

Heritage Branding and Customer Attachment to Tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The researchers set out to examine the impact of heritage branding on customer attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria, focusing on place identity, symbolic heritage elements, and cultural authenticity. The review of the related literature was captured in three parts, Conceptual framework, the empirical framework, and the theoretical framework. The study was anchored on Place attachment theory, which explains how people develop emotional, psychological, and cultural bonds with specific places. A survey design was adopted, with 384 tourists sampled across six major heritage sites in Calabar. Data was collected using a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and analysed with regression at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that place identity significantly influences customer attachment ($\beta=0.82$, $t=56.31$, $R^2=0.76$), while symbolic heritage elements positively affect attachment, ($\beta=0.82$, $t=37.89$, $R^2=0.68$), Cultural authenticity also positively impacts attachment ($\beta=0.78$, $t=38.49$, $R^2=0.66$), these results indicate that tourists' emotional bonds, engagement, and loyalty are strongly shaped by authentic, meaningful heritage experiences. The researchers recommend, among others, that tourism managers should leverage authentic cultural narratives, festivals, and heritage symbols in promotional strategies, while policymakers should safeguard heritage sites and enhance authentic experiences.

Keywords: Heritage Branding, Place Identity, Symbolic Heritage Elements, Cultural Authenticity, Customer Attachment.

Introduction

Heritage branding has become a dynamic part of global tourism marketing driven by interest in history, cultural memory, and authentic experiences. Timothy (2020) opined that cultural and historical assets act as a competitive tool in heritage tourism. As a strategic tool for shaping tourists' perceptions and enhancing emotional connections to place, heritage branding leverages cultural, historical, and symbolic elements of a place to establish a distinct place identity and attachment with visitors (Son et al, 2023). When experience is based on local culture, it creates trust and a strong connection to the place (Widodo & Octaviany, 2026). Cultural heritage fosters place identity and long-term attachment among tourists. Heritage branding is the use of historical elements and destination identity to create an image (Liang & Cheong, 2025). The term "heritage brand destination" has been used to reinforce cultural identity, support preservation, and enhance competitiveness in the global sphere. In New Zealand, some countries in Europe, and Asian heritage narratives,

historical symbols have positively shaped customer experience and encouraged repeat visitation, which creates attachment. (Steriopoulos et al., 2024). Heritage tourism is gaining prominence across the continent of Africa. Countries leverage indigenous traditions, festivals, and colonial history to enhance tourism competitiveness. African destinations are increasingly adopting heritage branding to show authenticity, indigenous pride, and place uniqueness (Mpilo, 2024). Heritage tourism forms an integral component of destination marketing, with cities in the southern part of Nigeria, like Calabar, Benin City, and Lagos, and in the northern part, like Kano, emphasizing cultural assets, colonial-era architecture, and their indigenous history.

Calabar, in Cross River State, has historical significance in trans-Atlantic trade, early colonial administration, missionary heritage, Efik cultural traditions, and internationally acclaimed cultural festivals, which make it a number one choice as a tourist destination in Nigeria. Calabar, as a tourist destination, has a rich cultural landscape and a recognized carnival, and resources that position it as a prime destination in Nigeria (Usang et al., 2023; Balogun & Nkebem, 2021).

These cultural and historical assets provide substantial potential for heritage branding and place-based tourism development. Indigenous cultural expressions and festivals converge, and heritage branding is crucial for differentiating the destination and strengthening its tourism value proposition. Heritage branding creates strong emotional resonance and authenticity among tourists, thereby influencing tourists' attachment. Destinations use historical narratives, urban layout, myths, and cultural memory to create meaning, making the brand more memorable and emotionally engaging (Kumar & Swain, 2025)

Statement of the Problem

Despite Calabar's recognized attractions like Calabar Carnival and indigenous culture, tourism performance remains constrained by inadequate emotional engagement strategies, and there is a dwindling tourist attachment to the tourist sites in Calabar. This may stem from weak reinforcement of place identity and continuity of symbolic heritage elements. According to Punch Newspaper (2025), in the year 2024, the Calabar Carnival attracted over 300,000 visitors and generated 14.06 billion naira, representing a 42% increase from the previous year. Attendance figures for heritage sites and cultural institutions across Calabar outside the carnival period remain low (Ofem et al., 2024). This shows that events do not translate into strong attachment to heritage sites in Calabar. Several heritage facilities in Calabar, including museums and cultural sites, experience declining visitor numbers due to poor branding appeal and weak narrative continuity (Ajake, 2016).

