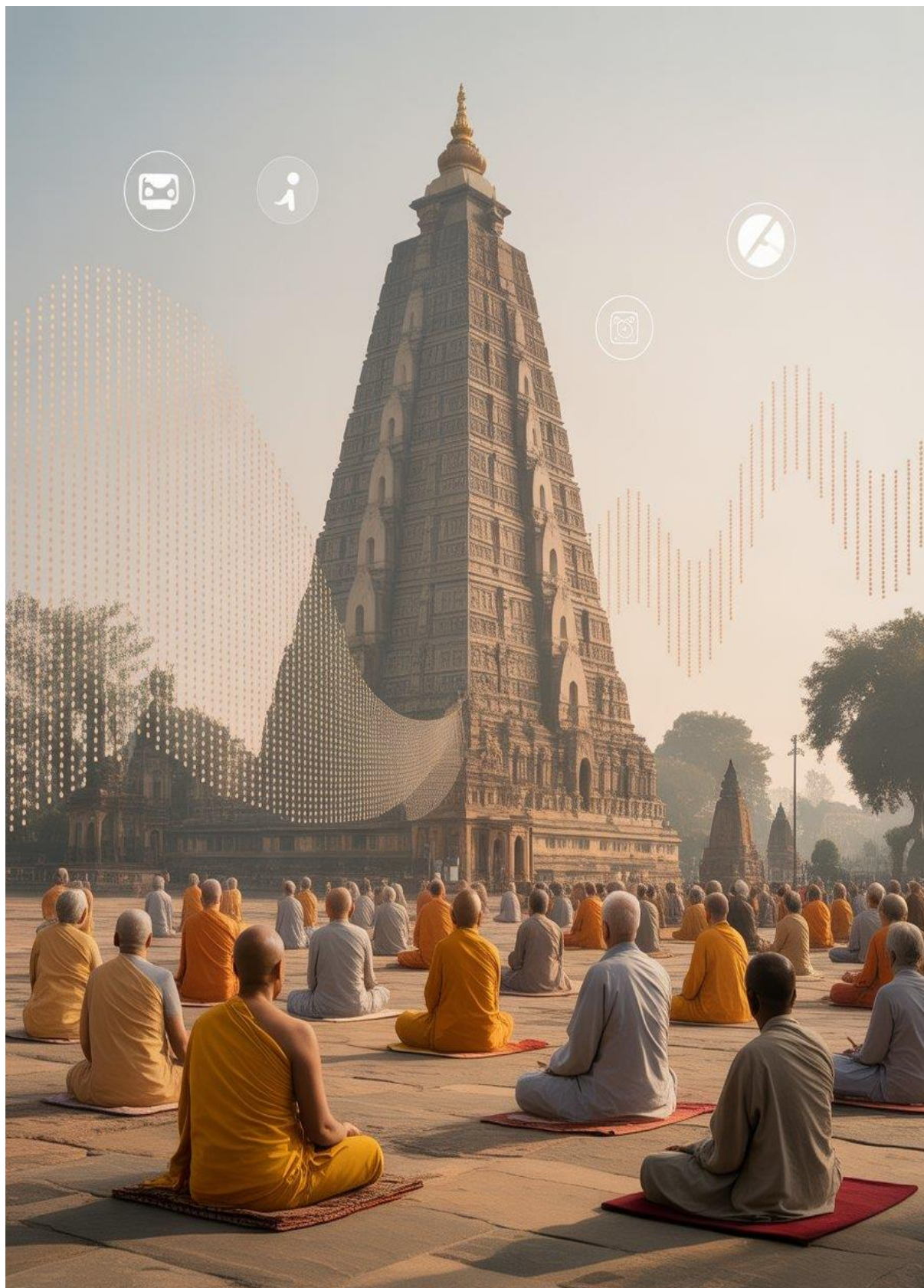




The Influence of Bodh Gaya Tourism Destination Image and Authenticity Attitude on Media Exposure Behavior and Perceived Value in Buddhist Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of the Bodh Gaya pilgrimage destination image and authenticity attitude on media exposure behavior, social media sharing behavior, and the perceived value of Buddhist tourism. Gender and age are incorporated as moderating variables. The sample comprised 397 Thai tourists aged 20 years and above who had visited Bodh Gaya and shared their pilgrimage experiences on social media platforms. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 0.05, and data were collected using a convenience sampling approach. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire developed from an extensive review of relevant literature, with reliability confirmed by Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.89. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis, and hierarchical multiple regression analysis. The results indicate that the environmental and facility dimensions of destination image, together with experiential authenticity attitude, have a significant positive effect on social media sharing behavior and enhance perceived spiritual and social value at the 0.05 significance level. The moderating analysis reveals that female tourists place greater importance on destination image, whereas male tourists emphasize authenticity attitude. In terms of age differences, tourists aged 30–39 prioritize destination image, while those aged 20–29 attach the highest importance to authenticity attitude. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Buddhist pilgrimage tourism by highlighting

the role of destination image, authenticity, and demographic characteristics in shaping media-related behaviors and perceived value.

Keywords: Destination Image, Authenticity Attitude, social media, Perceived Value, Buddhist Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Buddhist tourism has increasingly gained international scholarly and practical attention, as it integrates religious devotion, spiritual experience, and long-standing cultural heritage into a distinctive form of travel (Awais-E-Yazdan et al., 2025). Among the four principal Buddhist pilgrimage sites (Sangwechaneyasathan), Bodh Gaya in India holds exceptional significance as the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment, making it the spiritual epicenter of global Buddhist pilgrimage (Butcher & Chomvilailuk, 2022). As a result, Bodh Gaya attracts Buddhist pilgrims from diverse cultural and national backgrounds, serving not only as a sacred destination but also as a symbolic space for faith, learning, and identity construction (Hall, 2006).

In the contemporary tourism landscape, pilgrimage experiences are no longer confined to on-site religious practices. (Hemprapai et al., 2023). Instead, they are increasingly extended into digital spaces through social media, where tourists document, interpret, and share their experiences with wider audiences. (Liu et al., 2024). Social media has thus become a critical medium through which pilgrims communicate spiritual meanings, reinforce religious identity, and influence others' travel perceptions and intentions

