

# The rhythm (and decisions) of the night: how FoMO and place identity explain decision-making, nighttime economy usage and expenditure

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this research is to provide theoretical and practical insight into the night-time economy (NTE), which is underpinned by services that provide consumers with a “third place”. Specifically, the research examines the critical decision-making factors that encourage NTE use and expenditure, and how these are explained by place identity and individuals’ level of fear of missing out (FoMO).

**Design/methodology/approach** – This research uses a cross-sectional survey of 577 participants in the Sunshine Coast region of Australia. The data are analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling and PROCESS Macro, with mediation and moderated effects tested.

**Findings** – The results confirm four key decision-making factors: safety, transport, quality and social, which have a significant impact on NTE usage and expenditure. Place identity plays a key mediating role in explaining these relationships between decision-making factors and NTE usage and expenditure. Furthermore, these relationships are stronger for individuals who report higher levels of FoMO.

**Originality/value** – This research contributes to understanding how an NTE can be conceptualised as a sustainable ecosystem in which both social outcomes (senses of place identity) and economic outcomes (usage and expenditure) can be achieved. In doing so, it also draws greater scholarly attention to NTE, a sector embedded in services such as tourism, hospitality and retail, yet underexplored in the services marketing literature. Furthermore, the research addresses the fragmented understanding of factors influencing NTE usage by synthesising, validating and modelling key decision-making factors, along with establishing their quantified associations with NTE usage and expenditure.

**Keywords** Night-time economy, Third place, FoMO, Place identity, Consumer decision-making factors, Social identity theory, Tourism, Hospitality, Structural equation modeling, Transformative service research

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

A fundamental aspect of the human condition is the desire for social inclusion and connection. This is often sought outside the home and workplace, in “third places”, public settings that foster a sense of belonging (Alexander, 2019; Fong *et al.*, 2021; Meshram and O’Cass, 2018; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2007). These third places, such as pubs, clubs and cafes, can be accessed at night, offering opportunities for leisure, culture and emotional connection (Lee, 2022; Sandiford, 2019). Such services and the places they occur are mainstays of what is known as the night-time economy (NTE) and support commercial sustainability through employment and economic activity while also contributing to broader societal well-being (De *et al.*, 2024). In this way, NTE can be considered a sustainable service ecosystem given its ability to contribute both social and economic benefits simultaneously (Field *et al.*, 2021; Russell-

Bennett *et al.*, 2024). Despite these benefits offered by NTEs, they can often face challenges due to concerns about noise, crime and residential disruption (Nofre and Garcia-Ruiz, 2023; Søgaard, 2017). These issues can lead to restrictive regulations that affect consumers’ decisions to use and engage with the NTE, thereby limiting its profitability. This is a particular problem for regional areas, which are already underserved by NTE offerings (Cabras and Mount, 2017; Patrick, 2024). This research addresses the underexplored area of NTE in the service literature by investigating how consumer decision-making drives participation and expenditure in the NTE, clarifying the key factors and conditions that shape this third-place usage (Hill *et al.*, 2024).

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One theory that can help explain NTE usage and expenditure is social identity theory, which posits that individuals define themselves through group affiliations, thereby developing a sense of belonging (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). As NTEs often function as third places, social identity theory is particularly relevant, as it highlights how people form strong attachments to places that become part of their identity (Bernardo and Palma-Oliveira, 2016). Building on this, the current research investigates which factors in consumer decision-making drive NTE usage and expenditure. Currently, the limited NTE literature highlights that the decision-making factors encouraging usage are complex and multifaceted (Smallman and Moore, 2010), shaped by considerations of service diversity, transport access and safety (Priporas et al., 2017). Yet, a key limitation is that these factors are often considered in isolation, for example, considering transport access, without examining the multiple decision-making factors together and how they shape NTE usage and expenditure. This gap, therefore, shapes the first research question guiding this study:

**RQ1.** What are the key decision-making factors that encourage greater NTE usage and expenditure in regional centres (non-metropolitan areas)?

To further examine how social identity theory explains the relationship between decision-making factors and NTE usage and expenditure, this research considers two key concepts. The first is a specific form of social identity, place identity (Hunter, 2010), which is often developed in third places that foster belonging and attachment (Meshram and O'Cass, 2018). The second is a psychological attribute, fear of missing out (FoMO) (Przybylski et al., 2013), which may influence the strength of the relationship between decision-making factors, place identity and NTE usage and expenditure. Together, place identity and FoMO may provide an explanation for why individuals make decisions to participate in group-based activities like those found in NTEs (Gidley et al., 2010). For instance, some people seek social connection through shared identities tied to places and interests such as food, music or sport, reinforcing a sense of community and affiliation (Clark et al., 2012). Consistent with this, the current study proposes that place identity may mediate the relationship between decision-making factors and NTE usage and expenditure. In contrast, FoMO may act as a moderator, explaining why these relationships may be stronger for some individuals than for others. While third places promote shared meaning and belonging (Alexander, 2019; Meshram and O'Cass, 2018), higher levels of FoMO have been shown to intensify consumption behaviours related to social or cultural experiences (Bui et al., 2022). Therefore, individuals experiencing FoMO may be more responsive to decision-making factors signalling opportunities for connection, thereby increasing their likelihood of engaging with the NTE. Yet, there is currently limited NTE research examining how it facilitates a sense of place identity, or which factors may make this process salient, such as FoMO. Given the scarcity of NTE research, particularly regarding the issues raised in the preceding discussion, these gaps inform the second research question of the present study:

**RQ2.** Does place identity mediate the effect of decision-making factors on NTE usage and expenditure, and is this mediation moderated by individuals' FoMO?

To address these RQs, the current study uses a cross-sectional online survey of 577 consumers from the Sunshine Coast region of Australia. The data are analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), indicating that four critical dimensions represent the decision-making factors for NTE, which influence NTE usage and expenditure. Place identity is shown to mediate these relationships, but more so for individuals who have high FoMO. The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Firstly, a review of the NTE literature is presented to situate the research within this body of work. This is followed by a presentation of the hypotheses, which are theoretically grounded in social identity theory. Following this, the research survey method is presented, contextualising the study within the Sunshine Coast region of Australia. This is followed by a presentation of the results, using PLS-SEM. A discussion of the results, their theoretical and practical implications and the limitations and directions for future research will follow.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Current state of night-time economy research

The academic study of the NTE is a small but growing interdisciplinary field that explores the tangible and intangible aspects of night-time activities and their positive and negative impacts on people in modern urban settings (Nofre and Garcia-Ruiz, 2023). A summarised overview is provided in Table 1. NTE typically encompasses leisure-based activities occurring at service establishments, primarily between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. It is noted that many food and beverage venues also operate during the day. As such, a well-functioning NTE extends access to public and commercial facilities and services for third-place socialisation. NTEs can also contribute to a region or city's economy by lengthening operational times and increasing employment opportunities, particularly in leisure, entertainment, hospitality and tourism sectors (Sandford, 2019). There are also potential economic benefits from NTE through the stimulation of other industries, such as food and beverage production, and transportation (Hobbs et al., 2005; Zhuravlova et al., 2020).

