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The Effects of Thermal Facilities, Place Dependence, and Destination Image on Revisit Intention: An Application in Eynal Hot Springs*

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Abstract

Throughout history, the health benefits of hot springs have drawn millions of individuals globally. However, given today's tourist profile, determining the re/visit intention of tourists requires a more complex process than simply evaluating the benefits of hot springs. Thus, the study aims to find out the effects of thermal facilities, place dependence, and destination image on the revisit intention of tourists. Furthermore, the mediating role of destination image between thermal facilities and revisit intention as well as place dependence and revisit intention is aimed to be investigated. Accordingly, quantitative research methods have been utilized in the study. Adapting convenience sampling technique, data was obtained from 201 tourists visiting Eynal Hot Springs. The findings indicated that thermal facilities and place dependence had no direct effects on revisit intention. However, destination image mediated the relationship between place dependence and revisit intention. The study findings are discussed in detail. Furthermore, theoretical and practical implications are highlighted for both practitioners and researchers.

Keywords: *Thermal facilities, place dependence, destination image, revisit intention, thermal tourism*

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1. Introduction

Throughout history, thermal springs have been the subject of attention. As an alternative form of health tourism, thermal springs have been around since ancient times. Treating illnesses, refreshment and improving health are the main motivations of thermal springs (Tsiftelidou & Christodoulou, 2019). Thermal tourism combines rich underground resources use with recreational and entertainment activities, as well as the recovery, protection, and enhancement of health. It has the potential to attract and host visitors throughout the year, eliminating the seasonal characteristics of mass tourism, making it extremely important for tourism planning. Being one of the health tourism sub-categories, it allows the use of mineral waters, mud and steam-containing minerals that naturally reach the earth and are beneficial to health, for health purposes, as well as the use of existing attractive elements of the destination (Kozak et al., 2015). The main components of thermal tourism are springs that bring underground water to the earth's surface. Cohen (2008) emphasises that hot springs promote treatment, rehabilitation, and relaxation. Thermal springs are the terms used to describe the facilities built around them. The health benefits of hot springs contribute significantly to the area's popularity among visitors. At the same time, tourists who visit that area value experiences like nature immersion (Yen et al., 2018).

In destinations with thermal facilities, the health benefits of these resources, the quality of the water, and the destination's treatment units and cure centers are prominent (Aymankuy et al., 2012). The potential of thermal tourism to be developed as an alternative to mass tourism is often associated with the characteristics of the destination, as evidenced in the literature (Aklanoğlu, 2008; Zengin & Eker, 2016). In the literature, studies focus on several key issues, including destination carrying capacity (Bostan, 2020), destination infrastructure and superstructure facilities (Duman & Kozak, 2010; Gül & Gül, 2016), attraction elements, thermal facilities (Brandão et al., 2021; Dirican, 2022), and the attitude of local people (Çetin et al., 2021).

Cohen (2008) mentions that the rise of the thermal tourism sector reflects humans' demand for physical relaxation in a complex global context. However, the quantity of studies on the vital topic demonstrates that it is an underappreciated area of tourism research, as Kusdibyo (2022) emphasizes. It is postulated that the international literature has witnessed a decline in the intensity of studies conducted on the subject in recent years, largely due to the notable prominence of medical tourism within the broader domain of health tourism. Yet, it is anticipated that thermal tourism and thermal tourism destinations need further research. With a natural potential that might serve as an alternative for mass tourism, it is critical to dig deep to learn more about the revisit intention of guests in thermal tourism destinations. Furthermore, it is important to note that specific amenities of a destination may influence place dependence, which can be an influential factor in revisit intention. Moreover, destination image can also be an important contributor to revisit intention. Accordingly, the main aim of the research is to investigate the effects of thermal facilities, place dependence and destination image on revisit intention in a theoretically built model within the thermal tourism framework. Given the scarcity of research on the aforementioned relationships, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

In this section, thermal tourism, place dependence and destination image concepts and hypothesis development process are explained.

2.1. Thermal Tourism

Modern life causes many stressors in a variety of settings, including work, school, and even at home, requiring that people take time away from these stressors in order to balance their well-being. Thermal springs are essential components of health tourism, aiming to improve the guests' well-being. It provides both emotional and physical benefits to visitors (Brandão et al., 2021).

