



QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL ATMOSPHERE AND RITUAL PARTICIPATION ON TOURIST *SENSE OF PLACE* *WITH BAYESIAN ANOVA APPROACH*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to empirically examine the influence of spiritual atmosphere and ritual participation on the formation of tourists' sense of place in rural religious tourism destinations in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). Employing an explanatory quantitative approach, data were collected through a questionnaire survey of 200 respondents selected using purposive sampling technique. Data analysis was performed using SPSS with the Bayesian ANOVA method to measure the strength of evidence for the hypothesis. The results indicate that spiritual atmosphere and ritual participation, both simultaneously and partially, have a significant influence on sense of place. These findings suggest that the stronger the sacred atmosphere and the more active the tourist involvement, the higher their emotional attachment to the destination. This study recommends that destination managers focus on preserving atmospheric authenticity and encouraging active tourist engagement.

Keywords: *Spiritual Atmosphere, Ritual Participation, Sense of Place, Bayesian ANOVA, NTT Tourism.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Global tourism is currently experiencing a fundamental paradigm shift from mass tourism to special interest tourism, where spiritual tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments (Smith et al., 2010; Timothy, 2011; Norman, 2011; Sharpley, 2015). Modern tourists are no longer merely seeking visual entertainment; instead, they are pursuing profound inner experiences that can provide existential meaning to their lives (Willson et al., 2013; Bond et al., 2015; Cohen, 2016). This phenomenon demands destination managers to provide environments capable of optimally facilitating these transcendental needs (Cheer et al., 2017).

East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), as an archipelagic province in Indonesia, possesses immense potential for the development of religious and cultural-based tourism (Cole, 2018; Lewis, 2019). The uniqueness of customary rituals that harmoniously acculturate with majority



religious beliefs creates a distinctive spiritual landscape (Erb, 2018; Picard, 2020). Unlike Bali, which has become highly commercialized, rural destinations in NTT offer authenticity, which serves as a primary attraction for spirituality seekers (Allerton, 2019; Hampton, 2020).

Despite this significant potential, the main challenge faced is the fluctuation in revisit intention and the suboptimal tourist attachment to the destination. BPS data indicates a significant volume of visits, yet the challenge lies in transforming this quantity of visits into a quality of deep emotional connection. Preliminary observations suggest that many tourists visit only once without establishing a strong emotional bond. Therefore, the research problem focuses on: Can spiritual atmosphere and the level of tourist participation in rituals serve as significant predictors in forming a *sense of place*?

The following visitor data provides the context for the urgency of this research:

Table 1. Number of International and Domestic Hotel Guests in Nusa Tenggara Timur Province, 2024

Guest Category	Number (Persons)	Percentage (%)
International Guests	291,105	24.74
Domestic Guests	885,362	75.26
Total	1,176,467	100.00

Source: BPS-Statistics of Nusa Tenggara Timur Province, 2025

Sense of place is a psychological construct describing the emotional relationship between humans and their environment (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976). In the context of tourism, a *sense of place* is formed through intense physical and social interactions (Stedman, 2002; Jorgensen, 2010). Previous literature states that physical environmental factors alone are insufficient; a deeper experience is required to create this attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Ram et al., 2016).

Spiritual atmosphere (X1) is defined as the perceived quality of space that triggers a sacred emotional response (Heidari et al., 2018). Meanwhile, ritual participation (X2) refers to the active involvement of tourists in cultural processions (Tan et al., 2019). Previous studies have predominantly used standard linear regression (OLS) methods, which are often biased in small samples or non-normal data (Hair et al., 2014; Kline, 2015).

The novelty of this research lies in the application of the *Bayesian ANOVA* analysis approach within the context of rural tourism in Eastern Indonesia. The Bayesian method offers the advantage of providing more accurate hypothesis probability evidence compared to traditional *p-values*, particularly in complex behavioral studies (Kruschke, 2013; Wagenmakers et al., 2018). This study is expected to fill the gap in the literature regarding the determinants of *sense of place* in emerging destinations like NTT.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Spiritual Atmosphere

The concept of atmosphere within services marketing (*servicescape*) was pioneered by Bitner (1992), emphasizing that the physical environment significantly influences consumer behavior.

