

## Article

# Using the RPM Model to Explore the Impact of Organic Agritourism Destination Fascination on Loyalty—The Mediating Roles of Place Attachment and Pro-Environmental Behavior

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**Abstract:** Maintaining the sustainable development of fascinating resources in Taiwan's Hualien and Taitung (Huatung) regions is the basis of organic agritourism. Loyalty not only represents tourists' commitment to return and recommend but also serves as a goal for destination development. The purpose of this study is to propose and examine the effect of destination fascination on loyalty through a conceptualized Reasonable Person Model (RPM), mediated by place attachment and pro-environmental behaviors. SPSS21 and the linear structure relationship model (LISREL) were used as data analysis tools in this study. A total of 500 valid online questionnaires were collected through snowballing and convenience sampling. The data analysis results revealed that destination fascination has a positive and significant impact on loyalty through place attachment and pro-environmental behavior. Another finding is that place dependence, place identity, and pro-environmental behavior all have mediating effects, with place identity being the main mediating variable. The contributions of this study are mainly reflected in examining the application of RPM in fascination and loyalty, as well as providing practical suggestions for destination fascination and place identity.

**Keywords:** fascination; destination; place attachment; pro-environmental behavior; reasonable person model (RPM)



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## 1. Introduction

Fascination is extensively employed in destination marketing, as exemplified by initiatives such as 'Fascination Taiwan' and the promotion of the Hualien and Taitung (Huatung) regions, which are frequently showcased on government tourism websites. This highlights the importance of destination fascination in tourism destination marketing. Therefore, shaping the unique destination fascination to attract tourists becomes crucial for enhancing competitiveness in the tourism market [1].

Taiwan's Huatung regions are known as Taiwan's "backyard" or "last piece of pure land", where the coast, mountains, forests, and valleys all maintain their natural integrity [2]. The region's unique fascination arises from its rich ecological resources, a long history of agricultural culture, and the simplicity and kindness of the local people, all of which combine to create a distinctive allure. The development of tourism infrastructure and activities within the area is largely dependent on harnessing its natural resources, particularly in the realm of ecotourism or nature-based tourism [3]. Rural tourism in Taiwan's Huatung regions is characterized by low density, minimal pollution, vast fields, smaller scale, and a healing environment, making it highly appealing to tourists and driving the growth of rural tourism destinations [4]. Consequently, ensuring the sustainable development of the region's fascinating resources becomes a crucial concern for organic agritourism.

When tourists perceive a destination's image as consistent with their positive experiences, it leads to a high level of satisfaction. This satisfaction, in turn, contributes to their

intention to revisit or recommend the destination [5]. This phenomenon is indicative of tourists' loyalty to the destination [6,7]. Loyalty revolves around a favorable attitude toward the destination, signifying the dedication of tourists to the intention of revisiting [8,9]. Hence, loyalty plays a pivotal role in supporting the development of a destination.

While crafting a distinctive destination image is acknowledged as an effective strategy for enhancing tourist loyalty [5], organic agritourism places a paramount emphasis on the sustainable rural landscape environment as the central component of the tourist experience [10]. This emphasis goes beyond mere superficial fascination with destination resources [11]. Organic agritourism serves a dual purpose: it fosters rural tourism while concurrently safeguarding environmental landscapes and bolstering the sustainability of the ecological environment [12,13]. This underscores the pivotal role of pro-environmental behaviors in advancing sustainable development within organic agritourism. Furthermore, this highlights the necessity of nurturing tourists' responsible awareness and actions toward the environment, building upon the foundation of existing destination fascination resources. This cultivation of awareness and responsible behavior can, in turn, foster pro-environmental behaviors within organic agritourism destinations [14].

The destination environment can establish emotional connections with tourists, thereby increasing tourists' place attachment to the destination [15–18]. When a location possesses distinct social values or resources that can support and fulfill individual needs and goals [19], it engenders a unique emotional connection, referred to as place attachment [20]. Developing an attachment to a place not only stimulates pro-environmental behaviors aimed at preserving the place [21,22] but also cultivates loyalty toward that place [18,23]. This underscores that place attachment stands as a pivotal prerequisite for tourists' pro-environmental behaviors and loyalty toward the destination.

In summary of the discussions above, place attachment could act as an intermediary in the relationship between tourists and captivating environments, potentially mediating pro-environmental behaviors and loyalty. Moreover, this accentuates how tourists develop meaningful loyalty towards the destination under the influence of this mechanism. In response to the above research motivations and gaps, the objective of this study is to integrate the Reasonable Person Model (RPM) framework to comprehend how the allure of a given destination influences effectiveness and meaningful actions in subsequent stages [24]. The RPM, rooted in environmental psychology, posits that as people's information needs are met, their behavior tends to become more rational [14,24–27].

To gain a comprehensive understanding of tourists' pro-environmental behaviors and loyalty towards the Huatung regions, this study incorporates destination fascination and place attachment into the RPM framework to establish a research model. Drawing upon a review of the literature [1,14,24–27], fascination is measured based on six factors: mystique, richness, attractiveness, uniqueness, fitness, and friendliness. Place dependence and place identity are utilized to measure the two aspects of place attachment. Hence, this model encompasses three stages: model building, being effective, and meaningful action. In this study, these three stages are conceptualized as: (1) model building: the destination fascination resource; (2) being effective: tourists' place attachment and pro-environmental behavior towards the Huatung organic agricultural region; (3) meaningful action: tourists' loyalty to the region. The research uses two sampling techniques: convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Data collection was conducted through online surveys, mainly distributed among the tourism community of the Huatung regions through platforms like Facebook and Line.