Thermal tourism also referred to as hot spring tourism in the literature, constitutes a tourism movement and encompasses the utilisation of thermal waters emerging from the earth for purposes of health and recreation (Taş, 2012). Thermal tourism is a form of tourism that utilises thermal waters for recreational and therapeutic purposes. It encompasses a range of techniques, including thermo-mineral water bathing, drinking, inhalation, mud bathing, and other supportive treatments such as climate cure, physical therapy, rehabilitation, exercise, psychotherapy, and diet (Özdemir, 2015). According to Sandıkcı (2008), thermal tourism refers to people leaving their homes to improve their health, maintain a healthy lifestyle, or enjoy a health-oriented vacation. Thermal tourism facilities provide services to meet the demands of tourists during their stay. Turhan (2011), on the other hand, defines thermal tourism as a tourism type that occurs when people purchase services for the health purposes, accommodation, rest and participation in recreational activities from the enterprises established around the resources that reach the earth in a natural way. As the definitions indicate, the concept of thermal tourism encompasses not only the health benefits associated with thermal waters but also tourism activities with a holistic perspective.

The fact that mass tourism gains momentum in specific seasons or it has a seasonal characteristic, has led to the search for alternatives to mass tourism (Akkuş & Korkmaz, 2022). In this regard, it is postulated that thermal tourism, which is quite similar to mass tourism in terms of development potential, has emerged as a prominent alternative by differentiating itself from other tourism types. Türkiye gives a special importance to the thermal tourism. Türkiye Tourism Strategy 2023 Action Plan (2007-2023) suggests that thermal tourism may play an essential role in diversifying the country's tourism industry (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007). Furthermore, in Republic of Türkiye 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, it is clearly expressed that thermal tourism is one of the tourism types which can be a significant contributor of country's competitiveness and its market share (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2024).

2.1.1. Thermal Facilities

Thermal tourism represents a significant component of the country's tourism industry, particularly in terms of diversification strategies. The abundance of subterranean resources is a significant factor contributing to the prominence of thermal tourism. Türkiye's geological structure endows it with a wealth of thermal resources, making it the most promising country in Europe in this regard. Türkiye's thermal resources are ranked seventh in the world and first in Europe (Wellness GoTürkiye, 2025). The country's suitability for the use of underground resources for curative purposes and high flow rate differentiate it from other countries, conferring an advantage in the context of thermal tourism (Tavşan, 2012).

In their study on Gönen Hot Springs, Aymankuy et al. (2012) identified thermal facilities as a significant factor influencing satisfaction levels. The researchers also identified thermal facilities as a discrete factor in the scale they developed. The term "thermal facilities" encompasses a range of factors, including the properties of the thermal water, the therapeutic quality of the thermal water, and the equipment and qualifications of the personnel applying the treatments. In this context, in order for a location to be considered a thermal destination, the characteristics of the thermal water must be given due consideration. There has been little research that focuses on the relationship between thermal facilities and revisit intention. Silvestri et al. (2017) mentioned that technical quality, including thermal facilities had an impact on visitors' satisfaction that may also influence the revisit intention in the long run. Similarly, Albayrak and Örnek (2017) determined that thermal facilities had an effect on revisit intention of tourists.

Accordingly, it is assumed that:

H1: Thermal facilities have significant positive effects on revisit intention.

2.2. Place Dependence

Place dependence is a significant component of place attachment. An interdisciplinary subject, place attachment is an environmental psychology-based phenomenon that is frequently researched in the

tourism literature to understand human-space relations and to determine a more effective road map (Dwyer et al., 2019). Place attachment, an extension of attachment theory (Line & Hanks, 2019), is used to describe the relationship between an individual and a specific location. Williams et al. (2013) define place attachment by focusing on the strength with which people are attached to a location. According to the researchers, place attachment attempts to distinguish between the services provided by the location to which people feel attached and the emotional bonds and relationships they have created. Place attachment is the result of any interactions that lead to people developing feelings for a place as a result of physical and social interaction with it (Low & Altman, 1992). It is considered a positive factor in terms of a destination's success (Beckman et al., 2013). As a critical component of place attachment, place dependence has been evaluated as a distinct phenomenon in recent studies (Prayag & Grivel, 2018; Hamid et al., 2021). Place dependence is defined as a connection to a certain location based on that location's ability to meet one's expectations and goals (Williams et al. 1992). It encompasses the functional aspects and occurs when a specific location's surroundings and amenities fulfil the visitors' needs. Williams and Roggenbuck (1989) argue that place dependence is particularly important for recreational purposes. As a result, it demonstrates the significance of the resource for the intended activity. Literature indicates that place attachment is a predictor of revisit intention (Isa et al., 2019; Peng et al., 2023; Uşaklı, 2022). As a component of place attachment, it is assumed that:

H2: Place dependence has a significant positive effect on revisit intention.

