

## Conference Paper

# The Antecedents and Consequences of Ecotourist Place Attachment

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## Abstract

This study aims to test some antecedents and consequences of place attachment in a structural model. Ecotourism destination image and perceived value are specified as the antecedents of place attachment, while satisfaction and intention loyalty act as its consequences. This model was tested on 218 visitors to Tanjung Puting National Park (TPNP) in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. TPNP is the largest rehabilitation centre for orangutans and is promoted as one of the ecotourism destinations in Indonesia. SmartPLS 3.0 Professional was employed to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement items for each construct and structural model. The findings confirmed seven out of ten hypotheses. Theoretically, this study's findings contributed to expanding the tourist loyalty model; in terms of managerial implications, this study can be utilized in the marketing of ecotourism destinations.

**Keywords:** ecotourism destination image, perceived value, place attachment, satisfaction, intention loyalty

**JEL Classification:** M31, L83, C51, Q26, Q57

## 1. Introduction

The term 'ecotourism' emerged in the late 1980s as a direct result of the world's acknowledgment and reaction to sustainable practices and global ecological practices [13]. Ecotourism refers to responsible travel to some natural conservation areas and which improves the welfare of local people [54]. It is currently considered to be a growing niche market within a larger travel industry and is potentially being turned into an important sustainable development tool ([58], p. 7). Tourists visiting ecotourism destinations are known as ecotourists. They are particularly interested in wilderness settings and pristine areas ([58], p. 7), are highly committed to the environment, support enhanced sustainability, are eager for physical activity and challenging experiences, travel in small groups, take longer trips, demand fewer services, make their

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own travel arrangements, and more actively seek information than general tourists [31]. Ecotourists' decisions to visit an ecotourism destination (i.e., a National Park) is allegedly related to place attachment [57].

Place attachment refers to an individual's affective bond toward a certain environment [15, 26]; or an emotional and symbolic relationship shaped by an individual with a certain place [57]. Place attachment is formed because an individual forms a place identity and place dependence with a certain place (Williams et al. 1992; [35, 57]). Place identity itself refers to an emotional component of attachment which signifies a symbolic meaning of a place as an emotional repository and offers a relationship giving life meaning and purpose [57]; it is further interpreted as an element of self-identity to enhance one's self-dignity and sense of belonging toward his or her community [28, 32, 57]. Meanwhile, the second dimension (place dependence) signifies a functional meaning of a certain place. In other words, place dependence refers to several conditions and functions considered important in fulfilling one's needs and purposes [57].

Some previous studies have revealed that place attachment is the antecedent of satisfaction [43, 46, 60] and intention loyalty [1, 6, 23, 35]. In spite of the fact that those previous studies have stated that place attachment directly and significantly influences intention loyalty, some inconsistent findings have been detected when tourists' origins have been analyzed, proving that place attachment only significantly influences intention loyalty among international tourists, yet is insignificant for domestic tourists [37]. Furthermore, the descriptive analyses in previous studies have also revealed some inconsistencies, as shown by averagely high place attachment value for certain national parks; however, the results were not in line with the average frequencies of tourist visits to those parks [38]. As a conclusion, place attachment's role as the antecedent of tourist loyalty needs to be further empirically tested.

Furthermore, other previous studies have also illustrated that place attachment acts as a consequence of several cognitive components, such as destination image [17, 43]. Hence, place attachment can possibly be influenced by every concept within the framework of cognitive components, including perceived value. Perceived value itself is one of the key concepts attracting various marketing researchers [7]. It is tightly related to the perception on received benefits and money spent by costumers [61]. Some tourism studies have revealed that perceived value is the consequence of destination image [51] and the antecedent of satisfaction [7, 8, 51]. However, the further role of perceived value as the antecedent of place attachment has not been empirically

tested by previous empirical models, despite theoretically being related to the cognitive components acting as the consequences of affective components ([39], p. 394; [12]). Therefore, this study aims to test the antecedents and consequences of place attachment in a structural model within these specifications: ecotourism destination image and perceived value as the antecedents of place attachment and satisfaction and intention loyalty as the consequences of place attachment.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Ecotourism destination image

