AFRICAN JOURNAL OF HOSPITALITY, TOURISM AND LEISURE
2026, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 581-594
https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.764

AJHTL
OPEN ACCESS

Research article

Investigating the role of the image of the host city of sport events on tourists' intentions to revisit Riyadh City. The mediating role of place attachment

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of the image of Riyadh City as a host for sporting events on tourists' intentions to revisit, emphasizing the mediating role of place attachment. Drawing on destination image theory and the attachment framework, the study conceptualizes city image across four dimensions—natural environment, general touristic infrastructure, tourism offers, and urban environment. A quantitative design was employed using data from 422 tourists who attended major sporting events in Riyadh, such as international football and boxing matches. PLS-SEM was used to test the proposed relationships. The results reveal that all four dimensions of city image significantly and positively influence both place attachment and revisit intention. Furthermore, place attachment mediates the relationship between city image and revisit intention, indicating that emotional connection to Riyadh amplifies tourists' loyalty. This study adds to the existing tourism literature by explaining a sport event-based city image which leads to behavioral intentions through affection or emotional bonds. On practical grounds, this research will be useful for policymakers and tourism marketers in Saudi Arabia who are eager to make Riyadh one of the leading sports tourism destinations under Vision 2030's agenda on diversification and global city branding.

KEYWORDS

Sport tourism; city image; place attachment; revisit intention; Vision 2030.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, city administrations around the world have increasingly adopted a policy to use sporting events as strategic tools in urban branding for tourism and economic diversification of their cities. Sporting mega-events comprising the Olympics, FIFA World Cup, and Formula 1 Grand Prix among others ensure potentials in changing global perceptions about host cities with resultant long-lasting tourism legacies. In this general tendency at an international level Saudi Arabia—and above all Riyadh—has turned within recent years into one of rapidly developing centers of international sports tourism strongly connected to Vision 2030 that is supposed to make future development sustainable not only economically but also socially by involving new generations through education systems adapted accordingly towards labor market needs. The explicit objectives include improving income sources related both directly or indirectly toward enhancing attractiveness levels perceived from outside towards inside different destinations located within its territory based on hosting top-class sporting happenings like boxing championships motorsport races football competitions among many other events and initiatives. Major investments flow into developing advanced sporting infrastructure and upgrading urban facilities. However, the dimensions of tourists' perceptions toward Riyadh as a host city remain under-investigated in terms of psychological and emotional aspects. City image plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' experiences, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions. Beyond immediate satisfaction, a favourable city image often leads to stronger place attachment—the emotional bond between tourists and the destination—which in turn increases revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth. Understanding these linkages is vital for Riyadh's strategic development as a sustainable sport tourism destination.

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HOW TO CITE: Ayad, T.H. & Abdelwahed, N.A.A. (2026). Investigating the role of the image of the host city of sport events on tourists' intentions to revisit Riyadh city. The mediating role of place attachment. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 15(2), 581-594. https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.764.

ISSN: 2223-814X (Online) | © 2026 AJHTL

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The study draws on destination image theory and place attachment theory, both of which are fundamental in explaining post-visit behavioural intentions. Destination image is commonly defined as an individual's overall perception of a place, encompassing cognitive, affective, and conative components. It reflects not only tangible features such as infrastructure and attractions but also intangible factors such as hospitality, safety, and emotional experiences Lobo et al. (2023) defined the four dimensions based on which the image of a host city can be conceptualized as natural environment, general touristic infrastructure, city's tourism offers, and urban environment. The physical and experiential qualities that describe tourists' perceptions of a city are found within these dimensions. Place attachment is the feeling and emotional bond or psychological connection people develop with specific places (Yuxin et al., 2024). It extends beyond satisfaction to encompass feelings of belonging and identification with a place. Empirical studies indicate that attachment enhances visitors' loyalty and intentions to revisit (Ladhari & Souiden, 2020). Thus, place attachment serves as a potential mediator between perceived destination image and behavioural intentions, as favourable perceptions can cultivate emotional connection, which in turn reinforces commitment to the destination. Despite the growing literature on destination image and sports tourism, several gaps remain evident. First, most prior studies have concentrated on mega-event tourism in Western or Asian contexts, leaving limited understanding of Middle Eastern cities, especially Riyadh, which is undergoing rapid transformation. Second, while city image has been linked to revisit intentions, the mechanisms through which this relationship unfolds—particularly the mediating effect of place attachment—remain underexplored in emerging tourism destinations. Third, few studies have integrated the four-dimensional structure of host city image with behavioral outcomes in a sport event context. Addressing these gaps contributes to both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for Saudi Arabia's tourism policymakers and marketers.

The main aim of this study is to examine the effect of the image of Riyadh City as a host of sports events on tourists' intentions to revisit, considering the mediating role of place attachment. Specifically, the study pursues the following objectives: To evaluate how each dimension of the host city image—natural environment, general touristic infrastructure, city's tourism offers, and urban environment—affects tourists' place attachment. In addition to determine the direct effects of these image dimensions on tourists' intentions to revisit Riyadh. Also, it aims to assess whether place attachment mediates the relationship between host city image and revisit intentions. Riyadh's positioning as a global sports destination directly reflects Saudi strategic ambitions both to become the next home of 100 million annual tourists by 2030 and leading nation in sports, culture, and entertainment. This is more a transformation of the city with huge investments into stadiums and hospitality infrastructures as well public transport or green urban areas. International events ranging from Riyadh Season to Formula E or major boxing championships taking place have attracted international audiences contributing equally towards building the brand of the city while developing its soft power. By analyzing tourists' perceptions and emotional bonds with Riyadh, this study aligns with Vision 2030's Quality of Life Program and National Tourism Strategy, both of which prioritize improving visitor experience and fostering repeat visitation. The study contributes to literature and practice in several ways. First, it extends destination image theory by empirically validating its multidimensional structure within the context of Riyadh's sports tourism. Secondly, it provides advances in the understanding of place attachment as a psychological mechanism linking image perceptions to behavioral intentions and offers new insights into emotional loyalty in event tourism. Thirdly, this study provides very relevant implications for policies by determining the main dimensions that influence tourists' intention to revisit Riyadh. The stakeholders can make the city more attractive through targeted marketing and sustainable urban design. Following this introduction, a literature review follows in which city image, place attachment, and revisit intentions are discussed leading to hypothesis development and conceptual model formulation. This is followed by sections on methodology and empirical results found through structural equation modeling analysis. A final discussion and implications section specify the theoretical contribution of this study, provides managerial suggestions as well as directions for future research.

