influencing the satisfaction, where the effects of place dependence, place identity, and place affect were positive, while that of place social bonding was negative. Ramkissoon et al. (2013b) in their study on a sample of 452 visitors to the Dandenong Ranges National Park in Australia, found a positive relationship between place attachment and place satisfaction, implying that the greater attachment to the park, the higher level of satisfaction with the visit. In their study, place attachment has been conceptualized as a second-order four-dimensional construct, and the differentiation of the behavior of dimensions in association with satisfaction has not been elaborated. The positive influence of sense of place/place attachment, as a unit construct, on tourist/visitor satisfaction has been demonstrated also by Prayag and Ryan (2012), Veasna et al. (2013), and Abou-Shouk et al. (2018).

$H_3$  suggests a direct regression path from perceived quality & value of attractions to tourist satisfaction. Parameter estimates showed that the  $p$ -value is greater than 0.05, and the 95% confidence interval for standardized direct effect includes zero; so, the effect was not significant at the 0.05 level and the path was not supported ( $\beta = -0.146, t = -1.742, p = 0.086$  with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [-0.336, 0.022]). Accordingly, the hypothesis  $H_3$  is rejected. This is in line with the findings of Okello and Yerian (2009) who conducted a study on some protected areas on the Northern Tourist Circuit of Tanzania, and found that tourist satisfaction was independent of tourist attractions. However, this is in contrast to the findings of some studies. For example, Kozak and Rimmington (2000) demonstrated that the factor of 'tourism attractions and facilities' has a statistically significant effect on satisfaction levels of tourists visiting Mallorca, Spain. Similarly, Kyle et al. (2003) indicated that attraction positively influences visitor satisfaction. As previously mentioned, some researchers considered attractions as a sub-dimension of some more general concepts such as destination image, rather than treating it as a separate construct in their hypothesized model. For example, Chi and Qu (2008) in their study on the tourism destination of Eureka Springs located in Arkansas, developed a model in which tourism attractions has been considered as part of the constructs of destination image and attribute satisfaction, and examined their association with overall satisfaction. The findings of this research indicated that destination image and attribute satisfaction both positively influenced the overall satisfaction. In a study conducted by Chen and Chen (2013) in the heritage tourism context, perceived quality of attractions/destination was examined as experiential value perceptions, both intrinsic and extrinsic. These constructs showed different behaviors in association with satisfaction; Extrinsic value directly and positively influenced satisfaction, while the effect of intrinsic value was not statistically significant. It is worth considering that the divergent findings reported on association between attractions and satisfaction may be due to the researchers' different purpose of the study and as well,

their different attitudes toward evaluating tourism attractions.

$H_4$  suggests that overall perceived quality & value of attractions indirectly influences tourist satisfaction through sense of place dimensions. The standardized indirect effects for the paths from perceived quality & value of attractions to tourist satisfaction by mediation of dimensions of sense of place including place attachment, place identity and place dependence were estimated with bootstrapping method. As indicated in Table 5, all  $p$ -values are less than 0.001, and the 95% confidence intervals of indirect effects for all dimensions of sense of place don't include zero. The confidence intervals above zero indicate significant positive indirect effects. Thus, it is possible to conclude that perceived quality & value of attractions indirectly influences tourist satisfaction via each of dimensions of sense of place. Overall indirect effect of the perceived quality & value of attractions on tourist satisfaction through sense of place dimensions was also significant and positive (0.711,  $p < 0.001$  with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [0.553, 0.897]). Accordingly,  $H_4$  is confirmed.