Image is a key construct in destination positioning [42]. Destination image itself is a mental representation of knowledge, feeling, and the overall perception of an individual toward a certain destination [16] and has an important influence on tourist's consumption behavior [4]. As a relatively newly developed concept in tourist behavior study, researchers have not reached a consensus on the best measurement method. Some researchers employed a multiattribute approach ([7, 47]; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; [33]) and others used a single-item method [3]. Items to measure destination image also varied based on specific characteristics of each tourism destination used as the research setting. Previous findings of empirical studies revealed that destination image is the antecedent of perceived value [51], place attachment [43], satisfaction [2, 34, 43], and intention loyalty [2, 7, 34, 45]. Hence, four hypotheses are formulated as follows:

- H1: There is a significant and direct relationship between ecotourism destination image and perceived value.
- H2: There is a significant and direct relationship between ecotourism destination image and place attachment.
- H3: There is a significant and direct relationship between ecotourism destination image and satisfaction.
- H4: There is a significant and direct relationship between ecotourism destination image and intention loyalty.

## 3. Perceived value

The concept of 'perceived value' emerged as a defining business issue in the 1990s, and has continued to receive extensive research interest in the present century

[20]. Perceived value is defined as the overall assessment of consumers regarding a product's utility based on their own perceptions of what is received and what is given [61]. In other words, perceived value is a perceived benefit of the cost spent by consumers on a product or service and measured post-consumption. 'Cost' and 'benefit' are included in cognitive components ([39], p. 394). In the context of tourism, perceived value can be measured through 6 (six) indicators [21]. Some findings from previous empirical studies have revealed that perceived value recorded a positive and significant effect on satisfaction [7, 8, 51]. Moreover, perceived value is also reported to directly influence intention loyalty [7, 8, 37]. Referring to Four-stage Loyalty postulates ([39], pp. 394-395), which stated that cognitive components are the antecedents of affective components (which simultaneously act as conative components' antecedents), then perceived value is allegedly capable of influencing place attachment. Therefore, the fifth to seventh hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H5: There is a significant and direct relationship between perceived value and place attachment.

H6: There is a significant and direct relationship between perceived value and tourist satisfaction.

H7: There is a significant and direct relationship between perceived value and intention loyalty.

### 3.1. Satisfaction

Satisfaction is one of the core marketing concepts ([30], p. 31), categorized as an affective loyalty component ([39], p. 394), and widely studied in marketing over the last few decades (Tsotsou, 2005). Satisfaction is defined as 'a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment which resulted from comparing a product or service's perceived performance (or outcome) to expectation' ([30], p. 153). Stedman (2002) then described place satisfaction as a multidimensional summary of a setting's perceived quality. It is viewed as an utilitarian value of a certain place to meet certain basic needs, ranging from sociability to services to physical characteristics [50]. According to Gallarza et al. (2013), tourists' satisfaction with their visits to particular tourism destinations can be measured by three indicators (as illustrated in Table 2). The findings of previous empirical studies have revealed that place attachment directly influences

satisfaction [43, 46, 60]. Referring to those previous studies, the 8<sup>th</sup> hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H8: There is a significant and direct relationship between place attachment and satisfaction.

