



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Place Attachment and Destination Brand-Building Behaviour: Evidence from Pokhara Residents

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Abstract

Place attachment theory relates to the emotional and cognitive bonds people develop with a specific physical setting and is a key concept in environmental psychology. It is a popular concept in sustainable tourism development and destination branding behavior. This study aimed to explore the factors affecting destination brand-building behaviour of the residents of Pokhara through a quantitative study. A sample of 200 residents from Pokhara, Nepal, was used to conduct partial least squares (PLS) based structural equation modeling (SEM) for the test of proposed hypotheses. The study results revealed that place memory and affective attachment have a significant positive influence on destination brand-building behavior (DBBB). Furthermore, the longer the duration of residency was found to have a significant positive influence on DBBB compared to shorter residency. However, place identity, place dependence, and social bonding found no significant influence on DBBB. Furthermore, the result revealed that the dimensions of place attachment along with a dummy variable of duration collective explain 52.7 percent of the variation in DBBB. The findings indicate that destination brand-building behavior is primarily driven by emotional bonds and lived experience. The findings suggest that the destination management and local government should utilize residents with longer duration residency in branding campaigns by offering them a platform to share their emotional experiences.

Keywords: Affective attachment, brand-building, place dependence, place identity, place memory, social bonding

JEL Classification: Z32, M31, R23

Introduction

Tourism destinations increasingly compete not just on attractions and price, but on their ability to foster emotional bonds between people and places. This emotional bond, often called place attachment or destination brand attachment, is now seen as a strategic asset for destination branding, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability (Dwyer et al., 2019; Martins et al., 2023; Molinillo et al., 2022; Tsai, 2012; Veasna et al., 2013). Place attachment encompasses various dimensions such as place identity, place dependence, affective attachment, social bonding, and place memory, each contributing uniquely to residents' involvement in tourism and promoting the destination.

Place attachment is an emotional and cognitive bonds individuals develop with a specific location (Ramkissoon et al., 2013). It captures how much a destination feels like “home,” reflect who visitors are, and supports what they want to do, influencing loyalty, word of mouth, and advocacy among both tourists and residents (Arif et al., 2025; Chen & Dwyer, 2018; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021; Tsai, 2012; Vada et al., 2019; Zenker et al., 2017). Research shows that attachment grows from rich, memorable experiences, a credible and authentic place brand, and alignment between personal values and destination image (Chen et al., 2025; Karagiorgos et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2020; Martins et al., 2023; Molinillo et al., 2022; Rather et al., 2020; Shang & Luo, 2021; Shang et al., 2020; Vada et al., 2019; Veasna et al., 2013). These bonds then drive key behaviours such as revisits, positive recommendation, participation in tourism planning, and support for destination branding efforts (Arif et al., 2025; Chen & Dwyer, 2018; Chen & Segota, 2015; Gupta, 2024; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021; Shang & Luo, 2021; Tsai, 2012; Wong et al., 2022; Zenker et al., 2017).

The attachment to place can promote individual and community well-being,

environmental protection, and sustainable development. The attachment to place is a very important contributor to mental health as it offers stability, belongingness, and identity. Attachment to places has been correlated with less stress and greater life satisfaction. Scannell and Gifford (2010) point to the fact that place attachment meets core psychological needs (e.g. security, belongingness) in their “tripartite model” (person, process, place). Lewicka (2011) argues that place attachment fortifies social bonds, which act as the main countermeasures against loneliness and depression. Usually, the residents who have a strong attachment to their place are more inclined to take part in community activities which are conducive to the building of trust and cooperation. In their “systemic model,” Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) observed that the period of residence has a positive correlation with community participation. Manzo and Perkins (2006) are bringing attention to the role of place attachment as a strong motivator for the residents to work together on local matters, thus increasing social capital.

Mishra et al. (2010) showed that attachment to the place is a predictor of people's readiness to protect natural areas. Scannell and Gifford (2010) make a connection between place identity and environmental activism. Strongly attached communities often recover from disasters more quickly due to their common determination to rebuild. Cox and Perry (2011) focused on the communities affected by wildfires and found that place attachment was the main source of collective recovery efforts. Lewicka (2011) argues that planners must respect residents' attachments to avoid social fragmentation. Place attachment is thus a cornerstone of sustainable, resilient, and equitable communities, bridging individual well-being with collective action.

Residents are considered to be main stakeholders in destination branding since their perceptions and behaviors shape the image of the place and eventually its

authenticity (Zenker & Rütter, 2014). Strong place attachment supports and subsequently facilitates branding and sustainable tourism development efforts. More place identity and place dependence of the residents result in more endorsement of the destination brand, positive stories or word-of-mouth (WOM) about the destination, and participation in cultural conservation activities that aim to open up the destination for tourists (Stylidis et al., 2017). Residents with a high place attachment might be led to engage in activities that positively promote their destination through WOM. They serve as informal brand ambassadors, advertising good experiences and recommendations to visitors and potential tourists (Hosany et al., 2020).

The longer the stay, the more emotional bonding is created, moving from physical to social bonding, and the feeling of place is nurtured, which is the basis for destination branding. Destination brand love is a deep emotional attachment that is nurtured over a period of time, depending on how long an individual stays there. Time did not diminish the consequences of brand love for brand loyalty, but it did matter greatly in the formation of it for the sake of brand loyalty later on (Amaro et al., 2020). This emotional attachment resulting from a longer stay also strengthens the sense of place, which is considered very important in destination branding. Attributes such as nature and culture, which possibly form the basis of tourist discourses, are significantly emphasized during this process (Wong et al., 2022).