Sense of place dimensions were hypothesized to mediate the relationship between perceived quality & value of attractions and tourist satisfaction. In this regard, place attachment, place identity and place dependence were assumed as mediator variables that mediate the relationship between perceived quality & value of attractions and tourist satisfaction ( $H_5$ ). Mediation analysis was conducted based on the causal steps procedure elucidated by Baron and Kenny (1986). According to this approach and regardless of being complete or partial mediation, (a) the total effect of independent variable (perceived quality & value of attractions) on dependent variable (tourist satisfaction) should be significant; (b) the effect of independent variable (perceived quality & value of attractions) on mediator variable (each of dimensions of sense of place) should be significant; (c) the effect of mediator variable (each of dimensions of sense of place) on dependent variable (tourist satisfaction) should be significant. The results of examining these items were as follows: (1) the total effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on tourist satisfaction was significant and positive (standardized total effect = 0.565,  $p < 0.001$  with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [0.460, 0.654]); (2) as previously indicated, the effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on all dimensions of sense of place, including place attachment, place identity and place dependence, was also statistically significant and positive; (3) the effect of place attachment and place dependence on tourist satisfaction was statistically significant, but the effect of place identity was not supported. Consequently, it can be concluded that place attachment and place dependence satisfy the preconditions required for mediation between perceived quality & value of attractions and tourist satisfaction. The amount of mediation (indirect effect) for these mediators was estimated using bootstrap method, that both were statistically significant and positive (Perceived quality & value of attractions → Place attachment →

**Table 5**  
Parameter estimates in the structural model.

Regression paths	Standardized indirect effects	Standard errors	95% confidence intervals		p
			Lower bounds	Upper bounds	
Attractions→ Place attachment → Satisfaction	0.558	0.097	0.379	0.756	<0.001
Attractions→ Place identity → Satisfaction	0.092	0.028	0.044	0.151	<0.001
Attractions→ Place dependence → Satisfaction	0.261	0.039	0.184	0.338	<0.001
Attractions → Satisfaction	0.711	0.087	0.553	0.897	<0.001

Satisfaction = 0.558,  $p < 0.001$  with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [0.379, 0.756]; Perceived quality & value of attractions → Place dependence → Satisfaction = 0.261,  $p < 0.001$  with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals of [0.184, 0.338]).

In order to determine if these mediation roles are complete or partial, for each mediator the two models of complete mediation and partial mediation were defined and compared. In this way, complete mediation model was assumed to be nested in partial mediation model (so that the direct effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on satisfaction was assumed as a zero parameter in complete mediation model). Then these two models were compared with the  $\chi^2$  difference test. For mediator variable of place attachment, the two nested models did not differ significantly in their  $\chi^2$  values ( $p = 0.604$ ;  $\chi^2 = 189.7$  for complete mediation model;  $\chi^2 = 189.4$  for partial mediation model). So, given that the complete mediation model is more parsimonious, it is preferred to the partial mediation model. For mediator variable of place dependence, the two nested models differed significantly in their  $\chi^2$  values ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $\chi^2 = 210.3$  for complete mediation model;  $\chi^2 = 182.8$  for partial mediation model). So, the partial mediation model with the smaller  $\chi^2$  value is accepted. It should be noted that although, as indicated before, the indirect effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on tourist satisfaction through all dimensions of sense of place was significant and positive, causal steps procedure provides evidence only for statistically significant mediation of place attachment and place dependence.

Overall, the final structural model results showed that perceived quality & value of attractions directly and significantly influences place attachment, place identity and place dependence. It was found that place attachment and place dependence directly and significantly influence tourist satisfaction, while the effect of place identity on satisfaction was not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. The non-significant direct effect of place identity on satisfaction can largely be explained as follows. [Giuliani and Feldman \(1993\)](#), [Williams and Vaske \(2003\)](#), [Halpenny \(2010\)](#), [Rollero and De Piccoli \(2010\)](#), [Yuksel et al. \(2010\)](#), [Lewicka \(2011\)](#), [Arifwidodo and Chandrasiri \(2013\)](#), [López-Mosquera and Sánchez \(2013\)](#), [Ramkissoon and Mavondo \(2015\)](#) and [Shaykh-Baygloo \(2020\)](#) argued that formation and development of place identity requires time. Due to the restricted duration of presence of tourists in tourist destinations, all tourists in general and foreign tourists in particular usually do not have enough time to link and tie their identity to the places and consequently, to express their identity by tourist destinations; so, tourists may not have a deep sense of place identity to the destination city but, at the same time, may highly satisfied with their trip. Although some researchers, such as [Kyle et al. \(2003\)](#) and [Yuksel et al. \(2010\)](#), found a weak association between place identity and tourist satisfaction, the non-significant influence of place identity on satisfaction in the present sample can be explained through some specific conditions. All the participants were foreign tourists, the majority of whom (91.2%) were first-time tourists. Because of the socio-cultural and contextual differences between respondents' origin and visited destination on the one hand, and the limited length of trip and stay in the destination city on the other hand, tourists' overall satisfaction with their trip can be independent from their sense of place identity. In other words, tourists' satisfaction is mainly affected by some factors other than place identity. The results also showed that the direct effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on satisfaction was not statistically significant; However, the indirect effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on satisfaction through sense of place dimensions was significant and positive, suggesting that tourists' satisfaction depends partly on their evaluation of attractions. As indicated also by [Oriade and Schofield \(2019\)](#) and [Kyle et al. \(2003\)](#), tourists' evaluation of attractions influences their satisfaction, whether directly or indirectly. Place attachment and place dependence were identified as mediators of the relationship between perceived quality & value of attractions and tourist satisfaction.

