

แบบฟอร์มการขอเสนอวาระเข้าที่ประชุม
คณะกรรมการประจำคณะการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว
เรื่อง เงินรางวัลแก่นักวิจัยโครงการเงินรางวัลพิเศษสำหรับการตีพิมพ์บทความวิจัยและ
การรับทุนโครงการวิจัยจากหน่วยงานภายนอก คณะการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว ปี 2567

ความเป็นมา

ตามที่ คณะการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว จัดอนุมัติโครงการเงินรางวัลพิเศษสำหรับการตีพิมพ์บทความวิจัยและการรับทุนโครงการวิจัยจากหน่วยงานภายนอก คณะการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว ปี 2565 – 2567 เพื่อสร้างแรงจูงใจให้อาจารย์/นักวิจัยในคณะฯ ในการผลิตงานวิจัยให้ประสบผลสำเร็จและสามารถตีพิมพ์ในวารสารวิชาการที่มีคุณภาพในปริมาณที่เพิ่มขึ้นอย่างรวดเร็วและเพิ่มการรับทุนโครงการวิจัยจากแหล่งทุนภายนอก ซึ่งสอดคล้องกับวัตถุประสงค์ข้อ 2.4 สนับสนุนรางวัลให้งานวิจัยที่ประสบผลสำเร็จ ของประกาศกองทุนวิจัยของคณะกรรมการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว ความละเอียดแจ้งแล้วนั้น

ขั้นตอนที่ได้ดำเนินการไปแล้ว

นำเข้าประชุมคณะกรรมการบริหารกองทุนวิจัยคณะกรรมการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว ในคราวการประชุมครั้งที่ 2/2567 เมื่อวันที่ 10 เมษายน 2568

ข้อมูลประกอบการพิจารณา

ที่ประชุมพิจารณาเห็นชอบผลงานแก่นักวิจัย จำนวน 5 คน เป็นเงินทั้งสิ้น 420,000 บาท (สี่แสนสองหมื่นบาทถ้วน) จากเงินอุดหนุนกองทุนวิจัยคณะกรรมการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว

ประเด็นพิจารณา

ข้อมูลแจ้งเพื่อพิจารณา

**ข้อมูลสรุปเงินรางวัลโครงการเงินรางวัลพิเศษสำหรับการตีพิมพ์บทความวิจัยและ
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Understanding the gastronomy tourists' characteristics and perceptions: a cluster analysis of visitors to a creative city of gastronomy

Nimit Soonsan, Sarayute Thongmun and Panuwat Phakdee-auksorn

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to identify and understand distinct tourist segments in Phuket, focusing on their characteristics, attitudes and perceptions as visitors to a creative gastronomic destination.

Design/methodology/approach – In this study, cluster analysis is used to identify tourist segments in Phuket, a well-known United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) gastronomic city. The analysis is based on data collected from 525 domestic Thai tourists.

Findings – Cluster analysis revealed three distinct tourist segments: gastronomy enthusiasts, taste discoverers and gourmet wanderers. These segments exhibit significant differences in their characteristics and perceptions of Phuket's gastronomic offerings.

Research limitations/implications – This study is limited to domestic Thai tourists in Phuket and does not include international visitors. In addition, the findings are specific to the context of Phuket and may not be entirely generalizable to other gastronomic destinations.

Practical implications – The identified tourist segments provide valuable guidance for tourism professionals to tailor their marketing efforts, develop targeted products and meet the preferences of different gastronomically oriented tourists, contributing to the successful management of a gastronomic city.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the fields of destination management and gastronomy tourism by providing valuable insights for practitioners seeking to enhance their offerings and consider the preferences of different gastronomically oriented tourist segments. Identifying these segments enriches the understanding of visitor behavior in creative gastronomy cities.

Keywords Gastronomy tourism, Tourist segments, Cluster analysis, Destination management, Phuket

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

UNESCO's recognition of a city as a hub of gastronomy creativity has been shown to boost gastronomy tourism and increase visitor interest in the place (Xie, 2021). The nexus between gastronomy and tourism underlines its central role in promoting economic development (Kumar, 2019). However, the lack of research into Thai tourists' culinary preferences highlights the urgent need for more in-depth research to fortify Phuket's prominence as a gastronomic hotspot. Recognizing the growing importance of gastronomy tourism, as highlighted by the UNWTO (2017), scholars and industry stakeholders have increasingly focused their attention on the gastronomy landscape. Indeed, the appeal of a destination's local cuisine influences tourists' perceptions and choices (Derinalp Canakci and Birdir, 2020; Gupta and Duggal, 2020), making Phuket's gastronomy heritage a cornerstone of the tourism narrative.

Received 23 August 2023
Revised 19 December 2023
18 March 2024
Accepted 4 April 2024

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Phuket Rajabhat University Research Fund for this research project.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Despite the burgeoning interest in gastronomic tourism, there is little empirical research on the distinct characteristics of regional cuisine, especially in creative cities. Phuket, recognized by UNESCO as a city of creative gastronomy, presents an intriguing case study. Examining Phuket's gastronomic offerings not only sheds light on the island's unique culinary identity but also reveals the attributes that attract and captivate tourists (Gupta and Duggal, 2020). Amidst the diversity of food consumers, an understanding of their preferences, perceptions and behaviors is essential (Casas-Rosal *et al.*, 2023). The confluence of media, environmental factors and product-related attributes shapes tourists' culinary experiences, with visitors' perceptions of local cuisine varying (Lopez-Guzman *et al.*, 2017; Pérez Gálvez *et al.*, 2017). To strengthen Phuket's appeal as a gastronomic paradise, research into the factors that influence tourists' culinary choices and segmenting their preferences is paramount.

In this sense, segmentation analysis serves as a basis to recognize the heterogeneous array of gastronomy tourists and enable tailored marketing strategies and customized experiences (Lee and Bae, 2023). Uncovering behavioral patterns and distinguishing consumer segments not only simplifies targeting but also highlights the need to align marketing efforts with actual consumer behavior (Franco Lucas *et al.*, 2023; Hsu *et al.*, 2023). Although existing literature has addressed tourists' food preferences and local cuisine preferences in different locations (Gupta *et al.*, 2018), segmenting tourists and analyzing perceptions is central to deciphering the essence of local cuisine, especially in Phuket, Thailand, as a leading tourist destination in Southeast Asia.

This study attempts to identify the segmentation of tourists within the destination and elucidate the dynamics of gastronomic tourists. Such categorization enables destination marketers to develop tailored strategies that appeal to each tourist segment, enhance visitor satisfaction and increase visitor numbers. Furthermore, insights into tourists' characteristics, motivations and culinary preferences provide destination planners with the tools they need to develop effective marketing strategies, tourism policies and resource allocations (Andersson *et al.*, 2017).

Literature reviews

Understanding tourist behavior in a UNESCO creative city of gastronomy

The scholarly investigation of cities distinguished for their gastronomic creativity remains relatively sparse. Pérez-Gálvez *et al.* (2021) identified three distinct tourist segments in the World Heritage sites in Córdoba, Spain, based on their attitudes toward local gastronomy. Xie (2021) emphasized the promotional role of cuisine in tourism and the necessity to strengthen culinary heritage in Macao, a UNESCO creative city. Cheng and Hwang (2023) categorized culinary tourists in Chongqing, China, into four groups according to psychographic characteristics, focusing on family travel and online engagement. Pérez-Priego *et al.* (2019) also identified different tourist segments based on their attitudes toward local cuisine on the Costa del Sol. These studies underscore the significance of understanding tourist behavior and market segmentation in the UNESCO creative cities of gastronomy and advocate for tailored marketing strategies to increase tourist satisfaction.

Although there is a wealth of research on gastronomic tourism (Okumus, 2021), there is a gap in understanding market segmentation in Phuket. Cheng and Hwang (2023) emphasized the importance of segment-specific marketing and management strategies and suggest that a similar approach could be beneficial in Phuket. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the specific needs and preferences of tourists in Phuket and to develop customized gastronomic tourism marketing strategies that are suitable for each segment.

Gastronomy and tourists' attitude

Recent research has looked at the diverse characteristics and behaviors of gastronomy travelers, highlighting their different profiles and preferences. Scholars such as [Levitt et al. \(2019\)](#) and [McKercher et al. \(2008\)](#) highlighted the variability within this group, which includes differences in demographics, eating habits and motivations. For example, [Sohn and Yuan \(2013\)](#) identified different personality traits in gastronomy tourists, ranging from idealists to explorers. Despite the consensus on the diversity of the group, [Baah et al. \(2020\)](#) characterizes them as youthful and adventurous, whereas [Ignatov and Smith \(2006\)](#) emphasize their preference for luxury.

[Silkes et al. \(2013\)](#) emphasized gastronomy tourists' preference for ethnic and local foods that offer unique taste experiences. However, they share a passion for discovering different flavors and refer to themselves as "foodies" ([Robinson and Getz, 2014](#)). In addition, the influence of culinary characteristics significantly influences the choice of destination ([Knollenberg et al., 2021](#); [Okumus, 2021](#)). [Hashemi et al. \(2023\)](#) stated that tourism food activities, destination gastronomy image and dining image affect the behavioral intentions of international tourists in Malaysia. Similarly, [Yasami et al. \(2021\)](#) emphasized the importance of food safety, hygiene, service, taste and popularity for Chinese tourists in Phuket. [Soonsan et al. \(2023\)](#) identified key food attributes for a gastronomic destination in Phuket, including authenticity, quality, interpersonal aspects, hygiene, service, novelty, added value and food service in a creative gastronomy city.

H1. Tourists have different attitudes toward local gastronomy.

Market segmentation in gastronomy tourism

Analyzing market segmentation in gastronomy tourism is critical for targeted marketing and customized experiences that drive customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. [Crespi-Vallbona and Dimitrovski \(2016\)](#) studied the behavior of tourists at a food market in Barcelona and identified two groups – apathetic market visitors and food market lovers – using a factor cluster analysis. Food market behavior strongly influenced segmentation, with lovers showing higher revisit intention and greater satisfaction. [Bjork and Kauppinen-Raisanen \(2016\)](#) examined the characteristics of local cuisine and distinguished between experienced devotees and survivors. Given the enthusiasts' openness to new experiences and the survivors' preference for traditions, marketing tailored to these segments is essential. [Hanggraito \(2021\)](#) used psychographic segmentation in Malang, Indonesia and identified three types of gastronomy tourists: experiencers, enjoyers and survivors. By emphasizing experiential and hedonistic factors, this study highlights the importance of tailoring marketing strategies to the psychographic characteristics of different gastronomy tourism segments.

H2. The perception of local gastronomy is different among tourists.

Methodology

Measurement scale

A structured questionnaire was used for the study, comprising three sections tailored to capture the relevant dimensions of the gastronomy tourism experience. First, attitudes toward gastronomy were assessed using a modified scale derived from [Pérez-Galvez et al. \(2021\)](#). In the second section, eight dimensions of local food attributes were then assessed, covering aspects such as food quality, authenticity, hygiene, interpersonal aspects, novelty, quality of the service provider, ambiance of the food establishment and added value. This measurement scale was adapted from [Soonsan et al. \(2023\)](#) to fit the context of gastronomy tourism in Phuket. Respondents indicated their opinion on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The inclusion of multiple dimensions was

intended to ensure a nuanced understanding of tourists' attitudes and preferences toward local dining in Phuket. Finally, in the last section, the demographic profiles of the tourists were asked to obtain a holistic picture of the sample and identify possible differences in gastronomic preferences between different clusters. The questionnaires were validated by three tourism experts, followed by a pilot test with 30 tourists to ensure reliability. The internal consistency of all constructs was satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging between 0.86 and 0.92.

Sampling and data collection

The selection of Thai domestic tourists in this study was primarily justified by the fact that Phuket was the second most visited destination by domestic travelers in Thailand, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic ([Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2021](#)). Researching the culinary preferences of Thai domestic tourists not only contributed significantly to the broader discourse on gastronomy tourism in Phuket but also shed light on broader trends in domestic tourism. A survey was conducted over a period of one month, from October 1 to 30, 2021. The survey covered popular tourist areas, hotels and the airport to ensure that all key touchpoints of the tourist journey were represented. The target population encompassed domestic travelers actively experiencing Phuket's gastronomy scene, reflecting the diverse demographics of this group. Notably, a significant proportion of domestic visitors to Phuket favored local restaurants, indicating the wide variety of culinary offerings in the region ([Soonsan et al., 2023](#)). Of the 550 questionnaires collected, 525 were deemed suitable for analysis, resulting in an impressive 95% response rate. This high level of participation underlined the reliability and validity of the study's findings and provided a solid basis for subsequent analysis and interpretation.

Data analysis

The study focuses on using a rigorous segmentation approach proposed by [Dolnicar and Grün \(2008\)](#). Methodologically, the analytical framework began with hierarchical clustering and K-means clustering methods, complemented by a nonhierarchical technique commonly used in tourism research ([Hair et al., 2010](#)). A methodological test with chi-square tests was used to investigate the complex relationship between the clusters and the categorical variables of interest. In addition, a one-way ANOVA test was used to examine the differences between the clusters, reinforced by Games-Howell post hoc tests to detect differences between the clusters. This strategic approach, as recommended by [Field \(2009\)](#), was of utmost importance, especially when segment sizes varied, and homogeneity of variance was uncertain.

Results

Socio-demographic profiles of tourists

Each tourist cluster attached to gastronomy was analyzed using [Bjork and Kauppinen-Raisanen's \(2016\)](#) method, and three clusters were identified using a hierarchical cluster analysis and a nonhierarchical K-means cluster method. As presented in [Table 1](#), the clusters were labeled as follows: Cluster 1: gastronomy enthusiast ($n = 123$, 23.4%), Cluster 2: taste discoverers ($n = 125$, 23.8%) and Cluster 3: gourmet wanderers ($n = 277$, 52.8%)

Gastronomic attitude clusters

[Table 2](#) shows the characterization of the three clusters based on their gastronomic attitudes, including the mean scores and the results from ANOVA. The F -test was used to analyze the differences in gastronomic knowledge and interest among the three tourist groups. The results showed significant differences in gastronomic knowledge ($F = 354.179$,

Table 1 Tourist demographic profile

Demographic	Frequency (n = 525)	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	298	56.8
Male	227	43.2
<i>Age</i>		
18–25 years	108	20.6
26–40 years	280	53.3
41–56 years	102	19.4
More than 56 years	35	6.7
<i>Educational level</i>		
Below bachelor degree	10	2.0
Bachelor degree	486	92.5
Master degree	29	5.5
<i>Marital status</i>		
Marriage	377	71.8
Single	132	25.1
Others	16	3.1
<i>Occupation</i>		
Employee	250	47.6
Business owner	174	33.1
Government	89	17.0
Retirement	12	2.3

Source: Authors' own creation

Table 2 Characterization clusters from gastronomy attitude

	Cluster			Anova	
	1	2	3	F	p-value
1. How would you rate your knowledge on gastronomy?	4.48	3.36	1.79	354.179	0.000
2. How would you rate your interest in gastronomy?	4.50	3.25	1.79	490.906	0.000
3. How much has Phuket's gastronomy attracted your visit to the city?	4.49	3.26	1.74	507.267	0.000

Notes: Cluster 1 = *gastronomy enthusiasts*; Cluster 2 = *taste discoverers*; Cluster 3 = *gourmet wanderers*

Source: Authors' own creation

$p < 0.001$) and interest ($F = 490.906$, $p < 0.001$) among the three groups. Specifically, gastronomy enthusiast exhibited the highest level of knowledge, followed by taste discoverers and gourmet wanderers. Similarly, gastronomy enthusiast exhibited the highest level of interest in gastronomy, followed by the taste discoverers and gourmet wanderers. Therefore, accepting $H1$ that tourists had different attitudes toward local gastronomy.

In addition, the results showed that the degree of attraction to Phuket Creative City of Gastronomy was significantly different among the three groups ($F = 507.267$, $p < 0.001$). It was found that the gastronomy enthusiasts were most attracted to Phuket due to their high level of gastronomic knowledge and interest, followed by the taste discoverers and the gourmet wanderers (see [Figure 1](#)). Overall, these findings provide important insights into the behavior and preferences of tourists visiting food markets and underscore the importance of gastronomy in destination marketing.

[Table 3](#) shows the sociodemographic characteristics of tourists in each of the three clusters.

Cluster 1: gastronomy enthusiast ($n = 123$, 23.4%).

Figure 1 Average mean score of food attitude by each cluster

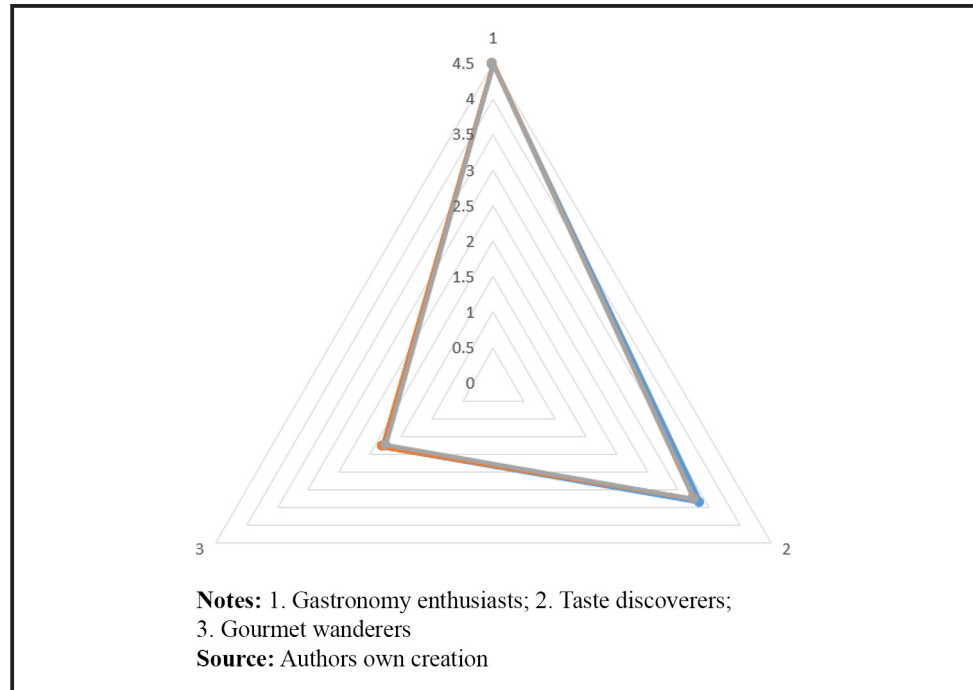


Table 3 Sociodemographic profile of the tourists in each cluster

Demographic	Cluster			Total (n = 525)	Chi-square	p-value
	1	2	3			
<i>Gender</i>					$\chi^2 = 15.177$	0.001
Female	35	64	128	227		
Male	88	61	149	298		
<i>Age</i>					$\chi^2 = 22.810$	0.001
18–25 years	41	27	40	108		
26–40 years	57	69	154	280		
41–56 years	15	22	65	102		
More than 56 years	10	7	18	35		
<i>Educational level</i>					$\chi^2 = 16.165$	0.003
Below bachelor degree	113	111	262	486		
Bachelor degree	8	14	7	29		
Master degree	2	0	8	10		
<i>Marital status</i>					$\chi^2 = 4.813$	0.307
Marriage	83	97	197	377		
Single	36	23	73	132		
Others	4	5	7	16		
<i>Occupation</i>					$\chi^2 = 19.763$	0.003
Retirement	2	4	6	12		
Business owner	26	37	111	174		
Government	22	17	50	89		
Employee	73	67	110	250		

Source: Authors' own creation

This cluster comprises 123 tourists, with a majority being male (88, 71.5%). The majority of tourists in this cluster hold a bachelor's degree or higher (113, 91.9%). The most common occupational groups are employees (73, 59.3%) and business owners (26, 21.1%).

Cluster 2: taste discoverers ($n = 125$, 23.8%).

This cluster consists of 125 tourists, with a relatively balanced gender distribution of 61 males (48.8%) and 64 females (51.2%). The majority of tourists in this cluster hold a bachelor's degree or higher (125, 88.8%). The most common occupational groups are employees (67) and business owners (37).

Cluster 3: gourmet wanderers ($n = 277$, 52.8%).

The largest cluster comprises 277 tourists, with a majority of males (149, 53.8%). Most tourists in this cluster hold a bachelor's degree (262, 94.6%). The age distribution is fairly evenly spread, with the largest group falling between 26 and 40 years old (154, 55.6%). The most common occupational groups are employees (110, 39.7%) and business owners (111, 40.1%).

Market segment in gastronomy tourism

In [Table 4](#), various dimensions related to food attributes are presented, along with their mean scores, standard deviations (SD) and rankings based on the mean scores. These dimensions reflect how tourists perceive the food attributes in relation to their overall experience. Overall, tourists perceive local food in Phuket positively, with various attributes contributing to their perception of food quality, authenticity, hygiene, interpersonal experiences and novelty. The specific rankings and mean scores highlight the relative importance of these attributes to tourists' overall perception of food in Phuket as a tourist destination.

[Table 5](#) and [Figure 2](#) show the average scores of the different food attributes in three clusters of tourists (gastronomy enthusiasts, taste explorers and gourmet wanderers) who visited Phuket. The results of the ANOVA tests show that the mean scores of each attribute are statistically significantly different among the three clusters of tourists, as indicated by the low p -values (all less than 0.001). Therefore, accepting $H2$ that tourists perceived differently the local gastronomy attributes.

Cluster 1, referred to as "Gastronomy enthusiast" places the highest value on novelty (mean = 4.41), hygiene (mean = 4.49) and the food service place (mean = 4.51). This indicates that this group of tourists pays great attention to the quality and cleanliness of the food they eat, as well as the ambiance of the food service establishment. They can be considered as foodies who are willing to pay a premium for a quality dining experience.

Cluster 2, referred to as "Taste discoverers," place less importance on food quality (mean = 3.56), service provider (mean = 3.56) and hygiene (mean = 3.83) compared to Cluster 1, but still consider these factors important. They also place a relatively high value on authenticity (mean = 3.43) and, to a lesser extent, on novelty (mean = 3.39) and added value (mean = 3.40). In addition, they place a relatively high value on the interpersonal aspects of gastronomy tourism, as indicated by their mean score of 3.55 for the attribute "Interpersonal". This may indicate that they value social interactions with locals and other tourists when dining out, or that they prefer experiences that allow them to connect with the local culture. Overall, Cluster 2's food preferences reflect their desire for new and valuable experiences, with an emphasis on social interactions and immersion in local culture.

Cluster 3, referred to as "Gourmet wanderers", assign the lowest value to all dimensions of gastronomy tourism compared to the other two clusters, with mean scores ranging from 2.61 to 2.98, suggesting that this group of tourists places less value on quality, authenticity, hygiene, novelty and service providers, and does not consider food as a primary motive for

Table 4 Food attribute dimensions

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
<i>Food quality</i>	<i>3.57</i>	<i>0.66</i>	
1. Local food is diverse	3.60	0.79	3
2. Local food creates an authentic experience	3.54	0.81	5
3. Local food is appropriate with a city of food tourism	3.54	0.87	6
4. Destination atmosphere displays a city of food tourism	3.55	0.80	4
5. Local food makes perfectly my travelling meaningful	3.61	0.81	2
6. Food festivals or events in Phuket can attract tourists	3.63	0.84	1
<i>Authenticity</i>	<i>3.41</i>	<i>0.82</i>	
1. Local food is different from others destination	3.45	0.93	1
2. Local food indicates Phuket's culture	3.38	0.90	4
3. Local food is particularly Phuket's identity	3.43	0.93	3
4. Local food makes more interesting to the destination	3.44	0.96	2
5. Food ingredients reflect locality	3.38	1.03	5
<i>Hygiene</i>	<i>3.77</i>	<i>0.82</i>	
1. Local food is fresh	3.77	0.93	3
2. Local food is hygienic	3.80	0.89	2
3. Local food is without contaminants	3.83	0.90	1
4. Local food is appropriately variety with their age	3.69	0.97	4
<i>Interpersonal</i>	<i>3.59</i>	<i>0.70</i>	
1. Local food gives an opportunity to spend time together with travel companions	3.61	0.80	2
2. Local food makes me in harmony with other tourists	3.57	0.79	3
3. Local food makes me to share experience with travel companions	3.65	0.85	1
4. Local food makes me to enjoy with others tourists	3.54	0.92	4
<i>Novelty</i>	<i>3.46</i>	<i>0.82</i>	
1. It can learn originally local food	3.39	0.98	4
2. It can learn about food story from local people	3.48	0.91	2
3. It gains exciting experience from local food service providers	3.47	0.91	3
4. It has me to taste original ingredients in local food	3.53	0.94	1
<i>Service provider</i>	<i>3.49</i>	<i>0.80</i>	
1. Local food service providers have nice personality	3.55	0.92	1
2. Local food service providers are friendliness	3.49	0.91	2
3. Local food service providers are well food knowledge	3.47	0.89	3
4. Local food service providers are warm welcome	3.46	0.93	4
<i>Food service place</i>	<i>3.59</i>	<i>0.80</i>	
1. Local food service places can easily be accessible	3.62	0.92	1
2. Local food service places are located in tourist attractions	3.59	0.86	2
3. Local food service places exhibit Phuket's style	3.56	0.87	3
<i>Value-added</i>	<i>3.48</i>	<i>0.80</i>	
1. Local food has completely worth	3.48	0.91	2
2. Local food is a reasonable price	3.46	0.84	3
3. Local food is valuable for travel experience at this time	3.50	0.89	1

Source: Authors' own creation

their trip. It is possible that this group prioritizes other aspects of travel, such as sightseeing, shopping or relaxation, over food.

Conclusion and discussion

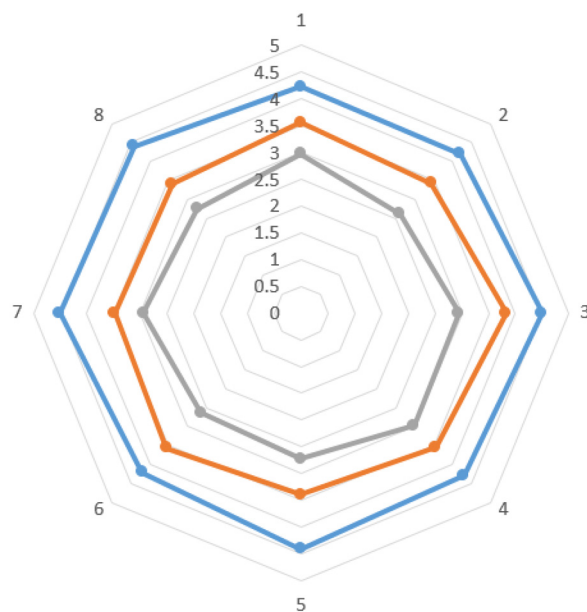
Segmenting Phuket's tourism market based on gastronomic preferences provides valuable insights into the increasingly significant role that food plays in destination choice (Bjork and Kauppinen-Raisanen, 2016). In this study, three different groups of tourists were identified based on their gastronomic attitudes and preferences. The identification of three distinct tourist groups – gastronomy enthusiasts, taste discoverers and gourmet wanderers –

Table 5 Characterization of the clusters from the average of food attribute dimensions

	Cluster			Anova	
	1	2	3	F	p-value
1. Food quality	4.23	3.56	2.97	188.905	0.000
2. Authenticity	4.20	3.43	2.61	203.661	0.000
3. Hygiene	4.49	3.83	2.94	188.827	0.000
4. Interpersonal	4.30	3.55	2.98	184.486	0.000
5. Novelty	4.41	3.39	2.72	270.534	0.000
6. Service provider	4.20	3.56	2.64	217.174	0.000
7. Food service place	4.51	3.48	2.94	233.951	0.000
8. Value-added	4.41	3.40	2.75	268.538	0.000

Notes: Cluster 1 = gastronomy enthusiast; Cluster 2 = taste discoverers; Cluster 3 = gourmet wanderers

Source: Authors' own creation

Figure 2 Average mean score of food attribute dimensions by each cluster

Notes: 1. Food quality; 2. Authenticity; 3. Hygiene; 4. Interpersonal; 5. Novelty; 6. Service provider; 7. Food service place; 8. Valueadded

Source: Authors' own creation

reflects the different interests and priorities of travelers. The gastronomy enthusiasts showed the greatest interest in gastronomy and a strong attraction to Phuket as a UNESCO Creative Gastronomy City. The analysis of gastronomic attitudes revealed distinct differences between the groups. Enthusiasts prioritized novelty, hygiene and quality and preferred premium culinary experiences. The taste discoverers valued authenticity and interpersonal interactions, while the gourmet wanderers placed less emphasis on culinary attributes. Despite these differences, all clusters have a positive perception of local food, emphasizing attributes such as food quality, authenticity, hygiene, interpersonal experiences and novelty.

The findings from this study not only enhances our understanding of Phuket's tourism landscape but also make an important contribution to the broader discourse on gastronomy-driven tourism segmentation. Cluster 1, consisting of gastronomy enthusiasts, shows a strong inclination toward novelty, hygiene and ambience, indicating a strong affinity with the concept of food neophilia. This finding is consistent with [Tuorila *et al.* \(2001\)](#), who describe individuals with a strong neophilia for food as actively seeking new and novel gastronomy experiences. In addition, [Sivrikaya and Pekergsen \(2020\)](#) emphasized the propensity for exploration and experimentation in gastronomy among such individuals. Furthermore, the emphasis on quality and cleanliness within this cluster underscores the significance of food safety perceptions on consumer behavior, as noted by [Cifci *et al.* \(2022\)](#) and [Yeung and Yee \(2020\)](#). These studies assert that perceived food safety has a significant impact on consumer food choice, particularly in the food service industry. This is consistent with the broader discussion in consumer psychology in which risk perception influences behavior ([Machado Nardi *et al.*, \(2020\)](#)).

According to [Manning \(2018\)](#) and [Zhang *et al.* \(2022\)](#), emphasizing high hygiene standards in dining establishments is crucial to increase the confidence and satisfaction of gastronomy enthusiasts. Therefore, introducing a certification scheme or an award program such as "Clean Food, Good Taste" to recognize exceptional gastronomic experiences can further incentivize excellence and foster a culture of continuous improvement within the destination. Furthermore, the preference for premium dining experiences among gastronomy enthusiasts can be understood through the lens of sensory marketing, as [Krishna \(2011\)](#) argues. Sensory cues such as ambience and presentation play a crucial role in influencing consumers' willingness to pay for products and services, thereby increasing perceived value.

To satisfy the preferences of this cluster, Phuket should emphasize its diverse and innovative gastronomic offerings. Collaborating with experienced local chefs and restaurants to create unique menus with fresh, locally sourced ingredients satisfies their quest for quality gastronomic experiences, as [Baldwin \(2018\)](#) suggests. Promoting local gastronomic offerings, especially those featuring locally produced seafood, as recommended by [Santos *et al.* \(2020\)](#), not only enhances the tourist experience but also promotes destination distinctiveness and supports sustainability efforts. Furthermore, research by [Bjork and Kauppinen-Raisanen \(2016\)](#) suggested that eating in an authentic cultural context enhances the perceived authenticity of the experience and enriches visitors' understanding of cultural identity and local lifestyle. Integrating local culinary traditions and cultural elements such as traditional menus into the restaurants can therefore increase Phuket's appeal to this discerning cluster.

Cluster 2, known as the taste discoverers, emphasizes authenticity and social interactions. This finding is consistent with the principles of experiential tourism, where travelers seek genuine and immersive encounters that foster cultural immersion. This finding confirms the significant role of authenticity in the tourism industry and is consistent with [Cohen's \(1979\)](#) notion that authenticity is a key motivator in tourism and emphasized the importance of meaningful experiences for travelers. In addition, taste discoverers exhibit a willingness to explore novel experiences while appreciating the basic characteristics of food, reflecting the concept of value creation in tourism. These findings support the study by [Pralhad and Ramaswamy \(2004\)](#), which explains how consumers contribute to value creation through their interactions with service providers and other stakeholders.

Taste discoverer' preference for social interactions is also consistent with social identity theory, which suggests that individuals gain a sense of belonging and identity through group affiliations and interactions. [Tajfel and Turner \(2000\)](#) conducted seminal studies demonstrating how social interactions with locals and fellow travelers can enhance tourists' satisfaction during their trip. A more recent study by [Stylidis \(2022\)](#), also emphasizes that personal interaction between tourists and locals can evoke destination distinctiveness and

positive behavioral intentions. Although Cluster 2 values food quality, service provider excellence and hygiene standards, they also look for opportunities to immerse themselves in the local culture. To attract taste discoverers, Phuket should focus on authentic gastronomic experiences, introduce innovative concepts and encourage social interaction between tourists and locals, e.g. by organizing a street market festival in Phuket Old Town. This proposal is in line with the study by [Darko and Montserrat \(2017\)](#), which shows that tourists visiting the food markets in La Boqueria in Barcelona, Spain, are strongly motivated by cultural experiences and interaction with local producers.

In addition, showcasing Phuket's rich gastronomic heritage and traditional dishes, as well as highlighting the origins and stories behind local recipes, can satisfy Taste Discoverers' desire for authenticity. Recent research by [Rachão et al. \(2020\)](#) supports this approach, showing that respondents who engage with food and wine while traveling are more willing to actively participate in gastronomy experiences. By leveraging the principles of authenticity, social interaction and cocreation of value, destinations like Phuket can create tailored experiences that resonate with taste discoverers and foster memorable and enriching tourism encounters.

Gourmet wanderers (Cluster 3) embody a special category of travelers who show a spontaneous appreciation for gastronomy experiences amidst their broader exploration of destinations. [Mandala Research's \(2013\)](#), characterization of this group highlights their preference for gastronomy activities that they encounter on their travels. This aligns with the findings of our study, as we observed that gourmet wanderers tend to favor a spectrum of travel experiences beyond just culinary enjoyment. Although gastronomy holds an important place in their itinerary, gourmet wanderers tend to weigh gastronomy experiences against a range of travel interests, as noted by [McKercher et al. \(2008\)](#). Research by [Beerli and Martin \(2004\)](#) shows that perceptions of a destination are shaped not only by food but also by a variety of factors such as natural attractions, cultural heritage and leisure activities. Our findings confirm this and suggest that gourmet wanderers consider a holistic travel experience when evaluating destinations.

To attract and captivate gourmet wanderers, Phuket can use its gastronomy offerings as part of a broader strategy to create memorable travel experiences. [Seyitoğlu and Ivanov \(2020\)](#) argued for the strategic integration of gastronomy into destination marketing and emphasize its potential to increase destination appeal. This is in line with our study's recommendation to develop gastronomic-themed tours that seamlessly combine culinary discoveries with sightseeing, relaxation or wellness activities. Such initiatives cater to the diverse interests of gourmet wanderers and enhance the overall appeal of Phuket as a destination. In addition, unique gastronomic venues such as rooftop restaurants with panoramic views or pop-up dinners on the beach can further enhance Phuket's appeal to this cluster. This suggestion aligns with recent findings by [Forlani et al. \(2022\)](#), who highlight the significance of gastronomic offerings in creating memorable and immersive travel experiences. By integrating culinary activities with other travel elements and showcasing unique gastronomy offerings, Phuket can effectively appeal to gourmet wanderers and position itself as a premier destination for gastronomic discovery.

Theoretical and practical implications

This study makes an important contribution to theoretical advances in tourism research by shedding light on the pivotal role of gastronomy in tourists' destination choice and behavior, particularly in the context of the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. By identifying different groups of tourists with different gastronomic preferences, the study enriches our understanding of tourists' attitudes and preferences, adding to the existing tourism literature, particularly in the area of destination marketing. It also provides empirical evidence for theoretical concepts such as experiential tourism and social identity theory.

In practice, the identification of these tourist clusters provides specific strategic insights for destination management in Phuket. It enables stakeholders to better align their marketing strategies and product development efforts with the needs of different tourist segments, thereby enhancing the overall visitor experience and satisfaction. This strategic focus on the gastronomic preferences of tourists enables Phuket to differentiate itself from its competitors and establish itself as a premier destination for gastronomic tourism, leveraging its status as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy to its fullest potential.

Limitations and recommendations for future study

The study acknowledges limitations in the applicability and generalizability of its findings. Data collection was limited to Thai tourists within the country, which may restrict its direct relevance to foreign tourists. Future research should compare Thai and foreign tourists to develop a more comprehensive marketing strategy. The study focused primarily on market segmentation based on tourist behavior theory, neglecting factors such as generational differences, gender dynamics and past travel experiences. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of different segments within the tourist population, future studies should incorporate these aspects. Furthermore, qualitative research methods such as interviews could provide deeper insights into the subjective experiences and motivations associated with gastronomy tourism.

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Source details

Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality

Formerly known as: International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research

Years currently covered by Scopus: from 2022 to 2025

Publisher: Emerald Publishing

ISSN: 2752-6666 E-ISSN: 2752-6674

Subject area: Social Sciences: Geography, Planning and Development
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Source type: Journal

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Understanding the gastronomy tourists' characteristics and perceptions: a cluster analysis of visitors to a creative city of gastronomy

[Nimit Soonsan, Sarayute Thongmun, Panuwat Phakdee-auksorn](#) ▼

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ISSN: 2752-6666

Article publication date: 8 May 2024

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Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand distinct tourist segments in Phuket, focusing on their characteristics, attitudes and perceptions as visitors to a creative gastronomic destination.

Design/methodology/approach

In this study, cluster analysis is used to identify tourist segments in Phuket, a well-known United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) gastronomic city. The analysis is based on data collected from 525 domestic Thai tourists.

Findings

Cluster analysis revealed three distinct tourist segments: gastronomy enthusiasts, taste discoverers and gourmet wanderers. These segments exhibit significant differences in their characteristics and perceptions of Phuket's gastronomic offerings.

The effect of audience involvement on previsit behavioral intentions: the mediating role of place attachment

Dongqi Shi, Nimit Soonsan and Panuwat Phakdee-Auksorn

Abstract

Purpose – *This study aims to explore the determinants of behavioral intentions during the previsit stage by investigating the influence of audience involvement with the audiovisual product and the mediating role played by place attachment.*

Design/methodology/approach – *Structural equation modeling was employed to verify the hypothesized relationships using the AMOS 24.0 program to assess the proposed model. A total of 564 young Chinese audiences who had watched the Thai television (TV) series “I Told Sunset About You” but had not previously visited Phuket, Thailand, were collected using the online survey as participants.*

Findings – *The findings indicate that audience involvement has a significant positive effect on place attachment and behavioral intentions during the previsit stage. Place attachment significantly influences behavioral intentions. Moreover, the result suggests that place attachment significantly mediates the relationship between audience involvement and behavioral intentions.*

Research limitations/implications – *This study contributes to film tourism research by revealing the crucial role of audience involvement in enhancing place attachment and fostering behavioral intentions toward depicted destinations among potential tourists.*

Practical implications – *This study suggests that destination marketers should be aware of the soft power of films and TV series to promote destination and attract prospective tourists.*

Originality/value – *This study provides a distinctive perspective on the interrelationships between audience involvement, place attachment, and previsit behavioral intentions. Additionally, it sheds light on the underlying mechanisms influencing potential tourists’ behaviors in the context of film tourism.*

Keywords *Film tourism, Audience involvement, Place attachment, Previsit behavioral intentions*

Paper type *Research paper*

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Introduction

The intimate connection between audiovisual products and tourism has garnered considerable scholarly and industrial interest since the 1990s (Gómez-Morales et al., 2022). Some films and television (TV) series often feature beautiful landscapes, scenery, local culture, and lifestyles that can evoke a strong emotional attachment in the audience to the destination shown, which in turn influences travel behavioral intentions (Beeton, 2008; Hudson et al., 2011). The phenomenon commonly referred to as film tourism refers to tourists intentionally or unintentionally visiting a destination featured in a film, TV series, or other audiovisual production (Beeton, 2006; Du et al., 2020). In recent years, mass media has gained widespread recognition as an important marketing tool for the promotion of portrayed destinations (Ng & Chan, 2020; Vila et al., 2021). It should be noted that the travel information presented in films and TV series is considered highly influential due to its inductive nature and is less aggressive compared to traditional advertising (Domínguez-Azcue et al., 2021).

Received 23 January 2024
Revised 25 March 2024
7 May 2024
Accepted 7 May 2024

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This is a self-funded research project.

In the context of film tourism, the audience undergoes a transition from merely watching a destination on screen to actively visiting the real destination in person. The extent of audience involvement with a film or TV series is considered an important factor in this transformation (Xia et al., 2022). Several studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between audience involvement and behavioral intentions (Fu et al, 2016; Han et al., 2022; Kim & Kim, 2018; Xia et al, 2022). Greater audience involvement with films or TV series is associated with an increased intention to visit the depicted destination (Xia, Qiu, Zuo, & Wang, 2022). In addition, place attachment is another important factor for behavioral intentions (Guo et al., 2022). Previous studies have identified that positive tourism experiences and personal involvement with the destination significantly affect the level of place attachment (Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Tsai, 2016). Nevertheless, recent studies argue that a sense of place attachment can also arise through a parasocial interaction with a place that one has not physically experienced or imagined (Hosany et al., 2020). Media experiences, particularly in long-running TV series, may lead audiences to have vicarious experiences with characters and narrative storylines (Hosany et al., 2020; Kim, 2012). Through repeated encounters with the depicted destination on screen, meanings are attached to the depicted places by the audience (St-James et al., 2018; Xia et al., 2022). Consequently, potential tourists have the opportunity to develop a “sense of place” and an emotional attachment prior to physically visiting a filmed destination (Hosany et al., 2020; Kim, 2010). However, it is still unclear how audience involvement influences audiences’ place attachment and previsit behavioral intentions toward the destination depicted in a particular film or TV series.

In the late 2000s, research in the field of film tourism experienced a rapid upsurge, particularly in the UK (Iwashita, 2006, 2008; O’Connor et al., 2008), New Zealand (Carl et al., 2007; Croy, 2010; Li et al., 2017), Australia (Croy & Wheeler, 2007; Wray & Croy, 2015), and South Korea (Kim, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2018; Yen & Teng, 2015). For example, after the release of the “*Lord of the Rings*” (2001–2003) trilogy, the number of tourists visiting New Zealand increased significantly (Beeton, 2006). Broken Hill, Australia, has established itself as a popular filming location due to its unique landscape and heritage, resulting in more than 50 films, TV series, and documentaries being filmed there, which has contributed to the development of the local economy and tourism (Wray & Croy, 2015). The Korean TV drama “*Winter Sonata*” (2002) was filmed on Nami Island and became the most popular tourist destination in South Korea, attracting millions of tourists from Asia (Kim, 2012). Although these studies have made valuable contributions to a better understanding of the phenomenon of film tourism, existing research on film tourism in the Thai context is still under-researched. Over the past two decades, Thai TV series have gained popularity in many Asian countries, especially among Chinese audiences (Jirattikorn, 2021). Researchers have also recognized the potential of Thai films and TV series to contribute to the growth of Thailand’s tourism industry by providing Chinese audiences with insights into Thai culture and people (Jiang et al., 2018; Shi, 2020). With the rise of streaming media platforms and the diversification of Chinese audience preferences, the Boys’ Love (BL) series has emerged as the most popular genre among young Chinese audiences (Jirattikorn, 2021; Xu & Tan, 2021). The genre of BL series is a type of drama that focuses on idealized romantic homosexual relationships between young men, while the producers and primary audiences are usually female (Xu & Tan, 2021). Thailand, in particular, has dominated the production of BL series and has held the largest share in recent years (Jirattikorn, 2021). The Thai BL TV series “*I Told Sunset About You*”, which was mainly filmed in Phuket, was well-received by a large young Chinese audience following its broadcast (Zhang, 2021; Zhang & Numtong, 2021). The series, which aired in October 2020, enjoyed great popularity and won the title of “*Most Popular Overseas Drama*” at the Weibo TV Series Awards 2020 with an impressive 4.9 million votes (Weibo, 2020). Phuket is a world-famous urban destination with natural, cultural, traditional, and other tourism resources (Koodsela et al., 2019). Furthermore, Phuket is highly dependent on tourism, with services and tourism businesses contributing a significant 96.5% of GDP (Nanthaamornphong et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that China’s millennials are becoming a dominant force in the outbound tourism market (Li et al., 2021). Considering this

trend, the present study employs the Thai TV series *"I Told Sunset About You"* as a case study to investigate its influence on young Chinese audiences' perceptions and behavioral intentions before visiting Phuket, Thailand.

Despite the burgeoning body of research on film tourism, a notable gap remains in the literature regarding the investigation of whether audience involvement influences place attachment and behavioral intentions of audiences toward depicted destinations they have yet to visit. While existing studies have indicated the direct impact of audience involvement on the intention to visit (Fu et al., 2016; Han et al., 2022), there is still a need for a comprehensive exploration of the underlying mechanism driving audiences to become tourists to visit the depicted destination. The Involvement-Commitment theory proposed by Beatty, Homer, & Kahle ((1988) may offer a valuable framework for elucidating this transition. According to Beatty et al. ((1988), purchase involvement has a positive effect on brand commitment. Purchase involvement refers to the level of *"an individual's interaction with the product and the purchase situation"* (Beatty et al., 1988, p. 150). Audience involvement closely aligns with this concept, which pertains to the extent of audiences' parasocial interaction with a certain audiovisual product (Sood, 2002). Audiences' consumption of a film or TV series product can be considered as a form of purchase consumption (Kim, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2018). Brand commitment refers to an individual's emotional attachment toward a particular brand (Beatty et al., 1988). In the realm of destination marketing and tourism, a destination can be regarded as a brand, making tourists' place attachment a form of brand commitment (Cardinale et al., 2016). While the Involvement-Commitment theory has been widely supported by empirical studies in a marketing context (Beatty et al., 1988; Inoue et al., 2017; Sung & Campbell, 2009), especially concerning customer loyalty to certain products, its application within tourism studies remains underexplored to date. As a result, this study adopts the Involvement-Commitment theory as the theoretical basis to investigate if audience involvement contributes to audiences generating place attachment and behavioral intentions toward the depicted destination during the previsit stage in the context of film tourism. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of audience involvement on place attachment and previsit behavioral intentions with a data sample of young Chinese audiences of the Thai TV series *"I Told Sunset About You"*. Furthermore, it is suggested that place attachment plays a mediating role in the relationship between audience involvement and behavioral intentions. From a practical perspective, this study can offer practical strategies for Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and tourism practitioners to attract prospective tourists.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Behavioral intentions

Behavioral intentions often result from systematic decision-making processes in which experiences, ideas, goods, or services are selected, provided, and used to meet needs and desires. Social and economic factors also play a significant role in influencing consumption and purchasing behavior in the context of tourism (Qian et al., 2017; Wu & Cheng, 2018). Intentions related to tourism behavior are frequently studied concerning willingness to visit, intention to return, and word-of-mouth recommendations (Fu et al., 2018). Research has indicated that tourists' perceptions and evaluations can notably impact their behavioral intentions (Lee, 2021). Several studies have examined the relationships between components influencing consumers' behavioral intentions (Clasen et al., 2019; Fu et al., 2018; Sharma & Nayak, 2019).

Audience involvement

Involvement refers to the extent to which an individual commits themselves to an activity, product, experience, or place (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Gross & Brown, 2008). The definition and measurement of involvement thus can vary depending on the object (Zaichowsky, 1985). In regard to audiences' involvement with a certain film or TV series, audience

involvement was early identified as equivalent to parasocial interaction, which refers to the imagined sense of intimacy that an audience member perceives with a media persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Kim & Rubin, 1997). Thereafter, Sood (2002, p. 156) put forward the concept of audience involvement as having a complex nature and defined it as *“the degree to which audience members engage in reflection upon, and parasocial interaction with, certain media programs, thus resulting in overt behavior change”*. Since then, audience involvement theory has been extensively applied to film tourism research because this concept could help researchers better understand the connection between the consumption of audiovisual products and tourist behavior (Kim, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2018). Kim (2012) built upon prior research to develop a set of measurement scales to test audience involvement which comprises three dimensions: behavioral involvement, emotional involvement, and referential reflection. Specifically, behavioral involvement refers to the degree to which an audience member alters their behaviors to make time for watching the related content during or after the media exposure (Kim, 2012; Sood, 2002). Emotional involvement refers to the extent to which an audience member identifies with characters, celebrities, storylines, or other significant elements of a media program (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021; Kim, 2012). Referential reflection refers to how an audience member connects their personal experiences to a media program (Kim, 2012; Sood, 2002). Several subsequent empirical studies have further demonstrated the suitability of these scales for assessing audiences' involvement with mass media, such as films, TV series, and reality shows in the film tourism context (Fu et al., 2016; Han et al., 2022; Kim & Assaker, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2018; Xia et al., 2022).

In recent years, the concept of audience involvement has garnered attention from researchers interested in exploring its association with audiences' subsequent perceptions and behavioral intentions toward depicted destinations (e.g. Fu, Ye, & Xiang, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2018; Xia et al., 2022). Previous studies have highlighted that media personas, celebrities, storylines, and destinations featured in films or TV series can effectively attract audiences to visit actual filming locations (Oshriyeh & Capriello, 2022; Yen & Teng, 2015). In this sense, audiences who exhibit a high level of involvement with an audiovisual product tend to harbor more favorable attitudes toward its content (Rojas-Lamorenna et al., 2019), influencing their subsequent behavior (Kim & Kim, 2018). For instance, Kim (2012) stated that highly engaged audiences with TV series are likely to spend significant time watching or rewatching episodes, thereby deepening their involvement and emotional attachment to the characters. These highly involved audiences may actively purchase related products, collect memorabilia, and share information about the film or TV series they are interested in (Kim, 2012; Wong & Lai, 2015). Additionally, some may even seek personal contact with celebrities who performed in the product (Wong & Lai, 2015). It is well-acknowledged that fans consider visiting a destination associated with a celebrity who has appeared in a film, TV series, or TV show as a form of pilgrimage (Jang, 2020). Consequently, the repeated exposure of a depicted destination in a film or TV series to audiences with a high level of involvement over time may increase their willingness to visit the destination, leading to the spread of favorable word-of-mouth and recommendations (Fu et al., 2016; Xia et al., 2022).

Behavioral intentions are typically divided into previsit and postvisit categories, playing a pivotal role in predicting tourists' destination choices and their future behaviors (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Prayag et al., 2013). As a result, behavioral intention is widely recognized as a key strategic metric for evaluating the popularity and success of a tourism destination (Prayag et al., 2013; Wang & Hsu, 2010). To date, several studies on behavioral intentions rely heavily on discussing the relationship between tourist involvement and postvisit intentions such as revisit intention (Zhou et al., 2023). However, compared to postvisit behavioral intentions, previsit behavioral intentions have received little attention from researchers. Kim & Kim (2018) have emphasized that a high level of involvement with Korean TV dramas can motivate audiences to visit depicted destinations they have not visited yet. Based on prior studies, in this research, we suggest that audience involvement

with an audiovisual product contributes to increasing the strength of their behavioral intentions toward the depicted destination in the previsit stage. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H1. There is a positive relationship between audience involvement and previsit behavioral intentions.