To date, much of the media and academic focus on the NTE centres on its financial value (Edwards and License, 2025; Glaecomics, 2018; NTIA, 2025; Zhuravlova et al., 2020). For instance, a 2019 study in Washington D.C. reported 65,000 jobs, 2,500 businesses and US\$7.1bn in annual night-time spending (Zhuravlova et al., 2020), while an Australian report found 1.06 million people, 6.9% of the workforce, employed in the core NTE in 2021 / 2022 (Edwards and License, 2025). However, less is known about why individuals engage with the NTE and its services, and how these services may benefit individuals socially, whilst also yielding financial benefits for economies. Existing research notes the NTE's role in enhancing liveability and social well-being by fostering cultural expression, creativity and social connection (Nofre, 2023; Rosenbaum et al., 2007; Shaw, 2021), yet these studies often lack empirical links to economic and financial outcomes. The current research seeks to address this gap by considering how NTE can deliver both social value (e.g. place identity) and

Table 1 Chronological overview of NTE related studies 2010 to present

| Author(s)/year                  | Theory                               | Regional NTE                               | NTE focus                                                                                             | Decision-making factors                                                                                    | Place identity | FOMO | NTE usage | NTE expenditure |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------|-----------|-----------------|
| Hunter (2010)                   | Social capital                       | Chicago                                    | Space, social capital, and urban black nightlife                                                      | Motivations, socialisation                                                                                 | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Shaw (2014)                     | Actor-network theory                 | Newcastle, England                         | Beyond night-time economy: Affective atmospheres of the urban night                                   | Different practices that contribute to atmosphere                                                          | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Silverstone (2016)              | N/A                                  | UK                                         | Variations in the nightclub industry                                                                  | Hedonism, drug usage, violence                                                                             | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Johnson et al. (2016)           |                                      | San Francisco                              | Nightclub violence                                                                                    | Observation or experience of violence                                                                      | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Cabras and Mount (2017)         | Third places                         | Rural Ireland                              | Community cohesion, economic development and social capital                                           | Price, public transport, safety, entertainment                                                             | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Søgaard (2017)                  | Sub-culture, interaction theory      | Denmark                                    | Ethnic based policing of nightclub accessibility                                                      | Phenotypical characteristics, style of dressing, attitude, situational behaviour and level of intoxication | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Homan (2019)                    | Moral panic model                    | Sydney                                     | Lockout laws and nightlife governance                                                                 | Safety                                                                                                     | Y              | Y    |           |                 |
| Díaz-Fernandez and Evans (2020) | Affect theory, Feminist theory       | UK Midlands                                | Sexism and misogyny in NTE                                                                            | Safety, experiences, fear                                                                                  |                | Y    | Y         |                 |
| Plyushteva and Boussauw (2020)  | Gender studies                       | Sofia, Bulgaria                            | Night-time mobility                                                                                   | Safety                                                                                                     | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Carah et al. (2021)             | Industry interviews                  | Brisbane, Australia                        | Venue management                                                                                      | Commercial opportunity, live entertainment                                                                 | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Gordon-Wilson (2021)            |                                      | Britain                                    | Pub                                                                                                   |                                                                                                            | Y              |      | Y         | Y               |
| Kuo et al. (2021)               | Social capital theory                | Zuoying district of Kaohsiung city, Taiwan | Local festivals                                                                                       | Social trust, social norms                                                                                 | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Jiang et al. (2021)             | Place attachment, consumption values | China                                      | Customer perceived value of night-time tourism and destination attachment among Generation Z tourists | Functional, economic, emotional, social, epistemic, safety and green values                                | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Lin et al. (2022)               | Night-time vitality index            | Zhejiang Province, China                   | Economic indicators                                                                                   |                                                                                                            |                |      | Y         | Y               |
| Le et al. (2023)                |                                      | Da Nang, Vietnam                           | Tourism impact on NTE                                                                                 | Cultural experience, natural attractions                                                                   | Y              |      | Y         | Y               |
| Nofre and Garcia-Ruiz (2023)    |                                      | N/A                                        | Literature                                                                                            | Safety, identity, experience, violence, alcohol                                                            |                |      | Y         |                 |
| Wang et al. (2023)              | Social exchange theory               | Kaifeng, Henan Province, China             | Resident support for night tourism                                                                    | Quality of life, emotional solidarity, resident attitude, supportive behaviour                             |                |      |           |                 |
| Kramer and Wittman (2023)       | Social well-being,                   | Freiburg, Germany                          | Nightlife as a counterspace                                                                           | Alcohol, atmosphere                                                                                        | Y              |      | Y         |                 |
| Lewis and McBride (2024)        |                                      | UK                                         | Gender based violence in NTE                                                                          | Emotional responses, safety                                                                                | Y              |      |           |                 |
| Current study                   | Social identity theory               | Y                                          | NTE                                                                                                   | Safety, transport, quality, place identity FOMO                                                            | Y              | Y    | Y         | Y               |

economic benefits (usage and expenditure), thereby supporting service profitability and employment.

Another limitation in the current NTE literature is its dominant focus on large metropolitan cities (Hadfield, 2006; Seijas and Gelders, 2021; Shaw, 2021; Smith and Eldridge, 2021), and scant consideration of regional contexts. This is particularly important for evaluating the prior aspects of NTE use and the social and economic benefits it provides. The scale and density of an NTE in regional areas tend to be smaller and more dispersed (Cabras and Mount, 2017), resulting in more seasonal and irregular patterns of night-time activity. But culturally, NTE may in fact be more embedded within the local community in regional contexts, whereas in metropolitan areas it is often associated with cosmopolitan and globalised lifestyles

(Eldridge, 2019). In regional settings, NTE may also play a more significant role in promoting social cohesion and supporting the retention of young people, partly by fostering place-based identities. Conversely, participation in a regional NTE could be affected by more basic consumer factors such as transport access and related safety concerns, as well as quality or diversity of offerings. Thus, due to the limited research in NTE in regional areas, this context becomes a critical focus for the current research.

## 2.2 Decision-making factors for NTE usage and expenditure

When reviewing the literature (Table 1), it becomes evident that several decision-making factors have been considered,

albeit in a fragmented way, to understand why individuals engage in NTE. These decision-making factors include social factors (Jiang et al., 2021; Kuo et al., 2021; Le et al., 2023), safety factors (Cabras and Mount, 2017; Homan, 2019; Lewis and McBride, 2024), transport factors (Cabras and Mount, 2017) and quality factors (Cabras and Mount, 2017; Jiang et al., 2021). Accordingly, this research conceptualises four key decision-making factors (social, transport, safety and quality of entertainment) that encourage NTE usage and expenditure. These factors are defined and justified below to address the gap of considering multiple influences simultaneously, rather than examining factors in isolation.

Relating to the first decision-making factor, social NTE research shows that the need for socialisation, coupled with a desire for hedonistic consumption, is a key motivation for participation in NTE activities (Gordon-Wilson, 2021; Kramer and Wittman, 2023). Following this socialisation theme, Nofre (2023) comments on the multiple networks of “nocturnal sociability” and how this situates nightlife as “a source of social well-being, community building and psychological support” (pg. 506). García (2013) also observed that nightclubs, for example, were a place where “groups of strangers manage to socialise, feel connected and even support each other in an intense environment, where there are very few clearly articulated norms and criteria of belonging” (p. 234).

The second decision-making factor, transport, refers to the private and public modes individuals can use to travel to and from NTE areas. Eldridge and Roberts (2013) argued for transport’s “importance in the management and delivery of the city at night as an economic and cultural space” (p. 55). However, despite its potential to constrain or enhance NTE usage, there is a paucity of research on this as a decision-making factor in the nightlife literature. Of the limited studies that consider transport as a decision-making factor, Cabras and Mount (2017) showed that a lack of effective public transport in rural Ireland has a significantly negative impact on pub patronage and culture, supporting its consideration in the current research.