### 3.2. Intention loyalty

Loyalty is a strategic, fundamental component for companies [3]. Hence, a successful marketing strategy is not only to focus on the effort to win over new consumers, but also to build loyalty among existing consumers by paying a hefty price for it [40]. Consumer loyalty refers to consumers' commitment to consistently repurchase or subscribe to a product or service they like in the future, although situational influence and marketing effort potentially cause switching behavior ([39], p. 392). Lovelock and Wirtz (2011, p. 338) posited that consumer loyalty is consumers' willingness to continuously subscribe to a certain company in the long term and exclusively; furthermore, consumers are also willing to recommend products to others. In tourism, tourist loyalty can be measured by intention loyalty [18, 19] and behavioral intention or future behavior [7, 33]. Several previous studies revealed that tourist loyalty is directly influenced by place attachment [1, 6, 23, 35] and satisfaction [2, 7, 8, 11, 19, 22, 34, 37, 44, 51, 52]. Therefore, the ninth and tenth hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H9: There is a significant and direct relationship between place attachment and intention loyalty.

H10: There is a significant and direct relationship between satisfaction and intention loyalty.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. Sample and data collection

This research used a sample of visitors to Tanjung Puting National Park (TPNP), Indonesia, gathered through an accidental sampling technique from May to June 2017. The number of returned questionnaires was 259 questionnaires or 86% out of 300 questionnaires distributed. From 259 questionnaires, only 218 or 84% of them were fully filled in and employable for further analysis. The majority of respondents were male

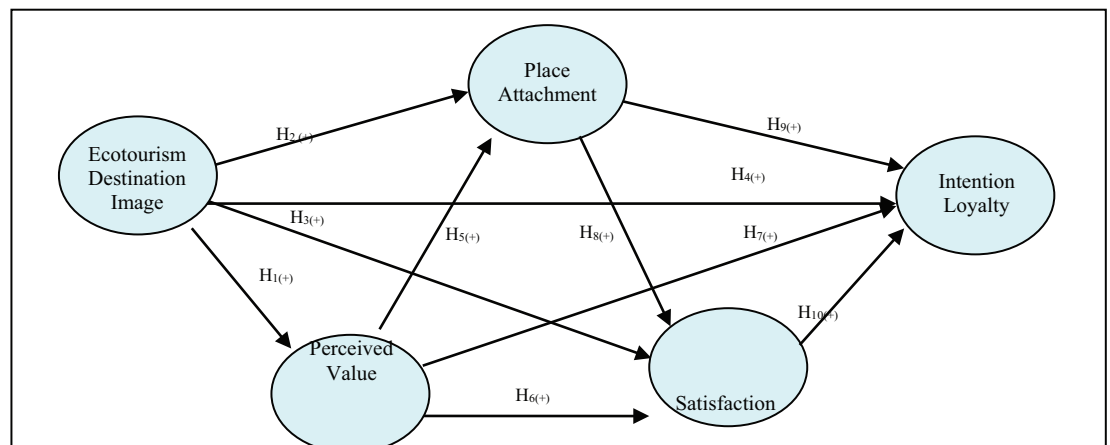


Figure 1: Research framework and hypotheses.

(56%), 25–25 years old (39.4%), highly educated (63.8%), professional (32.1%), and international tourists (63.8%).

## 4.2. Variables and measurement

Place attachment was measured by two dimensions through an instrument developed by William and Vaske (2003). Those dimensions were place identity with its six indicators and place dependence with six indicators. Ecotourism destination image was measured through two dimensions, nature and culture, whose indicators were adopted from Chen & Tsai (2007), Lee (2009), and Richard (2006). Perceived value was measured based on instruments developed by Gallarza et al. (2013). Moreover, tourist satisfaction was measured by three indicators from Ramkissoon et al. (2013). Lastly, intention loyalty was measured by three indicators from Lee (2009) and Byon and Zhang (2010). An alternative answer for each indicator was measured using a Likert scale from 1 (extremely disagree) to 5 (extremely agree).

## 4.3. Data analysis

The test for the measurement model and the hypotheses proposed in this research were analyzed using PLS-SEM and processed with SmartPLS 3.0 Professional [48]. PLS is an SEM approach based on the recurrent combination of main components and regression to explain the variance of model constructs [9]. PLS allowed researchers to avoid bias and inconsistent estimate parameters. Hence, it served as an effective analytical tool to test the interaction between variables while minimizing Type II mistakes and allowing an analysis of small samples [10, 14]. The PLS-path model also permitted

researchers to conceptualize higher-order factors using a recurrent manifest variable [10, 29, 53]. A structural model developed with PLS-SEM did not need to be evaluated with GoF, because it would derive sufficient results from the measurement model and structural model ([24], p. 186).