Place attachment

In previous studies, place attachment has been extensively explored in the field of psychology and, more recently, in the context of tourism (Jorge et al., 2023). Place attachment is commonly defined as “a positive connection or bond between a person and a particular place” (Williams & Vaske, 2003, p. 831). In recent years, both theoretical and empirical research has consistently affirmed that place attachment comprises two fundamental dimensions: place identity and place dependence (e.g. Hosany, Buzova, & Sanz-Blas, 2020; Lee et al., 2012; Loureiro, 2014). Place identity, as defined by Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff ((1983, p. 61), is “an individual’s strong emotional attachment to particular places or settings”. It can be established through a positive balance of cognitive factors and repeated exposure to a destination, whether that exposure is grounded in actual experiences (Dwyer et al., 2019). On the other hand, place dependence pertains to a functional attachment to a place (Williams & Vaske, 2003). This dimension implies that a place holds behavioral exclusivity when compared to available alternatives, signifying that the place is unique to the visitor and/or suitable for particular activities (Dwyer et al., 2019; Moore & Graefe, 1994).

Earlier studies have emphasized that a sense of attachment to a particular place typically develops through frequent and extended interactions (Kyle et al., 2004; Lewicka, 2011). In the leisure and tourism context, there has been considerable exploration of involvement as an antecedent to place attachment (e.g. Lee & Shen, 2013; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Previous studies primarily focused on realistic tourism involvement, characterized by physical experiences that readily evoke place attachment and behavioral intentions (Lee & Shen, 2013; Wang et al., 2022). The integration of involvement and place attachment in virtual reality tourism and film tourism has emerged only in recent literature. A growing body of research suggests that individuals can develop attachment even in cases where they have not personally experienced or imagined the place (Cheng & Kuo, 2015; Hosany et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022). Wang, Huang, Morrison, & Wu ((2022) demonstrated that virtual reality tourism involvement (VRTI) has significant positive influences on place attachment. VRTI offers individuals a unique opportunity to experience and interact with a destination, fostering a personal connection and emotional attachment to the virtual place. Similarly, the viewing experience of a film or TV series can influence audiences’ personal memories and attachments to the depicted destination (Kim, 2012; Oshriyeh & Capriello, 2022).

According to the Involvement-Commitment theory, individuals with higher involvement in the purchase process are more likely to develop strong preferences and attachments to the product (Beatty et al., 1988). In terms of audience involvement, although audiences may not be making a financial purchase in the traditional sense, they are investing their time, attention, and emotional energy into the consumption of media products such as films and TV series (Askwith, 2007). While absent studies have explicitly adopted the Involvement-Commitment theory to examine the impact of audiences’ involvement with films or TV series on place attachment in the previsit stage, several studies have used similar concepts to suggest a connection. For instance, Kim (2010) conducted a study involving on-site tourists visiting the destination featured in the Korean TV series “*Winter Sonata*” which revealed that prior viewing experiences could result in the development of personalized memories and attachment to the filming location. Additionally, Chen (2018) and Zhou et al. ((2023) demonstrated that a high level of celebrity involvement positively influences place attachment among a group of purposeful film tourists. In previous studies in the film tourism context, celebrity involvement has been regarded as a similar term to audience

involvement, which both refer to an extension of leisure involvement (Yen & Teng, 2015). Furthermore, Hosany et al. ((2020) argued that individuals can develop a sense of attachment to a depicted place based on parasocial interaction with media characters and vicarious involvement with storylines of various mass media (in oral, written, or visual form), despite lacking previous physical contact with that place. From this perspective, this study proposes that through high involvement with a film or TV series, audiences may be induced to form an attachment with the depicted destination, even if they have never physically visited that location. To extend the application of the Involvement-Commitment theory to the film tourism context, this study formulates the following hypothesis:

- H2. There is a positive relationship between audience involvement and place attachment.

According to place attachment theory, place attachment is an important predictor of an individual's decision to act in the physical environment (Inalhan et al., 2021). Once attachment to a place is established, it influences individual perception and subsequent behavior towards the place (Han et al., 2019), with stronger attachment to the place increasing the likelihood of visitation and recommendation (Jorge et al., 2023). Although previous studies have demonstrated the positive influence of place attachment on postvisit behavioral intentions, such as intention to revisit (e.g. Isa, Ariyanto, & Kiumarsi, 2020; Prayag & Ryan, 2012) and intention to recommend (e.g. Hosany, Prayag, Van Der Veen, Huang, & Deesilatham, 2017; Tsai, 2016), recent literature suggests that individuals can develop place attachment before physically experiencing a destination (Hosany et al., 2020; Jorge et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). In the previsit phase, the attachment to the place fostered by virtual reality (VR) experiences can significantly influence potential tourists' intentions to visit the destination (Jorge et al., 2023). Wang et al. ((2022) pointed out that users' involvement with VR content has a positive effect on place attachment, with place dependence mediating the relationship between virtual reality tourism involvement and behavioral intentions. With regard to film tourism, Chen (2023) conducted a study to examine the relationship between audiences' place attachment and their intention to visit the unvisited film location. Unexpectedly, the results of this study found no statistically significant relationship between place attachment and the intention to travel. Although the relationships between audience involvement, place attachment, and previsit behavioral intentions are not yet sufficiently validated, Hosany et al. ((2020) have argued that through parasocial interaction with media characters and vicarious engagement with storylines, audiences can develop attachment to the place, which positively impacts their behavioral intentions towards the depicted destination in the previsit phase. To build on the existing research, the following hypotheses are therefore proposed below:

- H3. There is a positive relationship between place attachment and previsit behavioral intentions.
- H4. Place attachment plays a significant mediating role between audience involvement and previsit behavioral intentions.

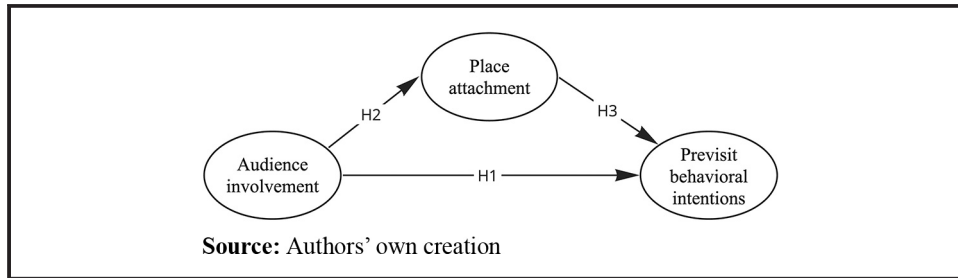
Based on the above literature review, a conceptual framework is proposed to indicate the relationships between audience involvement, place attachment, and behavioral intentions (see Figure 1).

Methodology

Study setting

This study selected Phuket, Thailand, the setting of the popular Thai TV series “*I Told Sunset About You*” as a case study to examine its impact on young Chinese audiences' perceptions and behavioral intentions prior to viewing. With the rise of streaming media platforms, Thai TV series experienced a steady increase in popularity, especially among

Figure 1 Conceptual framework



Chinese audiences in their twenties (Shi, 2020). Boys' Love (BL) series, in particular, emerged as the most popular genre among young Chinese audiences (Jirattikorn, 2021; Xu & Tan, 2021). The Thai BL TV series "*I Told Sunset About You*" received great attention and recognition from young Chinese audiences since its broadcast in October 2020 (Zhang, 2021; Zhang & Numtong, 2021). The series was set in various locations in Phuket, including Phuket Old Town, Laem Phromthep, and scenic beaches, and highlighted these attractive destinations in all episodes.

Sampling and data collection

The sample population of this study consisted of Chinese audiences aged 18 to 30 years old who had watched the Thai TV series "*I Told Sunset About You*" but had never been to Phuket. A nonprobability convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants. A self-administered online questionnaire was designed using the online panel database *SoJump* (www.sojump.com). *SoJump* is one of the largest online panel databases in China, with over 2.6 million registered users, and it allows individuals to design and distribute professional questionnaires (Chen & Chen, 2020). The online questionnaire was disseminated through several well-known Chinese social media platforms, including *Weibo*, *Douban*, and *WeChat*. These platforms host communities with forums or online groups for users interested in Thai TV series and celebrities to engage in discussions and share relevant information. To recruit participants, posts with the link to the online questionnaire were published in these online communities focused on Thai TV series. In addition, a poster featuring the two main characters from "*I Told Sunset About You*" along with a QR code to access the online questionnaire was designed to attract users' interest. At the beginning of the questionnaire, screening questions such as "Are you Chinese between the ages of 18 and 30?", "Have you ever watched the Thai TV series '*I Told Sunset About You*'?", and "Have you ever visited Phuket?" were asked to identify eligible participants for this study. The data collection took place from January to February 2023. During this period, a total of 607 respondents completed the questionnaires. After removing incomplete responses and missing data, 564 valid questionnaires were retained for further analysis.

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. Out of the 564 participants, 143 (25.4%) identified as male, while 421 (74.6%) identified as female, illustrating an imbalanced distribution in terms of gender. This finding aligns with previous research, indicating a predominantly female viewership for Thai TV series, particularly those in the BL genre (Jirattikorn, 2021; Shi, 2020). Given the study's focus on a young audience aged 18–30, the largest proportion of respondents fell within the 20-year-old age bracket (11.70%). Education levels were notably high, with 81.0% of respondents holding a bachelor's degree or higher. The majority (92.4%) of participants were single, and 40.1% reported a monthly income of less than RMB 2,000.

Table 1 Demographic profile of respondents (*n* = 564)

Variable	n	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	143	25.4
Female	421	74.6
<i>Age</i>		
18	60	10.6
19	63	11.2
20	66	11.7
21	59	10.5
22	50	8.9
23	51	9.0
24	43	7.6
25	40	7.1
26	39	6.9
27	21	3.7
28	23	4.1
29	26	4.6
30	23	4.1
<i>Education Level</i>		
High school or below	107	19.0
Bachelor's degree	387	68.6
Master's degree	65	11.5
Doctoral degree	5	0.9
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	521	92.4
Married	42	7.4
Separated	1	0.2
<i>Monthly Income (RMB)</i>		
≤ 2,000	226	40.1
2,001–4,000	106	18.8
4,001–6,000	102	18.1
6,001–8,000	60	10.6
8,001–10,000	33	5.9
> 10,000	37	6.6
Source: Authors' own creation		

Measurement items and survey development

The measurement items in this study were developed based on previous research in this area. The construct of audience involvement included three dimensions: Behavioral involvement, Emotional involvement, and Referential reflection. To assess the different aspects of audience involvement, a total of 14 items were adopted from questionnaires by [Kim \(2012\)](#) and [Fu et al. \(\(2016\)\)](#). The destination image was assessed using the cognitive image and affective image dimensions, with 12 items from [Fu et al. \(\(2016\)\)](#) and [Chen \(2018\)](#). Attachment to the place was assessed based on place identity and place dependence, using a total of 8 items from [Chen \(2018\)](#) and [Hosany et al. \(\(2020\)\)](#). Finally, behavioral intentions were measured with 3 items taken from previous studies by [Fu et al. \(\(2016\)\)](#) and [Afshardoost & Eshaghi \(2020\)](#). To measure the responses, a five-point Likert scale was used for all items in the study, ranging from 1 (“*strongly disagree*”) to 5 (“*strongly agree*”). To ensure content validity, three lecturers with PhDs in tourism and hospitality management from the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism at Prince of Songkla University were invited to review and clarify all items. Prior to formal data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 30 eligible respondents to assess the reliability of the questionnaire scales. The Cronbach's alpha values for each variable were within an

acceptable range (0.70 to 0.95), confirming the reliability of the questionnaire used in this study (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Data analysis

A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.0 to characterize the demographic profiles of the participants. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then executed utilizing AMOS 24.0 to evaluate the relationships within the proposed measurement model, connecting observed variables to latent constructs. Subsequently, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to scrutinize the conceptual model. This method allowed for the exploration of both direct and mediated effects through the maximum likelihood estimation method, facilitating a thorough examination of the proposed hypotheses.

Results

Measurement model

This study employed a second-order latent variable model to investigate the relationships among audience involvement, place attachment, and previsit behavioral intentions. Before conducting the SEM procedure, CFA was performed to evaluate the reliability and validity of measurement indicators and latent constructs. The measurement model displayed a good model fit ($\chi^2 = 770.106$, $df = 261$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.951$, CFI = 0.950, GFI = 0.900, TLI = 0.942, RMSEA = 0.059). Tables 2 and 3 present the standardized factor loadings for each item, Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (CR), and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each observed variable. All standardized factor loadings fell within the range of 0.617 to 0.995, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.6 (Kline, 2023). Additionally, the α values for each observed variable surpassed the threshold of 0.70, affirming a high level of reliability of all measurement scales (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The CR values for each construct exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, signifying the measurement model's reliability and satisfactory construct validity. Furthermore, AVE values surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.5 for all constructs, providing further confirmation of the strong convergent validity of the measurement scales employed in this study (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010).

Discriminant validity assesses the distinctiveness of a latent variable from others (Taherdoost, 2016). This assessment involves confirming that the square root of each construct's AVE exceeds its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In Table 4, the diagonal entries display the square root of the AVE values for each construct. These values consistently exceeded the AVE values for other constructs, confirming the discriminant validity of our measurement model.

Structural model and hypothesis testing

To assess the alignment of the hypothesized theoretical model with empirical data, this study employed structural equation modeling using the maximum likelihood estimation method. Figure 2 presents a summary of the structural model, which investigates the relationships between audience involvement, place attachment, and previsit behavioral intentions. The overall model exhibited a satisfactory fit, supported by $\chi^2 = 770.106$, $df = 261$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.951$. Furthermore, other fit indices, including CFI = 0.950, GFI = 0.900, TLI = 0.942, and RMSEA = 0.059, also affirmed a good model fit. These indicators suggest that the proposed model fits the empirical data adequately (Hair et al., 2010).

The results of hypothesis testing, as displayed in Table 5, reveal that all hypotheses were supported. Specifically, the path from audience involvement to previsit behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.294$, $t = 5.156$, $p < 0.001$) was found to be statistically significant, thereby supporting $H1$. The path from audience involvement to place attachment ($\beta = 0.742$, $t = 10.842$, $p < 0.001$)

Table 2 Results of confirmatory factor analysis for first-order model

Constructs/items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
<i>Behavioral involvement</i>				
I found my favorite character(s)/actor(s) in this TV series to be attractive	0.773			
If my favorite character(s)/actor(s) of this TV series appeared on another program, I would watch that program	0.739			
If there was a story about this TV series or my favorite character(s)/actor(s) on the Internet, in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it	0.794			
I looked forward to watching this TV series and my favorite character(s)/actor(s) in each episode	0.741			
I felt sad for my favorite character(s)/actor(s) when they made a mistake or when bad things happened to them	0.617	0.839	0.854	0.541
<i>Emotional involvement</i>				
I would like to meet my favorite character(s)/actor(s) from this TV series in person	0.727			
I feel comfortable when watching this TV series as if the character(s)/actor(s) were my friends	0.713			
When watching this TV series, I felt that I was a part of the story	0.631			
I arranged my daily/weekly schedule around this TV series to have a regular relationship with the program	0.628			
I feel this TV series and my favorite character(s)/actor(s) keep me company	0.817			
I like hearing the voice(s) of my favorite character(s)/actor(s) of this TV series in my home	0.750	0.852	0.861	0.510
<i>Referential reflection</i>				
I feel that this TV series presented things as they really are in life	0.725			
I feel that this TV series portrayed real life lessons and practices that I can personally relate to	0.792			
This TV series seemed to understand and cover the kinds of issues that I wanted to know more about	0.847	0.827	0.832	0.623
<i>Place identity</i>				
Phuket means a lot to me	0.901			
I am very attached to Phuket	0.878			
I identify strongly with Phuket	0.822			
Phuket is a very special destination to me	0.777	0.908	0.909	0.716
<i>Place dependence</i>				
I will enjoy visiting Phuket more than any other place	0.876			
I will get more satisfaction from visiting Phuket than any other place	0.948			
Visiting Phuket is more important to me than visiting any other place	0.904			
I would not substitute any other place for the experience I want to have in Phuket	0.813	0.929	0.936	0.786
<i>Previsit behavioral intentions</i>				
I will visit Phuket in the next 3 years	0.837			
I will recommend Phuket to others	0.861			
I will say positive things about Phuket to others	0.907	0.880	0.902	0.755

Source: Authors' own creation

exhibited significance, thus supporting *H2*. Finally, the path from place attachment to previsit behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.557$, $t = 9.296$, $p < 0.001$) was also found to be significant, providing support for *H3*.

To confirm the mediating effect of place attachment in this study, the indirect effect between constructs was examined. The results indicated that the path from audience involvement to previsit behavioral intentions had an indirect effect ($\beta = 0.414$), suggesting that place attachment serves as a mediator between audience involvement and previsit behavioral intentions. Following the mediation analysis procedure suggested by [Baron & Kenny \(1986\)](#),

Table 3 Results of confirmatory factor analysis for second-order model

Constructs/items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
<i>Audience involvement</i>		0.908	0.883	0.718
Behavioral involvement	0.758			
Emotional involvement	0.995			
Referential reflection	0.768			
<i>Place attachment</i>		0.942	0.905	0.826
Place identity	0.959			
Place dependence	0.856			

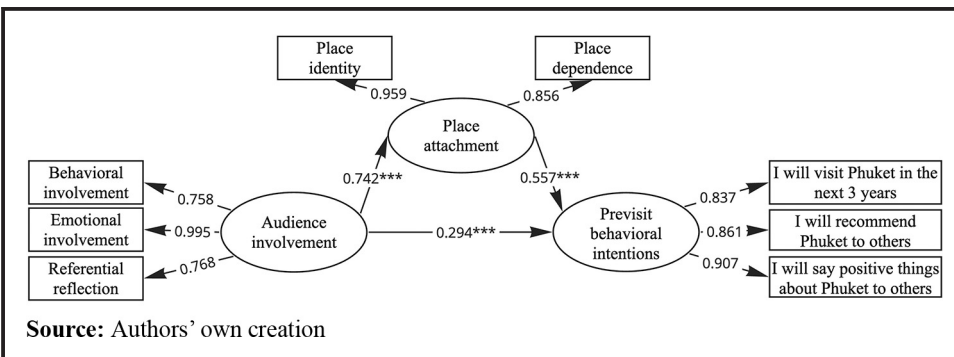
Source: Authors' own creation

Table 4 Results of discriminant validity

Constructs	Mean	S.D.	AI	PA	BIs
AI	4.54	0.74	<i>0.847</i>		
PA	4.38	0.85	0.742	<i>0.909</i>	
BIs	4.66	0.68	0.708	0.776	<i>0.869</i>

Notes: The *Italic* numbers on the diagonal represent the square roots of the AVE; AI = audience involvement; PA = place attachment; BIs = previsit behavioral intentions

Source: Authors' own creation

Figure 2 Conceptual framework and SEM results

Source: Authors' own creation

Table 5 Results of path coefficient and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Regression path	β	<i>t</i> -value	Results
H1	Audience involvement $\rightarrow$ Previsit behavioral intentions	0.294	5.156***	Supported
H2	Audience involvement $\rightarrow$ Place attachment	0.742	10.842***	Supported
H3	Place attachment $\rightarrow$ Previsit behavioral intentions	0.557	9.296***	Supported

Notes: β = Standardized path coefficient; *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Authors' own creation

the Sobel test was conducted, resulting in a Sobel z value of 7.075, which exceeds the significance threshold of 1.96 (Fiedler et al., 2011). To further establish the statistical significance of the mediating effect of place attachment, the bootstrapping method was applied. The Bootstrap confidence interval technique is widely recognized as a preferable approach for assessing mediating effects compared to the traditional Sobel test

(Collier, 2020). This study employed 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals and conducted 5,000 bootstrap samples to evaluate the significance of the indirect effects. The indirect effect is considered statistically significant if the bootstrap analysis reveals that the upper and lower bound confidence intervals do not encompass zero (Collier, 2020). Table 6 shows the result of the mediating effect analysis for the proposed structural model. The indirect effect of audience involvement on previsit behavioral intentions through perceived place attachment ($\beta = 0.414$, $p = 0.000$) was found to be statistically significant, providing support for $H4$.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between audience involvement, place attachment, and previsit behavioral intentions in the previsit stage. The findings support the proposed conceptual model and reveal that audience involvement positively influences previsit behavioral intentions through the mediating variable of place attachment, addressing a gap in film tourism literature.

The study findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between audience involvement and previsit behavioral intentions, in line with the previous studies of Kim and Kim (2018) and Xia et al. ((2022)). This implies that a high degree of audience involvement with a film or TV series is more likely to visit the destination depicted on the screen even if they have not physically visited it. Although our study focused exclusively on Chinese audiences, the findings are consistent with previous research conducted in other cultural contexts looking at the influence of audiovisual products on inducing audiences' willingness to visit film-related destinations (Hosany et al., 2020). In Indonesia, for example, a recent study by Halim & Kiatkawsin (2021) found that Indonesian female audiences were not only emotionally involved, related to Korean entertainment films, and admired celebrities, but also had a strong intention to visit South Korea. Similarly, Josiam, Spears, Dutta, Pookulangara, & Kinley (2020) found that Indians who showed high levels of engagement with Bollywood films and TV shows were more motivated to visit the filming locations.

In addition, the findings reveal that audience involvement can positively influence place attachment in the previsit stage. This result confirms the findings of several previous studies, which indicate that place attachment can be generated by a high level of involvement with a media program or VR content even without a prior visit experience (Hosany et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022).

Moreover, the findings suggest a positive influence of place attachment on previsit behavioral intentions, which is consistent with the finding of previous researchers that place attachment can significantly impact potential tourists' intentions to visit the destination (Hosany et al., 2020; Jorge et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Furthermore, this result contradicts the findings of Chen (2023). This discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that the current study used a different context than Chen (2023) to examine the relationship between place attachment and previsit behavioral intentions. Different content of films or TV series can have different effects on audience perceptions, emotional responses, and behavioral intentions (Kim & Kim, 2018; Muszynski et al., 2019).

Finally, the present study suggests that place attachment acts as a mediator in the relationship between audience involvement and previsit behavioral intentions. This finding is

Table 6 Result of the mediating effect analysis

Relationship	Indirect effect	Confidence Interval 95%		<i>p</i> -value	Result
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
<i>H4</i> : AI → PA → BIs	0.414	0.312	0.534	0.000	Supported
Notes: AI = Audience involvement; PA = place attachment; BIs = previsit behavioral intentions					
Source: Authors' own creation					

similar to that of [Wang et al. \(\(2022\)\)](#), who confirmed that place attachment mediates the association between involvement with VR content and behavioral intentions in the previsit stage.

Conclusion, implications, and limitations of the study

Conclusion

The main objective of this study is to understand the contribution of audiovisual products such as films and TV series to the tourism industry. This study also aims to understand the relationship between audience involvement, place attachment and behavioral intentions in the previsit stage. The result of the study shows that audience involvement has a direct and positive effect on place attachment. Furthermore, the results suggest that audience involvement has both a direct and indirect impact on behavioral intentions, with place attachment serving as a mediator in the relationship between audience involvement and behavioral intentions. In addition, a significant positive correlation is observed between place attachment and behavioral intentions. Therefore, the findings confirm that high degree of audience involvement with films and TV series have a significant positive impact on enhancing place attachment and induce potential tourists to visit the destinations depicted. The novel insights derived from this study make a remarkable contribution to the field of film tourism and have both theoretical and practical implications, as described in the subsequent subsection.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the theoretical framework by establishing a conceptual relationship between audience involvement, place attachment, and previsit behavioral intentions. While previous research highlights the significance of audience involvement in understanding audience media consumption in relation to a destination ([Fu et al., 2016](#); [Kim, 2012](#)), there is limited research that addresses the role of audience involvement in shaping potential tourists' perceptions and behaviors toward the depicted destination prior to their visit. This study extends the existing body of film tourism research by providing empirical evidence that audience involvement significantly influences both place attachment and behavioral intentions in the previsit stage. It is noteworthy that this finding also empirically validates the application of involvement-commitment theory in the context of film tourism. It demonstrates that audience involvement with media content can positively influence their commitment to a destination, enriching academic research and enhancing understanding of the value and effectiveness of audiovisual products. Furthermore, the finding suggests that place attachment can reinforce behavioral intentions even if the audiences have not physically visited the destination depicted on screen. Previous studies have extensively explored place attachment theory in experienced tourists to assess their loyalty toward a destination ([Isa et al., 2020](#); [Prayag & Ryan, 2012](#)). However, few have applied it to the field of film tourism ([Chen, 2023](#); [Zhou et al., 2023](#)), and there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the antecedents of tourists' attachment to a depicted destination and the resulting effects on behavioral intentions, especially among potential tourists. This study addresses this gap by examining the mediating role of place attachment and demonstrates that positive place attachment fostered through audience involvement in a film or TV series can increase audiences' travel behavioral intentions toward the depicted destination.

Practical implications

This study not only supports and extends previous literature, but also provides several significant practical implications for DMOs and tourism professionals planning to utilize films or TV series as tools to promote destinations and attract potential tourists. Firstly, related organizations should recognize the soft power of films and TV series. The findings highlight the critical role of audience involvement as an antecedent to place attachment and

behavioral intentions in the previsit stage. & As Tal-Or & Cohen (2010) noted, compelling storylines and identification with characters can lead audiences to invest in a greater degree of emotional involvement in audiovisual products, making them more susceptible to the messages conveyed. Therefore, destination marketers should prioritize efforts to strengthen the connection between the storyline of films or TV series and the destination. By exposing media content to audiences, imprinting the local scenery in audiences' minds can reinforce the desire to visit the destination depicted. The TV series *"I Told Sunset About You"* has generated a high level of viewer engagement and a positive perception of Phuket with its well-crafted storyline and scenes featuring attractive locations in Phuket such as Phuket Old Town, Laem Phromthep, and beautiful beaches. Thus, collaborating with well-established and experienced film or TV producers and frequently exposing the destination on screen can therefore be a suitable strategy for DMOs looking to promote their destination.

Secondly, DMOs should focus on fostering emotional attachment to the destination portrayed. The results highlight the central role of place attachment in the behavioral intentions of potential tourists. Endowing destinations with symbolic and emotional meanings could be an effective strategy for establishing place attachment among potential tourists (Hosany et al., 2020). This can be achieved through a comprehensive and unique storyline, highlighting the local culture and showcasing the local cuisine, all of which contribute to helping audiences form a distinctive attachment to the depicted destination (Tsai, 2016; Wong & Lai, 2015). In the TV series *"I Told Sunset About You"*, audiences cannot only admire the beautiful natural landscapes and unique Sino-Portuguese street views of Phuket, but some signature local foods such as Hokkien mee and Phuket's signature dessert O-aew are also introduced. It is worth noting that Phuket boasts a diverse culture and cuisine, which earned the city the title of *"City of Gastronomy"* by UNESCO in 2015 (Phakdee-Auksorn et al., 2023). Therefore, initiatives to promote Phuket's local cuisine in films and TV series should be encouraged, including partnerships with local restaurants to offer film tourists with a unique gastronomic experience. In addition, offering day trips in the footsteps of movie characters and selling related souvenirs can evoke a sense of nostalgia and maintain film tourists' attachment to the destination.

In addition to the above strategies, DMOs and local government institutions should encourage film and TV series producers to cooperate by offering them various incentives that benefit both sides. These incentives can include offering suitable and scenic locations, providing logistical support to streamline the production process, and providing tax breaks to make the destination more financially attractive to filmmakers.

Limitations and suggestions for future study

Although this study contributes to film tourism research, there are limitations. First, the focus on the younger generation precludes observation of the perceptions and behavioral intentions of other potential tourist groups. Future research should broaden its scope to examine different segments of film tourists, such as the middle-aged market. As the study is limited to the Chinese population, further research in different countries is recommended to strengthen the empirical evidence for the proposed theoretical framework. Finally, this study only addresses previsit stage behavioral intentions and does not provide insights into on-site behavior or postvisit intentions. Future research should employ a longitudinal design to explore evolving perceptions following actual visitations and assess the significance of identified relationships between constructs.

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Source details

International Journal of Tourism Cities

Years currently covered by Scopus: from 2015 to 2024

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ISSN: 2056-5607 E-ISSN: 2056-5615

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The effect of audience involvement on previsit behavioral intentions: the mediating role of place attachment

[Dongqi Shi, Nimit Soonsan, Panuwat Phakdee-Auksorn](#) ▼

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Abstract

[Abstract](#)

Purpose

[Introduction](#)

This study aims to explore the determinants of behavioral intentions during the previsit stage by investigating the influence of audience involvement with the audiovisual product and the mediating role played by place attachment.

[Literature review and hypotheses](#)

[Methodology](#)

Design/methodology/approach

[Results](#)

Structural equation modeling was employed to verify the hypothesized relationships using the AMOS 24.0 program to assess the proposed model. A total of 564 young Chinese audiences who had watched the Thai television (TV) series “I Told Sunset About You” but had not previously visited Phuket, Thailand, were collected using the online survey as participants.

[Discussion](#)

[Conclusion, implications, and](#)

Findings

The findings indicate that audience involvement has a significant positive effect on place attachment and behavioral intentions during the previsit stage. Place attachment significantly influences behavioral intentions. Moreover, the result suggests that place attachment significantly mediates the relationship between audience involvement and behavioral intentions.



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To cite this article: Pipatpong Fakfare, Chayanon Phucharoen, Jinkyung Jenny Kim & Heesup Han (2024) Ethics for tourism: integrating Confucian harmony and ethical beliefs into animal tourism, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 41:7, 923-940, DOI: 10.1080/10548408.2024.2361101

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2024.2361101>



Published online: 05 Jun 2024.



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Ethics for tourism: integrating Confucian harmony and ethical beliefs into animal tourism

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explain Asian traveler behaviors concerning ethical animal tourism, using the value-attitude-behavior model as the research framework. Through structural equation modeling analysis, critical factors for developing ethical behavior in animal tourism were verified. This research enhances the tourism literature by 1) incorporating Confucian harmony as an influencing cultural value and confirmed its essential role in the animal tourism context, and 2) verifying the significance of ethical beliefs as an important predictor for awareness and attitude, which subsequently induce responsible behaviors. Furthermore, the findings suggest how industry professionals could influence travelers' behavior in an ethical manner.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 April 2024
Revised 12 May 2024
Accepted 17 May 2024

KEYWORDS

Confucian harmony; ethical belief; awareness; attitude; animal cocreation behavior; involvement; behavioral intention; ethical animal tourism

Introduction

Animal tourism, which involves visits to places where animals live in their natural habitats or in captivity, such as national parks, game reserves, aquariums, and zoos, has become a popular activity for many travelers around the world (Blaer, 2022). According to Carr (2009), animal tourism refers to any activity in which animals are used as a form of entertainment or attraction for tourists. Participating in activities such as wildlife safaris, zoos, and aquariums, as well as animal-based cultural experiences and conservation experiences, constitutes animal tourism. While animal tourism can provide exciting and educational experiences, it also raises ethical considerations related to animal welfare, conservation, and the environment (Winter, 2020). The increasing demand for animal tourism experiences is associated with changing patterns in tourism desires and concerns for animal rights and well-being (Fennell, 2013).

As Winter (2020) claimed, ethical tourist behaviors in animal tourism include such actions as respecting animal welfare by choosing activities that prioritize the well-being of animals, engaging in educational opportunities about wildlife conservation, and advocating for ethical treatment of animals. Conversely, unethical behaviors involve supporting organizations that exploit animals for entertainment, participating in the illegal wildlife trade, and disregarding conservation guidelines

(Joo et al., 2023). Overall, ethical behaviors contribute to positive outcomes for animals, the environment, and local communities (Winter, 2020). However, the economic value of animal tourism is on the rise, raising concerns about the impact of unethical tourist behaviors on animals and their living conditions (Fennell & Thomsen, 2021). To address these concerns, tourism practices and policies that prioritize the welfare and animal protection are being promoted (Fennell, 2022a). This move is especially important given the potential negative impacts that tourism activities can have on animals and their habitats.

Many scholars have recognized the need to enhance animal ethics (Fennell, 2013, 2014; Winter, 2020), and an increasing number are researching compassionate animal-based tourism (von Essen et al., 2020). However, existing studies have predominantly focused on tourists' ethical practices from a Western perspective (Duffy & Moore, 2011; Fennell, 2014). By contrast, only a few studies have considered animal ethics from the view of Asian philosophies, despite the recent popularity of animal tourism among Asian travelers who are fascinated by animal travel-related activities and exotic species (Packer et al., 2014). According to Gao et al. (2018), Asian travelers may also be attracted to animal tourism activities as a unique experience not available in their home countries. Scholars have accentuated the importance of cultural values in shaping tourist attitudes,

decision-making, and behavior when taking holidays (Akram et al., 2024; Hsu & Huang, 2016; Koh et al., 2022; Maldonado-López et al., 2024). Thus, cultural perspectives must be considered when addressing the ethical concerns of travelers engaging in animal tourism.

Culture and religion are two major components that can greatly influence an individual's beliefs and values, including their ethical behaviors (Buijs et al., 2009; Davari et al., 2024; Ooi, 2019). The norms and traditions of a particular culture, as well as the teachings and beliefs of a religion, can shape how a person perceives and evaluates ethical issues (Hsu & Huang, 2016). In East Asia, a majority of the population adheres to Eastern philosophies, including Confucianism. This rooted ideology exerts a profound impact on how people engage with nature (M. J. H. Yang et al., 2020).

Embracing the Confucian harmony ideal in animal tourism can foster a deep sense of respect and empathy among tourists towards animals (Packer et al., 2014). This involves recognizing the intrinsic value of animals within the interconnected ecosystem. Such understanding fosters a deep appreciation for animal welfare and the importance of ethical behavior in a responsible tourism environment (von Essen et al., 2020). Confucian principles further emphasize education and self-cultivation. These aspects can encourage individuals to educate themselves about ethical animal tourism practices and to act in accordance with those practices (Lee et al., 2013). Therefore, the integration of Confucian harmony in animal tourism can help promote responsible tourism practices and foster tourists' better understanding of the moral considerations and their actions.

Traditionally, studies on animal ethics have been rooted in Western philosophical perspectives (Fennell, 2022a; Winter, 2020). For example, Sneddon et al. (2016) conceptualized animal-welfare as an individual ethical concern, analyzing its incorporation into a comprehensive value system to elucidate patterns in tourist behavior. In Markwell's (2020) study, the author drew upon the ethic of care and principles of ecofeminist scholarship to advocate for compassion and care towards all beings, including non-human animals. Furthermore, Fennell (2022a) established an animal welfare literacy framework based on Western ethical principles (e.g. environmental literacy) to promote awareness and understanding of animal welfare concerns among stakeholders. However, recognizing diverse philosophical frameworks is crucial to developing a comprehensive understanding of our relationship with animals and the ethical considerations involved. As Packer et al. (2014) declared, non-Western philosophical traditions, like Confucianism and Taoism may offer unique

viewpoints on the interrelationship between humans and animals. While the study of animal ethics from non-Western perspectives represents an area with limited research and understanding, this study fills this void by incorporating Confucian principles, particularly from the aspect of harmony towards developing a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to animal welfare and conservation.

The World Travel & Tourism Council (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019) reported that animal tourism generated US\$120.1 billion to the global GDP in 2018, and it is expected to continue to grow in the coming decades. As a response to the rise of animal tourism among Asian tourists, ethical awareness must be promoted among tourists and industry professionals. By incorporating Confucian harmony and prioritizing responsible practices, tourism stakeholders can ensure a harmonious and balanced approach to animal tourism, benefiting both industry and the well-being of animals. For example, the research findings on Confucian harmony and its influence on approach behaviors in ethical animal tourism can serve as a foundation for developing targeted education and awareness campaigns among Asian tourists. As Corr (2013) stated, approach behavior involves moving towards something, whether it is an object, person, or goal. This behavior can indicate interest, curiosity, or a desire for interaction. In ethical animal tourism, approach behavior can be implied as the respectful and responsible way in which tourists interact with animals in their natural habitats or in controlled environments (Fennell, 2014). Given that tourists play a central role in the demand for animal tourism experiences (J. J. Kim et al., 2023), this research defines ethical animal tourism from a perspective of tourist to cultivate their understanding of ethical considerations and responsible behaviors. By highlighting the importance of ethical considerations based on the Confucian harmony principles, tourists are encouraged to engage in approach behaviors that respect animals' well-being and fosters harmonious interactions.

To address the concerns on animal ethics in the travel industry, this study intends to assess the impact of Confucian harmony, ethical beliefs in animal tourism, awareness of ethical issues, and attitude on individuals' approach behaviors toward ethical animal tourism. Furthermore, we attempt to test the efficacy of the higher-order structure of Confucian harmony, which includes a sense of connection with nature and perceived need for autonomy of nature, within the proposed research framework. Finally, we aim to evaluate the relative importance of research constructs in determining approach behaviors encompassing animal

cocreation, involvement, and intention for ethical animal tourism. Based on the research objectives, we postulate the following research questions. The conceptual model is also illustrated in Figure 1.

RQ1: How does the higher-order structure of Confucian harmony, which includes a sense of connection with nature and the perceived need for autonomy of nature, and ethical beliefs interact with other variables in the theoretical framework to influence approach behaviors in ethical animal tourism?

RQ2: To what extent do tourists' attitude toward ethical animal tourism, and awareness of ethical issues influence their approach behaviors in terms of animal cocreation, involvement in ethical animal tourism, and intention toward ethical animal tourism?

RQ3: How can the research outcomes assist in shaping sustainable routes toward fostering ethical animal tourism?

The structure of the current research is organized as follows. A comprehensive review of the relevant literature and research hypotheses are presented next. Then, the research methodology, including data collection, operationalization of constructs, and data analysis through structural equation modelling is reported. Next, findings of the study are presented. Finally, research implications, limitations and future research avenues are provided.

Literature review

Confucian harmony

Confucianism is a philosophical system that originated in ancient China and has had a considerable influence on East Asian societies. Its values serve as guiding principles for individuals (Fu et al., 2015) and influence their behavior (Hsu & Huang, 2016). Confucianism emphasizes the importance of a harmonious relationship with nature, and its values, such as filial piety, respect for authority, and the pursuit of harmony, have been found to shape one's ethical beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (S. S. Huang & Wen, 2021).

Since the 1970s, Western societies have increasingly recognized the importance of the environment, leading to an essential reassessment of the paradigm that has governed the interactions between humans and nature (Gao et al., 2018). Holden (2003) highlighted that a pivotal concept within environmental ethics revolves around delineating the human stance concerning nature. Generally, three ethical positions with respect to nature have been identified: anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism (T. Yang, 2007). Anthropocentrism considers nature to be present solely for the benefit of humans and to have only instrumental value for human use. By contrast, biocentrism emphasizes the inherent worth of sentient beings, irrespective of their utilitarian value to humans. Ecocentrism surpasses the focus on individual rights and acknowledges the ethical significance of ecosystems, encompassing both living and nonliving elements. Ecocentrism recognizes that the health and well-being of the environment

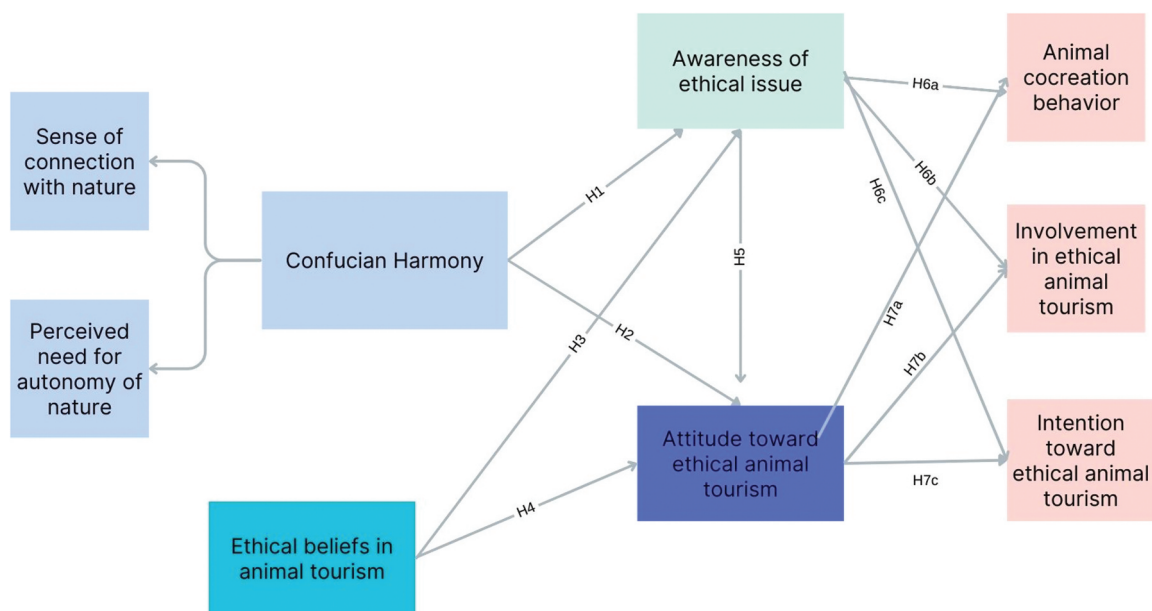


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

as a whole is just as important as that of individual organisms and thus emphasizes the interdependence and interconnectedness of all elements in an ecosystem (T. Yang, 2007).

Furthermore, as emphasized by York and Becker (2012), Aristotelian virtue ethics is another pivotal Western concept integral to cultivating an individual's environmental sustainability ethic. At its core, Aristotelianism is concerned with the notion of the good life, where moral and intellectual virtues serve as integral components (Jamal, 2004). The practical philosophy inherent in Aristotelianism consistently aligns assertions about moral imperatives with considerations of what is inherently good for human beings. In this ethical framework, the emphasis lies not solely in adhering to a set of rules but in the pursuit of virtuous character traits and habits contributing to the overall flourishing and well-being of individuals within the context of their environment (York & Becker, 2012).

However, culture arguably has a major influence on the formation of ethics regarding human – nature relationships (Buijs et al., 2009; S. S. Huang & Wen, 2021). From the perspective of Asian philosophies, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, cultural values, traditions, norms, and religious beliefs have strongly affected the way individuals view nature (M. J. H. Yang et al., 2020). In Buddhism, all lives, human and nonhuman, are considered equal, and causing suffering to others is prohibited. This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and encourages the cultivation of compassion toward all beings. Other Asian philosophies, such as Taoism, similarly emphasize the importance of respecting and harmonizing with nature. In East Asia, Confucianism is regarded as the most influential cultural root that shapes ethical considerations among individuals (Pun et al., 2000). Confucianism places great importance on moral virtues, such as loyalty, filial piety, and respect for authority, which are thought to be essential for maintaining social harmony. Confucianism also emphasizes the importance of humans as moral agents responsible for maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature (Gao et al., 2018). In Confucian philosophy, the concept of harmony between man and nature highlights the interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world (Li, 2008). Within this philosophical framework, nature is viewed not merely as a resource for human use but as a vital component of the moral and social fabric. By nurturing a harmonious relationship with nature, Confucian ethics aim to foster mutual respect and responsibility, wherein humans are accountable for their actions towards all forms of life (S. S. Huang & Wen, 2021). Based on the arguments discussed above, this research defines

Confucian harmony as an ethical framework that promotes both social values and a harmonious relationship with the environment, with humans being accountable for their decisions/behaviors toward nature and all life forms, including animals.

Following the frameworks outlined by Buijs et al. (2009) and Gao et al. (2018), this study examines two fundamental aspects of harmony: a sense of connection with nature and a perceived need for the autonomy of nature. These dimensions are pivotal for comprehending Confucian harmony within the framework of animal ethics. The sense of connection with nature echoes Confucian principles, emphasizing the interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world. This fosters morality and responsibility towards animal-related travel activities. On the other hand, the perceived need for the autonomy of nature highlights the significance of acknowledging intrinsic value, such as the inherent worth of our ecosystem (Buijs et al., 2009; Gao et al., 2018). Animal tourism, including activities such as animal hunting, elephant riding, and tiger shows often raises ethical concerns regarding animal welfare and conservation. Confucian harmony offers valuable insights into addressing these concerns by emphasizing the ethical responsibility of tourists towards all living beings, including animals.

Confucian harmony and animal tourism

In the context of tourism and marketing, scholars have attempted to interpret the behavior of tourists and their ethical consumption patterns from a Confucian perspective. Fu et al. (2015, 2017) and Shao and Perkins (2017) analyzed the travel motivations of modern-day Chinese travelers through the lens of Confucianism. Hsu and Huang (2016) explored the value system in China and its implications for tourism, highlighting the importance of Confucian principles, like respect for authority, group orientation, and harmony, in influencing the behavior of Chinese tourists. Chon and Hao (2020) developed a Confucian business framework for the hospitality industry based on the five constant virtues of Confucianism, whereas S. S. Huang and Wen (2021) attempted to develop and validate a scale to measure Chinese cultural values using items extracted from Confucian principles. Respect for authority, interdependence, face, group orientation, harmony, and external attribution have been generally found to be the dominant cultural values influencing the behavior of tourists, particularly those from East Asia.

Regarding animal tourism, scholars have integrated both Western perspectives and Eastern paradigms to explore issues related to ethical behaviors in tourism.

Within the framework of Western philosophies, scholars have focused on essential ethical aspects related to animal tourism, such as animal rights, welfare, and suffering (Fennell, 2013; 2022a). In a recent study, Fennell (2022b) introduced the concept of hypernorms for animal tourism by drawing on the integrative social contracts theory. These hypernorms include seven dimensions, such as the pinnacle of practice, recognition of beneficence, and literacy and education. Based on the aforementioned literature, Western perspectives on ethical animal tourism tend to advocate for fair treatment and respect of animals (Fennell & Thomsen, 2021).

Focusing on the Eastern perspectives, particularly on Confucianism, Bockover (2003) pointed out that the emphasis on benevolence should extend not only to human relationships but also to connections with other species. This mindset fosters a more ethical approach to animal tourism, where animal welfare takes precedence over commercial and tourists' own interests (Gao et al., 2018). Furthermore, by incorporating Confucian principles into the tourism industry, there is an opportunity to develop sustainable and culturally sensitive practices that align with the values of tourists from East Asian countries (Packer et al., 2014). These practices could ultimately promote a more harmonious and respectful relationship between humans and animals in the tourism context. Given the research context, Confucian harmony may explain tourists' beliefs, awareness, attitudes, and approach behaviors toward ethical animal tourism (Packer et al., 2014).

Influences of Confucian harmony

The theory of rational behavior states that an individual's attitudes and values play a crucial role in determining their engagement in specific behaviors (Zhang et al., 2019). Values are enduring beliefs about what is important in life and how one should behave (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017). Values are a fundamental aspect of an individual's cognitive system, affecting decision-making and behavior patterns. In the context of Asian culture, the values of Asian people are generally influenced by their lifestyles, beliefs, and cultural and social elements (Hsu & Huang, 2016). Confucianism has long dominated the ethical behavior of people in Eastern Asia. However, prior research has not explored in detail how tourists exhibit ethical behavior toward a travel destination or specific tourism activity, despite the continuous influence of Confucian harmony on East Asian tourists.

This study utilizes the value – attitude – behavior (VAB) model, along with the Confucian harmony and ethical beliefs constructs, specifically examining how the concept of Confucian harmony and ethical beliefs influence tourists'

ethical awareness, attitudes, and approach behaviors toward ethical animal tourism. Values and attitudes are crucial factors that drive individual intentions and behaviors (Ji & Yang, 2022; Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017; Yu et al., 2022). The VAB model has often been used to explain how value perceptions affect our actions through attitudinal constructs (Fakfare et al., 2022). In the context of consumer behavior, values are a fundamental ground that consumers consider when making purchasing decisions. Generally, individuals hold their value systems that reflect the choices they make from the various social values to which they are exposed.

Another key component of the VAB model is attitude, which pertains to the extent to which an individual holds a positive or negative evaluation of a specific belief or behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Prior research on pro-environmental/pro-social behavior has shown that values and attitudes influence tourists' support behaviors (Han, 2014, 2015; Han et al., 2019; Hwang et al., 2022), even though different constructs have been used to examine issues in various contexts (Zhu et al., 2022). In the animal tourism context, VAB variables have been employed to understand how tourists' values and attitudes shape their behaviors concerning animal welfare and ethical considerations. For example, Caplow's (2021) study on tourist reactions to education programs at animal-themed venues adopted the VAB and belief constructs, such as values, ethical beliefs, adverse consequences to frame how participants interpret important messages toward environmental education program contents. The findings showed that tourists accurately perceived key values-based messages when appropriate environmental education program contents were provided.

Furthermore, in a recent study by Ma and Chang (2022), the VAB model was applied to examine the consumption attitude and behavior of novel foods. By considering green and animal welfare values, the study identified significant effects between value and attitude constructs, subsequently influencing consumer consumption behavior. These studies illustrate the valuable insights gained by applying the VAB model and related constructs in the field of ethical animal tourism and environmental ethics, shedding light on the factors influencing tourists' decision-making processes and behaviors in these contexts. One of the aims of this study is to examine whether including the higher-order structure of Confucian harmony, which consists of a sense of connection with nature and a perceived need for the autonomy of nature, in the modified version of the VAB theory will enhance the explanatory and predictive power of the model. Thus, Confucian harmony, as a cultural value, is applied as a value construct in the current research context.

According to Bamberg and Moser (2007), individuals' awareness of an issue is a crucial concept in explaining the formation of attitudes and norms, which subsequently influence behaviors. In pro-environmental studies, Han (2014) defined problem awareness or awareness of an issue as individuals' perceptions of negative consequences related to valued objects when they are not acting pro-environmentally. Building on this background, this research offers a conceptual definition of awareness of ethical issues in animal tourism as the recognition and understanding of ethical concerns surrounding the treatment and welfare of animals within tourism activities. Several tourism scholars (2019; Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017) have suggested that tourists' awareness of ethical issues and attitude toward particular behaviors can be influenced by the values they perceive. For instance, Han et al. (2019) investigated how cruise passengers' decision-making formulated by utilizing the VAB model and found that passengers' perceived values influenced their attitudes. Megeirhi et al. (2020) further discovered that values, cultural worldview, and awareness of ethical issues are critical components that affect intentions to support heritage tourism. Previous studies have discussed the theoretical expansion in tourists' decision-making and emphasized incorporating ethics into their behavioral models, making it part of the value equation (Han, 2014, 2015).

The relationships between values and awareness of ethical issues were also found in prior pro-responsible studies. As evident in the work of Nordlund and Garvill (2003), values were found to affect awareness of ethical issues, which in turn have an impact on customers' pro-responsible intentions. In the context of animal tourism, the idea of Confucian harmony, considered a value construct in this study, can play an important role in shaping tourists' awareness of ethical issues. Confucianism emphasizes the importance of harmonious relationships between humans and nature, advocating for respect, compassion, and balance (Fu et al., 2015). Tourists who are influenced by Confucian harmony may be more attuned to the ethical considerations surrounding animal welfare and treatment within tourism activities. Arguably, they may demonstrate greater sensitivity to ethical issues in animal tourism and be more inclined to support initiatives that promote the humane treatment of animals. By fostering a mindset of harmony and ethical consideration, Confucian harmony can positively influence tourists' attitude and awareness of ethical issues in animal tourism, ultimately leading to more responsible and sustainable tourism practice. Based on the aforementioned academic evidence, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Confucian harmony positively affects awareness of ethical issues.

H2: Confucian harmony positively affects attitudes toward ethical animal tourism.