Pokhara is one of Nepal's most famous tourist destinations because of its extremely beautiful natural heritage. Lately, it has also been officially recognized as the tourism capital by the Nepal government. Most attachment-branding studies used samples from Australia, Europe, India, China, or other regions, not Himalayan cities like Pokhara (Chen & Dwyer, 2018; Gupta, 2024; Liu et al., 2020; Martins et al., 2023; Molinillo et al., 2022; Rather et

al., 2020; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021; Zenker et al., 2017; Zou et al., 2022). Existing Pokhara work is mainly exploratory, focusing on opportunities/challenges and proposing a branding framework rather than testing attachment-behaviour models quantitatively (Malla, 2024; Pahari, 2025). Empirical testing of how place attachment dimensions relate to brand equity, loyalty, advocacy and support for tourism in Pokhara's specific cultural and environmental context is lacking. Conceptual and empirical work shows residents' attachment shapes brand-building behaviors in other destinations (Chen & Dwyer, 2018; Chen & Segota, 2015; Rather et al., 2019; Styven et al., 2020). For Pokhara, research has largely centered on experts and entrepreneurs, with limited systematic resident-focused analysis (Malla, 2024; Pahari, 2025). Studies link brand experience, authenticity, self-expansion, and place attachment in heritage, adventure, and natural sites (Chen et al., 2025; Karagiorgos et al., 2023; Martins et al., 2023; Rather et al., 2020; Zou et al., 2022). Pokhara faces rapid urbanization, commercialization, and cultural commodification. In this context, an empirical study of how received authenticity, cultural transformation, and urban change in Pokhara influence residents' place attachment and brand-building behavior seems essential.

Literature Review

Place Attachment Theory

Place attachment emerged from mid-20th-century work on people-environment relationships. Geographers and social scientists in the 1970s began distinguishing *place* from abstract *space*. Tuan (1974) introduced the idea of *topophilia* (love of place), and Relph (1976) emphasized people's meaningful "sense of place." Around the same time, sociologists examined *community attachment*: for example, Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) found that length of residence and local

neighborhood ties were strong predictors of residents' attachment to their community. In psychology, Stokols and Shumaker (1981) and contemporaries began defining constructs like *place dependence* (functional attachment) and *place identity*. Early typologies by Riger and Lavrakas (1981) and others organized these ideas.

The 1990s saw the first major synthesis of these concepts. The edited volume *Place Attachment* (Altman & Low, 1992) consolidated environmental-psychology research on people-place bonds. Subsequent decades brought refined models and measurements: for example, Hidalgo and Hernández (2001) offered a conceptual framework and scale for place attachment, and Scannell and Gifford (2010) proposed a “tripartite” model (Person-Process-Place) to organize the varied definitions. By 2010, reviews (e.g. Lewicka 2011) noted a rapid expansion of place-attachment research across disciplines. Throughout its evolution, place attachment theory has drawn on both phenomenological geography (studying personal meanings of place) and environmental psychology (studying emotions and behavior). However, a fully unified *developmental* theory (how attachments form over a lifetime) is still an active area of research (Morgan 2010; Seamon 2014).

Place attachment is generally defined as the *affective bond between people and places*. For example, one summary notes that “place attachments are the positive bonds people form with places, arising from affective, behavioural, and cognitive ties between individuals or groups and their sociophysical settings” (Brown et al., 2012). In other words, place attachment involves emotions (feelings of love, comfort, or belonging), cognitive meanings, and behavioral or functional ties to specific locations. A useful organizing framework (the *Person-Process-Place* model) highlights three dimensions of attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010): who is attached (Person; individual vs. group), how the

attachment manifests (Process, including affect, cognition, and behavior), and what the attachment is to (Place characteristics).

Place Attachment Theory explains the emotional and functional bonds individuals develop with a place through dimensions such as place identity, place dependence, affective attachment, place memory, and social bonding. These bonds shape how individuals perceive, experience, and value a destination. When people feel strongly attached to a destination, they are more likely to engage in destination brand-building behavior such as positive word-of-mouth, recommending the destination, sharing experiences on social media, and even acting as informal ambassadors.

Empirical Review and Hypotheses

Strong place attachment and identity motivate residents to act as brand ambassadors, engage in brand-related behavior, and support tourism planning and development (Chen & Dwyer, 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Hay et al., 2021; Leicht et al., 2025; Puzi et al., 2025; Styven et al., 2020; Zhang & Xu, 2019; Zhao et al., 2022). Felling that “this is my place” boosts attachment and, in turn, opens “place citizenship” behavior such as helping, protecting, tolerating issues, and spreading positive word-of-mouth (Gautam, 2023; Puzi et al., 2025; Stylos et al., 2013; Zhang & Xu, 2019). When the place brand matches residents' self-image, place attachment increases and supports both retention such as “livelihood to stay” and ambassadorial roles (Styven et al., 2020; Strandberg, 2023). Similarly, strong place attachment comes up with the will to welcome tourists, support eco-friendly tourism projects, and protect the place's good name from bad publicity (Stylos et al., 2013; Zenker & Erfgen, 2014). Stylos et al., (2013) conducted a study and found that the stronger the residents' place attachment the more often they would engage in such brand-building activities as destination promotion, volunteering in community tourism events, and providing user-generated content.