## 7. Discussion and conclusion

Foreign tourists' experiences in Shiraz city in terms of their perception of attractions, sense of place dimensions - including place attachment, place identity, and place dependence - and satisfaction was investigated in this study. The structural model of association among mentioned constructs was hypothesized and tested using structural equation modelling. In this way, the direct effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on satisfaction and sense of place dimensions, direct effect of sense of place dimensions on satisfaction, and mediating role of sense of place in relationship between perceived quality & value of attractions and satisfaction were examined. Based on the results, the majority of hypotheses were supported.

The findings revealed that tourists' overall judgments about visited attractions in terms of uniqueness, quality and/or beauty, and worth visiting positively influenced the tourists' sense of place toward the city. Among sense of place dimensions, place attachment was more strongly affected than others. This is contrary to the findings of [Gross and Brown \(2008\)](#); In the study on a sample of 476 tourists attended in some tourism regions of South Australia, they represented place attachment through two distinct constructs including place dependence and place identity, and explored their relationships with attraction. Their findings provided a statistically significant support for the regression path of attraction → place dependence, in such a way that attraction was identified as a negative predictor of place dependence, and the effect of attraction on place identity was, unexpectedly, not confirmed. The findings reported by [Kyle et al. \(2003\)](#) expose another divergent result with that of present research. In their research on a sample of hikers along the Appalachian Trail, the effect of attraction on place identity and place dependence was not statistically significant. These contradictory results may be stem from the differences between case studies in terms of host destinations' geographical area, tourists' places of origin, the types of tourism attractions offered in each destination, etc. So, more studies are needed to be carried out in various tourism destinations to better explanation of the relationship between attractions and sense of place/place attachment. However, the findings imply that attractions can create an emotional link between tourists and the larger geographical area which encompasses the attractions. This attribute of attractions can be termed 'spatial function of attractions' which is important in some ways, e.g. it may result in tourists' loyalty and their more compassionate behavior toward the host city, the rise in popularity and reputation of the destination city, encouraging tourists to visit other destination attractions - even secondary and tertiary nuclei -, all of which can be effective in flourishing the tourism industry in the host destination.

The dimensions of sense of place showed specific behaviors in association with tourist satisfaction, that is, place attachment and place dependence positively influenced satisfaction, while the effect of place identity was not statistically significant. These results are important in three respects: First, in terms of how constructs of sense of place dimensions are presented in the structural model. The findings indicated that all dimensions of sense of place did not behave similarly in affecting the dependent variable, which provides an evidence for the point made by [Jorgensen and Stedman \(2001\)](#) on the rationale of considering each dimension of sense of place as a separate construct in the model. Second, the different behavior of place identity in predicting satisfaction compared to the two other dimensions of sense of place is arguable. [Fu et al. \(2019\)](#) also somehow reported non-convergent results for different constructs. They investigated the role of place attachment dimensions in predicting exhibition satisfaction in Shenzhen, China, and found that exhibition dependence and exhibition identity positively influenced satisfaction, while affective attachment showed a negative direct effect on satisfaction. Another evidence, in this respect, has been demonstrated by [Yuksel et al. \(2010\)](#), that is, the positive effect of affective attachment and place identity on satisfaction, and a statistically non-significant effect of place dependence on satisfaction. The third aspect of significance of the results refers to the respondents, i.e. foreign tourists. It was

revealed that foreign tourists' satisfaction is independent from feeling of place identity; So, it is inferred that place attachment and place dependence can act much stronger than place identity in meeting the foreign tourists' satisfaction.