Influences of ethical beliefs

In studies on pro-social and ethical consumption (Han, 2014, 2015; Han et al., 2019; Quan et al., 2022), the relationships between values, attitudes, beliefs, awareness of consequences in the VAB and value-belief-norm models, and ethical principles have been identified. However, how ethical consumption is integrated into these models' measures remains unclear (Sandve et al., 2014). Therefore, scholars have suggested adding new variables, such as ethical beliefs, to these models (Ajzen, 1991) to better understand prosocial and ethical consumption behavior (Sandve et al., 2014). As Chowdhury (2020) pointed out, ethical beliefs reflect the acceptability or unacceptability of consumer behavior based on moral perspectives. In other words, ethical beliefs refer to the set of principles, values, and moral perspectives that determine whether consumer behavior is deemed acceptable or unacceptable within a given environment. Ethical beliefs are essential because they can influence consumers' behavioral responses. In the context of animal tourism, ethical beliefs can play a crucial role in shaping tourists' attitudes and behaviors (Blaer, 2022). For example, some tourists may prioritize animal welfare over entertainment due to their ethical beliefs, leading them to avoid certain animal tourism activities (Fennell, 2013). Therefore, ethical beliefs must be considered a factor that influences tourists' decision-making in animal tourism. On the basis of these arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Ethical beliefs in animal tourism positively affect awareness of ethical issues.

H4: Ethical beliefs in animal tourism positively affect attitudes toward ethical animal tourism.

Influences of tourist awareness of ethical issues and attitudes on approach behaviors

In recent years, tourists have become more conscious of the negative impact of unethical travel behavior, especially in animal tourism (C. Kline & Fischer, 2023). These mindful tourists are increasingly interested in compassionate animal tourism, recognizing the problems of animal welfare and ethics within the industry (von Essen et al., 2020). In response to this trend, travel operators are taking proactive steps to encourage

ethical behavior among tourists engaging in animal-related tourism. They are providing education and guidelines on appropriate ways to interact with animals and developing campaigns to promote ethical travel (J. J. Kim et al., 2023).

In research on pro-environmental behavior, scholars have found that tourist willingness to engage in prosocial and pro-environmental actions is linked to their personal norms, which are shaped by their values, attitudes, and problem awareness (Han et al., 2019). As noted by Steg and De Groot (2010), problem awareness or awareness of the issues refers to the level of understanding someone has of the negative outcomes that can result from not acting in a prosocial manner toward others or toward things they value. In other words, awareness of ethical issues can be defined as tourists' understanding and recognition of moral concerns related to specific behaviors (Han, 2014). Empirical research across various fields has consistently found that individuals' awareness of ethical issues is a key predictor of their pro-environmental behavior. For example, Fakfare and Wattanacharoensil (2023) found that tourists who are more aware of environmental issues are more likely to have favorable attitudes and engage in behaviors that reduce their ecological footprint, such as recycling or reducing energy consumption. In Chi's (2022) study pertaining to ethical behavior towards ecological products, awareness of ethical issues concerning the environment was hypothesized to affect consumer attitude and their ethical consumption intention/behavior. In animal tourism, tourists' awareness of ethical issues has also been found to be a vital factor in promoting ethical behavior toward animals (von Essen et al., 2020). By increasing tourists' awareness of the potential negative consequences of unethical animal tourism, travel operators and relevant service providers can help promote ethical and compassionate animal tourism practices.

According to C. Kline and Fischer (2023), tourists' willingness to engage in ethical travel behaviors is considerably affected by their awareness and attitude toward specific travel activities. To promote ethical travel, tourist approach behaviors to ethical animal tourism must be considered. In this research context, approach behaviors are defined as the actions/behaviors that tourists exhibit when they are actively seeking and participating in ethical animal tourism activities. Tourists' cocreation behavior, involvement, and their intentions to support ethical tourism can be considered as crucial factors in promoting ethical travel practices (Campos et al., 2017; Chowdhury, 2020; M. J. Kim et al., 2020). These behaviors reflect tourists' genuine commitment to responsible tourism, particularly concerning animal welfare and conservation efforts.

According to Bertella (2014), cocreation behavior refers to tourists' active engagement and interaction during animal travel experiences. Studies have shown that actively participating in ethical behavior and being aware of ethical considerations play a critical role in tourists' involvement and intentions to participate in ethical animal travel activities (Campos et al., 2017). As asserted by Bertella et al. (2019), the concept of co-creation can be understood in two ways: experiential value co-creation and knowledge co-creation. Experiential value co-creation typically involves interaction, while knowledge co-creation can be activated through collaboration, where tourists engage in building upon knowledge and insights related to ethical animal tourism. Arguably, if co-creation involves activities that conserve natural habitats and prioritize the welfare of animals, it can be considered ethical. For instance, engaging in volunteer projects for conservation or supporting initiatives that promote animal welfare aligns with ethical tourism practices.

Prior research suggests that tourist awareness of ethical issues and their attitude toward ethical animal tourism are often associated with approach behaviors, such as cocreation behavior, involvement, and intentions toward ethical animal tourism (Blaer, 2022; Winter, 2020). Awareness of ethical issues plays a significant role in shaping animal cocreation behavior within the tourism industry. When tourists are informed about ethical considerations related to animal welfare, they are more likely to engage in ethical behaviors, such as customizing responsible itineraries and participating in volunteer projects (Bertella et al., 2019). This awareness can also lead tourists to participate in activities that promote positive interactions with animals, such as choosing responsible tour operators that prioritize animal welfare. Additionally, informed tourists are more likely to avoid activities that involve animal exploitation, thus fostering a more ethical approach to animal-related tourism experiences. Arguably, tourists who possess moral concern and a favorable attitude toward ethical animal tourism are more inclined to explore ethical animal travel experiences, such as educational programs, or conservation-focused tours (Blaer, 2022).

The concept of involvement in ethical animal tourism is also critical and can be defined as an outcome variable due to its profound impact on both tourists and the industry (Han et al., 2021; Y. C. Huang et al., 2013). When tourists are deeply involved in ethical animal tourism experiences, it indicates their heightened interest, emotional connection, and sense of responsibility towards the welfare of animals involved. This involvement translates into tangible behavioral impacts, such as active participation in conservation activities and financial support for responsible animal tourism initiatives (Han et al., 2021).

Moreover, involved tourists are more likely to express positive attitudes towards ethical animal tourism establishments. By considering involvement as an outcome variable, stakeholders can assess the effectiveness of conservation efforts, and ensure the long-term sustainability of ethical animal tourism initiatives.

Considering the abovementioned discussion, we can conclude that heightened awareness of ethical issues and a positive attitude empower tourists to make decisions that co-create, support, and involve in ethical animal tourism activities. The greater the tourist awareness of ethical issues related to animal tourism and the more positive their attitude toward ethical animal travel activities, the more likely they are to approach animal tourism with ethical behaviors. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Awareness of ethical issues positively affects attitudes toward ethical animal tourism.

H6a: Awareness of ethical issues positively affects animal cocreation behavior.

H6b: Awareness of ethical issues positively affects involvement in ethical animal tourism.

H6c: Awareness of ethical issues positively affects intention toward ethical animal tourism.

H7a: Attitudes toward ethical animal tourism positively affect animal cocreation behavior.

H7b: Attitudes toward ethical animal tourism positively affect involvement in ethical animal tourism.

H7c: Attitudes toward ethical animal tourism positively affect intention toward ethical animal tourism.

Methodology

Data collection

This study outsourced data collection to a marketing research agency that maintains nearly two million panels in South Korea. In September 2022, the company invited its panels to participate in a survey with an initial screen question and information to verify sample appropriateness, i.e. those experiencing animal tourism in the last five years. The survey was conducted online, and approximately 1,500 panel members who potentially had animal-related tourism experience received the online questionnaire link to participate. This approach allowed the researchers to gather data from individuals with relevant experiences in animal-related tourism,

ensuring their representativeness for the study. Only the panels who responded yes to the screening question (i.e. *"I have experienced animal-related tourism in the last five years."*) were allowed to participate in the survey.

To assist the panels in recalling their memory cues, several pictures, including animal performances and animal selfies, together with captions were also presented to help them prompt their prior travel experiences. Around 1,100 respondents were opted out due to their unqualified nature. Straight-liners and those who ended the survey without filling out all answers were also removed. As a result, 365 responses were obtained. Given the unknown population and the specific nature of animal tourists, this sample size is considered appropriate for conducting statistical analyses (R. B. Kline, 2011).

The survey respondents were requested to provide their demographic information. The gender ratio was 55% (male) to 45% (female). Monthly household income was classified as (1) less than USD 2,500 (9.6%), (2) USD 2,500 to USD 3,999 (20.5%), (3) USD 4,000 to USD 5,499 (18.9%), (4) USD 5,500 to USD 6,999 (16.7%), (5) USD 7,000 to 8,499 (16.2%), (6) USD 8,500 to 9,999 (9.3%), and (7) over USD 10,000 (8.8%). The majority of the respondents completed higher education: bachelor's degree (59.7%) and master's degree (14.5%), whereas 9.6% of them gained a community-college degree. The age group profile was as follows: (1) 20–29 (17.3%), (2) 30–39 (18.6%), (3) 40–49 (20%), (4) 50–59 (21.1%) and (5) over 60 (23%). A large percentage (51.8%) of participants experienced animal tourism two to three times within the last five years, followed by one time (26%) and four to five times (14.2%).

Operationalization of constructs

The survey instrument (Table 1) was developed from an extensive literature review (e.g. Ajzen, 1991; Campos et al., 2017; Han, 2015; Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017; Le et al., 2021). All measurement items were then modified to fit the ethical animal tourism context. In other words, the measures for research variables were all related to ethical behaviors and decision-making process on animal tourism. We conducted a pre-test of the questionnaire, which included the measures for research constructs, explanations of ethical behaviors toward animal tourism, and a demographic profile. The pre-test involved 12 individuals, consisting of tourism researchers, industry professionals, and experienced animal tourists. Based on their recommendations, a few items were revised to enhance the clarity of the measurement items.

On the basis of previous studies (e.g. Gao et al., 2018; Hsu & Huang, 2016; Shao & Perkins, 2017), Confucian harmony was operationalized as a second-order factor of a sense of connection with nature and the perceived

Table 1. Results of confirmatory factor analysis.

Factors	Factor Loading	t value
Factor 1: Sense of Connection with Nature (SCN)		
SCN 1: I spend as much time as I can in natural settings.	0.68	NA
SCN 2: I often feel a sense of connection with nature/animals.	0.77	12.65
SCN 3: I believe animals have emotions.	0.75	10.49
Factor 2: Perceived Need for Autonomy of Nature (PNAN)		
PNAN 1: To protect nature, some areas need to be closed to tourists.	0.68	NA
PNAN 2: Man-made facilities and buildings in nature settings make nature less valuable.	0.75	10.42
PNAN 3: The longer a natural area is left untouched, the greater its value.	0.76	11.84
Factor 3: Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism (EBAT)		
EB 1: I think the maintenance of the harmonious relationship between human beings and animals that are put into commercial performances is delicate and easily upset.	0.75	NA
EB 2: The cruel socializing training behind animal shows is wrong in animal-related tourism.	0.87	16.80
EB 3: The ongoing commercial use of animals is not right in animal-related tourism.	0.78	14.93
EB 4: We should prevent animal cruelty and the potential mental stress and physical damage to animals during animal-related travel.	0.82	15.86
EB 5: Tourists should try to participate in animal-related tourism in an ethical manner.	0.79	15.13
Factor 4: Animal Cocreation Behavior (ACB)		
ACB 1: In animal tourism, I directly interacted with the animals.	0.82	NA
ACB 2: In animal tourism, I have been able to act as if I were an animal trainer.	0.80	17.48
ACB 3: In animal tourism, I had a great play time with the animals.	0.88	20.10
ACB 4: In this experience with the animals, I have been physically active.	0.90	20.92
Factor 5: Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism (IEAT)		
IEAT 1: I am completely involved in animal-related tourism in an ethical manner.	0.83	NA
IEAT 2: I am deeply impressed by ethical animal-related tourism.	0.79	16.98
IEAT 3: I feel total empathy with animal-related tourism in an ethical manner.	0.82	17.91
Factor 6: Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism (BIEAT)		
BIEAT 1: I will make an effort to participate in animal-related tourism in an ethical manner.	0.85	NA
BIEAT 2: I plan to participate in animal-related tourism in an ethical manner.	0.86	20.54
BIEAT 3: I will engage in animal-related tourism activities with ethical manners.	0.91	22.05
Factor 7: Awareness of Ethical Issues (AEI)		
AEI 1: More threats to the lives of animals due to the commercial exploitation actions.	0.87	NA
AEI 2: More potential mental stress of animals due to commercial exploitation actions.	0.92	25.24
AEI 3: More potential physical damage to animals due to the cruel socializing training.	0.89	24.00
AEI 4: Destruction of biodiversity and harmonious relationship between human beings and nature.	0.88	23.28
Factor 8: Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism (AEAT)		
AEAT 1: Bad ——— Good	0.96	NA
AEAT 2: Unpleasant ——— Pleasant	0.94	37.07
AEAT 3: Harmful ——— Beneficial	0.88	30.13
AEAT 4: Foolish ——— Wise	0.81	23.47

All factor loadings are significant at $p < 0.000$. Parameters are fixed at 1.0 for the maximum-likelihood estimation. Thus, t values were not obtained (NA) for parameters fixed at 1 for identification purposes.

need for autonomy of nature. The sense of connection with nature is represented by three items, for instance, “*I believe animals have emotions.*” On the other hand, the perceived need for autonomy of nature consists of three items. The measures of animal cocreation behavior were adapted from the research of Campos et al. (2017). Attitudes toward ethical animal tourism (four items) and behavioral intentions toward ethical animal tourism (three items) were captured by the literature (e.g. Ajzen, 1991; Han, 2015), whereas ethical beliefs in animal tourism (five items) and awareness of ethical issues (four items) were based on the literature (e.g. Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017; Le et al., 2021). Three items of involvement in ethical animal tourism were derived from the studies of Y. C. Huang et al. (2013) and M. J. Kim et al. (2020). All the constructs were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale, with an anchor of 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Study design and data analysis methods

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of Confucian harmony, ethical beliefs related to animal tourism, awareness of ethical considerations, and attitudes on individuals’ approach behaviors toward ethical animal tourism. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to identify the underlying relationships that contribute to individuals’ approach behaviors in ethical animal tourism. Following a two-step approach, the evaluation of the measurement model was performed prior to the assessment of the structural model. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), the application of SEM is particularly effective when examining a research model involving multiple independent and dependent variables. Furthermore, model comparisons were performed to verify the superiority of the proposed theoretical

Table 2. Competing measurement models.

Model	Nested Models	χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
1	Single-factor	4,674.01/377	0.18	0.48	0.44
2	Three-factor	4,152.26/374	0.17	0.54	0.50
3	Study model	1,051.55/354	0.07	0.92	0.90
4	Second-order factor with eight subdimensions	1,465.40/719	0.08	0.85	0.84

framework over alternative models. Invariance tests, including non-restricted, full-metric invariance, baseline, and constrained models, were also executed to assess the proposed moderating impact. This comprehensive analytical approach ensures a robust evaluation of the study's theoretical model and enhances the validity and reliability of the findings.

Confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (Table 5) was performed to verify the constructs and items obtained from the literature review and to assess the issue of model specification (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Tsaur et al., 2022). The analysis revealed that the six-factor plus second-order factor structure, along with two subdimensions, exhibited significant factor loadings across all elements at an α level of 0.5, whereas goodness-of-fit indices ($\chi^2 = 1,051.55$ [$df = 354$, $p = .00$], RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.90) suggest that the measurement model fits the data satisfactorily (Hair et al., 2010). In addition, to validate that the model provides the most accurate fit, the current study establishes alternative models (as shown in Table 2) for comparison with the study model (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). The fit indices demonstrate that the study model (Model 3) demonstrates a better fit to the data compared to the other competing measurement models (Model 1, 2 and 4). This finding supports the validity of the conceptual model under investigation.

Scale validation and measurement invariance test

Table 3 shows the composite Cronbach's alpha for each factor. While sense of connection with nature is marginally below 0.7, the remaining constructs exceed 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978), suggesting no issue with construct reliability. Convergent validity is corroborated by the AVE value of each construct being larger than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), whereas discriminant validity is validated by the square root of AVE of each construct above the correlation between studied variables.

In addition, to cross-validate measurement items, measurement invariance (Table 4) was tested. This assessment

included testing for both metric invariance and scalar invariance (Hair et al., 2010). To investigate metric invariance, the study examined whether the factor loadings of two fundamentally different groups were equivalent. On the other hand, scalar invariance was assessed by assessing the means between these two distinct groups. Female and male groups are generally adopted for the testing of measurement invariance in that the two groups are inherently distinct in behavioral and emotional aspects (Fakfare et al., 2020). In other words, when measurement invariance is supported between the two groups, scale cross-validation is substantiated. The chi-square differences between the two groups from metric invariance ($\Delta\chi^2 [28.87] < 42.557$, $p > 0.05$) and scalar invariance ($\Delta\chi^2 [40.06] < 42.557$, $p > 0.05$) suggest that measurements are found to be equal across the two groups, thus evidencing scale cross-validation.

Test of method biases: nonresponse bias and common method variance

The study assessed nonresponse bias by comparing survey responses between two groups: the first 10% of survey observations, and the last 10% of the survey observations (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). Given that a statistically significant difference was not discovered between the two datasets, this study has no issue with nonresponse bias. In addition, this research developed a multitrait – multi-method model to determine whether common method variance influences the findings. According to Bagozzi and Yi (1990), method variance is triggered by methods rather than traits; thus, the chi-square difference was examined between a trait-only model (a baseline model) and a trait-method model. The chi-square difference ($\Delta\chi^2 [42] = 58.12$, $p > 0.05$) in Table 5 indicates that the trait-method model is insignificantly different from the trait-only model, suggesting that the common method variance is negligible in this study.

Hypothesis testing

According to structural model testing (Figure 2), Confucian harmony is well represented by its two subdimensions: a sense of connection with nature ($\gamma_{11} = 0.85$, $t = 9.55$) and the perceived need for autonomy of nature ($\gamma_{21} = 0.97$, $t = 12.97$). On the basis of the tested relationships within

Table 3. Correlations, mean, and standard deviation.

	SCN	PNAN	EBAT	ACB	IEAT	BIEAT	AEI	AEAT
SCN	0.73							
PNAN	0.55	0.73						
EBAT	0.46	0.65	0.80					
ACB	0.22	0.01	0.05	0.85				
IEAT	0.48	0.52	0.67	0.03	0.81			
BIEAT	0.34	0.36	0.48	0.19	0.58	0.87		
AEI	0.52	0.55	0.68	0.05	0.74	0.48	0.89	
AEAT	0.19	0.17	0.23	0.17	0.30	0.49	0.21	0.90
CA	0.66	0.74	0.89	0.91	0.85	0.90	0.93	0.94
MEAN	5.47	5.58	5.61	4.09	5.35	5.40	5.45	5.48
SD	0.94	0.95	1.02	1.37	1.01	1.14	1.11	1.32

SCN (Sense of Connection with Nature); PNAN (Perceived Need for Autonomy of Nature); EBAT (Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism); ACB (Animal Cocreation Behavior); IEAT (Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism); BIEAT (Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism); AEI (Awareness of Ethical Issues); AEAT (Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism); CA (Cronbach's Alpha); SD (Standard Deviation). Mean values are based on seven-point scales. The square root of AVE is in bold on the diagonal line.

Table 4. Testing for measurement model invariance.

Model	Model Description	χ^2 (df)	$\Delta \chi^2$ (Δdf)
1	Freely estimated model for men vs. women	1,519.95(698)	
2	Metric invariance model for men vs. women	1,548.82(727)	28.87(29)
3	Scalar invariance model for men vs. women	1,588.88(756)	40.06(29)

χ^2 (29) = 42.557.

Table 5. Assessment of common method variance.

Trait-Only Model	Trait-Method Model	Chi-Square Difference Test
$\chi^2 = 1,051.55$, $df = 354$	$\chi^2 = 1,002.52$, $df = 312$	$\Delta \chi^2$ (42) = 49.03 $p > .05$

χ^2 (42) = 58.12.

a conceptual model, Confucian harmony is found to affect awareness of ethical issues positively ($\gamma_{11} = 0.34$, $t = 4.37$), whereas it has an insignificant relationship with attitude toward ethical animal tourism ($\gamma_{21} = 0.06$, $t = 0.53$). Ethical beliefs in animal tourism are positively related to awareness of ethical issues ($\gamma_{12} = 0.49$, $t = 6.42$) and attitude toward ethical animal tourism ($\gamma_{22} = 0.22$, $t = 2.09$), but awareness of ethical issues does not influence attitude toward ethical animal tourism ($\beta_{21} = 0.02$, $t = 0.17$). Awareness of ethical issues is found to affect involvement in ethical animal tourism ($\beta_{41} = 0.78$, $t = 16.75$) and behavioral intention toward ethical animal tourism positively ($\beta_{51} = 0.42$, $t = 9.13$) but has a statistically insignificant relationship with animal cocreation behavior ($\beta_{31} = -0.09$, $t = -1.86$). Attitude toward ethical animal tourism is positively related to animal cocreation behavior ($\beta_{32} = 0.20$, $t = 3.83$), involvement in ethical animal tourism ($\beta_{42} = 0.16$, $t = 4.27$), and behavioral intention toward ethical animal tourism ($\beta_{52} = 0.45$, $t = 10.02$). In summary, except for H2, H5, and H6, the remaining hypotheses are supported.

Discussion and implications

This study is one of the first attempts to explain East Asian travelers' behaviors toward ethical animal tourism from the lens of Confucian harmony. Examining East

Asian traveler behaviors toward ethical animal tourism is of great significance because East Asia, particularly countries like China, South Korea, and Japan, has recently witnessed a substantial growth in outbound tourism (Gao et al., 2022; E. C. L. Yang & Ong, 2020). As the region becomes more economically prosperous, more people have the desire to travel (Lin et al., 2023). However, this rapid growth in tourism has also brought forth various ethical concerns, particularly in relation to animal tourism (Fennell, 2022a). Issues such as animal cruelty, exploitation, and habitat degradation have become increasingly prevalent in the global tourism industry. This study brought novel insights that differ from previous studies that have largely been dealt with from a Western viewpoint and have not encompassed cultural values behind behaviors. It fills a gap in the existing literature by shedding light on the role of Confucian harmony and ethical beliefs in raising awareness of ethical issues and developing tourists' favorable attitude toward ethical animal tourism. While previous studies have explored the effects of different factors, such as animal rights, welfare and cocreation experience on ethical tourism behaviors (Fennell, 2013; Winter, 2020), the specific influence of Confucian harmony on this aspect has been relatively understudied. By incorporating Confucian harmony into the research

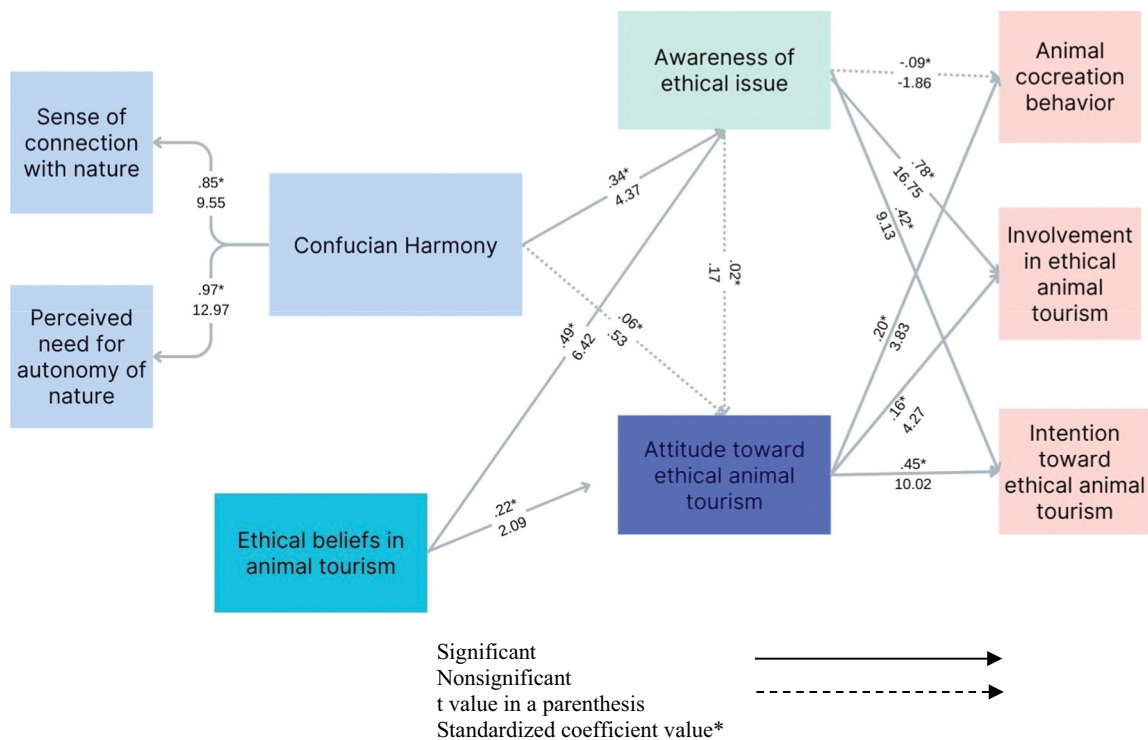


Figure 2. Results of structural model analysis for a conceptual model. Significant Nonsignificant t value in a parenthesis Standardized coefficient value*.

framework, not only can academics benefit, but destination managers and policymakers can also address specific cultural perspectives and encourage responsible behaviors towards animals, contributing to the preservation of biodiversity and the long-term viability of the tourism industry.

Our research framework, built on the VAB model and incorporating constructs rooted in Confucian harmony and ethical belief principles, determined how East Asian travelers' approach behaviors are formulated in the animal tourism context. Based on the analysis results, this study generates the following discussion and implications. In response to the RQ1, this research examines how the higher-order structure of Confucian harmony, and ethical beliefs in animal tourism interact with other constructs in the study model. The findings indicated how Confucian philosophy increases awareness of ethical issues (H1), which in turn contributes to growing involvement in ethical animal tourism (H7) and building behavioral intention toward ethical animal tourism (H8). This finding is in line with the concept of Confucianism, which offers an ethical guide to life, that is, to live harmoniously with nature (S. S. Huang & Wen, 2021). Additionally, we observed the effectiveness and appropriateness of a second-order structure of Confucian harmony. However, Confucian harmony

had no significant influence on attitudes toward ethical animal tourism (H2), which contradicts the value – attitude association in VAB theory. Fan (2010) claimed that Confucianism suggests that all living creatures, including animals, have value, but not the same degree of value. Confucianism states that humans should behave humanely toward animals, but it does not specify that humans should not use animals (Fan, 2010). Likewise, using animals for human entertainment in an ethical way can be debatable in Confucianism. This might be the potential reason for the insignificant effect of Confucian harmony on attitudes toward ethical animal tourism. Additionally, while Confucian harmony is a prominent cultural value in East Asian societies, its interpretation and application may vary among different individuals and regions (Packer et al., 2014). The notion of harmony may be more closely associated with human relationships and social order rather than the treatment of animals. Thus, tourists might not readily extend this value to their attitudes toward animals in tourism settings. In this respect, Confucian philosophy can be mainly used to raise awareness of ethical issues around animal tourism. In other words, when offering fact-based content around animal abuse in tourism, Confucian harmony should be utilized to bring more awareness to East Asian society.

Our findings confirmed the salient role of ethical beliefs in animal tourism that positively affect awareness of ethical issues (H3) and attitudes toward ethical animal tourism (H4). This finding is similar to the findings of Blaer (2022) and Fennell (2013), who documented the importance of ethical beliefs in building approach behavior in animal tourism. The sources of beliefs include knowledge, past experience, values, and beliefs that are developed over a period of time. In particular, ethical beliefs are related to moral principles (Chowdhury, 2020), and our results support current educational activities and campaigns in the animal tourism industry. Nevertheless, efforts to establish greater morality are necessary in the animal tourism context, and a large variety of programs are recommended to enhance ethical beliefs. More detailed rules can also be considered to add new normative beliefs in animal rights.

To address RQ2 on the extent to which tourist attitudes toward ethical animal tourism and awareness of ethical issues that influence their approach behaviors, we made two significant findings. First, we found that animal cocreation behavior was not affected by awareness of ethical issues (H6) but rather by attitudes toward ethical animal tourism (H7). Travelers with a high awareness of ethical issues in animal tourism are likely to worry about their interactions with animals that could potentially increase the mental stress of animals or cause any physical damage to animals. This could explain why animal cocreation behavior is not driven by awareness of ethical issues. Second, our results showed that travelers with a favorable attitude toward ethical animal tourism proactively participate in activities with animals (H10), which is consistent with previous studies that observed a close link between attitude and cocreation behavior (e.g. Ahn et al., 2019). This finding highlights the importance of cultivating positive attitudes toward ethical animal tourism to encourage tourists to engage in activities that promote animal welfare and conservation. It implies that travelers with a positive attitude toward ethical animal tourism may be more likely to seek out experiences, such as participating in volunteer projects for animal treatment, and attending responsible wildlife encounters where they can interact with animals in a manner that prioritizes their well-being. Therefore, practitioners should create an opportunity for travelers to evaluate travel products prior to engaging in animal tourism. For example, tourism operators could offer an introduction session that displays how the programs comply with any codes concerning ethical responsibility. They could also provide detailed information about the ethical practices and standards upheld by their animal tourism offerings. This transparency allows travelers to make informed decisions aligned with their values,

promoting responsible and ethical interactions with animals. The cultivation of positive attitudes toward ethical animal tourism and the promotion of awareness of ethical issues in animal tourism resonate with Confucian ideals of harmony by fostering respect, compassion, and balance in human-animal interactions within the tourism industry.

In addition, the analysis results determined the relative importance of predicting variables for the other two proposed outcomes. With respect to involvement in ethical animal tourism, the findings emphasized that awareness of ethical issues exerted a stronger influence than attitude (H5). Conversely, attitude contributes to behavioral intention toward ethical animal tourism (H11) more than awareness of ethical issues does (H8). Involvement reflects a deep degree of interest and attachment of individuals in a certain product/service (Han et al., 2021), whereas behavioral intention describes the likelihood of a person engaging in a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). These conceptualizations may account for the more salient effect of awareness on involvement than attitude and a more powerful effect of attitude on behavioral intention than awareness. Nevertheless, this study underscores the importance of awareness and attitude in inducing travelers' behaviors toward animal tourism in an ethical manner. The results replicate the findings of Blaer (2022) and Winter (2020) who stated the crucial role of awareness and attitude in ethical animal tourism. Furthermore, Fennell (2022a) has recently claimed that literacy is essential in animal tourism. Our study supports this assertion by providing empirical evidence about the prime role of awareness and attitude. Thus, efforts to enhance travelers' literacy about animal welfare are necessary in the East Asian region.

Given the significant role of Asian tourists in the global tourism sector and the substantial growth in animal-related tourism activities, the findings of this study present crucial policy implications (RQ3). These implications are particularly relevant for practitioners and authorities aiming to foster sustainable and responsible practices within the area of animal-related tourism. International organizations, such as UNWTO, UNESCO, and World Animal Protection can actively raise awareness about animal abuse among East Asian travelers. For example, educational programs/content can be created and tailored to suit the cultural values and perspectives of East Asian travelers, including references to Confucian harmony and ethical beliefs to effectively communicate the message. The policy makers could develop educational campaigns that emphasize the importance of respecting all living beings and fostering harmonious relationships with nature, drawing upon Confucian

principles on compassion and balance. Additionally, governmental bodies and tourism authorities can go the extra mile by collaborating to provide certification to operators who adhere to strict standards of animal welfare, ensuring that tourists can make informed choices and support responsible establishments. While implementing certification programs can incentivize businesses to adopt ethical practices, collaborations between governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector can strengthen efforts to combat animal cruelty in tourism. In addition, policymakers can enforce regulations that safeguard animal welfare in the tourism industry (von Essen et al., 2020). Regulations could also be framed within the context of Confucian ethics, emphasizing the duty of individuals and organizations to uphold moral integrity and promote the well-being of animals as part of achieving societal harmony. To cultivate tourists' attitudes and ethical behaviors, these regulations should address issues such as the treatment of animals, habitat protection, and the use of wildlife in entertainment (Fennell & Thomsen, 2021). Through the lens of Confucian philosophy, these actions should promote harmonious coexistence with nature, resonating with East Asian cultural values and influencing ethical decision-making.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of ethical beliefs in animal tourism, influencing attitudes and awareness of ethical issues in this sector. These beliefs not only influence individual perspectives but also play a pivotal role in driving collective actions towards promoting responsible tourism. Hence, regulations and monitoring systems should be implemented to prevent animal cruelty, addressing not only physical harm but also the mental stress experienced by animals. Given that ethical beliefs emphasize the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of preserving natural habitats, animal tourism operators can contribute to conservation efforts by supporting habitat restoration projects, wildlife research initiatives, and sustainable tourism practices. For instance, a wildlife tour operator may collaborate with local conservation organizations to allocate a portion of their profits towards wildlife protection and habitat conservation projects in the areas they operate. Additionally, tourism authorities can conduct regular inspections to ensure that animal venues and business operators maintain high standards of animal welfare. By doing so, the tourism industry can progress towards more responsible and sustainable practices, promoting the well-being of animals involved in these activities. In countries with animal welfare acts, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, practitioners in the animal tourism business should transparently display their training protocols, animal

performances, and animal treatment practices. These practices should be periodically monitored by law enforcement authorities. For example, information on positive reinforcement techniques and the avoidance of harmful training practices like physical punishment or coercion should be openly declared by the business operators. To promote sustainable and responsible tourism further, operators, such as zoos, animal shows, natural sites, and travel agencies should provide clear information about their offerings, including detailed information about the interaction between tourists and animals and the related code of conduct. This information should be provided to tourists before they engage in animal tourism activities, ensuring a more ethical and sustainable approach to animal tourism. By integrating ethical beliefs into operational practices and visitor experiences, the tourism industry can foster a deeper understanding and appreciation for ethical considerations, ultimately promoting a more harmonious and sustainable approach to animal tourism.

Conclusions, limitations and future research

This study was motivated to explore the formation of approach behaviors toward ethical animal tourism from the lens of Confucian harmony. On the basis of the existing theories and academic evidence, we proposed a conceptual model to explain travelers' ethical behavior in animal tourism and successfully examined 11 hypotheses through a quantitative approach. The main contributions of this research include 1) the successful integration of Confucian harmony as an influencing cultural value in predicting animal tourists' decisions and behaviors and 2) the verification of the significance of ethical beliefs as an important predictor for tourist's awareness and attitude toward ethical animal tourism, which subsequently induce approach behaviors. The rigorous methodology applied in this research enhances the reliability and validity of the study's findings. By recognizing the importance of Confucian harmony in this context, we gain a deeper understanding of how East Asian tourists perceive and approach ethical animal tourism experiences. Academics and the industry can also take significant steps toward promoting responsible and ethical practices, ultimately contributing to the well-being of animals and fostering ethical behaviors among tourists, particularly those from East Asia.

However, this research also includes some limitations that require more research in future studies. First, this study is confined to East Asian travelers. While it fills the gap in the extant literature, a cross-cultural analysis would be helpful to advance our knowledge. Second,

how cultural values (i.e. Confucian harmony) become implanted in the mind may vary from generation to generation. A comparative study of different generations is recommended to offer more practical implications in the industry. Third, although the sample size ($n = 365$) was not deemed problematic (Hair et al., 2010), it was relatively small. Future researchers are encouraged to replicate this study with a larger sample size to enhance the generalizability of the results. Fourth, this study focused solely on assessing the research framework within the context of ethical animal tourism. The findings may not be representative of other settings/industries. Further research is required to explore the framework's effectiveness in other domains to draw more comprehensive conclusions. Finally, this study employed traditional factor-based SEM to analyze data. The adoption of alternative methodological approaches, such as composite-based SEM in combination with other approaches like FsQCA and necessary conditions analysis, could enhance the exploration of inducible means to develop tourists' ethical behaviors (Manosuthi et al., 2022).

Acknowledgments

This research project was supported by Office of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, Thailand under the Reinventing University System/Visiting Professor Program

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Wellness tourism experience and destination brand love

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To cite this article: Sung in Kim, Amr Al-Ansi, Jin-Soo Lee, Bee-Lia Chua, Chayanon Phucharoen & Heesup Han (2024) Wellness tourism experience and destination brand love, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 41:7, 988-1004, DOI: [10.1080/10548408.2024.2369752](https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2024.2369752)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2024.2369752>



Published online: 01 Jul 2024.



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Wellness tourism experience and destination brand love

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed various aspects of the wellness tourism experience in Thailand. A survey was conducted with a sample of 420 Chinese tourists. The findings revealed significant and insignificant effects of the wellness tourism experience on the development of destination brand love. Additionally, it confirmed that barriers and destination familiarity play a vital role in shaping tourists' responses and strengthening their affinity towards the destination brand. The results highlight tourists' focus on comprehensive experiences rather than external dynamics like weather. This study suggests collaboration among stakeholders to enrich the overall travel experience and prioritize the emotional wellbeing of tourists.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 March 2024

Revised 15 May 2024

Accepted 7 June 2024

KEYWORDS

Wellness tourism experience; involvement; mental health; destination familiarity; brand love; tourism destination; Thai; China

Introduction

With today's busy life, the importance of wellness (well-being) is emphasized due to the individual's physical health, mental health, and burnout from extensive workload (Han et al., 2024; He et al., 2023). Wellness tourism is growing faster than overall tourism, satisfying diverse tourists' needs through meditation, relaxation, massage, traditional medicine, spa, yoga, food, etc. (Hunt & Harbor, 2019). The global wellness market increased to 5.61 trillion \$US in 2022 by 14% from pre-pandemic levels and is projected to grow to 8.47 trillion \$US in 2027 (Global Wellness Institute, 2024). Global wellness tourism is a significant player in the overall wellness market and the fourth largest sector in the wellness economy (6.51 billion \$US in 2022). With the wellness tourism industry growth, Asia-Pacific regions, including China, Thailand, Taiwan, and Australia have drawn more academic attention (Polat & Koseoglu, 2023). Asia Pacific region is the second largest wellness economy, followed by North America, with 1,689 billion US\$ and a 7.5% annual growth rate (GWI, 2024). Thailand is widely recognized as a dynamic travel destination where wellness has been considered as a significant dimension, including Buddhist meditation, Thai therapies, herbal remedies, Thai cuisine, and holistic wellness health retreats. The tourism industry in Thailand has experienced significant economic growth (63 billion \$US in 2021), an increasing number of international travelers

(40 million), and 18.21% of the national GDP contribution (Fakfare et al., 2022). The wellness market in Thailand is ranked 5th in Asia and 15th in Global, with 7.8 billion \$US market size in 2022 (GWI, 2024). Therefore, more research is requested to comprehensively explore the diverse wellness experiences and tourist behavior in Asia-Pacific markets (Polat & Koseoglu, 2023). Wellness tourists' various travel purposes and experiences are essential for evaluating overall travel experience and significantly impact future travelers' behavior. This study aims to investigate the complex and multi-dimensional wellness tourism experiences.

Wellness is recognized as feeling and being well and pursuing a healthy lifestyle (Gatrell, 2013). However, wellness is not a newly developed modern concept but a value consistently pursued throughout human history (Tian et al., 2017). According to the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), wellness is a human orientation and action for holistic health that includes physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, social, and environmental values. The human needs in wellness have been harmonized with the tourism industry, which named wellness tourism (Dillette et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). Wellness tourism has a multi-dimensional nature that encompasses a holistic tourist experience from attractions, lodging, amenities, location, and interpersonal connections (Majeed & Kim, 2023). This comprehensive aspect of the wellness tourism industry highlights the unique

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characteristics by integrating wellness tourists' diverse needs and preferences. Smith and Kelly (2006) argue that wellness is not just a travel destination. Wellness tourism is a momentous journey that helps meet tourists' needs in comprehensive experiences. Understanding the wellness tourists' characteristics is necessary to maximize satisfaction and capture future demand (Thal & Hudson, 2019). The wellness tourism market is experiencing diversification due to the necessity for various core and supporting products and services to function cohesively to satisfy the needs of wellness tourists. Moreover, competition for wellness tourism destinations is increasing (Phuthong et al., 2022; Prideaux et al., 2013). Therefore, securing competitiveness from a destination perspective is an essential issue.

Tourism literature highlights that positive perception and attachment to the tourism destination play a significant role in securing the destination's competitiveness (Seyyedamiri et al., 2022). Destination brand love originally came from "Brand love," which is developed to build positive and strong attachments with tourists in a specific destination (Amaro et al., 2020; Zhang & Xu, 2024). The destination brand love explains how much tourists interact and are positively connected with destinations. It is important to make the destination harmonized to appease traveler's preferences and make the experience memorable (Quan et al., 2023). It is established by an emotional connection with the target (Swanson, 2017). In wellness tourism, destinations are required to provide a comprehensive positive wellness experience to pursue tourist's emotional wellbeing (Dini & Pencarelli, 2021). However, there is a lack of research focused on destination brand love and its experiential and emotional drivers in the wellness tourism industry. Therefore, this paper investigates the relationship between wellness tourism experience and destination brand love, contributing to destination management for securing a competitive advantage in wellness tourism. Moreover, this study adopts perceived mental health and emotional wellbeing as mediators to explain the relationship between wellness tourism experience and destination brand love. It is essential to ascertain the relationship between wellness tourism experience and destination brand love through cognitive (perceived mental health) and emotional (emotional wellbeing) factors to demonstrate the relationship process with a tourist's destination.

The present study is designed to explore the complex interrelation among tourism experiences, wellness involvement, perceived image congruity, perceived mental health, and emotional wellbeing in generating destination brand love by considering the moderating influence

of destination familiarity and barriers of wellness tourism. This research specifically aimed (1) to explore the first-order dimensions of the wellness tourism experience and uncover the function of the higher-order structure of the wellness tourism experience, (2) to unearth the mediating role of perceived mental health and emotional wellbeing, (3) to assess the moderating impact of destination familiarity and Thai wellness tourism barriers, and (4) to evaluate the efficacy of the proposed theoretical framework in accounting for destination brand love.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Wellness tourism experience

Humans are constantly looking for a better life through the cultivation of social values, the maintenance of physical health, and the pursuit of psychological wellbeing (Yong et al., 2024). Moreover, long working shifts and work pressure have negatively impacted humans' physical and mental wellbeing, and this has increased interest in and need for wellness (Meera & Vinodan, 2019; Quan et al., 2022). These characteristics also apply to tourism experiences, where tourists seek relaxation, physical health, and self-awareness, known as wellness, during their tourism experience (Voigt et al., 2011; Wong & Lai, 2024). According to the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), wellness has become a significant lifestyle value and an important consideration in tourism experiences such as medical or cosmetic services and products, corporeal therapies, escapism, relaxation, hedonic experience, psychological value, spiritual care, and community-oriented activities (Smith & Kelly, 2006). Global wellness tourism is one of the fastest growing economies because travelers seek more wellness value than ever before (McGroarty, 2023). Asia-Pacific regions are well known for wellness tourism and are in extensive competition to become a leading destination for wellness tourism (Heung & Kucukusta, 2013). Diverse wellness tourism products and services attract many international visitors to wellness tourism destinations in Asia-Pacific countries and cities (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017). In response to current trends and projections, wellness services, packages, products, and activities are now being provided in the hospitality and tourism industry (Dillette et al., 2021). Traditionally, wellness tourism is identified specific components and categories, which include conventional medical treatments (e.g. surgery, medicine, medical staff, and facility), alternative health treatment (e.g. spa, yoga, traditional medicine, and therapies), and tourist attractions (e.g. food, accommodation, safety, transportation, and landscapes) (Majeed & Kim, 2023).

Smith and Kelly (2006) argued that wellness is not a destination but a journey. A common misconception is that wellness tourism only involves visiting a specific location or facility for health and relaxation. Wellness tourism has a very complex, subjective, and multi-dimensional nature (Dillette et al., 2021). Wellness tourism is the process of recovering and revitalizing the physical and psychological state based on an individual's values, characteristics, and particular goals. Previous studies have explained the wellness tourism experience as participation and response to an external stimulus, including educational, entertainment, esthetic, and escapist (He et al., 2023; Luo et al., 2018). These approaches explain the experience of pursuing specific values, but are still insufficient to describe the comprehensive and multi-dimensional wellness tourism experience. Moreover, travelers do not simply evaluate wellness products or services independently but comprehensively judge various experiences in their destination during travel (Majeed & Kim, 2023). Therefore, there are various wellness tourism experience factors, and wellness tourist's satisfaction will be achieved when these factors are fulfilled. This study explores diverse tourist aspects of the wellness tourism experience to reflect the nature of wellness tourism.

Eight sub-dimensions (transportation, law & order, accommodation, weather, sightseeing spot, medical support, staff support, and perceived safety) were adopted to explain comprehensive and complex wellness tourism experience from various travel-related encounters in the destination. First, transportation experience is a significant aspect of evaluating wellness tourism (Lehto & Lehto, 2019). Transportation for traveling between tourist destinations during a trip significantly impacts the overall travel experience, and good quality transportation plays an important role in attracting tourists (Pan et al., 2019). In order to create and disseminate a quality wellness tourism experience, the industry should link its core wellness products and services to supporting sectors, such as transportation, culture, and technology (Romão et al., 2017). Second, risk refers to the negative state that travelers experience during their travel. Law and order are the most significant risk aspects for travelers (Sheng-Hsiung et al., 1997). Since travel is a visit to an unfamiliar destination, how politically and culturally stable a traveler feels is a significant influencer in the overall tourism experience. Third, accommodation quality is also crucial in the wellness tourist's experience. Heung and Kucukusta (2013) argue that wellness tourists seek high-quality and special accommodations as one of the supporting facilities during their stays. Accommodation is also essential in general travel, but its importance is being emphasized in

order to satisfy the desire for relaxation and physical health in the wellness tourism experience. Fourth, weather conditions are an external environmental factor that the industry cannot directly control, but they have a significant impact on the tourism experience in terms of satisfaction and perceived value (Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009). Good weather is a general expectation, but diverse weather conditions have a very complex impact on the wellness tourism experience (Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Kelly, 2012). Fifth, even wellness tourism focuses on mental and physical wellbeing, tourists look for sightseeing spots, experiences, and activities, especially higher on repeat visitors (Meera & Vinodan, 2019). In a comprehensive wellness tourism experience, a variety of sightseeing options can positively impact overall satisfaction and increase attractiveness (Lim et al., 2016). Sixth, medical service is one of the main pillar of wellness tourism (Suess et al., 2018). Because wellness tourism pursues mental and physical well-being, medical service is a crucial factor in the wellness experience. Seventh, staff support is inevitable in wellness tourism (Dillette et al., 2021). Staff experience, knowledge, motivation, quality, and training are the key factors that differentiate the quality experience of wellness tourists (Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Lehto & Lehto, 2019; Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Lastly, safety should be highlighted in the wellness tourism experience (Luo et al., 2018).

The perceived safety of the tourist can be determined by diverse aspects, such as political stability, laws, medical system or support, and general safety concerns as tourists at the tourism destination (Sheng-Hsiung et al., 1997). In wellness tourism, which pursues psychological stability, a high level of perceived safety can provide greater satisfaction to tourists. The sub-components of wellness tourism experience describe the comprehensive experience during wellness travel which covers diverse service encounters and travel experience factors (no matter if it is related or not related to wellness tourism). This study investigates and tests the wellness tourism experience through multiple sub-factors, including transportation, law and order, accommodation, weather, sightseeing spots, medical support, staff support, and perceived safety (Sheng-Hsiung et al., 1997). This approach allows this study to specifically measure the comprehensive tourism experience of wellness tourists. Based on diverse wellness experiences, tourists prioritize their mental state and emotional wellbeing (Seyyedamiri et al., 2022; Smith & Kelly, 2006). The major goal is to experience mental refreshing and escape emotional pressure from daily life. By considering the relationship between wellness traveler's experience and perceived mental health and emotional wellbeing, this study explores the wellness tourist's experience and

its role in physical and mental wellbeing. A positive wellness tourism experience leads to greater mental health and emotional wellbeing.

H1: The wellness tourism experience significantly influences perceived mental health.

H2: The wellness tourism experience significantly influences emotional wellbeing.

While tourism experience explains the perception of external tourism environments, wellness involvement illustrates the degree of engagement in wellness tourism or the overall wellness of individuals. Involvement is explained as a consistent attitude and interest of individuals (Zaichowsky, 1985). Individual involvement relates to personal needs, interests, motivations, norms, and values that influence tourist's behavior (Yang et al., 2015). Wellness tourists seek mental health and emotional wellbeing and those driven by the ideal wellness tourism experience and positive involvement (Dillette et al., 2021; Heung & Kucukusta, 2013; Pan et al., 2019). Mental health and emotional wellbeing are strengthened by tourists who are highly involved in wellness tourism. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: Wellness involvement significantly influences perceived mental health.

H4: Wellness involvement significantly influences emotional wellbeing.

Wellness tourism and destination brand love

Brand love extends the concept of Brand loyalty and customer satisfaction on brand with the attachment and emotional connection toward the brand (Aro et al., 2018; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). In the tourism destination literature, different concepts were utilized to explain tourist behavior on the destination. Place bonding is the concept that explains the emotional and psychological bonding that is associated with a specific location (Cheng & Kuo, 2015). Destination image and attractiveness also illustrate the tourists' perception of the destinations (Aro et al., 2018; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Brand love highlights a tourist's emotional experience, past experience, individual identity, and behavior at a specific travel destination (Hamdy et al., 2024). This concept is constructed with customer behavior and perception factors such as passion-driven behavior, self-brand integration, positive emotional connection, long-

term relationship, anticipated separation distress, overall attitude valence, and attitude strength (Batra et al., 2012). Therefore, brand love has been claimed in the literature in order to investigate the outcome of the relationship between customers and brands because this concept explains stronger relationships than like, attachment, or involvement (Joshi & Garg, 2021). Brand love positively impacts brand performance, which is more powerful for hedonic brands in the highly competitive market (Nguyen & Feng, 2021). The tourists' emotional experiences have been identified to have a positive relationship with the perception of a destination, such as destination brand love (Chen et al., 2020; Prayag et al., 2016). According to the brand love model (Batra et al., 2012) and triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986), emotional connection and attachment strengthen the brand love and long-term relationship with the brand. Albert and Merunka (2013) argue that brand love consists of both cognitive (mental state) and emotional (affective), and cognitive and emotional states are interconnected toward customer's behavior with brand (brand love).

The tourism industry adopts the concept of brand love in a tourism destination to capture a comprehensive perception of the destination. Destination brand love is a deep emotional attachment, which is a post-consumption emotion influenced by experience-based tourism factors in a specific destination (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). These emotional attachments contribute to the success of destination management and planning. Many tourism destinations applied the "I love (city)" slogan as their destination branding or marketing campaign (Zhang & Xu, 2024). The strong destination love, cultivated via tourist experiences, shapes the traveler's positive perception and behavior. Aro et al. (2018) applied destination brand love to the general tourism context to identify antecedents (brand experiences, tourist-dependent, and brand-dependent antecedents) and consequences (emotion and behavior) of destination brand love. The destination brand love model (Swanson, 2017) proposed factors related to establishing destination brand love, including basics (things to do, people, weather, logistics, etc.), experiential factors, and relational factors. Due to severe tourism destination competition, destination brand love has been considered a significant indicator of a place's differentiation from the competitive tourism destination market (Swanson, 2017). Previous studies identified brand love leads to higher brand loyalty, stronger word of mouth, and willingness to pay a premium (Ahuvia et al., 2014; Bairrada et al., 2018; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Netemeyer et al., 2004). Moreover, it is confirmed that brand love positively

impacts a brand's operating performance, such as ROA, ROE, and market capitalization (Nguyen & Feng, 2021). Although wellness tourism and destination brand love have received much attention in tourism research, there is a lack of comprehensive research investigating destination brand love in the wellness tourism context. Therefore, this study explores the factors that establish and influence destination brand love based on the previous literature and destination brand love model (Swanson, 2017).