Safety concerns, as a third decision-making factor, represent concerns individuals may have for personal safety (e.g. “will I get home safely?”), health (e.g. impacts of hedonistic abuse) and security (e.g. protection of property and diffusion of conflicts). Such concerns have led to “safety” becoming a pre-eminent feature of scholarly research into nightlife and NTEs over many decades (Bromley et al., 2000). As such, NTE policy and governance have historically focused on mitigating anti-social behaviour and crime associated with the night (Hobbs et al., 2005; Measham and Brain, 2005). The current research seeks to extend these discussions and the consideration of safety-related factors to examine how, from a consumer perspective, this influences their NTE usage and expenditure.

The fourth factor, quality (of entertainment), is central to service industries like tourism and entertainment and underpins destination identity and loyalty (Mukherjee et al., 2018). Tourists and locals weigh the quality and variety of offerings, along with convenience, to assess the value of NTE offerings. This is especially true when businesses deliver either curated local alternatives to out-of-town options or distinctive community-rooted experiences. In night-time tourism, quality perceptions are considered based upon infrastructure, food and entertainment

(Jiang and Hong, 2023). It is these quality perceptions that shape consumers’ decisions to engage and use NTE’s offerings and expenditure. For example, if a consumer considers the quality of offerings high, this factor in their decision is likely to influence usage and expenditure. This is plausible, as it would extend previous research showing links between concepts such as service quality, satisfaction and loyalty to the current research (Goktas and Dirsehan, 2024; Huang et al., 2017).

The previous review and discussion of NTE literature highlights that decision-making for NTE participation, while multifaceted, has some common factors. However, the collective impact of these factors on NTE usage and expenditure remains underexplored. Yet, if, as theorised in prior literature, they are decision-making factors, they should influence consumers’ NTE usage and expenditure. Hypothesised formally as:

- H1.* Decision-making factors for NTE usage (represented by social, transport, safety and quality), will be significantly associated with NTE (a) usage and (b) expenditure.

### 2.3 Social identity theory and night-time economy

To explore how and why decision-making factors may influence NTE usage and expenditure, as proposed in *H1*, this paper draws on social identity theory. Specifically, social identity theory helps to explain the latter relationship through the concepts of place identity and FoMO. Social identity theory is briefly outlined below and then used to develop hypotheses regarding the roles of place identity and FoMO.

Social identity theory posits that people define themselves through the groups they belong to (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). This is key to understanding NTE participation, as individuals are often motivated by a desire to maintain membership in social groups, particularly those that engage in nightlife activities (Nofre, 2023). In dedicated nightlife spaces, or within the various clusters of bars, pubs and clubs that constitute an NTE, a phenomenon known as “flocking” behaviour often emerges among sub-groups (Roberts, 2015). Research indicates that subgroups that emerge in nightlife play a crucial role in shaping youth identities (Nofre and Garcia-Ruiz, 2023), where a diverse array of cultures, subcultures and neo-tribal patterns characterise groups engaging in the NTE (Hollands, 2002). This vibrant blend of lifestyles and activities contributes to the rich tapestry of social experiences found in these environments.

Nightsapes, defined as both nightlife zones and commercial activities (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002), are central to NTE and support identity when designed to enhance cultural and social life (Nofre and Garcia-Ruiz, 2023). These NTE spaces allow emotional expression, connection and identity formation, often marketed to specific identity groups tied to music, fashion, politics or sexuality (Bennett, 2000). As one participant of a previous study stated, “I’m a cocktail person” (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002; p. 110), highlighting the link between their social identity and NTE activity. Thus, NTE choices and their use reflect both social activity and identity, shaped by offerings like music or food and by where peers gather (Bennett and Petterson, 2004). This research builds upon existing findings and the theoretical principles of social identity theory. It proposes that social identity theory can help explain the decision-making factors regarding usage and expenditure in the NTE. These factors are further supported by the concepts of

place identity and the FoMO, which will be discussed and hypothesised in the following sections.

## 2.4 Place identity and NTE usage and expenditure

If the theoretical application of social identity theory holds in the current study, factors should influence NTE participation through the development and maintenance of identity, which this research considers via place identity. As mentioned, social identity theory posits that individuals derive a sense of self and identity from their group affiliations, including how these are undertaken in places and communities, supporting the potential role of place identity in the current research. Place identity, defined as emotional and symbolic attachment to a location, has been shown to foster belonging and collective action (Abou-Shouk *et al.*, 2018), which has parallels to social identity theory's principles. As NTE is designed for social connection and emotional experiences, the decision factors that facilitate its use and related expenditures should be attributable to its role in reinforcing a sense of place identity, according to social identity theory. In this way, place identity should mediate the effect of decision-making factors on NTE usage and expenditure.

Further supporting the current research, which considers place identity as a mediator, Kuo *et al.* (2021) showed that place identity mediates the effects of social trust and social norms on the encouragement of festival tourism in local communities. In Vong (2016), a study of Macau residents' support for heritage tourism illustrates that place identity mediates the effects of perceptions of heritage tourism and place attachment. Tournois and Rollero (2020) showed that place identity mediates the impact of residents' commitment to live in that area. Nightlife studies have also shown how the evolution of an NTE can cause conflict when it is perceived as overburdening or changing an existing place identity (Cardona and Sanchez-Fernandez, 2022; de Gois, 2024). Thus, based on the theorising with social identity theory and discussion of prior empirical studies, the following is hypothesised:

- H2. Place identity will mediate the effect of decision-making factors on NTE usage and expenditure.

## 2.5 Moderating role of FoMO

In the context of the NTE, FoMO is particularly relevant, as NTE activities are often social, time-sensitive and culturally significant, making individuals more susceptible to the fear of being left out. FoMO involves two primary components. Firstly, apprehension or anxiety from a perception that others are having rewarding experiences from which one is absent (but could be present for), and second, the persistent desire to stay connected with people in one's social network (Elhai *et al.*, 2021).

Although not explicitly investigated in the context of NTE behaviours, research on FoMO has demonstrated that this psychological trait can amplify the drivers of various social activities and behaviours. For example, FoMO has been shown to encourage individuals to engage more frequently with social media platforms (Chan *et al.*, 2022), often leading to increased time spent online. It also contributes to behaviours like "phubbing", where one person is ignored because another is preoccupied with their social network online (Tandon *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, FoMO has been linked to a heightened willingness to purchase goods, services or experiences to stay

aligned with social trends (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Individuals with higher levels of FoMO demonstrate a greater willingness to pay for products and experiences (Zhang *et al.*, 2020), reflecting behavioural tendencies that closely align with NTE usage and expenditure in the present study. More broadly, the marketing and psychology literature consistently establishes FoMO as a moderating factor across a range of behavioural contexts, including social media use (Riordan *et al.*, 2022; Einstein *et al.*, 2023; Dinh *et al.*, 2023) and alcohol consumption (Lewis *et al.*, 2023). Building on this well-established evidence base, this study models FoMO as a moderator to explain the conditional effects of decision-making factors on NTE outcomes.

While existing research demonstrates that FoMO can help explain variations in social and antisocial behaviour, as well as consumption behaviour, it has yet to examine consumer engagement with the NTE. There is, however, a strong theoretical basis for its relevance, given that the NTE is underpinned by social connection and identity, and that a central aspect of participation involves the consumption of, and expenditure on, related services.