Zenker and Erfgen (2014) pointed out that residents' place identity is the main factor in citizen-based brand equity and that, besides being a support, it also shapes and develops the destination's brand through ongoing co-creation processes. Based on the theoretical and empirical foundation, the researcher has developed a conceptual framework for the study where, residency duration is used as a categorical control variable (see *Figure 1*).

Place Identity and Destination Brand-Building Behavior

Place identity is a substructure of personal identity formed through everyday experiences, beliefs, feelings of belonging, and meaning attached to a place. Strong place identity and sense of place are considered critical to strategic destination branding, because they explain why residents engage with or disengage from branding activities (Hay et al., 2021). Residents with stronger place identity are more likely to show brand citizenship behavior, such as helping to improve visitor experience, correcting misunderstandings, supporting development programs, but place identity may not significantly increase brand ambassadorship behavior (i.e. external promotion) (Zhao et al., 2022). Conceptual work highlights place identity (as a dimension of place attachment) as a driver of positive word-of-mouth, participation in tourism activities, and ambassador behavior, especially when residents' self-image matches the place identity (Chen & Segota, 2015).

When residents or tourists perceived congruence between self and destination identity, they show more positive brand attitudes and ambassadorial behavior (Chen et al., 2020; Hay et al., 2021; Wassler et al., 2019). Destination brand identification in turn, predicts advocacy, loyalty, participation, and support for branding programs (Bose et al., 2021; Rather et al., 2020; Zenker et al., 2017). The existence of place identity gives birth to factors such as pride and loyalty, which are the main

contributors to the generation of WOM (Chen et al., 2014, 2018; Son et al., 2023).

In case the destination is important to residents, their ambassador behaviors will inform other individuals about the destination and participate in certain local tourism activities (Chen et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2024). Place identity fosters residents' pride and builds loyalty, encourages them to share positive word of mouth (Chen et al., 2014, 2018; Son et al., 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis was put forth on theoretical and empirical grounds.

H_1 : Place identity positively influences destination brand-building behavior.

Place Dependence and Destination Brand-Building Behavior

Place dependence involves the functional and utilitarian aspects of a place, such as meeting residents' needs and goals (Williams & Vaske, 2003). Residents who rely on the destination for economic benefits tend to support and advocate for its development (Blešić et al., 2022). Place dependence is important, but it has a weaker direct impact on WOM compared to place identity (Son et al., 2023; Sop & Kervankiran, 2022). Residents who depend on their destination for livelihood or lifestyle are more inclined to promote it. (Chen et al., 2014; Hu et al., 2019; Schlesinger et al., 2023). Also, people who feel a sense of belonging in the community and have benefited from tourism activities are more likely to approve the destination and recommend it to others (Schlesinger et al., 2023; Barbosa et al., 2024). Place dependence promotes the residents to get involved in brand-building practices that emphasize the strengths and special features of their place (Zahnow, 2023). Based on this empirical evidence, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H_2 : Place dependence positively influences destination brand-building behavior.

Affective Attachment and Destination Brand-Building Behavior

Affective attachment is an emotional attachment to a place, which has an impact on satisfaction and loyalty. This notion is an influential indicator of WOM as positive emotions lead to recommendations (Ge et al., 2022; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021; Sop & Kervankiran, 2022). Such emotional connection leaves the residents with the personal experiences and memories about the place that promotes online review activities and promotes the place through word of mouth (Chen et al., 2014; Zhang & Xu, 2019). The perceived greater gain of tourism is likely to encourage residents to participate in WOM, and this indicates the relevance of community attachment in destination promotion (Blasco López et al., 2020). A sense of duty is also established through emotional attachment, and it could inspire the residents to do what is good to improve the image of their community (Martins et al., 2023). Personal experience and memories are connected to the emotional attachment; it is a forceful provider because the residents reveal their feelings about the place (Chen et al., 2014, 2018). Based on this empirical evidence, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H₃: Affective attachment positively influences destination brand-building behavior.

Social Bonding and Destination Brand-Building Behavior

Social bonding involves interactions and relationships between persons and social networks inside a community that may increase the willingness of residents to participate in mutual brand-building activities (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Greater social ties will lead to collective promotional efforts, whereby residents work together to build the reputation of their destination (Chen et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2024). From a tourism marketing standpoint,

strong social ties within a community are conducive to collective promotion as residents embrace a sense of duty to market their destination (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017; Sop & Kervankiran, 2022; Zahnnow, 2023). Strong social bonds enable the residents to collaborate and communicate for successful branding exercises (Khairat & Marso, 2023). With strong social ties, communities collaborate to promote the destination by working together in the planning and execution of activities, sharing information, and so on (Wang et al., 2024; Schlesinger et al., 2023). Based on this empirical background, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H₄: Social bonding positively influences destination brand-building behavior.