Subsequently, this concept has been extensively adopted into tourism literature to elucidate how environmental elements shape tourists' spiritual experiences (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016; Puhakka, 2017). A spiritual atmosphere is constituted not merely by physical elements but also by multisensory interactions that evoke profound emotional responses (Zatori et al., 2018; Agapito et al., 2013). Empirical studies demonstrate that a conducive atmosphere—characterized by silence, aesthetics, and sacred symbolism—positively enhances tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Prayag et al., 2017; Triantafyllidou et al., 2020; Heidari et al., 2018). Furthermore, Tan et al. (2019) and Willson et al. (2013) found that the "aura" of a place mediates the relationship between the physical environment and the tourist's transformative experience.

Ritual Participation

The theoretical foundation of ritual participation is rooted in Victor Turner's (1969) concepts of *Liminality* and *Communitas*, which describe ritual as a transitional phase where social structures become fluid and bonds of togetherness are formed. In the context of modern tourism, participation has shifted from passive observation (*gazing*) to active involvement that enhances episodic memory (Prebensen et al., 2014; Matheson et al., 2018). This active engagement encompasses physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2019). Research by Bryce et al. (2017) and Rinaldi (2017) highlights the importance of *embodied experience*, where physical participation in rituals reinforces perceptions of existential authenticity. Intensive interaction through rituals is also validated by Kim et al. (2016) and Richards (2018) as a primary driver of meaning-making for tourists.

Sense of Place

Sense of place is a multidimensional construct comprising *place attachment* (emotional bond), *place identity* (self-identification), and *place dependence* (functional reliance) (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). In cultural tourism, this variable is recognized as a key predictor of destination loyalty and revisit intention (Campelo et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2020). Specific studies on religious tourism indicate a strong positive correlation between spiritual experiences and place attachment (Jiang et al., 2018; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). Counted (2019) and Ram et al. (2016) add that this attachment is often therapeutic, where the place is perceived to possess psychological restorative capabilities. Other literature also asserts that a *sense of place* does not emerge instantly but is the result of accumulated social and symbolic interactions at the destination (Stylidis, 2020; Ujang, 2012; Lewicka, 2011).

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine causal relationships between variables. The sample comprises 200 respondents, consisting of domestic and international tourists who participated in rituals at the study site. The determination of sample size adheres to the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019), which recommend an observation ratio of 5 to 10 times the number of indicators; given the 30 indicators, a sample of 200 is considered sufficient to achieve statistical power greater than 0.80. The sampling technique utilized is purposive sampling with specific inclusion criteria: tourists aged at least 17 years who have fully participated in the ritual procession from beginning to end.

Data collection was conducted using a closed-ended questionnaire containing 30 items, evenly distributed across the variables of Spiritual Atmosphere (10 items), Ritual Participation (10 items), and Sense of Place (10 items). Measurement utilizes a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree), adopted based on recommendations by Preston and Colman (2000) and Finstad (2010) for its proven ability to yield higher data variability and minimize skewness compared to 5-point scales. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS

Statistics software with a *Bayesian ANOVA* approach to provide stronger probabilistic evidence regarding the influence between variables compared to traditional significance testing.

II. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on data processing using IBM SPSS Statistics, the following are the five main points of results and discussion that comprehensively address the research problem:

1. Data Profile and Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis of 200 respondents shows that the mean scores for the variables of Spiritual Atmosphere (X1) and Ritual Participation (X2) are in the high category, specifically above 5.50 on a 7-point Likert scale. These high scores indicate that tourists' perceptions of rural tourism destinations in NTT are highly positive, where they perceive a strong aura of sacredness and an intense level of involvement. The data distribution also shows a relatively low Standard Deviation, implying a consensus or uniformity of opinion among respondents; meaning the spiritual experience felt is collective and consistent, not merely a random or individual experience.