These issues highlight the need for branding approaches that reinforce place identity, strengthen symbolic meaning, and enhance emotional resonance with tourists. Symbolic heritage continuity, place identity, and perceived authenticity are major predictors of tourists' emotional attachment to destinations (Elfitra & Mesra, 2024).

To the knowledge of the researchers, there are limited empirical studies that assessed how heritage branding influences tourists' place identity, perceptions of authenticity, and symbolic connection, core drivers of attachment, especially within Nigerian tourism contexts. This gap underscores the need for an empirical investigation into how heritage branding dimensions influence customers' attachment.

Objective of the study

The main aim of this study is to investigate the effect of heritage branding on customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. The following specific objectives were established for this study:

- i. examines how place identity influences customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.
- ii. evaluate the effects of symbolic heritage elements on customer attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.
- iii. assess the roles of cultural authenticity on tourist attachment in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

- i. how does place identity influence customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria?
- ii. what are the effects of symbolic heritage elements on customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria?
- iii. what are the roles of cultural authenticity on tourist attachment in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses will guide the conduct of this study:

- i. H₀₁: Place identity does not positively influence customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.
- ii. H₀₂: Symbolic heritage elements do not have any effect on customer attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.
- iii. H₀₃: Cultural authenticity does not play any role in tourist attachment in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study will integrate heritage branding and emotional attachment theories in a Nigerian tourism context, and in a practical aspect, its findings will equip tourism stakeholders in developing strategies that will enhance deeper connections for destination loyalty.

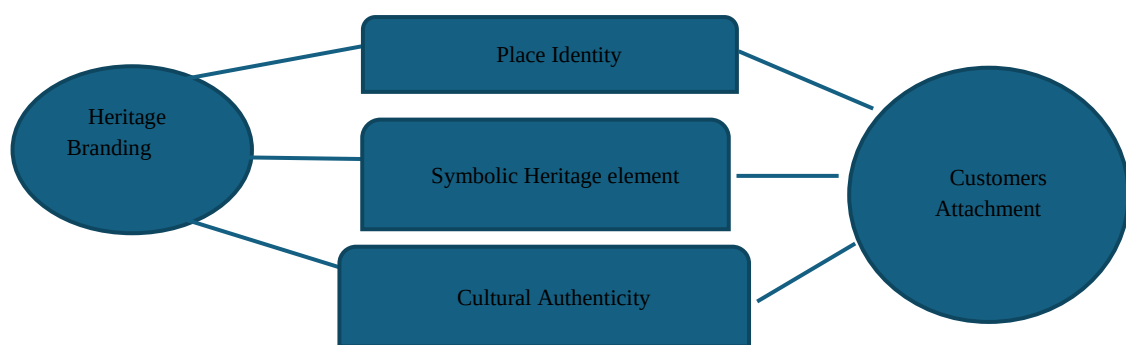
Scope of the Study

The study focuses on heritage branding and customers' attachment within the Calabar metropolis, Cross River, Nigeria. It examines three dimensions—place identity, symbolic heritage elements, and cultural authenticity—as predictors of tourism attachment. The study's respondents include domestic and international tourists visiting heritage and cultural sites in Calabar during the study period.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Model



Source: Researcher's computation, 2026

Figure 1. Research model showing the relationship between heritage branding and customer attachment in Calabar, Cross River State, a tourism destination, using the suggested conceptual model.

The concept is based on the knowledge that heritage branding, which is demonstrated through place identity, symbolic heritage components, and cultural authenticity, acts as a tactical means of influencing travelers' sentimental and psychological attachments to travel destinations.

Heritage Branding, Place Identity and Customer Attachment

The message of a destination's distinctive heritage offerings that draws tourists is known as branding. According to Villanueva (2022). Heritage branding has been closely associated with festivals, culinary traditions, museums, monuments, and artistic performances in the African context. This strategic ploy enhances destinations' attachment and also paves the way for loyalty and revenue generation for the tour operators. In Calabar, Cross River State, events like the Calabar Carnival, Ekpe festival, and bikers' dry run are heritage-signifying performances with strong ties to cultural memory and identity in Nigeria (Orfega, 2024). Place identity comprises tourists' emotional interpretations formed through engagement with cultural landscapes and narratives. It was revealed in the study carried out by Shim et al. (2023) that cultural heritage elements significantly contribute to destination branding and tourist experiences. According to Qian & Li (2024), place identity impacts tourists'

behavioral intention. A tourist's perception is enhanced by place identity; it creates distinctiveness and memorability, which aid in destination attachment and increased visitation. According to Zou et al. (2023), tourists' perceptions of heritage landscapes shape their place identity, influencing their intention to visit or revisit a destination. Destination identity captures the emotional and symbolic meanings tourists attribute to Calabar based on experiences with cultural landscapes, history, festivals, and heritage sites.