Place Memory and Destination Brand-Building Behavior

The term place memory refers to the historical and cultural significance of a place, which can influence residents in brand-building activities. Positive memories motivate residents to narrate their experiences to draw visitors through word-of-mouth (Chen et al., 2014; Mandal et al., 2022; Zhang & Xu, 2019). Residents' memories of past experiences in their community influence their current attitudes toward tourism and their WOM behavior (González Reverté et al., 2024). Positive memories inspire residents to share experiences with viewers, attracting potential visitors to and enhancing the appeal of a destination (Chen et al., 2014; Zhang & Xu, 2019). Furthermore, residents who value the heritage of their community would assist in maintaining and promoting the community's distinct identity (Jayakody et al., 2024). Thus, residents holding positive expectations from the place more often will exhibit promotional behavior in attracting visitors and supporting local development (Chen et al., 2014; Hu et al., 2019). Based on this empirical foundation, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H_5 : Place memory positively influences destination brand-building behavior.

Residency Duration and Destination Brand-Building Behavior

The term place memory refers to the historical and cultural significance of a place, which can influence residents in brand-building activities. Positive memories motivate residents to narrate their experiences to draw visitors through word-of-mouth (Chen et al., 2014; Mandal et al., 2022; Zhang & Xu, 2019). Residents' memories of past experiences in their community influence their current attitudes toward tourism and their WOM behavior (González Reverté et al., 2024). Positive memories inspire residents to share experiences with viewers, attracting potential visitors to and enhancing the appeal of a destination (Chen et al., 2014; Zhang & Xu, 2019). Furthermore, residents who value the heritage of their community would assist in maintaining and promoting the community's distinct identity (Jayakody et al., 2024). Thus, residents holding positive expectations from the place more often will exhibit promotional behavior in attracting visitors and supporting local development (Chen et al., 2014; Hu et al., 2019). Based on this empirical foundation, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H_5 : Place memory positively influences destination brand-building behavior.

Residency Duration and Destination Brand-Building Behavior

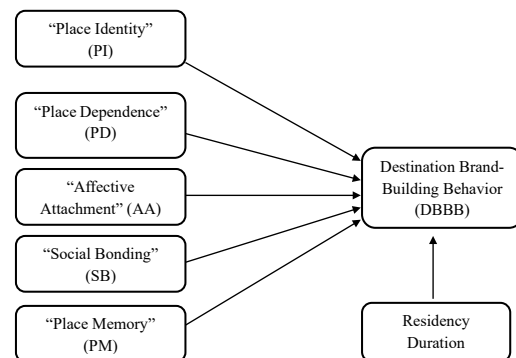
There is increased emotional attachment with a place through longer familiarity that changes to the physical to the social attachment. This shift is essential to the building of a strong sense of place that forms the basis of destination branding (Nejati and Mahdavi, 2016). Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) found out length of residence and the intensity of local social associations were important in the determination of the sense of community attachment of

residents. Emotional attachment that is created by increased length of stay creates a greater sense of place, which is essential in the branding of destinations. Developed emotional ties in the course of a greater stay might result in greater advocacy and favorable destination images that will contribute to a better brand image (Amaro et al., 2020; Le et al., 2024). Based on this literature, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H_{6a} : Individuals with longer residency duration exhibit higher destination brand-building behavior than those with shorter residency.

H_{6b} : Individuals with medium residency duration exhibit higher destination brand-building behavior than those with shorter residency.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Methods

This study was carried out in the Pokhara Metropolitan of Nepal. Pokhara is a fast growing urban area known as one of the most beautiful nature, tourist attractions, and cultural value. Being one of the largest metropolitan in the country, Pokhara is undergoing socioeconomic changes due to the development of tourism activities, infrastructural as well as the dynamics in community (Khatri et al., 2024; Shrestha, 2023). This unique mixture of urban and natural environments offers a suitable setting in the study of place attachment and brand-building behavior of residents.

Residents of Pokhara metropolitan were the population for this study. A power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009) to estimate minimum sample size required, based on the maximum number of predictors of an endogenous construct in the structural model assuming a significance level of 0.05, and a desired power of 0.95. The analysis indicated a total of 153 sample size is sufficient. Therefore, the use of 200 valid responses in the study has met the required criteria of sample size. The convenient sample technique was applied among the residents of Pokhara to collecting data. While convenience sampling may limit generalizability, it is most cost-effective and widely accepted in the modern social science research field (Ruhl, 2004). However, efforts were made to ensure heterogeneity in term of age, gender, education level, occupations, original residents, and migrated residents from various parts of Nepal to enhance representativeness as well as sampling was conducted at various times and locations of Pokhara.

The study adopted a quantitative approach and utilized a cross-sectional survey for data collection. Data were collected through self-administered structured questionnaire distributed in person and on an online platform. The constructs-related questionnaires were designed in a 7-point Likert scale format, where 1 = strongly disagree to a 7 = strongly agree. The utilization of 7-point scale improves the reliability and validity over a 5-point scale (Barnes et al., 1994) and provide better distribution of data (Churchill & Peter, 1984). Finstad (2010) also claimed that it gives more accurate results than the 5-point scales while measuring greater sensitivity and variability of respondents. The study utilizes established scales from previous research to measure the key constructs. The place attachment constructs consist of place identity, place dependence, place memory, affective attachment, and social bonding, which were adopted from

Chen et al. (2014a) and Kyle et al. (2005). Destination brand-building behavior comprises participation in community branding activities and destination word-of-mouth, which were adopted from Morhart et al.(2009), and were treated as a single construct in analysis. The questionnaire was pre-tested with 20 residents to ensure clarity, relevancy, and reliability. Minor adjustments were made based on feedback. The study constructs, operational definition, and measurement items are presented in Table 1.