H5: Perceived mental health significantly influences destination brand love.

H6: Emotional wellbeing significantly influences destination brand love.

Perceived mental health has been utilized in wellness tourism destination branding literature (Seyyedamiri et al., 2022). The ultimate goal of wellness tourism is to satisfy tourist's needs on physical and mental health, and both aspects cannot be separated (B. Liu et al., 2022). Kiatkawsin and Han (2017) found that wellness tourist's loyalty and intention toward the destination are highly influenced by tourist emotions. In exploring destination brand love, it is necessary to investigate the relationship to the tourists' emotional status. Moreover, brand love is highly correlated with an individual's emotional connection and evaluation of a specific target brand (He et al., 2023). According to image congruity theory, self-congruence and functional congruence influence customers' emotional responses and shopping behavior (Sirgy et al., 1991). While the wellness tourism experience explains the functional congruence by including various functional experiences and service encounters of wellness travel, perceived image congruity is added to describe the concept of self-congruence. Moreover, people are most likely to perceive greater emotional wellbeing when there is a strong congruity between individual value and destination image (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). This study adopts destination brand love as a consequence of the wellness tourism experience, and perceived mental health and emotional wellbeing were included as mediators of the proposed relationship. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H7: Perceived image congruity significantly influences emotional wellbeing.

Psychological distance plays an important role in the attachment process of brand love to the tourism destination, and can be explained by familiarity (which brings the distance closer) and barrier (which keeps it distant)

(Aro et al., 2018; Batra et al., 2012; Swanson, 2017). Torres-Delgado et al. (2023) suggested key barriers to the tourism destination, including lack of resources, economic benefits, reliable statistics, uncertainty, and outdated information. Barriers occur when customers or tourists perceive unfavorability (Lian & Yen, 2014). In this study, perceived barriers to wellness tourism in Thailand are identified as factors that prevent tourists from participating in wellness activities and services. These barriers include issues related to accessing services and facilities, language difficulties, unfamiliar surroundings, and costs, all of which can deter tourists from engaging in wellness tourism in Thailand. Previous literature identified barriers that negatively impact brand love (Huang et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2021). Recognizing the effect of barriers is crucial for wellness destinations aiming to establish emotional bonds with tourists and secure strong destination brand love. Therefore, this study established the following hypothesis to explore the moderating effects of barriers in the relationship between mental and emotional status and destination brand love.

H8a: Barriers to Thai wellness tourism significantly moderate the relationship between perceived mental health and destination brand love. (those who perceive lower barriers to participating in Thai wellness tourism are likely to show a significantly stronger relationship between perceived mental health and destination brand love than those who perceive higher barriers to participating in Thai wellness tourism)

H8b: Barriers to Thai wellness tourism significantly moderate the relationship between emotional wellbeing and destination brand love. (those who perceive lower barriers to participating in Thai wellness tourism are likely to show a significantly stronger relationship between emotional wellbeing and destination brand love than those who perceive higher barriers to participating in Thai wellness tourism)

Familiarity plays a significant role in shaping brand love, which is highly related to emotional connection (Rauschnabel et al., 2024). Destination familiarity influences tourist's behavior and makes tourists confident enough to make decisions based on internal information (Liu & Xiong, 2023; Zhang et al., 2017). Zhang and Xu (2024) explore destination brand love by testing different levels of familiarity. This study confirmed that destination brand love is developed differently depending on familiarity level. Tourists who are more familiar with a tourism destination tend to have a more positive image and higher revisit intention (Milman & Pizam,

1995). Therefore, this study tests the moderating effect of destination familiarity and develops the following hypotheses:

H9a: Destination familiarity significantly moderates the relationship between perceived mental health and destination brand love. (those who are more familiar with Thailand are likely to show a significantly stronger relationship between perceived mental health and destination brand love than those who are less familiar with Thailand)

H9b: Destination familiarity significantly moderates the relationship between emotional wellbeing and destination brand love. (those who are more familiar with Thailand are likely to show a significantly stronger relationship between emotional wellbeing and destination brand love than those who are less familiar with Thailand)

The hypothesized research framework displayed in Figure 1 is utilized to assess the principal theoretical ideas and study objectives. The model contains the main interest of our study, which is about achieving a clear comprehension of travelers' destination brand

love generation process. The proposed model has a total of nine research hypotheses. The barriers of wellness tourism and destination familiarity are included as moderators.

Methodology

Research design and context

In this study, a web-based cross-sectional survey was carried out. The rationale behind this method of data collection stems from the widespread availability of wellness facilities and services across the country, in addition to the impossibility of approaching guests on-site (Han, Kiatkawsin, et al., 2018). As a consequence of this, an online data collection method was used so that the target population could have the greatest possible access to the survey. Chinese tourists who visited Thailand and participated in wellness tourism activities were recruited for this study by a professional online survey company in China. Thailand is among the top emerging health and wellness tourism destinations, providing a wide range of facilities and services (Fakfare et al., 2022). Participants were given a link to an online survey and asked to volunteer for a survey on Thailand wellness tourism. The Thai

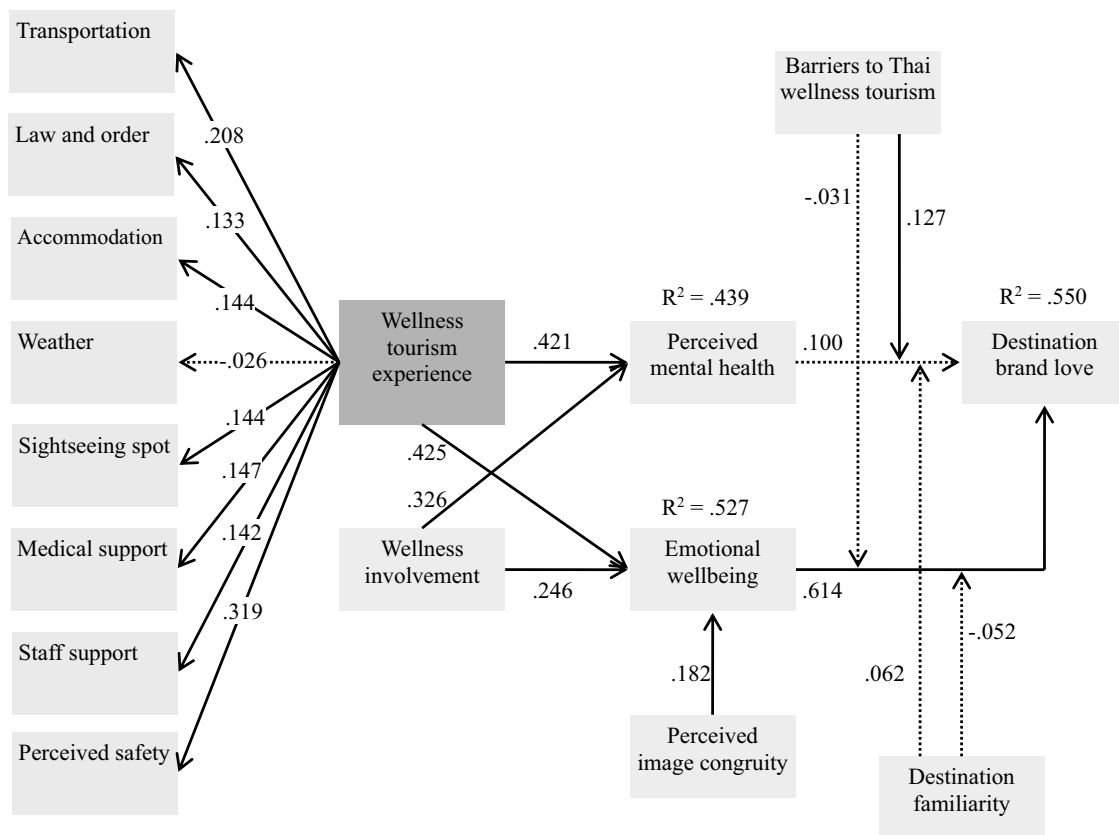


Figure 1. Results of the structural I model.

government aims to position the country as a prominent wellness destination by capitalizing on its abundant cultural heritage, picturesque landscapes, and state-of-the-art healthcare facilities (TAT Newsroom, 2022). The initiative aims to discern travelers who prioritize their health and are interested in activities such as spa treatments, Thai massage, meditation retreats, and medical tourism. The initiative seeks to combine wellness services with renowned Thai hospitality to enhance tourism, promote healthy lifestyles, and stimulate economic growth by attracting more international visitors (Public Relations Department, 2023). The survey was open to Chinese tourists, the largest group of international arrivals in Thailand (Phucharoen et al., 2023), who had participated in at least one of the following wellness tourism activities during their trip to Thailand: (1) beauty, spa, and massage, (2) Thai traditional medicine, (3) nature and forest, and (4) healing and meditation. The classification was made in accordance with Voigt's (2014) list of wellness tourism products and services.

Questionnaire design

This study's survey questionnaire includes 14 constructs and 45 measurement items. The measures were adapted from relevant tourism research and tailored to this study. More specifically, the seven dimensions of the Thai wellness tourism experience, comprising of transportation (three items), law and order (three items), health (two items), accommodation (two items), weather (two items), sightseeing spot (two items), and medical support (two items), were adopted from Tsaur et al. (1997). The items were scored on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 being very risky and 7 being very safe. Five items modified from Yang et al. (2015) were used to evaluate wellness engagement. Four items derived from Han et al. (2020) were used to measure perceived mental health. Five items adapted from Vada et al. (2019) were used to observe emotional wellbeing. Two items adapted from Han et al. (2019) were used to assess perceived image congruency. Three items derived from Sun et al. (2013) were used to measure destination familiarity. Four items adapted from Han, Lee, et al. (2018) were used to examine the barriers to Thai wellness tourism. Six items derived from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) were used to identify destination love. The items were scored on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strong disagreement and 7 representing strong agreement.

The survey questionnaire was prepared in English. Three tourism experts evaluated the content validity of the constructs by giving feedback on the relevancy of the items to the respective constructs in the context of Thai wellness tourism and improving those that were

ambiguous to increase clarity and understandability. They were also asked to identify any extraneous items and make suggestions for improving the content. The survey instrument was finalized after ensuring its validity. A multilingual tourism scholar subsequently translated it into Chinese. Following that, to detect any concerns with the consistency of the translation, the questionnaire was checked with another tourism scholar who is proficient in both languages.

Results

Respondent profile

For data analysis and interpretation, 420 valid cases were used. The survey's participants were divided into 60.5% females and 39.5% males. The tourists in the sample were young ($M = 32.40$, $SD = 7.280$) and married (75.7%). The vast majority of respondents (75.2%) held a four-year college degree. More than half of the respondents (53.1%) earned less than US\$40,000 per year. More than half (53.1%) of the respondents earned less than US \$40,000 per year. Beauty, spa, and massage (89.8%) were found to be the most frequently engaged wellness tourism activities in Thailand, followed by nature and forest (71.0%), Thai traditional medicine (43.3%), and healing and meditation (19.3%). Many respondents had visited multiple Thai cities, with Bangkok (55.2%), Phuket (26.9%), and Chiang Mai (23.6%) being the most popular cities. According to the respondents, online reviews or online social networks (75.5%) and word-of-mouth recommendations (72.9%) were the most important sources of information that influenced their decision to choose Thailand for their wellness tourism trip. Approximately 46.9% of the respondents were primary wellness travelers, which means they traveled to Thailand primarily for the purpose of wellness or getting healthy. In contrast, 53.1% were classified as secondary wellness travelers, which means they engaged in some wellness activities while in Thailand primarily for leisure or business.

Data screening and analysis results

We employed SmartPLS 4.0 to test the proposed model due to its capability to capture the complexity relationships of a structural model (e.g. higher order construct, mediators, moderators). Therefore, two data analysis stages were applied. Firstly, the designed survey scale was checked to test its reliability and validity according to accepted criteria by Hair et al. (2017) and Henseler et al. (2016). The results in Table 1 determine sufficient scores for all developed items and constructs. The composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted

(AVE) were reported higher than the suggested threshold (>0.60) and (>0.50). Further, a discriminant validity test using a Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) – Matrix reported in Table 2 indicates accepted scores which is lower than the suggested threshold (<1.0). Thus, the

reliability and validity of the developed survey scale were established. Secondly, a structural model test (e.g. path analysis) was performed to examine the relationships between all constructs including mediators (e.g. perceived mental health, emotional wellbeing). The

Table 1. Constructs and items.

	CR	rho_c	AVE	Mean	SD
Transportation	.785	.875	.701		
Safety of transportation				5.20	0.99
Convenience of transportation facilities				5.15	1.17
Safety of driving				5.16	1.09
Law and order	.607	.835	.717		
Political stability				5.03	1.06
Attitude of residents toward tourists				5.34	0.93
Accommodation	.754	.890	.802		
Hotel/guesthouse fire control system				5.28	0.94
Hotel/guesthouse security system				5.27	1.04
Weather	.704	.780	.657		
Difference of weather change				4.74	1.13
Possibility of natural disasters				3.98	1.37
Sightseeing Spot	.683	.863	.759		
Safety of recreational facilities				5.45	0.85
Quality of the management staff				5.30	1.00
Medical Support	.713	.874	.777		
Degree of assistance available in case of accident				5.26	0.94
Completeness of medical service system				5.07	1.10
Staff Support	.698	.869	.768		
The staffs who I met in this wellness tourism destination were willing to help				5.71	0.94
The staffs who I met in this wellness tourism destination were knowledgeable				4.92	1.15
Perceived Safety	.798	.869	.626		
I felt safe during my trip in Thailand.				5.29	0.94
I felt safe walking around during the daytime in Thailand.				5.66	0.87
I felt safe walking around during the night-time in Thailand.				4.51	1.28
Thailand is safer than any other place around here.				4.38	1.36
Wellness involvement	.785	.853	.538		
For me, wellness experience is an important part of my life.				5.54	0.91
The selection of wellness experience is more important to me than any other buyer.				5.19	1.22
I have been collecting the related information or materials on wellness experience.				5.18	1.16
I have rich knowledge about wellness experience.				4.89	1.25
I am interested in wellness experience.				5.71	0.92
Perceived Mental health	.710	.838	.634		
<i>Visiting Thailand for wellness tourism ...</i>					
was worthy as it helps me boost my confidence in everyday life				5.36	1.11
made me think that I am a valuable and important person				5.22	1.11
helped me turn any worry/anxiety into confidence				5.21	1.20
Emotional well-being	.760	.838	.509		
In most ways, my wellness tourism trip to Thailand was close to ideal.				5.28	0.88
The conditions on my wellness tourism trip to Thailand were excellent.				5.74	0.88
I was satisfied with my wellness tourism trip to Thailand.				5.64	0.97
I achieved the most important things on my wellness tourism trip to Thailand.				5.11	1.16
I would not change the plans I made for my wellness tourism trip to Thailand.				5.29	1.02
Perceived image congruity	.657	.860	.755		
<i>Thailand as a wellness tourism destination has an image consistent with how</i>					
I believe others see me.				5.16	0.98
I would like others to see me.				5.39	1.06
Barriers to Thai wellness tourism	.882	.917	.734		
I would normally be in a hurry while I am using Thailand wellness tourism products/services.				3.58	1.37
It is not easy to communicate with staff in Thailand wellness tourism destination.				3.56	1.48
It is not simple to conveniently perform my wellness activity in the generally unfamiliar environment of Thailand wellness tourism destination, which can be disorienting.				3.38	1.52
It is not easy to find a reasonable price to use Thailand wellness tourism products/services.				3.22	1.51
Destination Familiarity	.891	.932	.821		
I am more familiar with Thailand than my acquaintances.				4.61	1.29
I am more familiar with Thailand than my friends.				4.70	1.38
I am more familiar with Thailand than those who travel frequently.				4.07	1.49
Destination Love	.719	.826	.543		
Thailand wellness tourism is totally awesome.				5.68	0.96
I love Thailand as a wellness tourism destination.				5.82	0.88
Thailand wellness tourism is a pure delight.				5.51	1.11
I am very attached to Thailand wellness tourism.				5.70	0.90

Table 2. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) – Matrix.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Accommodation															
2. Barriers to Thai wellness tourism	.09														
3. Destination Familiarity	.43	.12													
4. Emotional well-being	.66	.25	.58												
5. Perceived image congruity	.58	.08	.63	.75											
6. Law and order	.86	.16	.51	.78	.64										
7. Destination Love	.62	.29	.47	.97	.70	.75									
8. Medical Support	.78	.10	.60	.64	.61	.88	.61								
9. Perceived Mental health	.52	.10	.64	.83	.78	.70	.71	.67							
10. Perceived Safety	.69	.27	.62	.72	.69	.97	.66	.81	.67						
11. Sightseeing Spot	.92	.20	.51	.73	.63	.96	.64	.93	.65	.80					
12. Staff Support	.59	.20	.42	.75	.63	.73	.74	.68	.69	.64	.65				
13. Transportation	.67	.16	.53	.65	.69	.87	.61	.77	.72	.83	.80	.70			
14. Weather	.07	.11	.06	.18	.10	.09	.18	.06	.11	.14	.11	.08	.04		
15. Wellness involvement	.51	.16	.72	.74	.70	.60	.68	.59	.74	.63	.60	.55	.62	.08	

results determine a significant association between all developed constructs. Table 3 and Figure 1 have reported the final results.

Prior to all of that, data screening was performed. A full collinearity (VIFs) test to detect any constructs with variance inflation factor values exceeding or equal to the suggested threshold (≥ 3.3) (Hair et al., 2017). The VIF results for all developed constructs were in the range of 1.321 ~ 2.589. In addition, the data normality was also assessed to ensure avoiding any invalid items were used. Accordingly, the skewness and kurtosis scores for all indicators were reported as accepted values between the range of ± 2 (Garson, 2012; Hair et al., 2017).

Hypotheses and path analysis results

The developed structural model, including the higher order construct, was assessed to test the proposed hypotheses as shown in Figure 1 and Table 3 by performing the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 sub-samples. Firstly, the higher-order construct namely “Thai

wellness tourism experience” involving eight lower-order constructs (e.g. transportation, law and order, accommodation, weather, sightseeing spot, medical support, staff support, and perceived safety) were reported positive and significant relationships for all proposed constructs except for “Weather” which indicate a negative and insignificant indicator ($\beta = 0.026$, $p > 0.05$). Secondly, the results of the inner structural model indicate positive and significant relationships between all constructs except for the path between perceived mental health and destination brand love, which reported a positive but insignificant relationship ($\beta = 0.100$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, the hypothesis 6 was rejected. However, the path analysis scores between higher-order construct and perceived mental health and emotional wellbeing were ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.425$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. Similarly, the path analysis between wellness involvement and perceived mental health and emotional wellbeing was ($\beta = 0.326$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.246$, $p < 0.05$), which confirmed hypotheses 3 and 4. Furthermore, hypotheses 5 and 7

Table 3. Path analysis and hypotheses results.

Hypotheses	Paths	β	t	P	Bias-corrected 95% CI		
					Lower	Upper	Significant
H1	Thai wellness tourism experience $\rightarrow$ Perceived mental health	.421	7.35	.000	.304	.528	Yes
H2	Thai wellness tourism experience $\rightarrow$ Emotional well-being	.425	7.90	.000	.313	.525	Yes
H3	Wellness involvement $\rightarrow$ Perceived mental health	.326	5.85	.000	.214	.429	Yes
H4	Wellness involvement $\rightarrow$ Emotional well-being	.246	4.44	.000	.137	.355	Yes
H5	Perceived mental health $\rightarrow$ Destination brand love	.100	1.89	.058	-.002	0.204	No
H6	Emotional wellbeing $\rightarrow$ Destination brand love	.614	12.4	.000	.512	.706	Yes
H7	Perceived image congruity $\rightarrow$ Emotional well-being	.182	3.58	.000	.082	.283	Yes
		β	t	P	95% CI		
Higher order construct	Thai wellness tourism experience $\rightarrow$ Transportation	.208	20.3	.000	[.189, .228]		
	Thai wellness tourism experience $\rightarrow$ Law and order	.133	16.5	.000	[.118, .149]		
	Thai wellness tourism experience $\rightarrow$ Accommodation	.144	16.1	.000	[.127, .162]		
	Thai wellness tourism experience $\rightarrow$ Weather	-.026	.876	.381	[-.066, .027]		
	Thai wellness tourism experience $\rightarrow$ Sightseeing spot	.144	17.1	.000	[.129, .162]		
	Thai wellness tourism experience $\rightarrow$ Medical support	.147	20.4	.000	[.134, .162]		
	Thai wellness tourism experience $\rightarrow$ Staff support	.142	17.1	.000	[.126, .159]		
	Thai wellness tourism experience $\rightarrow$ Perceived safety	.319	26.0	.000	[.294, .343]		

were ($\beta = 0.182, p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.614, p < 0.05$), which reported sufficient scores to confirm the significant associations between perceived image congruity, emotional wellbeing, and destination brand love.

Moderation effect results

The study applied a two-stage technique to evaluate the two proposed moderation constructs of barriers to Thai wellness tourism and destination familiarity impact on the structural model (Becker et al., 2018; Hair et al., 2017). The statistical evaluations determine that the barriers to Thai wellness tourism have a positive and significant impact on the relationship between perceived mental health and destination brand love ($\beta = 0.127, p < 0.05$), while it shows an insignificant impact between the path of emotional wellbeing and destination brand love ($\beta = -0.031, p > 0.05$). In contrast, the statistical results also determine that destination familiarity has an insignificant impact on perceived mental health, emotional wellbeing, and destination brand love ($\beta = -0.052, p > 0.05$; $\beta = 0.062, p > 0.05$).

To capture further details of the moderation impact, we have visualized the evaluation using a simple slope by plotting the relationships between all possible paths at one standard deviation (above and below) of the mean value of both moderators. As exhibited in Figure 2, the interaction impact of barriers to Thai wellness tourism shows a positive interaction between perceived mental

health and destination brand love, suggesting that perceiving low barriers to wellness tourism in Thailand with high mental health perception strengthens the destination brand love which supports hypotheses 8a, while in Figure 3, it shows the upper slope “red line” is somehow in parallel with the lower slope “green line” which determine the insignificant impact on the relationship between emotional wellbeing and destination brand love, thus, not supported hypotheses 8b. This suggests that characteristics unique to Thai wellness tourism interacted with barriers in ways that did not significantly affect emotional wellbeing but impacted the perceived mental health of the travel experience. In contrast, Figures 4 and 5 have reported that destination familiarity significantly moderates the relationship impact of perceived mental health, emotional wellbeing, and destination brand love, which supports hypotheses 9a and 9b.

Discussion and implications

This study explores the associations of wellness tourism experience, wellness involvement, perceived image congruity, perceived mental health, and emotional wellbeing in generating destination brand love. The participants in this study include wellness tourism travelers who have participated in wellness activities such as beauty, spa, massage, traditional medicine, exploring nature, or meditation. The results provide theoretical and practical implications and future managerial

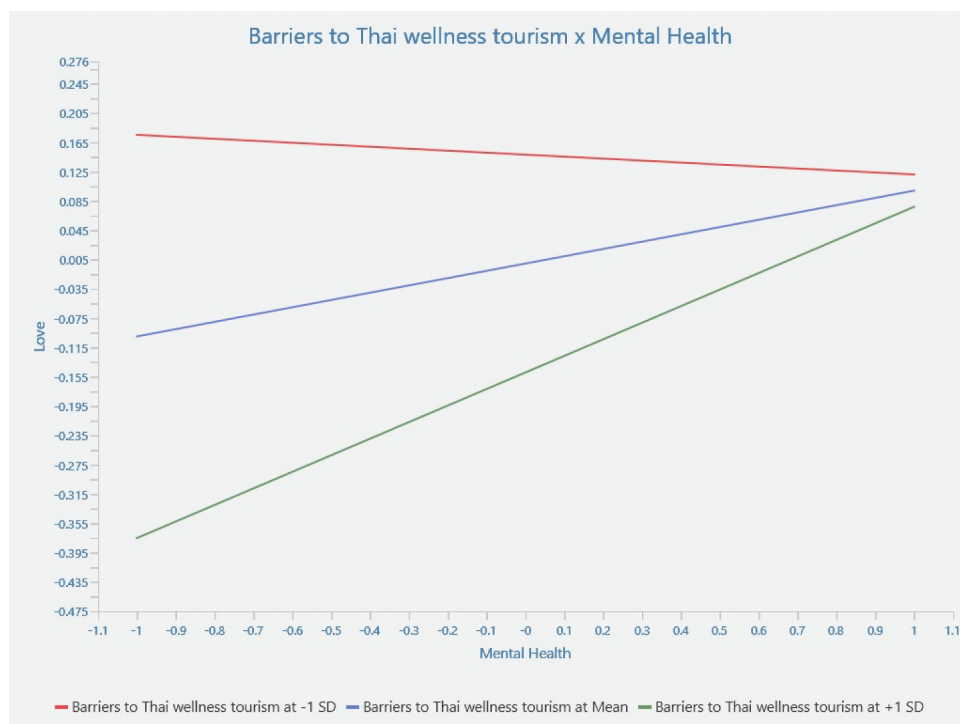


Figure 2. The moderation effect of barriers to Thai wellness tourism. (Perceived mental health and destination brand love)

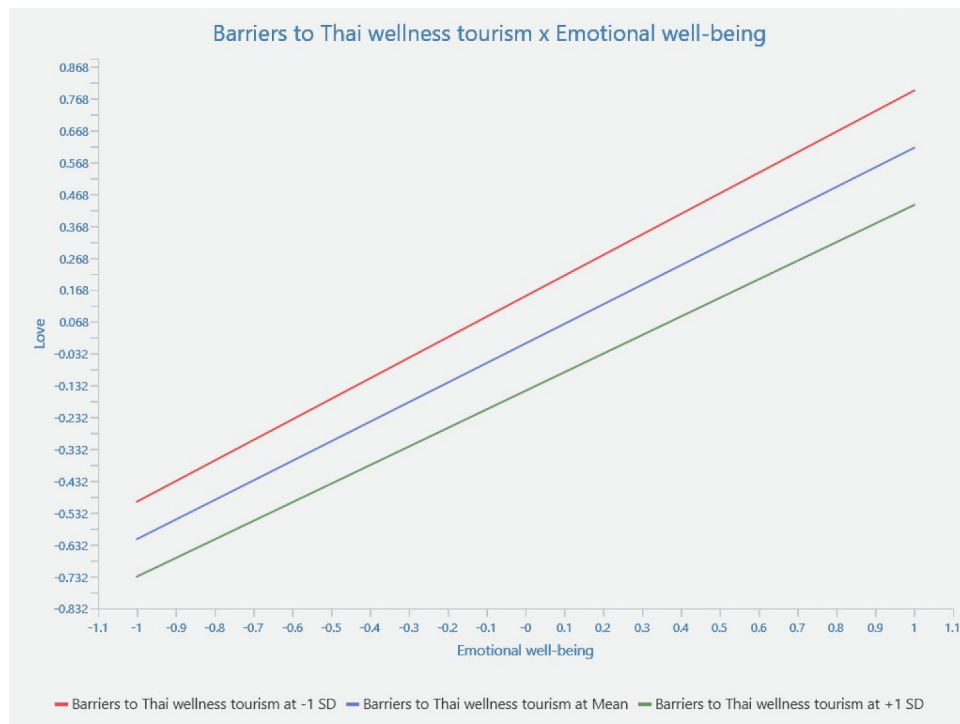


Figure 3. The moderation effect of barriers to Thai wellness tourism. (Emotional well-being and destination brand love)

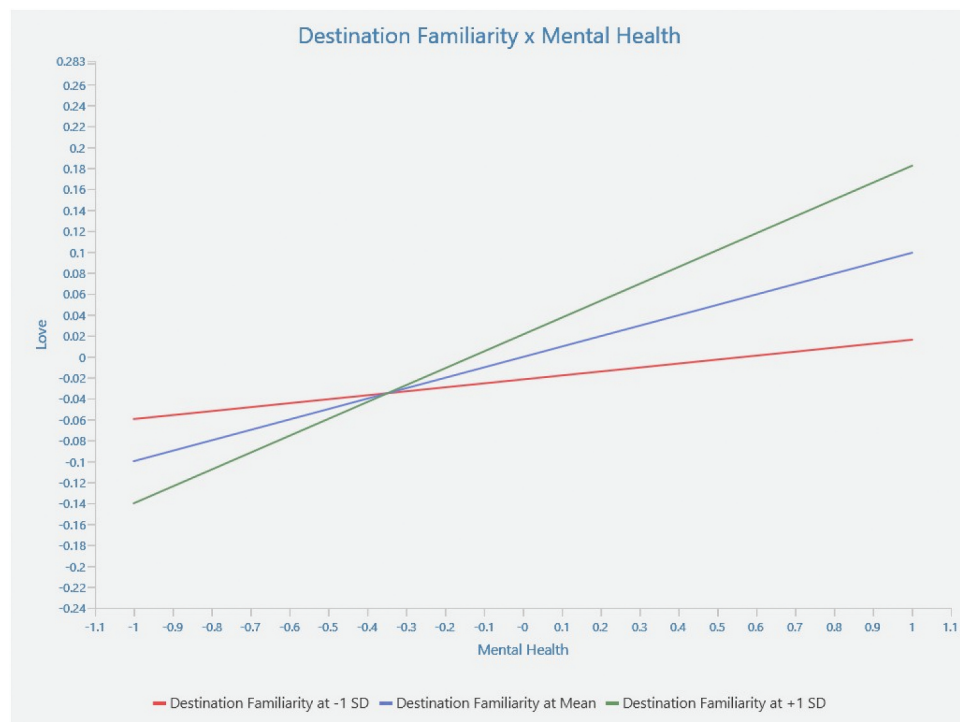


Figure 4. The moderation effect of destination familiarity. (Perceived mental health and destination brand love)

guidance and direction to reflect wellness tourists' perceptions and characteristics.

The results describe how tourists' experience of wellness tourism establishes destination brand love via

mental and emotional status. Seven lower constructs (transportation, law and order, accommodation, sight-seeing spots, medical support, staff support, and perceived safety), except the weather, significantly account

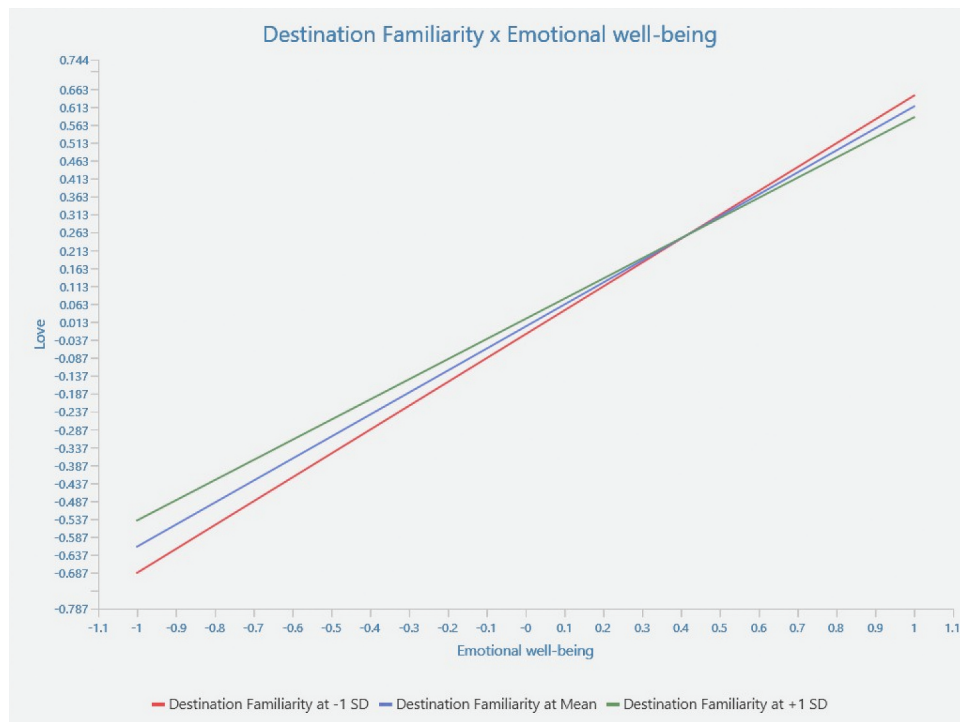


Figure 5. The moderation effect of destination familiarity. (Emotional well-being and destination brand love)

for the higher order construct, wellness tourism experience. Diverse lower constructs sufficiently describe a tourist's wellness experience. Under this research construct, weather is only a natural macro-environmental factor that the industry or firm cannot directly control. Through this finding, it can be demonstrated that tourists construct overall wellness experiences via factors that the industry and its members directly manage for their customers (wellness tourists).

Therefore, wellness tourists focus more on how they can comprehensively experience tourist-oriented products and services rather than on the external environmental dynamics. Caldeira and Kastenholz (2018) suggest that the impact of weather on tourist negative behavior may be decreased or supplemented even if weather conditions can influence tourists' activities and behavior. Tourists substitute outdoor activities for indoor activities in response to unfavorable weather conditions. This finding indicates that wellness tourists value indoor activities more over weather-dependent experiences, so it is recommended to prioritize creating travel experiences through the core and supporting products for wellness tourists.

The second-order wellness tourism experience construct focuses on explaining functional congruence. To optimize the wellness tourism experience, destination administrators and business practitioners must engage in collaborative efforts to prepare the destination and its service points. These points encompass various aspects

such as ensuring the safety of tourists during their travel within the destination, addressing transportation concerns, providing adequate medical support, ensuring the quality of accommodations, selecting suitable sightseeing spots, managing staff, ensuring medical support, and promoting political stability within the wellness destination. It is important to acknowledge that the perceived safety of tourists generally plays a larger part than other aspects in shaping a tourist's wellness experience.

Based on the findings of H3 and H4, it is clear that tourists' involvement in wellness experiences has a significant impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing, confirming that tourists seek mental and emotional wellbeing in wellness tourism. Wellness tourists look for a higher level of relaxation, which satisfies dynamic needs and wants. Wellness tourism is a holistic travel experience offering health, relaxation, and spiritual awareness, not just spa and massage therapies. The result confirms that wellness tourism should focus more on tourist's emotional motivations and behaviors than just on service and product quality (Pesonen et al., 2011). For example, some cruise companies highlight the value of wellness, while the cruise industry has long been promoting fun and excitement as floating amusement parks. By replacing fun-oriented cruise environments and service with wellness-oriented concepts, such as nature feel design, fitness activity programs, wellness amenities, farm-to-table dining, and medical staff on board, it can satisfy wellness needs

and enhance the level of wellbeing for its customers or tourists.

Image congruity is identified as a significant player in determining emotional wellbeing. A cognitive match is when an individual compares their identity with the image of a target product or service, impacting emotional response and satisfaction level. This finding supports the image congruency theory (Sirgy et al., 1991), which reaffirms that both functional congruence (wellness tourism experience) and self-congruence (perceived image congruity) result in a positive emotional response (emotional wellbeing). The self-image of wellness tourists and their desired perception by others plays a crucial role in enhancing their emotional wellbeing through image congruity.

This study applies the destination brand love to the context of wellness tourism. This study helps to understand how wellness travelers establish destination brand love through testing variables based on the destination brand love model (Swanson, 2017) and tourism experience factors (transportation, law & order, accommodation, weather, sightseeing spots, medical support, staff support, and perceived safety). Moreover, through testing moderation and mediation effects considering the traveler's perception and emotion, this study provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation of destination brand love in a wellness tourism context. This study found that wellness tourism destination brand love is positively influenced by the overall wellness tourism experience, and that relationship is mediated by emotional wellbeing. In order to increase the tourist's destination brand love, it is essential for tourism stakeholders and various factors that affect travel experience to collaborate effectively, working together to enrich the overall travel experience and prioritize the emotional wellbeing of tourists, going beyond mere satisfaction with the experience.

limitation and future research

The current study is not free from limitations, and there is much room to help understand the overall wellness tourism industry. First, the survey focuses on Thailand's wellness tourism industry among Chinese participants. Even though Thailand is a noticeable wellness tourism destination and Chinese tourists are one of the most significant volumes in this region, it is still not sufficient to apply to the global wellness tourism industry. Cultural comparison research or exploring other wellness tourism destinations such as North America and Europe are highly suggested. Second, additional moderators in the research model should be tested. There are diverse aspects influencing brand love, such as the length of

the relationship (Batra et al., 2012), Gender (Hamdy et al., 2024), perceived quality (Seyyedamiri et al., 2022), and attitude (Swanson, 2017). By exploring various moderating effects, future studies can find more accurate processes and influencing factors regarding destination brand love. Third, different data and methodologies to investigate the characteristics of wellness tourism are required. Secondary data, such as actual statistics or tourist information about wellness tourism, online reviews, and financial performance data can be utilized to identify the significant aspects and their impact on wellness tourism.

Fourth, it is essential to reflect a consistent image that tourists pursue image in wellness or wellbeing. Han and Back (2008) argue that a customer's ideal social image congruence is a positive function of consumption emotion. Physical and functional wellness needs must be satisfied, but in order to pursue greater emotional wellbeing, the tourist's values and tendencies must be understood. Ethical consumption or ethical consumerism is getting attention in the hospitality and tourism industry (Abdullah & Valentine, 2009). The tourism industry has been highlighting the social roles regarding labor, governance, sustainability, resource management, and social issues (Santos & Almeida, 2022). The environmental, social, and governance (ESG) concept is an essential hospitality and tourism management strategy (Koh et al., 2022; Park & Shin, 2024). This unique industry characteristic and diverse stakeholders in the tourism industry, such as labor, the need for natural resources, the use of foods and their ingredients, and relationships in communities and societies, require communal improvement with their customers. However, industry practices and academic research regarding wellness tourism applying ESG initiatives are lacking. Individuals are looking for value and meaning in products and services beyond simple consumption, which significantly impacts emotional perceptions. Therefore, in future studies, it is suggested that the wellness traveler's values regarding ESG be explored to enhance emotional wellbeing and destination image.

Fifth, tourists try to escape from the unbalanced life and stress of daily living, which is one of the crucial reasons for seeking wellness tourism (Li et al., 2023). People nowadays start and finish their daily lives with screen-based digital platforms, and this phenomenon is linked to negative wellbeing, such as anxiety, poor sleep quality, and depression (Yang et al., 2020). Digital detox receives attention to let people escape from digital life (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). There is still a lack of industry practices and academic research on digital detox in the tourism industry, but the wellness tourism industry needs to adopt digital detox in order

to satisfy individual needs for mental and emotional wellbeing. To experience a higher level of escape, isolation from daily stress, and emotional relaxation, not only physical separation but also digital detox may be applied. Finally, future research in wellness tourism could benefit from analyzing various types of wellness activities, given the diverse experiences they offer. Exploring activities like yoga retreats, spa visits, adventure wellness, and holistic health programs can provide insights into their distinct impacts on well-being. Comparative studies across these activities could reveal unique benefits and preferences to tailor wellness tourism to different demographics. Such analyses would enhance understanding of how specific activities contribute to mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing, which ultimately guides the development of more effective and personalized wellness tourism experiences for tourists.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This research project was supported by Office of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation under the Reinventing University System/Visiting Professor Program.

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Source details

Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing

Years currently covered by Scopus: from 1992 to 2025

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ISSN: 1054-8408 E-ISSN: 1540-7306

Subject area: Business, Management and Accounting: Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Management

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▶ ข้อมูลทุน

แหล่งทุน	เงินงบประมาณแผ่นดิน
ชื่อทุน	ทุนงานมูลฐาน (Fundamental Fund : FF) ปี 2567

▶ ข้อมูลโครงการ

รหัสอ้างอิง	24263
รหัสโครงการวิจัย	FSI6701062S
ประเภทโครงการ	โครงการวิจัย
ลักษณะโครงการ	โครงการวิจัยสิ้นสุดในงบประมาณ
คณะ/หน่วยงาน ที่เสนอโครงการ	คณะการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว
ชื่อโครงการ (ภาษาไทย)	ความเชื่อมโยงระหว่างความมั่งคั่งและการกระจายตัวทางภูมิศาสตร์ของที่ตั้งธุรกิจการท่องเที่ยวในภูมิภาคอันดามัน
ชื่อโครงการ (ภาษาอังกฤษ)	The Linkage Between Relative Wealth and Geographical Dispersion of Accommodation Andaman Region
คำสำคัญ	ความมั่งคั่งสัมพัทธ์,การท่องเที่ยว,การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงพื้นที่,อันดามัน,ประเทศไทย,Relative Wealth,Tourism,Spatial data analysis,Andaman,Thailand
อีเมลหลัก	chayanon.p@phuket.psu.ac.th
สถานะปัจจุบัน (หัวหน้าโครงการ)	นักวิจัยทั่วไป

▶ ระยะเวลาการวิจัย

วันที่เริ่มต้น	1 ตุลาคม 2566	Expected Score 1
วันที่สิ้นสุด	30 กันยายน 2567	
วันที่สิ้นสุด (ตามการขยายเวลาครั้งล่าสุด)	31 มีนาคม 2568	
ระยะเวลาโครงการ	1 ปี	

► รายละเอียดโครงการ

สาขาวิชาการ ISCED	00 Generic programmes and qualifications 000 Generic programmes and qualifications not further defined 0000 Generic programmes and qualifications not further defined
สาขาการวิจัย OECD	05 สังคมศาสตร์ 07 ภูมิศาสตร์ทางสังคมและเศรษฐกิจ
กลุ่มสาขา	สังคมศาสตร์ มนุษยศาสตร์ และสังคมศาสตร์ประยุกต์
ความสอดคล้องกับนโยบาย และยุทธศาสตร์ ด้านการวิจัยของมหาวิทยาลัย	การท่องเที่ยวและเศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์

ระดับความพร้อมทางเทคโนโลยี (Technology Readiness Level: TRL)

TRL ณ ปัจจุบัน ระดับ	TRL Level 1 : Basic principles observed and reported
รายละเอียด	-
TRL เมื่องานวิจัยเสร็จสิ้น ระดับ	TRL Level 3 : Concept demonstrated analytically or experimentally
รายละเอียด	-

ระดับความพร้อมทางสังคม (Societal Readiness Level: SRL)

SRL ณ ปัจจุบัน ระดับ	SRL Level 1 : identifying problem and identifying societal readiness
รายละเอียด	-
SRL เมื่องานวิจัยเสร็จสิ้น ระดับ	SRL Level 2 : formulation of problem, proposed solution(s) and potential impact, expected societal readiness; identifying relevant stakeholders for the project.
รายละเอียด	-

เป้าหมายการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืน (Sustainable Development Goals : SDGs)

Goal 1 : No Poverty

► คณะผู้วิจัย

ลำดับ	ชื่อ-นามสกุล	สถานะ	หน่วยงานที่สังกัด/สถานที่ติดต่อได้	Email	ตำแหน่งในโครงการ	สัดส่วน(%)
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1	รศ.ดร.ชยานนท์ ภูเจริญ	บุคลากร ม.อ.	คณะกรรมการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว สาขาวิชาการจัดการการท่องเที่ยว คณะกรรมการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตภูเก็ต	chayanon.p@phuket.psu.ac.th	หัวหน้าโครงการ	50
2	นางสาวณิชาพัชร สังข์แก้ว	บุคลากร ม.อ.	คณะกรรมการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว สาขาวิชาการจัดการการท่องเที่ยว คณะกรรมการบริการและการท่องเที่ยว มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตภูเก็ต	nichapat.s@phuket.psu.ac.th	ผู้ร่วมวิจัย	50

▶ งบประมาณ

ปีงบประมาณ	ประเภทงบประมาณ	แหล่งเงินทุน	งบประมาณที่เสนอขอ (บาท)	รายละเอียด
2567	งบประมาณรวมประจำปี	เงินงบประมาณแผ่นดิน***	410,000.00	-
รวม			410,000.00	

▶ เอกสารข้อเสนอโครงการ

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ลำดับ	เอกสารรายงานวิจัย	ขนาดไฟล์	การเผยแพร่สู่สาธารณะ	แก้ไขล่าสุด
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▶ งบประมาณที่ได้รับจัดสรร

ประเภทงบประมาณ	แหล่งเงิน	งบประมาณ (บาท)
ปีงบประมาณ 2567		
งบดำเนินการ	กองทุนส่งเสริมวิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรม (ววน.)	341,666.67
ปีงบประมาณ 2568		
งบดำเนินการ	กองทุนส่งเสริมวิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัยและนวัตกรรม (ววน.)	68,333.33
รวม		410,000.00

● จำแนกตามปีงบประมาณ

ปี	จำนวนเดือน	งบประมาณ (บาท)
2567	12	410,000.00
รวม	12	410,000.00

● จำแนกตามปีปฏิทิน

(พ.ศ./BE)

ปี	จำนวนเดือน	งบประมาณ (บาท)
2566	3	102,500.00
2567	9	307,500.00
รวม	12	410,000.00

● จำแนกตามปีการศึกษา

ปี	จำนวนเดือน	งบประมาณ (บาท)
2566	10	341,666.67
2567	2	68,333.33
รวม	12	410,000.00

● จำแนกตามสัดส่วนนักวิจัย

ลำดับ	ชื่อ-สกุล	สถานะ	หน่วยงานที่สังกัด/สถานที่ที่ติดต่อได้	ตำแหน่งในโครงการ	สัดส่วน (%)	เฉลี่ยตามสัดส่วน (บาท)
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KORNWIKA.DU , 3 พ.ย. 66, 15:22

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กำหนดสถานะโครงการวิจัยโดยผู้ดูแลระบบ จาก (04) โครงการวิจัยอยู่ระหว่างดำเนินการ เป็น (02) ส่งกลับให้นักวิจัยดำเนินการแก้ไข

KORNWIKA.DU , 3 พ.ย. 66, 15:24

2567

ยืนยันข้อมูลถูกต้องโดยผู้ดูแลระบบ

Success Reminder

CHIRAWAN.L , 4 ม.ค. 67, 13:47

คำนวณการจัดสรรงบประมาณโดยผู้ดูแลระบบ

CHIRAWAN.L , 4 ม.ค. 67, 13:52

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CHAYANON.P , 28 ส.ค. 67, 13:05

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KORNWIKA.DU , 19 ก.ย. 67, 13:57

2568

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Perceptions of pet-accompanying tourism: Pet owners vs. nonpet owners

Wei Quan Seongsoo (Sam) Kim I. I. and Heesup Han View all authors and affiliations

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Abstract

This study used a mixed-methods design combining qualitative interviews (30 respondents: pet owners and nonpet owners) and quantitative questionnaires (832 valid samples) based on the extended theory of planned behavior (TPB) to explore the formation of behavioral intentions in pet owners and nonpet owners in pet-friendly tourism destinations. This study found that the green environment of tourism destinations significantly affects behavioral intention, specifically for pet owners. In contrast, perceived constraints had no significant effect on behavioral intentions. In addition, although pet owners and nonpet owners showed consistency in their attitudes toward pet tourism, there was a significant difference in the importance they placed on a green environment. This finding not only enriches the application of the TPB in the field of pet tourism, but also emphasizes the importance of the green environment in pet tourism planning and provides the industry with targeted recommendations for improvement.

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A configurational impact assessment of pet tourism destination visit intention: application of TPB, servicescapes, and loss-aversion under prospect theory

Heesup Han , Seongseop (Sam) Kim , Sarah Blankson-Stiles-Ocran, Wei Quan , Amr Al-Ansi  & Hayeon (Hailey) Choi  

Received 19 May 2024, Accepted 22 Sep 2024, Published online: 08 Oct 2024

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ABSTRACT

As the number of pet lovers is increasing, the tourism industry has become keenly interested in pet-friendly business environments. This study aimed to explain pet owners' intentions to visit a pet tourism destination using diverse determinants, which were applied in three theoretical frameworks. Data were collected from a sample of 349 pet owners. Among the meaningful results, pet owners chose pet tourism destinations that offered physical environment attributes. Their intentions were salient to overcoming perceived behavioural control issues or perceived risks. Overall, pet owners revealed a strong intention to visit pet tourism accommodation if the destination provided suitable facilities or services. The results of this study are of academic and industrial significance because they relate to a new niche market: pet lovers and pet-friendly tourism businesses.

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ABSTRACT

With accelerated digitalisation in all business sectors, digital currencies (DC) are increasingly popular. This study aimed to identify the effects of central bank digital currency (CBDC) innovation characteristics and perceived risks on CBDC adoption intention in the tourism and hospitality field. This study devised a research model incorporating research hypotheses addressing CBDC customers' perceptions of CBDC's innovative technology and risks. To test the hypotheses, data were obtained from the USA, Korea, and China. CBDC's innovation characteristics and perceived risks affected the adoption of CBDC for transactions during travel. The results have academic and practical value because they aid understanding of customers' reactions to the new transaction system and establish proactive marketing strategies such as promotional message development to reduce perceived risks in lieu of strengthening innovative characteristics.

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There is no limit to what we as women can accomplish: promoting women's entrepreneurial empowerment and disaster management capabilities

Rimsha Khalid and Mohsin Raza

*Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, Prince of Songkla University Phuket Campus,
Phuket, Thailand*

Katarzyna Piwowar-Sulej

Wroclaw University of Economics and Business, Wroclaw, Poland, and

Zahed Ghaderi

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Abstract

Purpose – Existing gender inequality across all sectors has weakened women's resilience to risk management. The chaos heightens if they are not only breadwinners of their family but roaring the entrepreneurial world. Disasters and crises hit entrepreneurs equally but post-disaster damages following ripple effects hit hardest to women ruling the one-third portion of the entrepreneurial world. Surprisingly, the post-disaster entrepreneurial challenges of women are overlooked, and the study aims to fill the gap by explaining the right way of empowering women through entrepreneurial initiatives.

Design/methodology/approach – The research is based on data collected from 372 women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry of the Andaman Sea coastal area in Thailand by following the cluster sampling technique. The women entrepreneurs of Thailand were chosen as target respondents because women's participation is more than 40% in entrepreneurial businesses.

Findings – The findings revealed that entrepreneurial marketing, entrepreneurial opportunity and entrepreneurial tenacity have a significant influence on entrepreneurial initiatives and the entrepreneurial mindset successfully mediates between dependent variables and entrepreneurial initiatives.

Practical implications – This study has important insights for policymakers, women entrepreneurs, institutions and the tourism industry. However, it focuses solely on women entrepreneurs participating in the tourism industry of Thailand. Therefore, future studies are invited to incorporate male entrepreneurs and be conducted in other developed and Asian countries.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the entrepreneurial field by proposing entrepreneurial factors that can help women entrepreneurs restart their businesses, mitigating or minimizing natural disaster effects and proposing pioneering suggestions to uplift the tourism entrepreneurial sector.