Attachment to a destination originates from the expression derived from the uniqueness of a destination. Tourists perceive a place or destination as memorable when it possesses a strong heritage identity (Elsawy & Magdy, 2025). Therefore, it predicts a positive relationship.

Heritage Branding, Symbolic Heritage Elements, and Customer Attachment

Symbolic heritage elements, such as festivals, traditions, artifacts, and cultural performances, serve as emotional cues that trigger touristic engagement and attachment. This proposes that these elements evoke meaning and create emotional attachment, which in turn increases revisit intentions. A study on intangible cultural heritage tourism carried out by Zhifu & Jebbouri (2025), shows that perceived attributes and involvement significantly enhance tourist loyalty and experiential value. Symbolic elements provide heritage destinations with authenticity, distinctiveness, and emotional value.

Heritage Branding, Cultural Authenticity, and Customer Attachment

Cultural authenticity is defined as the perception that a heritage experience is genuine, consistent with its cultural roots, and free from staged commodification. Perceived authenticity significantly enhances place attachment and satisfaction in heritage tourism contexts, acting as a psychological driver of loyalty and revisit intention (Wei et al., 2023).

Customers' Attachment

Customer attachment refers to the emotional and psychological bond that tourists develop toward a place based on its cultural meaning, identity expression, and experiential value. In Calabar, elements like the Efik culture and heritage festivals create authentic experiences that aid attraction. Nghiep (2025) confirmed that cultural authenticity and symbolic heritage elements significantly enhance customers' attachment to a destination. Cross River State, being known for its cultural festivals, historical sites, and deeply ingrained heritage, has an emotional and symbolic bond that visitors form with the city significantly influences their tourism behavior. Studies investigated by Suryana et al (2025) revealed that heritage-rich destinations strengthen attachment because they evoke nostalgia, cultural pride, and personal identity connections. Attachment reflects the emotional bonds tourists form with destinations, comprising place identity and place dependence (Rui et al., 2024). It mediates the relationship between heritage perceptions and loyalty.

Tourists' Loyalty and Revisit Intentions

Tourist loyalty encompasses behavioral and attitudinal loyalty. An indicator of loyalty is customer attachment (Wang et al., 2022). Visitors to Calabar are more likely to stick around if they connect with the city's cultural narratives, historical significance, and identity expressions, such as through cultural performances or the Old Residency Museum. Cultural celebrations such as the Calabar Carnival also foster a sense of community and identity, which strengthens repeat visitors' allegiance. Revisit intention reflects a tourist's likelihood of returning to a destination. Festivals and traditional practices increase the desire to revisit (Dang & Weiss, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in place attachment theory developed by Altman and Low (1992). They argued that emotional bonds between individuals and places stem from meaningful experiences and symbolic interactions with the destination. It differentiates emotional and functional dimensions of attachment.

Relevance to this Study

It clarifies how heritage cues create emotional bonds between tourists and Cross River heritage destinations. In view of this study, place attachment is conceptually linked to the variable tourist emotional connectedness, which is one of the key determinants of repeat visitation. Items measuring emotional effects, consistent with Altman and Low's conceptualization, were incorporated into the survey instrument. The stimuli that shape emotional bonding were operationalized, which is correlated with heritage branding and symbolic heritage elements. The hypotheses were grounded in this theory.

Authenticity Theory

This theory was proposed by MacCannell, (1973) and further developed by Wang, (1999). It highlighted the superficiality of modern life in the quest for authentic experience by tourists. It focuses on the tourist's personal experience.

Relevance to This Study:

Authenticity theory provides the conceptual foundation for the variable perceived cultural authenticity, which captures how tourists evaluate the genuineness of heritage representations and symbolic elements at Cross River cultural sites. Authenticity is meant to enhance the bond between tourists and heritage destinations.

Empirical Review

Place Identity

Studies across tourism, ecotourism, and cultural contexts consistently affirm that place identity significantly influences attachment and behavioral intention.