Descriptive statistics were employed to provide an overview of respondents' characteristics and summarize the responses. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM is suited for exploratory research, small sample sizes, and complex models with latent variables. This consists of measurement model assessment, the measurement model was assessed in terms of reliability and validity, including indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), Fornell-Larcker Criteria, and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The structural model was evaluated using path coefficient, coefficient of determination (R^2), and effect size (f^2). Bias corrected and accelerated (BCA) method bootstrap with the 5000 subsample bootstrapping procedure was applied following Hari et al. (2017) recommendations. Additionally, residency duration was included as a categorical control variable and operationalized using dummy coding. Two dummy variables were created to represent medium-term (5-10 years) and long-term (more than 10 years) residency, with short-term (that is less than 5 years) serving as the reference category. These variables were included in the structural model to assess their influence on destination brand-building behavior.

Table 1*Operationalization of Constructs*

Construct	Operational definition	Code	Items
Place Identity	Place Identity refers to the degree to which individuals emotionally and psychologically associate themselves with a specific location.	PI1	“I identify strongly with Pokhara.”
		PI2	“I feel commitment to Pokhara.”
		PI3	“I feel that I can really be myself in Pokhara.”
		PI4	“Pokhara is very special to me.”
Place Dependence	Place Dependence refers to the functional attachment an individual has to a specific location.	PD1	“I prefer Pokhara to others for the activities that I enjoy.”
		PD2	“Pokhara is my favorite place to be.”
		PD3	“I really miss Pokhara when I am away from Pokhara for long time.”
Affective Attachment	Affective Attachment refers to the emotional bond individuals develop with a specific place.	AA1	“Pokhara means a lot to me.”
		AA2	“I feel a strong sense of belonging to Pokhara and its setting/facilities.”
		AA3	“I have an emotional attachment to Pokhara and its setting/facilities.”
		AA4	“I have a special connection with Pokhara and people here.”
Social Bonding	Social Bonding refers to the interpersonal connections and social ties that individuals maintain within a specific place.	SB1	“My friends/family would be disappointed if I were to move from Pokhara.”
		SB2	“If I were to leave Pokhara, I would lose contact with several friends.”
		SB3	“Many of my friends/family prefer Pokhara over other cities.”
Place Memory	Place Memory refers to the emotional and cognitive connection individuals develop with specific location based on unique, unforgettable, and personally meaningful past experiences that enhance their sense of attachment to the place.	PM1	“My experiences with Pokhara is unique.”
		PM2	“My experiences in Pokhara is unforgettable.”
		PM3	“My experiences in Pokhara make me feel loving Pokhara more.”
		PM4	“I feel connected to Pokhara due to my experiences here.”
Destination Brand Building Behavior	Destination Brand Building Behavior refers to individuals' voluntary and proactive efforts to promote, support, and enhance the image, reputation, and tourism performance of a specific location by sharing positive opinions, offering constructive suggestions, and engaging in favorable word-of-mouth communication within their community and social networks.	DBBB1	“I let my community know of ways to strengthen the image of Pokhara as a tourism destination.”
		DBBB2	“I make constructive suggestions to improve tourists' experience in Pokhara.”
		DBBB3	“If I have a useful idea on how to improve Pokhara's tourism performance, I share it with my community.”
		DBBB4	“I talk up Pokhara to people I know.”
		DBBB5	“I bring up Pokhara in a positive way in conversations I have with a friend and acquaintances.”
		DBBB6	“In social situations, I often speak favorably about Pokhara.”

Since the study used a cross-sectional survey and one questionnaire to collect data, common method bias (CMB) could be a concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To check for CMB, two methods were used. First, Harman's one-factor test was conducted by running exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with one factor. If a single factor explains less than 50% of the total variance, CMB is likely not an issue (Harman, 1976). The result showed 45.45% of the variance explained by one factor, which was below the threshold. Secondly, a full collinearity test via the variance inflation factor (VIF) was conducted as recommended by Kock (2015). All latent constructs were regressed on the remaining constructs, and VIF values were examined. All VIF values below were below the suggested threshold of 3.3 (*see Table 3*), indicating that CMB was not a serious concern in this study.

In Nepal, formal ethical approval from an institutional review board is not mandatory for social science research involving minimal risk to participants; therefore, ethical approval was not obtained. However, the research process adhered to the ethical principles strictly. Participation was

voluntary and the respondents were made well aware of the fact that they were free to withdraw at any time without repercussions. All information was gathered anonymously, and no personally identifiable information was documented, which ensured the privacy of the information.

Results and Discussion

A total of 200 respondents were surveyed during the study, and the research covered a wide range of demographic characteristics. Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents in various demographic variables. The respondents were mostly male with 75.5 percent of the total respondents and 24.5 percent were female. This situation happened due to the lower willingness of females to participate in the survey due to Nepalese family culture and their shy nature. The Ages of the respondents were classified under five groups. The highest percentage (31.0%), was in the 21-30 age category, and then the 31-40 age group, which consists of 26.0 percent.