2.3. Destination Image

Destination image is defined as a person's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular place (Crompton, 1979). The major focus of destination image is the general impression of individuals about a specific place (Chiu et al., 2016). Since it is a vital factor in travel behaviour and decision-making, it has received extensive attention in destination management and marketing research (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). According to Gallarza et al. (2002), destination image is a multifaceted concept. Furthermore, it is multidimensional and subjective. Because images of a specific destination involve one's perception of its inhabitants, businesses, and other visitors, they are expected to be highly subjective.

In order to find out the effect of destination image on tourists' revisit intention, it is crucial to consider other factors simultaneously due to its high complexity. Literature gives insights about the relationship between destination image and visit intention (Kim et al., 2012; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Tosun et al., 2015; Öztürk & Şahbaz, 2017). Chew and Jahari (2014) examined the relationships between revisit intention and destination image in risky destinations. According to them, destination image had an effect on the revisit intention of tourists. However, with a theoretically framed model covering the perceived risk as an important variable, researchers revealed that especially in risky destinations, it is important to develop strategies considering perceived risks of tourists. Chen and Funk (2010) also formed a theoretical model to investigate the relationship between visit intention and destination image in sports events destinations. In their study, it was found that destination image is an important predictor of revisit intention. However, it was highlighted that tourists' satisfaction and positive experiences had a substantial effect on revisit intention of tourists in a specific sports event tourism destination. When considering the thermal tourism destinations, Timur (2018) determined a strong correlation between destination image and revisit intention of thermal tourists. Yalman (2023) conducted a similar research and it was determined that destination image was a strong predictor of revisit intentions in thermal tourism destinations. Lastly, Shaleha et al. (2024) concluded that destination image had a strong influence on revisit intention of thermal tourists.

Considering the mentioned studies, it is assumed that:

H3a: Destination image has a significant positive effect on revisit intention.

Literature has indicated that destination image can be a strong predictor of revisit intention (Kim et al., 2012; Kanwel, 2019). Furthermore, there are studies investigating the mediating effect of destination image

(Chew & Jahari, 2014; Timur, 2018). Since thermal facilities can be evaluated of the functional facilities of a specific location, besides place dependence is correlated to functional facilities such as environmental and physical amenities, it can be assumed that:

H3b: Destination image mediates the relationship between thermal facilities and revisit intention.

H3c: Destination image mediates the relationship between place dependence and revisit intention.

The research model with the hypotheses developed is exhibited in Figure 1.