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. Measurement model

Constructs utilized in a developed research model must be the result of valid and reliable instruments or measurement tools. Instrument validity can be measured by convergent validity. Validity test results proved that, beside the sixth indicator of place dependence (PD6), all the research variables were declared to fulfil the convergent validity test, because all of them recorded loading factors of more than 0.50 and AVE of more than 0.50 for both the first and second order, and composite reliability of more than 0.70. Moreover, it also fulfilled the discriminant validity value, because the square-root of the AVE value for each variable was higher than the correlation rate between each variable based on the FornellLarcker criterion.

TABLE 1: Measure results and second order reflective factors.

Latent Variables, Items and Symbols	Mean (SD) items	Mean LV	Outer Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
Place Identity (PI)		3.730		0.917	0.650
1. I feel this National Park is a part of me (PI1)	3.60 (0.89)		0.748		
2. This National Park is very special to me (PI2)	3.93 (0.81)		0.819		
3. I identity strongly with this National Park (PI3)	3.66 (0.79)		0.855		
4. I am very attached to this National Park (PI4)	3.76 (0.80)		0.802		
5. Visiting this National Park says a lot about who I am (PI5)	3.53 (0.88)		0.808		
6. This National Park means a lot to me (PI6)	3.87 (0.84)		0.801		
Place Dependence (PD)		3.380		0.903	0.654
1. This National Park is the best place for what I like to do (PD1)	3.51 (0.93)		0.680		
2. No other place can compare to this National Park (PD6)	3.33 (0.98)		0.773		
3. I get more satisfaction out of visiting this National Park than any other (PD3)	3.29 (0.88)		0.886		

Latent Variables, Items and Symbols	Mean (SD) items	Mean LV	Outer Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
4. Doing what I do at this National Park is more important to me than doing it in any other place (PD4)	3.33 (0.93)		0.873		
5. I wouldn't substitute any other area for doing the types of things I do at this National Park (PD5)	3.42 (0.92)		0.813		
6. The things I do at this National Park would enjoy doing just as much at similar site (PD6)	3.31 (0.85)		0.245 <sup>a</sup>		
Nature (NAT)		4.340		0.843	0.519
1. A place with great variety of fauna and flora (NAT1)	4.30 (0.72)		0.660		
2. A place with spectacular landscape (NAT2)	4.25 (0.70)		0.756		
3. A place with opportunity for environmental learning (NAT3)	4.32 (0.75)		0.793		
4. A place with opportunity to view wildlife (NAT4)	4.43 (0.76)		0.659		
5. A place with benefit to conservation (NAT5)	4.42 (0.67)		0.726		
Culture (CUL)		3.980		0.869	0.577
1. A place with unusual ways of life and customs (CUL1)	3.88 (0.82)		0.558		
2. A place with opportunity to experience local culture (CUL2)	3.80 (0.94)		0.871		
3. A place with opportunity to learn about local culture (CUL3)	3.80 (0.95)		0.867		
4. A place with friendliness of locals (CUL4)	4.30 (0.87)		0.768		
5. A place with benefit to local community (CUL5)	4.14 (0.90)		0.687		
Perceived Value (PV)		4.190		0.889	0.573
1. Overall, I have perceived the tourism service at destination as efficient (PV1)	4.08 (0.74)		0.706		
2. In general, the service quality offered by employees at tourism destination was very high (PV2)	4.03 (0.84)		0.795		
3. With this experience the social value and relationship with others that I obtained was very good (PV3)	4.04 (0.75)		0.686		
4. In general, I had fun and entertainment with this experience (PV4)	4.32 (0.67)		0.831		
Overall, I found beauty and aesthetics in the destination I visited (PV5)	4.38 (0.66)		0.741		