Table 2

Respondent Profile According to Demographic Characteristics (n = 200)

Characteristic	n	%	Characteristic	n	%
Age			Gender		
Below 20	21	10.5	Male	151	75.5
21 – 30	62	31.0	Female	49	24.5
31 - 40	52	26.0	Place of Birth		
41 - 50	39	19.5	Baglung	12	6.0
Above 50	26	13.0	Gorkha	20	10
Education			Parbat	24	12
High School	30	15.0	Lamjung	19	9.5
Under Graduate	92	46.0	Monang	11	5.5
Graduate and above	78	39.0	Mustang	10	5.0
Residency Duration			Myagdi	9	4.5
≤ 5years	51	25.5	Nawalpur	13	6.5
5 – 10 years	71	35.5	Kaski	51	25.5
≥ 10 years	78	39.0	Syangja	14	7.0
			Tanahun	17	8.5

The age groups of 41-50 years (19.5%) and above 50 years were 13 percent. The last category was the youngest group (under 20 years), which constituted 10.5 percent. In matters of education, 46.0 percent of the respondents had a degree at the undergraduate level, with 39.0 percent having graduate-level education or higher. The rest of 15.0 percent had a high school education. The respondents had varying durations of residency in study destination. The largest group, 39.0 percent, had lived in the area for more than 10 years. A significant portion, 35.5%, had been residents for 5–10 years, while 25.5 percent had lived there for less than or equal to 5 years. Respondents originated from

various districts of Nepal, including study areas with the highest representation from Kaski (25.5%). Other migrated residents from different districts of Nepal such as Parbat (12.0%), Gorkha (10.0%), and Tanahun (8.5%). Syangja contributed 7.0%, while Nawalpur accounted for 6.5%. The remaining respondents hailed from Baglung (6.0%), Lamjung (9.5%), Manang (5.5%), Mustang (5.0%), and Myagdi (4.5%).

Measurement Model Assessment

In PLS-SEM, the measurement model (outer model) assessment ensures the reliability and validity of the measurement indicators (e.g., survey items) and constructs by conducting internal consistency reliability and validity tests.

Table 3
Reliability and Validity

Construct	Items	M	SD	λ	α	CR	AVE	VIF
A f f e c t i v e Attachment	AA1	5.88	0.85	0.85	0.85	0.90	0.69	2.70
	AA2	5.92	0.82	0.84				
	AA3	6.01	0.85	0.87				
	AA4	6.03	0.96	0.76				
Destination Brand Building Behaviour	DBBB1	5.99	0.78	0.76	0.90	0.92	0.67	2.67
	DBBB2	6.12	0.79	0.84				
	DBBB3	6.16	0.76	0.84				
	DBBB4	6.24	0.76	0.80				
	DBBB5	6.28	0.74	0.82				
	DBBB6	6.37	0.73	0.84				
Place Dependence	PD1	6.12	0.77	0.71	0.76	0.86	0.68	2.50
	PD2	5.95	0.90	0.88				
	PD3	5.96	1.00	0.87				
Place Identity	PI1	5.80	0.85	0.85	0.87	0.91	0.72	2.72
	PI2	5.63	0.94	0.85				
	PI3	5.91	0.86	0.86				
	PI4	6.08	0.83	0.83				
Place Memory	PM1	5.85	0.73	0.80	0.86	0.91	0.71	2.71
	PM2	5.92	0.84	0.85				
	PM3	6.02	0.82	0.86				
	PM4	6.15	0.79	0.85				
Social Bonding	SB1	5.34	0.94	0.70	0.58	0.78	0.55	2.66
	SB2	5.12	1.13	0.81				
	SB3	5.92	0.97	0.70				

Note. M = mean, SD = Standard deviation, λ = Factor loadings, α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = Composite reliability, AVE = Average variance extracted, VIF = Variance inflation factor.

Table 3 presents the results of the internal consistency reliability of the measurement scales of each construct. The internal consistency reliability test was conducted by using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, where 0.70 or more is assumed to be an acceptable threshold (Henseler et al., 2009). The composite reliability (CR) test results are assumed to be more reliable to measure internal consistency reliability in structural equation modeling and all constructs met the threshold ranging from 0.78 to 0.91. The Cronbach's alpha value of social bonding (0.58) was below the recommended threshold but it was not a serious concern in reliability because the CR value was 0.78 and the AVE value was 0.55. These results, therefore, indicated a good internal consistency reliability of measurement scales.

Construct validity assesses whether a set of measurement variables (indicators) actually represents the theoretical construct they are intended to measure. It ensures that the survey items or measurement scales accurately reflect the underlying concept.

To ensure construct validity, convergent validity and discriminant validity tests were applied. Factor loading and average variance extracted (AVE) values were examined to test the convergent validity. The convergent validity test assesses whether multiple indicators that are supposed to measure the same construct are actually related. The minimum acceptable threshold value for factor loading ($\lambda \geq 0.7$) and AVE is ≥ 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017) which was achieved (*see Table 3*), indicating convergent validity was maintained.

Discriminant validity test results assess whether constructs that are theoretically different are indeed distinct from each other. A construct demonstrates discriminant validity when it does not correlate too highly with other constructs and it is assessed either using Fornell-Larcker Criteria or Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). In the Fornell-Larcker Criteria the square root of AVE for a construct should be greater than its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which have been presented in Table 4 as bold diagonal values and HTMT ratio were less than 0.85 or 0.90 as a threshold value suggested by Henseler et al. (2015). These results indicate that discriminant validity was properly maintained for each construct.

