

Research Article

Behavioral Patterns and Place Attachment in Misurata's Traditional Market

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of behavioral patterns in fostering place attachment within the traditional shopping area of Misurata City, Libya. As urban development transforms Misurata, maintaining a strong sense of place attachment in traditional areas becomes increasingly challenging. This research identifies key factors influencing place attachment and proposes strategies for enhancing urban spaces. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the study combines semi-structured interviews with 22 lifelong residents and systematic field observations to analyze behavioral patterns, spatial usage, and sociocultural influences. The thematic analysis reveals critical connections between urban behaviors and place attachment: pedestrian-friendly alleys and heritage landmarks cultivate emotional bonds and community identity, while issues such as vehicular dominance, inadequate management, and gendered spatial practices undermine these connections. Key findings indicate that improving walkability and infrastructure, addressing cultural norms that segregate users, and preserving heritage elements are vital for enhancing place attachment. The study advocates for urban policies prioritizing pedestrianization, heritage-sensitive design, and gender-inclusive spaces. By grounding place attachment theory in observed behaviors and lived experiences, this research contributes to global discussions on sustainable urbanism, highlighting the intersection of cultural identity and behavioral patterns in shaping resilient public spaces.

Keywords: Place attachment, behavioral patterns, cultural norms, traditional shopping area, Libya.

1. Introduction

The intricate relationship between people and their surroundings has long captivated urban scholars, with increasing attention directed towards the concept of place attachment, particularly within traditional urban fabrics that deeply resonate with cultural and social life (Özkan and Yilmaz, 2019). Defined as the positive, emotional, and meaningful connection individuals forge with specific locales (Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2014), place attachment is not merely a sentimental notion; it acts as a cornerstone of urban identity, profoundly shaping individuals' integration, adaptation, and overall well-being within their environments. Building upon the understanding that the person-place bond is a complex interplay of factors (Scannell and Gifford, 2010; Kyle *et al.*, 2004), this study adopts a nuanced perspective, conceptualizing place attachment through the lens of behavioral association and social interaction within the environment, drawing critical insights from existing literature (Kusumowidagdo *et al.*, 2023).

Within this context, traditional shopping areas the vibrant markets, bustling bazaars, and enduring high streets stand out as critical yet often under-examined cultural and social crucibles (Arefi, 2011). These spaces are more than mere conduits of commerce; they are living tapestries where localized behaviors, encompassing time-honored rituals, everyday commerce, and spontaneous communal activities, actively sculpt residents' fundamental sense of belonging (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). Indeed, these areas frequently embody the very cultural essence of a community, fostering deep-seated place attachment through the continuous rhythm of social engagement and the perpetuation of shared traditions. The vitality of these places' hinges not only on the services they offer but also on their efficacy as dynamic public spaces that facilitate social encounters, the rekindling of old acquaintances, and the forging of new social bonds (Carmona, 2021). As Gehl (2010) compellingly argues, the design of outdoor spaces should prioritize the fundamental human needs for comfortable movement and diverse activities – walking, sitting, conversing – all of which are social catalysts that, in turn, bolster place attachment by nurturing community ties and personal connections (Gehl, 2010).

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However, the socio-spatial dynamics of these vital traditional shopping areas are increasingly threatened by forces of change, such as gentrification and the homogenizing influence of global retail chains, which can disrupt deeply ingrained localized practices, erode cherished cultural identities, and ultimately weaken the emotional anchors of place (Johnstone and Conroy, 2008). While existing scholarship has broadly acknowledged the role of public spaces in fostering attachment (Carmona, 2014), traditional shopping areas, as distinct and intensely social public spaces, have received surprisingly limited dedicated scholarly attention. Furthermore, and crucially, there remains a significant and largely unexplored gap in our understanding of the specific mechanisms through which local *behavioral* and *social* activities within these unique spaces directly shape place attachment among diverse resident groups. This is particularly pertinent for understanding the experiences of marginalized populations, such as immigrants and women, whose interactions with and perceptions of these environments may be uniquely shaped by prevailing cultural and social norms.