Considering the guiding theory of the research, social identity theory helps explain how FoMO may influence NTE behaviours and expenditure. According to social identity theory, individuals are motivated to maintain or enhance their social identity by aligning with the values, norms and behaviours of the groups to which they belong (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). As such, FoMO could play a key role in driving behaviour by heightening the social pressure and decisions to participate in nightlife activities, especially when these events are seen as integral to (place) identity. In this way, higher levels of FoMO may be a psychological intensifier (moderator) that reinforces decision-making factors for NTE usage and expenditure by facilitating a sense of place identity. Whereas those with low FoMO are less likely to be influenced, as they do not possess the internal characteristics that encourage the need for social connection and identity, and thus are less likely to make related decisions about NTE usage and expenditure to facilitate these needs. Based upon the prior discussion and theorising, the following is therefore hypothesised:

- H3. FoMO will moderate the association of decision-making factors on place identity NTE.

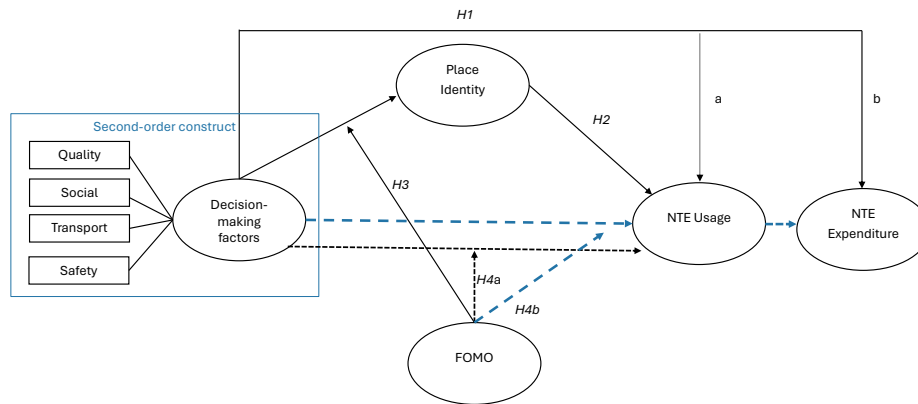
- H4. FoMO will moderate the indirect effect of decision-making on NTE usage and expenditure.

In conclusion, Figure 1 presents a visual summary of the conceptual model guiding this research. In testing this model, this paper examines multiple decision-making factors for NTE usage and expenditure, rather than studying them in isolation. Furthermore, it seeks to move NTE research beyond a solely economic focus to provide a theoretical and empirical understanding of individuals' motivations and the social benefits of engaging with NTE, and how these can lead to economic impacts through greater expenditure. It also seeks to holistically examine the different decision-making factors that may drive these outcomes.

## 3. Methods and context

The current study used an online survey with participants recruited via an online survey panel provider, Dynata, and via

**Figure 1** Conceptual model of NTE usage and expenditure



social media posts, consistent with other tourism and services marketing studies (Mulcahy *et al.*, 2024; Pareek and Harrison, 2020). Ethical considerations and approval were also sought and attained before commencing data collection through the lead author's institution (ethics approval number: A231860).

This research specifically targeted participants from the Sunshine Coast region, Queensland, Australia. The Sunshine Coast is approximately 100 km (62 miles) north of Brisbane, the state capital. The region covers 2263.5 km<sup>2</sup>, encompassing the coastal shires of Caloundra, Maroochy and Noosa, and the hinterland of Maleny. Since the COVID-19 period, the Sunshine Coast has been recognised as Australia's fastest growing region for domestic migration (Atfield, 2023; Macrotrends, 2023). One may assume that this population growth has led to prosperity for local operators within the local NTE. However, the initial spur for this research was anecdotal industry reports and media commentary indicating the local NTE was not only in decline but historically not a distinctive feature of the region (Khalil, 2022; Sinclair, 2023).

### 3.1 Sample characteristics

The sample consisted of 577 Sunshine Coast residents (sample summarised in Table 2). Most participants identified as female (65.7%,  $n = 379$ ), with a mean age of 39. Furthermore, the majority of the participants identified as living in a single household (32.5%) or as a couple (with no children at home; 30.4%). The median income for the sample is \$60,000, which is comparable to the state's reported 2024 median income of \$70,000 (ABS, 2024). Regarding education, most participants (32.1%) reported having attained an undergraduate degree.

### 3.2 Analysis techniques

This study adopts a sequential analytical strategy combining partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with supplementary conditional process analysis using the PROCESS macro. PLS-SEM is retained as the primary technique due to the model's complexity, including multiple latent constructs and a second-order hierarchical construct representing decision-making factors. It is well-suited to predictive modelling, hierarchical latent structures and non-normally distributed data, particularly the outcome variable NTE expenditure.

**Table 2** Sample characteristics

| Sample characteristics                  | %    |
|-----------------------------------------|------|
| <b>Gender</b>                           |      |
| Male                                    | 33.6 |
| Female                                  | 65.7 |
| Non-binary/ third gender                | 0.5  |
| Prefer to self-describe                 | 0.2  |
| <b>Education</b>                        |      |
| Some high school                        | 16.3 |
| High school certificate                 | 20.8 |
| Trade certificate                       | 18.9 |
| Undergraduate degree                    | 32.1 |
| Postgraduate degree                     | 11.8 |
| <b>Household</b>                        |      |
| Single                                  | 32.5 |
| Single parent (children at home)        | 5.4  |
| Couple (children at home)               | 20.5 |
| Group/share household                   | 3.8  |
| Living at home with one or more parents | 5.9  |
| Other                                   | 0.9  |
| Prefer not to say                       | 0.7  |
| Couple (No children at home)            | 30.4 |

This represents a key advantage over covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), which relies on multivariate normality assumptions that may bias estimates when violated (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

To complement the primary analysis, PROCESS is used to examine moderation effects in greater depth. It enables detailed probing of interaction effects through spotlight and floodlight analyses, offering interpretive insights beyond standard PLS-SEM outputs. This is particularly relevant for assessing the moderating role of FoMO in the relationship between decision-making factors and behavioural outcomes. Although prior research suggests that PLS-SEM is sufficient for estimating mediation and conditional process models (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2020), it provides limited insight into conditional effects across levels of moderators. Accordingly, PROCESS enhances the interpretation of moderation without replacing the primary structural modelling approach.

The limitations of PROCESS are acknowledged, particularly its reliance on observed composite scores rather than latent variables (Hayes *et al.*, 2017). To address this, the measurement model is first validated using PLS-SEM, after which composite scores derived from validated constructs are entered into PROCESS analyses. Prior methodological evidence supports the robustness of this approach. Overall, this strategy aligns with current best practice in services marketing research (e.g. Nguyen, 2026; Gupta and Verma, 2025).

### 3.3 Common method bias

The current research addressed and mitigated common method bias during both the survey and study design phases, and through post hoc analysis. During survey and study design, we implemented strategies, such as incorporating varied response formats and informing participants about the anonymity of their responses, to reduce the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, since some hypotheses involve interaction (moderation) effects, it is worth noting, as Siemsen *et al.* (2010) observed, that common method bias does not inflate interaction effects. Given that the current research examines the moderating role of FoMO, this suggests common method bias is not a significant concern. For thoroughness, the current study conducted a post hoc variance inflation factor (VIF) test to rule out common method bias, following the approach recommended by Kock (2015). The results indicated that all VIF scores were below 5.0, confirming that common method bias was not a significant concern in the data. Harman's single-factor test was also used to further assess and help rule out common method bias in the data. The first factor accounted for 31.38% of the total variance, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of 50% (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), further indicating that common method bias is unlikely to pose a significant concern in this study.