Literature review& hypotheses development

City image and sport tourism

Recently, the concept of city image has attracted increasing attention among scholars as destinations worldwide enter into competition to attract tourists, investors, and residents (Lobo et al., 2023). In tourism studies, destination image is defined as a composite of beliefs and ideas-and-impressions that people have about a place (Crompton, 1979). Both tangible and intangible attributes are involved which realized in the behavior of visitors either in decision making or after actual visitation. In the context of sport tourism, the image of the host city becomes a critical determinant of visitor satisfaction and loyalty because sport events often serve as symbolic experiences that shape overall perceptions of the destination (Kaplanidou & Vogt,

2010). According to Baloglu & McCleary's (1999) model, destination image consists of two main components: cognitive (knowledge-based evaluation of physical and functional attributes) and affective (emotional responses or feelings about the destination). Recently, the concept of city image has attracted increasing attention among scholars as destinations worldwide enter into competition to attract tourists, investors, and residents (Lobo et al., 2023). In tourism studies, destination image is defined as a composite of beliefs and ideas-and-impressions that people have about a place (Crompton, 1979). Both tangible and intangible attributes are involved which realized in the behavior of visitors either in decision making or after actual visitation.

Dimensions of host city image

Recent research emphasizes that the image of a host city is multidimensional and must reflect diverse aspects of the visitor experience. Lobo et al. (2023) point four major dimensions that collectively shape the perceived image of event-hosting cities: natural environment, general touristic infrastructure, city's tourism offers, and urban environment. These dimensions are adopted in the present study and elaborated below.

Natural environment

The natural environment represents the aesthetic and ecological attributes of a city—such as climate, green spaces, parks, and landscapes—that influence tourists' sensory and emotional experiences. Chen & Phou (2013) stated that attractive scenery and environmental quality have a significant effect on satisfaction and revisit intentions. In sports tourism, the natural aesthetics add to general enjoyment particularly for outdoor activities such as marathons or motorsport races. For Riyadh, recent urban greening initiatives under Vision 2030's *Saudi Green Initiative* aim at improving environmental livability which may eventually make the city more appealing to international visitors.

H1: The natural environment of the host city positively and significantly contributes to tourists' place attachment.

H2: The natural environment of the host city positively and significantly contributes to tourists' intention to revisit.

General touristic infrastructure

Touristic infrastructure encompasses accessibility, accommodation quality, transport systems, and service efficiency. Prior studies emphasize that functional infrastructure strongly influences destination choice and repeat visitation (Zhang et al., 2014). In the context of sport tourism, infrastructure such as stadiums, hotels, and mobility networks determines not only the feasibility of hosting large events but also the comfort of tourists. Riyadh's investments in transport connectivity (e.g., Riyadh Metro, new airport terminals) and high-end hospitality have been central to its transformation into a global sports destination.

H3: The host city's general touristic infrastructure positively and significantly contributes to tourists' place attachment.

H4: The host city's general touristic infrastructure positively and significantly contributes to tourists' intention to revisit.

City's tourism offers

A city's tourism offers include the diversity of attractions, entertainment, cultural heritage, cuisine, and leisure activities available beyond the main event. Scholars such as Lee (2015) argue that variety and authenticity in tourism offerings stimulate greater satisfaction and encourage repeat visitation. For sports tourists, additional attractions—such as museums, traditional markets, and culinary experiences—extend the length of stay and strengthen emotional connection to the host city. Riyadh's blend of heritage and modern leisure experiences (e.g., Diriyah heritage sites and Riyadh Season festivals) creates a multifaceted appeal that integrates culture and entertainment.

H5: The availability and quality of tourism offerings in the host city positively and significantly strengthen tourists' place attachment.

H6: The host city's tourism offerings positively and significantly enhance tourists' intention to revisit the destination.

Urban environment

The urban environment represents the city's social and spatial qualities, including safety, cleanliness, hospitality of residents, and the overall sense of order. As noted by Stylidis (2020), visitors' evaluations of

urban atmosphere significantly shape destination image and emotional responses. A welcoming and secure urban environment fosters trust, relaxation, and positive memories—essential elements for attachment formation (Yuksel et al., 2010). Riyadh's recent improvements in public security, family-oriented recreation, and public space design reflect this dimension of sustainable tourism development.

H7: The host city's urban environment positively and significantly contributes to tourists' place attachment.
H8: The host city's urban environment exerts a positive and significant influence on tourists' intention to revisit.

Place attachment

Place attachment is a multidimensional psychological construct reflecting individuals' emotional and functional bonds with specific locations (Williams & Vaske, 2003). It encompasses affective (emotional connection), cognitive (sense of belonging), and conative (behavioural commitment) components. In tourism research, place attachment is frequently regarded as a predictor of loyalty and revisit intention because emotionally attached visitors tend to repeat visits, recommend the destination, and engage in place-supportive behavior (Chen et al., 2014). The formation of place attachment often results from meaningful experiences that align personal values with environmental or cultural attributes of the destination (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2017). In the sport tourism context, attending events can produce intense emotions, social connections, and memorable experiences that deepen attachment. Empirical evidence supports that emotional bonds created through shared experiences—such as cheering for teams, interacting with locals, or celebrating in iconic venues—transform sport tourists into loyal advocates of the host city (Kyle et al., 2004). Furthermore, Yuxin et al. (2024) demonstrated that attachment mediates the effect of cultural heritage experiences on revisit intentions, suggesting that emotional connection acts as a bridge between cognition (image) and behavior (loyalty). Given this theoretical perspective, place attachment is hypothesized as a mediator between city image and revisit intention.

H9: Place attachment positively and significantly influences tourists' intention to revisit the destination.

Revisit intention

Revisit intention is a key indicator of destination loyalty and sustainable tourism success. It refers to the individual's conscious willingness to return to a destination or to recommend it to others (Oppermann, 2000). From a managerial perspective, repeat visitors are valuable because they require lower marketing costs and tend to generate positive word-of-mouth. Previous studies have found revisit intention to be strongly influenced by satisfaction, perceived value, and emotional connection (Bigne et al., 2001). In event tourism, revisit intentions are influenced not only by the quality of the event but also by the broader city image—including perceptions of hospitality, cultural identity, and urban atmosphere (Ladhari & Souiden, 2020). Sports events often serve as "first impressions" of a destination, offering opportunities for cities to convert short-term visitors into long-term ambassadors. Thus, for Riyadh, understanding the determinants of revisit intention is crucial for maintaining post-event tourism momentum beyond one-time events.