Next, the study formulates four hypotheses and utilizes SPSS 21 and the Linear Structure Relationship Model (LISREL) for analysis. Through scholarly research findings, this study strives to gain a profound insight into the advantages brought about by destination fascination and its influence on tourist behavior. Furthermore, it offers practical value for fostering the sustainable development of destination environments and interests.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Reasonable Person Model (RPM)

The Reasonable Person Model (RPM) seeks to establish connections between environmental factors and human behavior, exploring elements that fulfill information needs and considering factors that lead to more rational actions. When individuals find themselves in environments that satisfy their fundamental information needs, they tend to exhibit greater rationality, helpfulness, and willingness to collaborate [25,26]. This model aggregates a series of human information needs into three main stages to better understand their independent and mutually influencing effects. 1. Model building: People absorb information from the environment and gain feeling. When people's information needs are met, their behavior will be more rational [24]. 2. Being effective: Individuals process and manage stored information about their environment, which has the potential to empower them with skills and abilities to take action and solve problems, enhancing their self-confidence and awareness [24]. 3. Meaningful action: People believe they can make a difference by getting involved; if people think they can take some useful action, they are more likely to feel hopeful and work toward their goals [24,25]. Wang, Liu, Huang, and Chen [18] conducted a study involving tourists from national parks, forest recycling areas, and theme parks, and constructed an RPM model for their destination fascination. This study validated the positive impact of destination, subjective well-being, and destination attachment on loyalty.

Organic agricultural tourism provides tourists with information on environmental sustainability, including aspects such as organic, non-toxic, healthy living, and environmental friendliness. This helps tourists understand the importance of a healthy environment and sustainable environmental development, stimulating their recognition and attachment to the place and subsequently encouraging pro-environmental behavior [10]. Likewise, tourists will strengthen their loyalty to destinations focused on organic farming, fulfilling their desire for eco-friendliness. Therefore, this study adopts destination fascination (model building), place attachment and pro-environmental behavior (being effective), and loyalty (meaningful action) to construct an organic agriculture tourism RPM to explore the loyalty of fascinated organic agriculture tourists.

### 2.2. Destination Fascination

Fascination arises from involuntary attention and restores attention through the natural environment, which is an important component of attention restoration theory [28]. Kaplan [28] believed that environmental fascination refers to people's freedom to pursue their interests, explore details in the environment, and customize the meaning of the environment within their surroundings. Hence, individuals can experience a fascinating environment, with this fascination stemming from their interaction with various elements of the environment.

Consistent findings from previous studies indicate that destinations should provide tourists with a fascinating environment that allows them to experience the environment and explore themselves freely and independently, allowing the body and mind to separate from daily life and achieve effective psychological recovery [1,18,27,29]. Therefore, in studies concerning rural tourism as a destination, the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) is commonly employed as the foundational framework. Previous research has not only highlighted the significance of agritourism for individual physical and mental well-being but has also increasingly focused on issues related to the sustainable development of rural tourism environments in recent years. In the study by Zheng et al. [22] on rural tourism as a destination, destination-specific fascination and tourist delight were identified as antecedent variables influencing tourists' pro-environmental behaviors. In the research conducted by Kucukergin and Gürlek [30], aspects like environmental consciousness, self-reflection, last-chance experiences, and fascination were examined to understand tourists' intention to recommend natural destinations. Zheng et al. [31] explored energy-saving behaviors and loyalty among tourists in rural tourism through examining destination image.

Despite identifying destination fascination or image as a crucial influencing factor in rural development issues, there remains a limited comprehensive explanation of the process connecting destination fascination to tourists' pro-environmental behaviors and loyalty. Therefore, in order to better address the research objectives mentioned earlier, this study will consider "fascination destination" as a predictor variable and examine its impact on place attachment, environmental perceptions, and loyalty.

### 2.3. Place Attachment

Place attachment refers to an individual's emotional connection to a place [32,33]. In prior studies, place attachment was applied to destination attachment and defined as an individual's enduring reliance on the functional value of a place, along with their psychological recognition and connection to that place [16,33–35]. Despite the confirmation of emotional attachment as a precursor to tourist loyalty in the study by Zheng et al. [36], this research primarily employs fascination within the Huatung regions as the influencing factor for tourists' pro-environmental behaviors and loyalty towards organic agritourism. Therefore, place attachment is used as the influencing variable in this study.

Place dependence refers to the level of functionality associated with a particular functional place [37], in which a place offers support for a particular objective or necessary activity [33,38,39]. Place dependence refers to a profound emotional connection that decreases the inclination to utilize alternative places instead of this particular place [33,40].

Kyle and Chick [15] found that destination fascination enhances tourists' destination attachment by establishing a deep connection with the destination. The research results of Prayag and Ryan [16] and Veasna, Wu, and Huang [17] reported positive correlation between destination fascination and destination attachment. Wang, Liu, Huang, and Chen [18] believed that destination attachment is the emotional connection between tourists and the destination, and proposed that destination fascination enhanced tourists' attachment and loyalty to the destination. Kyle and Chick's [15] study demonstrated that destination fascination strengthens tourists' attachment to a destination by establishing a profound connection with it. It indicated a positive correlation between destination fascination and destination attachment. Wang, Liu, Huang, and Chen [18] stated that destination attachment represents the emotional bond between tourists and the destination, proposing that destination fascination enhances tourists' attachment and loyalty to the destination.