### 3.4 Instrument development and validation

To confirm the four-dimensional structure and to identify and develop items for NTE decision-making factors, a series of in-depth interviews ( $n = 10$ ) with local NTE operators (e.g. venue operators and musicians) was conducted. As shown in Table 3, the insights from the NTE operators supported the identified decision-making factors, and subsequent items were generated to operationalise the dimensions (as reported in Table 3).

For all other constructs, scales and items were drawn from previously validated scales. FoMO items were adapted from (Przybylski *et al.*, 2013), NTE usage items were adapted from (Micromex, 2018; Schlenker *et al.*, 2010), and place identity items were adapted from (Lee *et al.*, 2012). For NTE expenditure, participants were asked, "How much money would you estimate you spend on an average typical night out/activity?" An open-text box was provided to record the amount. The average spend reported by participants was \$159.46 (AUS). In the current research, expenditure is measured as a single-item indicator, as it is a concrete, objective variable measured in monetary units, whereas the other constructs in the study are latent constructs inferred from multiple indicators. This also aligns with the literature, which notes that measuring expenditure as a single-item indicator is appropriate for structural models but not feasible with multi-item measurement (Petrescu, 2013).

**Table 3** Representative industry operator quotes for decision-making decisions

| Decision-making dimension | Representative quote from industry operator                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Quality of entertainment  | There's certain artists that will still sell (our venue) out very quickly. But at the moment it's just the hot ones that are selling tickets, none of the other ones are<br>I think the venues that are providing an [quality] atmosphere that's uniquely different, which includes the music as much as the offering that they're providing                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Social factors            | So we'd open and the business guys would come in for after work drinks at six o'clock, then the band crew would start coming in at 830 for the show. And then the nightclub kids would start coming in at 1030. And then it was just never empty<br>The people that come back are the people that met someone there last Friday, meeting them there again this Friday and having that connection, so we talk about this all the time                                                                                                                                |
| Transport                 | It's hard to really measure exactly how much custom we're losing because it's too hard to get here (to the venue) and back again (home) So, it is challenging to get people to drive out here, especially with the transport issues. Yes, (transport) I think it impacts it hugely, because one of the reasons why I think Melbourne has such a vibrant music scene is because of they've got trams and they've got these like, just really like cultural centres or streets like Lygon street or Brunswick and people can just easily travel there and travel home |
| Safety                    | Safety? Massive (decision-making factor). I don't think they're (consumers) consciously aware of it, but I think yeah, a well-run venue you're more likely to go back<br>Yeah, there's always a concern of safety that people have and that depends on the nature of the person and the location. If the locations are safe environment, you know all those barriers get dropped                                                                                                                                                                                    |

Prior to testing the hypotheses, the study items were assessed for validity and reliability (see Table 4). Convergent validity was assessed via parameter estimates (standardised regression weights), and the significance of the associated  $t$ -values was confirmed (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table 5 shows that item loadings were positive for all items relevant to their constructs, including decision-making factors, and that second-order loadings were positive for the dimensions of social, transport and quality. Loadings ranged from 0.54 to 0.91 and were statistically significant.

Composite reliability also exceeded the accepted minimum threshold of  $> 0.60$  (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988) with scores ranging between 0.76 and 0.95. In addition, discriminant validity was also evidenced with AVE scores for all constructs being above

Table 4 Items, composite reliability, AVE and factor loadings

| Construct/Items                                                                                   | Composite reliability | AVE  | Factor loadings |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------|-----------------|
| <b>FoMO</b>                                                                                       | 0.95                  | 0.70 |                 |
| I fear that others may have more rewarding experiences than me                                    |                       |      | 0.77            |
| I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to                                         |                       |      | 0.91            |
| It is important that I understand my friends' "in jokes"                                          |                       |      | 0.81            |
| Sometimes, I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what my friends are getting up to    |                       |      | 0.85            |
| It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to meet up with friends                                  |                       |      | 0.83            |
| When I have a good time it is important for me to share the details online (e.g. updating status) |                       |      | 0.84            |
| When I miss out on a planned get-together it bothers me                                           |                       |      | 0.81            |
| When I go on vacation, I continue to keep tabs on what my friends are doing                       |                       |      | 0.89            |
| <b>NTE usage</b>                                                                                  | 0.90                  | 0.60 |                 |
| Go to a nightclub                                                                                 |                       |      | 0.79            |
| Attend a ticketed live music concert                                                              |                       |      | 0.83            |
| Go to a cultural performance (e.g. theatre, dance or comedy)                                      |                       |      | 0.80            |
| Attend free live entertainment (e.g. in a bar, café, restaurant or club)                          |                       |      | 0.76            |
| Visit night markets                                                                               |                       |      | 0.75            |
| Go out for a movie night                                                                          |                       |      | 0.71            |
| <b>Place identity</b>                                                                             | 0.92                  | 0.74 |                 |
| Night-time entertainment on the Sunshine Coast means a lot to me                                  |                       |      | 0.74            |
| Night-time entertainment on the Sunshine Coast is very special to me                              |                       |      | 0.88            |
| I identify very strongly with being a person from the Sunshine Coast                              |                       |      | 0.86            |
| Night-time entertainment on the Sunshine Coast is more important than in other places             |                       |      | 0.89            |
| <b>Decision-making factors (second order)</b>                                                     | 0.87                  | 0.61 |                 |
| Quality of entertainment                                                                          |                       |      | 0.67            |
| Social factors                                                                                    |                       |      | 0.78            |
| Transport services                                                                                |                       |      | 0.82            |
| Safety                                                                                            |                       |      | 0.85            |
| <b>Quality of entertainment (first order)</b>                                                     | 0.89                  | 0.80 |                 |
| The type or quality of the entertainment on offer                                                 |                       |      | 0.87            |
| How much I like the performers                                                                    |                       |      | 0.91            |
| <b>Social environment (first order)</b>                                                           | 0.78                  | 0.55 |                 |
| It will be a busy and fun vibe                                                                    |                       |      | 0.75            |
| It will be a quiet and relaxed vibe                                                               |                       |      | 0.73            |
| How packed the venue is likely to be                                                              |                       |      | 0.74            |
| <b>Transport (first order)</b>                                                                    | 0.84                  | 0.64 |                 |
| The cost of transport                                                                             |                       |      | 0.77            |
| Distance to the venue                                                                             |                       |      | 0.79            |
| Convenience of transport to and from the venue                                                    |                       |      | 0.85            |
| <b>Safety (first order)</b>                                                                       | 0.88                  | 0.79 |                 |
| The ability to get home safely                                                                    |                       |      | 0.90            |
| My safety and security while out                                                                  |                       |      | 0.88            |

the recommended threshold of 0.50 with scores ranging from 0.53 to 0.80. In addition, as per the recommendations in the literature, we used the HTMT ratio to further evaluate discriminant validity, which was confirmed with the ratio scores as illustrated in Table 5 the recommended threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 5 HTMT correlations

| Construct                  | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5 |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Decision-making factors |       |       |       |       |   |
| 2. FOMO                    | 0.383 |       |       |       |   |
| 3. NTE usage               | 0.254 | 0.618 |       |       |   |
| 4. Expenditure             | 0.219 | 0.366 | 0.401 |       |   |
| 5. Place identity          | 0.220 | 0.711 | 0.731 | 0.413 |   |