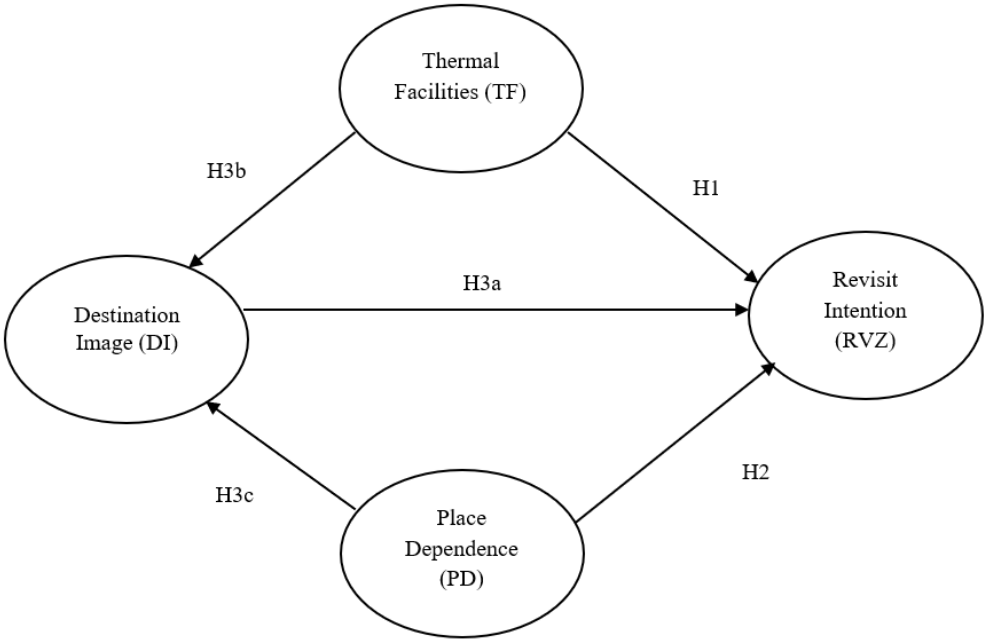

Figure 1. Research Model

3. Methodology

In the study, quantitative research methods were used to determine the effects of thermal facilities (TF), place dependence (PD), and destination image (DI) on revisit intention (RVZ). To prevent common method bias, participants were notified that their self-reported data would be kept anonymous and utilized solely for scientific study purposes. Furthermore, Harman's one-factor analysis was conducted to check the common method bias. That is consistent with the 50% threshold established by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Distribution normality, validity, and reliability were tested. First, data was inserted into the IBM SPSS Statistics 27 program. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM) were used as part of a process-based technique. To test the measures, CFA was performed first, followed by SEM to determine the correlations between variables. SEM proved an effective and powerful statistical tool for investigating structural invariance (Hair et al., 2009).

3.1. Sample and Procedure

Data was obtained from the participants visiting Eynal Hot Springs between June and November 2024. Located in Simav, Kütahya, Eynal Hot Springs are especially used for [†]balneotherapy. The hot water source is 163 C° and the hot spring water is 70-80 C° (Kütahya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025). It has therapeutic elements approved by the Ministry of Health (Kılıç & Kılıç, 2009). A questionnaire was used to collect demographic information from respondents, such as gender, age, educational background, marital status, reason for visiting the hot spring, length of stay, and frequency of visits. In the second section, four scales adapted from literature were used. Data were gathered using a

[†] *"Balneotherapy: The term refers to the use of thermomineral waters, peloids, gasses, and other natural therapeutic compounds for bathing, drinking, and inhaling" (Çelik, 2019).*

self-administered survey. Using a convenience sampling technique, 220 questionnaires were collected. Questionnaires with missing or incorrect data were deleted, leaving only 201 for further analysis. Various approaches for determining the sample size are indicated in the literature. Wolf et al. (2013) clearly state that the sample size may vary. According to Stevens (2002), the optimal sample size may be 5–20 participants for each questionnaire item. Additionally, Cohen and Cohen (1983) claim that a minimum of 10 participants are sufficient for each item. Similarly, Schreiber et al. (2006) also recommend a minimum of 10 cases per estimated parameter. The sample size in this study meets the criteria of Stevens (2002), Cohen and Cohen (1983), and Schreiber et al. (2006). Table 1 shows the demographic data of the respondents.

Table 1. Respondents' Profile

Demographic Statistics (N=201)		f	%	Demographic Statistics (N=201)		f	%
Age	18-25	26	12.94	**Reason for Visit**	Relaxation	61	30.35
	26-33	29	14.43		Health	106	52.74
	34-41	47	23.38		Entertainment	31	15.42
	42-49	36	17.91		Other (business)	3	1.49
	50+	63	31.34	**Length of Stay**	1-7 days	133	66.17
Gender	Female	100	49.75		8-14 days	52	25.87
	Male	101	50.25		15-21 days	9	4.48
Marital Status	Single	70	34.83		22 days / more	7	3.48
	Married	131	65.17				
Educational Background	Elementary	35	17.41	**Frequency of Visit**	First	70	34.83
	High School	73	36.32		Second	53	26.37
	Associate degree	44	21.89		Third or more	78	38.80
	Bachelor degree	41	20.40				
	Postgraduate degree	8	3.98				

3.2. Scales

The study designed the find out the relationships among variables. Thus, a survey instrument with two sections was designed including four different scales adopted from the literature. TF was adapted from Aymankuy et al.'s (2012) study. PD was adapted from Williams and Vaske (2003). To measure DI, the modified version created by Kusdibyo (2022) utilizing the studies of Chen and Tsai (2007) and Chi and Qu (2008) was used. Lastly, RVZ was measured by adapting the studies in the literature (Koç, 2022). The scales were 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

4. Findings

Findings of the study are explained below.