Although nascent research has begun to explore the nexus of place attachment and social interactions within broader public space contexts (Ujang, Kozłowski and Maulan, 2018), a critical void persists in comprehensive investigations that specifically dissect how the granular details of local behavioral and social activities within traditional shopping areas influence the depth and nature of residents' attachment to these vital urban nodes. To directly address these significant oversights, this study poses the central research question:

How do local behavioral and social activities in traditional shopping areas affect residents' place attachment? Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. Analyze how cultural practices and social interactions in traditional shopping areas influence residents' emotional and cognitive bonds to these spaces.
- ii. Identify urban design strategies that can preserve culturally significant behaviors while enhancing inclusivity and attachment across diverse resident groups.

By directly bridging the critical disconnect between cultural diversity, localized social practices within these specific urban forms, and informed urban design, this research seeks to generate actionable insights for policies aimed at sustaining the invaluable socio-cultural vitality of traditional shopping areas as enduring anchors of place attachment in an increasingly globalized world.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Area and Respondents

This research was conducted in 2024 in a traditional shopping area of Misurata, Libya. This area features a layout that promotes social interaction and the exchange of goods and services, characterized by gathering spots, narrow alleys, and shaded streets. The narrow streets create an inviting atmosphere that encourages pedestrian movement. Historical buildings have been repurposed as shops and cafés, offering a unique shopping experience. Shaded walkways and open spaces enhance comfort and accessibility, inviting both residents and visitors to engage with their surroundings (Figure 1).

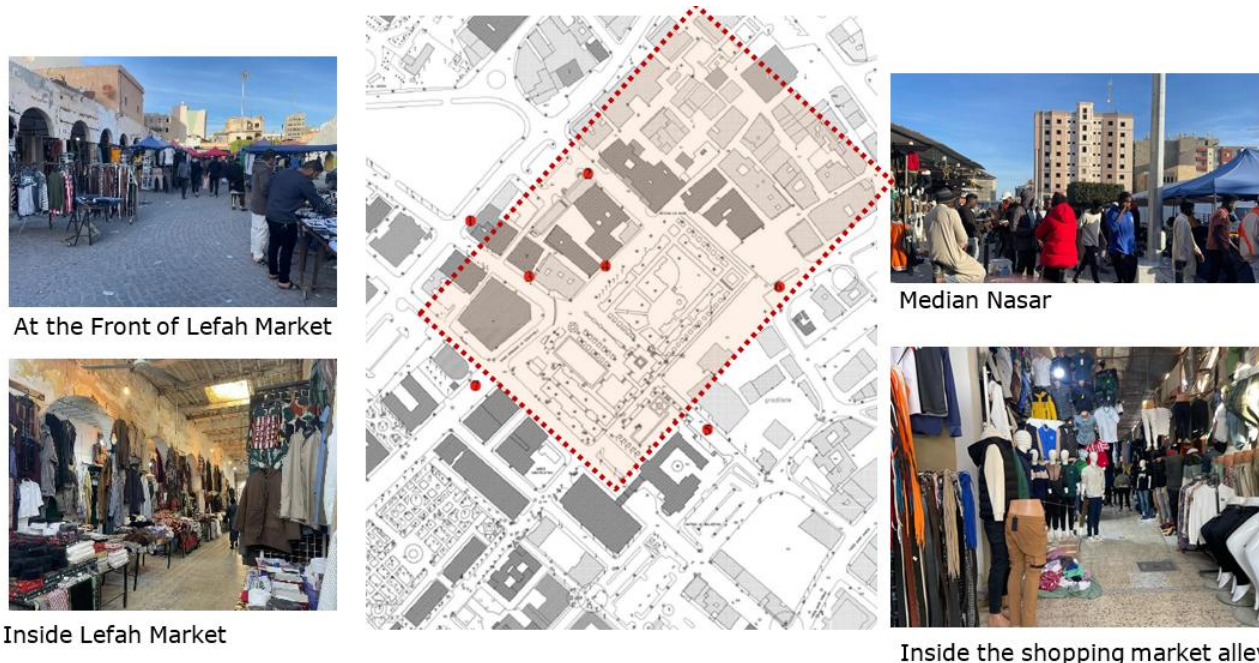


Figure 1. The study area of traditional shopping area, Misurata.