#### 4. Results

Next, the results of the PLS-SEM analysis are presented in terms of direct, indirect and total effects (see Table 5). The direct effects are specifically used to assess a direct path relationship, for example, between decision-making factors and place identity, as moderated by FoMO (H3). The indirect effects allow mediation assessment, considering place identity and NTE usage as mediators between decision-making factors and NTE expenditure (H2) and as moderated by FoMO (H4). Finally, the total effect is used to assess the combined effect, including both direct and indirect effects, which will be critical for determining the flow-on effects of decision-making factors on NTE expenditure (H1). These are summarised in Table 6. Overall, the model provided moderate explanations for NTE usage ( $R^2 = 0.436$ ) and place identity ( $R^2 = 0.455$ ), but a

Table 6 PLS-SEM results

| Relationship                                                                  | B     | SE    | T      | P     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| <b>Direct effects</b>                                                         |       |       |        |       |
| Decision-making factors → place identity                                      | 0.027 | 0.041 | 0.657  | 0.511 |
| FOMO x decision-making factors → place identity                               | 0.149 | 0.036 | 4.181  | 0.000 |
| FOMO x place identity → night expenditure (H3)                                | 0.203 | 0.038 | 5.297  | 0.000 |
| NTE usage → night expenditure                                                 | 0.165 | 0.043 | 3.792  | 0.000 |
| Place identity → night expenditure                                            | 0.232 | 0.041 | 5.600  | 0.000 |
| Place identity → NTE usage                                                    | 0.661 | 0.024 | 27.598 | 0.000 |
| <b>Indirect effects</b>                                                       |       |       |        |       |
| Decision-making factors → place identity → NTE usage                          | 0.018 | 0.027 | 0.652  | 0.514 |
| Decision-making factors → place identity → night expenditure                  | 0.006 | 0.010 | 0.647  | 0.518 |
| Decision-making factors → place identity → NTE usage → night expenditure (H2) | 0.003 | 0.005 | 0.643  | 0.520 |
| FOMO x decision-making factors → place identity → NTE usage                   | 0.098 | 0.023 | 4.242  | 0.000 |
| FOMO x decision-making factors → place identity → night expenditure           | 0.034 | 0.011 | 3.110  | 0.002 |
| <b>Total effects</b>                                                          |       |       |        |       |
| Decision-making factors → night expenditure (H1b)                             | 0.009 | 0.014 | 0.658  | 0.511 |
| Decision-making factors → NTE usage (H1a)                                     | 0.018 | 0.027 | 0.652  | 0.514 |
| FOMO x decision-making factors → NTE usage (H4a)                              | 0.098 | 0.023 | 4.242  | 0.000 |
| FOMO x decision-making factors → night expenditure (H4b)                      | 0.051 | 0.015 | 3.44   | 0.001 |

low explanation for night expenditure ( $R^2 = 0.228$ ). Although PLS-SEM lacks widely agreed-upon, strict model-fit indices (Hair et al., 2019), the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) for the saturated model was 0.097, indicating acceptable model fit.

#### 4.1 Direct effects

The analysis results showed that decision-making factors were not significantly related to place identity ( $B = 0.027$ ,  $SE = 0.041$ ,  $t = 0.657$ ,  $p = 0.511$ ). The interaction effect of FoMO and decision-making factors on place identity was significant ( $B = 0.149$ ,  $SE = 0.036$ ,  $t = 4.18$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), supporting H3. This suggests that decision-making is conditional on individuals' levels of FoMO, and that its effect increases with higher FoMO, as shown in the simple slope analysis (Figure 2).

Place identity was shown to be significantly associated with NTE usage ( $B = 0.661$ ,  $SE = 0.024$ ,  $t = 27.59$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and NTE expenditure ( $B = 0.232$ ,  $SE = 0.041$ ,  $t = 5.60$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). NTE usage was shown to be significantly associated with NTE expenditure ( $B = 0.165$ ,  $SE = 0.041$ ,  $t = 3.792$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The interaction effect of FOMO on place identity on NTE spend was also significant ( $B = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.038$ ,  $t = 5.297$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

#### 4.2 Indirect effects

The results show that decision-making factors associated with NTE expenditure via the serial mediation chain of place identity and NTE usage were non-significant ( $B = 0.003$ ,  $SE = 0.005$ ,  $t = 0.643$ ,  $p = 0.520$ ). The moderated serial mediation effect considering the interaction between decision-making factors and FoMO on NTE expenditure via place identity and NTE usage, was significant ( $B = 0.016$ ,  $SE = 0.006$ ,  $t = 2.709$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ), supporting H4.

#### 4.3 Total effects

When examining total effects, the effect of decision-making factors was not statistically significant for NTE expenditure ( $B = 0.009$ ,  $SE = 0.014$ ,  $t = 0.658$ ,  $p = 0.511$ ) or NTE usage ( $B = 0.018$ ,  $SE = 0.027$ ,  $t = 0.652$ ,  $p = 0.514$ ). However, in line with the direct effects and indirect effects, when considering the moderating role of FoMO, the total effect was shown when interacting with decision-making factors and their relationship with NTE usage ( $B = 0.098$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 4.24$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), and NTE expenditure ( $B = 0.051$ ,  $SE = 0.015$ ,  $t = 3.44$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). This therefore provides conditional support for H1, in that decision-making factors are associated with NTE expenditure, but only at different FoMO levels.

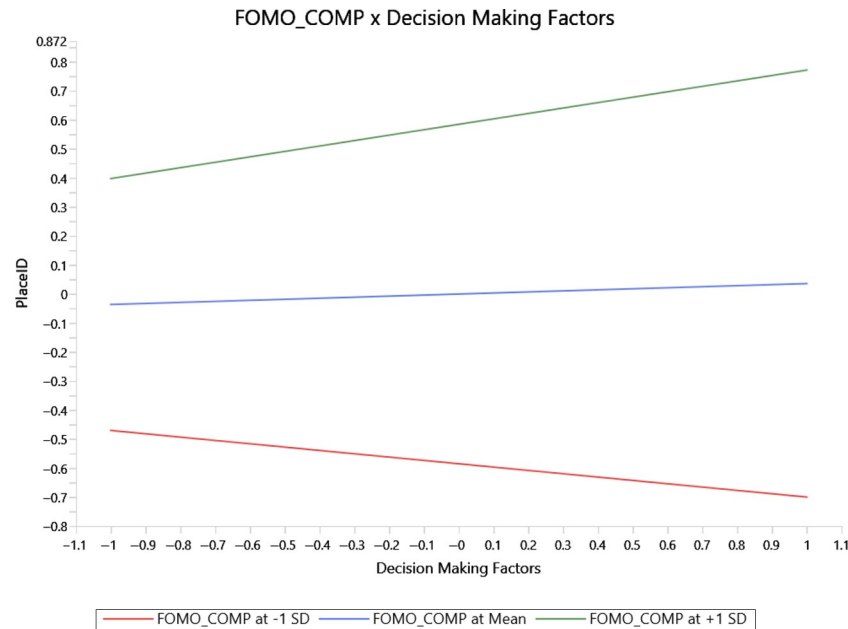
#### 4.4 Additional probing of the moderating role of FoMO

To further test the robustness of our results and also probe further the moderating role of FoMO, we tested the data using the PROCESS Macro extension for SPSS, using Model template 84 with 10,000 bootstraps, and probing the interaction at conditional mean values of  $-1SD$ , Mean,  $+1SD$ , noted as a spotlight analysis, as well as probing via the floodlight technique (also known as the Johnson–Neyman output). Specifically, we consider the floodlight technique when probing H3, whereby the relationship between decision-making and place identity is moderated by FoMO, and the spotlight technique for H4b, whereby the indirect effect of decision-making factors on NTE expenditure is moderated by FoMO, operating through place identity and NTE usage.