The non-significant effect of place identity on tourist satisfaction is in contrast with the findings of some scholars, who found a positive relationship between place identity and place satisfaction. For instance, [Yuksel et al. \(2010\)](#) through studying a sample of visitors to Didim, demonstrated that place identity, namely cognitive link between the self and the destination, positively influences the satisfaction. Consistent with them, [Kyle et al. \(2003\)](#) evidenced a positive association between place identity and satisfaction. The findings of the present study in terms of the positive effect of place attachment and place dependence on tourist satisfaction is in line with the findings released by some researchers. For example, as part of their research on a sample of 452 visitors at the Dandenong Ranges National Park in Australia and using structural equation modelling, [Ramkissoon et al. \(2013b\)](#) demonstrated that place attachment has a significant positive effect on place satisfaction. It is worth mentioning that in this study, place attachment has been defined and validated as a second-order factor comprised of four dimensions including place dependence, place identity, place affect, and place social bonding. [Prayag and Ryan \(2012\)](#), in their study on a sample of 705 international visitors in Mauritius island, found a statistical support for the hypothesis of positive effect of place attachment on overall satisfaction. The findings of [Abou-Shouk et al. \(2018\)](#) in the study on the White Desert and Fayoum in Egypt provided another evidence for positive effect of sense of place on tourist satisfaction.

Investigation of the direct and indirect effects of perceived quality & value of attractions on satisfaction yielded surprising outcome. The results did not support the direct effect, while the indirect effect was confirmed. Within the framework of the proposed model, it implies that the positive association between tourists' evaluation on attractions and overall satisfaction is conducted through sense of place dimensions. Accordingly, sense of place toward destination city plays a critical role in the mechanism that perceived quality & value of attractions affects tourists' satisfaction. However, the strong total effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on tourist satisfaction suggests that the greater acknowledging the value and quality of visited attractions, the higher the overall satisfaction with the trip. In this line, [Oriade and Schofield \(2019\)](#) in the study on visitor attractions of Midlands Region of the UK, found statistically significantly positive relationships between perceived value and perceived quality of attractions with visitor satisfaction. There is a subtle difference between their approach and the present study's one in terms of the evaluation of attractions. In fact, their respondents were questioned about the two specific visitor attractions, while in the present study the participants' overall evaluation of visited attractions - without considering whether or not all respondents visited the same attractions - has been explored.

The mediating role of the two dimensions of sense of place, i.e. place attachment and place dependence, in perceived quality & value of attractions - satisfaction relationship was authenticated. This finding implies that tourists' sense of place attachment and place dependence toward destination city acts as an important mechanism that relates the evaluation on attractions to the overall satisfaction with the trip. Consequently, the influence of judgment of desirability of attractions on satisfaction would be enhanced by sense of place, especially place attachment dimension. The critical importance of the role that sense of place plays in the relationship between perceived quality & value of attractions and satisfaction becomes more salient when it is remembered that the direct effect of perceived quality & value of attractions on satisfaction was not statistically significant. The mediating role of sense of place/place attachment has been examined by few researchers. For example, [López-Mosquera and Sánchez \(2013\)](#) in the study on visitors of the two suburban natural parks in Spain demonstrated that place dependence mediates the relationship between perceived benefits and loyalty. They did not find enough statistical support for mediation of

place identity in this relationship. The findings highlight the significance of in-depth investigation of tourists' sense of place both as a distinct construct and as a construct in relation to other various concepts raised in tourism context. Future researches can help to more clarifying the mechanism of function of sense of place in association with other tourism-related constructs. In this respect, it is highly recommended that attitudes of both native and foreign tourists toward various tourism destinations in the world be addressed and compared.