Despite the significant changes occurring in urban spaces and public places across Libya, few studies have focused on users' attachment to open public spaces. This research is the first to specifically examine place attachment in the traditional shopping area of Misurata, Libya. This localized focus in a less-studied geographical context represents a significant contribution to the field.

The participants in this study were limited to the perceptions of Misurata residents, excluding foreigners, visitors out of the city, and tourists. Only individuals who have lived and worked in Misurata either since birth or as long-term residents were considered. This focus on residents aimed to explore place attachment as a lived experience (Lewicka, 2008), which is a key significance of this study.

3. Procedure for Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted alongside site observations. Data saturation, a key principle in qualitative research, occurs when no new information or themes emerge from the data (Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 1995; Saunders et al., 2018). To determine an appropriate sample size, we considered both literature recommendations and the point of data saturation. According to the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2006), a sample size of 5 to 25 participants is sufficient for qualitative studies to achieve depth and comprehensiveness. Accordingly, this study included interviews from various sociodemographic backgrounds until data saturation was reached (Saunders et al., 2018; Hennink et al., 2017). Participants were purposively sampled to ensure representation across three criteria:

- a. User diversity: Shop owners, workers, shoppers, office employees, students, and frequent visitors.
- b. Spatial coverage: Equal representation from three distinct zones within the city center to account for locational nuances.
- c. Depth of engagement: Individuals with long-term familiarity (minimum 10 years of residency) and high visit frequency (daily or weekly engagement).

This sampling technique ensures a comprehensive understanding of place attachment by considering the diverse backgrounds and experiences of respondents. Guest et al., (2006) highlighted the importance of articulating the process of achieving data saturation in qualitative research. We assessed data saturation in two stages: during the interviews and the subsequent analysis. Initially, we noted repetition in the data and concluded that we had gathered enough detail to address the research questions after five participant interviews. This saturation was further confirmed during the data analysis phase. While conducting the interviews, we simultaneously transcribed and coded the data. By the fifth transcription for each participant, our analysis revealed consistent patterns in codes and themes, with no new themes emerging.

Each interview was conducted individually and face-to-face, lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. Semi-structured interviews were selected for data collection due to their sensitivity to social realities and their ability to provide a deep understanding of participants' experiences, perspectives, and emotions. This method focused on specific themes relevant to the study while also allowing participants the flexibility to introduce new insights that were significant to the research.

To explore feelings and emotions, we categorized questions based on preferences, reasons for visiting, reasons for liking the area, social experiences, memories, and motivations for conservation and enhancement. The questions were organized under headings corresponding to the aforementioned theoretical components, demonstrating how the framework guided their development while allowing for flexibility within the semi-structured interview process. Furthermore, we used clear language and examples to assist interviewees in articulating their experiences related to place attachment, and unstructured questions emerged based on their responses.

3.1 Procedure for Field-Observation

Systematic observations were conducted across the selected study areas, utilizing photography and ethnographic note-taking to document spatial usage, pedestrian behavior, and social interactions in streets and public spaces. Photographs gathered were analyzed to identify recurring activities (e.g., informal gatherings, vendor-customer exchanges) and spatial features influencing engagement. Field notes recorded temporal variations (e.g., peak hours vs. quiet periods; active spots; type of activities, etc.) and contextual factors such as architectural layout and accessibility.

3.2 Data Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized for analyzed. A hybrid thematic analysis was employed, combining inductive coding (to identify emergent patterns) and deductive coding (guided by place attachment theory).

3.3 Initial Coding

Interview transcripts were coded, a qualitative data analysis tool. We initially employed descriptive coding to assign labels to segments of the transcripts that captured core themes discussed by participants (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). Some text segments received multiple descriptive codes. Following up first interview coding, the same procedures were then used for the rest interviews. As the coding process continued, more codes emerged, look at any differences or similarities between them and the refine codes were applied.

3.4 Reviewing Coded Data and Identifying Themes

After completing the initial coding, we organized and grouped related codes into broader themes to address

the research questions (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). Both deductive and inductive thematic analyses were used to ensure a comprehensive approach. According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), deductive thematic analysis employs pre-existing theories or frameworks to guide coding and theme development, whereas inductive thematic analysis identifies themes directly from data without predefined categories.