Summary of Studies

The role of place attachment in eco-motivation intention was investigated by Luong (2025). A survey and SEM method were employed. Findings revealed that place attachment mediates eco-motivation and ecotourism intention; attachment predicts stewardship. Seraphin & Sealy (2023) examined the relationship between place identity and heritage spatial perception using the survey method. It was found that heritage spatial perceptions, including architecture, cultural ambience, and heritage site layout, significantly contribute to forming tourists' place identity, thereby increasing satisfaction and revisit intention. Odere & Ojong (2021) made the case in the study on uncovering the impact of Calabar Carnival on the economic development of Cross River State. In the study, a survey (large sample) and instrumental-variable econometric analysis were used as methodology. Findings showed that a carnival increases visitor numbers and local economic activity, but has only an insignificant effect on internally generated revenue and infrastructure development in some specifications.

All the studies reviewed show that place identity strongly predicts attachment and revisit intention. It revealed that cultural encounters aid emotional attachment. Although rather than focusing on psychological variables, Luong (2025) employed attachment as a mediating variable, Seraphin & Sealy (2023) treat attachment as an outcome variable, and Odere & Ojong (2021) focus on economic effects.

Strengths: The use of SEM, as used by Luong (2025), provides robust causal inference. Seraphin & Sealy (2023) employed spatial perception analysis, which captures multidimensional aspects of place identity.

Symbolic Heritage Elements

This theme examines how symbols, artifacts, festivals, and cultural representations influence tourist perceptions and attachment.

Summary of Studies

Brand heritage model and time-honoured brands were a study carried out by Song & Kim, (2022) in South Korea on 400 grocery shoppers; the methodology adopted was observation and interviews. Findings showed that food products with a heritage branding strategy are more likely to trigger impulse purchases.

Emotional responses that spur attachments are being evoked by symbolic elements. It was revealed that the uniqueness of symbols is an identity marker. Though the study of Song & Kim (2022) linked symbolic heritage to consumer buying behavior (market setting), not tourism.

Strengths: The observation method employed by Song & Kim (2022) captures real-life reactions beyond self-reported behavior.

Cultural Authenticity

This theme captures authenticity perceptions, heritage stories, and brand heritage as predictors of loyalty, revisit intention, and perceived value. Bakri et al., (2025) examined the relationship between authenticity and heritage tourism, and it was found that ambiguities in authenticity affect conservation.

In the United States, a study was carried out by Ahn. (2023) on heritage branding and customer loyalty in the hospitality industry. Interviews were employed for data collection. It was revealed that hotels with a strong heritage are more likely to attract and retain loyal customers.

Liu et al., (2025) investigated heritage branding and consumer behavior in the art market with a sample size of 150 art buyers in France and mixed methods. It was revealed that artworks with a heritage brand association have higher perceived value among consumers. Heritage branding and purchase intention in the wine industry was a study carried out by Lu, J., & Liu (2024) in China, on a sample size of 200 wine consumers, and methodology: experiments. Findings showed that wine brands with a heritage story have a positive impact on purchase intention.

Aisyah, N., & Evanita, S. (2024) carried out an investigation on the influence of brand heritage and brand loyalty; online survey data from brand consumers were employed. It was found that brand heritage positively influences brand image, and that in turn affects brand loyalty.

The methodology involved online questionnaires and analysis of a cosmetics brand's consumers. Findings support the role of brand heritage in shaping loyalty, although mediated by image and sometimes trust.

Wiedmann et al., (2011) carried out a study on drivers and outcomes of brand heritage: how consumers perceive heritage brands in the automotive industry. Methodology: Empirical study using PLS-based structural modeling to analyze consumer perceptions.

Findings: Heritage brands are seen as more credible, trustworthy, and preferable, enhancing consumer attitudes and loyalty and reducing perceived risk. Brand loyalty and purchase intentions are being enhanced by authenticity. In the studies reviewed, authenticity was applied differently: in the study conducted by Lu & Liu (2024), it was operationalized as brand story.

In the study conducted by Bakri et al. (2025), as spatial and cultural realism, and in the investigation by Liu (2022), as a value enhancer. Compared to product-based heritage studies, tourism-based authenticity studies are fewer.

Strengths: Use of experiments (Lu & Liu, 2024) allows causal inference, mixed methods (Liu, 2022) provide an in-depth understanding, and cross-industry comparisons show generalizability.