The mediating role of place attachment

Integrating theories of destination image and place attachment, this study argues that tourists' emotional connections to the city mediate the relationship between city image and their desire to return. When tourists hold a favourable view of Riyadh—due to its environment, infrastructure, and offerings—they are likely to form attachments, which can boost their loyalty. This view aligns with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, in which the city image (stimulus) affects emotional attachment (organism), leading to the intention to return (response). Evidence supports the idea that place attachment serves as a mediator. Prayag & Ryan (2012) showed that the bond people have with a destination affects the link between its perceived image and tourist loyalty in resort settings. Similarly, Tsai (2016) reported that emotional ties to a destination strengthen the influence of image perceptions on future behavioural intentions. In the realm of sports tourism, Kaplanidou & Gibson (2010) found that intense emotional attachment formed during major sporting events increases the likelihood that visitors will return for future leisure trips. Taken together, these studies indicate that the emotional impact of sporting events can significantly influence tourists' long-term connection with host cities. Based on this theoretical foundation, the following hypotheses are proposed: Based on this theoretical rationale, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H10: Place attachment mediates the relationship between the host city's natural environment and tourists' revisit intention.

H11: Place attachment mediates the relationship between the host city's general tourism infrastructure and tourists' revisit intention.
H12: Place attachment mediates the relationship between the city's tourism offerings and tourists' revisit intention.
H13: Place attachment mediates the relationship between the host city's urban environment and tourists' revisit intention.

Building on existing theoretical and empirical research, the conceptual framework (Figure 1) outlines the proposed relationships among the key variables in this study. The host city image, shaped by elements such as the natural environment, general tourism infrastructure, tourism offerings, and the urban environment, serves as the predictor construct. Place attachment acts as the mediator, and the intention to return is the outcome variable. The model includes both direct and indirect paths, consistent with previous findings from Ladhari & Souiden (2020) and Yuxin et al. (2024).

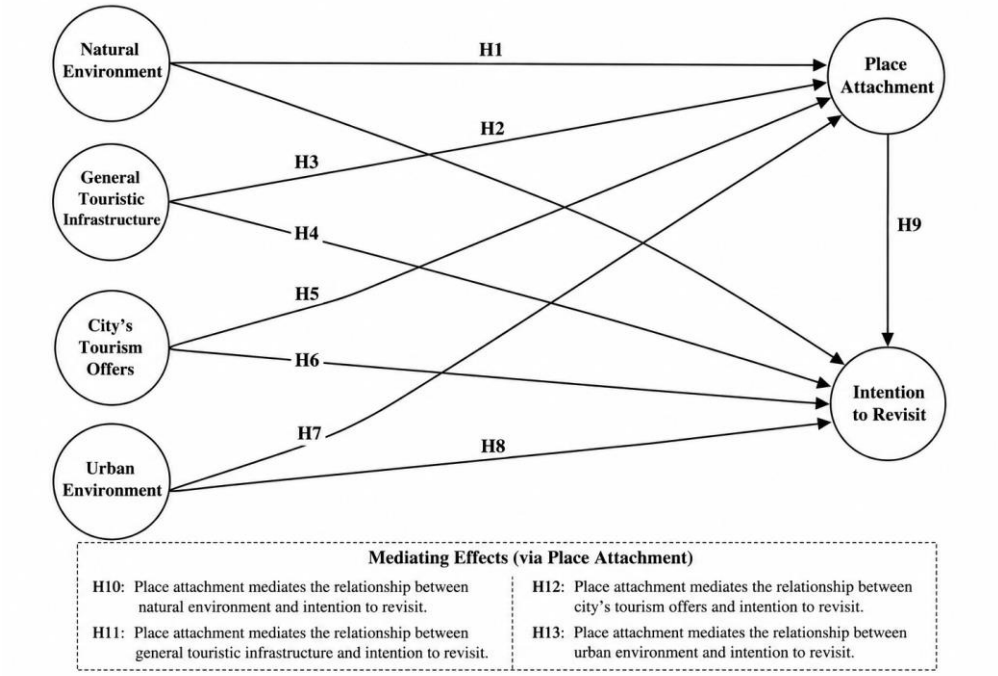

Figure 1. Study conceptual framework

In summary, most of the literature reviewed supports the fact that destination image is a multi-dimensional construct which includes different aspects and has an outcome on tourists' emotions and behavior. An understanding of revisit intention in Riyadh as it is growing to be one of the major cities in sports tourism through cognitive assessment (city image) and affective response (place attachment) is provided by this study empirically testing such relationship thus contributing toward theoretical fine-tuning besides offering practical intelligence for policymakers interested in harnessing sporting events as sustainable tourism drivers within the context of Saudi Vision 2030.

Materials and methods

The measurement instruments used in this study were adapted from established literature. The host city image construct was operationalized using four dimensions proposed by Lobo et al. (2023): (1) Natural Environment (4 items: attractive viewpoints, remarkable landscapes, captivating natural parks, and the value of green spaces); (2) General Touristic Infrastructure (3 items: quality of accommodation services, quality of dining services, and diversity of retail and shopping facilities); (3) Tourism Offerings (8 items: rich cultural customs, good value for money, variety of tourist activities, vibrant entertainment and nightlife, extensive cultural attractions, inspiring sporting events, intriguing cultural heritage, and high-quality cuisine and local products); and (4) Urban Environment (5 items: family-friendly environment, peaceful atmosphere, local hospitality, maintenance of public spaces, and perceived safety). As for the second construct intention to revisit, it was measured using seven-item scale, which focus on behavioral intentions of tourists, developed by Ladhari & Souiden (2020). The instrument questions were focusing on a group of tourists behaviorals: willingness to return, posting and sharing experiences on social media, taking souvenir

photographs, recommending the destination to others, purchasing local souvenirs, and expressing positive word-of-mouth about Riyadh. Regarding the mediating variable of the study -place attachment-, it was measured using six-item scale, focusing on the emotional and functional attachment of tourists to Riyadh city, the scale proposed by Yuxin et al. (2024), and asking about the strong personal connection with destination, unique travel experiences, affection toward the destination, importance of traveling to the city, perceived suitability of its sport tourism amenities, and preference for Riyadh over alternative sport tourism destinations.