Within tourism studies, destination image has been widely recognized as a key determinant of tourists' satisfaction, behavioral intentions, and decision-making processes (Mangar et al., 2024). Similarly, authenticity conceptualized in objective, ritualistic, and existential or experiential dimensions plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' psychological engagement and perceived meaning of travel experiences, particularly in religious and cultural tourism contexts (Manop Nakkannian et al., 2022). Despite their theoretical importance, empirical research that simultaneously examines destination image and authenticity attitude in relation to media exposure behavior, social media sharing, and perceived value remains limited, especially within the specific context of Buddhist pilgrimage tourism

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the influence of the Bodh Gaya destination image and authenticity attitude on social media sharing behavior and the perceived value of Buddhist tourism. (Phra Kru Pariyatti Wachirakhun, 2021). Furthermore, gender and age are incorporated as moderating variables to capture demographic differences in perceptions, media-related behaviors, and value formation among Thai Buddhist tourists

This study contributes to the literature by extending destination image and authenticity theories into the context of digital media behavior in Buddhist pilgrimage tourism. From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for tourism authorities, cultural organizations, and media agencies in designing targeted communication strategies, enhancing pilgrimage experiences, and promoting sustainable Buddhist tourism in the international arena.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the influence of the Bodh Gaya destination image and authenticity attitude on social media exposure and sharing behavior in the context of Buddhist tourism.
2. To examine the influence of the Bodh Gaya destination image and authenticity attitude on the perceived value of Buddhist tourism.
3. To analyze the moderating effect of gender on the relationships between the independent variables (destination image and authenticity attitude) and the dependent variables (social media exposure and sharing behavior, and perceived value).
4. To analyze the moderating effect of age on the relationships between the independent and dependent variables in the proposed research model.

3. RELATED LITERATURE

This study is grounded in an interdisciplinary body of literature that integrates tourism studies, religious and cultural tourism, media behavior, and value perception. (Phraathikanchaiya Piyatharo et al., 2023). The review focuses on four core constructs: destination image, authenticity attitude, social media behavior, and perceived value, which together form the theoretical foundation of the proposed research model (Rai, 2020).