In this study, we conducted a thorough analysis of interview transcripts by applying descriptive and structural coding techniques to identify themes related to participants' emotional attachments to places. We extracted specific reasons for these emotional connections and examined how these reasons correlated with their responses to other interview questions, revealing the factors that influenced their attachments. We used a similar process to extract participants' challenges and desires regarding public space development. Furthermore, we categorized and assessed structural codes based on interview questions about the challenges participants encountered and the aspects that required improvement to enhance interaction and attachment to the traditional shopping

area. We triangulated observational data, including photographs and notes, with interview findings to validate connections between tangible features, observed behaviors, and expressed emotional ties.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic analysis of 22 interview participants reveals a diverse group, consisting of 54.5% males and 45.5% females. Their ages range from 19 to 69 years, with most participants between 22 and 56. A majority (63.6%) are married, and the group includes both visitors/shopkeepers (54.5%) and shop owners (27.3%) from various occupations, such as traders, artists, and engineers. Over half of the participants hold degrees (54.5%), while a significant portion possesses diplomas (22.7%). Engagement with the area is high, as 50% visit daily, underscoring the space's importance for social interaction and economic activity. This demographic profile highlights a well-educated and actively involved community.

Table 1. Interview participants' demographics characteristics

Participants	Gender/ age	Status	Role	Occupation	Education	Frequency of visits
P1	Male/ 28	Single	Shop owner	Trader	Diploma	Daily
P2	Male/ 26	Single	Shop keeper	Seller	Secondary	Daily
P3	Male/ 31	Married	Visitor/shopper	Computer Eng.	Degree	Monthly
P4	Male/ 37	Married	Visitor/shopper	Seller	Diploma	Daily
P5	Male/ 22	Single	Visitor/shopper	Student		Monthly
P6	Male/56	Married	Visitor/shopper	Artist	Degree	Monthly
P7	Male/ 46	Married	Visitor/shopper	Self-employed	Secondary	Weekly
P8	Male/ 69	Married	Resident	Retried	Degree	Daily
P9	Male/38	Married	Visitor/shopper	Civil Eng.	Degree	Weekly
P10	Male/46	Married	Visitor/shopper	Doctor	Degree	Monthly
P11	Male/19	Single	Shop keeper	Seller	Diploma	Daily
P12	Male/49	Married	Visitor/shopper	Administrative	Degree	Weekly
P13	Female/34	Married	Visitor/shopper	Pharmacist	Degree	Monthly
P14	Female/38	Married	Visitor/shopper	Housewife	Degree	Monthly
P15	Female/29	Married	Visitor/shopper	Office work	Degree	Monthly
P16	Female/47	Married	Visitor/shopper	Nurse	Degree	Monthly
P17	Female/40	Married	Visitor/shopper	Teacher	Degree	Weekly
P18	Female/24	Single	Visitor/shopper	Student		Weekly
P19	Female/22	Single	Visitor/shopper	Student		Monthly
P20	Female/32	Married	Visitor/shopper	Administrative	Diploma	Monthly
P21	Female/53	Married	Visitor/shopper	Housewife	Primary	Monthly
P22	Female/69	Married	Visitor/shopper	Housewife	Secondary	Monthly

4.2 Challenges and Desired Improvements for Public Open Places

The research revealed that one of the main challenges in the traditional shopping area of Misurata is creating public spaces that are comfortable, pedestrian-friendly, and free from vehicular traffic. The area, which includes a historical and popular market, suffers from a lack of street activities that promote diverse social interactions. While the narrow alleys and streets surrounding the market naturally restrict vehicular access and enhance pedestrian movement, the integration of pedestrian activities with other public spaces remains poorly coordinated. The lack of

pedestrian-friendly infrastructure can be traced back to rapid urbanization policies that prioritized commercial development over community needs, leading to a disconnect between urban design and social interaction.

Furthermore, commercial activities dominate most spaces, with people primarily focused on buying and selling at shop frontages. This restricts the potential for broader social interactions, a phenomenon noted by Heath, Oc and Tiesdell, (2011), who argue that an overemphasis on economic functions can undermine the social and cultural value of public spaces. However, small interstitial spaces within the market area, such as those in front of the Sheikh Mosque and the shaded

alleys, serve as exceptions. These spaces provide opportunities for shopping, socializing, and hosting thematic bazaars, as well as offering resting areas for visitors. As one participant noted:

"I prefer to come here in my spare time. What sets this place apart are its narrow roads, closely situated stores, and pedestrian-only movement. This unique aspect creates a distinct atmosphere and fosters a sense of relaxation" (P7-M-46 Y).