Latent Variables, Items and Symbols	Mean (SD) items	Mean LV	Outer Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
5. Comparing what I gave up, the experience has satisfied my needs and wants (PV6)	4.28 (0.77)		0.772		
Satisfaction (SAT)		4.400		0.957	0.881
1. I believe I did the right thing when I chose to visit this National Park (SAT1)	4.33 (0.68)		0.907		
2. Overall, I am satisfied with my decision to visit this National Park (SAT2)	4.42 (0.67)		0.954		
3. I am happy about my decision to visit this National Park (SAT3)	4.44 (0.65)		0.954		
Intention Loyalty (IL)		4.380		0.850	0.658
1. I will recommend this National Park to others (REC)	4.55 (0.61)		0.900		
2. I will say positive things about this National Park (WOM)	4.55 (0.63)		0.877		
3. I am willing to revisit this National Park (REV)	4.03 (0.85)		0.630		
Path Estimate (Reflective Factors)		Std. estimate		t-value	p-value
Place Identity ← Place Attachment		0.913		79.980	0.000
Place Dependence ← Place Attachment		0.871		46.226	0.000
Nature ← Ecotourism Destination Image		0.838		28.933	0.000
Culture ← Ecotourism Destination Image		0.923		82.271	0.000

Variables	AVE	Sqrt AVE	Correlation (FornellLacker Criterion)				
			Ecotourism Destination Image	Perceived Value	Place Attachment	Satisfaction	Intention Loyalty
Ecotourism Destination Image	0.515	0.718	1.000				
Perceived Value	0.573	0.757	0.571	1.000			
Place Attachment	0.520	0.721	0.413	0.409	1.000		
Satisfaction	0.881	0.939	0.469	0.704	0.420	1.000	
Intention Loyalty	0.658	0.811	0.413	0.548	0.566	0.679	1.000

Note: AVE: average variance extracted; SD: standard deviation; LV:Latent Variable; “not valid.

### 5.2. Structural model

The evaluation results of the collinearity diagnostic for this research’s structural model proved that VIF values between constructs were higher than 0.20 and lower than 5.00; thus, it was not necessary to eliminate a construct or combine some predictors into one construct ([24], p. 170). Therefore, the structural model assessment to find out the significance of the path coefficient, prediction power ( $R^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) could be processed.

Figure 2 illustrates that seven out of ten developed paths recorded significant coefficients, while the rests were not supported by the data. The seventh significant and direct path coefficients were (1) ecotourism destination image to perceived value ( $\beta = 0.571$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); (2) ecotourism destination image to place attachment ( $\beta = 0.267$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); (3) perceived value to place attachment ( $\beta = 0.257$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); (4) perceived value to satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.610$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); (5) place attachment to satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.145$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ); (6) place attachment to intention loyalty ( $\beta = 0.330$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); and lastly (7) satisfaction to intention loyalty ( $\beta = 0.493$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). While the insignificant and direct path coefficients still significant for indirect effect were (1) ecotourism destination image to satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.061$ ;  $p = 0.348$ ); (2) ecotourism destination image to intention loyalty ( $\beta = 0.011$ ;  $p = 0.834$ ); and (3) perceived value to intention loyalty ( $\beta = 0.059$ ;  $p = 0.417$ ). Furthermore,  $R^2$  for each endogenous variable was significantly high, as it was recorded at more than 0.20 ([24], p. 175) and an evaluation for  $Q^2$  also proved that exogenous constructs had predictive relevance for endogenous constructs, because its value was more than 0.