Destination Image

Destination image is a fundamental concept in tourism research, referring to tourists' overall perceptions, beliefs, and impressions of a destination (Sanvises & Kaewnuch, 2025). It has been widely acknowledged as a key determinant of tourist satisfaction, destination choice, and post-visit behavior. (Santachitto, 2021). In the context of religious and pilgrimage tourism, destination image extends beyond physical attributes to include symbolic meanings, spiritual significance, and cultural narratives embedded within sacred sites. Recent studies emphasize that pilgrimage destination image is shaped by multiple dimensions, including environmental quality, facilities, historical authenticity, and religious atmosphere, all of which influence pilgrims' motivation and experiential outcomes (Worapongpat, 2023c). Empirical research in Asian tourism contexts further supports that a positive destination image enhances emotional attachment, behavioral intention, and value perception among tourists (Worapongpat et al., 2021). Accordingly, in the case of Bodh Gaya, destination image represents not only tangible infrastructure but also the spiritual and symbolic meanings associated with the site of enlightenment.

Authenticity Attitude

Authenticity is a central concept in understanding tourist experiences, particularly within cultural and religious tourism. Early conceptualizations distinguish between objective authenticity, which emphasizes the genuineness of objects and sites, and constructive authenticity, which is socially constructed through interpretation and experience (Worapongpat et al., 2023). More recent perspectives highlight existential authenticity, focusing on tourists' subjective feelings of self-discovery, spiritual fulfillment, and emotional engagement. In pilgrimage contexts, authenticity attitude reflects tourists' personal evaluations of the meaningfulness and spiritual depth of their experiences. Rather than merely observing sacred objects, pilgrims actively participate in rituals, practices, and symbolic acts that validate their faith and reinforce their spiritual identity (Yu et al., 2023). Empirical evidence suggests that authenticity perceptions significantly influence tourists' emotional responses, satisfaction, and perceived value, particularly when the experience aligns with deeply held religious beliefs.

Social Media Behavior

Social media behavior in tourism has been widely examined through the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which posits that individuals actively select media channels to satisfy specific psychological and social needs, such as information seeking, social interaction, and self-expression (Zhao et al., 2024). In tourism contexts, social media serves as a platform for experience sharing, identity construction, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which significantly influences destination image formation and travel decision-making

In the context of Buddhist pilgrimage, social media enables pilgrims to communicate spiritual meanings, document transformative experiences, and connect with wider religious communities beyond physical boundaries. (Phra Supakit Supanyo et al., 2023). Sharing pilgrimage experiences online not only influences others' perceptions but also reinforces pilgrims' own religious identity and sense of belonging (Zhao et al., 2024). Thus, media exposure and sharing behavior represent an important behavioral outcome influenced by both destination image and authenticity perceptions.

Perceived Value

Perceived value is a multidimensional construct traditionally defined as the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product or experience based on perceptions of what is received versus what is given (Kanchanathaveekul et al., 2024). further conceptualizes value as an experiential and subjective phenomenon encompassing emotional, social, and symbolic dimensions.

In religious and spiritual tourism, perceived value extends beyond economic or functional benefits to include spiritual enrichment, emotional well-being, and social connectedness (Worapongpat, 2023b). For Buddhist tourists, perceived value often manifests in forms such as inner peace, moral reflection, spiritual growth, and a shared sense of religious community (Palmer, Chuamuangphan, 2021). Accordingly, perceived value in this study is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising spiritual, social, and experiential value derived from the pilgrimage experience.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a conceptual framework that integrates destination image and authenticity attitude as key antecedents influencing media-related behaviors and perceived value in the context of Buddhist pilgrimage tourism. The framework proposes both direct and moderating relationships among the study variables, as illustrated in Figure 1.

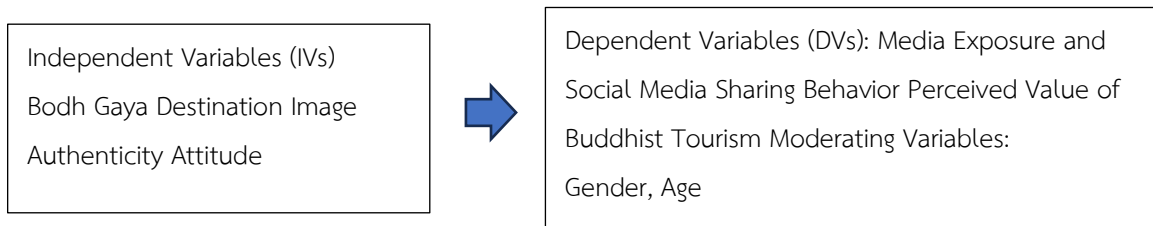


Figure 1 Shows the Conceptual Framework of the Research.