The area adjacent to Medan Nasser, stretching towards the Sheikh Mosque, is one of the busiest parts of the traditional market. Historically a hub for commercial activities, this space now also functions as a bazaar, a place for strolling, waiting, and dining. This axis adds vibrancy to the area, serving as a façade for the traditional market while providing a direct link to the public transport network and nearby services. The diversity of activities in this space was highlighted by another participant:

"I can see people coming here continuously. Even though the place is crowded and uncomfortable, people still come. My friends invited me to come here; I also wanted to see what is special about this place. When I am here, it is certainly the best place because it has everything" (P4-M-37 Y).

Despite these positive aspects, the lack of effective place management poses significant challenges.

Insufficient parking spaces and the absence of regulations for vehicle movement and parking lead to confusion and inefficiency. Visitors often park their cars wherever space is available, disrupting the functionality of public spaces and discouraging social activities. This issue is exacerbated by the prioritization of vehicle movement over pedestrian needs, as seen in the frequent parking of vehicles directly in front of store entrances or in areas designated for gatherings. Observations of crowded areas reveal that physical layout inhibits social interaction, as shown in Figure 1, where vehicles obstruct pedestrian pathways.

As noted, that the lack of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure can be traced back to rapid urbanization policies that prioritized commercial development over community needs, leading to a disconnect between urban design and social interaction. This disconnect undermines the continuity and vibrancy of street activities, limiting opportunities for meaningful social encounters and interactive communication among users. These findings also align with Gehl's (2011) assertion that public spaces prioritizing pedestrian activities over vehicular traffic are more likely to foster social interactions and create vibrant urban environments. As noted by Shamsuddin et al., (2012), poor place management, including inadequate parking regulations, can significantly disrupt the functionality and social potential of public spaces.



Figure 2. Improper parking by individuals negatively impacts the integrity of sidewalks and open spaces.

To address these challenges, several solutions could be implemented. These include creating public spaces with activities around their peripheries, providing street furniture, ensuring accessibility and continuity throughout the area, and adding more attractions to enhance the pedestrian experience. While the study recorded instances of limited movement and activity, some active interactions such as conversations, eating, drinking, street vending, and social greetings were observed.

4.3 Behavioral Patterns Influence Place Attachment

Table 2 indicates the pattern of activities and interactions observed in the study area and the form of users' engagement. However, the streets still offer

limited opportunities for engagement, largely due to the dominance of vehicular traffic and the lack of pedestrian-oriented design.

The market's activity peaks during the weekly evening market and annual events like holidays, highlighting its role as a hub for commercial and social activities (Figure 2). Attachment to the market is significantly influenced by interactions with familiar individuals, such as acquaintances who work in the area. The urban form, including the old mosque Sheikh Mosque and Nasser Square, reflects the traditional Arab culture and identity of the place. As Low and Altman (1992) suggest, place attachment is influenced by social and cultural factors. The Sheikh Mosque serves not only as a religious site but also a cultural anchor that fosters community identity.

Table 2: Behavioral patterns analysis in the traditional area of Misurata

Measure	Social activities and interaction	Engagement
Types of Interaction	Primarily engaged in bargaining, conversing, walking, eating, mixing, talking on mobile phones, greeting others, observing, and promoting products.	Users are primarily involved in commercial activities.
Varied levels of user participation.	Most people were shopping, and there were street performers; however, very few bused in to watch.	Short stays in the public spaces are allowed except when there is seating in front of the bazaar in Nasser Square and Shieh Mosque, and front some stores.
Users' level of involvement in activities.	Mostly people are shopping, staying in the café, and walking through.	Social attachment among shopkeepers and shop owners is interactive and involves direct participation from other users.
Opportunity to engage in activities in open spaces.	Space in front of the mosque, Nasser Square, and some areas used for car parking are suitable for shared activities such as social and leisure activities.	Social engagement is limited to buying and selling, with no shared activities organized for users to participate in. The street becomes the shared public space for the night market, holiday occasions, and an extended praying area during Friday prayers.
Level of mixed uses.	Residential area, hotel, administrative buildings, banks, historical buildings, stalls, offices, weekly bazaar.	Mixed-use settings accommodate a variety of activities, where people participate in both essential and leisure pursuits; however, they tend to foster less social interaction.
Opportunities for walking: a suitable area that features obstacles, accessibility, and interesting details to observe.	Suitable for walking, but there is insufficient paving and suitable furniture for pedestrians. There is illegal car parking and street vendors on walkways.	Pedestrians walked along a narrowing path in front of the stores but could not engage longer because of the limited space to stop and communicate.
Opportunities for standing and staying: appealing areas that provide support for these activities.	Limited space to stay and stand, except in front of the mosque, along the pathway by Nasser Square, and next to the main store.	Lack of space design, service quality, and shared activities for people to stay and stand while observing.