Table 4

Discriminant Validity Test

Construct	AA	DBBB	PD	PI	PM	SB
AA	0.83	0.68	0.85	0.81	0.76	0.82
DBBB	0.60	0.82	0.64	0.61	0.75	0.70
PD	0.68	0.53	0.82	0.73	0.86	0.81
PI	0.70	0.55	0.61	0.85	0.67	0.69
PM	0.65	0.67	0.70	0.58	0.84	0.83
SB	0.57	0.51	0.54	0.49	0.59	0.74

Note. Bold faced and italicized diagonal values are square roots of AVE. Lower off-diagonal values are inter-construct correlations. Upper off-diagonal elements are HTMT values.

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model assessment aims to examine the model's predictive capabilities and the hypothesized relationships between constructs. The hypothesis test results for

the predictors of destination brand-building behavior (DBBB) among residents have been summarized in Table 5. The findings indicate that Affective Attachment ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 2.03$, $p < 0.05$) and Place Memory ($\beta =$

0.39, $t = 4.72$, $p < 0.05$) had a significant positive impact on DBBB, supporting hypotheses H3 and H5.

Similarly, the duration of residence influences DBBB. Residents who have lived in the destination for more than 10 years showed a significant positive influence on DBBB ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 2.65$, $p < 0.05$), as do those who have lived in the destination for

5–10 years ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 1.99$, $p < 0.05$) compared to people who have lived for five years or less. These findings suggest that longer residency enhances engagement in brand-building behavior and support the hypotheses H6a and H6b. However, Place Identity (H1), Place Dependence (H2), and Social Bonding (H4) did not show significant effects on DBBB ($p > 0.05$), leading to the rejection of these hypotheses.

Table 5
Structural Model Path Coefficients and Effect Size

Hypo.	Path	β	SE	t-statistic	P-value	LCI 2.50%	UCI 97.50%	Effect Size f^2
H1	PI -> DBBB	0.03	0.09	0.34	0.736	-0.145	0.207	0.00
H2	PD -> DBBB	-0.01	0.10	0.14	0.891	-0.205	0.177	0.00
H3	AA -> DBBB	0.19	0.09	2.03*	0.042	0.001	0.360	0.03
H4	SB -> DBBB	0.11	0.07	1.60	0.109	-0.031	0.245	0.02
H5	PM -> DBBB	0.39	0.08	4.72***	0.000	0.226	0.547	0.13
H6a	D > 10 yrs -> DBBB	0.22	0.08	2.65**	0.008	0.058	0.392	0.04
H6b	D 5-10 yrs -> DBBB	0.146	0.07	1.99*	0.047	-0.004	0.291	0.02

R-squared DBBB = 0.527,

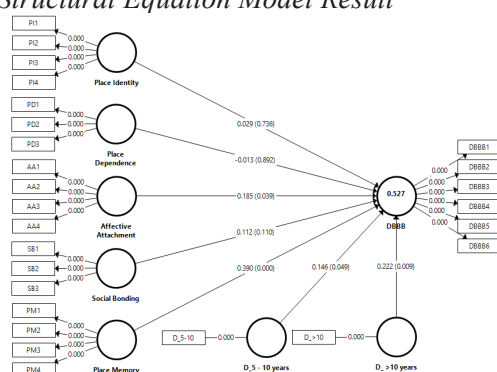
$p < 0.001$,

$Q^2 = 0.34$

Note. $N=200$. Bootstrap samples = 5000, Confidence interval method (Bias corrected accelerated (BCA) method. LCI = Lower Confidence Interval, UCI = Upper Confidence Interval.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 2
Structural Equation Model Result



Hair et al. (2013) suggested in scholarly research that R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 for endogenous latent variables can, as a rough rule of thumb, be respectively described as substantial, moderate or weak. In this study, the R^2 value was 0.527

implied that the place attachment construct, place identity, place dependence, affective attachment, social bonding, place memory and duration dummy variables collectively explain 52.7% variation in DBBB, which is a moderate impact. And the Q^2 value 0.34 reveals that the model has good predictive relevance since the Q^2 values are greater than 0. It implies that the model has a strong predictive power out of the samples to the endogenous construct based on the relationships identified in the model.

The effect size (f^2) was assessed to determine the relative contribution of each predictor to destination brand-building behavior (DBBB). According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, an f^2 value of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represents small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

The results indicate that Place Memory (H5) has the largest effect on DBBB ($f^2 = 0.13$), suggesting a moderate effect size. However, all other predictors exhibited small or negligible effect sizes; Affective Attachment (H3) ($f^2 = 0.03$) and Social Bonding (H4) ($f^2 = 0.02$) showed small and insignificant contributions. Duration of residence had small effect sizes, with more than 10 years (H6a) \rightarrow DBBB ($f^2 = 0.04$) and 5–10 years (H6b) \rightarrow DBBB ($f^2 = 0.02$). Place Identity (H1) and Place Dependence (H2) had negligible effects ($f^2 < 0.01$) (see Table 5).