5. METHODOLOGY

Sample and Sampling

The target population of this study comprised Thai tourists aged 20 years and above who had visited the Bodh Gaya pilgrimage site in India at least once and had shared their travel experiences on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. The minimum required sample size was calculated using W.G. Cochran's formula for a population of unknown size, with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 0.05, resulting in a required sample of 385 respondents.

To enhance data robustness and reduce potential non-response or incomplete-response bias, a total of 436 questionnaires were distributed. After data screening and quality checks, 397 complete and usable questionnaires were retained for analysis, yielding a response rate of 91.06%, which exceeds the minimum statistical requirement. A convenience sampling method was employed due to the specific and hard-to-reach nature of the target population. Data were collected through both online Buddhist travel communities and offline pilgrim networks to improve sample diversity.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed through a comprehensive review of relevant literature and established theoretical frameworks. The questionnaire consisted of five sections:

1. Demographic Information: Gender, age, education level, monthly income, and pilgrimage experience (5 items).
2. Bodh Gaya Destination Image: Adapted from measuring perceptions of facilities, environmental quality, and spiritual connection to the destination (13 items).
3. Authenticity Attitude: Modified authenticity framework, encompassing object-based authenticity, activity-based authenticity, and existential authenticity (14 items).
4. Social Media Exposure and Sharing Behavior: Developed based on Uses and Gratifications capturing frequency of use, engagement level, and content creation related to pilgrimage experiences (12 items).
5. Perceived Value of Buddhist Tourism: Adapted consumer value typology, focusing on spiritual, social, and experiential value dimensions (12 items).

Except for demographic items, all questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

Content validity was established through expert evaluation by three scholars in tourism and social sciences, who assessed the relevance and clarity of the questionnaire items. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Based on a pilot test, the Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs ranged from 0.72 to 0.89, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, thereby indicating satisfactory internal consistency and suitability for data collection. Table 2 presents the reliability coefficients for each research construct.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software. The analytical procedures included:

Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to describe respondents' demographic characteristics and summarize the main study variables. Mean values were interpreted based criteria.

Inferential Statistics:

Multiple Regression Analysis was employed to examine the influence of destination image and authenticity attitude on media exposure and social media sharing behavior, as well as on perceived value of Buddhist tourism. Prior to regression analysis, multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance values to ensure that no serious multicollinearity issues were present

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis was used to test the moderating effects of gender and age on the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

6. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Dimension	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
Destination Image (DI)	Facilities	3.98	0.64
	Tourism Environment	4.12	0.58
	Spiritual Experience	4.21	0.55
Authenticity Attitude (AU)	Object-based Authenticity	4.07	0.62
	Activity-based Authenticity	3.95	0.67
	Symbolic Authenticity	4.18	0.57
Social Media Behavior (SM)	Experience Sharing	3.88	0.71
	Engagement	3.92	0.68
	Content Sharing	4.05	0.59
	Self-expression	4.10	0.63
Perceived Buddhist Value (PV)	Spiritual Value	4.25	0.52
	Social Value	4.08	0.61
	Learning Value	4.15	0.58

Note: N = 397. Mean scores range from 3.88 to 4.25, indicating a high level of perception across all constructs based criteria.

Table 2 Reliability and Validity of Research Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Destination Image (DI)	0.842	0.87	0.58
Authenticity Attitude (AU)	0.816	0.85	0.56
Social Media Behavior (SM)	0.847	0.88	0.59
Perceived Buddhist Value (PV)	0.833	0.86	0.60

Note: Cronbach's alpha values exceed 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency. CR and AVE values meet acceptable thresholds, confirming convergent validity.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Analysis of Destination Image and Authenticity Attitude on Social Media Behavior

Independent Variable	B	β	t	p
Destination Image (DI)	0.42	0.38	7.21	<0.001
Authenticity Attitude (AU)	0.29	0.27	5.84	<0.001