The population of this study includes both international and domestic tourists who visited Riyadh specifically to participate in major sporting events, such as international football tournaments and professional boxing matches. These events have gained increasing importance in Riyadh's tourism strategy, making sports tourists a significant and influential segment for studying the city's profile, tourism core, and connection to the place. Given the absence of a formal, reliable, and publicly available database that identifies the number of tourists whose primary motivation for travel is attending sporting events, and in accordance with Veal's (2017) guidelines on determining sample sizes for large or undefined research populations, a conservative population size of approximately 20,000 individuals was assumed here (Ayad et al., 2024). To determine the sample size required to obtain statistically significant and reliable data, the Stephens and Sampson's formula was applied to estimate sample size (Ayad, 2022). The formula is formulated as follows:

$$n = \frac{Nxp(1-p)}{[[N-1\,x(d^2 \div z^2)] + p(1-p)]}$$

Where: "n" = the required sample size; "N" = population size (assumed here 20,000); "p" = the estimated proportion of the attribute present in the population; "z" = the confidence level (1.96); and finally, "d" = margin of error (5%). Accordingly, the minimum calculated sample size is 377 respondents. This study employed a quantitative research methodology, utilizing self-administered questionnaires to collect primary data. To enhance the questionnaire's credibility and ensure its suitability for the sport tourism sector, it underwent multiple reviews and evaluations by a panel of academics and sport and tourism experts to verify its reliability and usability in achieving the study's objectives. Furthermore, the confidentiality of the collected data was emphasized, ensuring its use solely for scientific research purposes. Respondents were free to withdraw from the questionnaire at any time. Data were collected during two peak sport tourism periods, namely September–November 2024 and September–October 2025, the questionnaires were distributed to 450 tourists attending major sporting events in Riyadh, including international football and professional boxing competitions. In the end, 422 completed surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 93.8%, and were analysed statistically. To achieve the objectives of the study, the questionnaire was organized into four distinct sections. The first section of the questionnaire was dedicated to collect demographic data, while the rest for sections were dedicated to collect all needed data about the study's key constructs, which are "Host City Image" with four reflective dimensions (Natural Environment "NEN"; General Touristic Infrastructure "GTI"; City Tourism Offerings "CTO", and Urban Environment "UE"), Intention to Revisit "INRV", and fourth the section for Place Attachment "PATT". The items related to the three main constructs were assessed using a five-point Likert scale. As for data analysis techniques, the descriptive statistical analyses were employed using SPSS v.29.2022 and Microsoft Excel v.15.2013. In addition, the structural equation modeling (Smart-PLS-SEM.V.4.1.1.6) was used to examine the study hypotheses.

Results

The outer model

Validation of measurement constructs:

To determine whether items created to measure a particular construct were related to other items measuring the same construct, convergent validity was assessed. As all standardized factor loadings met the thresholds suggested by Hair et al. (2022), with all values surpassing the lowest acceptable level of 0.50 and the majority approaching or surpassing the ideal threshold of 0.70, the results confirmed satisfactory construct validity. Also, the internal consistency was examined for all measurement scales of the study, and all results meets the recommended cut-off point (0.70) by Bryman & Cramer (2011); Hair et al. (2017); and Hair et al. (2022), confirming the composite reliability for all constructs. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) was conducted to examine the measurement model's convergent validity. All results exceed the recommended value of 0.50 by Fornell & Larcker (1981). See Table 1.

Table 1. The measurement model validity analysis

Constructs	Items	Convergent Validity		Internal Consistency	
		"λ"	"AVE"	**"α"**	"rho_a"
Natural Environment "NEN"	1	0.956	0.680	0.826	0.891
	2	0.777			
	3	0.960			
	4	0.735			
General Touristic Infrastructure "GTI"	1	0.812	0.732	0.815	0.832
	2	0.821			
	3	0.928			
City's Tourism Offers "CTO"	1	0.735	0.597	0.902	0.926
	2	0.804			
	3	0.945			
	4	0.931			
	5	0.755			
	6	0.753			
	7	0.753			
	8	0.753			
Urban Environment "UEN"	1	0.788	0.567	0.809	0.828
	2	0.748			
	3	0.755			
	4	0.814			
	5	0.851			
Intention To Revisit "INRV"	1	0.753	0.578	0.873	0.898
	2	0.788			
	3	0.880			
	4	0.735			
	5	0.753			
	6	0.801			
	7	0.880			
Place attachment "PATT"	1	0.755	0.645	0.874	0.910
	2	0.920			
	3	0.953			
	4	0.788			
	5	0.735			
	6	0.943			

The results of the statistical analysis, presented in Table 1, indicate that all standardized factor loading values were higher than the recommended cut-off point (0.70) by Hair et al. (2022), showing a satisfactory level of reliability. Additionally, the average extracted variance score high values, ranged from 0.567 to 0.732, which exceed the recommended value (0.50) of Fornell & Larcker (1981), confirming a statistically sufficient level of convergence. Furthermore, all Cronbach's alpha values were high scores, ranged from 0.809 to 0.902, and the composite reliability values ranged from 0.828 to 0.926, all values exceeded the cut-off point (0.70) recommended by Bryman & Cramer (2011) and Hair et al. (2022), confirming strong internal consistency among the model's various variables. Taken together, these results confirm that the measurement model has acceptable convergence and reliability in internal consistency, providing a solid basis for subsequent structural model analysis.

Discriminant validity

To determine the distinctiveness of each model construct, discriminatory validity was examined. This validity assumes the independence of the constructs, or in other words, the absence of statistically significant correlations between them. Based on the procedures described by Kock (2020), the cross-loading method and the Fornell & Larcker (1981) were applied to verify the discriminatory validity of the model constructs. The statistical results confirmed the distinctiveness of the model constructs, showing that each construct differs sufficiently from the others. See Table 2 and Figure 2 for further details.

Table 2. Fornell Larcker criterion - Construct discriminant validity assessment

Constructs	NEN	GTI	CTO	UEN	INRV	PATT
NEN	**0.824**					
GTI	0.737	**0.855**				
CTO	0.722	0.644	**0.773**			
UEN	0.699	0.522	0.611	**0.753**		
INRV	0.656	0.712	0.544	0.622	**0.760**	
PATT	0.532	0.533	0.684	0.546	0.612	**0.803**

Table 2 shows that each factor in the proposed model is clearly empirically distinct from the others factors. As all the diagonal values (the square root of the AVE. "NEN" = 0.824; "GTI" = 0.855; "CTO" = 0.773; "UEN" = 0.753; "INRV" = 0.760; and "PATT" = 0.803) are higher than the correlations values (off-diagonal), confirming the discriminant validity across all constructs, which is in line with the standards set by Hair et al. (2022) and Fornell & Larcker (1981) and Chin's (1998) guidelines for the sufficient discriminant validity. Accordingly, "NEN"; "GTI"; "CTO"; "UEN"; "INRV"; and "PATT" are empirically distinct constructs, the observed correlations are theoretically meaningful without indicating multicollinearity or construct overlap, and the measurement model is valid and suitable for testing the

hypothesized direct effects and mediation relationships. Furthermore, the discriminant validity was more investigated using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio. See Table 3.