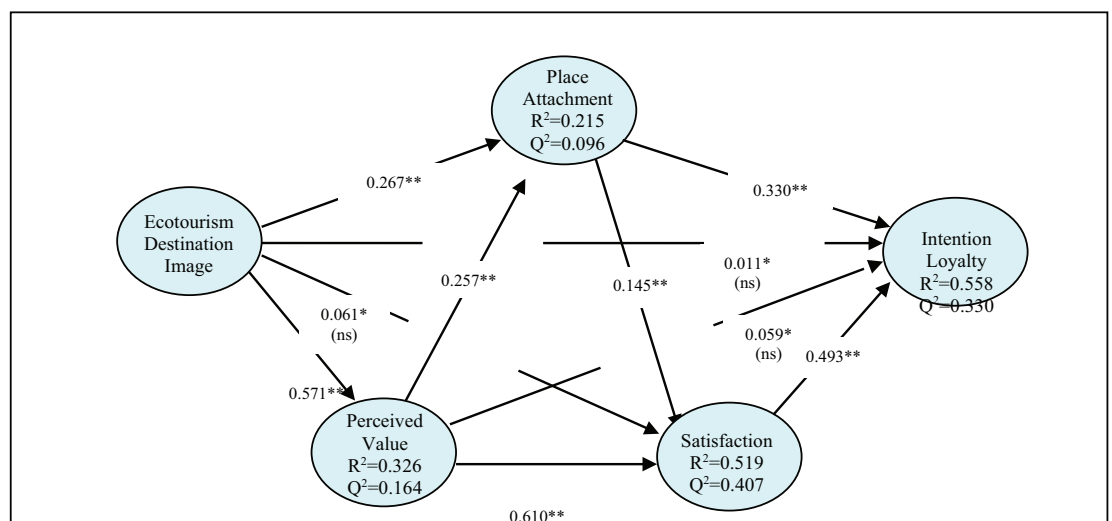


Figure 2: Structural model.  $^{**}p < 0.05$ ;  $^*p > 0.05$  (ns = not significance).

## 6. Discussion

This research was conducted to understand place attachment, as well as its antecedents and consequences in a loyalty model for ecotourists. Hence, the relationships between variables in the structural model were developed based on theories from previous research and tested on TPNP visitors. TPNP itself is one of 50 (fifty) National Parks in Indonesia offered as an ecotourism destination, deemed as the first and the largest orangutan rehabilitation center in the world, and decreed by UNESCO as a Biosphere Conservation area in 1977. Ecotourism activities offered by TPNP include the 'safari river', a trip to enjoy the scenery along the Sekonyer river, appreciate the vegetation and wildlife diversity, directly observe orangutans in their natural habitat (including Tanjung Harapan, Pondok Tanggui, and Camp Leakey as orangutans' feeding locations), and visit local villages to directly participate in their activities, experience their culture, and enjoy local food. The ecotourism activity in TPNP involves local people who accompany the tourists to paddle along the Sekonyer river with a 'Klotok', a wooden ship that serves as the main transportation, accommodation, and restaurant for tourists during their stay in TPNP.

In total, three out of five variables recorded fairly high values, namely place attachment, ecotourism destination image, and perceived value; while satisfaction and intention loyalty recorded the highest values. Ecotourism destination image and perceived value served as the antecedents of place attachment and were positively and significantly influenced by place attachment. From those two antecedents, the dominant one was perceived value. Tourist satisfaction and intention loyalty as the consequences of place attachment were also supported by the data. Generally, the findings illustrated that place attachment was indeed a core concept in marketing an ecotourism destination, because it mediated the relationship between ecotourism destination image and perceived value, as well as satisfaction and intention loyalty.