Model fit: $R^2 = 0.41$, $F = 135.70$, $p < 0.001$

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis of Destination Image, Authenticity Attitude, and Social Media Behavior on Perceived Buddhist Value

Independent Variable	B	β	t	p
Destination Image (DI)	0.24	0.22	4.56	<0.001
Authenticity Attitude (AU)	0.18	0.16	3.89	<0.001
Social Media Behavior (SM)	0.37	0.35	7.52	<0.001

Model fit: $R^2 = 0.53$, $F = 147.30$, $p < 0.001$

Table 5 Moderating Effects of Gender and Age on the Relationships between Independent and Dependent Variables

Panel A: Moderating Effect of Gender

Interaction Term	Dependent Variable	β	t	p
Destination Image $\times$ Gender	Perceived Buddhist Value	0.11	2.34	< 0.05
Authenticity Attitude $\times$ Gender	Perceived Buddhist Value	-0.09	-2.01	< 0.05

Note: Gender was coded as a dummy variable. The results indicate that female tourists place greater importance on destination image, whereas male tourists emphasize authenticity attitude in shaping perceived Buddhist value.

Panel B: Moderating Effect of Age

Interaction Term	Dependent Variable	β	t	p
Destination Image $\times$ Age	Perceived Buddhist Value	0.13	2.58	< 0.05
Authenticity Attitude $\times$ Age	Perceived Buddhist Value	-0.12	-2.46	< 0.05

Note: Age was measured using categorical age groups. The findings show that tourists aged 30–39 place greater importance on destination image, while tourists aged 20–29 prioritize authenticity attitude.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 presents the mean values and standard deviations of the main research variables. Overall, the results indicate that respondents reported high levels of perception across all constructs, with mean scores ranging from 3.88 to 4.25. According to Best's (1977) interpretation criteria, these values fall within the "high" level, suggesting positive evaluations of the pilgrimage experience.

For destination image, the spiritual experience dimension recorded the highest mean score ($\bar{X} = 4.21$, SD = 0.55), followed by tourism environment ($\bar{X} = 4.12$, SD = 0.58) and facilities ($\bar{X} = 3.98$, SD = 0.64). This indicates that pilgrims perceive Bodh Gaya primarily as a spiritually meaningful destination, supported by favorable environmental conditions and adequate facilities.

Regarding authenticity attitude, symbolic authenticity showed the highest mean ($\bar{X} = 4.18$, SD = 0.57), while object-based authenticity ($\bar{X} = 4.07$, SD = 0.62) and activity-based authenticity ($\bar{X} = 3.95$, SD = 0.67) also received high evaluations. These findings suggest that pilgrims strongly value the symbolic and experiential authenticity of Bodh Gaya rather than solely tangible or activity-based aspects.

For social media behavior, self-expression ($\bar{X} = 4.10$, $SD = 0.63$) and content sharing ($\bar{X} = 4.05$, $SD = 0.59$) scored higher than experience sharing ($\bar{X} = 3.88$, $SD = 0.71$) and engagement ($\bar{X} = 3.92$, $SD = 0.68$). This implies that pilgrims actively use social media to express personal and spiritual meanings associated with their pilgrimage experiences.

Finally, perceived Buddhist value demonstrated the highest overall mean scores among all constructs. Spiritual value recorded the highest mean ($\bar{X} = 4.25$, $SD = 0.52$), followed by learning value ($\bar{X} = 4.15$, $SD = 0.58$) and social value ($\bar{X} = 4.08$, $SD = 0.61$). These results indicate that Buddhist pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya provides strong spiritual and personal enrichment for tourists.

Reliability and Validity Analysis

As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs ranged from 0.816 to 0.847, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.80, which indicates strong internal consistency. In addition, composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.85 to 0.88, while average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.56 to 0.60, exceeding the minimum acceptable criteria. These results confirm the reliability and convergent validity of the research instrument.

Regression Analysis

Effects of Destination Image and Authenticity Attitude on Social Media Behavior

Table 3 presents the results of multiple regression analysis examining the influence of destination image and authenticity attitude on social media behavior. The model demonstrates a good fit ($R^2 = 0.41$, $F = 135.7$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that 41% of the variance in social media behavior is explained by the independent variables.