Table 3. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) – matrix

Constructs	CTO	GTI	INRV	NEN	PATT
GTI	0.677				
INRV	0.522	0.654			
NEN	0.412	0.482	0.422		
PATT	0.468	0.325	0.577	0.445	
UEN	0.522	0.566	0.681	0.548	0.612

According to the conservative threshold of 0.85 recommended by Kline (2023) and the recommended threshold suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) for heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios of 0.90, and as shown in table 3, all HTMT values were below the cut-off point ranging from 0.325 to 0.681, reflecting that all constructs are clearly distinict, empirically different, and not measuring overlapping concepts. Accordingly, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios results indicate that all structures in the model possess satisfactory discrimination validity and are experimentally distinct, thus supporting the suitability of the measurement model.

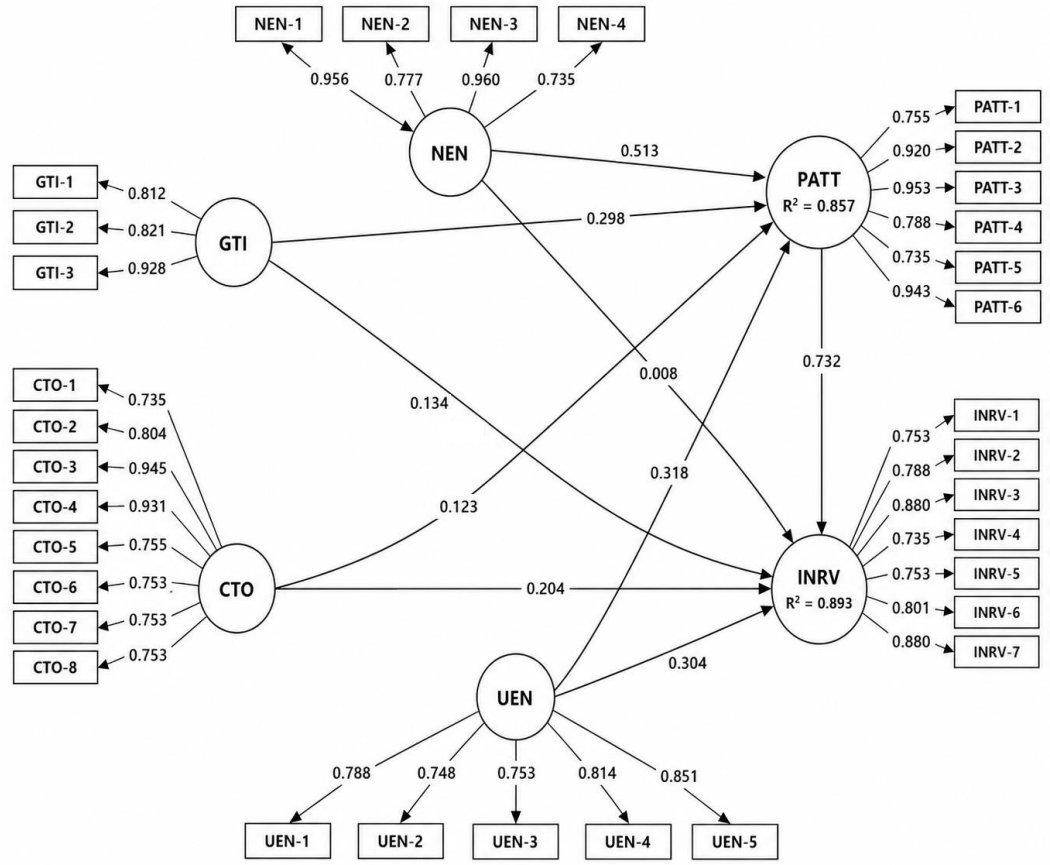

Figure 2. Structural equation measurement model

The inner model

Explanation power of the model (R^2):

To test the explanatory power of the suggested model and the variance in the dependent variables accounted for by the independent variables, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was utilized. This number varies from 0 to 1, with a value of 1 signifying perfect prediction accuracy and a value of 0 denoting a lack of explanatory ability. Based on the thresholds established by Chin (1998), the R^2 values in Table 4 demonstrate that the independent variables significantly impact the dependent variables, exhibiting predictive power from weak to moderate. These statistical data indicate that the model has enough explanatory power.

Table 4. Explanation power of the model results (R^2)

Constructs	R^2	Level
INRV	0.893	High
PATT	0.857	High

The results in Table 4 indicate that the predictors explained 89.3% of the variance in "INRV" ($R^2 = 0.893$), indicating that tourists' perceptions of the host city of the sport event and their emotional and functional attachment to the city are highly effective predictors of their intention to revisit. Additionally, the results show that the predictors explained 85.7% of the variance in "PATT" ($R^2 = 0.857$), indicating that tourists' attachment to the city is strongly shaped by their cognitive and affective evaluations of the host city. Accordingly, both values represent high/strong explanatory power, indicating the model's adequacy explanatory power, and according to Chin (1998) and Hair et al. (2022), it can be pointed out that the model has satisfactory explanatory power is suitable for hypothesis testing.

Variance explained (f^2):

An effect size test (f^2) was performed to evaluate the extent of influence that each independent variable (IV) had on the dependent variable (DV) in the proposed model. According to Cohen's (1988) criteria, the statistical results in Table 5 demonstrate that the effect sizes of the independent factors on the dependent variables range from small to strong level. These findings offer more understanding of the comparative impact and practical importance of each predictor within the model.

Table 5. Variance explained/ squared effect size (f^2)

Constructs	INRV	PATT
NEN	0.121"Small Effect Size"	0.334"Medium Effect Size"
GTI	0.220 "Medium Effect Size"	0.178"Medium Effect Size"
CTO	0.274"Medium Effect Size"	0.220 "Medium Effect Size"
UEN	0.321"Medium Effect Size"	0.352"Large Effect Size"
PATT	0.721"Large Effect Size"	

As shown in Table 5, and according to the proposed criteria of Cohen (1988) and Hair et al. (2022) and among all constructs "PATT" shows the largest effect on "INRV" ($f^2 = 0.721$), which means that removing "PATT" from the model would lead to a significant reduction in the explained variance of "INRV", indicating that tourists' intention to visit the host city is primarily by emotional attachment to the place. Additionally, all four dimensions of "Host City Image" have medium to large effects on place attachment, and among the dimensions "UEN" shows the largest effect on "PATT" ($f^2 = 0.352$), indicating that place attachment is primarily shaping by environmental qualities of the host city. Collectively, the predictors vary in their influence, but they substantially contribute to the model's explanatory strength in sport tourism contexts.