Furthermore, seven out of the ten hypotheses in this research were supported. The first hypothesis, 'there is a significant and direct relationship between ecotourism destination image and perceived value', was supported. This finding shows that visitors' perceived value of TPNP is in line with TPNP's appropriateness as an ecotourism destination. This is consistent with the findings of Sun et al. (2013). The second hypothesis, 'ecotourism destination image has a direct and significant influence on place attachment', was supported. This finding proves that visitors' place attachment toward TPNP will increase as TPNP's aptness as an ecotourism destination improves. This finding confirms previous findings [17, 43]. The third hypothesis, 'there is a significant

and direct relationship between ecotourism destination image and satisfaction', was not supported. This study reveals that ecotourism destination image had no direct influence on tourist satisfaction, but it was mediated by perceived value and place attachment. This result contradicts the previous findings [2, 7, 34]. The fourth hypothesis, 'there is a significant and direct relationship between ecotourism destination image and intention', was rejected. This finding illustrates that the relationship between ecotourism destination image and intention loyalty was mediated by place attachment. Hence, this finding does not support the previous research, which states that there is a significant and direct relationship between ecotourism destination image and intention [2, 7, 34]. The relationship between perceived value and place attachment formulated in the first hypothesis was supported. This finding demonstrates that the higher the perceived value of TPNP, the higher the place attachment of its visitors shall be. This finding is one of the empirical proofs which supported the postulates of the Four-stage Loyalty Model ([39], p. 394), confirming that cognitive components are the antecedents of affective components. The sixth hypothesis, 'there is a significant and direct relationship between perceived value and satisfaction', was supported. This finding supports the findings of Chen and Tsai (2007), Chen and Chen (2010), and Sun et al., (2014). The seventh hypothesis, 'there is a significant and direct relationship between perceived value and intention loyalty', was rejected. This study finds that the relationship between perceived value and intention loyalty was mediated by satisfaction. Therefore, the previous findings [7, 8, 37] are not supported by this study.

Moreover, the consequence of place attachment, formulated in the eighth hypothesis as 'there is a significant and direct relationship between place attachment and satisfaction', was supported. The previous empirical findings [43, 46, 60] are supported by this study. The ninth hypothesis, 'there is a significant and direct relationship between place attachment and intention loyalty', was supported. This finding is consistent with the previous studies [1, 6, 23, 35]. Finally, the tenth hypothesis, 'there is a significant and direct relationship between satisfaction and intention loyalty', was accepted and proved to be in line with the previous studies [2, 7, 8, 11, 19, 22, 34, 37, 44, 51, 52].

## 7. Implications

### 7.1. Theoretical implications

Theoretically, these findings affect the development of the consumer behavior model, particularly in terms of post-purchase behavior based on cognitive perspective. The

path suggested by this empirical finding is as follows: 'ecotourism destination image (cognitive) → perceived value (cognitive) → place attachment (affective) → satisfaction (affective) → intention loyalty (conative)'. It echoes the loyalty model developed by Cronin et al. (2000), namely 'service quality (cognitive) → perceived value (cognitive) → satisfaction (affective) → intention loyalty (conative)'. On another note, the empirical model in this research can be categorized as an application of three stages in the Four-stage Loyalty Model ([39], pp. 394-395).

## 7.2. Managerial implications

TPNP visitors are tourists with a high level of place attachment, satisfaction, and intention loyalty. They perceive TPNP as a suitable and profitable ecotourism destination. Taking this into consideration, TPNP's management should maintain its current condition and uniqueness as the habitat for numerous types of vegetation and wildlife with orangutans as its flagship attraction. Furthermore, it should also withhold the natural condition along the Sekonyer river, maintain the 'Klotok' which are looked after and owned by local people, and distribute economic profit to local people through tour packages involving them.

However, the use of 'Klotok' is not connected with a professional marketing network and tends not to fulfill the minimum operational standard. Increasing numbers of visits would prompt an additional number of 'Klotok' and possibly overwhelm the existing support system and disturb the wildlife surrounding TPNP. Therefore, TPNP needs to be managed by integrating all ecotourism services provided by TNTN, at least by implementing the two policies detailed as follows. Firstly, to avoid overcrowding in the orangutans' feeding locations, there should be a policy to divert tourist routes and limit 'Klotok' entry per day by adding new 'spots'. Secondly, the management should provide regular training and certification for all 'Klotok' owners and operators in order to improve the minimum standard of ecotourism services in TPNP.

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