Both destination image ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) and authenticity attitude ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$) have significant positive effects on social media behavior. Destination image exhibits a stronger influence than authenticity attitude. These findings support Hypothesis 1, confirming that pilgrims who perceive Bodh Gaya positively and experience higher levels of authenticity are more likely to engage in media exposure and social media sharing behavior.

Effects of Destination Image, Authenticity Attitude, and Social Media Behavior on Perceived Value

Table 4 shows the regression results for perceived Buddhist value. The model demonstrates strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.53$, $F = 147.3$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that 53% of the variance in perceived value is explained by destination image, authenticity attitude, and social media behavior.

The results reveal that social media behavior has the strongest positive effect on perceived value ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$), followed by destination image ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$) and authenticity attitude ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$). These findings support Hypothesis 2, demonstrating that media engagement plays a crucial role in enhancing the perceived value of Buddhist tourism.

Moderating Effects of Gender and Age

The moderating effects of gender and age were tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. The results indicate that gender significantly moderates the relationship between destination image and perceived value (β interaction = 0.11, $p < 0.05$). Female tourists place greater importance on destination image in shaping perceived value, whereas male tourists emphasize authenticity attitude to a greater extent.

Similarly, age exhibits a significant moderating effect ($p < 0.05$). Tourists aged 30–39 assign the highest importance to destination image, particularly in terms of facilities and environment, while those aged 20–29 prioritize authenticity attitude, reflecting a stronger preference for experiential and symbolic authenticity. These findings confirm Hypotheses 3 and 4, highlighting the importance of demographic differences in Buddhist pilgrimage tourism behavior.

The moderating effects of gender and age were tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis, and the results are presented in Table 5. The findings indicate that gender significantly moderates the relationship between destination image and perceived value ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$). Female tourists place greater importance on destination image in shaping perceived value, whereas male tourists emphasize authenticity attitude to a greater extent.

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Hypotheses 3 and 4, highlighting the importance of demographic differences in Buddhist pilgrimage tourism behavior.

7. DISCUSSION

Objective 1: The Influence of Destination Image and Authenticity Attitude on Social Media Behavior. The findings confirm that both the Bodh Gaya destination image and authenticity attitude exert a significant positive influence on social media exposure and sharing behavior. This indicates that tourists who perceive Bodh Gaya as a spiritually meaningful destination with a favorable image and authentic experiences are more likely to actively share their pilgrimage experiences through social media platforms. From a theoretical perspective, this behavior can be explained through Symbolic Interactionism (Shinde, 2021), which suggests that individuals construct meaning and identity through social interaction. In the context of Buddhist pilgrimage, social media functions as a symbolic space where tourists communicate spiritual meanings, reinforce their religious identity, and validate their pilgrimage experiences through interaction with others. Sharing pilgrimage-related content thus becomes an extension of the spiritual journey rather than merely a communication activity. These findings are consistent with prior studies, including (Sotrin Chokkatitwattana, 2022), which demonstrate that positive destination perceptions and authentic experiences significantly enhance tourists' willingness to engage in experience-sharing behavior via social media. The present study extends this line of research by confirming its applicability within the context of Buddhist pilgrimage tourism.

Objective 2: The Influence of Destination Image and Authenticity Attitude on Perceived Value. The results further reveal that both destination image and authenticity attitude have a significant positive influence on the perceived value of Buddhist tourism. This suggests that tourists who hold positive perceptions of Bodh Gaya and experience a strong sense of authenticity are more likely to perceive greater spiritual, social, and experiential value from their pilgrimage. This relationship can be explained by the alignment between tourists' religious beliefs and the symbolic meaning embedded in the pilgrimage site. When the destination image and authenticity resonate with tourists' expectations and spiritual motivations, the pilgrimage experience generates deeper emotional fulfillment and spiritual satisfaction. This supports the notion that perceived value in religious tourism extends beyond

functional benefits to include profound internal and symbolic rewards. These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of authenticity in value creation within cultural and religious tourism contexts (Suksawat & Tepanon, 2021). The present study contributes to the literature by empirically demonstrating how destination image and authenticity jointly shape perceived value in Buddhist pilgrimage tourism.