Model fit evaluation

A model fit evaluation test (GoF test) was carried out to evaluate the suitability and adequacy of the suggested model across the measurement model, structural model, and the overall model framework. This assessment aimed to determine whether the model meets the criteria for a comprehensive global fit, as recommended by Chin (2009):

$$GoF = \sqrt{R^2 x\ AVE}$$

$$GoF = 0.744$$

Based on the model fit evaluation test findings and the benchmark criteria established by Wetzels et al. (2009), it can be concluded that the proposed structural model demonstrates a large goodness of fit (0.744, above the 0.36 threshold), confirming that the measurement model is valid and reliable, based on the satisfactory AVE and reliability values, and the structural model explains a substantial proportion of variance in the dependent constructs, based on the high R^2 values for "INRV" and "PATT". Accordingly, the model exhibits strong predictive and explanatory adequacy, confirming that the theoretical framework fits the empirical data well.

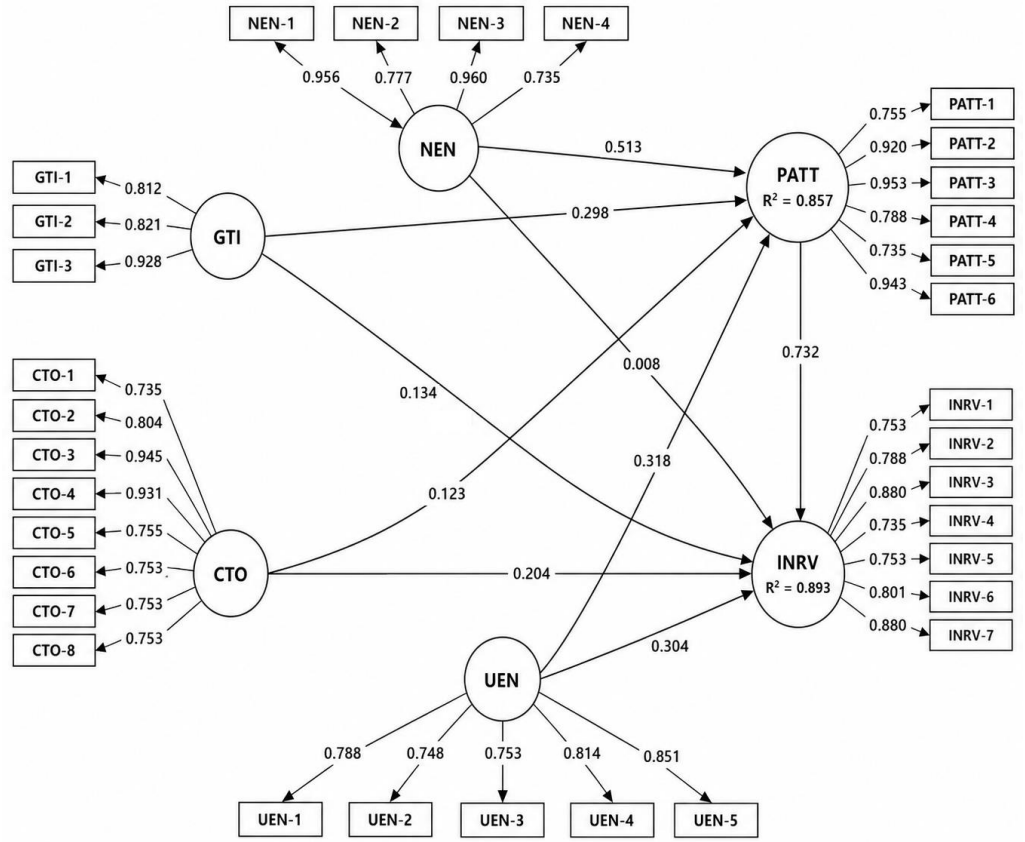

Figure 3. Final structural equation model

Structural model hypotheses evaluation-Significance of path coefficients

The test of path coefficient significance was conducted to assess how effectively the proposed theoretical model is compatible with the primary data. The results of each hypothesis test are presented in table 5, 6 and 7.

Table 6. Structural model – Direct path estimates (PLS-SEM)

Pathway	β	σ	t-score(O/STDEV)	Sig.	Result
H-1: NEN ->PATT	0.513	0.105	4.864	0.000	√**
H-2: NEN ->INRV	0.008	0.001	8	0.005	√
H-3: GTI ->PATT	0.298	0.107	2.795	0.005	√
H-4: GTI ->INRV	0.134	0.049	2.734	0.005	√
H-5: CTO ->PATT	0.123	0.049	2.510	0.012	√
H-6: CTO ->INRV	0.204	0.050	4.080	0.000	√**
H-7: UEN ->PATT	0.318	0.058	5.475	0.000	√**
H-8: UEN ->INRV	0.304	0.034	8.873	0.000	√**
H-9: PATT ->INRV	0.732	0.078	9.429	0.000	√**

Significant at P** = 0.000

According results of the study's hypothesis testing at Table 6 and Figure 3. Natural Environment "NEN", as one of the four dimensions of host city image, has a positive direct effect on "PATT" [$f^2 = 0.334$; Std. $\beta = 0.513$; $p = 0.001$], and (INRV) [$f^2 = 0.121$; Std. $\beta = 0.008$; $p = 0.005$], indicating that host city environmental qualities enhance the emotional attachment to the host city of sport event, and also the generated revisit intention. Additionally, General Touristic Infrastructure "GTI", as one of the four dimensions of host city image, has a positive direct effect on "PATT" [$f^2 = 0.178$; Std. $\beta = 0.298$; $p = 0.005$] and "INRV" [$f^2 = 0.220$; Std. $\beta = 0.134$; $p = 0.005$], confirming the key role of service quality and infrastructure in motivating the positive behavioral intention among tourists. Moreover, City's Tourism Offers "CTO", as one of the four dimensions of host city image, has a positive direct effect on "PATT" [$f^2 = 0.220$; Std. $\beta = 0.123$; $p = 0.012$] and "INRV" [$f^2 = 0.274$; Std. $\beta = 0.204$; $p < 0.001$], showing that the experiential value of the city's tourism offers enhance emotional attachment to the host city of sport event, and motivate revisit intention among tourists. Additionally, Urban Environment "UEN", as one of the four dimensions of host city image, has a positive direct effect on "PATT" [$f^2 = 0.352$; Std. $\beta = 0.318$; $p < 0.001$], and "INRV" [$f^2 = 0.321$; Std. $\beta = 0.304$; $p < 0.001$], confirming the power of urban atmosphere in shaping sport tourists experience. Finally, "PATT" a positive direct effect on "INRV" [$f^2 = 0.721$; Std. $\beta = 0.732$; $p < 0.001$], confirming that the generated emotional connections during sport tourism events play a key role in shaping positive behavioral

intention among sport tourism tourists. Accordingly, hypotheses H1,H2,.....and H9 were empirically supported.