**Figure 3.** A weekly market at Al Nasser Square draws people in, encouraging them to revisit and engage with the area

To better understand how people use the market and how it influences their attachment, activities were observed inside the selected area. The market, while the most active commercial hub in the city, lacks adequate facilities for social interaction, such as seating areas, shaded spots, and quality street furniture. As noted by Kyle *et al.*, (2004), individuals with strong emotional connections to their environment are more likely to engage in activities that promote community stewardship, as evidenced by the frequent social gatherings observed at the Sheikh Mosque. However, small interstitial spaces near the round market and Sheikh Mosque, as well as in front of shaded shops,

provide limited opportunities for sitting, resting, and conversing.

The traditional shopping area of Misurata is characterized by narrow alleyways and pedestrianized streets, which contribute to a walkable environment. Participants described the area as "walkable" and "pedestrian-friendly," highlighting how the physical characteristics of the space foster a sense of comfort and safety. These features enhance place attachment by fostering a stronger sense of community than is typically experienced in areas accessed primarily by vehicle traffic. This was strongly expressed by more than half the interviewees:

"Being here feels like being in a quiet room. This market is quite different from others, like the one on Sana Street. It's notably quieter, with no cars around, so the only sounds you hear are people chatting, negotiating discounts, or asking about the goods they're seeking. It creates a sociable atmosphere (P2-M-26 Y).

Another participant shares that the traditional area fosters strong social interactions and creates a

supportive environment for communicating with others.

There is certainly a distinct vibe in the traditional area. The atmosphere feels unique. I often visit this place with friends, wandering around, chatting, joking, shopping, and sitting together. The sellers here are also friendlier compared to those in the formal market on the main streets, where transactions are quick and there is little contact or conversation (P1-M-28 Y).



Figure 4. A car-free street in the historic area creates a vibrant atmosphere, contrasting with other spaces where cars frequently pass and park.

This pedestrian-friendly environment encourages individuals to walk freely and comfortably, enhancing their sense of social interaction, community and well-being. This finding aligns with Ujang's (2014) study on walkability and attachment to tourism destinations, which illustrates how walking is correlated with visitors' levels of engagement and attachment to such places. Similarly, Southworth (2005) notes that pedestrian-friendly environments contribute to a sense of safety, comfort, and well-being, encouraging people to engage more deeply with their surroundings. This suggests that, in Misurata, attachment to the market fosters informal social gatherings, yet community engagement is often limited.

Overall, the narrow, pedestrian-friendly alleys of Misurata promote social interactions but face challenges due to vehicular traffic. In contrast, the open plazas of Barcelona, Spain, are designed specifically for social gatherings, featuring seating, greenery, and cultural activities that enhance community bonding (Gehl, 2010). The traditional market of Misurata presents a unique case study of the interplay between historical urban design, commercial activities, and social interactions. While the area benefits from its pedestrian-friendly layout, the lack of coordinated place management and the dominance of vehicular traffic hinder its potential as a vibrant social space. By addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, the area could be transformed into a more inclusive and dynamic public space that fosters both economic and social vitality.