Objective 3: The Moderating Effect of Gender. The results indicate that gender significantly moderates the relationships between the independent variables and perceived value. Female tourists place greater importance on destination image and symbolic experiences, whereas male tourists emphasize authenticity attitude, particularly activity-based and experiential aspects. These differences can be interpreted through gender-based tourism behavior theories, which suggest that females tend to focus more on emotional, symbolic, and contextual elements of travel experiences, while males are often more oriented toward experiential engagement and active participation. This explanation is consistent with the Gender Differences in Tourism Behavior framework proposed by (Tuntipisitkul et al., 2021). which highlights how gender influences tourists' perceptions, motivations, and evaluative processes. The findings suggest that gender plays a crucial moderating role in shaping how pilgrims interpret destination attributes and authenticity, thereby influencing their perceived value of Buddhist tourism experiences.

Objective 4: The Moderating Effect of Age. The analysis also reveals that age significantly moderates the relationships among destination image, authenticity attitude, and perceived value. Tourists aged 20–29 place greater emphasis on authenticity attitude, particularly experiential and symbolic authenticity, while those aged 30–39 prioritize destination image, including facilities and environmental conditions. This generational difference can be explained by Generational Cohort Theory (Unhasuta et al., 2021). which posits that individuals' values and preferences are shaped by shared life experiences within a particular age cohort. Younger tourists are typically driven by a desire for novel, meaningful, and authentic experiences, whereas middle-aged tourists tend to value comfort, safety, and well-developed infrastructure. These findings are consistent with the study by (Worapongpat, 2023a). which demonstrates that tourist perceptions, motivations, and evaluative criteria differ significantly across age groups. The present study reinforces the importance of considering age as a moderating factor in Buddhist pilgrimage tourism research.

8. NEW KNOWLEDGE FROM THE RESEARCH

This study contributes new knowledge to the field of Buddhist tourism by proposing an integrated conceptual model that explains how destination image and authenticity attitude jointly shape tourists' social media behavior and perceived value. Unlike prior studies that examine these constructs in isolation, the present research demonstrates their combined influence within a pilgrimage context, highlighting the dynamic role of digital media in contemporary religious tourism.

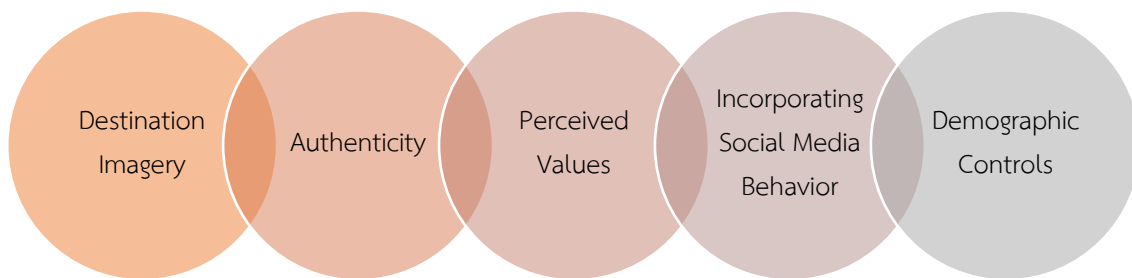


Figure 2 illustrates the influence of image and attitudes regarding the authenticity of the Bodhi Gaya tourist site on media exposure behavior and perceived values in Buddhist tourism.

The newly developed conceptual model (Figure 2) illustrates that destination image and authenticity attitude not only directly influence perceived value but also indirectly affect value formation through social media exposure and sharing behavior. This finding advances existing tourism theory by positioning social media behavior as a critical mechanism through which spiritual and experiential meanings are communicated, reinforced, and transformed into perceived value.

Furthermore, the study introduces gender and age as significant moderating variables, revealing that the strength and direction of these relationships differ across demographic groups. This demographic-sensitive perspective provides a deeper understanding of heterogeneity in Buddhist tourist behavior, offering a more nuanced explanation of how pilgrims interpret destination attributes and authenticity based on personal and generational characteristics.

Overall, the proposed model extends existing theories of destination image, authenticity, and perceived value by incorporating social media behavior and demographic moderation, thereby offering a comprehensive framework for analyzing Buddhist pilgrimage tourism in the digital era.