##### 4.4.1 Floodlight analysis (H3)

The floodlight analysis probing H3 indicates that the effect of decision-making factors is positive and statistically significant at low to moderate levels of FoMO. Specifically, at lower values of FoMO (1.000 to approximately 2.536), the effect remains positive and significant (e.g.  $\beta = 0.392$ ,  $p < 0.001$  at FoMO = 1.000;  $\beta = 0.094$ ,  $p = 0.050$  at FoMO = 2.536),

**Figure 2** Simple slope analysis



indicating that decision-making factors strengthen place identity within this range (as evidenced in Figure 3).

As FoMO increases beyond this point, the effect loses statistical significance, indicating a neutralisation of the relationship (approximately  $\text{FoMO} = 2.684\text{--}3.105$ ). Within this mid-range, confidence intervals include zero, suggesting that the effect of decision-making factors on place identity is not statistically distinguishable from zero.

At higher levels of FoMO (from approximately 3.526 onward), the effect reverses direction, becoming negative and statistically significant, indicating a substantive shift in the nature of the relationship. For example, at  $\text{FoMO} = 3.737$ , the effect is negative and significant ( $\beta = -0.139$ ,  $p = 0.017$ ), and this negative effect strengthens as FoMO increases further, reaching  $\beta = -0.385$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) at  $\text{FoMO} = 5.000$ . This pattern indicates that at high levels of FoMO, decision-making factors significantly undermine place identity.

The results complement the PLS-SEM analysis by confirming the significant moderating role of FoMO and, through the Floodlight analysis, further revealing that the effect of decision-making factors on place identity is not

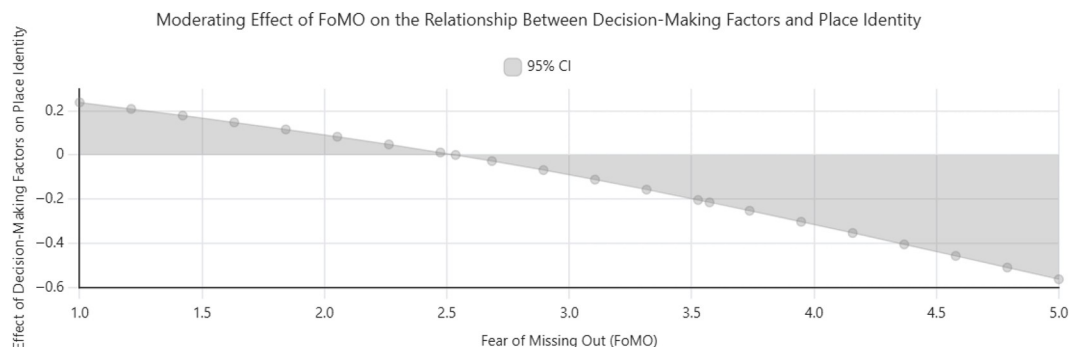
homogeneous across levels of FoMO. Rather, this relationship is nuanced: at low levels of FoMO, decision-making factors exert a positive and statistically significant effect on place identity, whereas at high levels of FoMO, the effect becomes negative and significant.

#### 4.4.2 Spotlight analysis moderated serial mediation (H4)

A moderated serial mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether the indirect effect of decision-making factors on night-time spending, mediated by place identity and NTE usage, varied as a function of FoMO. Bootstrapping procedures were used to estimate conditional indirect effects at low ( $-1$  SD), mean and high ( $+1$  SD) levels of FoMO.

The results indicate that the serial indirect effect was conditional on FoMO. At low levels of FoMO ( $\text{FoMO} = 1.64$ ), decision-making factors exerted a positive and statistically significant indirect effect on night-time spending via place identity and NTE usage (effect = 4.18,  $\text{BootSE} = 1.59$ , 95% CI [1.63, 7.77]). At the mean level of FoMO ( $\text{FoMO} = 2.88$ ), the indirect effect was no longer statistically significant, as the confidence interval included zero (effect = 0.41,  $\text{BootSE} = 0.82$ ,

**Figure 3** Floodlight analysis of FoMO on decision-making factors to place identity



95% CI  $[-1.10, 2.20]$ ). In contrast, at high levels of FoMO (FoMO = 4.13), the indirect effect became negative and statistically significant (effect =  $-3.35$ , BootSE = 1.29, 95% CI  $[-6.22, -1.19]$ ), see Figure 4.

Consistent with these conditional effects, the index of moderated mediation was statistically significant (Index =  $-3.02$ , BootSE = 0.95, 95% CI  $[-5.18, -1.49]$ ), providing formal evidence that the magnitude and direction of the serial indirect effect varied significantly as a function of FoMO.

Together, these findings suggest that decision-making factors indirectly increase night-time spending through enhanced place identity and subsequent use of the NTE, but only when FoMO is low. As FoMO increases, this indirect pathway weakens and ultimately reverses, such that higher FoMO undermines the positive role of place identity and night-time usage in translating decision-making factors into night-time spending. The implications of these results, along with those of the PLS-SEM, will now be discussed.

## 5. General discussion

The study was guided by two research questions, with the findings indicating that:

- 1 transport, safety and quality and social factors are the key decision-making drivers of NTE usage and expenditure; and
- 2 place identity mediates the relationships between these decision-making factors and NTE usage and expenditure, with FoMO emerging as a critical moderator that helps explain when these factors are most strongly associated with NTE outcomes.

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

This research advances the service and NTE literature in three ways. Firstly, it draws on social identity theory to develop and test a model that links NTE-related social and economic benefits to key decision-making factors. Unlike previous studies that focus solely on either economic (e.g. Zhuravlova *et al.*, 2020) or social aspects (e.g. Jiang *et al.*, 2021), this study demonstrates how NTEs foster social value, such as place identity, which in turn drives economic outcomes like increased expenditure. This dual perspective aligns with and extends third-place literature, which demonstrates that such spaces can foster well-being while also generating economic benefits for service organisations (Cabras and Mount, 2017; Rosenbaum and Dickens, 2025). In doing so, this research advances service marketing scholarship by addressing the under-researched area of NTEs, demonstrating their role as transformative socio-economic third-places that deliver both social value (through place identity) and economic uplift (through consumer expenditure). Consequently, it responds to calls for greater

empirical evidence on services that simultaneously promote well-being and support economic activity (Field *et al.*, 2021; Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2024), illustrating how place identity underpins NTE expenditure and, in turn, contributes to employment in these areas.

A second contribution of this research is the conceptualisation, measurement and validation of decision-making factors influencing NTE (third-place) usage and expenditure. Prior work has been fragmented in its identification of these factors (see Table 1). Although decision-making in services has been examined previously, this literature has tended to focus on professional or non-professional services (Ettenson and Turner, 1997) or on discrete mechanisms such as consumer self-efficacy in service purchases (Hale *et al.*, 2022). While informative, these studies do not provide a comprehensive account of how multiple factors interact to shape consumers' decisions to engage with NTE services, which differ in their functions as third places. Building on prior research (see Table 1), this study identified four key decision-making factors, safety, transport, quality and social, of which three (safety, transport and quality) were significantly associated with NTE usage and expenditure via place identity. These factors also loaded onto a second-order construct, supporting their use as a composite measure of NTE decision-making. Collectively, this advances NTE and broader services literature by providing a validated framework for understanding consumer behavior and decision-making in this context, with the flexibility to examine both individual decision-making factors and their combined effects.