People tend to establish their emotional connection and sense of belonging to places in fascinating environments [41,42]. Prayag and Ryan [16] discovered in their study that destination imagery, such as cultural diversity, service levels, and exoticism in places, can influence place attachment. Liu, Wang, Huang, and Chen [1] proposed that the richness, friendliness, mystery, and uniqueness of destinations provide essential resources for activities, cater to the needs of tourists, stimulate individuals to explore and discover the potential of destinations, increase the challenge of substituting the destination, and ultimately foster connections and dependencies with it. Based on the above discussions, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>1a</sub>:** *Destination fascination has a significant positive impact on place dependence.*

Place identity is defined as an individual's sense of identity through their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, values, and behavioral tendencies toward the environment [43], along with their emotional involvement in this place [33,44]. Research by Sirgy and Su [45] highlighted that place identity is the suitability of tourists' subjective establishment of destination image and self-realization, ideal and social, which will significantly affect tourists' choice of destination [46]. Stokburger-Sauer [47] pointed out that tourists' suitability for their destination enhances their identification with the place, stimulates their willingness to revisit, and sustains their long-term relationship with the destination. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>1b</sub>:** *Destination fascination has a significant positive impact on place identity.*

#### 2.4. Pro-Environment Behavior

Environmentally friendly behavior is gaining increasing attention from scholars and practitioners in the tourism and hotel industries [22,48,49]. Encouraging pro-environmental behavior among tourists offers several benefits, including the enhancement of environmental sustainability management in destinations. Pro-environmental behavior refers to the actions taken by individuals or groups to mitigate negative environmental impacts [50,51]. People's perception and experience of the physiological and psychological benefits brought by the environment can affect their behavior and actions [38,52].

Place attachment refers to the interaction and connection with a specific place, serving as the emotional foundation for commitment, responsibility, and stewardship toward that place [53]. It intertwines social and environmental considerations and impacts individuals' willingness to safeguard meaningful locations [33,54]. Place attachment stands as a significant indicator of environmental conservation behavior [21,38,55,56]. The discussions above further support the research conclusion of Shen, Wang, and Loverio [21], indicating that place attachment refers to expressing concern for environmental preservation when people form place attachments.

Numerous studies have confirmed a strong positive relationship between place attachment and the intention of environmental behavior [57–59]. This conclusion also applies to different types of tourism, such as national forest park tourism [60] and organic agricultural tourism [10]. The degree of place dependence is determined by considerations for people's well-being, such as the level of support for people's participation in the environment and the ability to meet human needs (leisure, interests, goals). Place dependence can significantly influence personal development and happiness, so people seek ways to protect the places they rely on [61]. Halpenny [62] and Lee et al. [63] found that place dependence positively and significantly affects pro-environmental intentions; the same conclusion applies to Chow, Ma, Wong, Lam, and Cheung [57] and Uesugi and Kudo [58]. Based on the above discussion, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>2a</sub>:** *Place dependence has a significant positive impact on pro-environmental behavior.*

When the potential loss or deterioration of a place poses a threat to human well-being [64,65], individuals' identification with that place creates a commitment to the environment. Previous studies have consistently shown a positive relationship between place identity and environmentally responsible behavior [33,57,63]. Building upon this premise, the current study posits that this conclusion applies to the present research context and, therefore, presents the following research hypothesis:

**H<sub>2b</sub>:** *Place identity has a significant positive impact on pro-environmental behavior.*

#### 2.5. Loyalty

Customer loyalty refers to the relative attitude and loyalty behavior of customers towards products, brands, services, or stores. Loyalty behavior encompasses motivation to search for relevant information, positive word-of-mouth, buybacks/revisits, and resistance to negative information [66]. In the study of tourist destination loyalty, tourists' intention to revisit the destination and their willingness to engage in word-of-mouth communication are often used to measure tourist loyalty [5,7].

A fascinating environment can easily capture tourists' attention [67]. Additionally, Um et al. [68] discovered that destination fascination is more likely to influence tourists' willingness to revisit compared to tourist satisfaction. The fascination associated with a destination is manifested in its capacity to offer tourists experiences that are not typically encountered in their daily lives. As a result, this fascination bears the capacity to influence destination loyalty [18] and intentions to revisit [69].

Wang et al. [70] found that abundant tourism resources enable tourists to enjoy various experiences, thereby stimulating their willingness to revisit. The richness of destinations is reflected in the abundance of natural and cultural resources, which not only enhances tourists' perception of the place but also maintains the competitiveness of the destination



through a strong willingness to revisit [71,72]. Liu, Wang, Huang, and Chen [1] argue that an intriguing destination possesses the capability to stimulate tourists to persist in exploring the destination's resources. Moreover, it serves as a wellspring of inspiration for diverse experiences, offering a form of fascination that aids tourists in temporarily escaping the pressures of daily life. Evidently, from the preceding discussion, it becomes evident that tourist destinations can amplify positive word-of-mouth and intentions to revisit by enriching their distinctive allure. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *Destination fascination has a significant positive impact on loyalty.*

Environmentally friendly behavior (PEB) is an increasingly valued tourism activity behavior [73], which is associated with individuals' beliefs, attitudes, values, environmental knowledge, and environmental awareness [74]. Social exchange theory can be used to explore the exchange relationship between destination social responsibility (DSR), PEB, and loyalty [75–77]. When tourists perceive that DSR activities contribute to society, they are more inclined to support initiatives aimed at the advancement of the destination's development [76]. This indicates that an actively engaged destination in DSR can strengthen tourists' willingness to visit [77].