Table 7. Structural model – Indirect path estimates (PLS-SEM)

Pathway	β	σ	t-score(O/STDEV)	Sig.	Result
H-10: NEN ->PATT ->INRV	0376	0.093	4.036	0.000	√**
H-11: GTI ->PATT ->INRV	0.219	0.082	2.658	0.008	√
H-12: CTO ->PATT ->INRV	0.090	0.039	2.309	0.021	√
H-13: UEN ->PATT ->INRV	0.233	0.046	5.069	0.000	√**

Significant at P** = 0.000

According to results of examining the indirect relationships between the study variables at Table 7 and according to Figure 4, the results indicate that "PATT" has a significant partial mediating effect on the relationship between "NEN" and "INRV" [Std. $\beta = 0.376$, $p < 0.001$], indicating that environmental attractiveness will motivate the revisit intention among sport tourism tourists by fostering emotional attachment with the city. Similarly, "PATT" has a significant partial mediating effect on the relationship between "GTI" and "INRV" [Std. $\beta = 0.219$, $p = 0.008$], the quality of infrastructure at the host city contribute to revisit behavioral intention among sport tourists when tourists feel that they are emotionally attached to the host city. Additionally, "PATT" has a significant partial mediating effect on the relationship between "CTO" and "INRV" [Std. $\beta = 0.090$, $p = 0.021$], showing that the rich tourism experiential offers of the host city will contribute to the revisit behavioral intention among sport tourists through their personal attachment to the host city. Moreover, "PATT" has a significant partial mediating effect on the relationship between "UEN" and "INRV" [Std. $\beta = 0.233$, $p < 0.001$], indicating that the urban and safe atmosphere of the host city will be transformed into emotional relationships that lead to behavioral intention to revisit the host city among sport tourists. Accordingly, all mediation hypotheses (H10–H13) were empirically supported.

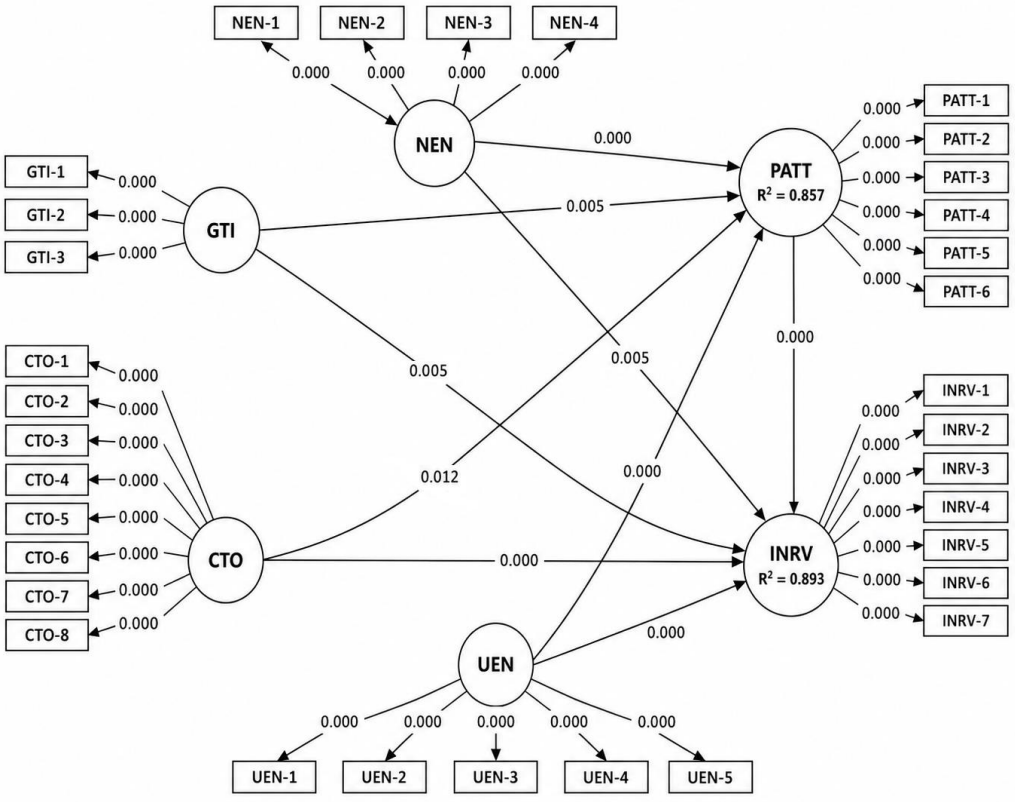

Figure 4. Structural model- Significance of hypothesized paths

Discussion and Implications

This study examined how Riyadh City's image as a host of sporting events affects tourists' intentions to revisit, highlighting the role of place attachment. Results from Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using data from 422 international tourists show that all four dimensions of the city image -natural environment, general touristic infrastructure, the city's tourism offers, and urban environment- significantly and positively influence both place attachment and intention to revisit. Additionally, place attachment plays a strong mediating role, indicating that emotional connections are

crucial for linking perceptions to behaviour. These findings support the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, in which tourists' perceptions of Riyadh's features (stimulus) generate emotional connections (organism), which, in turn, influence behaviours (response). The model has strong explanatory power, with R^2 values of 0.893 for revisit intention and 0.857 for place attachment. This indicates that the city's image and place attachment account for a substantial share of the variance in tourists' loyalty behaviour. The results show that Riyadh's natural environment significantly boosts both place attachment and revisit intention. This aligns with Chen & Phou (2013), who found that natural beauty and environmental quality generate positive emotions that strengthen emotional bonds. In Riyadh, new green landscape projects -such as King Salman Park and the Riyadh Green Program- positively influence visitors' perceptions of sustainability and well-being. The moderate effect size indicates that while natural beauty enhances emotional connections, its impact on loyalty is more substantial through attachment than through direct effects. This finding emphasises that caring for the environment is not only ecological but also experiential, suggesting that greener cityscapes can provide psychological comfort for tourists. Policymakers should focus on expanding green infrastructure and promoting eco-friendly sports tourism experiences to support Saudi Arabia's Green Initiative.