Discussion

The significant effect of affective attachment highlights the role of emotional bonds in fostering destination brand-building behavior. Residents who feel affection, pride, or happiness toward the destination are more likely to engage in brand advocacy. This finding aligns with studies conducted by Chen et al. (2018), Martins et al. (2023), Ge et al. (2022), Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin (2021), and Son and Kervankiran (2022). The finding revealed that place memory is a stronger predictor of destination brand-building behavior of the residents, which highlights the power of nostalgia and lived experience. It indicates that residents with meaningful memories of place (past life experiences, cultural events) are emotionally invested and act as organic ambassadors of the destination. This finding supports the studies of Chen et al. (2014), Mandal et al. (2022), Zhang and Xu (2019), and Hu et al. (2019). Similarly, longer duration of the residency showed a significant influence on destination brand-building behavior. These results revealed that the longer the duration of stay at a destination, the stronger the attachment of residents with the place that encourage for the active brand advocacy due to deep-rooted familiarity and sustained emotional ties. This finding align with the studies of Amaro et al (2020), Kasarda and

Janowitz (1974), Le et al (2024), and Nejati and Mahdavi (2016).

However, place identity, place dependence, and social bonding were not significant influencers of destination brand-building behavior. The lack of significant contribution of place identity challenges conventional wisdom about functional and symbolic place attachment. Place identity such as “I identify strongly with the destination” may not translate into advocacy unless paired with emotional triggers. This finding supports the findings of Zhao et al. (2022), but contrasts with the study of Base et al., (2021), Chen et al (2018), Rather et al., (2020), Son et al (2023), Wang et al (2024), and Zenker and Erfgen (2014). This might be due to mismatch between self-image and destination identity (Chen et al., 2020; Hay et al., 2021; Wassler et al., 2029). Similarly, place dependence, such as “I rely on this destination for my needs,” reflects transactional relationships rather than genuine advocacy motives or might indicate that residents do not depend on the destination for their livelihood. This finding supports the study of Son et al (2023), Sop and Kervankiran (2022) but disagrees with the findings of Blesic et al (2022), Chen et al (2014), Hu et al (2019) and Zahnow (2023). Additionally, the weak and non-significant effect of social bonding suggests that social networks alone do not drive destination brand-building behavior. While social ties foster community belonging, they may not directly motivate residents to promote the destination externally, or residents do not have strong social bonding at the place. This result did not support the findings of Chen et al (2024), Jeuring and Haartsen (2017), Khirat and Marso (2023), Son and Kervankiran (2022), Wang et al (2024), and Zahnow (2023). But support the idea that social network and identity alone do not guarantee residents will promote the destination externally; instrumental benefits, brand commitment, and psychological ownership are also needed (Chen & Dwyer, 2018; Han et al., 2022; Zhang & Xu, 2019;

Zhao et al., 2022)

Moreover, the dominance of personal memory contrasts with studies prioritizing social bonding or place identity in community-driven branding. This divergence may stem from the unique cultural or demographic context of the study (e.g., destinations with rich historical or personal significance). And the non-significance of social bonding conflicts with research emphasizing community collaboration in destination branding. This could reflect fragmented social networks or a lack of platforms for residents to collectively advocate for the destination.

Conclusion

The paper is a rigorous investigation of the factors behind the destination brand-building behavior (DBBB) of residents with subtle theoretical and practical implications. The results show that Affective Attachment and Place Memory became the most significant predictors of DBBB and functional or social attachments have a minor role. These findings highlight that emotional attachments (e.g., pride, nostalgia) and experience (e.g., cultural involvement, childhood memories) of residents are imperative to the development of organic brand advocacy. This criticizes traditional frameworks in which place attachment (e.g., dependence/place identity) is primarily functional or symbolic and is consistent with the new literature on the importance of autobiographical narratives in place marketing. Equally, the considerable impact of extended lengths of residence brings out a time aspect to the brand-building behavior. The long-term residents who have emotional and experience roots are the true ambassadors, whereas the new residents do not have the attachment to perform proactive advocacy. This supports the argument that brand loyalty is a cumulative process that develops through the history of living and prolonged engagement. The rejection of Place identity (H1), Place dependent (H2)

and Social bonding (H4) suggests that the factors may not directly exercise their influence but rather mediate through any other factors, such as cultural values or economic incentives, to influence DBBB. As an illustration, although social bonding may be used to enhance cohesiveness within the society, it may not yield outward promotion unless an excellent emotional stimulus.

The research paper emphasizes that emotional attachment, such as pride and nostalgia, and experiential factors, such as cultural engagement are essential towards creating organic brand promotion among locals. This calls into question the traditional models that single out functional or symbolic attachments with the argument that destination branding should give more importance to emotional attachment of the residents. The long-term residents, as they are more tied to the area, will serve as true ambassadors, and the more recent residents might not have the attachment required to become an active advocate. This implies branding strategies should engage long-term residents and consider how cultural or economic factors might mediate the influence of other attachments. Future research could examine how these findings vary across different cultures, distinguishing between local and temporary residents. In this study only 200 heterogeneous sample have used which may be a limitation of small sample size, larger, diverse samples could validate the model, and comparative studies with visitors could provide a broader perspective. Since place identity (H1) and social bonding (H4) were rejected as direct predictors, researchers should examine mediating mechanisms (e.g., cultural pride, economic incentives) that might activate their influence on DBBB. Exploring antecedents of place citizenship behavior and the impact of leadership styles could also enhance understanding. Additionally, longitudinal study may provide more insight into the residents' perspective regarding destination branding behavior.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to this manuscript.

Ethical Compliance

This study used the secondary sources of data. We declare that the study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical standards.

Consent for Publication

"Not applicable"

Plagiarism and AI Use

The manuscript is free from plagiarism and improper use of AI-generated content. Any permitted use of AI tools was limited to language support and has not replaced the original scholarly contribution.

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