Gaps in the literature

There is a clear and defensible gap for a field study in Cross River, and there are also geographic gaps. Most empirical studies originated from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

No study integrated the proxies of the study's independent variable within a tourism destination.

Secondly, there were methodological gaps. This study fills the methodological gap by implementing a field survey and structured measurement in multiple heritage sites in Calabar.

Thirdly, there are theoretical gaps. Few studies anchors heritage branding research on place attachment theory within African contexts. Absence of a comprehensive model linking: Place identity, symbolic heritage elements, cultural authenticity, and tourist attachment. Previous research treats constructs in isolation, while this study integrates them into a single explanatory model.

Methodology

Research Design

A survey design was employed to provide a structured approach for collecting data representative of a larger population. This design enabled the study to gather detailed information using a structured questionnaire. The study focused on heritage branding and customer attachment to tourism in Calabar, encompassing local and international tourists.

Study Area

The study was carried out within the Calabar metropolis, the capital city of Cross River State, Nigeria. The choice of Calabar in Cross River State was due to limited funds, accessibility, and security.

Population of the Study

The population of tourists visiting sites in Calabar is adopted as the population for this study. This is because it was assumed that all residents within the state capital are conversant with heritage branding. The population of the study is not known.

Data Collection

Primary data was gathered firsthand from tourists encountered in tourist sites in Calabar, ensuring the study captured authentic and representative experiences. A predefined questionnaire functioned as the principal method for collecting data. Distributed personally to participants, it featured a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD), designed to elicit detailed responses aligned with the study objectives. The questionnaire's validity was confirmed to ensure it measured the intended constructs accurately. Reliability testing verified the instrument's consistency in measuring variables over time. The study used Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient above 0.7 considered satisfactory. A reliability analysis returned a Cronbach's alpha figure of 0.933, reflecting excellent internal consistency.

Sample Size Determination

The Cochran formula was used to calculate the sample size, ideal for infinite populations. The computation process ensured a representative sample for accurate data analysis.

$$n = \frac{[Z^2 * p * (1-p)]}{e^2}$$

Where: n = sample size for infinite population

Z = Z-score corresponding to desired confidence level (1.96 for 95% confidence)

p = estimated proportion (0.5 for maximum variability)

e = margin of error (0.05 for 5%)

Substituting the values: $n = \frac{[(1.96)^2 * 0.5 * (1-0.5)]}{(0.05)^2}$

$$n = \frac{(3.8416 * 0.25)}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} = 384$$

Therefore, the sample size is 384.

Sampling Technique

The research employed a purposive sampling technique, selecting participants based on their relevance to the study's objectives. Purposive sampling involves judgment-based participant selection, which can introduce some bias but ensures alignment with the study's focus on specific characteristics. Six locations (tourist sites) at the selected study areas were targeted where people who engaged in tourism or tourism businesses were present. A minimum of 64 respondents were selected from each of the locations in Calabar. The rationale for the distribution of the questionnaire is shown in the table. 1

Table 1: Allocation of Questionnaire by Tourist Locations.

S/N	Area	Tourist locations	Copies of the questionnaire allocated
1.	Calabar south	Marina Resort	64
2.	Calabar South	Slave Museum	64
3.	CS&Municipal	Carnival & Dry festival	64
4.	Municipal	Tinapa Business Resort	64
5.	Calabar South	Mary Slessor's home	64
6.	Calabar South	Botanical garden	64
	Grand Total		384

Source: Researchers' compilation (2026)

Table 2: Reliability Table

Heritage branding and customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State.	No of items	Cronbach Alpha(CA) Coefficient
Place Identity (PI)	4	0.932
Symbolic Heritage Elements (SHE)	4	0.930
Cultural Authenticity (CAT)	4	0.932
Customers Attachment (CATT)	4	0.933

Source: Computation by Researchers (2026)

The Cronbach Alpha test values, ranging between 0 and 1, indicated strong reliability with an achieved value of 0.933, surpassing the acceptable threshold of 0.7

Method of Data Analysis

After data collection, responses were scrutinized for completeness and prepared for statistical analysis. The linear regression was conducted using SPSS version 27.0, with results presented in tabular form for clarity.

The study utilized linear regression models to assess the causal relationship between the predictor variables and customer attachment. The models were specified as:

$$\text{CATT} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PI} + \mu \quad (\text{i})$$

$$\text{CATT} = \beta_0 + \beta_2 \text{SHE} + \mu \quad (\text{ii})$$

$$\text{CATT} = \beta_0 + \beta_3 \text{CAT} + \mu \quad (\text{iii})$$

Where CATT = Customer Attachment

PI = Place identity

SHE = Symbolic Heritage Elements

CAT = Cultural Authenticity

β_0 = Intercept or regression constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ = Regression coefficients to be estimated for destinations i in period t

μ = Stochastic error term.