Organic agricultural tourism plays an active role in realizing sustainable tourism development. To achieve this objective, it is crucial to highlight the close interrelation between destinations and tourists, as tourists' attitudes and evaluations of destinations are significantly shaped by the destination's social responsibility initiatives [78]. The research findings of Azinuddin, Hanafiah, Mior Shariffuddin, Kamarudin, and Mat Som [75] demonstrate that DSR will affect loyalty and PEB will influence loyalty through DSR. However, this study posits that PEB is an integral component of DSR and should have a direct impact on loyalty.

Previous research has discussed the relationship between the design of ecotourism availability and destination social responsibility on tourists' environmentally friendly behaviors and destination loyalty [73]. Other research has utilized protection motivation theory (PMT) to explain the emergence and implementation of pro-environmental behaviors (PEB) by small rural tourism enterprises (SRTE) [79]. Additionally, Shen, Wang, Loverio, Liu, and Wang [10] confirmed that in rural tourism studies, tourists' attachment to a place will influence their well-being through pro-environmental behaviors. Despite the growing attention to rural tourism research in recent years, it does not align with the objectives mentioned in this study. Therefore, based on a review and support from previous literature, the researchers propose the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>4</sub>:** *Pro-environmental behavior has a significant positive impact on loyalty.*

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Site

Hualien and Taitung, located in eastern Taiwan, boast a favorable natural climate, picturesque pastoral landscapes, a leisurely and unhurried atmosphere, and distinctive customs. They embrace an organic and non-toxic agriculture, provide healthy and safe organic agricultural products, and take into account the sustainable development of the environment [80], aligning with the criteria for destination fascination. According to the official statistics, the regions receive more than 13.6 million visitors annually [81].

#### 3.2. Measurement Development

This research takes the questionnaire survey as the primary data collection method. The survey questionnaire includes six parts: destination fascination (FAN), place dependent (PDE), place identity (PID), pro-environment behavior (PEB), loyalty (LOY), and demographic variables.

Destination fascination refers to the extent to which a destination provides tourists with the freedom to focus on their interests, delve into the destination's details, and personally define its significance [1]. This study refers to Liu, Wang, Huang, and Chen's [1]

six dimensions of destination fascination: mystique, richness, attractiveness, uniqueness, fitness, and friendliness.

Place attachment refers to the recognition and dependence of tourists on places related to organic agriculture tourism destinations. It is assessed based on two dimensions: place dependent (PDE) and place identity (PID) [21,82]. In the PDE scale, there are three items, namely: "Tourists' liking" (PDE1), "Tourists' thoughts" (PDE2), and "For the sake of environmental sustainability" (PDE3), which examine why tourists engage in organic agritourism. In the PID scale, there are four items, which are: "Identification with organic agritourism" (PID1), "Emotion" (PID2), "Environmental consciousness" (PID3), and "Understanding the importance of environmental protection" (PID4).

Pro-environmental behavior (PEB) refers to tourists actively participating in organic agriculture tourism activities, their willingness to share ideas and practices of organic agriculture environmental protection, and playing a more active role in environmental protection [10]. The PEB scale comprises four items, namely: "Participation in organic agritourism" (PEB1), "Purchase of products" (PEB2), "Sharing of environmental ideas" (PEB3), and "Taking positive actions" (PEB4).

In this study, loyalty (LOY) refers to tourists' intention to revisit the destination and their willingness to engage in word-of-mouth communication, which is often used to measure tourist loyalty [5,7]. This dimension includes individuals who enjoy organic tourism and product-related experiential activities, prefer purchasing organic agricultural products, and express a desire to engage in the rural life experience of organic agricultural tourism [10]. The LOY scale consists of four items, reflecting "Tourists' loyalty towards the organic agritourism environment" (LOY1), "Product purchase" (LOY2), "Participation in activities" (LOY3), and "Tourism" (LOY4).

Regarding the above variables, this study adopts a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from one (extremely disagree) to seven (extremely agree). Additionally, demographic variables encompass gender, marital status, age, education, occupation, place of residence, and income.

### 3.3. Research Design

To ensure an accurate target audience, participants are required to complete the screening questions before proceeding with the rest of the questionnaire. The screening questions are as follows: (1). Are you over 20 years old? (2). Have you ever visited the Huatung regions of Taiwan for organic agricultural tourism? (3). Are you willing to voluntarily fill out this questionnaire and grant permission for the use of its content for academic publication? In summary, during the questionnaire design phase, researchers follow the principle of simplifying questions and wording to prevent respondent fatigue.

This study employed two methods for data collection. Firstly, a convenience sampling approach was employed to select tourists who have traveled to the Huatung regions through social media platforms such as Facebook and Line communities. Secondly, a snowball sampling method was used where tourists who have visited the Huatung regions were asked to fill out a questionnaire and help identify other eligible participants within their social circles who had also filled out the survey, completing the snowball sampling process. For valid questionnaires, the researchers conduct a lottery activity (invalid questionnaires will be automatically invalidated). Each participant could only respond once per provided link. A total of 520 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 500 valid responses. Descriptive statistics in SPSS 21.0 were utilized to grasp the fundamental characteristics of tourists. Moreover, the Linear Structure Relationship Model (LISREL) was employed to validate the constructed linear structure model and assess the impact relationships between variables.

## 4. Statistical Results

### 4.1. Demographic Variables

The demographic characteristics of respondents show that there were more female participants (50.8%) than males (49.2%). The majority fall within the age range of 32–41 (53.4%),

followed by 42–51 (23.6%). Furthermore, there were more married participants (55.2%) than unmarried ones (42.0%). A significant proportion (73.2%) hold a university degree, while the remainder (13.6%) completed high school. The average monthly income of the participants is 25,001–35,000 TWD (888–1243 USD) for 25.2% of respondents, followed by incomes above 65,000 TWD (2311 USD) for 22.6%. Most participants work in the service industry (29.8%), followed by the Industry and Commerce sector (19.0%). In terms of their place of residence, the majority live in the southern region (78.4%), followed by those residing in the northern region (13.2%). For detailed demographic profiles of the participants, refer to Table 1.