4. 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To ensure that the obtained data was consistent with the original conception, CFA was performed without meddling in the initial phase using IBM AMOS Version 24. Using 18 items and four factors model, the preliminary CFA results suggested that the model did not fit the data well (CMIN/DF: 1.958; GFI: .881; AGFI: .842; IFI: .897; TLI:.875; CFI: .895; RMSEA: .069). In the evaluation process, standardized factor loadings and modification indices were considered. There are various approaches for the minimum factor loadings in the literature. According to Hair et al. (2009), the minimum factor loading for each item is < 0.4 with a sample size of 200. Thus, two items from TF (TF1 and TF5) were deleted. Before deleting each item, the analysis was repeated, and modification indices were taken into consideration. The final model goodness of fit scores was CMIN/DF: 1.382; GFI: .930; AGFI: .900; IFI: .966; TLI: .957; CFI: .966; RMSEA: .044, indicating sufficient convergence validity and fit (Hu and Bentler, 1998). Additionally, the factor loadings of TF (TF2: .667; TF3: .773; TF4: .698), PD (PD1: .747; PD2: .685; PD3: .697; PD4: .652), DI (DI1: .538;

DI2: .714; DI3: 757; DI4: .544; DI5: .468), and RVZ (RVZ1: .802; RVZ2: .752; RVZ3: .676; RVZ4: .739) were within acceptable values. The Cronbach alpha values were calculated as TF: 0.76, PD: 0.79; DI: 0.72; RVZ: 0.81. In order to ensure reliability, CR values of all factors were above the threshold of 0.7 (TF: .756; PA: .789; DI: .744; RVI: .832). Average Variance Extraction (AVE) was also considered (TF: .510; PA: .494; DI: .376; RVI: .553). However, there are some concerns related to AVE values. Studies underline that CR values can be regarded as adequate for reliability alone (Malhotra and Dash, 2011), and the discriminant validity can also be tested through Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) analysis (Henseler et al., 2015) the discriminant validity was retested with HTMT analysis. According to HTMT analysis results, there are no warnings. All constructs were under the threshold of 0.9. Thus, further SEM analyses were conducted.

4.2. Testing Hypotheses

After confirming the validity of the measurement model, the structural model was examined in the following stage. The theoretically generated model was evaluated, and fit indices indicated good fit (CMIN/DF: 1.382; GFI: .930; AGFI: .900; IFI: .966; TLI: .957; CFI: .966; RMSEA: .044). Thus, means, standard deviations of each factor and correlations among factors were tested and obtained results were demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Constructs

Variables	*TF*	*PA*	*DI*	*M*	*SD*
TF	-			4.37	.605
PD	.582**	-		4.42	.588
DI	.520**	.550**	-	4.51	.470
RVZ	.326**	.371**	.438**	4.68	.455

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) (*TF*: Thermal facilities; *PD*: Place Dependence *DI*: Destination Image, *RVZ*: Revisit Intention; *M*: Mean, *SD*: standard Deviation)

According to Table 2, TF, PD, DI and RVZ were correlated (p< .001). Looking at the details, TF was correlated to PD (r=.582, p< .001), DI (r=520, p< .001) and RVZ (r=.326, p< .001). Furthermore, PD was correlated to DI (r=.550, p< .005) and RVZ (r=.371, p< .001). DI also correlated to RVZ (r=.437, p< .001).

SEM was used to analyze direct and mediating effect models (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996). According to the SEM analysis results, the path linking TF to RVZ (β=.005, p < 0.05) (H1), The path linking PD to RVZ (β=.160, p < 0.05) (H2) were not found significant. Thus, H1 and H2 were not supported. However, the path linking DI to RVZ (β=.507, p < 0.05) was found significantly positive. Then, H3a was supported by the research data. The results are given in Table 3. In the study, Baron and Kelly (1986), a bootstrapping resampling technique was also employed to determine the mediating effects of DI (H3b-H3c). The value for bootstrapping was used as 500 samples with 95% confidence intervals. According to the obtained results the mediating effect of DI between TF and RVZ asserted by H3b was rejected since the lower (-.023) and upper values (.451) contains zero. However, the mediating effect of DI between PD and RVZ (H3c) was supported (lower: .029- upper: .604).