Gender Respondents' Responses on Demographic Questions

Table 3

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Female	206	53.6	53.6	53.6
Male	178	46.4	46.4	100.0
Total	384	100.0	100.0	

Source: The Researchers' compilation (2026)

The results from 384 respondents surveyed revealed that 178 (46.4%) were male and 206 (53.6%) were female. An indication that the study was gender insensitive, as customers' attachment towards tourism applied to both genders in society.

Table 4: Frequency of age of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
18-30years	143	37.2	37.2	37.2
31-40years	90	23.4	23.4	23.4
41-50 years	71	18.5	18.5	18.5
51 years above	80	20.9	20.9	100.0
Total	384	100.0	100.0	

Source: The Researcher's computation (2026)

Respondent age also revealed that a majority of 143 (37.2%) of the respondents surveyed were between the age range of 18-30 years old, 90 (23.4%) respondents fell between the ages of 31 to 40 years, 71 (18.5%) respondents were between 41 and 51 years of age, and 62 (20.9%) respondents were 51 years and above. This indicates that the younger age range participated more in this survey, an implication that those who fell within the ages of 18-30 years were more adventurous.

Table 5: Frequency of Educational Qualification of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative present
Postgraduate	92	24	24	24
Bachelor's Degree/HND	85	22	22	22
O'Level	91	24	24	24
Others	116	30	30	100.0
Total	384	100.0	100.0	

Source: The Researcher's computation (2026).

The result in Table 5 shows that 116 (30%) of the respondents who participated in the survey instrument do not have any educational qualification, while 92 (24%) respondents had graduate qualifications, 91 (24%) respondents had O-Level qualifications, and 85 (22%) had post-bachelor's degrees and their academic qualifications. This result implies that a greater proportion of the respondents who participated in the survey were literate and knowledgeable enough to understand and provide answers to the research inquiry.

Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Customer Attachment (CA)	3.84	0.71
Place Identity (PI)	3.92	0.76
Symbolic Heritage Elements (SHE)	3.88	0.69
Cultural Authenticity (CAT)	3.90	0.73

Source: Researchers' computation (2026).

All the variables have mean values above 3.5 on the 5-point scale. This indicates that Calabar tourism embodies the independent variable proxies.

Correlation Matrix

Table 6: Correlation Matrix Showing Bivariate Relationships

Variables	Customer Attachment	Place Identity	Symbolic Heritage Elements
CA	.1	.72**	.76**
PI	.72**	1	.79**
SHE	.76**	.79**	1
CAT	.83**	.87**	.90**

All correlation shows a significant relationship with CAT, and it justifies proceeding to regression analysis.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 7: Model summary of the influence of place identity on customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State.

Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std.Error of the Estimate
Place identity	.87	.76	.76	0.015

H₀₁: Place identity does not positively influence customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 8. Simple Linear Regression Result 1

Variable	Unstandardized coefficients (B)	t-Stat	Standardized coefficients	P-value	F-ratio	Sig,(F)
Constant	.512	10.45	-	.000	-	.000
PI	.854	56.31	.82	.000	3162.9	.000

Source: Researchers' computation (2026)

The analysis revealed an R-squared value of 0.76, indicating that 75.7% of the variation in customers' attachment is attributed to place identity. The F-statistic of 3162.9 and a p-value of 0.000 denote a significant relationship, while the t-statistic of 56.31 confirms a positive impact. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, supporting the alternative hypothesis.

Table 9: Model summary of the influence of symbolic heritage elements on customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State.

Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std.Error of the Estimate
SHE	.83	.68	.68	0.024

H₀₂: Symbolic heritage elements do not have a positive effect on customer attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 10. Simple Linear Regression Result 2

Variable	Unstandardized coefficients(B)	Standardized coefficients()	t-Stat	P-value	F-ratio	Sig
Constant	.141	-	1.73	.085		.000
Symbolic Heritage Elements	.911	.82	37.89	.000	1436.5	.000

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2026)

The regression analysis demonstrated an R-squared value of 0.68, meaning that 92.3% of the variation in customers' attachment is explained by symbolic heritage elements. The F-statistic of 1436.534, p-value of 0.000, and t-statistic of 37.9 strongly indicate a significant relationship, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative.