This study contributes to the existing literature in the field of international tourism, both theoretically and empirically, through conducting an investigation on foreign tourists' experience in a world-famous destination city from developing world. Through developing and validating a structural model, the study highlighted the significant role of sense of place in the mechanism of association between perceived quality & value of visited attractions and tourists' overall satisfaction. In actual fact, the present study is one of a handful of studies that explores that tourists - from different geographical, historical, social and cultural backgrounds - develop their identity, dependence and attachment toward the destination area via visiting tourism attractions, and subsequently demonstrates these bonds contribute to increasing their overall satisfaction. Another significant contribution of this study is its aggregated approach toward examining attractions and tourist satisfaction, with the reasoning that, as discussed earlier, often the synergistic effect of a combination of attractions results in motivating travel demand; accordingly, it is suggested that the quality & value perceived from all attractions as a whole, and not just from a specific attraction, contributes to the tourist satisfaction with the destination. This research also contributes to further understanding of the potential ability of tourism attractions to create a bond between tourists and destination city/region. It was demonstrated that perceived quality & value of a set of tourism attractions in a definite destination creates a sense of place toward the broader area (e.g. city, region, and country), wherein located the visited attractions. This feature can be interpreted as 'spatial function of attractions', which can bring positive outcomes to the host regions and, as well, to the tourists; e.g. increasing the level of tourist satisfaction, tourist loyalty in terms of positive word-of-mouth, intention to revisit, intention to visit other not-experienced attractions located in the destination area, etc, all are of critical importance for countries and communities who are seriously looking to develop tourism industry and enjoy its benefits.

## 8. Implications

Tourism is born of attractions, and its ultimate goal is the satisfaction of tourists. In general, it is assumed that the tourists' judgment and evaluation of the quality of attractions play a decisive role in their level of satisfaction, but the mechanism of this effect has not yet been well explained. In fact, there are some important factors that can strongly contribute to the relationship between attractions and satisfaction. Recognition of these factors and exploration of their influence can be very important for tourism destinations. Each tourism destination exposes its own specific attractions, and the relevant tourism management system attempts and hopes to satisfy tourists with these attractions. The prevailing assumption is that high-quality attractions can by themselves bring about the tourists' satisfaction. Tourism managers, policy makers and planners should exercise great caution in relying on this assumption. Because, on the one hand, apart from attractions, there are several other factors that influence the level of tourists' satisfaction with their trip. On the other hand, the effect of attractions on satisfaction may be enhanced through mediation of some factors. Paying attention to these two points can help tourism practitioners to gain a more in-depth insight into the factors, mechanisms and processes that influence tourists' satisfaction.

The present study revealed that tourists' sense of place toward the host city can enhance the impact of attractions on satisfaction. Although, this is not surprising and uncommon subject in general, but here are some subtle and contemplative points, as follows. After visiting and

experiencing an attraction, tourists usually evaluate the attractions in terms of quality, uniqueness, desirability, and etc. These judgements make tourists develop an emotional sense to the attractions, and consequently, to the wider geographical area wherein are located the attractions. This sense of place, resulted from spatial function of attractions, can result in valuable benefits for the whole area of the region, one of which was explored in this study, that is increasing the tourists' overall satisfaction level with their trip. The potential advantages of the extended and generalized sense of place toward destination city can include several various items, which are recommended to be addressed in future tourism researches. For example, the sense of place that is created after visiting an attraction for the first time, is expected to encourage tourists to visit and experience the other not-visited attractions in the region in the future. In fact, here is raised the 'generalized loyalty' to a region and its relevant subsequent positive outcomes, which requires to be clarified through in-depth investigations.

The positive association between tourists' evaluation on attractions and their sense of place toward destination city, and also the positive relationship between sense of place and satisfaction implies important points that should be considered by tourism authorities and practitioners; when tourism attractions are so powerful that they can generalize their desirability to the whole destination area and bring significant economic and cultural benefits to the host region, it is of great importance that all tourism attractions be well recognized, well introduced and well offered. In this way, the rich, unique and high-quality tourism attractions should be more focused. Because they play a decisive role in attracting tourists, especially foreign tourists. On the other hand, as demonstrated, tourists' satisfaction is highly tied to the tourists' emotional and functional attachment toward destination area after visiting attractions. Accordingly, tourism authorities, policy makers and practitioners need to adopt a chain of efficient strategies for conservation, management and presentation of tourism attractions, and then, for attracting tourists and ultimately, for strengthening tourists' sense of place and increasing their satisfaction.

#### Declaration of competing interest

None.

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