**Table 1.** Profile of respondents.

Items	Variables	N	%	Items	Variables	N	%
Gender	Male	246	49.2	Occupation	Civil servant	52	10.4
	Female	254	50.8		Service	149	29.8
Marital status	Married	276	55.2		Business	93	18.6
	Single	210	42.0		Freelance	70	14.0
	other	14	2.8		Industry and Commerce	95	19.0
					Others	41	8.2
Age (years)	22–31	77	15.4	Place of residence	Northern region	66	13.2
	32–41	267	53.4		Central region	32	6.4
	42–51	118	23.6		Southern region	392	78.4
	52–61	32	6.4		East region	10	2.0
	Above 62	6	1.2				
Education	Elementary and middle	6	1.2	Monthly income (TWD)	≤25,000	62	12.4
	High school	68	13.6		25,001–35,000	126	25.2
	College	366	73.2		35,001–45,000	67	13.4
	Graduate				45,001–55,000	84	16.8
	and above	60	12.0		55,001–65,000	48	9.6
					Above 65,000	113	22.6

In the process of collecting samples, researchers aim to align with Taiwan’s actual population distribution as closely as possible. However, variations in demographic proportions may occur due to the unique characteristics of different subjects or regions. For instance, regarding the “Place of residence” variable in this study, the higher representation (78.4%) of the southern region can be attributed to two factors: 1. The Huatung regions are situated near the southern region, making travel to this area convenient and rapid for residents of the southern region. 2. In this study, the southern region comprises four major cities: Chiayi, Tainan, Kaohsiung, and Pingtung. It does not refer to the population count of a single city but collectively represents these four major cities in the southern region.

#### 4.2. Descriptive Statistics

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis are as described below. The average fitness scores range from 4.81 to 5.49, with the item ‘The atmosphere in this place is the style I like’ achieving the highest mean score. For average friendliness, scores span from 5.05 to 5.53, with ‘This place has hospitable and friendly local residents’ obtaining the highest mean score. Average uniqueness scores range from 5.39 to 5.61, with ‘This place performs a unique style’ having the highest mean score. In terms of attractiveness, scores range from 5.32 to 5.70 and the item ‘I can transfer my mood in this place’ obtaining the highest mean score. The average mystique scores range from 5.08 to 5.37, with ‘My curiosity toward the place is aroused while visiting the place’ achieving the highest mean score. Regarding richness, scores range from 5.40 to 5.55 and both ‘During visiting this place, I can experience different feelings’ and ‘This place provides various leisure activities’ share the highest mean score.

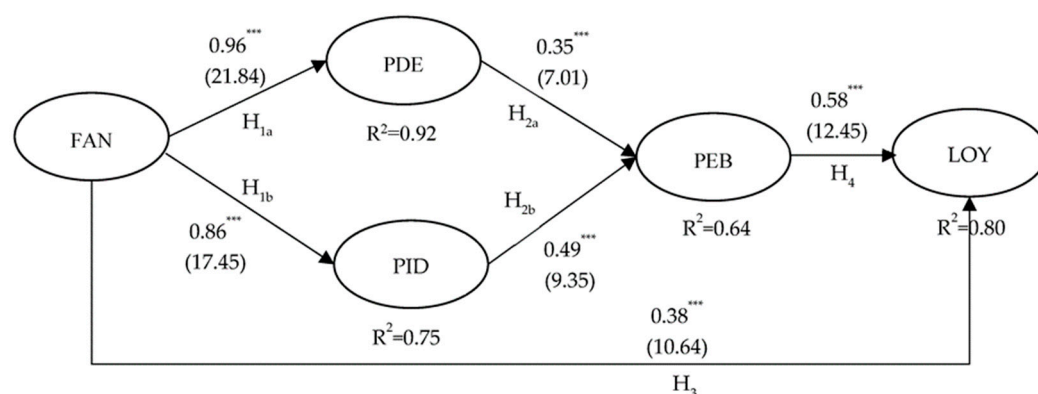


Place dependence scores range from 4.85 to 5.39, with ‘For the sustainable development of the environment, I like to travel more to organic agriculture’ receiving the highest mean score. Place identity scores range from 5.16 to 5.68 and the item ‘The experience of organic agricultural tourism makes me better understand the significance of environmental protection’ achieves the highest mean score. Pro-environmental behavior scores range from 5.23 to 5.51, with ‘I am willing to protect the organic agricultural environment more actively’ having the highest mean score. Finally, loyalty scores range from 4.96 to 5.09 and ‘I have a strong loyalty to organic produce’ achieves the highest mean score.

The high average scores on these questions indicate that the eastern region of Taiwan is a favored tourist destination. This region offers a rustic atmosphere distinct from the urbanity of the western region and is rich in cultural enthusiasm. Simultaneously, it genuinely aligns with the ideal travel environment visitors have in mind for their daily lives, along with offering natural tourism resources that exude a sense of mystery. Given Taiwan’s experience of food safety concerns, the people have become more conscious of the interplay between the natural environment and human health. Consequently, tourists are more inclined to visit areas associated with organic agriculture and purchase locally produced organic goods. This fosters a sense of endorsement, protection, and loyalty toward these destinations.