Keywords Entrepreneurial tenacity, Entrepreneurial mindset, Entrepreneurial initiatives, Women entrepreneurs, Crisis and disaster, Tourism industry

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The entrepreneurship world has received immense attention from policymakers, and practitioners due to its ability to alter economic fabric, national structural transformations and contribution to economic prosperity (Vedula *et al.*, 2022). Entrepreneurial growth



guarantees the fortune of the country, favors economic development and pushes back the poverty line. However, a sudden strike of crises such as climate change, natural disasters, rainfalls and floods shut down entrepreneurial activities as entrepreneurs have always been hit hard due to the closure of businesses, restricted activities, disturbance of demand and the supply chain worsening the situation. Disasters are almost inevitable, and the entrepreneurial world understands it. However, the tricking economic and environmental situations, demand and supply uncertainty and higher inflation, enhance the vulnerability of crises and entrepreneurs are in dilemma whether to restart or initiate a new business or wait for global situations to be normalized (Jones and Comfort, 2020). The entrepreneurs are the spine of the country's economy, and their vulnerability brings the economy down to its knees. Therefore, the turbulent economic situation gives an immense call to practitioners and researchers to help entrepreneurs, take them out of economic crises and come up with a perpetual solution to heal the entrepreneurial world in post-disaster situations (Boin and Rhinard, 2023).

The women entrepreneurship has received broad attention in entrepreneurial literature as women are having the capacity to operate the firm, enhance performance, contribute to the national income and capacity to generate job opportunities (Kyrgidou *et al.*, 2021). The women entrepreneurs provide key support in the development of society and the economy, and entrepreneurial ventures create jobs, however, restart failures are no exceptions here (Ghouse *et al.*, 2021). At the same time, industrial reports mention that women entrepreneurs who are one-third of the entrepreneurial world get hit harder than male entrepreneurs (Stengel, 2021). Women entrepreneurs are usually concentrated in sectors that are more vulnerable to economic downturns. For example, industries heavily affected by crises, such as tourism, may have a higher representation of women-owned businesses. Women, especially in certain cultures or societies, often bear a larger share of domestic and caregiving responsibilities. Balancing these responsibilities with the demands of entrepreneurship can become even more challenging during crises, potentially impacting their ability to focus on their business, building influential networks, secure support or find new business opportunities during crises (Mohapatra and Roy, 2023; Richardson and Roberts, 2020; Sörensson and Ghannad, 2024).

Past literature explored women tourism entrepreneurship mainly in Ghana, Nigeria, Cameron (Kimbu *et al.*, 2019), China (Xu *et al.*, 2018), UK (Figueroa-Domecq *et al.*, 2022) and Turkey (Kutlu and Ngoasong, 2023). This study focuses on Thailand. Guelich (2020) claims that women's participation is more than 40% in entrepreneurial businesses, and in Thailand, it can be expected higher as it is a hub for business setups. It hosts 3.1 million small and medium-scale businesses which employ 12.7 million people (Yuvejwattana, 2021). A high percentage of women entrepreneurship is based on the tourism industry. As per the Thai Chamber of Commerce, many solopreneurs and small entrepreneurial startups are unregistered which accounts for 35% of the national GDP (Thepaat, 2022). These small entrepreneurial businesses carry most of the economic burden and sudden disasters trick the situation. During a recent pandemic, the Thai federation warned that the prolonged crisis brought almost 80% of entrepreneurs near bankruptcy, and if the post-crisis situations are mismanaged then a recession can be predicted (Yuvejwattana, 2021). The mismanagement of post-crisis is the "black swan" that made entrepreneurship vulnerable to unnatural external forces. Based on the geological factors, the intensity and frequency of events in Thailand made studying entrepreneurial disaster management a necessity, particularly in risk mitigation and recovery of the entrepreneurial sector (Kamalipoor *et al.*, 2022).

Considering the above, there is a need to devise concrete strategies for women entrepreneurs specifically in post-pandemic times to minimize restart failures as well. Therefore, this study came up with possible solutions to mitigate the grim effects of pandemics on the entrepreneurial world (Hughes *et al.*, 2022). In particular, this study aims to explore the antecedents of women entrepreneurial initiatives that are referred to as restarting and developing ongoing entrepreneurial activities (Keller *et al.*, 2022).

This study presents a different perspective on natural disasters that could be an entrepreneurial opportunity to identify and explore new ways to take initiatives and help firms survive, thrive and remain competitive market (Whitler, 2022). The sudden upsurges of pandemic outbreaks change working norms and execution of entrepreneurial operations or activities; therefore, it is crucial to take entrepreneurial initiatives intelligently for ongoing activities. Past literature provided evidence that company characteristics such as loyal customers, service quality, adoption of modern technologies, high paid in capital and restructuring debts, domestic market base, hygiene and safety image, branding as well as product and market diversification were effective in achieving organizational resilience in crises in terms of tourism companies (Aydogan *et al.*, 2023; Kirant Yozcu and Cetin, 2019). In turn, Prayag *et al.* (2024a) emphasized the role of dynamic capabilities in shaping organizational resilience in tourism. However, this study focuses on women leaders' characteristics because personal factors are of utmost importance in successful entrepreneurship (Cifci and Cetin, 2023; Prayag *et al.*, 2024b). Regarding this, the entrepreneurial marketing skill can help entrepreneurs to plan market strategies and have a better idea of market demands. This factor was widely being studied in SMEs of many developed countries, however, it is still an under-researched area in other contexts (Adel *et al.*, 2020). The entrepreneurial opportunity recognition can help entrepreneurs to take initiative in opportunities that best fit their strengths (Polas *et al.*, 2021). It is the first step in the entrepreneurial process (Otache *et al.*, 2024). Entrepreneurial tenacity as a leadership attribute associated with never giving up and never accepting "no", keeping going with the goal-oriented initiatives (Zeng and Ouyang, 2020) has also the potential to stimulate entrepreneurial initiatives. Entrepreneurial success is often the result of the interplay between various factors, thus examining entrepreneurial marketing, entrepreneurial opportunity and entrepreneurial tenacity in one research model can provide a comprehensive understanding of the antecedents of entrepreneurial initiatives.

Further, past literature emphasized the need for exploration of mechanisms underlying the positive relationship between the above presented factors and their entrepreneurial outcomes (Jarumaneerat *et al.*, 2023). This study further introduces the entrepreneurial mindset which is defined in social cognitive theory as the mode of thinking that strengthens the capability of entrepreneurs to achieve their goals. Entrepreneurial mindset – according to social cognitive theory – is the kind of personal variable that is influenced by personal and external factors in entrepreneurial behavior and action (Cui *et al.*, 2019). Successful entrepreneurs embrace challenges, mistakes and failure as an opportunity to develop skills and to take entrepreneurial initiatives for a successful business (Colombelli *et al.*, 2022). Various studies examined the mediating effect of an entrepreneurial mindset with entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial preparation (Saptono *et al.*, 2020), entrepreneurial intention (Mukhtar *et al.*, 2021), intolerance of uncertainty and career adaptability (Lee and Jung, 2021). However, the study fills the gap by examining the mediating effect of an entrepreneurial mindset between entrepreneurial marketing, entrepreneurial opportunity, entrepreneurial tenacity and women's entrepreneurial initiatives in running businesses. Finally, this study emphasizes the development of women's tourism entrepreneurship in the post-disaster era in Thailand, thus filling the geographical research gap.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1 Women entrepreneurship and crises

Women's entrepreneurship is considered one of the important economic growth indicators of a country's economic development and its contribution to the GDP is widely accepted (Suseno and Abbott, 2021). However, prior industrial reports mentioned that women enterprises have lower growth and productivity as compared to male enterprises (Stefan *et al.*, 2021). The study

by Coleman (2004) noted that women-owned firms are small and engaged with highly competitive and small sectors (retail and services). At the same time, women tend to be more risk-averse than men, focusing more on meaningful work than on earnings (Morgenroth *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, in developing countries, their legal and property rights are less secured and they have less assets and managerial experience to start a business because of the discrimination practices in the workplaces (Franzke *et al.*, 2022). In many cultures women's roles are defined primarily through household responsibilities, therefore they also face difficulties in obtaining external funding for their businesses (Carranza *et al.*, 2018). Nevertheless, women entrepreneurs have the potential to improve their businesses through innovative approaches, branding practices and operational strategies. Therefore, it is one of the major governmental policies to stimulate entrepreneurial behavior among women (Raza *et al.*, 2024).

The results of a literature review conducted by Cardella *et al.* (2021) show that women's participation in entrepreneurial activities is consistently lower than men entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurship in Asian developing countries has great potential to transform society through women empowerment in the region. However, developing countries still have low capabilities for the development of women entrepreneurship with still significant challenges (Khalid *et al.*, 2023). While in Thailand, women entrepreneurs have a significant number approximately 40%, women entrepreneurs have been confronted with failure in entrepreneurial activities during the recent pandemic and it has been considered the major drawback to their entrepreneurial growth. They are concentrated in sectors that are more vulnerable to economic downturns (Selem *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, the existing stereotypes about gender roles can affect how women entrepreneurs are perceived during times of crisis. This can lead to additional challenges in securing support or being taken seriously in the business community (Richardson and Roberts, 2020). Along with this, the failure element is forcing women entrepreneurs to take the initiative in the adoption of better strategies for creative and innovative entrepreneurial contribution (Khalid *et al.*, 2022) (see Figure 1).

2.2 Social cognitive theory

The social cognitive theory developed by Bandura (1986) emphasizes the interaction of people regarding their factors, environmental factors and behavior. This interaction is confirmed by the construct called the reciprocal interaction of person (individual with a set of learned experiences), environment (external social context) and behavior (responses to stimuli to achieve goals) (Bandura, 2001). Previous literature discovered that the entrepreneurial mindset is influenced by knowledge, learning awareness and interaction with individuals in the environment (Çemberci and Karakeçe, 2020; Handayati *et al.*, 2020; Wardana *et al.*, 2020). Social cognitive theory supports the proposed framework of work culture and practices including entrepreneurial marketing, entrepreneurial opportunities and entrepreneurial tenacity to bring about attitudinal change and emotional change (Mukhtar *et al.*, 2021) which eventually influence women entrepreneurial initiatives. Thus, various environmental factors related to entrepreneurship such as market, opportunity, tenacity enhance individual learning, knowledge, mindset and knowledge that encourage to nurture the entrepreneurial initiatives.

In the women entrepreneurial context, these independent variables (entrepreneurial marketing, opportunities and entrepreneurial tenacity) can be seen as influencing the psychological process of individuals, especially women entrepreneurs. These factors may affect how women entrepreneurs perceive it and influence marketing strategies. Social cognitive theory suggests that engaging in successful marketing behaviors can increase an individual's own ability to trade in marketing, leading to more active marketing behaviors. An example of this principle in action could be seen in a scenario where a novice entrepreneur initially lacks confidence in their marketing abilities. However, through consistent effort and exposure to successful marketing strategies, such as targeted advertising campaigns or effective social media engagement, they gradually start to witness positive outcomes, such as



Source(s): The figures are adapted from the socialmedia

Figure 1.
Women entrepreneurs
during natural
disasters
Thailand's sites

increased customer engagement or higher sales conversions. As they observe the direct correlation between their marketing efforts and tangible results, their self-efficacy in marketing skills grows (Figueroa-Domecq *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, they become more proactive and innovative in their marketing endeavors, continually refining their strategies, and exploring new avenues for promoting their products or services. This illustrates how engaging in successful marketing behaviors can reinforce one's belief in their marketing capabilities, leading to a cycle of increased confidence and more effective marketing practices, as posited by social cognitive theory. Moreover, this theory emphasizes the role of monitoring and evaluating opportunities in business decisions.

Furthermore, societal norms and stereotypes have a profound impact on women's self-efficacy and their integration into entrepreneurial networks by shaping their perceptions, access to resources, network dynamics and perceived competence. Addressing these systemic barriers is essential for promoting gender equality and fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports the success and empowerment of women entrepreneurs (Ghaderi *et al.*, 2023).

Gender norms and expectations might be challenged by disasters. According to social cognitive theory, people are shaped by the expectations of society. If a calamity induces a

change in the way others perceive women's capabilities, this might motivate more women to go for business opportunities. A framework for comprehending the interactions between entrepreneurial marketing, opportunities, entrepreneurial tenacity and entrepreneurial mindset in the context of disasters and women's entrepreneurial initiatives is provided by social cognitive theory. Through an analysis of these variables, new perspectives may be obtained about how women might be persuaded to start their business initiatives following natural disasters, defying gender norms and bolstering community resilience and empowerment.

2.3 Entrepreneurial marketing and entrepreneurial initiatives

Marketing is commonly believed as a mechanism for entrepreneurial growth on a large scale and it is considered a more suitable phenomenon according to the available resources (Qiu, 2022). Entrepreneurial marketing is associated with the marketing efforts of entrepreneurs and is related rather to small than to big businesses (Ferreira *et al.*, 2019). It is defined as "the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation" (Morris *et al.*, 2002).

The lack of awareness and newness of their brand cause problem in marketing new ventures in a marketplace. The technological changes and customers' demands are major reasons for entrepreneurial uncertainties, as the customers' demand for new products generally depends on their awareness of the products and value of money. The state of uncertainty is higher for new ventures as other managerial and organizational factors are also influential in the process of, offering new products and services (Eggers *et al.*, 2016).

Entrepreneurship literature recommends the marketing of new ventures (Li *et al.*, 2021; Souakri, 2020). At this point it is worth, however, emphasizing that entrepreneurs within their marketing activities – may build networks, spread information about their firms and current products as well as identify new opportunities, which constitutes a crucial role of entrepreneurial marketing in the entrepreneurial process (Lam and Harker, 2015). The brand awareness of customers will increase through spreading information about products and firms (Roslina and Jimad, 2021) which motivates customers to try new products and further stimulates entrepreneurial initiatives (Raza *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, this study hypothesizes the following:

H1. Entrepreneurial marketing has a positive influence on entrepreneurial initiatives.

2.4 Entrepreneurial opportunity and entrepreneurial initiatives

Entrepreneurial opportunity recognizes the ability to identify new products, raw materials, resources and markets as well as organizing methods that can be familiar by the creation of new relationships (Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017). The opportunities occur from several sources such as technological emergence, unsolved challenges, product demand, development of business models, evolving market awareness, innovation and rearrangement of knowledge (Polas *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, women must be vigilant as entrepreneurial initiatives depend on entrepreneurial opportunities. If an opportunity is not taken at the right time, it can cause complications for business as well. Contrarily, good opportunities in the marketplace help businesses to stabilize, grow and get competitive advantages. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. Entrepreneurial opportunity has a positive influence on entrepreneurial initiatives.

2.5 Entrepreneurial tenacity and entrepreneurial initiatives

Entrepreneurial tenacity is a personal trait that describes entrepreneurship and its concept is not sufficiently studied in the entrepreneurial literature (Rauch and Frese, 2007). It helps to

solve the determined social actions by carrying out viable goals-oriented activities and energy when confronted with social hurdles. Further, [Tang et al. \(2015\)](#) revealed that tenacity is a behavioral commitment to entrepreneurial ventures. As entrepreneurs take initiative, they develop confidence which increases their attentiveness in using the prior information of markets, innovation and experience to start an enterprise and awareness of opportunities. They endure in starting, sustaining, adhering to and finding something valuable in their new ventures. [Nsereko \(2020\)](#) indicated that entrepreneurial tenacity has a significant association between the creation and growth of new ventures. Entrepreneurs overcome the hindrances related to the social needs of ventures with the use of knowledge and readiness to launch the venture. Therefore, this study hypothesizes:

H3. Entrepreneurial tenacity has a positive influence on entrepreneurial initiatives.

2.6 Entrepreneurial mindset

Entrepreneurial mindset refers to a particular state of mind in which humans adapt their behavior toward entrepreneurial activities and consequences ([Kwapisz et al., 2022](#)). Moreover, [Thompson et al. \(2014\)](#) confirms that an entrepreneurial mindset is important to establish and participate in entrepreneurial activities with new and valuable creations in a competitive market. The entrepreneurial marketing process is encouraged to be innovative and believes in a mindset, process and outcomes ([Yadav and Bansal, 2020](#)). In this context, different companies adopt the entrepreneurial marketing process, and it should be more successful which is expected to increase the entrepreneurial mindset for value addition in entrepreneurial ventures.

According to [Shane and Nicolaou \(2015\)](#), the entrepreneurial opportunity is the point at which customers' demand meets the feasibility of satisfying products and services. This entrepreneurial opportunity identifies the specific criteria required to move the idea into an opportunity, and it helps to develop the entrepreneurial mindset. Along with this, an entrepreneurial mindset allows entrepreneurs to observe the opportunities and utilize the available resources in new methods by forming and implementing the utilization of these opportunities ([Kuratko et al., 2021](#)).

Moreover, entrepreneurial tenacity is a behavioral characteristic of committing to entrepreneurial ventures ([Nadelson et al., 2018](#)). Similarly, it is the ability to handle innovative situations, work with others and create connections between people in failed situations to establish a new understanding between them. However, entrepreneurial tenacity works as a rope in developing an entrepreneurial mindset that entangles, processes and acts upon the idea of entrepreneurial initiatives and needs plans and supports ([Zeng and Ouyang, 2020](#)). This importance is shown in that it helps the entrepreneurs build a new idea in developing the organization with new innovative ideas and values, that are encouraging and supporting the culture. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H4. Entrepreneurial marketing has a positive influence on entrepreneurial mindset.

H5. Entrepreneurial opportunity has a positive influence on entrepreneurial mindset.

H6. Entrepreneurial tenacity has a positive influence on entrepreneurial mindset.

H7. Entrepreneurial mindset has a positive influence on entrepreneurial initiatives.

2.7 Mediating role of entrepreneurial mindset

[Njeru et al. \(2012\)](#) describe that an entrepreneurial mindset is established by creativity, innovation, risk-taking and business awareness. Along with this, entrepreneurial initiatives portray organizational willingness and achieve the desired results in terms of strategies,

behavior, processes and action (Aydogan *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, Wardana *et al.* (2020) suggested that an entrepreneurial mindset is the crucial factor that arouses the performance of an organization. Furthermore, Adokiye *et al.* (2017) urged the emergence and criticality of an entrepreneurial mindset for SME success. They further added that an entrepreneurial mindset supports the building of women-owned organizations that ultimately lead to economic contributions by adding new jobs and reducing poverty (Pidduck *et al.*, 2021). Although, the entrepreneurial mindset is a cognitive ability that allows individuals to adjust and adapt to an uncertain situation. Further, people with an entrepreneurial mindset are frequently drawn to new opportunities, innovation, creation of new values as well as having the capacity to take risks and accept the realities of change and uncertainty (Kadam *et al.*, 2019). Being resourceful and having entrepreneurial qualities and initiatives are essential for success (Cifci and Cetin, 2023). A well-known entrepreneurial mindset is a propensity to find, assess and take advantage of possibilities, which comprises looking for and chasing new chances of entrepreneurial tenacity. An entrepreneurial mindset is defined by persistently seeking out chances, thinking differently, being intuitive and executive, taking risks and doing away with the status quo (Daspit *et al.*, 2021). By measuring an entrepreneurial mindset and breaking through competencies, entrepreneurship tenacity stimulates initiatives (Lynch and Corbett, 2021). The present study hypothesized the mediating role of entrepreneurial mindset in increasing the positive attitude, behavior and belief toward entrepreneurial initiatives. It formulates the following hypothesis:

- H8. Entrepreneurial mindset positively mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing and entrepreneurial initiative.
- H9. Entrepreneurial mindset positively mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial opportunity and entrepreneurial initiative.
- H10. Entrepreneurial mindset positively mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial tenacity and entrepreneurial initiative.

The conceptual framework of the study is provided as follows (see Figure 2).

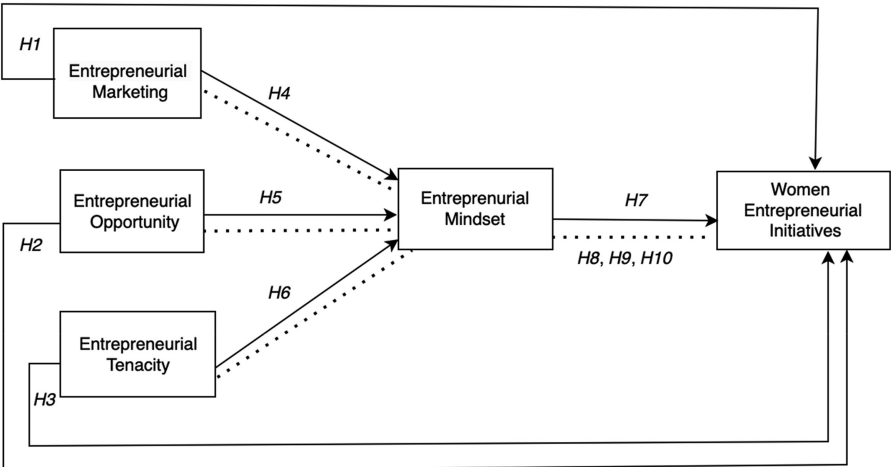


Figure 2.
Conceptual model

Source(s): Authors' own compilation

3. Methodology

3.1 Sampling and data collection

This study adopted the quantitative approach, using a survey method for data collection. It intended to focus on women entrepreneurs related to the tourism sector of Thailand. Thailand is one of the top 10 tourism destinations in the world and a maximum number of women entrepreneurs relates to the tourism sector. The survey was carried out with the assistance of women entrepreneurs who are dealing with complex problems and obstacles in their entrepreneurial endeavors. The data were collected from the Andaman Sea coast area because it is the backbone of the tourism industry of Thailand. Andaman coastal area is famous for water activities, and it is more prone to natural disasters and crisis that impacts not only the landscape but entrepreneurs as well. Andaman coastline of Thailand holds the maximum number of tourists and women entrepreneurs to host them and support their families.

The cluster sampling technique was used in this study because the population would be divided into three further multi clusters that are Northern Andaman Coast, the Central Andaman Coast and Southern Andaman Coast. Before the actual data collection, a pre-test was administered to 52 respondents to confirm they understood the concepts used in the survey and to validate its content. All participants found the questionnaire easy to understand and to fulfill its intended goal. In this study, 600 questionnaires were distributed to respondents to get the maximum response rate. The questionnaires that were returned were 409. This study found that values are extremely diverted from the mean point and get the uproar to data. These values were detected and removed. Therefore, this study used Mahalanobis distance method to detect multivariate outliers through SPSS and excluded them from the main data analysis (De Maesschalck *et al.*, 2000). Further, the incomplete and missing items >40% were removed (Mirzaei *et al.*, 2022). After the deletion of outliers and half-filled questionnaires, 372 responses were carried out for further analysis.

3.2 Measurement

The study adopted the measurement scale of five constructs from previous studies. The study used the 21 items for the measurement of entrepreneurial marketing adopted by Hoque and Awang (2016). In this study, six items were used for the measurement of entrepreneurial opportunity, adopted from Farery and Nyang'au (2021). The entrepreneurial tenacity measurement scale was adopted from Nsereko (2020) and consisted of four items. The mediating variable of entrepreneurial mindset was measured with the use of a six-item scale adopted from Mukhtar *et al.* (2021). Finally, the 20-item measurement scale of entrepreneurial initiatives was adopted from Al Qudah (2018). All constructs were measured by the seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree).

3.3 Data analysis

The construct of entrepreneurial marketing has five dimensions, and it was analyzed in second order through a repetitive indicator approach in Smart PLS. In considering the validity and reliability of entrepreneurial marketing dimensions, one item was deleted from the dimension of risk-taking and one item was deleted from the dimension of resource leveraging due to their loadings lower than 0.5. Furthermore, one item was deleted from the construct of entrepreneurial opportunity. The study also deleted three items from the management support dimension and six items from the dimension titled strategies and both belonged to the construct of entrepreneurial initiatives. The deletion of items was based on research context and these were less than the allowed limits of 20% of total items (Hair *et al.*, 2013).

4. Results

The next phase to ensure is goodness of model fit which have several criterions to satisfy. The first step is to ensure the predictive relevance (Q^2). The Q^2 represents that the model is meeting the criteria of predictive relevance through Stone–Geisser criterion which is measured through the procedure mentioned as blindfolding. It assumes that the model should provide the dependent latent variable indicators. Similarly, it measures the accuracy of data prediction based on the model's parameters and predictive power is measured as well (Hair *et al.*, 2016). There is also no specific threshold value but the value of Q^2 should be more than zero and it indicates the predictive relevance of the model (Hair *et al.*, 2013). The predictive relevance value of this study was 0.425.

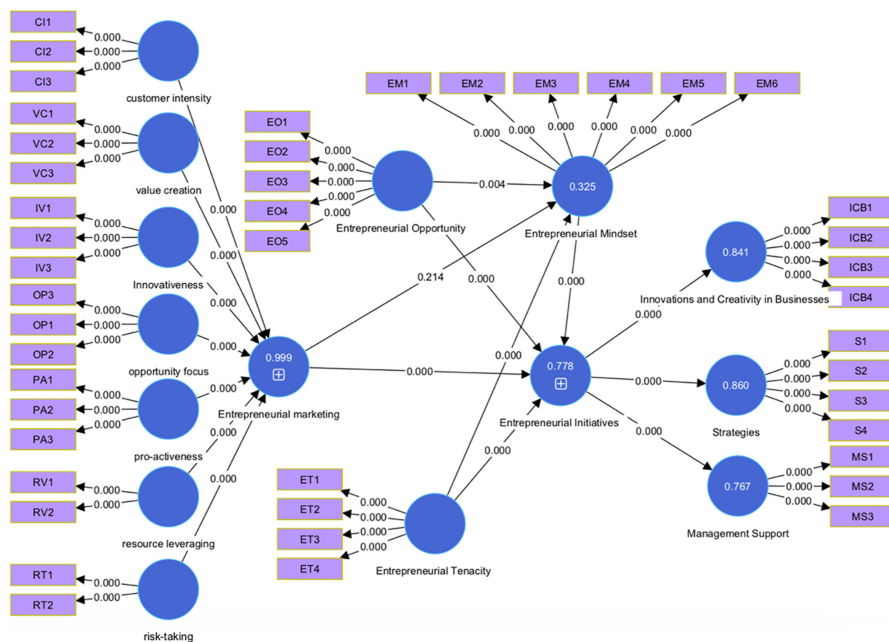
After the measurement of predictive relevance, the next criterion to meet is the coefficient of determination (R^2) of depending latent variables. It indicates the variance of the dependent variable due to predictors (Hair *et al.*, 2016). Henseler *et al.* (2009) mentioned R^2 values as moderate if it ranged between 0.33 and 0.67. The higher values show a higher level of variance, and it mostly depends on the research context. The acceptance level is 10% higher than the threshold level (Falk and Miller, 1992). In this study, the value of R^2 was 0.075 which determined that the model has substantial predictive validity. After that, the study measured the effect sizes of direct relationships and as per previous studies, the values should be at least higher than 0.02 to the range of 0.35 (Hair *et al.*, 2013). The study met the criteria, and all values of effect sizes were in an acceptable range.

4.1 Test of measurement model

To measure the model through Smart PLS, this study ensured convergent validity, internal consistency and discriminant validity. The convergent validity is ensured through consideration of the average variance extracted (AVE) and the outer loadings of the study. Internal consistency is ensured through the measurement of composite reliability (CR). The study ensured discriminant validity based on the proposed criteria of Fornell–Larcker's and the measurement of cross-loadings (Hair *et al.*, 2016).

The first step is to check the convergent validity of the constructs. Convergent validity measures the level of correlation between two distinct sources countering the same measure (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Literature has suggested measuring the average variance extracted to measure the convergence of items (Hair *et al.*, 2016). The proposed convergent value of average variance extracted is 0.5 and values higher than 0.5 show sufficient convergence (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). This average variance extracted values of this study is higher than 0.5 which indicates the establishment of adequate convergent validity. The convergent validity includes factor loading that shows the correlation of factors of given items (Hair *et al.*, 2010). In this study, the loadings of factors were higher than the threshold level of 0.5 which shows the strength of convergent validity.

Furthermore, the study investigated the internal consistency as well. The value of composite reliability of constructs ranges from 0.8 to 0.9 which is a highly desirable and acceptable (Sekaran, 2003). The next step is a measurement of internal consistency that is based on the results of similar tests. The internal consistency ensures the degree to which the item of a construct is homogeneous and reflects that construct. There is a redefined acceptance level of composite reliability the least acceptable level of composite reliability is 0.6–0.7 (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019). The value of composite reliability ranging away from 0.6 to 0.9 may not be considered adequate. However, there is an exception that if there is no redundancy issue in the items of measurement scale, then composite reliability can be considered highly reliable. In the current study, the value of composite reliability was ranging from 0.83 to 0.93 which is considered reliable and acceptable. Figure 3 represents the measurement model of the study.



Source(s): The figure is developed through SmartPLS by using PLS-SEM Algorithm feature

Figure 3.
Measurement model

After that, the study intends to measure inter-correlation of items of specific measures through a reliability test adopted. Literature shows that it is almost impossible for a single item to measure a concept fully and it makes it necessary to measure internal consistency (Hahn and Ang, 2017). There are several tests to ensure internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha is one of the widely accepted techniques (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). The value of Cronbach's alpha should be higher than 0.6, the value of Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.6 to 0.7 is considered to be satisfactory, the value between 0.8 and 0.95 is considered good, however, it is not recommended to have values higher than 0.95 (Ursachi *et al.*, 2015). In this study, the values of Cronbach's alpha were in an acceptable range. The final measurement model is shown in Table 1.

The discriminant validity of this study was measured through Fornell–Larcker's criterion and heterotrait-monotrait ratio. The discriminant validity ensures the distinctiveness of a construct from another construct (Hair *et al.*, 2013). The review of the literature did not provide a specific threshold for discriminant validity. However, most scholars mentioned that the desirable and acceptable threshold value is 0.90 or lower (Hair *et al.*, 2016). As per Fornell–Larcker's criterion, the square root of the average variance extracted should be higher on their own constructs than correlations with other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The values of HTMT and Fornell–Larcker's are mentioned in Tables 2 and 3 simultaneously indicating that loadings are highest on their respective constructs.

4.2 Test of hypotheses

From the analysis, this study confirmed eight hypotheses, and two hypotheses were rejected, and the details are provided in Table 4 as well. Hypothesis 1 proposed that entrepreneurial

Table 1.
Measurement Model

First Order	Second Order	Item Labelling	Loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Customer Intensity		CI1: My business enterprise frequently measures the customer satisfaction	0.868	0.902	0.754	0.837
		CI2: My business enterprise closely monitors the level of commitment to serving customers' needs	0.868			
		CI3: All employees in my enterprise recognize the importance of satisfying the customers	0.870			
Value Creation		VC1: My enterprise creates value for consumers with excellent customer service	0.847	0.874	0.699	0.784
		VC2: Providing value for customers is the most important thing of my enterprise	0.818			
		VC3: My enterprise 's value is the driving force behind its operation	0.843			
Innovativeness		IV1: My business enterprise creates an atmosphere that encourages innovativeness	0.786	0.836	0.630	0.707
		IV2: My business enterprise tends to be more innovative than most of competitors	0.804			
		IV3: My business enterprise uses innovative approaches to have the job done efficiently	0.792			
Opportunity Focus		OP1: My business enterprise is always looking for new opportunities	0.756	0.871	0.693	0.778
		OP2: My business enterprise does whatever it takes to pursue a new opportunity	0.854			
		OP3: Management looks beyond current market trends for more opportunities for my business.	0.882			
Pro-activeness		PA1: In my business enterprise, I enjoy overcoming obstacles to my ideas	0.891	0.913	0.778	0.858
		PA2: I am good at identifying opportunities for my business enterprise	0.887			
		PA3: I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve business enterprise	0.867			
Resource Leveraging		RV1: My business enterprise able to leverage the resources by sharing	0.897	0.890	0.802	0.753
		RV2: My business enterprise prides itself on doing more with less	0.894			
		RV3: My business enterprise has always found a way to get the resources need to get the job done <i>(Omitted based on lower loadings)</i>				
Risk Taking		RT1: My business enterprise would rather accept a risk to pursue an opportunity than miss it altogether	0.933	0.933	0.874	0.856
		RT2: My business enterprise is willing to take risks for benefits of itself	0.936			

(continued)

First Order	Second Order	Item Labelling	Loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
	Entrepreneurial Marketing (Hoque and Awang, 2016)	RT3: My business enterprise is always ready to take risks (Omitted based on lower loadings)		0.963	0.593	0.959
		Entrepreneurial Opportunity (Farery and Nyang'au, 2021)		0.934	0.738	0.911
		EO1: I assess the market to identify an opportunity before starting a business	0.861			
		EO2: I know the right people to approach to avail opportunities	0.886			
		EO3: I have technical skills that assist me in exploring opportunities	0.862			
		EO4: The customer complaints are a source of business opportunity	0.844			
	Entrepreneurial Mindset (Mukhtar <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	EO5: I have a broad knowledge of my business area	0.841			
		EO6: I know where to locate the necessary raw materials once I recognize an opportunity (Omitted based on lower loadings)		0.818	0.530	0.713
		ET1: I have frequently interacted with other people to acquire new information	0.724			
		ET2: I can identify business opportunities from the new market knowledge that is available to us	0.777			
		ET3: I constantly consider how to better exploit the business knowledge	0.747			
		ET4: I can combine existing market knowledge with the newly acquired	0.658	0.860	0.506	0.806
		EM1: I have determined either positive or negative impact in elaborating with the entrepreneurial activities. EM2: I have determined whether it is desirable for us to be engaged in the entrepreneurial activities	0.669 0.693			

(continued)

Table 1.

Table 1.

First Order	Second Order	Item Labelling	Loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
		EM3: I have determined about possible business ideas in the entrepreneurial activities	0.685			
		EM4: I have determined either negative or positive information in acquaintance with entrepreneurial activities.	0.736			
		EM5: I have determined the financial chances to be engaged in the entrepreneurial activities	0.735			
		EM6: I have determined whether we have the time to involve in the entrepreneurial activities	0.727			
				0.889	0.670	0.831
Innovation and Creativity in Business		ICB1: Innovations and creativity promote successful business	0.649			
		ICB2: It is important to be innovative and creative in business	0.860			
		ICB3: Good business environment supports creativity and innovation	0.885			
		ICB4: Good chances support creativity and innovation	0.859			
Strategies		S1: Well-built strategies create a better entrepreneurship	0.681			
		S2: Planned strategies help entrepreneurial initiatives	0.862			
		S3: Employees are part of resources in entrepreneurial initiatives	0.876			
		S4: Training is a crucial part in entrepreneurial initiatives	0.583			
		S5: It is important to be aware of the meaning of entrepreneurship before embracing it				
		(Omitted based on lower loadings)				
		S6: Most entrepreneurship initiatives are based on strategies and planning				
		(Omitted based on lower loadings)				
		S7: Technology entrepreneurs derive its strength from technology as technology is powerful entrepreneurship initiatives support				
		(Omitted based on lower loadings)				
		S8: A strategic infrastructure can promote a good entrepreneurship initiative				
		(Omitted based on lower loadings)				
		S9: A good technological infrastructure can promote entrepreneurship initiatives				
		(Omitted based on lower loadings)				
		S10: Resources are important to entrepreneurship initiatives				
		(Omitted based on lower loadings)				

(continued)

First Order	Second Order	Item Labelling	Loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Management Support	Entrepreneurial Initiative (Al Qudat, 2018)	MS1: The manage is the first support of entrepreneurship initiatives as entrepreneurship initiatives starts within the managerial environment	0.871	0.927	0.809	0.882
		MS2: A manager must be aware of entrepreneurship initiatives meaning and benefits	0.922			
		MS3: There is always a good entrepreneurship initiative in a good culture	0.905			
		MS4: The culture is the first incubator of entrepreneurship initiatives (Omitted based on lower loadings)				
		MS5: A culture can support innovation and creativity (Omitted based on lower loadings)				
		MS6: The culture and the environment are the bases of good entrepreneurship initiatives (Omitted based on lower loadings)				
				0.931	0.554	0.916
Note(s): CI: Customer Intensity, VC: Value Creation, IV: Innovativeness, OP: Opportunity Focus, PA: Pro-activeness, RV: Resource Leveraging, RT: Risk Taking, EO: Entrepreneurial Opportunity, ET: Entrepreneurial Tenacity, EM: Entrepreneurial Mindset, ICB: Innovation and Creativity in Business, S: Strategies, MS: Management Support						
Source(s): The measurement items are adapted from the previous studies and the values are obtained through Smart PLS						

Table 1.

Table 2.
Heterotrait-
monotrait (HTMT)

	Entrepreneurial initiatives	Entrepreneurial mindset	Entrepreneurial opportunity	Entrepreneurial tenacity	Entrepreneurial marketing
Entrepreneurial Initiatives					
Entrepreneurial Mindset	0.709				
Entrepreneurial Opportunity	0.875	0.578			
Entrepreneurial Tenacity	0.669	0.546	0.56		
Entrepreneurial Marketing	0.887	0.534	0.908	0.913	
Source(s): The table is developed through Smart PLS-SEM Algorithm feature					

Table 3.
Fornell–Larcker

Entrepreneurial initiatives	Entrepreneurial mindset	Entrepreneurial opportunity	Entrepreneurial tenacity	Entrepreneurial marketing
0.745				
0.61	0.711			
0.702	0.508	0.859		
0.553	0.456	0.458	0.728	
0.633	0.486	0.749	0.473	0.77
Source(s): The table is developed through Smart PLS-SEM Algorithm feature				

marketing has a positive influence on entrepreneurial initiatives. The results showed a positive relationship by having $\beta = 0.467$, $t = 9.348$, $p < 0.05$, therefore H1 is accepted. The second hypothesis (H2) assumed that entrepreneurial opportunity has a positive influence on entrepreneurial initiatives. The results of analysis indicate a positive relationship at $\beta = 0.244$, $t = 4.376$, $p < 0.05$, therefore, H2 is accepted. The third hypothesis (H3) proposed that entrepreneurial tenacity has a positive influence on entrepreneurial initiatives and results led ($\beta = 0.129$, $t = 3.874$, $p < 0.05$) to the acceptance of this hypothesis. Further, the fourth hypothesis (H4) proposed that entrepreneurial marketing has a positive influence on entrepreneurial mindset. The results showed that H4 is rejected at $\beta = 0.114$, $t = 1.262$, $p < 0.05$. The fifth hypothesis (H5) indicated that entrepreneurial opportunity has a positive influence on entrepreneurial mindset and the hypothesis is accepted at $\beta = 0.288$, $t = 3.009$, $p < 0.05$.

The sixth hypothesis (H6) purposed that entrepreneurial tenacity has a positive influence on entrepreneurial mindset and the result indicates a significant relationship at $\beta = 0.271$, $t = 4.772$, $p < 0.05$. Regarding H7, the result showed that entrepreneurial mindset has a positive influence on entrepreneurial initiatives, thus accepting H7 ($\beta = 0.200$, $t = 5.423$, $p < 0.0$). Hypothesis 8 proposes that the entrepreneurial mindset positively mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing and entrepreneurial initiative. The results indicated an insignificant relationship at $\beta = 0.023$, $t = 1.222$, $p < 0.05$, thus, H8 was rejected. Moreover, the ninth Hypothesis (H9) proposed that entrepreneurial mindset positively mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial opportunity and entrepreneurial initiative and the relationship is accepted at $\beta = 0.257$, $t = 2.563$, $p < 0.05$. Finally, H10 proposes that an entrepreneurial mindset positively mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial tenacity and entrepreneurial initiative. The results indicated a significant relation at

Hypotheses	Beta	T value	Sig	VIF	Effect	R ²	Q ²	Decision
H1 Entrepreneurial Marketing → Entrepreneurial Initiatives	0.467	9.348	0	3.727	0.264	0.075	0.425	Accepted
H2 Entrepreneurial Opportunity → Entrepreneurial Initiatives	0.244	4.376	0	3.766	0.071			Accepted
H3 Entrepreneurial Tenacity → Entrepreneurial Initiatives	0.129	3.874	0	1.416	0.053			Accepted
H4 Entrepreneurial marketing → Entrepreneurial Mindset	0.114	1.262	0.207	3.708	0.005			Rejected
H5 Entrepreneurial Opportunity → Entrepreneurial Mindset	0.288	3.009	0.003	3.644	0.034			Accepted
H6 Entrepreneurial Tenacity → Entrepreneurial Mindset	0.271	4.772	0	1.307	0.083			Accepted
H7 Entrepreneurial Mindset → Entrepreneurial Initiatives	0.200	5.423	0	1.482	0.121			Accepted
H8 Entrepreneurial Marketing → Entrepreneurial Mindset → Entrepreneurial Initiatives	0.023	1.222	0.222					Rejected
H9 Entrepreneurial Opportunity → Entrepreneurial Mindset → Entrepreneurial Initiatives	0.057	2.563	0.011					Accepted
H10 Entrepreneurial Tenacity → Entrepreneurial Mindset → Entrepreneurial Initiatives	0.054	3.291	0.001					Accepted
Source(s): The table is developed through Smart PLS-SEM Bootstrapping feature								

Table 4.
Hypothesis testing

$\beta = 0.054, t = 3.291, p < 0.05$, thus H10 is accepted. The following figure represents the structural equation model of study (see Figure 4).

5. Discussion and concluding thoughts

The findings of study indicated that H1 is accepted, and one compelling rationale lies in the indispensability of entrepreneurial marketing for empowering women as prospective entrepreneurs. The brand awareness of customers will increase through spreading information about products and firms (Roslina and Jimad, 2021). It will motivate customers to try new products and further stimulate entrepreneurial initiatives (Zhang, 2020). Further, the result of study shows the acceptance of H2 is endorsed by previous studies (Polas et al., 2021) and evidence confirmed that opportunities occur from several sources such as technological emergence, unsolved challenges, product demand, development of the business model, restriction of industry, evolving market awareness, innovation and rearrangement of knowledge.

The acceptance of H3 indicated the positive relationship and the findings are similar to previous literature (Sadiku-Dushi et al., 2020), each entrepreneurial opportunity and the effective persistence in each role requires a set of competencies including knowledge or expertise, skills, perseverance, initiative and efficiency orientation. These competencies play an important role in influencing the performance of women entrepreneurs. Moreover, H4 is rejected and results of this study is supported by (Gielnik et al., 2014; Li et al., 2015) and one of the reason found that some drawbacks and disadvantages of entrepreneurial experience in marketing and emerging economies require young new entrepreneurs that are more open to unique opportunities. Furthermore, the identification of drawbacks and the need for young entrepreneurs open to unique opportunities adds another layer of

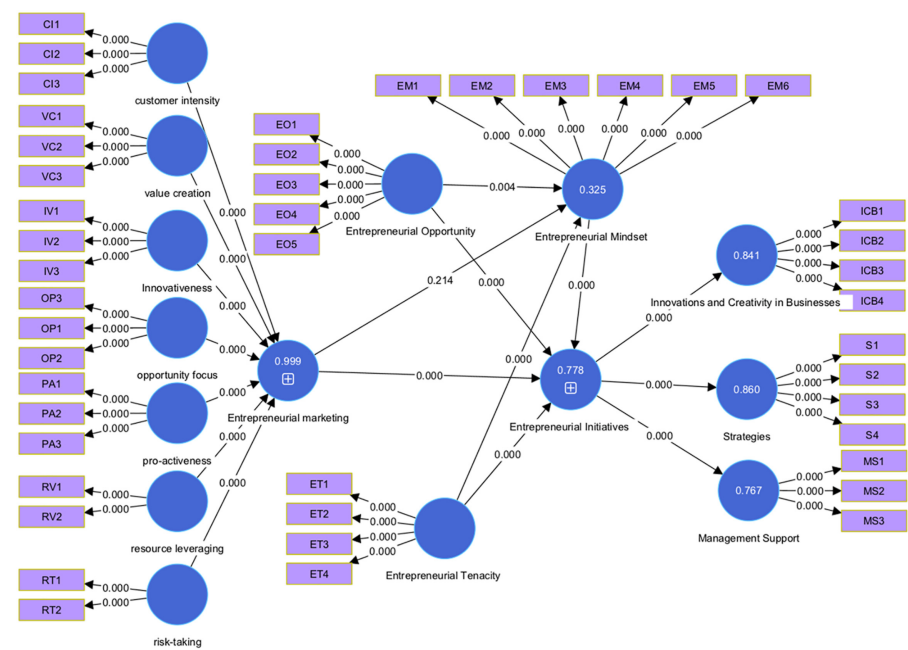


Figure 4.
Structural
equation model

Source(s): The figure is developed through SmartPLS by using bootstrapping feature

complexity, emphasizing the importance of considering contextual factors in understanding these relationships.

The H5 accepted in this study, and it implies that when individuals perceive and engage with entrepreneurial opportunities, it tends to foster and positively impact their entrepreneurial mindset. In reality, encountering and seizing entrepreneurial opportunities are linked to the development or enhancement of a mindset conducive to entrepreneurial thinking and actions (Hamdan, 2023). This result is consistent with the argument of Pidduck *et al.* (2021) and provides the evidence that entrepreneurial opportunity beliefs have been approached in various ways including, confidence, recognition and evaluation and entrepreneurial opportunity positively influence entrepreneurial mindset. Furthermore, acceptance of H6 denotes that individuals who exhibit tenacity in entrepreneurial pursuits are likely to have a mindset that aligns with the characteristics and perspectives essential for successful entrepreneurship. The finding is similar to Kuratko (2017) study and highlights that having the tenacity to push an idea through to reality combines a special perspective as an entrepreneurial mindset.

The H7 is accepted and the result is in line with Rajagopal (2022), noted that women have been given much emphasis in recent entrepreneurship research due to their vital contributions to the economy of every country, which is supported by the fact that in many countries, women are considered a primary potential source for the economic development and new initiatives are positively associated with an entrepreneurial mindset. Further, the H8 is rejected, and the finding implies that the entrepreneurial mindset does not act as a positive mediator in the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing and entrepreneurial initiative. This finding opens avenues for further research and encourages a more in-depth exploration of the factors influencing the connection between these variables. This finding is similar to Ruhara and Kayitana (2018) the result and suggests that certain barriers to advertising and marketing experience restricted the growth of the entrepreneurial mindset in the organization.

The acceptance of H9, which posited that entrepreneurial mindset serves as a positive mediator in the relationship between entrepreneurial opportunity and entrepreneurial initiative, suggests that having an entrepreneurial mindset plays a mediating role in influencing the connection between recognizing entrepreneurial opportunities and taking entrepreneurial initiatives. Therefore, Suvittawat (2019) suggested that a combined model of an entrepreneurial mindset is a strong predictor of performance that represents both the themes of entrepreneurial opportunity in their study of entrepreneurial initiatives. Finally, H10 is accepted and the result is supported by Lynch and Corbett (2021) and confirms that having the self-assurance, tolerance for ambiguity and necessary education for conducting successful entrepreneurial ventures could boost the likelihood of success for SMEs and make it possible to compete in a dynamic environment.

5.1 Conclusion

The study concluded that entrepreneurial marketing, entrepreneurial opportunity and entrepreneurial tenacity have a significant influence on entrepreneurial initiatives and the entrepreneurial mindset successfully mediates between dependent variables and entrepreneurial initiatives. Additionally, it provides evidence of how entrepreneurial marketing, entrepreneurial opportunity, entrepreneurial tenacity and entrepreneurial mindset affect women's entrepreneurial initiatives in a crisis. It also offers the valuable insights to practitioners about natural disaster effects and proposing pioneering suggestions to uplift the tourism entrepreneurial sector.

5.2 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the existing literature on crisis management in tourism as well as women's entrepreneurship research by documenting that entrepreneurial marketing

demonstrates the way of thinking and complements a positive relationship with entrepreneurial opportunity, entrepreneurial tenacity is significantly associated with entrepreneurial initiatives. Furthermore, this study documents the initial evidence of the mediating effect of entrepreneurial mindset with critical thinking and in the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing, entrepreneurial opportunity, entrepreneurial tenacity and entrepreneurial initiatives. The study recognizes that numerous studies investigated the performance of women entrepreneurs through various aspects, but the current study assesses the impact of the women's initiative in the tourism sector of Thailand. As a result, they differ from developed nations in terms of their culture, systems and legal aspects.

Social cognitive theory can help women entrepreneurs develop the psychological skills necessary for flexibility and change. It can provide strategies to cope with barriers and uncertainties, which are especially important in post-crisis situations. Through the implication of cognitive strategies for problem-solving and stress management, professional women can better deal with challenges. The theory can also contribute by helping women entrepreneurs reevaluate and reframe their beliefs and attitudes toward work in a post-pandemic world to challenge negative self-perceptions, promote and develop a sense of achievement and positive thinking about adapting to changing circumstances. Social psychological theory suggests that skills and competencies can be acquired through learning and practice. Training and skills development programs tailored to the unique challenges faced by women working in a post-pandemic environment can empower them to take the lead and succeed. The theory emphasizes the importance of feedback and goal setting for motivation and performance improvement. Women entrepreneurs can benefit from structured feedback mechanisms and set achievable yet challenging goals to move their programs forward.

5.3 Practical implications

This study has practical implications for policymakers, women entrepreneurs, institutions and researchers. Women entrepreneurs and policymakers can use this study's findings to add their capabilities to attain the objectives. One significant implication is providing support mechanisms and educational initiatives that help women entrepreneurs recognize and capitalize on entrepreneurial opportunities arising from technological advancements, market demands and other sources. Further, women entrepreneurs accept the realities of change and uncertainty and assume associated risks. In this vein, implementing programs that focus on building self-assurance, tolerance for ambiguity and necessary education among women entrepreneurs to enhance their likelihood of success in dynamic tourism environments is crucial.

In line with the positive effect of entrepreneurial tenacity on entrepreneurial initiatives, policymakers could develop mentorship programs and training modules that focus on building the necessary competencies, including knowledge, skills, perseverance, initiative and efficiency orientation, to enhance the performance of women entrepreneurs.

The current study offers guidance to policymakers and supports the institution while also having ramifications for women and researchers, as well as providing women. The study provides more practical insights that women entrepreneurs need initiative and a business-starting mindset as well as the opportunity to launch their ventures through the organization of seminars, workshops, women's incentives or women's entrepreneurial universities. It implies that women's motivation and confidence can improve entrepreneurship performance. It also advises the government and policymakers to host a seminar or women's entrepreneurial university that aids women entrepreneurs in building confidence and launching a firm.

5.4 Limitations and directions for future research

This study has some limitations that could be addressed in future studies. This study collected the responses from women entrepreneurs from tourism-based business

organizations, but other social and non-profit organizations can be chosen in future research. This study is limited to one country which depicts this study as applicable to women's entrepreneurial perspective in Thailand. Moreover, future research is suggested for other developed and developing countries in similar contexts specifically in gender-based studies. The study does not explicitly explore cultural influences on entrepreneurial initiatives, potentially overlooking significant determinants. Future research could integrate cultural dimensions to better capture the diversity of entrepreneurial experiences.

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A consensus map for Ladakh's development as potential geotourism destination: key drivers

Potential
geotourism
destination

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Received 19 June 2023
Revised 6 October 2023
17 December 2023
17 February 2024
Accepted 22 February 2024

Abstract

Purpose – Given the prevalence of protecting geoheritage tourism sites, Ladakh has enormous potential. However, Ladakh's potential and developments in its growth as a geotourism destination have received scant consideration. As such, this paper aims to explore Ladakh's key drivers as a potential geotourism destination through cognitive dissonance and protection motivation theories.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper conducted in-depth interviews with 86 geoscientists and tourism professionals to assess Ladakh's potential as a geotourism destination. This paper used a qualitative approach to congregate four constructs based on the image difference of the consensus map.