Table 3. The Summary of the Tests

Hypothesis	*Paths*	*Paths Coefficients*	*p*	*Outcome*
H1	TF→RVZ	.005	.998	Not supported
H2	PD→RVZ	.160	.312	Not supported
H3a	DI→ RVZ	.507	.008*	**Supported**
H3b	TF→DI→RVZ	.127	.088	Not Supported
H3c	PA→DI→RVZ	.170	.028*	**Supported**

Table 4. Direct and Indirect Effect Results

Dependent Variable RVZ	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Independent Variables			
TF	.000	.127	.127
PD	.165	.170	.335
DI	.391*	-	.391*
R^2=.27			
Dependent Variable DI	**Direct Effect**	**Indirect Effect**	**Total Effect**
Independent Variables			
TF	.325*	-	.325*
PD	.434*	-	.434*
R^2=.51			

*p<0.05 (TF: Thermal facilities; PD: Place Dependence DI: Destination Image, RVZ: Revisit Intention)

The direct and indirect effects demonstrated that TF and PD did not direct effects on RVZ. However, DI had a direct effect on RVZ. Furthermore, TF and PD had direct effects on DI.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study is intended to investigate the effects of thermal facilities, place dependence and destination image on revisit intention. Moreover, the mediating role of destination image between thermal facilities and revisit intention and also between place dependence and revisit intention aimed to be examined. The results indicated that thermal facilities had no direct effects on revisit intention. This can be attributed to the quality of the thermal facilities. The facilities may be limited to accommodation, bathing, and swimming pools. Because there are many similar hot springs in the region, the thermal facilities of the hot spring may not be of particular significance to the guests' revisit intentions. Moreover, the place dependence didn't have a direct effect on revisit intention. Studies in the literature indicate that place dependence is a predictor of revisit intention (Isa et al., 2019; Hamid et al., 2021). However, the study finding can be explained by the abundance of hot springs in the region where the data was obtained. Furthermore, place dependence is connected to the environmental infrastructure. The quality of the infrastructure, in other words, the physical and functional facilities of the region is critical for visitors to create social interactions which might lead to place dependence (Ujang, 2010). Eynal Hot Springs is located in a small town which has limited physical and functional facilities to offer for the guests. So, it can be stated that place dependence may not be a direct factor influencing the revisit intention of the guests.

The findings also indicated that destination image had an influence on revisit intention. Furthermore, destination image had a full mediating role between place dependence and revisit intention. There are studies indicating that destination image is a strong predictor of revisit intention (Chen &Tsai, 2007; Allameh et al., 2015; Metin & Kalay, 2021; Yalman, 2023). Besides, some studies highlight the mediating role of destination image (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Kanwel et al., 2019). The finding obtained in the study can be explained by the relationship between place dependence and destination image. Through destination image, place dependence influences revisit intention, supporting the concept that destination image is one of the requirements that molds place attachment which also covers place dependence (Jeong & Kim, 2019). Some researchers believe that destination image is the most important factor in determining place attachment (Fan & Qui, 2014) which can also indicate the mediating role of destination image.

The study findings have some theoretical contributions. No study has been reached which includes thermal facilities, destination image, place dependence and revisit intention together in a theoretically formed model. This study is an attempt to fill the gap in the literature. Second, the study findings have demonstrated that destination image is a factor in explaining the revisit intention of guests in thermal hot

springs. Furthermore, findings indicated that place dependence influences revisit intention through destination image which also gives insights to the researchers in the future.

The study findings have critical practical contributions. First and foremost, in line with other studies in the literature, this study also shows that destination image influences the revisit intention of the tourists. As a result, authorities and practitioners should devote more time and effort to developing a distinct destination image as part of a comprehensive strategy. Furthermore, it is important to note place dependence influences revisit intention of tourists through destination image. Place dependence is directly linked to the physical and functional amenities of a specific place. Since there are many hot springs in the region, local authorities and tourism practitioners should evaluate the region's environmental, physical and functional facilities. They can also include these evaluations in their master plans in order to strengthen the destination image of the region.

The study has some limitations. First, the study was conducted in one specific location. Researchers may collect data from other hot springs to make a comparison. Second, only domestic tourists participated in the research. Other studies may consider including international tourists in the data collection process. Third, only 201 respondents participated in the research. Fourth, the perceptual, cognitive, and affective components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) were not examined separately; instead, the destination image was evaluated as a single construct (overall image). The study's main focus is on determining the relationships among thermal facilities, destination image, revisit intention, and place dependence. Future studies may improve the model by integrating each component of the destination image separately to have a deeper understanding of the destination image. Lastly, this study tested a theoretically formed model involving thermal facilities, place dependence, destination image and revisit intention. Researchers may add other variables such as tourists' satisfaction, service quality and destination loyalty and retest the model in the future.

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