#### 4.3. Structural Model

In this research, the independent variable is destination fascination (FAN); the dependent variables are place dependent (PDE), place identity (PID), pro-environment behavior (PEB), and loyalty (LOY). The Linear Structure Relationship Model (LISREL) was used to verify the constructed linear structure model and the impact relations between the variables of the proposed research hypotheses. The LISREL 8.52 software is used as the analysis tool to verify the impact relationship. Figure 1 shows the path coefficient of the structural model.



**Figure 1.** Path coefficients of the structural model (Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ).

For the goodness-of-fit index of this research model, error variation is positive. The factor loadings range from 0.81 to 0.97 and Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  ranges from 0.881 to 0.958. The composite reliability (CR) ranges from 0.919 to 0.958, which surpasses the recommended 0.7 [83]. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) estimates range from 0.742 to 0.861, which exceeded the cut-off value of 0.5. These results showed that the reliability and validity of each dimension were acceptable (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Results of the measurement model.

Path			Factor Loadings	t-Value	SMC	Standardized Residuals	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE
FAN	→	FIT	0.81 ***	19.78	0.67	0.32	0.952	0.945	0.742
FAN	→	FRI	0.81 ***	19.95	0.67	0.33			
FAN	→	UNI	0.83 ***	20.26	0.69	0.31			
FAN	→	ATT	0.92 ***	23.88	0.84	0.16			
FAN	→	MYS	0.90 ***	23.12	0.80	0.20			
FAN	→	RIC	0.88 ***	22.33	0.78	0.22			
PDE	→	PDE1	0.89 ***	-	0.81	0.18	0.881	0.919	0.792
PDE	→	PDE2	0.77 ***	28.83	0.61	0.38			
PDE	→	PDE3	0.97 ***	18.30	0.95	0.05			
PID	→	PID1	0.86 ***	-	0.73	0.28	0.885	0.956	0.846
PID	→	PID2	0.95 ***	20.98	0.90	0.11			
PID	→	PID3	0.97 ***	19.08	0.93	0.07			
PID	→	PID4	0.93 ***	24.20	0.83	0.17			
PEB	→	PEB1	0.97 ***	-	0.94	0.06	0.917	0.958	0.850
PEB	→	PEB2	0.86 ***	22.48	0.75	0.25			
PEB	→	PEB3	0.90 ***	23.11	0.81	0.19			
PEB	→	PEB4	0.95 ***	25.76	0.90	0.10			
LOY	→	LOY1	0.87 ***	-	0.77	0.23	0.958	0.961	0.861
LOY	→	LOY2	0.91 ***	51.67	0.86	0.14			
LOY	→	LOY3	0.97 ***	34.50	0.94	0.06			
LOY	→	LOY4	0.94 ***	28.57	0.88	0.12			

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Concerning the goodness-of-fit index of the model, the chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ) was 229.10 (df = 82) while the chi-square ratio ( $\chi^2/\text{df}$ ) was 2.79. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was 0.95 and the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) was 0.85. The root means a square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.067, the mean square residual (RMR) was 0.028, the normalized fit index (NFI) was 0.99, the non-normalized fit index (NNFI) was 0.99, and the comparative fit index (CFI) was 1.00. All of these indices were within an acceptable range which indicated that the overall goodness-of-fit of the model was good [84], demonstrating that the model fitted well with the data.

The following table shows the discriminant validity of the constructs. As presented in Table 3, the AVE square root of each construct has a greater square root correlation with the same concept than with the other concept, showing an acceptable discriminant validity.

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity of the constructs.

	Mean	SD	FAN	PDE	PID	PEB	LOY
FAN	5.36	0.901	0.861				
PDE	5.10	1.093	0.856	0.890			
PID	5.49	0.991	0.840	0.851	0.920		
PEB	5.32	1.059	0.762	0.742	0.834	0.922	
LOY	5.10	1.081	0.743	0.726	0.729	0.858	0.928

Based on the analysis, the verification of the research hypothesis is presented in Table 4. The hypotheses are all accepted ( $p < 0.050$ ).

**Table 4.** The results of hypotheses.

Hypotheses	$\beta$ Coefficient	t Value	p	Result
H <sub>1a</sub>	0.96 ***	21.84	$p < 0.05$	Accepted
H <sub>1b</sub>	0.86 ***	17.45	$p < 0.05$	Accepted
H <sub>2a</sub>	0.35 ***	7.01	$p < 0.05$	Accepted
H <sub>2b</sub>	0.49 ***	9.35	$p < 0.05$	Accepted
H <sub>3</sub>	0.38 ***	10.64	$p < 0.05$	Accepted
H <sub>4</sub>	0.58 ***	12.45	$p < 0.05$	Accepted

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. The Discussion from Factor Loadings

Referring to Table 2, among the observed variables of FAN, ATT shows the highest factor loading (0.92), signifying that attractiveness significantly influences tourism. Organic agricultural tourism destinations offer a significant allure by elevating tourists' moods, eliciting positive emotions, and fostering the creation of lasting and remarkable experiences. Pertinent research underscores that these experiences culminate in enduring and treasured memories for tourists, constituting the foundational essence of leisure tourism [80].

Among the observed variables of PDE, PDE3 (0.97) has the highest factor loading, indicating that environmental sustainability is an important influencing factor for tourists' dependence on organic agriculture tourism. Similarly, among the observed variables of PID, PID 3 (0.97) has the highest factor loading, indicating that the organic agriculture tourism experience enhances tourists' environmental understanding and is a crucial factor in their identification with organic agriculture tourism. This aligns with previous research which suggests that the appeal of organic agricultural tourism destinations provides visitors with environmental knowledge and interpretive significance for environmental sustainability, while place attachment connects social and environmental issues, influencing individuals' willingness to protect the place [33]. Therefore, when a destination fulfills tourists' environmental needs and highlights the importance of the environment, it fosters emotional connections to the destination.