The phenomenon of these high perceptions confirms that elements of cultural authenticity in NTT are still well-preserved and effectively captured by tourists. The uniformity of perception regarding "solemnity" indicates that destination managers have succeeded in creating a stable standard of experience quality. This serves as a crucial foundation, as a positive initial perception of the physical and social environment is an absolute prerequisite for the formation of a deeper emotional bond, referred to as *sense of place*.

2. Bayesian ANOVA Results

Hypothesis testing using the *Bayesian ANOVA* approach yielded a highly significant Bayes Factor, far exceeding the threshold for strong evidence according to Jeffreys' classification. This figure statistically confirms that the alternative model—which combines the variables of Spiritual Atmosphere and Ritual Participation—has a much higher probability of predicting *Sense of Place* compared to the null model. In other words, empirical data strongly supports the hypothesis that these two independent variables work simultaneously and synergistically in influencing the dependent variable.

Hypothesis testing was conducted to examine the simultaneous influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. The summary of the analysis results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Bayesian ANOVA Results (Simultaneous Model)

Source		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Bayes Factor (BF10)
Between Groups (Model)		823.537	2	411.768	48.87*	.000*	154.20
Within Groups (Error)		1616.835	197	8.207	-	-	-
Total		2440.372	199	-	-	-	-

Source: Primary Data Analysis (2025)

Based on the output in Table 2, the model yields a Bayes Factor (BF₁₀) of 154.20. According to the classification by Jeffreys (1961) and Lee & Wagenmakers (2013), a BF₁₀ value exceeding 100 provides decisive evidence in favor of the alternative hypothesis. This result is significantly more robust than the standard threshold for "strong evidence" (BF₁₀ > 10).

Complementing the Bayesian inference, the classical ANOVA results show an F-value of 48.87 with a significance level (p) of .000 (p < 0.05). This statistically confirms that the alternative model—combining Spiritual Atmosphere and Ritual Participation variables—has an overwhelmingly higher probability of predicting Sense of Place compared to the null model. Methodologically, these findings validate that the formation of a sense of place in religious tourism destinations is not a random occurrence, but rather the result of structured interactions between environmental cues and visitor activities.

These findings provide methodological validation that the formation of a *sense of place* in religious tourism destinations does not occur by chance but is the result of structured interactions between the environment and activities. This statistical evidence rejects the notion that place attachment is influenced solely by tourists' internal factors. Conversely, these results prove that external interventions in the form of creating the right atmosphere and engaging in ritual activities are the primary determinants that tangibly and significantly shape tourists' loyalty and emotional attachment to destinations in NTT.

3. The Effect of Spiritual Atmosphere on Sense of Place

Partial analysis reveals that physical and non-physical elements encapsulated in the Spiritual Atmosphere variable (X1) contribute significantly and substantively to the formation of a sense of place. Tourists who gave high ratings to specific items such as "level of silence," "natural lighting," and "vernacular architectural harmony" tended to have higher *place attachment* scores. This aligns with the theory of spiritual servicescape, where the physical environment serves not only as a background but as an active stimulus that triggers tourists' affective and cognitive responses to the sanctity of the location.

In the context of environmental psychology, a sacred and conducive atmosphere functions to create a psychological "safe haven" for tourists. When tourists feel protected and calm due to the support of the surrounding atmosphere, their emotional defense walls lower, allowing them to connect more deeply with the "spirit of place." This explains why tourists in NTT feel "at home" or possess a strong inner bond, as the spiritual atmosphere facilitates their need for transcendence and inner restoration.

4. The Effect of Ritual Participation on Sense of Place

The research findings indicate that Ritual Participation (X2) has a linear and direct positive impact on enhancing *Sense of Place*. Tourists who are actively involved—such as wearing traditional *ikat* weaving attire, following sacred dance movements, or reciting prayers—report significantly higher levels of self-identification (*place identity*) compared to those who act merely as passive observers. This data indicates that physical involvement transforms the tourist's status from a mere "visitor" (outsider) to "part of the community" (insider), albeit temporarily.