4.4 Influence the Cultural Norms on Place Attachment

As expected, the study reveals a pronounced divergence in how men and women perceive and engage with the traditional market in Misurata. Men exhibit a stronger attachment to the market and visit more frequently than women. This disparity can be attributed to several factors, including the presence of migrant workers from various African countries who operate as vendors and shoppers, often in an irregular manner on the sidewalks. This dynamic contributes to a negative perception of the area. Observations indicate that migrants frequently gather with friends in public spaces, especially during weekends and holidays. Unlike female respondents, many male participants expressed a willingness to interact with individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, including migrants. This suggests that the accessibility and use of public spaces are deeply influenced by cultural norms. As one young vendor noted:

"Everyone here is fine; we conduct our business as usual. I have no problem mixing with others from different ethnicities. The workers from other shops are Egyptians and Africans; we are used to talking freely, and there are no problems here" (P2-M-26 Y).

Similarly, other male participants highlighted their comfort with the market environment:

"I am familiar with this place; I take my time wandering, shopping, and chatting with others as if we know each other. This place gives a sense of social connectivity more than other shops along the street" (P12-M-49 Y).

In contrast, female respondents uniformly expressed discomfort with the market's atmosphere, citing feelings of insecurity due to the presence of migrants and foreign workers. One participant remarked:

"I just don't feel comfortable with the many migrants and foreign workers scattered everywhere here; this creates a sense of insecurity, despite the government's attempts to develop this area and make it more attractive" (P13-F-34 Y).

Most of the female respondents expressed discomfort with the crowded, male-dominated inside old market areas; here is an example of one respondent stating:

"I rarely visit this place because it is always crowded with young men. However, I do feel comfortable here, especially during Eid when the vibrant atmosphere enhances the street" (P14-F-38 Y).

Notably, women were predominantly found at the edges of the market, near shops selling fabrics, embroidery, and home textiles, while men congregated in the central areas, where shops sell shoes, clothing, and cafes. Despite the lower frequency of visits by women, the market remains inclusive, attracting diverse social groups. However, the needs of users with special requirements remain inadequately addressed. In the Libyan context, the functions of public spaces vary significantly between men and women, shaped by cultural norms. Women's activities are often confined to specific areas of the market, while men engage in a broader range of activities, including shopping, sitting, and conversing. The flexibility and multifunctionality of a space enhance its attractiveness. However, the narrow alleys, while fostering pedestrian movement, often fail to encourage lingering or meaningful interaction, as they primarily facilitate commercial transactions. Despite this, these alleys also serve as spaces for social communication, which could be further enhanced with designated public gathering spots.

In Misurata, female participants reported discomfort in crowded, male-dominated areas, reflecting cultural norms surrounding gender segregation. This contrasts sharply with traditional shopping streets in Surabaya, Bali, Indonesia, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where women often engage freely in public spaces. Community practices in both case studies encourage mixed-gender interactions, creating a more inclusive atmosphere (Kusumowidagdo, Astrid and Ujang, Norsidah and Rahadiyanti, Melania and Ramli, 2023). This comparison illustrates how cultural context shapes experiences of safety and belonging, suggesting that interventions in Misurata must consider these dynamics to enhance female participation.

The findings align with existing literature on social environments and responsive urban design. Barnett and Casper (2001) define social environments as the physical settings that facilitate social relationships and cultural interactions. Mehta, (2013) emphasizes that

responsive environments provide physiological comfort, stable behavioral patterns, enjoyable sensory experiences, and positive symbolic associations. These elements are crucial for fostering social interaction and place attachment. However, the lack of coordination, organization, and maintenance in Misurata's old market undermines its potential as a vibrant social space.

The separation of men and women in public spaces, driven by religious and cultural beliefs, further underscores the need for inclusive design that respects these practices. Askarizad and He, (2023) highlight the importance of addressing privacy demands in urban spaces, particularly for Muslim women, to promote social justice and fair interactions.

To enhance the market's role as a social space, it is essential to create well-designed public areas that reflect the social, cultural, and psychological needs of Libyan society. This includes providing more spaces for interaction, improving accessibility, and ensuring continuity throughout the area. The fundamental principle is to leverage place attachment as a driving force for creating inclusive urban environments. Public spaces must be thoughtfully planned and designed to support meaningful interactions between people and their surroundings, fostering a sense of belonging and community.