The study also finds that general tourism infrastructure significantly and positively affects both place attachment and revisit intention, with medium effect sizes. This aligns with Zhang et al. (2014), who showed that accessibility, service quality, and transport links enhance tourists' perceptions of comfort and efficiency, thereby boosting loyalty. Riyadh's large infrastructure projects—such as the Riyadh Metro and new luxury hotels—enhance tourists' sense of convenience and modernity, fostering a stronger emotional connection. These results show that infrastructure investments meet not only practical needs but also symbolise progress and a modern identity, supporting Vision 2030's goals for a "vibrant society" and a "thriving economy." Effective management of urban mobility and hospitality services enhances satisfaction and emotional involvement, turning first-time visitors into repeat travellers. Riyadh's tourism offerings, including cultural, leisure, and entertainment activities, are strong predictors of both attachment and revisit intention. This aligns with Lee (2015), who stated that diverse and authentic experiences enhance emotional impact and memory value. In Riyadh, events such as Riyadh Season, Diriyah Gate, and culinary tourism offer visitors opportunities to engage with both Saudi heritage and modern entertainment. This finding supports the view that sporting events serve as gateways to broader city experiences. Tourists drawn to a boxing match or a Formula E race are more likely to visit cultural sites and leisure attractions, creating well-rounded impressions of Riyadh. This variety is crucial for sustaining tourism after events, ensuring that motivations extend beyond the excitement of a specific occasion.

The overall effects of the urban environment on place attachment and revisit intention are the strongest, underscoring the importance of safety, cleanliness, and hospitality. This aligns with Stylidis (2020), who argued that a positive urban atmosphere fosters a sense of belonging and comfort, both essential for emotional bonding. Riyadh's focus on security, family-friendly activities, and well-maintained public spaces boosts tourist trust and comfort, which are critical for repeat visits. In conclusion, the "soft" urban factors of friendliness, safety, and warmth are as crucial as the "hard" infrastructure elements in fostering loyalty. For Saudi tourism planners, ensuring that Riyadh excels in cleanliness, safety, and hospitality is essential to shaping the city's global image as a tourism destination. The results confirm that place attachment significantly mediates the relationships between all four city image dimensions and revisit intention. The indirect effects are substantial and statistically significant, particularly for the urban and natural environment pathways. This aligns with evidence from Prayag & Ryan (2012) and Yuxin et al. (2024), which show that emotional connections transform cognitive assessments into behaviour. The results emphasise that emotional engagement is key to converting perceptions into loyalty. If tourists feel a strong connection to Riyadh through its hospitality, culture, and natural charm, they will return and recommend it to others. Therefore, sporting events should be more than simple spectacles; they should be experiences that foster strong feelings through storytelling, cultural engagement, and meaningful interactions.

Study Implications:

This research advances the understanding of destination image theory and place attachment in three significant ways: (i) Contextual extension: It extends the theoretical framework into the context of emerging Middle Eastern cities, where sport event–based tourism is becoming a new pillar of diversification. The findings demonstrate that Western-derived models of image–attachment–behaviour also apply to non-Western destinations undergoing transformation. In terms of model integration,the study integrates cognitive (city image) and affective (place attachment) components into a single structural framework validated through PLS-SEM. Strong Explanatory Power ($R^2 > 0.85$): This finding provides very strong empirical support for the multidimensional model of host city image. (ii) Emotional mediation mechanism: The research empirically validates the mediating effect of attachment, confirming that emotional bonds serve as the psychological conduit translating perception into loyalty. This contributes to a more nuanced

understanding of behavioural intention formation in sport tourism literature. In addition, the findings carry significant practical implications for tourism authorities, city planners, and event organizers in Saudi Arabia and beyond. (iii) Enhancing emotional experience: Policy makers should prioritize experience design that fosters emotional engagement—such as interactive fan zones, cultural storytelling, and community-based hospitality programs. Such emotional immersion changes tourists' perceptions from mere spectators to that of participants hence strong attachment and revisit. (iv) Sustainable city image development" Given the strong impact of natural and urban environments, sustainable urban planning should continue to be a core component in Riyadh's tourism development. This shall include increasing green areas within the city, smart transportations as well as event organizations with zero waste which will make the city more beautiful and known. (v) Integrating sport and culture: Cultural and leisure experiences can be integrated with sport tourism by encouraging heritage tours, food festivals, and art exhibitions alongside major sporting events. Eventually, such an approach will lead to the extension of tourists' stays while integrating motives for cultural and leisure experiences together with sport events. (vi) Branding Riyadh as a global sport city: The results reinforce the value of city image branding. Riyadh's strategic narrative should emphasize safety, hospitality, and vibrancy—attributes that the empirical model shows as central to loyalty. Positioning Riyadh as a "City of Sports and Culture" aligns with Vision 2030's objective to project a modern, dynamic national identity. (vii) Data-driven tourism policy: Finally, the high explanatory value of the PLS model underscores the importance of continuous data monitoring of visitor perceptions and attachment levels. Regular feedback from tourists can inform adaptive marketing strategies and infrastructural investments that sustain the city's competitive advantage.

Conclusion

This study explored the role of host city image in shaping tourists' intentions to revisit Riyadh, with place attachment as a mediating variable. Based on data from 422 international tourists attending sport events, the study applied PLS-SEM to test thirteen hypotheses. The results show that all four image dimensions—natural environment, general touristic infrastructure, city's tourism offers, and urban environment—significantly and positively influence both place attachment and revisit intention. Moreover, place attachment mediates these relationships, confirming its critical role in converting perceptual impressions into emotional and behavioural loyalty. The findings enrich the literature on destination image and sport tourism by demonstrating that the emotional dimension of attachment bridges the gap between image perception and behavioural intention. The multidimensional conceptualization of host city image provides a comprehensive lens for analysing post-event tourism behaviour in rapidly modernizing cities such as Riyadh. For policy makers and tourism authorities, the study underscores that sports events are more than temporary attractions—they are vehicles for emotional and cultural branding. The availability of sustainable infrastructure, genuine cultural offers, and friendly city environments improve perception and attachment. Therefore, tourism policies should be integrated wherein sports tourism is mixed with cultural tourism and sustainability to ensure long-term tourism development. The study provides direct support to the Saudi Vision 2030 in showing how the reformation of Riyadh into a global sports destination addresses the national goals of economic diversification, quality of life, and international recognition. Sustainable sport tourism! That is what happens when memorable experiences create an emotional attachment to ensure repeat visits that foster communities within households and neighbouring countries in the Middle East. Future research can apply the same model to other Saudi cities like Jeddah or Al-Ula for comparison of variation in image and attachment. A longitudinal design can capture how attachment develops over time and across different types of events. Deeper affective meanings, however, have to be explored qualitatively regarding place attachment from both international and domestic tourists. Tin summary, the study found that good perceptions about nature, infrastructure, culture, and urban components of Riyadh develop an individual's emotion toward the city and makes him/her a repeated visitor to the city. The strengthening of such perception-emotion-behavior cycles is a strategic pathway toward achieving the long-term vision of sustainable tourism leading to global city competitiveness advocated for by Riyadh and Saudi Arabia.

Funding

This work was supported through the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia [GRANT. KFU260040]

Acknowledgement

This work was supported through the Annual Funding track by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia.

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