9. CONCLUSION

This research empirically demonstrates that both pilgrimage destination image and authenticity attitude have significant positive effects on tourists' social media exposure and sharing behavior as well as their perceived value of Buddhist tourism. The findings confirm that pilgrims who perceive Bodh Gaya as a spiritually meaningful and authentic destination are more likely to engage in media-based experience sharing and derive higher spiritual, social, and experiential value from their pilgrimage.

Importantly, the study reveals that gender and age function as crucial moderating variables, shaping how tourists interpret destination image and authenticity. Female tourists tend to place greater emphasis on symbolic and image-related aspects, while male tourists prioritize authenticity-related experiences. Similarly, younger tourists focus more on experiential authenticity, whereas middle-aged tourists value destination image and infrastructural attributes. These differences highlight the need for differentiated strategies in Buddhist tourism management and communication.

By integrating destination image, authenticity attitude, social media behavior, perceived value, and demographic moderators into a single empirical model, this study provides a robust foundation for future research and practical applications. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, tourism authorities, and religious organizations seeking to enhance the sustainability and global appeal of Buddhist pilgrimage destinations through culturally sensitive and digitally informed strategies.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recommendations for Practical Application

1.1 Based on Research Objective 1: Destination Image, Authenticity, and Social Media Behavior Given that destination image and authenticity attitude significantly influence social media exposure and sharing behavior particularly among female tourists and those aged

20–29 tourism authorities and relevant stakeholders should prioritize strategies that encourage meaningful digital engagement. Specifically, they should develop experiential content and on-site activities that emphasize authenticity and create memorable spiritual experiences, which can motivate tourists to share their journeys online. In addition, offering short workshops or guidance on social media usage, such as photography, storytelling, and review writing, can empower tourists to effectively communicate their experiences and enhance perceived value. Furthermore, the use of social media analytics is recommended to continuously monitor tourists' interests, preferences, and feedback, allowing for adaptive service improvement and more targeted communication strategies.

1.2 Based on Research Objective 2: Destination Image, Authenticity, and Perceived Buddhist Value As the findings confirm that destination image and authenticity attitude positively influence perceived Buddhist value particularly through activity-based authenticity tourism organizations should focus on developing immersive Buddhist-oriented activities. These may include participation in religious rituals, guided meditation sessions, historical interpretation programs, and local cultural immersion experiences, all of which can deepen tourists' spiritual engagement. Simultaneously, improving on-site facilities and the overall environmental quality is essential to ensure comfort and satisfaction throughout the pilgrimage. Promotional materials should also be carefully designed to clearly communicate the historical, cultural, and spiritual significance of Bodh Gaya, thereby fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation among visitors.

1.3 Based on Research Objective 3: Moderating Effects of Gender and Age

Considering that gender and age moderate the relationships among destination image, authenticity attitude, social media behavior, and perceived value, tourism authorities should adopt segmented marketing and communication strategies. For example, digital campaigns targeting female tourists could emphasize visually rich and emotionally engaging content that highlights symbolic and experiential aspects of the pilgrimage. In addition, tiered tourism packages tailored to different age groups are recommended. Younger tourists may be attracted to hands-on, experiential programs that emphasize authenticity and participation, while older age groups may prefer more comfortable, well-organized itineraries that balance spiritual depth with convenience and cultural enrichment.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

Building on the key findings of this study that destination image and authenticity attitude influence social media behavior and perceived value in Buddhist tourism, with gender and age serving as moderating factors future research can further expand the scope of knowledge in this field. First, future studies should explore the role of individual tourist characteristics, such as personality traits, intrinsic motivations, and levels of religiosity, in shaping media-sharing behavior and value perception. Second, comparative cross-cultural studies examining differences between Thai tourists and international pilgrims would provide valuable insights into cultural variations in Buddhist tourism experiences. Finally, future research should investigate the application of emerging digital technologies and advanced social media tools, such as virtual reality, live streaming, or AI-driven personalization, to enhance perceived value and enrich the overall Buddhist pilgrimage experience.

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Figure 3 illustrates the influence of image and attitudes regarding the authenticity of the Bodhi Gaya tourist site on media exposure behavior and perceived values in Buddhist tourism. Source : Ntapat Worapongpat (2025)



Figure 4 illustrates the influence of image and attitudes regarding the authenticity of the Bodhi Gaya tourist site on media exposure behavior and perceived values in Buddhist tourism. Source: Ntapat Worapongpat (2025)