Findings – Because of the interviewees' heterogeneity and uniqueness, meaningful constructs in the consensus were included for each figure and cloud words. This paper concluded that four drivers are the main forces behind geotourism development.

Originality/value – This paper explores the drivers – geotourism services, legislative requirements, experiential geotourism and SPARC (scientific, preservation, aesthetic, recreational, cultural) values – affecting

Funding: No funding was received to assist with the preparation of this manuscript.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

Author contributions: Rimsha Khalid, Software, Validation, Investigation, Resources and Writing – Original Draft.

Rajinder Kumar, Validation, Investigation, Resources and Writing – Original Draft.

Rupa Sinha, Conceptualization, Writing – Review and Editing and Project Administration.

Kareem M. Selem, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal analysis, Supervision and Data curation.

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geotourism in Ladakh. It is feasible to lessen the negative effects of overtourism and make sure that Ladakh's distinctive nature is preserved for future generations by implementing sustainable tourism practices.

Keywords Geotourism, Qualitative approach, Geological drivers, Tourism destination, Ladakh

Paper type Research paper

Highlights

- Geotourism as novel phenomenon that combines sustainable tourism, geoheritage and geodiversity.
- A qualitative approach was conducted based on the image difference of the consensus map.
- Engaging with local communities and stakeholders to ensure that they benefit from geotourism services.

Graphical abstract



1. Introduction

Visiting scenically beautiful natural areas is always in demand (Selem *et al.*, 2023b). However, geotourism has only recently gained attention (Quesada-Valverde and Quesada-Román, 2023). The rapidly expanding niche or special interest tourism sector now includes

geotourism (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022), a relatively new addition that centers tourism on highly valuable geological and geographical landscapes (Hose *et al.*, 2011). A form of natural area tourism known as “geotourism” focuses specifically on geology and landscape interpretation, promotion and conservation through education and appreciation. Newsome and Dowling (2010). Geotourism has shown tremendous growth with the rise of geoparks and tourism based on the geological environment (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023). A particular type of nature-based tourism known as “geotourism” is strongly in favor of the preservation of geographic diversity (Bhat *et al.*, 2023).

Further, it involves biotic (flora and fauna), abiotic (geology, landscape, geomorphic forms and climate) and cultural elements (Dowling, 2013; Mahato and Jana, 2021). Additionally, it promotes geosites as tourist destinations and preserves geodiversity through an understanding of earth science (Hose *et al.*, 2011). This is a new phenomenon that integrates geodiversity, geoheritage and sustainable tourism (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022). It has been suggested that environmentally innovative tourism should receive more attention because it promotes social and environmental responsibility (Pásková, 2012).

The rise of geotourism is readily apparent through United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Network of Geoparks program (Fassoulas *et al.*, 2022). The promotion of geotourism endeavors is closely linked to the establishment and rise of geoparks globally, with numerous proposals for new geoparks gaining traction (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023). This is accomplished through self-guided exploration of geological attractions and engaging in their activities (Ober, 2023). Currently, there are 195 geoparks within 48 countries (UNESCO, 2023). The swift proliferation of geoparks on a global scale is contributing to geotourism’s gradual expansion, turning it into a thriving sector (Dhirendra *et al.*, 2022). This extensive range of geobiodiversity has positioned Himalayan area as an alluring destination for geoscientists (Bhat *et al.*, 2022).

The Northwestern Himalaya, encompassing Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh (Dhirendra *et al.*, 2022), boasts remarkable geological diversity, encompassing a spectrum of rocks that parallels the rich tapestry of landscapes, fauna, ongoing mountain-building processes and sedimentary records (Verma *et al.*, 2022). In this regard, Ladakh is well renowned for its splendid scenery, pristine skies and lofty mountain passes (Goswami, 2022), offering a unique and spiritually captivating experience that has a timeless quality (Skandalis, 2023) and encouraging visitors to find inner peace (Chaskar *et al.*, 2023).

Further, Ladakh was recognized by UNESCO (2015) as India’s culturally significant cold desert region. Ladakh’s distinctive geographic setting and the confluence of numerous civilizations have contributed to its fascinating sociocultural heritage (Bhat *et al.*, 2022). In Ladakh, paleoclimatic records of Himalayan tectonics can be found within panoramic geotourism sites in Himalayan ranges (Dhirendra *et al.*, 2022). Ladakh can be a potential geoheritage tourism site, further fostering socio-economic sustainability (Bhat *et al.*, 2023).

Otherwise, Ladakh’s natural values have received most of the attention in research (Brian, 2021), yet it is imperative to highlight the region’s noteworthy cultural distinctiveness. Undoubtedly, ethnographic factors influence Ladakh’s tourism offerings (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022); this influence serves as a link between the region’s cultural identity and its other tourism attractions and potentials, including its natural, scientific and educational resources. This area’s geoheritage mainly consists of a large number of unexplored geosites with exceptional aesthetic values, making Ladakh a unique destination for suitable geotourism development.

Although tourism in Ladakh has grown rapidly during the last decade (Verma *et al.*, 2022), it still forms the foundation of the local economy in the area. Hence, total tourist arrivals crossed 530,000 in 2022 (see Table 1) (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2022),

Table 1.
Total tourists
arrival in Ladakh
(2012–2022)

Year	Domestic tourists	Foreign tourists	Total tourists
2012	39,345	107873	147,219
2013	32,411	104989	137,400
2014	59,305	121532	180,837
2015	37,497	108844	146,341
2016	38,005	197693	235,698
2017	46,593	230662	277,255
2018	49,477	277889	327,366
2019	38,652	241285	279,937
2020	6,743	1,126	7,869
2021	303,023	1,054	304,077
2022	–	–	530,000

Source: India Brand Equity Foundation (2022)

resulting in 2.38% of more tourists than the total population. Considering 2023, there has been a noticeable uptick in the geotourism trend in Ladakh (Dada *et al.*, 2023).

Even though a high influx of tourists is beneficial for any economy (Yang *et al.*, 2023), improper planning may cause unsustainable growth, including environmental and socio-cultural degradation, which further leads to mass tourism (Bansal *et al.*, 2023). The problem can be attributed to the growing appeal of these distinctive geological formations as tourist destinations (Selem *et al.*, 2023b), coupled with inadequate management and planning.

Undoubtedly, Ladakh’s tourism industry raised the region’s standard of living through an increased tourist influx (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022), but overtourism in Ladakh has resulted from mass tourism (Singh *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, anthropogenic activities, ongoing mountain-building processes (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023) and changing climatic conditions are destroying Ladakh’s geosites (Verma *et al.*, 2022). Thus, there is a dire need to preserve georesources sustainably in Ladakh (DST, 2022) by engaging geologists in exploratory research to develop geotourism in this region as an alternative tourism to combat mass tourism (Bansal *et al.*, 2023).

The primary aim of this paper is to explore Ladakh’s key drivers as a potential geotourism destination within the framework of cognitive dissonance and protection motivation theories. Additionally, we assessed the key drivers – geotourism services, legislative requirements, experiential tourism and SPARC (scientific, preservation, aesthetic, recreational and cultural) values – affecting geotourism in Ladakh (Newsome and Ladd, 2022). Many theories of tourist motivation theoretically combine the attraction of the place with the tourist’s motivations (Su *et al.*, 2022). They consequently fall short in addressing the independent motives of tourists.

Understanding the nature of visitor motivation has become more difficult as a result. The protection motivation theory (PMT) and cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) have been proposed by Sharma *et al.* (2023) as potential frameworks for assessing potential geotourism sites and the motivations behind geotourists’ visits. Practically, our findings might be of practical use to tourism professionals and academia in terms of policy planning inputs and product development. From tourism management perspective, this paper is feasible to reduce the negative impacts of overtourism and make sure that Ladakh’s distinctive ecology is preserved for future generations by implementing sustainable tourism practices.

2. Literature review

2.1 Geotourism

Geotourism is defined as traveling to appreciate our planet's history and geotourists' movements toward tourism attractions (Cai *et al.*, 2023). Stone monuments, fossil sanctuaries and geomorphological landscapes are examples of geotourism resources (Das *et al.*, 2022). Dowling *et al.* (2021) argued that geotourism can be aerial or terrestrial and comprises five types (e.g. incidental, accidental, serendipitous, intentional and purposeful). Geoheritage site exploration is a new effort in tourist research (Nirmala *et al.*, 2022) and appears to preserve geocultural historical sites through enjoying landscapes (Ghosh *et al.*, 2021). Geotourism has evolved into a vital factor in UNESCO's geoparks through its development in natural areas (Bansal *et al.*, 2023), which tourists visit for educational purposes (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023).

The notion of geotourism, first presented by Hose (1995), has developed with an intensified emphasis on geology and geoscience, along with the conservation of geographical regions and geographic data (Dhirendra *et al.*, 2022). Meanwhile, the term "land transportation" was first used in 2006 (Newsome and Ladd, 2022), although its wide interpretation has evolved. However, Quesada-Valverde and Quesada-Román (2023) defined ecotourism as "travel that conserves or improves a place's distinctive geographical traits, such as its environment, cultural legacy, and the welfare of its people." Protecting the land and its features is the main goal of geotourism (Catana and Brilha, 2020).

According to Tefogoum *et al.* (2020), the primary goal of terrestrial tourism is to educate visitors about the unique geological characteristics connected to a location and the significance of preserving them via experiences like site visits (Cusano *et al.*, 2022). In the past twenty years, institutions across many countries have put forth diverse interpretations and definitions of geotourism. The enjoyment and interpretation of land and landscape elements are intimately related to land tourism in areas like the United Kingdom and Australia (Hose and Vasiljević, 2012). Education, conservation and sustainable tourist activity are promoted (Khalaf, 2022).

Furthermore, this study defines a geotouristic destination, also known as a geotourism destination, after analyzing the literature on the subject of geotourism. A destination of this kind is defined as a place or region that is well-known for its unique and alluring natural characteristics, scenery and geological features (Kubalíková *et al.*, 2022). Travelers who are particularly interested in learning about and understanding earth's geological past, which includes things like rocks, volcanoes, caverns, hills and other geological features, are drawn to geotourist sites. These destinations frequently provide educational programs, guided tours and interpretive materials aimed at giving guests a thorough grasp of the geological significance of destinations as well as earth's geomorphology.

2.2 Underpinned theories

This study integrates two theories, PMT and CDT, as a theoretical basis (Sharma *et al.*, 2023) for justifying the motives leading to the potential development of Ladakh as a geotourism destination. One of the most important theories in social psychology is CDT, which was developed by Leon Festinger in 1957 (Su *et al.*, 2022). Festinger recommends that when individuals experience psychological uneasiness because of conflicting contemplations (Arora and Sharma, 2021), they will frequently make changes to determine what this distress causes (Kruger and Viljoen, 2023). CDT has found application in tourism research (Su *et al.*, 2022), wherein it has been used to analyze how psychological factors influence tourist behaviors (Mehdioui *et al.*, 2022). Although certain scholars have explored the relationship between perceived risk and cognitive dissonance (Pourfaraj *et al.*, 2020; Sharma, 2019), there is a notable scarcity of research endeavors to integrate CDT into the geotourism realm.

Tourists' decision-making processes are notably intricate when it comes to geotourism destinations (Kruger and Viljoen, 2023), making the selection of their destination a crucial determinant of their chosen tourism type (Arora and Sharma, 2021). Despite this significance, there remains a gap in understanding how CDT can be validated in comprehending tourists' decision-making behavior (Sharma, 2019) when selecting geotourism destinations. Thus, CDT is supported as a way of expressing the importance that individuals attach to destinations' qualities (Kruger and Viljoen, 2023). As such, SPARC believes that the values associated with geotourism attractions should be the foundation for their conservation efforts (Newsome and Ladd, 2022). Moreover, the legislation and integrity levels of geotourism attractions influence how to guarantee their value (Pourfaraj *et al.*, 2020).

On the other hand, PMT theory seeks to elucidate how individuals come to decisions about defensive ways of behaving despite possible threats or risks (Zhu *et al.*, 2022). PMT theory was created as a response to impediments to well-being behavior theories (Rogers, 1975; Sun *et al.*, 2023). The fundamental reason for PMT theory is that individuals are roused to shield themselves from risks (Selem *et al.*, 2023a). Their choice to take part in a defensive way of behaving is impacted by two factors (Oakley *et al.*, 2020):

- (1) their view of threat seriousness; and
- (2) their awareness of their capacity to handle potential threats.

Further, PMT has found application in various tourism and hospitality studies (Ryu *et al.*, 2023; Selem *et al.*, 2023a). In the initial stages of tourism risk research, Ruan *et al.* (2020) examined perceived vulnerability, assessing the probability of encountering a risky situation. Otherwise, Seow *et al.* (2022) evaluated travelers' perceptions of severity, which pertain to the seriousness of potential risks. However, this disparity within travel risk studies has been somewhat superficial, posing challenges in translating theory into practical applications (Ryu *et al.*, 2023). Despite PMT relevance, there is still a knowledge gap concerning its practical application in comprehending tourists' decision-making behaviors in geotourism destinations.

2.3 Geotourism destination development drivers

Geotourism services refer to activities that focus on the unique geographical features of a particular area (Nirmala *et al.*, 2022). It may include guided tours, educational programs about local culture and history or outdoor recreation opportunities (Das *et al.*, 2022). Geotourism services are a new niche market that integrates different tourism products, including travel agencies, tourist guides and other stakeholders (Azmi *et al.*, 2023). These services (i.e. infrastructure, interpretive panels and geotour guides) facilitate tourist visits, determine destinations' images (Cai *et al.*, 2023) and predict whether or not visitors will return (Selem *et al.*, 2023b).

Legislative requirements include legal provisions at geotourism destinations for geotourist site conservation and institutional setup to develop these geoheritage sites (Matshusa and Leonard, 2023). The most essential factor in geotourism promotion is geoheritage protection for education, interpretation and entertainment (Wadhawan, 2021). It can be inferred that geoheritage sites of geological importance are destroyed due to a lack of legal provisions (Das *et al.*, 2022).

Experiential geotourism refers to geotourists' experiences with various geoheritage activities at geotourism destinations under the supervision of professional geotour guides (Rozenkiewicz *et al.*, 2020). Experience-based geotourism takes this concept one step further (Wessels and Douglas, 2022) by providing visitors with an immersive experience in which they can learn about local culture and history (Goswami, 2022). Experimental geotourism engages them with nature through fossil hunting, kayaking

and mountain biking (Ghosh *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, experiential geotourism has the potential to make geotourists' experiences better (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023) by incorporating aesthetically pleasing elements (Nirmala *et al.*, 2022) and developing a feeling of awe about geological stories contained in the landscape (Wessels and Douglas, 2022).

SPARC values are an array of diverse values showcased by or associated with geotourism destinations (Kubalíková, 2013). Integrity, earth-science relevance, origin and variety of geological sites are examples of scientific values (Wadhawan, 2021). Milenković (2021) recommended that the scientific characteristics of destinations be considered when deciding what type of tourism to implement. The scientific importance of geosites can be a priority for geoconservation or tourism destination development (Mehdioui *et al.*, 2022).

2.4 Ladakh: destination development

Ladakh has a tourism-dependent economy with a six-month tourism season (Tiago *et al.*, 2021), but it has a negative socio-environmental impact (Bhat *et al.*, 2023). As such, many geological sites in Ladakh are under threat (e.g. Shey and Spituk Lake) (Verma *et al.*, 2022). In the last decade, Ladakh has been facing the unwarranted impact of overtourism on natural resources, farming and culture (Singh *et al.*, 2023). The absence of efficient management and unplanned development led to overtourism in Ladakh (Verma *et al.*, 2022). There is a growing trend toward alternative forms of tourism because of their lifetime experience and changing consumer tastes (Goswami, 2022).

Based on the river slope and valley width, the Indus River catchment is subdivided into four segments (Kumar *et al.*, 2022). The first segment is a U-shaped valley from Nyoma to Mahegy. Hence, the valley slope is 0.75 m/km. The second segment begins at Mahe-Upshi, a sharp V-shaped valley with an average valley width of 200 meters. The third segment runs from Upshi to Leh and has a valley width of 1200–1650 meters and a gradient of 1.8 meters per kilometer. This segment has landforms in the form of moraines, paleolake deposits and debris (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022).

The fourth segment extends from Nimu to Dah-Hanu and covers 120–130 kilometers. The deep gorge, terraces and molassic bedrock are found in this stretch. Hills, beaches, plains and plateaus—the land has a wide range of physical characteristics. There are 32 geoheritage sites and national geological monuments in India, some of which are recognized by UNESCO as world heritage sites (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022). According to the Geological Survey of India (2022), there are 90 geotourism sites in India, of which two are located in Ladakh.

2.5 Ladakh region as tourist destination

Ladakh, located in the Himalayan high desert region of northern India, offers a unique and spiritually captivating experience that has a timeless quality (Goswami, 2022). Ladakh is renowned for its splendid scenery, Buddhist monasteries and vibrant festivals (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022). Ladakh's allure is heightened by its status as the sole cold desert in India and its proximity to the world's highest saltwater lake, "Pangong Lake" (Keay, 2022). Ladakh is a unique habitat for various natural wonders, including frozen river treks and elusive snow leopards (Stobdan, 2023). Beyond these features, Ladakh boasts several other attractions that have earned it renown and are highly sought-after (Yadav, 2022).

The challenging high deserts and treacherous valleys along this route make it a renowned and rewarding trek for adventurers (Goswami, 2022). Ladakh has risen to prominence as a premier travel destination in recent times (Ober, 2023). With its distinctive combination of rugged landscapes and profound spiritual heritage, Ladakh has emerged as a sought-after travel destination in recent times (Hussain *et al.*, 2023). As such, there is a

projected surge in cultural tourism (Sinha *et al.*, 2023), emphasizing motorcycle journeys and community-centered experiences (Lee *et al.*, 2023). In an interview with HT Lifestyle, Chirag Gupta, chief executive officer of Deyor, highlighted the emerging trends in group travel to Ladakh for 2023 (Chaskar *et al.*, 2023).

3. Methods

3.1 Research setting

Data were gathered using in-depth interviews (Elgammal *et al.*, 2023; Shoukat *et al.*, 2023) after the field visit to four locations in Ladakh: Hemis, Alchi, Lamayuru and Thiksay (see Figure 1). Hemis, which spans a total area of 1700 square miles and is situated in the Leh district of Ladakh, ranges in altitude from 3 to 6 kilometers. Alchi is 3,100 meters above sea level, Lamayuru is 3,510 meters above sea level, and Thiksay is located at an altitude of 3600 meters (Bhat *et al.*, 2023). The location map of heritage sites (under study) is depicted in Figure 2. These regions were chosen as study contexts for a variety of reasons, including their physiographic locations and wide range of geomorphic and geological features

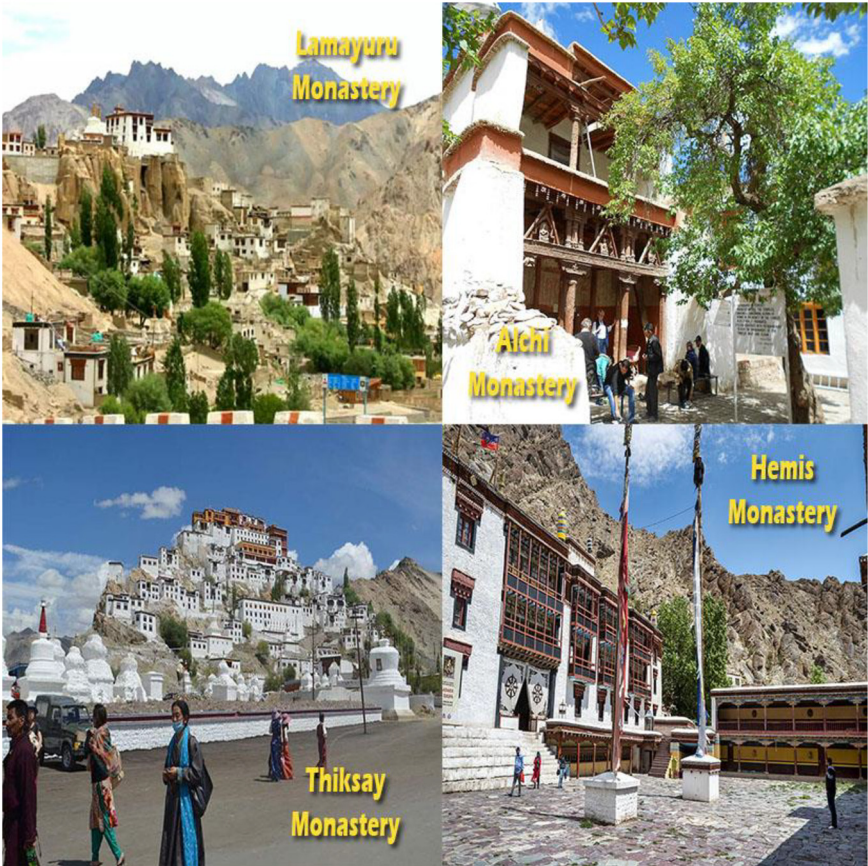
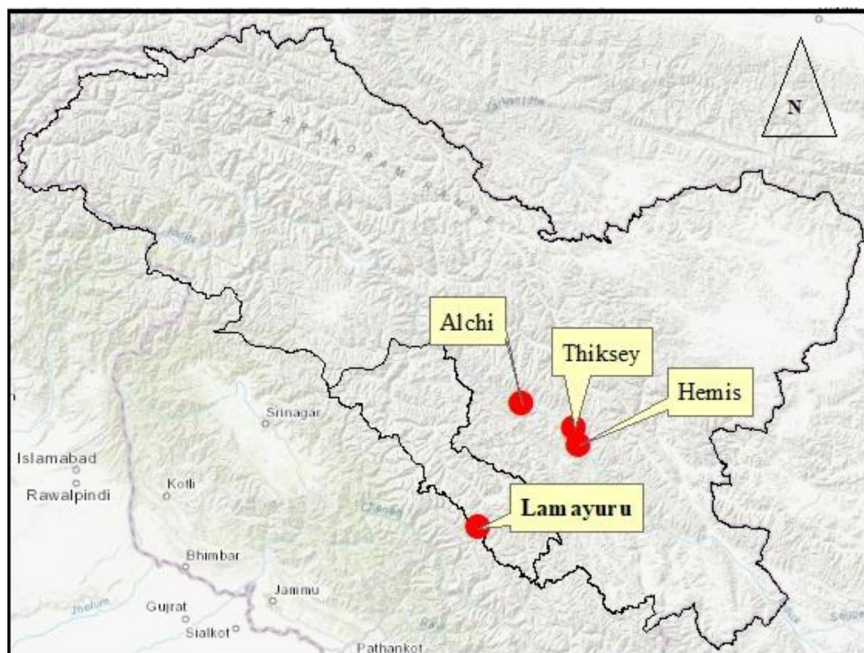


Figure 1.
Tourists during
visiting Ladakh's
geosites

Source: Prepared by authors



Source: Prepared by authors

Figure 2.
Heritage sites under
study

(Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022). Furthermore, visitors' accessibility to tourism services, capacity to offer experiential geotourism services, compliance with local laws and resources related to SPARC values at these destinations (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023).

3.2 Data collection

By delving deeply into a subject or learning about people's experiences, an in-depth interview-based qualitative approach was conducted (Kostere and Kostere, 2021). Participants included geoscientists and geotourism professionals in Ladakh who were from Indian and non-Indian-speaking countries to better understand the changes in geotourism development (Dhirendra *et al.*, 2022; Goswami, 2022; Verma *et al.*, 2022). According to Lester and O'Reilly (2021), the main objective of qualitative interviews is to gather respondents' knowledge based on how they understand the existing events under study. As a result, the decision to choose these respondents was based on the researchers' judgment (Etikan *et al.*, 2016) based on a purposive sampling approach. Therefore, this kind of sampling was subjective and made it possible to contact several participants.

Accordingly, two employees of the India Brand Equity Foundation and three members of the Indian Ministry of Tourism helped researchers gain access to these respondents' Facebook and Twitter accounts. As such, three criteria were determined to choose these participants (Etikan *et al.*, 2016):

- (1) Each participant was chosen as a faculty member (i.e. professors and associate professors) at a public or private university.
- (2) They were all geoscientists with at least five years of experience.

- (3) Tourism professionals with a connection to Ladakh's geocultural drivers were chosen (Bansal *et al.*, 2023; Bhat *et al.*, 2023; Singh *et al.*, 2023).

A total of 90 out of the 106 invited geoscientists and geotourism experts participated in in-depth interviews. To agree on all the specifics of the in-person interview and the nature of their voluntary participation, they were contacted via Telegram and WhatsApp and informed that the major goal of conducting these interviews is to increase geotourism in Ladakh. In keeping with the above, 86 respondents gave online interviews via Zoom Meeting, while four others expressed regret about having poor internet. A native English-speaking researcher conducted the interviews in English with such respondents. Table 2 lists 86 respondents; 66.3% represented 57 males and 42.7% represented 29 females. Further, 28 respondents were Indian (32.6%). Finally, participants' ages ranged from 21 to 63 years.

Initially, a brainstorming session was performed to provide a broad range of ideas from which to select. These ideas were then classified based on whether they were "optional" or "unsuitable" (Lee *et al.*, 2023). This method also aided in the development of research questions. Hence, all questions contained the option to share insights, recommendations and critiques (see Supplement A). Following verification of recording 86 respondents' interview information, the transcripts were coded.

The interview transcripts were separated into sections and given codes before processing. For instance, "P" stands for the respondent number, "S" for the page number in interview transcripts and "L" for the line number. Thus, the ideas that participants wished to transmit were assessed to produce a consensus map (Klavans and Boyack, 2009). Next, high-quality audio recordings of the interviews were made to fully comprehend and analyze responses (Gray *et al.*, 2020). To identify patterns of thought that could offer new perspectives on the issues of geotourism development, free-form comments were compiled and examined.

Participants' statements were entered into NVivo 12 in script format after the interviews were finished and their recordings were confirmed to be successful (Rutakumwa *et al.*, 2020), while less planned remarks were held back until they could all be taken into account and arranged using a tagging system (Gray *et al.*, 2020). The same comments might be given different classifications; for instance, they could be categorized as suggestions and criticisms. In this approach, respondents' comments may be categorized into various categories and looked at from various angles.

Each construct was examined and discussed. Using the originator, connector and destination constructs, a consensus map was created (Zaltman and Coulter, 1995). Additionally, researchers incorporated significant components into the consensus in Figure 2 due to respondents' variety in this paper. Respondents' perceptions about Ladakh's growth as a geotourism destination may be better understood with the use of this map (Lee *et al.*, 2023).

4. Results and discussion

Our results are discussed under four major domains (geotourism services, legislative requirements, experiential geotourism and SPARC values) as per the analysis of the consensus map, which is affecting Ladakh as a geotourism destination. The responses of respondents are analyzed (P-S-L, i.e. participant, subject of the response, line of sentence) as follows.

								Potential geotourism destination
Code	Gender	Age	Nationality	Code	Gender	Age	Nationality	
P1	Male	31	Morocco	P44	Female	52	India	399
P2	Female	45	India	P45	Male	59	India	
P3	Male	39	Pakistan	P46	Female	62	Pakistan	
P4	Male	44	India	P47	Male	43	Egypt	
P5	Male	37	India	P48	Male	48	Russia	
P6	Female	63	India	P49	Male	41	The Netherlands	
P7	Female	41	India	P50	Female	36	The Netherlands	
P8	Female	43	India	P51	Female	45	Russia	
P9	Female	39	Wales	P52	Female	56	UAE	
P10	Female	45	USA	P53	Male	45	China	
P11	Female	29	Pakistan	P54	Female	57	Brazil	
P12	Female	30	India	P55	Male	31	Pakistan	
P13	Male	54	The Netherlands	P56	Female	45	Pakistan	
P14	Male	52	India	P57	Male	39	UAE	
P15	Male	59	Pakistan	P58	Male	44	Australia	
P16	Male	62	India	P59	Male	37	Canada	
P17	Male	43	Pakistan	P60	Female	63	Morocco	
P18	Male	48	Wales	P61	Female	41	France	
P19	Male	41	Wales	P62	Female	43	India	
P20	Male	36	Pakistan	P63	Female	39	India	
P21	Male	45	USA	P64	Male	45	Morocco	
P22	Male	56	Brazil	P65	Female	29	Brazil	
P23	Male	45	The Netherlands	P66	Male	30	India	
P24	Male	57	Pakistan	P67	Male	54	India	
P25	Male	37	Morocco	P68	Male	52	India	
P26	Male	63	The Netherlands	P69	Female	31	Egypt	
P27	Male	41	Pakistan	P70	Female	45	Vietnam	
P28	Male	43	India	P71	Female	39	India	
P29	Male	39	The Netherlands	P72	Male	44	India	
P30	Male	45	India	P73	Male	37	Vietnam	
P31	Male	29	India	P74	Male	63	India	
P32	Female	30	USA	P75	Male	41	India	
P33	Female	54	Brazil	P76	Male	43	Morocco	
P34	Female	52	Brazil	P77	Male	39	The Netherlands	
P35	Male	52	Brazil	P78	Male	34	Vietnam	
P36	Male	59	India	P79	Male	45	Italy	
P37	Male	62	India	P80	Male	39	Italy	
P38	Female	43	India	P81	Male	44	Russia	
P39	Male	48	USA	P82	Male	37	Brazil	
P40	Female	45	USA	P83	Male	63	India	
P41	Female	29	USA	P84	Male	41	India	
P42	Male	30	Vietnam	P85	Male	43	USA	
P43	Female	54	The Netherlands	P86	Male	39	USA	

Source: Prepared by authors

Table 2.
Profile of
participants

4.1 Development of geotourism services

A consensus map of Ladakh’s development in geotourism services (see Figure 3); hence, 39 participants indicated that they visited and discovered its topography:

I know Ladakh is a geographical region because it has extremely cold weather, but it’s good for me compared to the Netherlands. (P26-S2-L1-2)

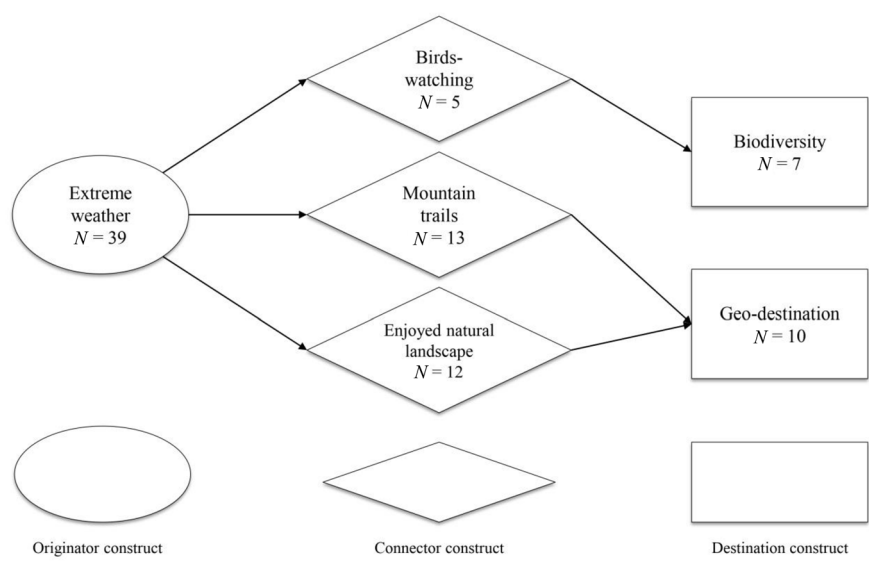


Figure 3.
Consensus map of the
change in geotourism
services

Source: Prepared by authors

Because of Ladakh’s area and geology, it has become a fabulous geodestination. Ladakh has many nature reserve regions; hence, wildlife looks like an attraction for global travelers. However, five participants demonstrated that Ladakh is an incredible spot to notice wild mammals:

As an Indian, this was also a pleasant outing to go bird-watching. (P5-S3-L4)

All around Ladakh, several trekking trails have been built. Ladakh has strategically important tourist attractions. Therefore, mountain trails in Ladakh impressed thirteen participants, while twelve stated they liked Ladakh’s scenic views. My country lacks mountains, but I enjoy hiking:

The trails are beautifully designed, and it was fantastic to be in nature while climbing in the mountains. (P37-S4-L7-8)

It was a beautiful experience to visit “Thinksey Monastery”, and I was impressed by many perspectives on Ladakh and the way that Leh maintains the ideal natural scenery. (P26-S5-L2-3)

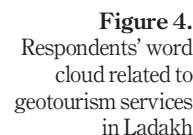
Seven participants indicated that Ladakh has wonderful biodiversity:

I saw floral and faunal diversity in Ladakh when I walked between its streets. (P37-S7-L9)

Finally, ten participants indicated that Ladakh is considered a geodestination for future visitors:

As an Egyptian, I will encourage my friends and family to travel to this wonderful destination. (P47-S8-L4-5)

To enrich our understanding of geotourism services in Ladakh, we used word cloud analysis of responses (see Figure 4), which proved that trails, mountains, cold, geology, geotourism, unique and geology worlds were dominating. Accordingly, the optimization aspect deals with



geotourism services that are meant to help develop Ladakh as a geotourism destination. Strategies for geotourism services must aim to promote and conserve geoheritage and sociocultural heritage while also being capable of offering tourists and visitors valuable experiences, e.g. learning about nature. Due to the specialized knowledge and interpretations needed to promote geotourism and arouse tourist interest, guided tours and geoactivities are essential (Newsome and Dowling, 2018).

4.2 Development of legislative requirements

A consensus map of Ladakh's legislative requirements and development as a geotourism destination (see [Figure 5](#)); hence, the initial legislative requirements include legal provisions at a geotourism destination for heritage site conservation and institutional setup to promote a geoheritage site as a geotourism destination. As such, 22 participants indicated that they had strong relationships with most locals as close friends in Ladakh:

As a Pakistani, I had the opportunity to get to know the locals and engage with them socially. (P3-S10-L4-5)

Eight participants confirmed that signboards placed on all roads leading to the monasteries of Ladakh indicate good hospitality and good treatment of visitors:

As a Moroccan, I have interacted with Lamayuru Monastery employees who are kind and always smiling. (P1-S11-L2-3)

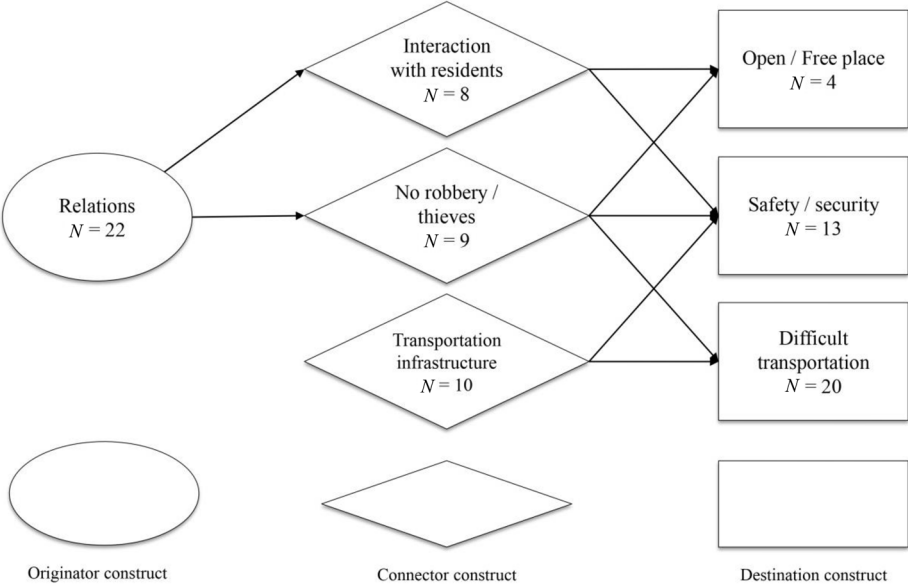


Figure 5.
Consensus map of the
change in legislative
requirements

Source: Prepared by authors

Nine participants mentioned that they had not encountered any incidents of theft or robbery during their stay:

Although I felt secure, I still had to be cautious about the possibility of theft or robbery. (P45-S14-L6)

Ten participants proved that the transportation infrastructure in Ladakh is somewhat weak:

As per my previous visit to Vietnam, there is poor public transportation in Ladakh. (P78-S17-L5-6)

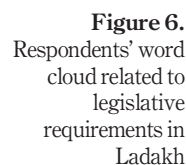
Thirteen participants showed that tourist safety is crucial at this geosite:

Indian police are deployed all over Ladakh, making it a safe destination compared to some other geological sites. (P72-S18-L3-4)

Twenty participants mentioned that Ladakh suffers from difficult transportation means to reach most monasteries in this tourist destination:

It is difficult to arrive at Alchi Monastery by taxi due to the security signage that prevents cars from passing through these areas at all. (P57-S19-L16-17)

To enrich our understanding of legislative requirements in Ladakh, we used word cloud analysis of responses (see Figure 6), which proved that secure, sites, geological, Ladakh, robbery, safety, safe, fragile and protection words are keywords in the participants' responses. Accordingly, Mahato and Jana (2021) postulated that hilly and forested geosite environments require adhering to sustainable development principles. Policymakers and other tourism stakeholders in managing geosites can benefit from the planned execution of strict policies for sustainable promotions (Elgammal, 2022; Singh et al., 2023b). However, successful development of geotourism destinations can be achieved through the preservation of geotourism attractions and destination management organizations (Tiago et al., 2021).



4.3 Development of experiential geotourism

Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual model with three main components: Originator construct, Connector construct, and Destination construct.

Originator construct (Left):

- Colonial culture ($N = 9$)
- Religious activities ($N = 14$)
- (Empty oval)

Connector construct (Middle):

- Memorial hall ($N = 11$)
- Ancient monument ($N = 13$)
- Temples / Races / Customs ($N = 6$)
- (Empty diamond)

Destination construct (Right):

- Nostalgic ($N = 12$)
- Multicultural / Preservation ($N = 21$)
- (Empty rectangle)

Relationships (Arrows):

- Colonial culture points to Memorial hall.
- Religious activities points to Temples / Races / Customs.
- Memorial hall points to Nostalgic and Multicultural / Preservation.
- Ancient monument points to Multicultural / Preservation.
- Temples / Races / Customs points to Multicultural / Preservation.

Figure 7.
Consensus map of the
change in experiential
geotourism

While exploring geolife in Ladakh, I was surprised to see the Moravian Mission Church and Moravian School in the heart of Leh Town. (P61-S21-L2-3)

Fourteen participants confirmed that religious activities are an integral part of Ladakhi life:

During my visit to Thiksey and Lamayuru monasteries, I found youth and older Ladakhi people chanting mantras on the way to the monasteries. (P25-S22-L6-7)

I came to know that Ladakhi (Buddhist) crosses mane, stupa, and mane walls in a clockwise direction, whether they are going to school or office, or otherwise. (P82-S24-L2-3)

Eleven participants indicated that Ladakh has a memorial hall that shows modern and ancient incidents:

I visited Zorabar Fort; it was a masterpiece, like forts in my country. (P60-S25-L4)

Thirteen participants indicated that Ladakh is full of ancient monuments:

Visiting Ladakh is like walking through the jungle of monuments. Buddha engraving at Shey, Mane wall at Lamayuru, Thiksey, Hemis, Alchi, Petroglyph at Alchi, ancient stupa, Mane, and many others were frequently observed in Ladakh. (P42-S28-L15-17)

Six participants discovered that Ladakh has unique and ancient monasteries at every nook and cranny, as well as that Ladakh inhibits diverse races and customs:

While exploring Leh Market, I met a person with blue eyes, and he advocated himself as a descendant of Alexander the Great. (P69-S31-L4-5)

Twelve participants discovered that the traditional dance of Ladakh was a nostalgic experience:

I witnessed the Spawo (bravery dance), which took me back into the ancient life of the Ladakhi Kingdome era. (P16-S33-L7-8)

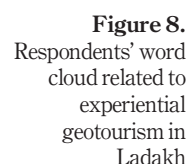
Finally, 21 participants reported that Ladakh showcases multiculturalism, history and preservation in various forms:

I found during my visit to Alchi Monastery that tourists in short pants were not allowed inside the monastery to preserve the valuable wall paintings. (P5-S3-L12-13)

I gained immense knowledge about the history and lifestyle of ancient Ladakh during my visit to the Hemis Museum. (P74-S35-L10-11)

To enrich our understanding of experiential geotourism in Ladakh, we used word cloud analysis of responses (see [Figure 8](#)). This proved that respondents commonly used words like monastery, Leh, Mane, Ladakh, ancient, church, palace, stupa, chanting, dance and Ladakhi during the conversation on experiential geotourism in Ladakh. Accordingly, experiential geotourism represents guided tours and the establishment of geoactivities ([Shoukat et al., 2023](#)) to engage visitors and tourists in the understanding of earth sciences at the geotourism sites ([Wessels and Douglas, 2022](#)).

Although experiential tourism could be essential in a geotourism destination's development ([Tiago et al., 2021](#)), participants' perceptions have not been significantly demonstrated, which is in the early stages of geotourism destination development. Accordingly, it is understandable that this paper does not reveal a statistically significant effect of experiential tourism on Ladakh's development. The effect of experiential tourism on geotourism can vary based on numerous aspects, including tourism activity management and destinations' natural and cultural state.



Additionally, diverse types of infrastructure within destinations hold significant importance in driving regional tourism growth (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023). This is because they provide destination-specific resources that form the foundation for tourism activities. Tourism production outcomes are rooted in diverse tourist experiences, which are influenced by the infrastructure they use. Hence, infrastructure plays a pivotal role in tourism development (Shoukat *et al.*, 2023).

A consensus map of Ladakh's SPARC values: scientific, preservation, aesthetic, recreational and cultural values (see [Figure 9](#)); hence, ten participants explored that Ladakh has different Indian restaurants:

Five participants indicated that Indian food is well-known overseas:

Seven participants confirmed food or beverages from Ladakh as Fortune cookies.

Four participants advocated that Ladakh is a land of diverse flavors:

Nine participants indicated that the night market experience is a must-do thing in Ladakh:

While I was sitting on a rooftop restaurant, I could see stars while I was having my dinner. I also bought organic fruits from local vendors; these vendors were wearing traditional attire. (P44-S39-L11-13)

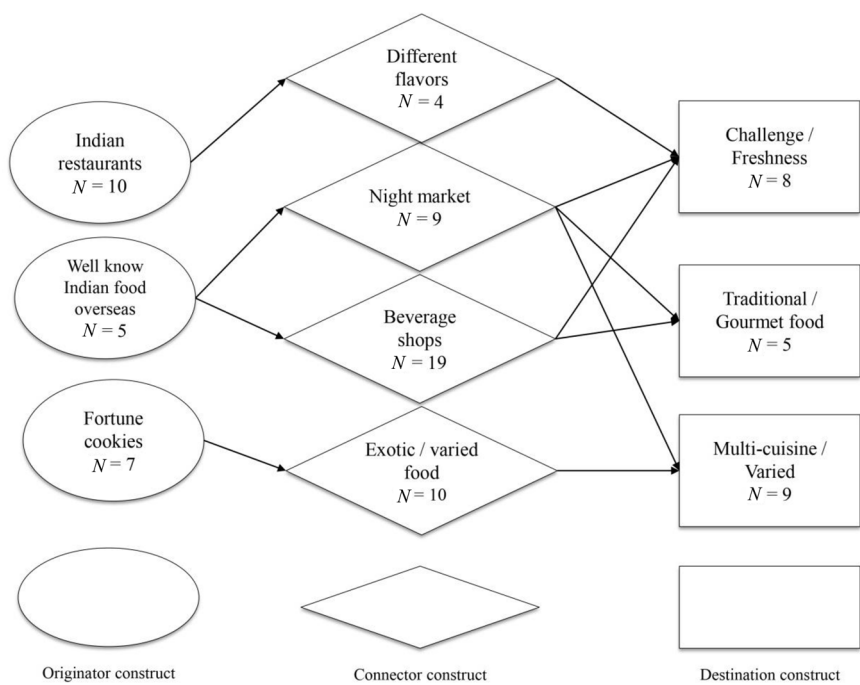


Figure 9.
Consensus map of the
change in SPARC
values

Source: Prepared by authors

Nineteen participants indicated that Ladakh has a variety of beverage shops:

I tasted butter tea, and it was the first time in my life that I was an American. I also found shops serving a variety of apricot beverages. (P41-S40-L18-19)

Ten participants indicated that Ladakh has exotic and varied food:

During my travels to a local festival, I tried Yak Cheese Mok-Mok, Skyu, and Chu-Tagi. It was a new experience for my taste buds. (P36-S42-L21-22)

Eight participants indicated that a smooth supply of vegetables to Ladakh from other parts of the country is a challenge for the food industry in Ladakh:

During my visit to Zangsti Café, while I was having Khambir (mutton stuffed), I found a tomato missing in the chutney as the vegetable supply was hampered because of snowfall at Zozila. (P77-S43-L9-11)

Five participants indicated that Ladakh has a variety of traditional foods:

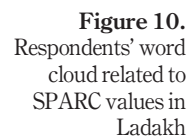
It was a soul-enriching experience to have traditional Ladakhi food, e.g., Kholag, Tang-Tur, Pagtsa Markhu, and Phating. (P51-S44-L2-3)

Nine participants indicated that Ladakh provides international cuisine-based restaurant services:

I tried Korean, Italian, Japanese, and Chinese food in Ladakh, and it gave me a sense of contentment. (P24-S45-L7-15)

It is essential to note that these perspectives are generalizations, and individual tourists within India may have many different perspectives on Ladakh land tourism based on their own experiences, beliefs and values. Public opinions may also change due to changing conditions and developments in the region. Further, individual opinions can vary, and not all foreign tourists have the same opinion. Finally, Ladakh perceptions can evolve as infrastructure, accessibility and tourism developments across the region change.

Our empirical results proved that participants perceive two factors, namely legislative requirements and geotourism services, as significantly vital to Ladakh's development as a geotourism destination. The two factors fit the notion of "geotourism," which embraces the protective and optimization aspects (Matshusa and Leonard, 2023). The protective factor acknowledges the roles of relevant stakeholders in preserving geoheritage sites and creating the institutional policies (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023) and mechanisms necessary to promote Ladakh as a geotourism destination (Hussain *et al.*, 2023). Bhat *et al.* (2023) highlighted that



Source: Prepared by authors

Ladakh is appealing from geotourism perspective because of its excellent aesthetic sense and good accessibility.

6. Implications

Theoretically, this paper contributes to the tourism development literature by supporting geotourism factors. Analyzing our findings, CDT and PMT theories offer a theoretical contribution in two significant domains: expectation and sense of place. In terms of theory, the operationalization of measurement reflects participants' expectations, and the significance of geotourism activities and the legislative requirements that describe such activities emphasize the importance of expectations. The expectation is drawn from such participants, who would aim to protect the identity and geosystem of Ladakh.

The protective expectation is reflected in the legislative requirements construct, which involves aspects of institutionalization, consultation with geologists and geoheritage protection. The degree of cognitive dissonance may also be inferred from the level of linkage between legislative requirements and SPARC values. Based on the extent of correlations, CDT determines whether to weaken or eliminate dissonant conditions or augment or intensify consonant conditions (Xu and Wu, 2022). Moreover, PMT theory offers a theoretical contribution to link protective mechanisms. The expectations highlight cognitive appraisals toward geotourism, at least from geologists' views, which may regulate their expectations and derive an understanding of Ladakh's development as a geotourism destination. The degree of motivation for protection may also be inferred from linking geotourism services with experiential tourism.

Practically, this paper provides managerial implications to marketers and tourism destination planners about how they can craft meanings – whether of temporal, spatial or socio-cultural implications – from the geoheritage (e.g. as about landforms and the earth's surface materials and landscapes) to deliver educational and leisure purposes. Geotourism makes use of Ladakh's natural resource advantages, like its distinctive geographical character (Bhat *et al.*, 2023) and its associated socio-cultural themes in terms of residents' heritages, cultures and lifestyles (Newsome and Dowling, 2018).

Legislative requirements are positively significant in influencing geologists' perceptions of Ladakh's development as a geotourism destination and reflect Ladakh's meaning intersections (e.g. geoheritage character and site identity). This paper provides valuable insights to government agencies that legislative requirements can be treated as legalizing and institutionalizing the planning, investment and residential support to enact the realization of geotourism services. In addition to geomarketing strategies, practitioners can focus on a more systematic investment plan that is more holistic, such as a museum that displays or educates on the uniqueness of the destination, landscapes and villages.

Geotourism services in Ladakh have the potential to contribute significantly to this region's economic growth while preserving its unique cultural heritage. Geotourism services in Ladakh should be developed in partnership with local communities. This will ensure that the benefits of tourism are shared equitably and that the cultural and environmental values of the region are respected. There is a need for capacity building in the region to ensure that local communities have the necessary skills to operate geotourism services. This can include training in hospitality, tour guiding and other tourism-related skills (Selem *et al.*, 2023b).

The effects of experiential tourism and SPARC values on Ladakh's development as a geotourism destination (Hussain *et al.*, 2023) reflect the reality that Ladakh's current geotourism activities are in their early stages of development, and these are two aspects that supply-side stakeholders and government policies should emphasize. At this juncture, it could imply that the supply side is not able to match the demand needs. If unresolved, it would lead to a competitive disadvantage in the geotourism market (Tiago *et al.*, 2021).

This paper also recommends engaging with local communities and stakeholders to ensure that they benefit from tourism and that their concerns are addressed.

7. Limitations and further studies

Our findings revealed that key drivers of statistical significance are categories of high importance and moderate-to-high performance levels, which reinforce the role of importance as customer expectation. However, the variables under consideration are not exhaustive, and further research could offer a more theory-driven and qualitative-based approach to expanding the variables. This leads to a better ability to study the legislative requirements of potential visitors and customer segments.

Second, further study can make use of Kano's three factors: basic, performance and excitement. The basic factor can offer a picture of the must-have preference of the potential visitors, while excitement factors for WOW experiences and performance factors indicate those geotourism attributes that visitors can easily define, articulate and communicate (Sinha *et al.*, 2023). Third, one of the main limitations is the lack of comparison between male and female geotourism experts or those who are nationals and expatriates from other countries (Elgammal *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, future researchers can make a comparison between these geoparks to develop some geological areas to serve sustainable tourism development goals.

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Further reading

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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A consensus map for Ladakh's development as potential geotourism destination: key drivers

Potential
geotourism
destination

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Received 19 June 2023
Revised 6 October 2023
17 December 2023
17 February 2024
Accepted 22 February 2024

Abstract

Purpose – Given the prevalence of protecting geoheritage tourism sites, Ladakh has enormous potential. However, Ladakh's potential and developments in its growth as a geotourism destination have received scant consideration. As such, this paper aims to explore Ladakh's key drivers as a potential geotourism destination through cognitive dissonance and protection motivation theories.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper conducted in-depth interviews with 86 geoscientists and tourism professionals to assess Ladakh's potential as a geotourism destination. This paper used a qualitative approach to congregate four constructs based on the image difference of the consensus map.

Findings – Because of the interviewees' heterogeneity and uniqueness, meaningful constructs in the consensus were included for each figure and cloud words. This paper concluded that four drivers are the main forces behind geotourism development.