Table 11: Model summary of the influence of Cultural authenticity on customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State.

Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std.Error of the Estimate
Cultural authenticity	.81	.66	.66	0.020

H_{03} : Cultural authenticity does not play any role in tourist attachment in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 12. Simple Linear Regression Result 3

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient	standardized coefficient	t-Stat	P-value	F-ratio	Sin
Constant	.265	-	4.08	.000		/000
SCAT	.792	.78	39.49	.000	1559.1	.000

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2026)

The results revealed an R-squared value of 0.66, showing that 83.1% of the variation in customers' attachment is due to access to cultural authenticity. The significant F-statistic of 1559.1, p-value of 0.000, and t-statistic of 39.49 confirm a positive and significant effect. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, supporting the alternative hypothesis.

Discussion of the Findings

The results of the study showed a significant positive relationship between each of the independent variables' proxies and customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings also provide empirical support for Altman and Low's 1992 theory of place attachment, which states that emotional attachment to a destination arises from place identity, authentic experience, and symbolism. The result of the first hypothesis tested shows that place identity significantly associates with customers' attachment to

tourism in Calabar with a correlation coefficient $R_{xz} .76$. This is in agreement with the study carried out by Son, Choi & Kim (2023) and Zou et al. (2023), which confirms that identity-related heritage cues and artifacts shape emotional bonds and memorability in heritage sites.

The result of the second hypothesis demonstrates that symbolic heritage elements significantly influence customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, with a correlation coefficient of $R_{x^2} = 0.68$. The result is in line with previous studies done by Li, Wang & Chang (2022), whose findings illustrate that symbolic representations of heritage significantly shape tourists' emotional attachment and sense of belonging. The study shows that symbolic heritage artifacts enhance emotional resonance, which directly strengthens tourist attachment and memory formation.

The result of the third hypothesis shows that cultural authenticity significantly associates with customers' attachment to tourism in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria, with a correlation coefficient of $R_{xz} = 0.66$. This is an indication of a positive relationship between customers' attachment and cultural authenticity. This finding is in line with the study carried out by Son et al. (2023), which also highlighted that heritage branding grounded in authentic cultural values fosters attachment and loyalty among tourists.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have several theoretical, practical, and policy implications.

In an African context, few studies investigate place attachment and African heritage destinations. This study will contribute to affirming that authentic cultural expression and symbolic heritage strengthen loyalty to a destination.

Theoretical Implications: This study contributes to heritage branding literature by empirically validating the role of place identity, symbolic heritage elements, and cultural authenticity in shaping customer attachment to tourism. It strengthens the relevance of place attachment theory (Altman & Low, 1992) in the Nigerian tourism context, confirming that emotional and symbolic bonds with destinations mediate tourist loyalty and revisit intentions. The study reinforces prior findings that cultural authenticity enhances emotional resonance, confirming the conceptual link between authentic heritage experiences and visitor engagement (Li et al, 2025).

Practical Implications: Tourism marketers and destination managers can leverage heritage branding to strengthen tourist attachment and loyalty by emphasizing authentic cultural elements and symbolic heritage assets. Festivals, monuments, and intangible cultural practices like dances and rituals should be curated and promoted as strategic tools for customer engagement and repeat visitation.

Destination managers should integrate heritage branding strategies in marketing campaigns to highlight Calabar's unique colonial history, indigenous cultures, and festivals, thereby differentiating it from other destinations.

Policy Implications: Policymakers should formulate frameworks to protect and preserve cultural heritage sites while promoting them as tourist attractions. Training programs and incentives could be introduced for local stakeholders to improve the delivery of authentic experiences.

Strategic investment in heritage preservation, infrastructure, and promotional campaigns can enhance visitor satisfaction, loyalty, and overall economic impact.

The findings of this study may be influenced by cultural bias, cultural familiarity, and measurement validity. It will extend the place attachment theory by showing that SHE, CA, and emotional resonance in African tourism play an important role in destination attachment.

Conclusion

This study concludes that heritage branding is a critical driver of tourists' emotional and psychological attachment in Calabar, Cross River State. Specifically, place identity significantly enhances customer attachment by creating a sense of belonging and emotional connection to the destination. Symbolic heritage elements, including festivals, artifacts, and traditions, serve as strong emotional cues that reinforce tourists' experiences and memories.