Among the observed variables in the PEB, PEB1 (0.97) has the highest factor loading, indicating that tourists enjoy participating in organic agricultural tourism experiences greatly, which plays a crucial role in fostering pro-environmental behavior within the destination. Similarly, within the LOY dimension, LOY3 (0.97) demonstrates the highest factor loading, suggesting that tourists' engagement in activities related to organic agricultural tourism is a significant influencing factor for their loyalty towards the destination. In essence, the findings indicate that tourists who actively partake in organic agricultural tourism experiences are more likely to exhibit both pro-environmental behavior and loyalty. As mentioned in the studies by Lee [85] and Shen, Wang, and Loverio [21], an increase in place dependence is associated with a rise in responsible environmental behavior among tourists, and it also manifests their concern and attention towards environmental protection.

### 5.2. The Discussion from the Measurement Model

In Figure 1, the impact coefficient of destination promotion on place dependence is 0.96, indicating that promoting organic agriculture can provide the necessary environmental resources to support tourist activities and foster a strong emotional attachment to the place, reducing the likelihood of substitution [33]. Furthermore, the impact coefficient of destination promotion on place identity is 0.86, suggesting that the welcoming environment created by the promotion of organic agriculture caters to tourists' desires for environmental preservation, thus amplifying their sense of place identity [47].

The impact coefficient of place dependence on pro-environmental behavior is 0.35, indicating that tourists often seek to protect the places they rely on. Organic agricultural tourism not only meets tourists' needs for health and experience but also enhances their well-being [61]. The impact coefficient of place identification on pro-environmental behav-

ior is 0.49, signifying that tourists' identification with organic agricultural tourism not only ensures a friendly environment but also boosts their confidence in safeguarding meaningful places [33].

Furthermore, the impact coefficient of destination promotion on loyalty is 0.38, indicating that a higher level of promotion of organic agricultural tourism leads to greater tourist loyalty towards the destination. Moreover, the coefficient of influence of pro-environmental behavior on loyalty is 0.58, showing a higher impact. This indicates that the higher the pro-environmental behavior of tourists, the higher their loyalty to the destination. This study confirms previous findings regarding these two variables [70,77]. Notably, it reveals a nuanced finding: among the two factors directly influencing tourist loyalty, pro-environmental behavior has a greater impact than destination promotion.

### 5.3. The Discussion from Mediating Variables

This study identifies two paths through which fascination influences loyalty via the mediation of place attachment. (1). The path with place dependence as the mediating variable is FAN-PDE-PEB-LOY and its path coefficient is multiplied to 0.195; (2). the path with place identity as the mediating variable is FAN-PID-PEB-LOY and its path coefficient is multiplied by 0.244. Both place identity and place dependence serve as primary intermediary variables through which fascination influences loyalty, with place identity having a more significant mediating effect. This discovery aligns with the research findings of [63].

The influence coefficients of place dependence and place identity on loyalty through pro-environmental behavior are 0.203 and 0.284, respectively, confirming that pro-environmental behavior serves as a mediating variable between place attachment and loyalty.

## 6. Implication

### 6.1. Theoretical Implication

It is the first time that Kaplan and Kaplan's [24] RPM has been integrated with destination fascination attachment, pro-environmental behavior, and loyalty theory from the perspective of environmental psychology and applied to the subject research of organic agricultural tourism behavior. Its primary theoretical contributions are as follows:

- (a) It examines the triggers of organic agricultural tourism by constructing a model that validates fascination as a pivotal factor impacting tourists' environmental behavior.
- (b) It verified the role of place dependency, place attachment, and pro-environmental behavior as indicators of "effectiveness".
- (c) It sorts out factors influencing loyalty among tourists as meaningful behavior.
- (d) It applies the RPM to academic research on organic agricultural tourism behavior, thereby expanding the application of the RPM framework.

Additionally, this study notably integrates pro-environmental behavior into the RPM and established its positive and significant impact on loyalty. This distinguishes it from previous frameworks concerning loyalty and behavioral intention [14,27]. Furthermore, the findings of this study provide strong insight into the fact that, within the realm of organic agricultural tourism, a sustainable rural landscape environment serves as the cornerstone of the tourist experience [80]. Moreover, fostering a friendly and sustainable environment emerges as a crucial objective in organic agricultural tourism.

While previous studies have recognized the significance of pro-environmental behavior and destination loyalty as crucial variables [63,75] and have explored various antecedents of both of pro-environmental behavior and destination loyalty, there has been a dearth of research concurrently exploring both pro-environmental behavior and destination loyalty [63]. This study distinguishes itself from previous loyalty research by demonstrating the significant impact of "fascination" on tourists' "place attachment." Furthermore, it enhances our understanding of how rural tourist destinations can motivate visitors to voluntarily engage in environmental protection by fostering a sense of depen-

dency, particularly through place identification. This, in turn, cultivates loyalty towards the destination.

In summary, this research underscores that emotional identification among tourists leads to a strong desire for protection and positive word-of-mouth, highlighting the importance of appealing organic agricultural environments and resources. By introducing innovative models and conducting comprehensive analyses, this study fills a gap in existing research. Consequently, the validation of these research findings and theories undoubtedly represents a breakthrough in the field of organic agricultural tourism research. The validation of these research results and theories undoubtedly represents a breakthrough in the realm of organic agricultural tourism studies. It serves as a cornerstone that prompts researchers to reconsider the relationship between humans and the environment.