Originality/value – This paper explores the drivers – geotourism services, legislative requirements, experiential geotourism and SPARC (scientific, preservation, aesthetic, recreational, cultural) values – affecting

Funding: No funding was received to assist with the preparation of this manuscript.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

Author contributions: Rimsha Khalid, Software, Validation, Investigation, Resources and Writing – Original Draft.

Rajinder Kumar, Validation, Investigation, Resources and Writing – Original Draft.

Rupa Sinha, Conceptualization, Writing – Review and Editing and Project Administration.

Kareem M. Selem, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal analysis, Supervision and Data curation.

Mohsin Raza, Investigation, Resources, Writing – Original Draft and Visualization.



geotourism in Ladakh. It is feasible to lessen the negative effects of overtourism and make sure that Ladakh's distinctive nature is preserved for future generations by implementing sustainable tourism practices.

Keywords Geotourism, Qualitative approach, Geological drivers, Tourism destination, Ladakh

Paper type Research paper

Highlights

- Geotourism as novel phenomenon that combines sustainable tourism, geoheritage and geodiversity.
- A qualitative approach was conducted based on the image difference of the consensus map.
- Engaging with local communities and stakeholders to ensure that they benefit from geotourism services.

Graphical abstract



1. Introduction

Visiting scenically beautiful natural areas is always in demand (Selem *et al.*, 2023b). However, geotourism has only recently gained attention (Quesada-Valverde and Quesada-Román, 2023). The rapidly expanding niche or special interest tourism sector now includes

geotourism (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022), a relatively new addition that centers tourism on highly valuable geological and geographical landscapes (Hose *et al.*, 2011). A form of natural area tourism known as “geotourism” focuses specifically on geology and landscape interpretation, promotion and conservation through education and appreciation. Newsome and Dowling (2010). Geotourism has shown tremendous growth with the rise of geoparks and tourism based on the geological environment (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023). A particular type of nature-based tourism known as “geotourism” is strongly in favor of the preservation of geographic diversity (Bhat *et al.*, 2023).

Further, it involves biotic (flora and fauna), abiotic (geology, landscape, geomorphic forms and climate) and cultural elements (Dowling, 2013; Mahato and Jana, 2021). Additionally, it promotes geosites as tourist destinations and preserves geodiversity through an understanding of earth science (Hose *et al.*, 2011). This is a new phenomenon that integrates geodiversity, geoheritage and sustainable tourism (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022). It has been suggested that environmentally innovative tourism should receive more attention because it promotes social and environmental responsibility (Pásková, 2012).

The rise of geotourism is readily apparent through United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Network of Geoparks program (Fassoulas *et al.*, 2022). The promotion of geotourism endeavors is closely linked to the establishment and rise of geoparks globally, with numerous proposals for new geoparks gaining traction (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023). This is accomplished through self-guided exploration of geological attractions and engaging in their activities (Ober, 2023). Currently, there are 195 geoparks within 48 countries (UNESCO, 2023). The swift proliferation of geoparks on a global scale is contributing to geotourism’s gradual expansion, turning it into a thriving sector (Dhirendra *et al.*, 2022). This extensive range of geobiodiversity has positioned Himalayan area as an alluring destination for geoscientists (Bhat *et al.*, 2022).

The Northwestern Himalaya, encompassing Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh (Dhirendra *et al.*, 2022), boasts remarkable geological diversity, encompassing a spectrum of rocks that parallels the rich tapestry of landscapes, fauna, ongoing mountain-building processes and sedimentary records (Verma *et al.*, 2022). In this regard, Ladakh is well renowned for its splendid scenery, pristine skies and lofty mountain passes (Goswami, 2022), offering a unique and spiritually captivating experience that has a timeless quality (Skandalis, 2023) and encouraging visitors to find inner peace (Chaskar *et al.*, 2023).

Further, Ladakh was recognized by UNESCO (2015) as India’s culturally significant cold desert region. Ladakh’s distinctive geographic setting and the confluence of numerous civilizations have contributed to its fascinating sociocultural heritage (Bhat *et al.*, 2022). In Ladakh, paleoclimatic records of Himalayan tectonics can be found within panoramic geotourism sites in Himalayan ranges (Dhirendra *et al.*, 2022). Ladakh can be a potential geoheritage tourism site, further fostering socio-economic sustainability (Bhat *et al.*, 2023).

Otherwise, Ladakh’s natural values have received most of the attention in research (Brian, 2021), yet it is imperative to highlight the region’s noteworthy cultural distinctiveness. Undoubtedly, ethnographic factors influence Ladakh’s tourism offerings (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022); this influence serves as a link between the region’s cultural identity and its other tourism attractions and potentials, including its natural, scientific and educational resources. This area’s geoheritage mainly consists of a large number of unexplored geosites with exceptional aesthetic values, making Ladakh a unique destination for suitable geotourism development.

Although tourism in Ladakh has grown rapidly during the last decade (Verma *et al.*, 2022), it still forms the foundation of the local economy in the area. Hence, total tourist arrivals crossed 530,000 in 2022 (see Table 1) (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2022),

Table 1.
Total tourists
arrival in Ladakh
(2012–2022)

Year	Domestic tourists	Foreign tourists	Total tourists
2012	39,345	107873	147,219
2013	32,411	104989	137,400
2014	59,305	121532	180,837
2015	37,497	108844	146,341
2016	38,005	197693	235,698
2017	46,593	230662	277,255
2018	49,477	277889	327,366
2019	38,652	241285	279,937
2020	6,743	1,126	7,869
2021	303,023	1,054	304,077
2022	–	–	530,000

Source: India Brand Equity Foundation (2022)

resulting in 2.38% of more tourists than the total population. Considering 2023, there has been a noticeable uptick in the geotourism trend in Ladakh (Dada *et al.*, 2023).

Even though a high influx of tourists is beneficial for any economy (Yang *et al.*, 2023), improper planning may cause unsustainable growth, including environmental and socio-cultural degradation, which further leads to mass tourism (Bansal *et al.*, 2023). The problem can be attributed to the growing appeal of these distinctive geological formations as tourist destinations (Selem *et al.*, 2023b), coupled with inadequate management and planning.

Undoubtedly, Ladakh’s tourism industry raised the region’s standard of living through an increased tourist influx (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022), but overtourism in Ladakh has resulted from mass tourism (Singh *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, anthropogenic activities, ongoing mountain-building processes (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023) and changing climatic conditions are destroying Ladakh’s geosites (Verma *et al.*, 2022). Thus, there is a dire need to preserve georesources sustainably in Ladakh (DST, 2022) by engaging geologists in exploratory research to develop geotourism in this region as an alternative tourism to combat mass tourism (Bansal *et al.*, 2023).

The primary aim of this paper is to explore Ladakh’s key drivers as a potential geotourism destination within the framework of cognitive dissonance and protection motivation theories. Additionally, we assessed the key drivers – geotourism services, legislative requirements, experiential tourism and SPARC (scientific, preservation, aesthetic, recreational and cultural) values – affecting geotourism in Ladakh (Newsome and Ladd, 2022). Many theories of tourist motivation theoretically combine the attraction of the place with the tourist’s motivations (Su *et al.*, 2022). They consequently fall short in addressing the independent motives of tourists.

Understanding the nature of visitor motivation has become more difficult as a result. The protection motivation theory (PMT) and cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) have been proposed by Sharma *et al.* (2023) as potential frameworks for assessing potential geotourism sites and the motivations behind geotourists’ visits. Practically, our findings might be of practical use to tourism professionals and academia in terms of policy planning inputs and product development. From tourism management perspective, this paper is feasible to reduce the negative impacts of overtourism and make sure that Ladakh’s distinctive ecology is preserved for future generations by implementing sustainable tourism practices.

2. Literature review

2.1 Geotourism

Geotourism is defined as traveling to appreciate our planet's history and geotourists' movements toward tourism attractions (Cai *et al.*, 2023). Stone monuments, fossil sanctuaries and geomorphological landscapes are examples of geotourism resources (Das *et al.*, 2022). Dowling *et al.* (2021) argued that geotourism can be aerial or terrestrial and comprises five types (e.g. incidental, accidental, serendipitous, intentional and purposeful). Geoheritage site exploration is a new effort in tourist research (Nirmala *et al.*, 2022) and appears to preserve geocultural historical sites through enjoying landscapes (Ghosh *et al.*, 2021). Geotourism has evolved into a vital factor in UNESCO's geoparks through its development in natural areas (Bansal *et al.*, 2023), which tourists visit for educational purposes (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023).

The notion of geotourism, first presented by Hose (1995), has developed with an intensified emphasis on geology and geoscience, along with the conservation of geographical regions and geographic data (Dhirendra *et al.*, 2022). Meanwhile, the term "land transportation" was first used in 2006 (Newsome and Ladd, 2022), although its wide interpretation has evolved. However, Quesada-Valverde and Quesada-Román (2023) defined ecotourism as "travel that conserves or improves a place's distinctive geographical traits, such as its environment, cultural legacy, and the welfare of its people." Protecting the land and its features is the main goal of geotourism (Catana and Brilha, 2020).

According to Tefogoum *et al.* (2020), the primary goal of terrestrial tourism is to educate visitors about the unique geological characteristics connected to a location and the significance of preserving them via experiences like site visits (Cusano *et al.*, 2022). In the past twenty years, institutions across many countries have put forth diverse interpretations and definitions of geotourism. The enjoyment and interpretation of land and landscape elements are intimately related to land tourism in areas like the United Kingdom and Australia (Hose and Vasiljević, 2012). Education, conservation and sustainable tourist activity are promoted (Khalaf, 2022).

Furthermore, this study defines a geotouristic destination, also known as a geotourism destination, after analyzing the literature on the subject of geotourism. A destination of this kind is defined as a place or region that is well-known for its unique and alluring natural characteristics, scenery and geological features (Kubalíková *et al.*, 2022). Travelers who are particularly interested in learning about and understanding earth's geological past, which includes things like rocks, volcanoes, caverns, hills and other geological features, are drawn to geotourist sites. These destinations frequently provide educational programs, guided tours and interpretive materials aimed at giving guests a thorough grasp of the geological significance of destinations as well as earth's geomorphology.

2.2 Underpinned theories

This study integrates two theories, PMT and CDT, as a theoretical basis (Sharma *et al.*, 2023) for justifying the motives leading to the potential development of Ladakh as a geotourism destination. One of the most important theories in social psychology is CDT, which was developed by Leon Festinger in 1957 (Su *et al.*, 2022). Festinger recommends that when individuals experience psychological uneasiness because of conflicting contemplations (Arora and Sharma, 2021), they will frequently make changes to determine what this distress causes (Kruger and Viljoen, 2023). CDT has found application in tourism research (Su *et al.*, 2022), wherein it has been used to analyze how psychological factors influence tourist behaviors (Mehdioui *et al.*, 2022). Although certain scholars have explored the relationship between perceived risk and cognitive dissonance (Pourfaraj *et al.*, 2020; Sharma, 2019), there is a notable scarcity of research endeavors to integrate CDT into the geotourism realm.

Tourists' decision-making processes are notably intricate when it comes to geotourism destinations (Kruger and Viljoen, 2023), making the selection of their destination a crucial determinant of their chosen tourism type (Arora and Sharma, 2021). Despite this significance, there remains a gap in understanding how CDT can be validated in comprehending tourists' decision-making behavior (Sharma, 2019) when selecting geotourism destinations. Thus, CDT is supported as a way of expressing the importance that individuals attach to destinations' qualities (Kruger and Viljoen, 2023). As such, SPARC believes that the values associated with geotourism attractions should be the foundation for their conservation efforts (Newsome and Ladd, 2022). Moreover, the legislation and integrity levels of geotourism attractions influence how to guarantee their value (Pourfaraj *et al.*, 2020).

On the other hand, PMT theory seeks to elucidate how individuals come to decisions about defensive ways of behaving despite possible threats or risks (Zhu *et al.*, 2022). PMT theory was created as a response to impediments to well-being behavior theories (Rogers, 1975; Sun *et al.*, 2023). The fundamental reason for PMT theory is that individuals are roused to shield themselves from risks (Selem *et al.*, 2023a). Their choice to take part in a defensive way of behaving is impacted by two factors (Oakley *et al.*, 2020):

- (1) their view of threat seriousness; and
- (2) their awareness of their capacity to handle potential threats.

Further, PMT has found application in various tourism and hospitality studies (Ryu *et al.*, 2023; Selem *et al.*, 2023a). In the initial stages of tourism risk research, Ruan *et al.* (2020) examined perceived vulnerability, assessing the probability of encountering a risky situation. Otherwise, Seow *et al.* (2022) evaluated travelers' perceptions of severity, which pertain to the seriousness of potential risks. However, this disparity within travel risk studies has been somewhat superficial, posing challenges in translating theory into practical applications (Ryu *et al.*, 2023). Despite PMT relevance, there is still a knowledge gap concerning its practical application in comprehending tourists' decision-making behaviors in geotourism destinations.

2.3 Geotourism destination development drivers

Geotourism services refer to activities that focus on the unique geographical features of a particular area (Nirmala *et al.*, 2022). It may include guided tours, educational programs about local culture and history or outdoor recreation opportunities (Das *et al.*, 2022). Geotourism services are a new niche market that integrates different tourism products, including travel agencies, tourist guides and other stakeholders (Azmi *et al.*, 2023). These services (i.e. infrastructure, interpretive panels and geotour guides) facilitate tourist visits, determine destinations' images (Cai *et al.*, 2023) and predict whether or not visitors will return (Selem *et al.*, 2023b).

Legislative requirements include legal provisions at geotourism destinations for geotourist site conservation and institutional setup to develop these geoheritage sites (Matshusa and Leonard, 2023). The most essential factor in geotourism promotion is geoheritage protection for education, interpretation and entertainment (Wadhawan, 2021). It can be inferred that geoheritage sites of geological importance are destroyed due to a lack of legal provisions (Das *et al.*, 2022).

Experiential geotourism refers to geotourists' experiences with various geoheritage activities at geotourism destinations under the supervision of professional geotour guides (Rozenkiewicz *et al.*, 2020). Experience-based geotourism takes this concept one step further (Wessels and Douglas, 2022) by providing visitors with an immersive experience in which they can learn about local culture and history (Goswami, 2022). Experimental geotourism engages them with nature through fossil hunting, kayaking

and mountain biking (Ghosh *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, experiential geotourism has the potential to make geotourists' experiences better (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023) by incorporating aesthetically pleasing elements (Nirmala *et al.*, 2022) and developing a feeling of awe about geological stories contained in the landscape (Wessels and Douglas, 2022).

SPARC values are an array of diverse values showcased by or associated with geotourism destinations (Kubalíková, 2013). Integrity, earth-science relevance, origin and variety of geological sites are examples of scientific values (Wadhawan, 2021). Milenković (2021) recommended that the scientific characteristics of destinations be considered when deciding what type of tourism to implement. The scientific importance of geosites can be a priority for geoconservation or tourism destination development (Mehdioui *et al.*, 2022).

2.4 Ladakh: destination development

Ladakh has a tourism-dependent economy with a six-month tourism season (Tiago *et al.*, 2021), but it has a negative socio-environmental impact (Bhat *et al.*, 2023). As such, many geological sites in Ladakh are under threat (e.g. Shey and Spituk Lake) (Verma *et al.*, 2022). In the last decade, Ladakh has been facing the unwarranted impact of overtourism on natural resources, farming and culture (Singh *et al.*, 2023). The absence of efficient management and unplanned development led to overtourism in Ladakh (Verma *et al.*, 2022). There is a growing trend toward alternative forms of tourism because of their lifetime experience and changing consumer tastes (Goswami, 2022).

Based on the river slope and valley width, the Indus River catchment is subdivided into four segments (Kumar *et al.*, 2022). The first segment is a U-shaped valley from Nyoma to Maheogy. Hence, the valley slope is 0.75 m/km. The second segment begins at Mahe-Upshi, a sharp V-shaped valley with an average valley width of 200 meters. The third segment runs from Upshi to Leh and has a valley width of 1200–1650 meters and a gradient of 1.8 meters per kilometer. This segment has landforms in the form of moraines, paleolake deposits and debris (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022).

The fourth segment extends from Nimu to Dah-Hanu and covers 120–130 kilometers. The deep gorge, terraces and molassic bedrock are found in this stretch. Hills, beaches, plains and plateaus—the land has a wide range of physical characteristics. There are 32 geoheritage sites and national geological monuments in India, some of which are recognized by UNESCO as world heritage sites (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022). According to the Geological Survey of India (2022), there are 90 geotourism sites in India, of which two are located in Ladakh.

2.5 Ladakh region as tourist destination

Ladakh, located in the Himalayan high desert region of northern India, offers a unique and spiritually captivating experience that has a timeless quality (Goswami, 2022). Ladakh is renowned for its splendid scenery, Buddhist monasteries and vibrant festivals (Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022). Ladakh's allure is heightened by its status as the sole cold desert in India and its proximity to the world's highest saltwater lake, "Pangong Lake" (Keay, 2022). Ladakh is a unique habitat for various natural wonders, including frozen river treks and elusive snow leopards (Stobdan, 2023). Beyond these features, Ladakh boasts several other attractions that have earned it renown and are highly sought-after (Yadav, 2022).

The challenging high deserts and treacherous valleys along this route make it a renowned and rewarding trek for adventurers (Goswami, 2022). Ladakh has risen to prominence as a premier travel destination in recent times (Ober, 2023). With its distinctive combination of rugged landscapes and profound spiritual heritage, Ladakh has emerged as a sought-after travel destination in recent times (Hussain *et al.*, 2023). As such, there is a

projected surge in cultural tourism (Sinha *et al.*, 2023), emphasizing motorcycle journeys and community-centered experiences (Lee *et al.*, 2023). In an interview with HT Lifestyle, Chirag Gupta, chief executive officer of Deyor, highlighted the emerging trends in group travel to Ladakh for 2023 (Chaskar *et al.*, 2023).

3. Methods

3.1 Research setting

Data were gathered using in-depth interviews (Elgammal *et al.*, 2023; Shoukat *et al.*, 2023) after the field visit to four locations in Ladakh: Hemis, Alchi, Lamayuru and Thiksay (see Figure 1). Hemis, which spans a total area of 1700 square miles and is situated in the Leh district of Ladakh, ranges in altitude from 3 to 6 kilometers. Alchi is 3,100 meters above sea level, Lamayuru is 3,510 meters above sea level, and Thiksay is located at an altitude of 3600 meters (Bhat *et al.*, 2023). The location map of heritage sites (under study) is depicted in Figure 2. These regions were chosen as study contexts for a variety of reasons, including their physiographic locations and wide range of geomorphic and geological features

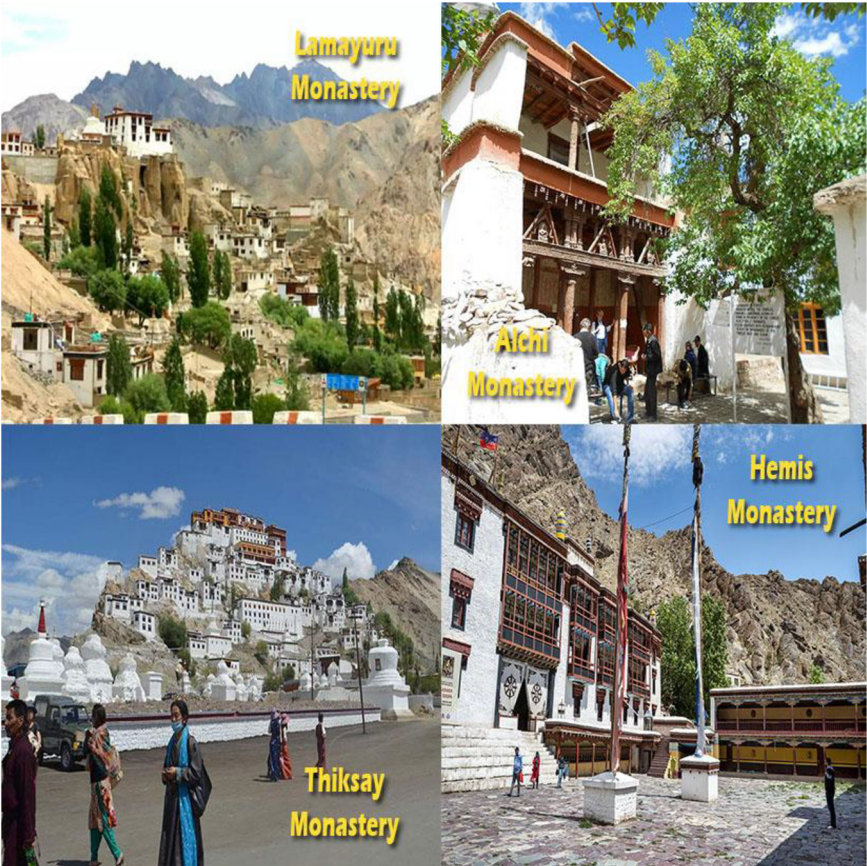
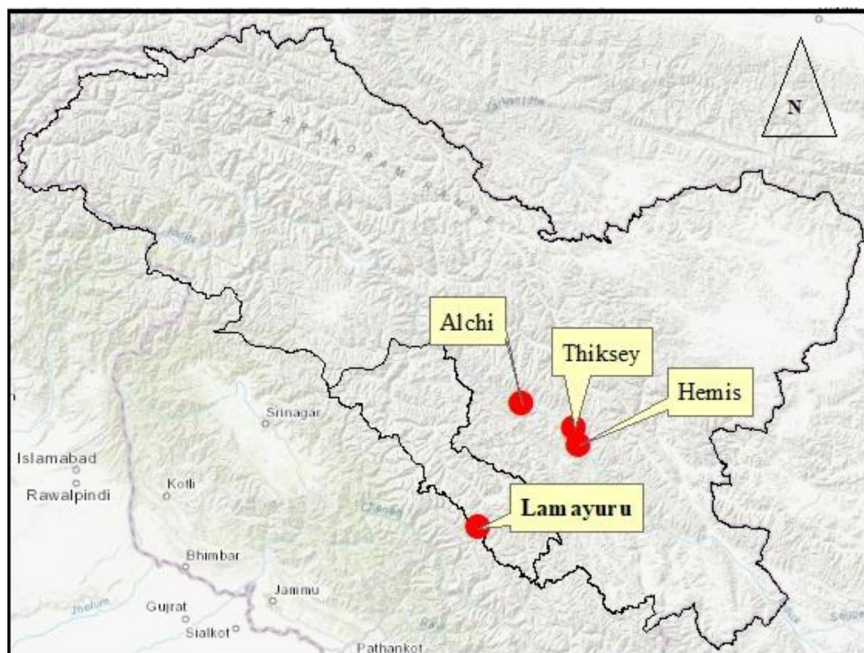


Figure 1.
Tourists during
visiting Ladakh's
geosites

Source: Prepared by authors



Source: Prepared by authors

Figure 2.
Heritage sites under
study

(Nayak and Karuppannan, 2022). Furthermore, visitors' accessibility to tourism services, capacity to offer experiential geotourism services, compliance with local laws and resources related to SPARC values at these destinations (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023).

3.2 Data collection

By delving deeply into a subject or learning about people's experiences, an in-depth interview-based qualitative approach was conducted (Kostere and Kostere, 2021). Participants included geoscientists and geotourism professionals in Ladakh who were from Indian and non-Indian-speaking countries to better understand the changes in geotourism development (Dhirendra *et al.*, 2022; Goswami, 2022; Verma *et al.*, 2022). According to Lester and O'Reilly (2021), the main objective of qualitative interviews is to gather respondents' knowledge based on how they understand the existing events under study. As a result, the decision to choose these respondents was based on the researchers' judgment (Etikan *et al.*, 2016) based on a purposive sampling approach. Therefore, this kind of sampling was subjective and made it possible to contact several participants.

Accordingly, two employees of the India Brand Equity Foundation and three members of the Indian Ministry of Tourism helped researchers gain access to these respondents' Facebook and Twitter accounts. As such, three criteria were determined to choose these participants (Etikan *et al.*, 2016):

- (1) Each participant was chosen as a faculty member (i.e. professors and associate professors) at a public or private university.
- (2) They were all geoscientists with at least five years of experience.

- (3) Tourism professionals with a connection to Ladakh's geocultural drivers were chosen (Bansal *et al.*, 2023; Bhat *et al.*, 2023; Singh *et al.*, 2023).

A total of 90 out of the 106 invited geoscientists and geotourism experts participated in in-depth interviews. To agree on all the specifics of the in-person interview and the nature of their voluntary participation, they were contacted via Telegram and WhatsApp and informed that the major goal of conducting these interviews is to increase geotourism in Ladakh. In keeping with the above, 86 respondents gave online interviews via Zoom Meeting, while four others expressed regret about having poor internet. A native English-speaking researcher conducted the interviews in English with such respondents. Table 2 lists 86 respondents; 66.3% represented 57 males and 42.7% represented 29 females. Further, 28 respondents were Indian (32.6%). Finally, participants' ages ranged from 21 to 63 years.

Initially, a brainstorming session was performed to provide a broad range of ideas from which to select. These ideas were then classified based on whether they were "optional" or "unsuitable" (Lee *et al.*, 2023). This method also aided in the development of research questions. Hence, all questions contained the option to share insights, recommendations and critiques (see Supplement A). Following verification of recording 86 respondents' interview information, the transcripts were coded.

The interview transcripts were separated into sections and given codes before processing. For instance, "P" stands for the respondent number, "S" for the page number in interview transcripts and "L" for the line number. Thus, the ideas that participants wished to transmit were assessed to produce a consensus map (Klavans and Boyack, 2009). Next, high-quality audio recordings of the interviews were made to fully comprehend and analyze responses (Gray *et al.*, 2020). To identify patterns of thought that could offer new perspectives on the issues of geotourism development, free-form comments were compiled and examined.

Participants' statements were entered into NVivo 12 in script format after the interviews were finished and their recordings were confirmed to be successful (Rutakumwa *et al.*, 2020), while less planned remarks were held back until they could all be taken into account and arranged using a tagging system (Gray *et al.*, 2020). The same comments might be given different classifications; for instance, they could be categorized as suggestions and criticisms. In this approach, respondents' comments may be categorized into various categories and looked at from various angles.

Each construct was examined and discussed. Using the originator, connector and destination constructs, a consensus map was created (Zaltman and Coulter, 1995). Additionally, researchers incorporated significant components into the consensus in Figure 2 due to respondents' variety in this paper. Respondents' perceptions about Ladakh's growth as a geotourism destination may be better understood with the use of this map (Lee *et al.*, 2023).

4. Results and discussion

Our results are discussed under four major domains (geotourism services, legislative requirements, experiential geotourism and SPARC values) as per the analysis of the consensus map, which is affecting Ladakh as a geotourism destination. The responses of respondents are analyzed (P-S-L, i.e. participant, subject of the response, line of sentence) as follows.

								Potential geotourism destination
Code	Gender	Age	Nationality	Code	Gender	Age	Nationality	
P1	Male	31	Morocco	P44	Female	52	India	399
P2	Female	45	India	P45	Male	59	India	
P3	Male	39	Pakistan	P46	Female	62	Pakistan	
P4	Male	44	India	P47	Male	43	Egypt	
P5	Male	37	India	P48	Male	48	Russia	
P6	Female	63	India	P49	Male	41	The Netherlands	
P7	Female	41	India	P50	Female	36	The Netherlands	
P8	Female	43	India	P51	Female	45	Russia	
P9	Female	39	Wales	P52	Female	56	UAE	
P10	Female	45	USA	P53	Male	45	China	
P11	Female	29	Pakistan	P54	Female	57	Brazil	
P12	Female	30	India	P55	Male	31	Pakistan	
P13	Male	54	The Netherlands	P56	Female	45	Pakistan	
P14	Male	52	India	P57	Male	39	UAE	
P15	Male	59	Pakistan	P58	Male	44	Australia	
P16	Male	62	India	P59	Male	37	Canada	
P17	Male	43	Pakistan	P60	Female	63	Morocco	
P18	Male	48	Wales	P61	Female	41	France	
P19	Male	41	Wales	P62	Female	43	India	
P20	Male	36	Pakistan	P63	Female	39	India	
P21	Male	45	USA	P64	Male	45	Morocco	
P22	Male	56	Brazil	P65	Female	29	Brazil	
P23	Male	45	The Netherlands	P66	Male	30	India	
P24	Male	57	Pakistan	P67	Male	54	India	
P25	Male	37	Morocco	P68	Male	52	India	
P26	Male	63	The Netherlands	P69	Female	31	Egypt	
P27	Male	41	Pakistan	P70	Female	45	Vietnam	
P28	Male	43	India	P71	Female	39	India	
P29	Male	39	The Netherlands	P72	Male	44	India	
P30	Male	45	India	P73	Male	37	Vietnam	
P31	Male	29	India	P74	Male	63	India	
P32	Female	30	USA	P75	Male	41	India	
P33	Female	54	Brazil	P76	Male	43	Morocco	
P34	Female	52	Brazil	P77	Male	39	The Netherlands	
P35	Male	52	Brazil	P78	Male	34	Vietnam	
P36	Male	59	India	P79	Male	45	Italy	
P37	Male	62	India	P80	Male	39	Italy	
P38	Female	43	India	P81	Male	44	Russia	
P39	Male	48	USA	P82	Male	37	Brazil	
P40	Female	45	USA	P83	Male	63	India	
P41	Female	29	USA	P84	Male	41	India	
P42	Male	30	Vietnam	P85	Male	43	USA	
P43	Female	54	The Netherlands	P86	Male	39	USA	

Source: Prepared by authors

Table 2.
Profile of
participants

4.1 Development of geotourism services

A consensus map of Ladakh’s development in geotourism services (see Figure 3); hence, 39 participants indicated that they visited and discovered its topography:

I know Ladakh is a geographical region because it has extremely cold weather, but it’s good for me compared to the Netherlands. (P26-S2-L1-2)

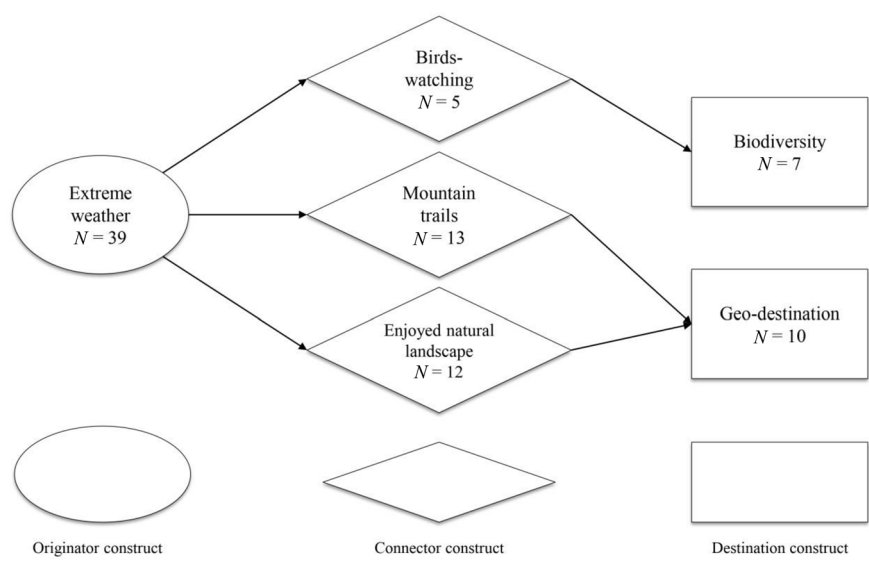


Figure 3.
Consensus map of the
change in geotourism
services

Source: Prepared by authors

Because of Ladakh’s area and geology, it has become a fabulous geodestination. Ladakh has many nature reserve regions; hence, wildlife looks like an attraction for global travelers. However, five participants demonstrated that Ladakh is an incredible spot to notice wild mammals:

As an Indian, this was also a pleasant outing to go bird-watching. (P5-S3-L4)

All around Ladakh, several trekking trails have been built. Ladakh has strategically important tourist attractions. Therefore, mountain trails in Ladakh impressed thirteen participants, while twelve stated they liked Ladakh’s scenic views. My country lacks mountains, but I enjoy hiking:

The trails are beautifully designed, and it was fantastic to be in nature while climbing in the mountains. (P37-S4-L7-8)

It was a beautiful experience to visit “Thinksey Monastery”, and I was impressed by many perspectives on Ladakh and the way that Leh maintains the ideal natural scenery. (P26-S5-L2-3)

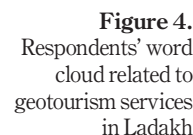
Seven participants indicated that Ladakh has wonderful biodiversity:

I saw floral and faunal diversity in Ladakh when I walked between its streets. (P37-S7-L9)

Finally, ten participants indicated that Ladakh is considered a geodestination for future visitors:

As an Egyptian, I will encourage my friends and family to travel to this wonderful destination. (P47-S8-L4-5)

To enrich our understanding of geotourism services in Ladakh, we used word cloud analysis of responses (see Figure 4), which proved that trails, mountains, cold, geology, geotourism, unique and geology worlds were dominating. Accordingly, the optimization aspect deals with



geotourism services that are meant to help develop Ladakh as a geotourism destination. Strategies for geotourism services must aim to promote and conserve geoheritage and sociocultural heritage while also being capable of offering tourists and visitors valuable experiences, e.g. learning about nature. Due to the specialized knowledge and interpretations needed to promote geotourism and arouse tourist interest, guided tours and geoactivities are essential (Newsome and Dowling, 2018).

4.2 Development of legislative requirements

A consensus map of Ladakh's legislative requirements and development as a geotourism destination (see [Figure 5](#)); hence, the initial legislative requirements include legal provisions at a geotourism destination for heritage site conservation and institutional setup to promote a geoheritage site as a geotourism destination. As such, 22 participants indicated that they had strong relationships with most locals as close friends in Ladakh:

As a Pakistani, I had the opportunity to get to know the locals and engage with them socially. (P3-S10-L4-5)

Eight participants confirmed that signboards placed on all roads leading to the monasteries of Ladakh indicate good hospitality and good treatment of visitors:

As a Moroccan, I have interacted with Lamayuru Monastery employees who are kind and always smiling. (P1-S11-L2-3)

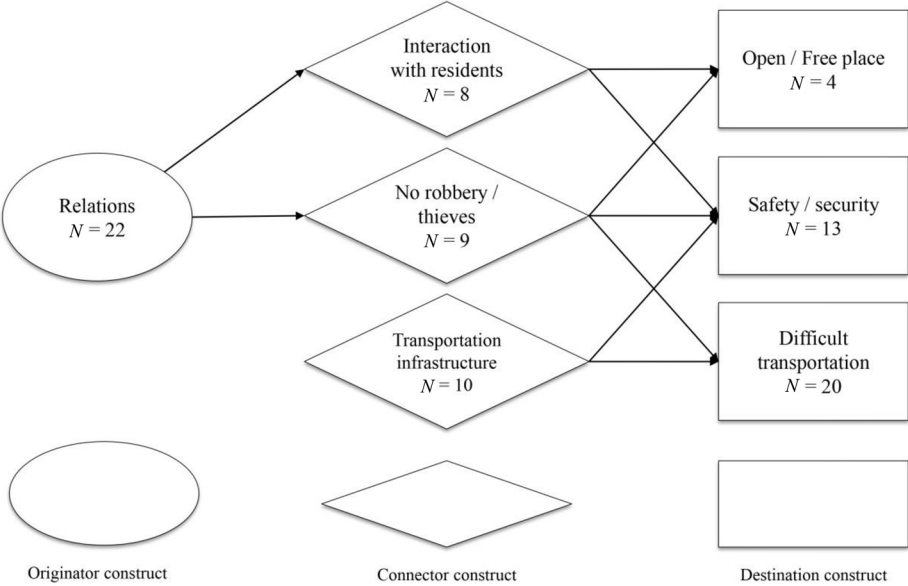


Figure 5.
Consensus map of the
change in legislative
requirements

Source: Prepared by authors

Nine participants mentioned that they had not encountered any incidents of theft or robbery during their stay:

Although I felt secure, I still had to be cautious about the possibility of theft or robbery. (P45-S14-L6)

Ten participants proved that the transportation infrastructure in Ladakh is somewhat weak:

As per my previous visit to Vietnam, there is poor public transportation in Ladakh. (P78-S17-L5-6)

Thirteen participants showed that tourist safety is crucial at this geosite:

Indian police are deployed all over Ladakh, making it a safe destination compared to some other geological sites. (P72-S18-L3-4)

Twenty participants mentioned that Ladakh suffers from difficult transportation means to reach most monasteries in this tourist destination:

It is difficult to arrive at Alchi Monastery by taxi due to the security signage that prevents cars from passing through these areas at all. (P57-S19-L16-17)

To enrich our understanding of legislative requirements in Ladakh, we used word cloud analysis of responses (see Figure 6), which proved that secure, sites, geological, Ladakh, robbery, safety, safe, fragile and protection words are keywords in the participants' responses. Accordingly, Mahato and Jana (2021) postulated that hilly and forested geosite environments require adhering to sustainable development principles. Policymakers and other tourism stakeholders in managing geosites can benefit from the planned execution of strict policies for sustainable promotions (Elgammal, 2022; Singh et al., 2023b). However, successful development of geotourism destinations can be achieved through the preservation of geotourism attractions and destination management organizations (Tiago et al., 2021).



Figure 6.
Respondents' word
cloud related to
legislative
requirements in
Ladakh

Source: Prepared by authors

4.3 Development of experiential geotourism

A consensus map of Ladakh's experiential geotourism includes the potential to make geotourists' experiences better by incorporating emotive and aesthetically pleasing elements and developing a feeling of awe about geological stories contained in the landscape (see [Figure 7](#)); hence, nine participants discovered that colonial culture or footprints are present in Ladakh:

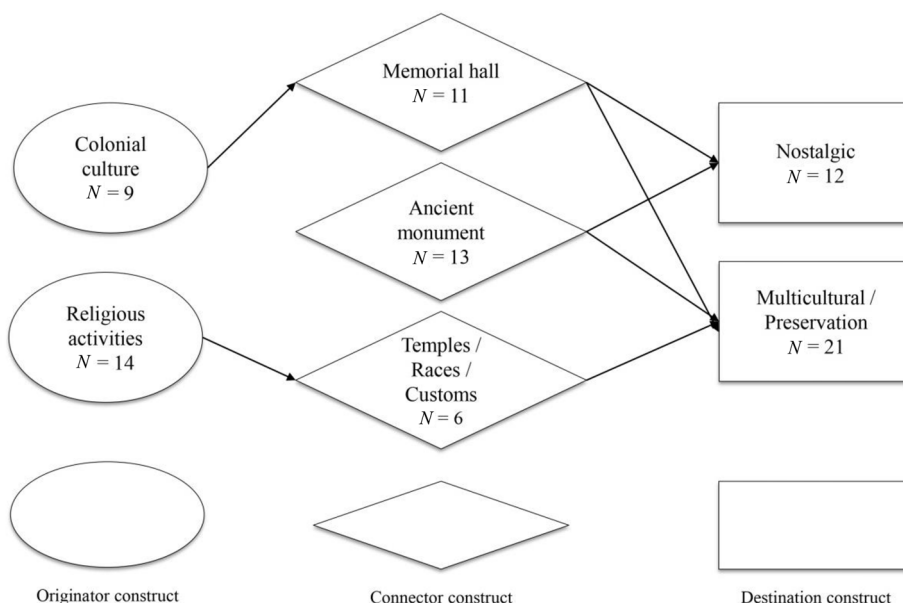


Figure 7.
Consensus map of the
change in experiential
geotourism

Source: Prepared by authors

While exploring geolife in Ladakh, I was surprised to see the Moravian Mission Church and Moravian School in the heart of Leh Town. (P61-S21-L2-3)

Fourteen participants confirmed that religious activities are an integral part of Ladakhi life:

During my visit to Thiksey and Lamayuru monasteries, I found youth and older Ladakhi people chanting mantras on the way to the monasteries. (P25-S22-L6-7)

I came to know that Ladakhi (Buddhist) crosses mane, stupa, and mane walls in a clockwise direction, whether they are going to school or office, or otherwise. (P82-S24-L2-3)

Eleven participants indicated that Ladakh has a memorial hall that shows modern and ancient incidents:

I visited Zorabar Fort; it was a masterpiece, like forts in my country. (P60-S25-L4)

Thirteen participants indicated that Ladakh is full of ancient monuments:

Visiting Ladakh is like walking through the jungle of monuments. Buddha engraving at Shey, Mane wall at Lamayuru, Thiksey, Hemis, Alchi, Petroglyph at Alchi, ancient stupa, Mane, and many others were frequently observed in Ladakh. (P42-S28-L15-17)

Six participants discovered that Ladakh has unique and ancient monasteries at every nook and cranny, as well as that Ladakh inhibits diverse races and customs:

While exploring Leh Market, I met a person with blue eyes, and he advocated himself as a descendant of Alexander the Great. (P69-S31-L4-5)

Twelve participants discovered that the traditional dance of Ladakh was a nostalgic experience:

I witnessed the Spawo (bravery dance), which took me back into the ancient life of the Ladakhi Kingdome era. (P16-S33-L7-8)

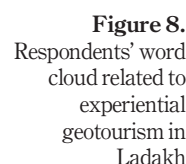
Finally, 21 participants reported that Ladakh showcases multiculturalism, history and preservation in various forms:

I found during my visit to Alchi Monastery that tourists in short pants were not allowed inside the monastery to preserve the valuable wall paintings. (P5-S3-L12-13)

I gained immense knowledge about the history and lifestyle of ancient Ladakh during my visit to the Hemis Museum. (P74-S35-L10-11)

To enrich our understanding of experiential geotourism in Ladakh, we used word cloud analysis of responses (see [Figure 8](#)). This proved that respondents commonly used words like monastery, Leh, Mane, Ladakh, ancient, church, palace, stupa, chanting, dance and Ladakhi during the conversation on experiential geotourism in Ladakh. Accordingly, experiential geotourism represents guided tours and the establishment of geoactivities ([Shoukat et al., 2023](#)) to engage visitors and tourists in the understanding of earth sciences at the geotourism sites ([Wessels and Douglas, 2022](#)).

Although experiential tourism could be essential in a geotourism destination's development ([Tiago et al., 2021](#)), participants' perceptions have not been significantly demonstrated, which is in the early stages of geotourism destination development. Accordingly, it is understandable that this paper does not reveal a statistically significant effect of experiential tourism on Ladakh's development. The effect of experiential tourism on geotourism can vary based on numerous aspects, including tourism activity management and destinations' natural and cultural state.



Additionally, diverse types of infrastructure within destinations hold significant importance in driving regional tourism growth (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023). This is because they provide destination-specific resources that form the foundation for tourism activities. Tourism production outcomes are rooted in diverse tourist experiences, which are influenced by the infrastructure they use. Hence, infrastructure plays a pivotal role in tourism development (Shoukat *et al.*, 2023).

I found that Leh town has a variety of restaurants, but outside the town, variety is scarce. Restaurant menus outside town are dominated by local cuisines, e.g., Mok Mok, Thukpa, Khambir, and Sapta. The Alchi Kitchen (Alchi), Tibetan Kitchen (Leh), and De Khambir (Leh) are must-visit restaurants. (P13-S35-L3-6)

I tried Samosa, and it is a popular food in my country. (P43-S36-L7)

I tried Tisane tea, and a story of luck is associated with it. (P18-S37-L12)

Being a Brazilian, tasting Nankeen Chai (salty tea) was an amazing experience. (P82-S38-L8)

While I was sitting on a rooftop restaurant, I could see stars while I was having my dinner. I also bought organic fruits from local vendors; these vendors were wearing traditional attire. (P44-S39-L11-13)

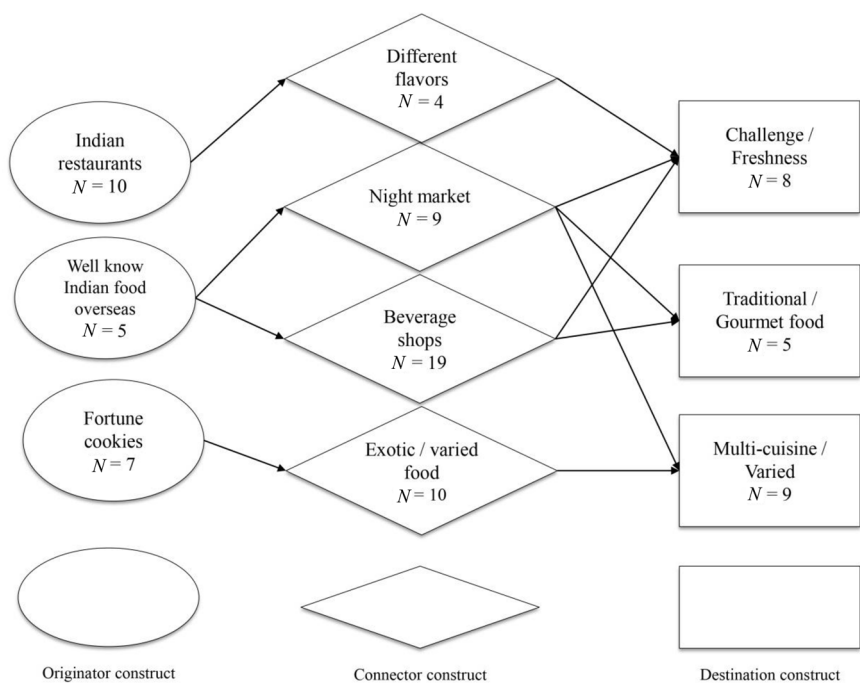


Figure 9.
Consensus map of the
change in SPARC
values

Source: Prepared by authors

Nineteen participants indicated that Ladakh has a variety of beverage shops:

I tasted butter tea, and it was the first time in my life that I was an American. I also found shops serving a variety of apricot beverages. (P41-S40-L18-19)

Ten participants indicated that Ladakh has exotic and varied food:

During my travels to a local festival, I tried Yak Cheese Mok-Mok, Skyu, and Chu-Tagi. It was a new experience for my taste buds. (P36-S42-L21-22)

Eight participants indicated that a smooth supply of vegetables to Ladakh from other parts of the country is a challenge for the food industry in Ladakh:

During my visit to Zangsti Café, while I was having Khambir (mutton stuffed), I found a tomato missing in the chutney as the vegetable supply was hampered because of snowfall at Zozila. (P77-S43-L9-11)

Five participants indicated that Ladakh has a variety of traditional foods:

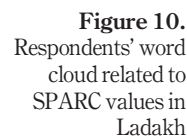
It was a soul-enriching experience to have traditional Ladakhi food, e.g., Kholag, Tang-Tur, Pagtsa Markhu, and Phating. (P51-S44-L2-3)

Nine participants indicated that Ladakh provides international cuisine-based restaurant services:

I tried Korean, Italian, Japanese, and Chinese food in Ladakh, and it gave me a sense of contentment. (P24-S45-L7-15)

It is essential to note that these perspectives are generalizations, and individual tourists within India may have many different perspectives on Ladakh land tourism based on their own experiences, beliefs and values. Public opinions may also change due to changing conditions and developments in the region. Further, individual opinions can vary, and not all foreign tourists have the same opinion. Finally, Ladakh perceptions can evolve as infrastructure, accessibility and tourism developments across the region change.

Our empirical results proved that participants perceive two factors, namely legislative requirements and geotourism services, as significantly vital to Ladakh's development as a geotourism destination. The two factors fit the notion of "geotourism," which embraces the protective and optimization aspects (Matshusa and Leonard, 2023). The protective factor acknowledges the roles of relevant stakeholders in preserving geoheritage sites and creating the institutional policies (Batabyal *et al.*, 2023) and mechanisms necessary to promote Ladakh as a geotourism destination (Hussain *et al.*, 2023). Bhat *et al.* (2023) highlighted that



Source: Prepared by authors

Ladakh is appealing from geotourism perspective because of its excellent aesthetic sense and good accessibility.

6. Implications

Theoretically, this paper contributes to the tourism development literature by supporting geotourism factors. Analyzing our findings, CDT and PMT theories offer a theoretical contribution in two significant domains: expectation and sense of place. In terms of theory, the operationalization of measurement reflects participants' expectations, and the significance of geotourism activities and the legislative requirements that describe such activities emphasize the importance of expectations. The expectation is drawn from such participants, who would aim to protect the identity and geosystem of Ladakh.

The protective expectation is reflected in the legislative requirements construct, which involves aspects of institutionalization, consultation with geologists and geoheritage protection. The degree of cognitive dissonance may also be inferred from the level of linkage between legislative requirements and SPARC values. Based on the extent of correlations, CDT determines whether to weaken or eliminate dissonant conditions or augment or intensify consonant conditions (Xu and Wu, 2022). Moreover, PMT theory offers a theoretical contribution to link protective mechanisms. The expectations highlight cognitive appraisals toward geotourism, at least from geologists' views, which may regulate their expectations and derive an understanding of Ladakh's development as a geotourism destination. The degree of motivation for protection may also be inferred from linking geotourism services with experiential tourism.

Practically, this paper provides managerial implications to marketers and tourism destination planners about how they can craft meanings – whether of temporal, spatial or socio-cultural implications – from the geoheritage (e.g. as about landforms and the earth's surface materials and landscapes) to deliver educational and leisure purposes. Geotourism makes use of Ladakh's natural resource advantages, like its distinctive geographical character (Bhat *et al.*, 2023) and its associated socio-cultural themes in terms of residents' heritages, cultures and lifestyles (Newsome and Dowling, 2018).

Legislative requirements are positively significant in influencing geologists' perceptions of Ladakh's development as a geotourism destination and reflect Ladakh's meaning intersections (e.g. geoheritage character and site identity). This paper provides valuable insights to government agencies that legislative requirements can be treated as legalizing and institutionalizing the planning, investment and residential support to enact the realization of geotourism services. In addition to geomarketing strategies, practitioners can focus on a more systematic investment plan that is more holistic, such as a museum that displays or educates on the uniqueness of the destination, landscapes and villages.

Geotourism services in Ladakh have the potential to contribute significantly to this region's economic growth while preserving its unique cultural heritage. Geotourism services in Ladakh should be developed in partnership with local communities. This will ensure that the benefits of tourism are shared equitably and that the cultural and environmental values of the region are respected. There is a need for capacity building in the region to ensure that local communities have the necessary skills to operate geotourism services. This can include training in hospitality, tour guiding and other tourism-related skills (Selem *et al.*, 2023b).

The effects of experiential tourism and SPARC values on Ladakh's development as a geotourism destination (Hussain *et al.*, 2023) reflect the reality that Ladakh's current geotourism activities are in their early stages of development, and these are two aspects that supply-side stakeholders and government policies should emphasize. At this juncture, it could imply that the supply side is not able to match the demand needs. If unresolved, it would lead to a competitive disadvantage in the geotourism market (Tiago *et al.*, 2021).

This paper also recommends engaging with local communities and stakeholders to ensure that they benefit from tourism and that their concerns are addressed.

7. Limitations and further studies

Our findings revealed that key drivers of statistical significance are categories of high importance and moderate-to-high performance levels, which reinforce the role of importance as customer expectation. However, the variables under consideration are not exhaustive, and further research could offer a more theory-driven and qualitative-based approach to expanding the variables. This leads to a better ability to study the legislative requirements of potential visitors and customer segments.