Third, this research demonstrates how decision-making factors are associated with NTE usage and expenditure, and under what conditions these relationships are strengthened. Specifically, it identifies place identity as a key mediating mechanism, extending emerging work in the services literature that highlights its role in shaping consumer behavior (Abou-Shouk *et al.*, 2018). Aligned with social identity theory, the findings show that decision-making factors only encourage NTE participation and spending when they foster a sense of identity tied to the place where NTE activities occur, reinforcing the conceptualisation of the NTE as a third place.

A fourth contribution of this research lies in identifying the unique and asymmetric moderating role of FoMO. While prior research has recognised FoMO as a moderating variable (Riordan *et al.*, 2022; Einstein *et al.*, 2023; Dinh *et al.*, 2023; Lewis *et al.*, 2023), its capacity to both amplify and invert the direction of theoretically established relationships has not yet been demonstrated within the marketing or psychology literature. Somewhat counter-intuitively, the findings indicate that consumers low in FoMO exhibit a stronger positive relationship between decision-making factors and place identity within NTE contexts. For these individuals, engagement in the NTE and the decision factors underpinning it appear to

**Figure 4** Spotlight moderated serial mediation results



**Note(s):** Low FoMO:  $b = 4.18$ , SE = 1.59, LCI = 1.63, UCI = 7.77. Moderate FoMO:  $b = 0.041$ , SE = 0.82, LCI = 1.10, UCI = 2.20. High FoMO:  $b = -3.35$ , SE = 1.29, LCI =  $-6.22$ , UCI =  $-1.19$

meaningfully contribute to place identity formation, consistent with social identity theory (Bernardo and Palma-Oliveira, 2016; Tajfel and Turner, 2004), which positions places as salient identity anchors. In contrast, among consumers high in FoMO, this relationship becomes comparably strong in magnitude but negative in direction, suggesting that the same decision-making factors actively undermine place identity rather than reinforce it. Theoretically, this pattern implies that for high-FoMO consumers, decision-making is less intrinsically tied to place-based social identity and may instead be driven by alternative psychological motivations that fall outside traditional place-based identity frameworks. This advances current theorising by demonstrating that FoMO does not merely alter the strength of identity-based processes but can fundamentally reshape or even reverse the psychological mechanisms that link decision-making to place-based and NTE outcomes.

### 5.2 Practical and policy implications

This study also has several practical and policy implications for NTE and related services. Firstly, this study highlights that place identity is shaped by multiple consumer decision-making factors, not solely by core entertainment offerings (Eldridge, 2019; Homan, 2019). As such, policymakers should adopt a multifaceted approach to place-making strategies and planning that support not only core services but also complementary services, such as public transport, precinct safety through urban design and appropriate regulatory frameworks. These elements are essential to addressing tangible decision-making factors for participation in, and provision of, services.

In terms of product offerings, policymakers and destination marketers should consider how to leverage the crucial finding regarding the role of place identity identified in this research. The study demonstrates that place identity is an underlying factor influencing NTE usage and expenditure, underscoring the importance of designing NTE experiences that resonate with and reflect the identities of individuals and communities from the region. Therefore, policy and marketing strategies should prioritise integrating local cultural, social and environmental characteristics into NTE offerings. This could involve promoting local artists, cuisine, traditions and storytelling within NTE spaces, and engaging local communities in co-creating these experiences. Such approaches can strengthen residents' sense of place identity and encourage greater engagement with the NTE, benefiting not only the community but also the local economy and service providers. Ultimately, for a region like the Sunshine Coast, it would help overcome negative perceptions and media coverage of its NTE by providing more objective information to shape community engagement, policy, planning and communications.

Practitioners may also consider how venues or precincts are positioned to resonate with different levels of FoMO among participants in the NTE. The findings suggest that FoMO can, in some cases, activate decision-making drivers linked to participation and expenditure, making it a potentially useful lever for encouraging engagement. For example, branding and promoting areas as “must-visit” or “not to be missed” destinations and reinforcing these messages through social and mass media channels may heighten salience and encourage attendance, particularly among consumers who are sensitive to social cues and visibility.

There is some support for this approach in prior work. Lough (2023), for instance, shows how *in situ* selfies and social media posts from music festivals can elicit envy and FoMO among non-attendees, which in turn can motivate participation. At the same time, the present results suggest that such FoMO-based positioning should be used selectively. While it may be effective for driving short-term attendance or trial, an overemphasis on FoMO-driven appeals may weaken the development of deeper place-based attachment and create NTE precincts. This underscores the importance of balancing FoMO activation with strategies that foster more enduring connections between consumers and night-time economy settings.

### 5.3 Limitations and further research directions

This study was contextualised within a single region of Australia. As with all contextually bound studies, caution should be exercised when applying these insights to other geographical areas or populations, particularly where cultural values may differ and, consequently, influence how decision-making factors are prioritised. Despite this limitation, the current research provides important initial contributions to understanding and mapping the factors that explain NTE usage and expenditure more holistically, thereby informing subsequent research.

One limitation of this study, which also presents an opportunity for future research, concerns the dimensionality of the decision-making factors influencing NTE use and their associated measurement items. Although NTE precincts share commonalities, they also possess unique characteristics that may shape the decision-making factors that motivate consumers to use them and to form third places within these environments. Accordingly, future research should examine the extent to which the identified decision-making factors are generalisable across different NTEs, or whether they require extension or modification. This would also necessitate further investigation into the robustness of measurements of these decision-making factors, including testing any necessary modifications or extensions to adequately capture the unique aspects of different NTEs.

Additionally, the key insights of the current study are based primarily on data collected from individuals who are local to or within driving distance of the Sunshine Coast NTE precincts. Future research could extend this to other geographical NTEs and examine how local versus visiting individuals may prioritise certain decision-making factors. For instance, visitors from outside the region may emphasise transportation or safety more than locals, who may be more familiar with available options. Using techniques such as multi-group analysis to explore these variations would enhance understanding of the generalisability and heterogeneity of decision-making influences and provide valuable insights for targeting marketing and promotional strategies to different market segments.

While this research identified FoMO as a relevant consideration for NTE, it is essential to acknowledge the growing scholarly and practical interest in a related but distinct trend, JoMO, the joy of missing out (Barry et al., 2023). Recent discussions highlight how previous disruptions, such as COVID-19, have altered consumers' willingness to “go out” (Creative Australia, 2024), and how younger generations, such as “Gen Z”, increasingly seem to value personal time and well-being, sometimes over and above participation in certain social activities (Caluzzi et al., 2022). Exploring the nuances between FoMO and the more recently

developed notion of JoMO will be theoretically and practically valuable for future research. Such inquiry can help explain the evolving complexity of variations in NTE patronage and service use. Furthermore, understanding JoMO may offer insights into how NTE and related service providers can adapt their offerings to appeal to consumers who are less inclined to engage with traditional NTE experiences, thereby fostering relevance in a changing cultural landscape.

## Acknowledgements

AI and large language model (LLM) use via ChatGPT, and Grammarly were used for the sole purposes of enhancing written communication, including grammar, spelling and punctuation of this paper.

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## Further reading

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