## 6.2. Practical Implications

Considering the outcomes of the aforementioned analysis, this study presents specific recommendations in two key parts: enhancing destination fascination and reinforcing place identity.

### 6.2.1. Enhancing Destination Fascination

The findings of this study reveal that destination fascination significantly influences tourism behavior, a trend that aligns with prior research [18,22,27]. This underscores the pivotal role of destination landscapes as the cornerstone of tourism development [86]. Therefore, it is recommended that destinations contemplate the creation of captivating travel experiences that offer distinctive and unforgettable activities for tourists [18]. Additionally, an essential facet of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) is their alignment with tourists' interests and their commitment to strategically accentuating the destination's distinctiveness to enhance its fascination. This approach ultimately fosters marketing differentiation, thereby attracting tourists [22].

Given the significance of destination fascination, it is recommended that its six dimensions—mystery, richness, attractiveness, uniqueness, fitness, and friendliness [1]—should be integral elements in destination development. DMOs should play a key role in facilitating tourists' experiences and captivating the essence of organic agricultural tourism destinations through the creation of experiential activities. Furthermore, DMOs can assist tourists in recognizing and forming a connection with the destination itself [21].

For instance, by utilizing organic agriculture as a distinctive theme or emphasizing the tranquility of rural slow living as a local characteristic, DMOs can design engaging experiential activities that encompass various themes, such as agricultural DIY or immersive field experiences. By curating a diverse range of leisure activities that intertwine practical engagement with contemplative elements, DMOs can harness the power of storytelling or local legends to enhance the aura of mystery surrounding the destination. Additionally, tailoring the mode of travel can further amplify the overall experience.

### 6.2.2. Reinforcing Place Identity

Based on the analysis of this study, it is suggested that destination construction should strengthen tourists' identification with the purpose of organic agriculture tourism, cultivate tourists' positive environmental protection awareness and attitude, and enhance tourists' pro-environmental behavior towards tourism destinations. When tourists become attached to a place and like it, they will increase their pro-environmental behavior toward the destination [10]. Moreover, when tourists realize the importance of the environment, they may pay attention to responsible tourism behavior [87]. Therefore, organic agricultural tourism should integrate environmental protection awareness into tourism activities and experiences [80], improve tourists' environmental awareness through this educational tourism experience, and establish a positive attitude towards sustainable destination landscape protection [22].



Moreover, tourists' perception of the destination's significance and their affinity for it constitutes the fundamental elements that elevate their level of attachment. Consequently, this study proposes that the principal strategy for augmenting this attachment lies in the integration of organic agricultural tourism resources and cultural elements. For example, incorporating aspects like "organic food", "organic lifestyle", "organic leisure", "organic shopping", and "organic education" can serve as effective means to enhance this connection.

Analyzing demographic variables, it is evident that a significant portion of tourists fall within the 32–41 age range, indicating a strong interest in organic agriculture among this demographic group. This group, characterized by stable employment and a thoughtful approach toward financial investments, presents an opportunity for relevant managers and government agencies to encourage investment in organic agricultural leisure projects in the eastern region.

One such initiative could be the establishment of a "farmer's market-style supermarket", a retail platform integrating leisure agricultural tourism in the region, both online and in physical stores. This initiative should be coupled with the incorporation of local agriculture and culture, fostering the growth of businesses that embody the distinctive characteristics of the Huatung regions. This approach will enable a broader audience to experience the agricultural and leisure development of the region. This not only provides a substantial source of income for residents in the eastern region but also encourages more people to invest in the "farmer's market-style supermarket". Through this interconnectedness of benefits, identification, and reciprocity, it fosters a stronger reliance on the environment. Furthermore, as individuals gradually become aware that many health issues stem from the origin and methods of food production, they are more likely to proactively safeguard this region. This virtuous cycle helps alleviate concerns about the contamination of organic agricultural products and the tourism environment in the Huatung regions.

## 7. Limitation and Future Research

Firstly, this study examines the impact of fascination on personal pro-environmental behavior through the lens of place attachment. It suggests that future research could delve more deeply into topics like environmental awareness or health consciousness.

Secondly, it is worth noting that this study centers on tourists who have visited the Huatung regions for organic agricultural tourism. As a result, the sample size is relatively small compared to the scope of mass tourism. Furthermore, the theme of organic agriculture tourism retains its distinctiveness. Therefore, this study recommends that future research explore mass tourism within the framework established here.

Lastly, this study surveyed all tourists without conducting a differentiation analysis based on various ethnic groups. To provide more specific and tailored recommendations, it is suggested that future researchers conduct an ANOVA analysis to assess the differences and preferences of different ethnic groups.

## 8. Conclusions

This study is grounded in RPM and investigates the correlation between destination fascination, place attachment, pro-environmental behavior, and loyalty through a quantitative method. These findings underscore the pivotal role of tourists' place attachment as a significant mediating variable influencing both their pro-environmental behavior and loyalty. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of aiding and guiding tourists in cultivating both an emotional and functional attachment to the destination, illuminating how destination tourism influences tourist psychology through RPM. Furthermore, this study makes a significant contribution as the first comprehensive integration of destination fascination, tourists' place attachment, destination environmental conservation, and loyalty within the context of organic agricultural tourism. This not only supplements the current literature on organic agricultural tourism but also provides scientifically grounded recommendations for the management and development of future organic agricultural leisure tourism.

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