Second, further study can make use of Kano's three factors: basic, performance and excitement. The basic factor can offer a picture of the must-have preference of the potential visitors, while excitement factors for WOW experiences and performance factors indicate those geotourism attributes that visitors can easily define, articulate and communicate (Sinha *et al.*, 2023). Third, one of the main limitations is the lack of comparison between male and female geotourism experts or those who are nationals and expatriates from other countries (Elgammal *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, future researchers can make a comparison between these geoparks to develop some geological areas to serve sustainable tourism development goals.

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Further reading

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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Rupa Sinha is currently working as an Assistant Professor at the Amity Institute of Travel and Tourism Studies, Amity University, Kolkata, India. She has attended and presented research papers on a number of national and international platforms, including the Tourman conference in Greece, Hagia Sophia in Turkey, Viswa Bharati, Pondicherry University, Karnataka University and AIMS Delhi, and has been invited as a keynote speaker and delegate from several national and international bodies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Turkey and ASSOCHAM in India. Her area of research includes cultural and heritage tourism development, community-based tourism, indigenous community development, community development and sustainability.

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KORNWIK.A.DU , 3 พ.ย. 66, 15:22

กำหนดสถานะโครงการวิจัยโดยผู้ดูแลระบบ จาก (04) โครงการวิจัยอยู่ระหว่างดำเนินการ เป็น (02) ส่งกลับให้นักวิจัยดำเนินการแก้ไข

KORNWIK.A.DU , 3 พ.ย. 66, 15:24

ส่งโครงการวิจัยโดยนักวิจัย

MOHSIN.R , 14 พ.ย. 66, 17:44

ตรวจสอบโครงการวิจัยโดยผู้ดูแลระบบ และกำหนดสถานะเป็น (04) โครงการวิจัยอยู่ระหว่างดำเนินการ

KORNWIK.A.DU , 2 ธ.ค. 66, 16:06

คำนวณการจัดสรรงบประมาณโดยผู้ดูแลระบบ

KORNWIK.A.DU , 2 ธ.ค. 66, 16:07
- 2567

ลบเอกสารหนังสือยินยอม โดยผู้ดูแลระบบ

CHIRAWAN.L , 4 ม.ค. 67, 13:58

แจ้งขยายระยะเวลาโครงการวิจัย (2802)

MOHSIN.R , 31 ต.ค. 67, 15:11

เสนอผู้บริหารพิจารณาอนุมัติการขยายเวลาโครงการวิจัย (2802) โดยผู้ดูแลระบบ

KORNWIK.A.DU , 6 พ.ย. 67, 08:27

บันทึกและยืนยันผลการพิจารณาการขยายเวลาโครงการวิจัย (2802) โดย

ผู้บริหาร

ผลการพิจารณา: อนุมัติการขยายระยะเวลาโครงการ

👤 MUTTANACHAI.S , 13 พ.ย. 67, 08:50

2568**แจ้งขยายระยะเวลาโครงการวิจัย (2934)**

👤 MOHSIN.R , 20 มี.ค. 68, 16:29

เสนอผู้บริหารพิจารณาอนุมัติการขยายเวลาโครงการวิจัย (2934) โดย ผู้ดูแลระบบ

👤 YANIKA.O , 20 มี.ค. 68, 16:30

บันทึกและยืนยันผลการพิจารณาการขยายเวลาโครงการวิจัย (2934) โดย ผู้บริหาร

ผลการพิจารณา: ไม่อนุมัติการขยายระยะเวลาโครงการ

👤 MUTTANACHAI.S , 20 มี.ค. 68, 20:47

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An exploratory study with western female tourists about perceived drivers and challenges towards environmental stewardship in a nature-based destination

Kevin Fuchs

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ABOUT

Abstract

Nature-based destinations heavily rely on their natural environment as the primary driver to attract tourists. The balance between preserving the unique characteristics of the destination and meeting the demands of the rapidly growing tourism industry has become a pressing challenge. Environmental stewardship emerged as a proactive approach to mitigating the negative impacts of tourism on the environment. An exploratory research design was adopted to investigate how tourists perceive the importance of environmental stewardship. The thematic analysis revealed two primary themes that could explain the attitude-action-gap in the context of environmental stewardship. The results indicated a strong awareness of the importance of environmental stewardship. Moreover, there was a notable indifference towards taking action when the perceived impact seemed minimal or nonexistent. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to bridge the gap between awareness and behaviours among tourists and extend the discourse on the importance of long-term sustainability in nature-based destinations.

Keywords

environmental stewardship, sustainable tourism development, nature tourism, ecotourism, responsible practices

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Volume XV

Issue 1 (73)

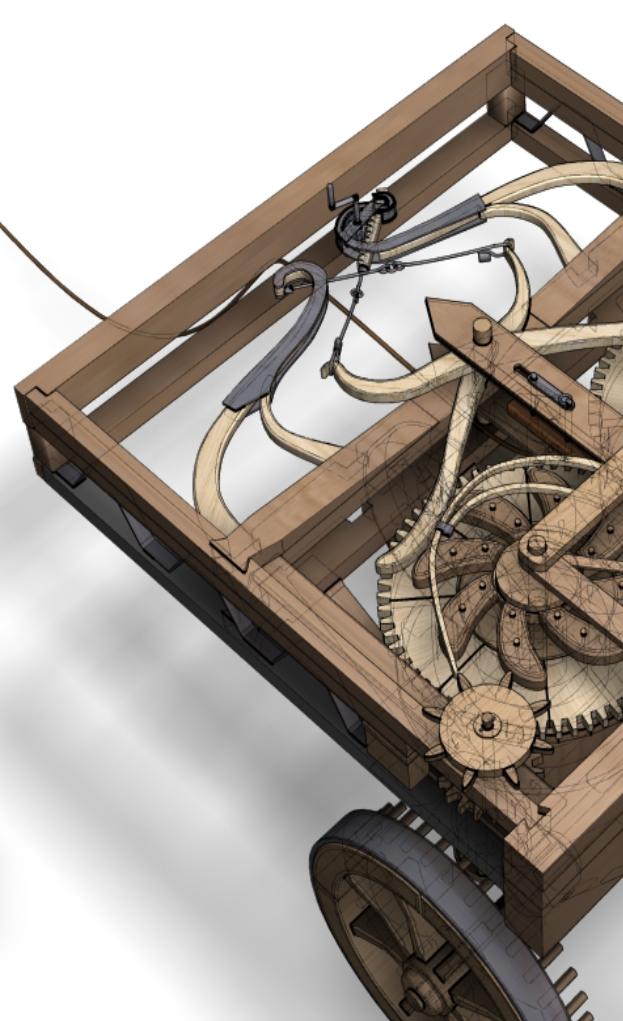
Spring 2024

ISSN 2068 – 7729

Journal DOI

<https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt>

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ISSN 2068 – 7729

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt>

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Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism

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Deadline for submission:	15 st April 2024
Expected publication date:	1 June 2024
Website:	https://journals.aserspublishing.eu/jemt
E-mail:	jemt@aserspublishing.eu



DOI: [https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v15.1\(73\).09](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v15.1(73).09)

An Importance-Performance Analysis of Accessible Tourism: A Tourist and Resident Perspective with Empirical Insights from Phuket

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Article info: Received 23 December 2023; Received in revised form 4 January 2024; Accepted for publication 26 January 2024; Published 29 February 2024. Copyright© 2024 The Author(s). Published by ASERS Publishing 2024. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of CC-BY 4.0 license.

Abstract: The fundamental principle of accessible tourism revolves around advocating for the inclusion and empowerment of individuals with disabilities, aiming to facilitate complete engagement for individuals with disabilities within tourism experiences. Previous research established a five-dimensional exploratory framework revealing several barriers that prevent Phuket Island from fully engaging in accessible tourism and increasing its global market share in this emerging market segment. This study sought to build upon previous findings by empirically investigating these barriers through the utilization of the importance-performance analysis method. Methodologically, survey data was collected from 391 tourists and residents in Phuket. The findings align with previous research, highlighting the preparedness of Phuket's international airport, diverse luxury accommodation options, and internationally accredited medical facilities. These elements stand out as exemplary in meeting the needs of accessible tourism. Conversely, the present infrastructure, insufficient transportation systems, and limited recreational options pose significant challenges, marking them as pivotal bottlenecks. The article discusses practical implications to rectify these limitations and advances the discussion about using the importance-performance analysis as a managerial tool to evaluate the quality of tourism experiences in the context of accessible tourism.

Keywords: accessible tourism; importance-performance analysis; inclusive tourism; disability; Thailand; sustainable development goals.

JEL Classification: L83; M39; Z32; Q01; R11.

Introduction

At its core, accessible tourism revolves around advocating for the rights of individuals with mental and physical disabilities to fully engage in tourism activities (Benjamin *et al.* 2021). This advocacy entails the removal of barriers that might impede differently abled tourists' participation (Scheyvens and Biddulph 2018), thereby ensuring that people with disabilities can enjoy tourist activities without hindrance (Szmukler *et al.* 2014). Accessible tourism is an emerging field of study and poised to impact the competitiveness of tourism destinations in various dimensions, be it from a human rights perspective, the emergence of a new market segment, or the enhancement of service delivery (Michopoulou *et al.* 2015; Fuchs, 2023). Moreover, accessible tourism is a pivotal consideration, not only because accessibility is a fundamental human right (McCabe and Diekmann 2015) but also due to its significance as a business opportunity (Darcy *et al.* 2010) and as an integral component of sustainable tourism implementation (Sica *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, this type of tourism serves to promote equality in tourism development, embracing individuals of all abilities (Qiao *et al.* 2021). Consequently, it plays a key role in the realm of inclusive tourism, aligning with the objectives of reducing inequalities outlined in Sustainable Development Goal Ten (SDG10) (United Nations, 2022).

An exploratory investigation in Phuket unveiled a range of barriers hindering the island's full engagement in accessible tourism and its global market share expansion for physically disabled tourists (Fuchs 2023). Addressing these barriers, including the enhancement of physical infrastructure, diversification of recreational offerings for the physically disabled, and provision of more affordable accommodation options, has the potential to reduce inequality (Sahoo and Choudhury 2023). To overcome these challenges, an importance-performance

analysis (IPA) was implemented to comprehensively assess Phuket's readiness. IPA can help prioritize areas for improvement while maintaining overall quality (Deepa and Baral 2019). An empirically informed approach can guide tourism stakeholders in Phuket to efficiently plan and implement improvements that benefit both the destination and the emerging accessible tourism segment. Therefore, the study presented in this article extends the existing literature in several ways and provides valuable practical implications for policymakers in Phuket. First, the study presented in this article builds upon prior research, which primarily aimed to understand barriers faced by differently abled travelers (Sisto *et al.* 2022; Fuchs 2023) or recognize the economic potential of specialized travel (Özogul and Baran 2016). Moreover, the article highlights the need for more research dedicated to identifying barriers and understanding tourist preferences from the perspective of differently abled individuals.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Literature on Accessible Tourism

The European Network for Accessible Tourism acknowledges that there is not one universal definition of accessible tourism, but broadly defines it as follows:

"Accessible Tourism' refers to tourism that caters to the needs of a full range of consumers including persons with disabilities, older persons, and cross-generational families. It entails [the] removal of attitudinal and institutional barriers in society, and encompasses accessibility in the physical environment, in transportation, information and communications, and other facilities and services. It encompasses publicly and privately-owned tourist locations" (ENAT, n.d.).

Furthermore, Simon Darcy, a renowned scholar and pioneer in accessible tourism research, said the following more than a decade ago:

"Accessible tourism enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing, and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services, and environments. This definition is inclusive of all people including those traveling with children in prams, people with disabilities, and seniors" (Darcy and Dickson 2009, 34)

Successful implementation of accessible tourism often hinges on a closely coordinated effort involving collaboration among local stakeholders (Michopoulou *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, Michopoulou *et al.* (2015) noted that enhancing the accessibility of facilities, transportation, attractions, and, more broadly, destinations necessitates the collective involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders, including travelers with disabilities. Moreover, accessible tourism can be viewed as a competitive advantage in the global positioning and marketing of destinations (Kourkouridis and Salepaki 2023). Accessible tourism aims to make travel and tourism experiences inclusive for individuals with disabilities and people with special needs (Qiao *et al.* 2023).

Although it is an emerging market segment, accessible tourism gained increasing attention as more destinations and businesses recognized the importance of catering to a diverse range of travelers (Cockburn-Wooten and McIntosh 2020). Notably, Phuket, a tropical island heavily reliant on tourism and esteemed as a world-class destination (Jarumaneerat 2022), plays a substantial role in Thailand's economic prosperity through tourism revenues (Fuchs 2021). In addition, the proposed direction aligns with the government's strategy of positioning Phuket as a premier health and wellness tourism destination (Sopha *et al.* 2019). Despite Phuket's appeal as a destination, the study reveals that inclusivity remains a challenge there, contributing to inequality (Weiss *et al.* 2018; Fuchs 2023).

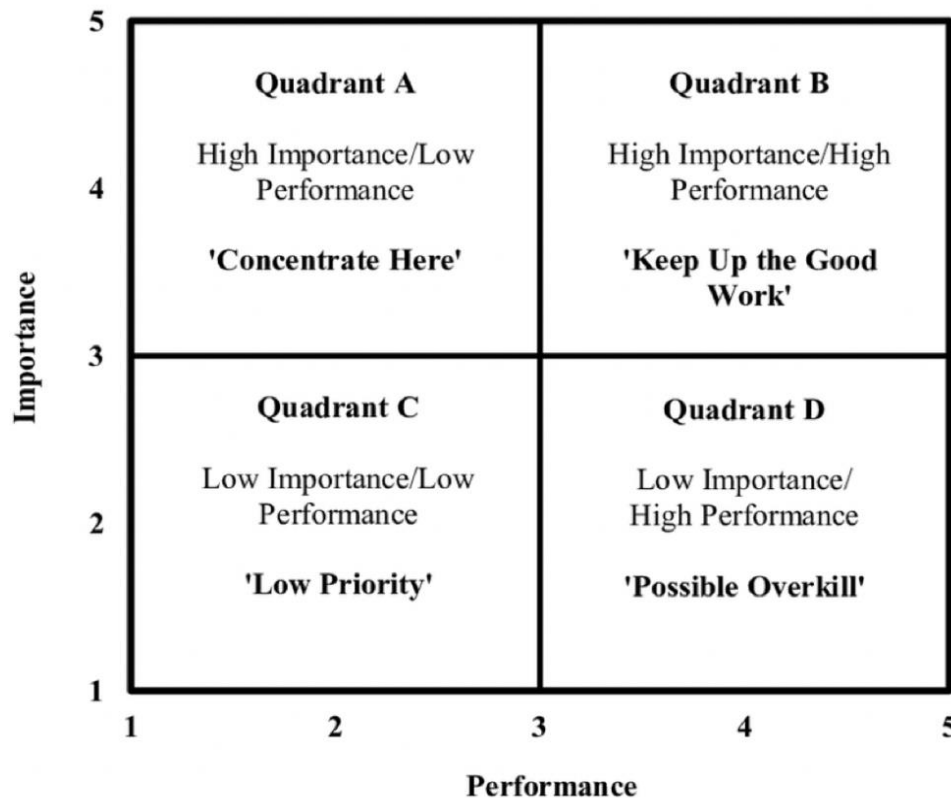
1.2. Importance-Performance Analysis in Tourism

Importance-performance analysis (IPA) is a well-established methodology employed in various fields to evaluate and improve the quality of products, services, or experiences (Agyekum *et al.* 2023). IPA is rooted in the field of marketing and was initially proposed by Martilla and James in the late 1970s (Chen *et al.* 2023). This analytical tool has since found widespread application in diverse sectors, with tourism being a prominent context (Simpson *et al.* 2020). The core purpose of IPA is to identify the critical dimensions or attributes of a product, service, or experience that deserve attention and improvement by categorizing them based on their importance and performance (Saleem *et al.* 2023).

In its fundamental form, IPA involves a two-dimensional matrix in which one axis represents the importance of various attributes and the other axis gauges the performance of the entity in delivering those

attributes (Mimbs *et al.* 2020). The resulting matrix is divided into four quadrants, each providing distinct insights and recommendations for action (Kokkhangplu and Kaewnuch, 2021; Boley and Jordan, 2023) as exemplified in Figure 1. Kokkhangplu and Kaewnuch (2021) as well as Boley and Jordan (2023) described these quadrants as "Keep Up the Work" (high importance, high performance), "Concentrate Here" (high importance, low performance), "Low Priority" (low importance, low performance), and "Possible Overkill" (low importance, high performance).

Figure 1. A visualization of the importance-performance analysis showing a two-dimensional matrix divided into four quadrants



Source: A modified version adapted from Ferreira and Fernandes (2015)

The importance of an attribute is usually determined through market research, while simultaneously, performance is evaluated by assessing the level at which the entity meets the standards or expectations set by its stakeholders, typically the customers (Boley *et al.* 2017). In the context of tourism, the application of IPA is of considerable significance (Simpson *et al.* 2020). Tourism is an industry that heavily relies on customer satisfaction and positive experiences (Simpson *et al.* 2020). The demand for destinations, accommodations, and attractions often hinges on the perceived quality of the experience offered (Yin *et al.* 2020). Consequently, managing the factors that contribute to a visitor's overall experience becomes paramount (Yin *et al.* 2020).

Tourism is inherently multifaceted, and tourists have diverse expectations and preferences (Cohen *et al.* 2014). Identifying which aspects of a destination, service, or experience matter most to various segments of tourists is a challenge that IPA can effectively address (Boley *et al.* 2017). By gathering data on tourists' perceptions of attribute importance and their corresponding assessments of performance, the tourism industry can better tailor its offerings to meet the needs and desires of different customer segments (Cohen *et al.* 2014). In doing so, it not only improves the overall tourist experience but can also gain an edge in a highly competitive market (Cohen *et al.* 2014; Singjai *et al.* 2018).

1.3. Accessibility Research in Phuket

Fuchs (2023) conducted an exploratory study in July 2022 focusing on the accessibility of Phuket for differently-abled individuals. The exploratory research collected data through semi-structured interviews. Moreover, the study revealed several noteworthy findings regarding the barriers and opportunities in this context. The research established a comprehensive framework to assess Phuket's readiness for accessible tourism, shedding light on the island's potential in this emerging market segment. Namely, the dimensions were: (1) airport facilities, (2)

accommodation services, (3) transportation and infrastructure, (4) recreational activities, and (5) health and wellness (including medical facilities). Within this framework, various dimensions were explored, encompassing different aspects of the travel experience (Fuchs 2023).

It was observed that the airport facilities at Phuket International Airport (IATA: HKT) generally provided adequate support for travelers with disabilities, including dedicated wheelchair services. However, the research also highlighted a noteworthy contrast between the ease of arrival at the airport and the challenges faced in departing from it. In terms of transportation and infrastructure, the study found that Phuket had limited options for disabled tourists, particularly when it came to the availability of accessible taxis. Furthermore, the absence of a well-developed public transportation network and the existence of insufficient infrastructure, such as roads and sidewalks, posed significant hurdles for differently-abled individuals moving around the island. The sentiment among participants was that “there are not many options for differently abled to independently move around the island” (Fuchs 2023, 801).

Accommodation services in Phuket varied widely, from budget to luxury options. Generally, lower-end accommodations were less accommodating for individuals with physical disabilities due to inadequate infrastructure. On the other hand, high-end hotels were better equipped to cater to the needs of disabled tourists. The availability of recreational activities for differently-abled tourists in Phuket was found to be limited, with the extent of options decreasing as the severity of physical disabilities increased. Inclusivity in these activities was lacking, partly due to additional costs associated with accommodating disabilities. For example, some participants in the study voiced their concern by noting that “the additional costs [for recreational activities] make it less desirable and financially sustainable” (Fuchs 2023, 801).

Table 1. Positive aspects and areas for improvement concerning Phuket's readiness for accessible tourism

Positive Aspects
The airport provides adequate support for travelers with disabilities (including dedicated wheelchair services)
High-end hotels are well-equipped to cater to the needs of differently-abled tourists
Availability of state-of-the-art private medical centers operated by world-class physicians
Areas for Improvement
Limited transportation options for differently-abled tourists, with a need for pre-booking accessible taxis
A lack of a well-developed public transportation network
Inadequate infrastructure (including road crossings and sidewalks that pose a significant barrier)
Limited availability of recreational activities for differently-abled tourists in Phuket

Source: Summarized in tabular form based on the findings from Fuchs (2023)

One of the most contentious findings emerged in the area of health and wellness. Phuket was recognized for its private medical centers staffed by world-class physicians. While some interviewees highlighted concerns about the cost of health insurance for people with disabilities, the quality of medical assistance in Phuket was generally regarded as meeting international standards. Access to high-quality healthcare facilities was deemed essential for selecting a vacation destination for differently-abled individuals. The aforementioned Table 1 presents a summary of the findings from Fuchs' study (2023), categorizing them into positive aspects and areas requiring improvement. This establishes the foundational framework for further exploration of Phuket's readiness for accessible tourism.

2. Methodology

2.1. Study Site

Phuket, a tropical island heavily reliant on tourism and esteemed as a world-class destination (Jarumaneerat 2022), plays a substantial role in Thailand's economic prosperity through tourism revenues (Fuchs 2021). Phuket is Thailand's largest island, with a total land area of 543 km². In comparison, Phuket is somewhat smaller than the sovereign island city-state of Singapore (728.6 km²) and about half the size of Okinawa in Japan (1,199 km²). Given the island's location in the Andaman Sea, Phuket is often referred to as “The Pear of the Andaman Sea.” Overall, Phuket is the second-smallest province in Thailand but a substantial contributor to the national GDP.

2.2. Research Instrument

A survey was used as the research instrument for this study. The questionnaire was designed to gather information on various aspects connecting Phuket to the realm of accessible tourism. In total, 10 statements were asked, including but not limited to the readiness of hotel staff to cater to differently-abled customers,

infrastructure, transport systems, accessibility, and marketing activities (Table 3). The questionnaire design for the IPA largely followed the guidelines in Simpson *et al.* (2020) based on the five themes identified in Fuchs (2023). The first draft of the questionnaire, including the phrasing of each statement, was established by the lead researcher and reviewed by two academics in similar research fields. After minor adjustments to improve comprehension and avoid ambiguous phrasing, a pre-test was conducted with a sample of 15. The final questionnaire asked the respondents to rate the 10 statements on their importance and performance on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = “Not at all important” and 5 = “Extremely important” for the importance of an attribute and 1 = “Highly dissatisfied” and 5 = “Highly satisfied” for the performance of that attribute.

2.3. Sampling and Data Collection

Five hundred questionnaires were administered to obtain the desired number of responses. In total, 391 responses were included in the final analysis, corresponding to a response rate of 78%. The data collection was conducted during 2023 in three tourist locations (Patong Beach, Phuket Town, and Laguna Area). Research assistants were employed to distribute the questionnaires and collect them a few minutes later. To minimize selection bias by the fieldworkers, every fifth person was approached for participation. Informed consent about the research aim and objective of the study was a prerequisite for participation. After returning the questionnaire, each participant received a souvenir as a token of appreciation for their participation. Those who declined to participate in the survey and unreturned/incomplete questionnaires were considered as non-respondents. The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

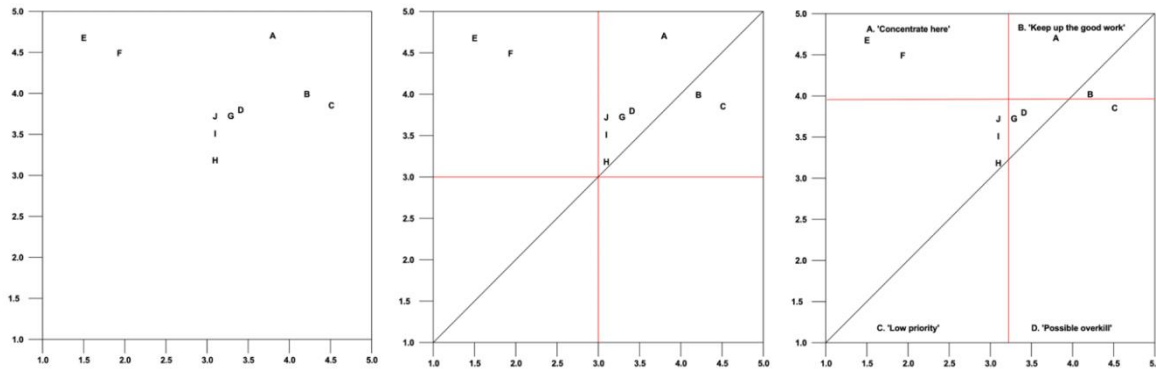
Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Type	Tourist	287	73%
	Resident	104	27%
Gender	Male	183	47%
	Female	208	53%
Nationality	Thai	86	22%
	Foreign	305	78%
Age	18 – 29 years old	92	24%
	30 – 39 years old	123	31%
	40 – 49 years old	51	13%
	50 – 59 years old	77	20%
	60 years old or over	48	12%
Education	Not Graduated	28	7%
	High School Diploma	135	35%
	University Degree	212	54%
	Other	16	4%

Source: Summarized in tabular form based on the empirical data

2.4. Data Analysis

The collected data was converted into a spreadsheet and cleaned by performing a consistency check before proceeding to a detailed analysis. For example, incomplete questionnaires with many missing responses were discarded. Furthermore, unengaged responses (*i.e.*, 3-3-3-3 or 5-5-5-5) were removed (Guin *et al.* 2012). The data set was analyzed using a combination of JASP (V.0.18.1) and Microsoft Excel. This process included calculating the mean values for each statement, the perceived gap between importance and performance (Table 3), and, finally, several iterations of plotting the results into graphs (Figure 2) until the final result emerged (Figure 3).

Figure 2. A visual representation of importance–performance analysis by plotting the mean values onto the graph (left), adding the four quadrants and a diagonal line where importance and performance align (center), and adjusting the quadrants based on the empirical results (right)



Source: The visualization plot is based on the collected empirical data

3. Empirical Results

The first statement asked the respondents to rate the importance and performance of medical facilities in Phuket. The exact statement read, “The medical facilities are well-equipped and prepared for differently-abled tourists.” The perceived importance yielded a high average rating of 4.70 out of 5.00, whereas the perceived performance yielded 3.82 out of 5.00. This negative gap (-0.88) indicates that the perceived performance does not live up to the perceived importance (Statement A). The second statement inquired about the “variety of accommodation options for differently-abled tourists.” The perceived importance yielded an average rating of 4.00 out of 5.00, whereas the perceived performance yielded 4.22 out of 5.00. This positive gap (+0.22) indicates that the perceived performance is higher than the perceived importance (Statement B).

The third statement, “The hotel staff is ready to help and assist differently-abled tourists,” received an importance rating of 3.84 (out of 5.00) and a (relatively high) performance rating of 4.54 (out of 5.00). This positive gap (+0.70) indicates that the perceived performance is higher than the perceived importance (Statement C). The fourth statement asked the participants to rate the access and facilities for differently-abled tourists at Phuket International Airport. The importance rating was 3.80 (out of 5.00), whereas the performance rating was slightly lower at 3.46 (out of 5.00), creating a negative gap (-0.34) (Statement D). Fifth, the participants were asked to rate the following statement: “There are inclusive transportation options available for differently-abled tourists.” The perceived importance yielded an average rating of 4.67, whereas the average performance yielded a 1.61 rating (Statement E).

Next, the participants were asked about the infrastructure, *i.e.*, “The infrastructure in the tourist areas supports access for differently-abled tourists,” resulting in 4.47 for importance and 1.86 for performance (Statement F). Sixth, respondents were asked if Phuket brands itself as an accessible destination for differently-abled tourists. This resulted in average ratings of 3.67 out of 5.00 for importance and 3.33 out of 5.00 for performance (Statement G). The next item asked about recreational activities, *i.e.*, “There is a range of recreational activities catering to the differently-abled tourists,” which yielded average ratings of 3.13 for importance and 3.07 for performance (Statement H). Furthermore, the participants were asked if “Restaurants around the island are prepared and cater to differently-abled tourists,” which resulted in mean values of 3.52 (out of 5.00) for importance and 3.08 (out of 5.00) for performance, creating a negative gap (-0.44) (Statement I).

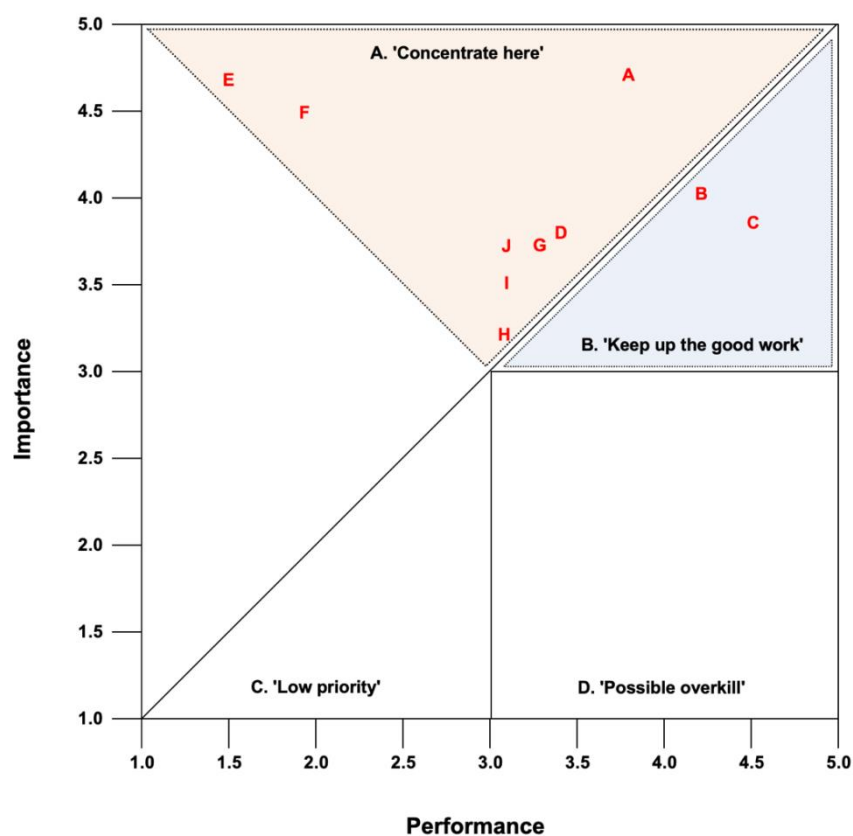
The last statement required the respondents to provide their overall sentiment, asking them if “Phuket Island is generally prepared and equipped for differently-abled tourists.” This resulted in average ratings of 3.68 out of 5.00 for importance and 3.05 out of 5.00 for performance. This negative gap (-0.63) indicates that the perceived performance does not live up to the perceived importance (Statement J). A summary of all mean ratings and the corresponding gap are reported in Table 3 below. After descriptive analysis of the results, it is noteworthy to mention that two items had a positive gap (Statements B and C, respectively), indicating that the perceived performance outperforms the perceived importance. On the other hand, eight items had a negative gap ranging from -0.06 (Statement H) to -3.06 (Statement E). In the following step, the results are visualized through a plot graph to identify areas requiring attention (Figure 3).

Table 3. Results of the importance-performance analysis including mean values for each category and their gap dimension

Code	Abbreviation	Statement	Mean Value		Gap
			Importance	Performance	
A	MEDICAL	The medical facilities are well-equipped and prepared for differently-abled tourists.	4.70	3.82	-0.88
B	ACCOMMODATION	There is a good variety of accommodation options for differently-abled tourists.	4.00	4.22	0.22
C	READINESS	The hotel staff is ready to help and assist differently-abled tourists.	3.84	4.54	0.70
D	AIRPORT	The international airport provides access and facilities for differently-abled tourists.	3.80	3.46	-0.34
E	TRANSPORT	There are inclusive transportation options available for differently-abled tourists.	4.67	1.61	-3.06
F	INFRASTRUCTURE	The infrastructure in the tourist areas supports access for differently-abled tourists.	4.47	1.86	-2.61
G	MARKETING	Phuket brands itself as an accessible destination for differently-abled tourists.	3.67	3.33	-0.34
H	ACTIVITIES	There is a range of recreational activities catering to the differently-abled tourists.	3.13	3.07	-0.06
I	RESTAURANT	Restaurants around the island are prepared and cater to differently-abled tourists.	3.52	3.08	-0.44
J	OVERALL	Phuket Island is generally prepared and equipped for differently-abled tourists.	3.68	3.05	-0.63

Source: Summarized in tabular form based on the empirical data

Figure 3. A revised importance-performance analysis plot graph divided into four quadrants



Source: The visualization plot is based on the collected empirical data

As initially stated, the importance-performance analysis plot graph is divided into four quadrants following good practice (Kokkhangplu and Kaewnuch 2021; Boley and Jordan 2023). These quadrants are labeled as "Keep Up

the Work" (high importance, high performance), "Concentrate Here" (high importance, low performance), "Low Priority" (low importance, low performance), and "Possible Overkill" (low importance, high performance). Notably, the quadrants "Low Priority" and "Possible Overkill" yielded no results. This indicates that none of the reported statements are perceived as exceptionally unimportant or particularly high-performing. Both statements with the positive gaps (Statements B and C, respectively) are placed in the quadrant "Keep Up the Work." This indicates that Phuket – as a destination – is perceived as well-positioned regarding the variety of accommodation options for differently-abled tourists and that lodging staff is ready to assist these tourists (Figure 3).

Consequently, the eight negative gaps are placed in the remaining quadrants, *i.e.*, "Concentrate Here" indicating that there is still room for improvement (Figure 3). However, it is noteworthy that not all eight statements are equally weighted. For example, priority should be placed on those with the largest gap between importance and performance, namely, "inclusive transportation options available for differently-abled tourists" (Statement E) and "infrastructure in the tourist areas supports access for differently-abled tourists" (Statement F). Moreover, it is important to see the results in context (to perceived importance) without entirely relying on the severity of the gap. For example, MEDICAL (statement A) yielded the third largest negative gap (-0.88) following TRANSPORT (Statement E) and INFRASTRUCTURE (Statement F), though this stemmed primarily from the high level of importance placed on this item (4.70 out of 5.00). Therefore, it is important to evaluate the gap (between perceived importance and perceived performance) in context to the perceived performance of each statement.

4. Discussion and Implications

The study focused on understanding the dimensions influencing the engagement of differently-abled tourists within Phuket, revealing a nuanced picture. The empirical investigation shed light on various aspects, showcasing both strengths and areas requiring substantial attention to foster a more inclusive and accommodating environment. Certain elements stood out positively. Notably, the variety of accommodation options available for differently-abled tourists and the readiness of lodging staff to assist these individuals were perceived as commendable. This indicates a level of preparedness and a proactive approach within the lodging sector, reflecting positively on Phuket's potential to cater to this specific segment of tourists (Scheyvens and Biddulph 2018). However, the study brought forward several critical areas demanding immediate focus and improvement.

Foremost among these are the inadequacies in transportation options and the deficiency in infrastructure supporting access for differently-abled tourists in the tourist areas. These findings underscore the pressing need for substantial enhancements to make Phuket more accessible and accommodating to individuals with disabilities (Fuchs 2023). Notably, the negative gaps between perceived importance and performance were not uniform across the surveyed dimensions. While some aspects like medical facilities showcased a negative gap, it is important to contextualize these results against the perceived importance assigned to each dimension. For instance, the high level of perceived importance of medical facilities (rated 4.70 out of 5.00) contributed to the negative gap despite a relatively high performance rating (3.82 out of 5.00). This underlines the high expectations and critical importance attached to this aspect.

The transformation of Phuket into a more inclusive destination requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing not only physical infrastructure but also cultural awareness and sensitivity toward diverse tourist needs. In light of these findings, the implications for the tourism industry in Phuket are significant. For example, addressing the identified shortcomings and implementing practical solutions will put Phuket on the map for another segment of tourism (*i.e.*, inclusive tourism). In particular, improving transportation systems and the local infrastructure (streets, sidewalks, road crossings, etc.) should be a priority (Natalia *et al.* 2019; Gillovic and McIntosh, 2020). Devile and Kastenholz (2020) add that these factors influence travel decisions and satisfaction, and therefore, Phuket is not maximizing its full potential with this customer segment.

Improving ground transportation options and enhancing the accessibility infrastructure within tourist areas can substantially boost Phuket's appeal as an inclusive and accommodating destination for differently-abled tourists (Fuchs 2023). Additionally, stakeholders within the tourism industry in Phuket should leverage the positive aspects identified, such as the readiness of lodging staff and the existing variety of accessible accommodations. Strengthening and further promoting these attributes can support Phuket's image as an attractive and hospitable destination for individuals with disabilities (Devile and Kastenholz 2020). Ongoing commitment to continuous improvement and sustained investment in accessibility infrastructure will be crucial in ensuring Phuket's long-term success as an inclusive tourist destination (Adshead *et al.* 2019; Darcy *et al.* 2020).

Lastly, the study confirms the validity of the IPA as a managerial tool for evaluating accessible tourism experiences in Phuket. It not only identifies key areas for improvement but also assists in prioritizing efforts,

allocating resources effectively, and fostering a continuous cycle of enhancement. Its structured approach and ability to provide actionable insights make it an invaluable instrument for decision-makers aiming to enhance the inclusivity and quality of tourism experiences for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, the iterative nature of IPA lends itself well to continual assessment and monitoring (Deepa and Baral 2019). It offers a mechanism for tracking improvements over time, allowing managers to gauge the effectiveness of interventions and measure progress in enhancing the quality of accessible tourism experiences in Phuket (Simpson *et al.* 2020).

5. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study add to our understanding of accessible tourism in Phuket while also highlighting avenues for future research (constrained by the methodology of this study or emerging from its findings). First, the study surveyed 391 tourists and residents in Phuket. Future research could aim for a larger and/or more diverse sample to enhance the representativeness. Additionally, including perspectives from a more extensive range of stakeholders (for example, interviews with local authorities or disability advocacy groups) could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Second, the study focused primarily on Phuket Island. Future research could expand the scope to include other tourist destinations in Thailand or compare other island destinations on a global scale and contrast the challenges and successes that various destinations face in promoting accessible tourism. Third, the study might not have fully accounted for cultural nuances or specific contextual factors that influence perceptions of accessible tourism. Therefore, future research should consider these cultural complexities that might impact the experiences of differently-abled tourists. Moreover, the study has natural limitations related to the time frame during which data was collected. Tourism landscapes evolve, and improvements might have occurred after the study's completion. Thus, continuous reassessments are needed to monitor the progress and evaluate the status quo.

Conclusion

The results of the research provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of Phuket's accessible tourism landscape. Phuket can significantly enhance its reputation as an inclusive and welcoming destination for all by addressing the highlighted areas of improvement. This approach aligns with the core principles of accessible tourism, fostering greater engagement among differently-abled tourists. Therefore, this research serves as a roadmap for stakeholders to focus on improving these key areas, positioning Phuket to excel in accessible tourism and offer fulfilling experiences to tourists with diverse needs. This can be achieved by leveraging the existing strengths while diligently addressing the highlighted bottlenecks. Thus, Phuket can establish itself as a leading and exemplary destination for accessible tourism, ensuring enjoyable and fulfilling experiences for all visitors, irrespective of their abilities. Moreover, the results highlight the economic potential of catering to accessible tourism, opening doors to a wider market and enhancing Phuket's competitiveness on the global tourism stage. Finally, emphasizing inclusivity not only benefits differently-abled tourists but also aligns with a broader global movement toward more equitable and accessible tourism practices.

Acknowledgments

Any opinions articulated in this article do not necessarily reflect the stance of the affiliated institution.

Funding

The Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, Prince of Songkla University supported the research financially through the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Research Fund (Contract No. FHT66000008).

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

The author confirms sole responsibility for the conception of the article and its design, the empirical data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and the final manuscript preparation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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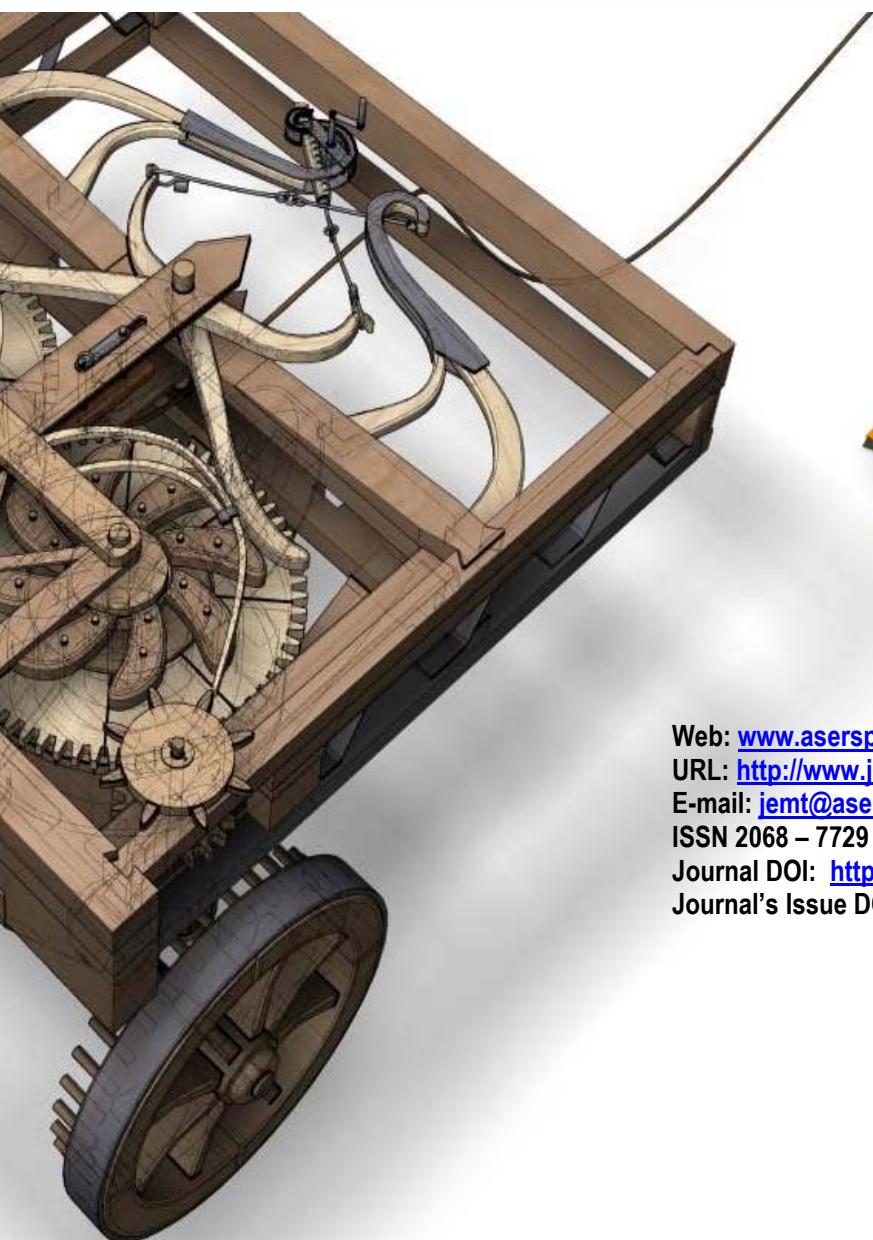
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Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt>

Journal's Issue DOI: [https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v15.1\(73\).00](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v15.1(73).00)



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Enhancing qualitative tourism research through reflexivity and rigour: an experience from a doctoral study

Kevin Fuchs

Published Online: September 4, 2024 · pp 449-460 · <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTP.2024.140946>

ABOUT

Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the author's experiences in embracing reflective practices within doctoral research and explores the potential of reflexivity to enhance the quality of research outputs. The paper argues for the importance of situating oneself within a specific research paradigm and encourages qualitative tourism researchers to incorporate reflexive writing as a tool. Reflexive writing preserves the integrity of research outcomes but also enriches their quality by cultivating researcher self-awareness and facilitating a deeper interpretation of findings. By adhering to rigorous protocols and embracing reflexivity, researchers ensure the integrity and validity of their results. This paper emphasises the significance of recognising and challenging the misconception that self-inclusion in research constitutes improper practice. When employed appropriately, reflexive writing enhances the overall quality of qualitative research. Moreover, it fosters an understanding that researchers are an integral part of the research process, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields.

Keywords

reflexivity, tourism research, research methodology, rigour, reflective practices

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Unravelling perceived travel risk: a regression study with implications for tourism planners

Kevin Fuchs

Published Online: May 2, 2024 · pp 257-271 · <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTP.2024.138402>

ABOUT

Abstract

Understanding the factors that shape travel risk perception is essential for developing effective risk management strategies and targeted marketing campaigns in the tourism industry. This study investigated the relationship between social media usage, personal prior experiences, healthcare concerns, information preferences, and gender in shaping perceived travel risks toward the intention to travel. Through an examination of 256 survey responses utilising multiple regression analysis, the study reveals a noteworthy connection between the utilisation of social media and personal past experiences, and their relationship with the intention to travel in relation to travel risk. The findings have implications for the tourism industry, as they enable tourism stakeholders to develop customised risk management strategies and targeted communication approaches by understanding the contributions that the investigated factors make to travel risk perception. Furthermore, the study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence into the complex interplay of factors influencing travellers' risk perception.

Keywords

travel risk, travel decision-making, social media, Thailand, personal experiences, healthcare

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Abstract

The ongoing decline of significant parts of the natural environment has elevated environmental awareness and has generated increased consumer interest in products such as green hotels. These hotels differ from conventional hotels by specifically appealing to environmentally sensitive consumers and offering a value proposition based on the adoption of green management practices. The emergence of green hotels as an alternative form of lodging offers opportunities for the hospitality sector to offer products and services that specifically promote sustainable approaches to accommodation. The study examines how international tourists in Phuket, Chiang Mai, and Bangkok perceive Thai green hotels. Forty-six semistructured interviews were undertaken and thematically analyzed. The findings revealed that tourists are generally aware of the environmental benefits that stem from green hotels. Limited availability and narrow variety as well as financial considerations and marketing transparency were the most important factors considered by respondents when considering green hotels. Theoretical implications for tourism researchers and practical implications for hotel managers are discussed.



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An Inductive Study with Travellers About the Perceived Barriers and Drivers to Sustainable Tourism Development in a Nature-Based Destination

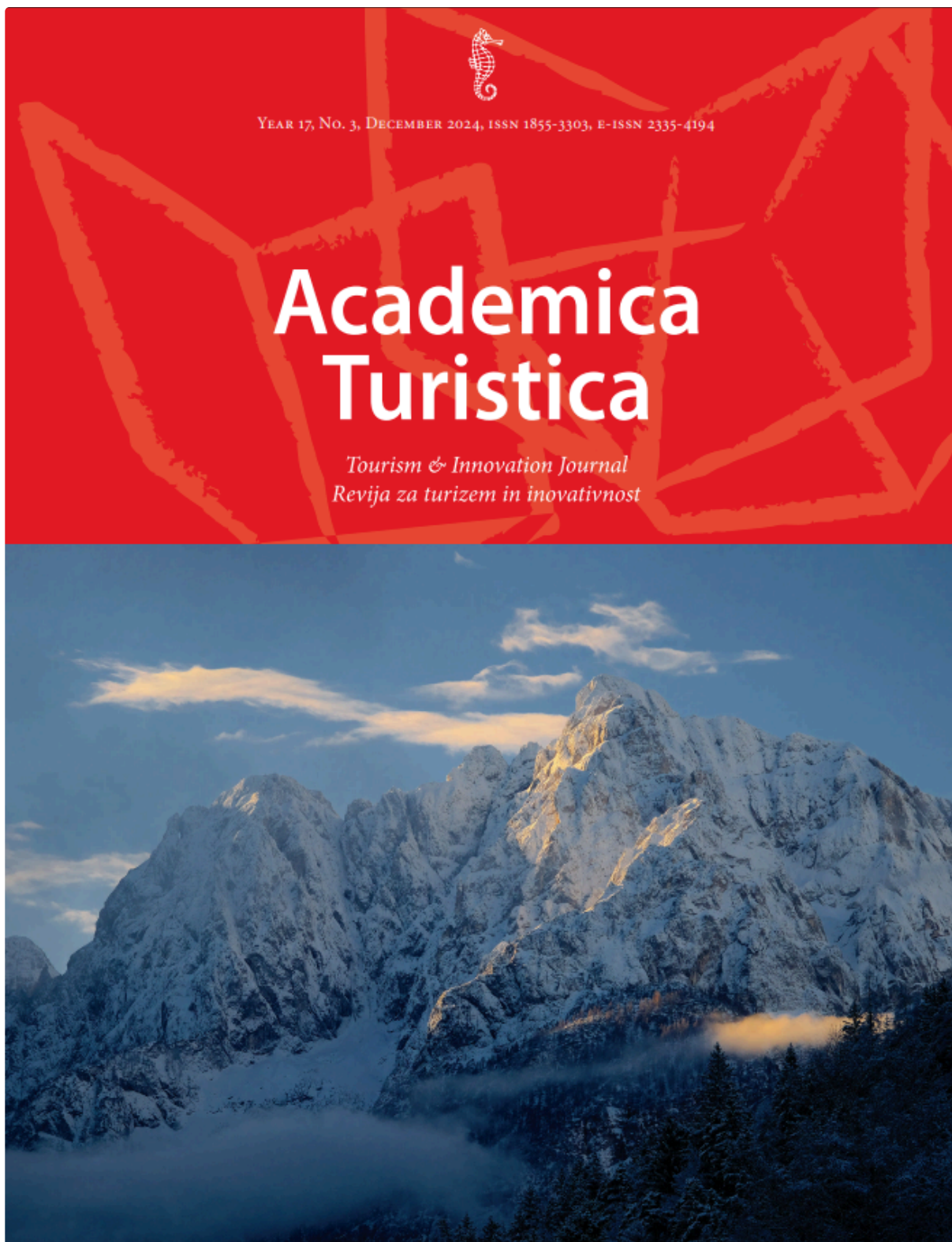
Kevin Fuchs

ABSTRACT

The growing popularity of nature-based tourism triggers concerns about its environmental and cultural impacts, thereby initiating discussions on diversifying and reinforcing economic strategies. This situation is particularly relevant in destinations like Phuket, which strives to position itself as a premier global tourist hotspot while relying significantly on international tourist receipts to sustain its island economy. The study identifies the perceived barriers and drivers that prevent and enable tourists from participating in practices that support sustainability in nature-based destinations such as Phuket, shedding light on fundamental factors influencing tourist

behaviours. The empirical data was gathered through 38 semi-structured interviews with Generation Z travellers and analysed thematically. The results highlight key barriers—costs, cultural differences, and convenience over sustainability—and drivers—social responsibility, policy support, and heightened awareness—impacting sustainable tourism development in Phuket. The study advances the discussion about the complicated interplay between individual motivations, external factors, and environmental realities in shaping tourists' sustainable behaviours. Theoretical implications for tourism researchers and practical implications for policymakers and businesses are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: green consumer behaviour, sustainability: environmental awareness, tourism development, tourism, sustainable tourism



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PUBLISHED

2025-03-21

HOW TO CITE

Fuchs, K. (2025). An Inductive Study with Travellers About the Perceived Barriers and Drivers to Sustainable Tourism Development in a Nature-Based Destination. *Academica Turistica - Tourism and Innovation Journal*, 17(3). Retrieved from <https://academica.turistica.si/index.php/AT-TIJ/article/view/707>

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Academica Turistica - Tourism and Innovation Journal | ISSN 1855-3303 (printed) | ISSN 2335-4194 (online)



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