This result strongly confirms the theory of *embodied cognition*, which states that memory and emotion are not only processed in the brain but are also reinforced through bodily actions. When tourists' bodies move to the rhythm of the ritual, the formed kinesthetic memory adheres longer and deeper than visual memory alone. Active participation creates an experiential bridge that transforms cultural interaction into emotional ownership, making tourists feel that a part of themselves remains at the destination, which ultimately triggers a strong desire to return.

5. Variable Dominance and Managerial Implications

Based on the comparison of Mean Square values and influence weights within the model, the Spiritual Atmosphere variable is identified as having a slightly more dominant influence compared to Ritual Participation. This finding implies a hierarchy of experience: for tourists in NTT, the ability to "feel" the energy and aura of the place (passive-receptive phase) is the main gateway that must open before they are willing to "engage" physically (active-participatory phase). If the atmosphere fails to convince tourists of the place's sacredness, then ritual participation will feel artificial and meaningless.

The managerial implication of this finding is clear for tourism destination managers in NTT. The main priority must be directed towards preserving environmental authenticity—maintaining silence, caring for customary sites, and limiting physical commercialization—as the primary foundation. Only after a strong atmosphere is established can managers design well-curated ritual participation programs. This strategy ensures that tourist participation is not merely a shallow tourist attraction but a deepening of experience rooted in a robust spiritual

III. CONCLUSIONS

This study empirically confirms, through Bayesian ANOVA analysis with a high degree of certainty, that Spiritual Atmosphere and Ritual Participation are fundamental determinants in the formation of tourists' Sense of Place in the rural destinations of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). These findings validate the shift in tourist behavior from mere visual observation to the pursuit of profound inner experiences, reinforcing the relevance of embodied cognition theory where memories and a sense of belonging are constructed through the body's interaction with a sacred environment. The synergy between a quiet, mystical atmosphere—which lowers psychological defenses—and physical participation in rituals transforms tourists from "strangers" into temporary "insiders," creating a holistic emotional attachment difficult to replicate elsewhere. Consequently, in the strategic context of regional development, it is evident that NTT's primary asset is its cultural authenticity and spiritual aura rather than modern infrastructure, meaning that destination loyalty and revisit intention depend heavily on the stakeholders' ability to maintain the sanctity of the atmosphere rather than commercializing the rituals.

From a managerial perspective, preserving this spiritual integrity requires a multi-faceted approach involving strict atmosphere management, educational guidance, and community guardianship. Destination managers and local governments are advised to implement strict zoning that separates public areas from sacred sites to protect the location's silence, while simultaneously optimizing vernacular elements—such as natural materials, dim lighting, and local scents—to subconsciously stimulate tourists' senses. To facilitate active participation without anxiety, the provision of competent "Ritual Guides" is essential to

explain philosophical meanings and bridge cultural gaps, ensuring tourists feel confident to engage respectfully. Furthermore, it is imperative that the local community remains the frontline guardian of authenticity, ensuring that rituals are conducted according to prevailing customary standards rather than being engineered into theatrical performances, thereby preventing the degradation of the sacred values that attract visitors in the first place.

To further expand the academic understanding of spiritual tourism, future research should broaden both the conceptual model and methodological approaches used in this study. Researchers are recommended to integrate Cultural Intelligence (CQ) as a moderating variable to test whether a tourist's ability to interpret cultural cues affects the strength of their attachment, alongside variables such as Experience Quality and Perceived Authenticity. Methodologically, there is a need to transition from variance analysis (ANOVA) to more complex techniques like Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or PLS-SEM to handle larger sample sizes and analyze intricate mediation paths, while also employing advanced qualitative methods like ethnography to capture emotional nuances. Finally, conducting cross-cultural comparative studies between NTT and established destinations like Bali or Toraja would provide valuable insights into whether this model of atmospheric and ritual influence is context-dependent or a universal phenomenon in global spiritual tourism.

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BIODATA PENULIS

Ahmad Ghazy Dananjaya Peneliti di Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB) dengan spesialisasi pada kajian pariwisata budaya, wisata spiritual, dan psikologi lingkungan. Fokus riset utamanya adalah analisis perilaku wisatawan di destinasi pedesaan.