The findings resonate with studies by Low and Altman (1992), who argue that place attachment is influenced by social and cultural factors, including gender roles. The gendered use of space in Misurata's market reflects broader societal norms that shape how men and women interact with public spaces. Likewise, Gehl (2010) emphasizes the importance of designing public spaces that cater to diverse user groups, including women and marginalized communities. The study's emphasis on privacy and segregation aligns with research by Madanipour (2003), who discusses how cultural and religious values influence urban design in Muslim-majority societies. Addressing these considerations is crucial for creating spaces that respect local traditions while promoting inclusivity. By integrating these insights, the discussion underscores the need for culturally sensitive urban design that enhances place attachment and fosters inclusive, vibrant public spaces in Misurata city. The pronounced gender differences in attachment and usage patterns suggest that urban planners must consider gender-specific needs in their designs, potentially leading to policies that promote safer, more inclusive spaces.

Conclusion

This study illuminates the intricate relationship between behavioral patterns, and place attachment in Misurata City's traditional shopping area, offering critical insights into sustaining culturally significant public spaces amid rapid urbanization. The findings underscore that walkability, mixed-use layouts, and active frontages are pivotal in fostering social

interaction and emotional bonds to place, aligning with global urban design principles. However, the area's potential as a vibrant social hub is hindered by vehicular dominance, inadequate place management, and sociocultural norms that shape gendered spatial practices.

Key takeaways include:

1. **Pedestrian-Centric Design as a Catalyst for Social Interaction:** The narrow, shaded alleys and walkable streets of Misurata's market naturally encourage pedestrian movement, echoing Gehl's (2010) emphasis on human-scale urbanism. However, the lack of coordinated infrastructure such as seating, shaded rest areas, and traffic-free zones limits opportunities for sustained social engagement. Prioritizing pedestrian needs over vehicular access could amplify the area's role as a communal space.
2. **Cultural and Gender Dynamics in Place Attachment:** The study reveals stark gender disparities in spatial usage. Women's discomfort with the market's crowded, male-dominated zones highlights the need for inclusive design that respects cultural norms while fostering safety and accessibility. Spaces tailored to diverse user groups, such as segregated seating or activity zones, could bridge this gap and enhance inclusivity.
3. **Place Identity and Heritage as Drivers of Attachment:** Historical landmarks like the Sheikh Mosque and Nasser Square anchor collective memory and cultural identity. Their preservation, coupled with adaptive reuse of traditional architecture, can strengthen emotional ties to the market while accommodating modern economic needs.

Practical Implications

1. **Policy Interventions:** Urban planners must integrate heritage conservation with modern infrastructure, enforcing regulations on vehicular traffic, parking, and encroachment. Designating car-free zones and enhancing pedestrian connectivity between key nodes (e.g., mosques, squares, and markets) could revitalize the area's social fabric.
2. **Community-Centric Design:** Engaging local stakeholder's vendors, residents, and cultural leaders—in place-making initiatives ensures that interventions align with users' needs. For instance, thematic bazaars or seasonal events could leverage the market's existing vibrancy to attract broader demographics.
3. **Gender-Inclusive Strategies:** Addressing women's safety concerns through improved lighting, designated gathering spots, and culturally sensitive layouts (e.g., semi-private seating areas) would democratize access to public space.

Theoretical Contribution: By grounding place attachment theory in observed behaviors rather than self-reported intentions, this study bridges a critical gap in urban scholarship. It demonstrates how emotional bonds to place manifest not only through nostalgia or cultural pride but also through tangible practices daily visits, vendor customer exchanges, and communal rituals. This behavioral lens enriches global debates on sustainable urbanism, particularly in contexts where rapid development threatens traditional landscapes.

Limitations and Future Research: While the qualitative approach provides depth, future studies could quantify attachment metrics through surveys or spatial analytics. Comparative analyses with other Libyan cities or MENA-region markets would further contextualize Misurata's challenges. Additionally, longitudinal research tracking the impact of proposed interventions (e.g., pedestrianization) could validate design strategies.

In conclusion, Misurata's traditional market embodies the tension between preservation and progress. Its survival hinges on balancing economic vitality with the sociocultural values that define its identity. By centering human experiences in urban policy, planners can transform such spaces into resilient, inclusive hubs that honor heritage while nurturing community well-being a lesson with profound relevance for cities worldwide grappling with similar dynamics.

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