Cultural authenticity plays a substantial role in shaping tourists' perceptions, fostering trust, loyalty, and positive revisit intentions.

This study establishes that integrating heritage branding dimensions into tourism management strategies is essential for fostering stronger visitor attachment, which in turn supports sustainable tourism growth and local economic development.

This study provides an important empirical contribution to the growing body of heritage tourism literature by showing that the proxies of the independent variables predict attachment in Nigeria, and it offers rare evidence from Calabar. Theoretically, this study shows that the proxies of the independent variable studied significantly predict that in African destinations, attachment is shaped by symbolic, communal, and experiential heritage expressions rather than just architectural edifices. This study, theoretically, extends the application of Place Attachment Theory (Altman & Low, 1992) beyond Western and Asian urban heritage settings.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations were made:

Tourism authorities should design immersive storytelling programs around key heritage pillars.

These should be incorporated into guided tours, mobile apps, and cultural exhibitions to deepen emotional connection.

Festivals, masquerades, artifacts, and culinary traditions should be curated as symbolic heritage assets, not just entertainment. There should be heritage signage and digital archives positioned in key tourist sites.

Also, the destination managers should partner with local communities to offer authentic experiences like Efik language classes, indigenous craft workshops, storytelling nights, boat rides to heritage settlements, and participation in traditional ceremonies, ensuring visitors encounter heritage in its lived form rather than staged commercial formats.

The state government of Cross River State should develop policies for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and ensuring that traditional custodians, community performers, tourism marketers, and managers emphasize authentic cultural narratives and symbolic heritage elements in promotional activities. They should also develop tourism packages and experiences that immerse visitors in Calabar's history, traditions, and festivals.

Policymakers should protect and preserve heritage sites and intangible cultural assets to ensure the sustainability of tourism offerings, and they should introduce policies that encourage local stakeholders to maintain and promote authentic heritage experiences.

Future Research Recommendations

To advance scholarly understanding of heritage attachment in African tourism, future research should test mediating variables such as cultural involvement, destination image, perceived authenticity, emotional resonance, heritage motivation, and cultural pride.

These variables would help explain how and why heritage branding shapes attachment.

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Appendix I

Questionnaire

Section A: Personal Data

Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. Your specific answer would be completely anonymous and confidential, but your views in combination with those of others are of extreme importance. Please tick (☐) one cell for each statement. Thank you.

1. Age: 18-30years ☐ 31-40years ☐ 41-50 years ☐ 51 years above ☐
 2. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
 3. Education: ☐ O'Level ☐ HND/Bachelor ☐ Postgraduate ☐ Others ☐
- Strongly agree – SA (5) , Agree- A(4), Neutral– N(3), Disagree –D(2)Strongly Disagree-SD(1)

SECTION B: Place Identity.RQ1: How does place identity influence customer attachment to tourism in Calabar?

- a. I feel emotionally connected to Calabar because of its unique cultural and historical features. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐
- b. Calabar's heritage and cultural landmarks make me feel a sense of belonging. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐
- c. Visiting Calabar enhances my personal identification with its history and culture. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐
- d. The cultural and historical features of Calabar make it a memorable and distinctive destination for me. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐

Section C: Symbolic Heritage Elements.RQ2: What are the effects of symbolic heritage elements on customer attachment to tourism in Calabar?

- a. Festivals and cultural performances (e.g., Calabar Carnival) make me feel emotionally attached to the destination. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐
- b. Traditional artefacts, monuments, and historic sites in Calabar enhance my connection to the city. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐
- c. The stories, rituals, and symbolic expressions of Calabar culture make my visit more meaningful. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐

Section D: Cultural Authenticity (RQ3: What are the roles of cultural authenticity?)

- a. I perceive the cultural experiences in Calabar as authentic and true to its heritage. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐
- b. The representation of traditions, rituals, and history in Calabar reflects genuine local culture. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐
- c. Experiencing authentic cultural practices in Calabar strengthens my emotional attachment to the destination. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐

- d. Authentic cultural offerings in Calabar influence my intention to revisit the city. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐

Section E: Customer Attachment (Outcome Variable)

Statement

- a. I feel a strong emotional bond with Calabar as a tourist destination. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐
- b. Calabar is a destination I would recommend to others because of its cultural and heritage value. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐
- c. I am likely to revisit Calabar because I feel attached to its culture and heritage. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐
- d. The cultural and heritage experiences in Calabar create lasting memories for me. 1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