

Investigating the Relationship between Religious and Tourists' Perceptions of Temple Visitation Experience: Evidence from Phra Nakhon District Bangkok

Issarapong Poltanee*

Lecturer in the Department of Hospitality Industry Management, Faculty of Hospitality Industry, Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus, Thailand

Umaporn Boonphetkaew

Lecturer in the Department of Service Creation for Tourism Business, Faculty of Hospitality Industry, Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus, Thailand

Email: isarapong_aaa@hotmail.com* and faasupb@ku.ac.th

*Corresponding author

(Received: 13 March 2023, Revised: 1 June 2023, Accepted: 18 June 2023)

<https://doi.org/10.57260/rcmrj.2023.264134>

Abstract

The objectives of this research are 1) to analyze the differences in religious tourism behaviors of Thai tourists in Phra Nakhon District, 2) to develop a structural equation model of religious tourism behaviors of Thai tourists. Data was collected, by using accidental sampling technique, with a sample of 400 people who were tourists and came to visit temples.

The results revealed that the relative chi-square (CMIN / DF) is 1.978, the conformity index GFI is 0.938, the CFI of the comparative conformity index CFI (Comparative Fit Index) is 0.980, (NFI) is 0.961 and the expected shift (RMSEA) is 0.050.

The results of the hypothesis testing which scrutinized the causal influence of image variables on experience, showed a significant direct impact. Furthermore, the experience component directly influences the satisfaction component. Additionally, the elements contributing to the willingness to spread the word were found to be statistically significant at the 0.001 level. This includes the importance of constructing floor features, such as ramps, to accommodate the needs of elderly tourists.

Keywords: Destination image, Experience, Satisfaction, Revisit intention, Word of mouth, Religious tourism

Introduction

Religious attractions, by and large, attract more than 300 million tourists every year (Gabor, 2016), and revenue from the religious tourism industry is approximately US \$ 20 billion (Askin, 2012). The nature of religious tourism has attracted the attention of researchers from the fields of education, religion, psychology, leisure, sociology and tourism (Argyle, 2002; Harris, 2004). Scholars had separated groups by distinguishing the pilgrimage-style tourism from tourism activities, and focused on the motivations and activities of tourists (Abbate & Nuovo, 2013; MacCannell, 1973; Oktadiana et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2013). Past studies have shown more trends in creating differentiation and interest in traveler experiences than other trends in the past (Badone & Roseman, 2004; Collins-Kreiner, 2010).

Although religious tourism is concerned with the issue of motivation, it was found that the studies on image and experience gained from tourism were relatively few. That is, few researchers attempted to analyze the visitor experience (Pearce et al., 2013; Poria et al., 2006; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). The image of a destination is a key element to attract consumers, since consumers tend to choose their holiday destinations when they have free time from their regular work or main jobs. Mostly, selection of the location is based on the weather, facility, safety, or specific interest (Qu et al., 2011). From the foregoing, it showed that the influence of travel destination choice on many occasions will play an important role in travel decision making. It is the image of a destination that is one of the key decision-making attributes. This is because it helps differentiate each location in the consumer sentiment. Past research has shown that the image of a destination is related to satisfaction in tourism that will influence revisit intention and will develop as a recommendation or word-of-mouth (Nisco et al., 2015; Prayag et al., 2017). In addition, little consideration is given to visitors' views on new services that could impact religious experiences and revisiting (Huang et al., 2017; Kasim, 2011; Raj & Morpeth, 2007; Singh, 2004; Wong et al., 2013).

Additionally, studying the image of religious tourism is a crucial tool for predicting tourist behavior. This study aims to understand behavioral differences and develop a structural equation model for religious tourism behavior, thereby optimizing the results to attract tourists. It aims to meet tourists' expectations when they visit the Phra Nakhon area, rich with historical and political landmarks like Wat Chetu, Phanvimonmangkalaram Ratchaworamahaviharn, Wat Bowonniwet Worawihan, Wat Suthat Thewararam, Wat Chana Songkhram Ratchaworawiharn, and Wat Ratchanatdaram Worawihan. Given its historical depth and rich culture, the Phra Nakhon district has become a major attraction in Bangkok for both Thai tourists and foreigners. The district is regarded as a region of significant religious and cultural tourism in Thailand.

Research objectives

1. To analyze the differences in religious tourism behaviors of Thai tourists in Phra Nakhon District
2. To develop a structural equation model for religious tourism behaviors of Thai tourists concerning temples in Phra Nakhon District Bangkok

Research conceptual framework

According to the literature review, the development of the model can be divided into 5 components. These include 1) the image of the tourist attraction 2) the tourism experience 3) satisfaction 4) the revisit intention and 5) the word-of-mouth intention, as shown in Figure 1

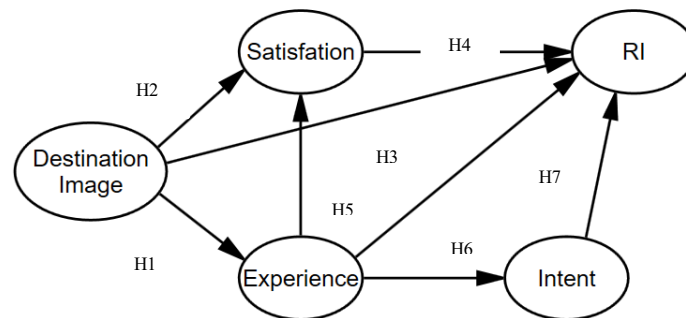


Figure 1 Research conceptual framework

(Source : Researcher, 2023)

Literature review and hypotheses development

1 Destination Image, Experience

The image of a tourist destination is a complex structure (Gallarza et al., 2002). A tourism destination image is fundamentally based on two components: 1) cognitive evaluation and 2) emotional evaluation (Walmsley & Young, 1998). The cognitive evaluation is the nature of the tourist's beliefs or knowledge of the destination; however, the emotional evaluation will reflect the visitor's emotions, or it could be the visitor's feelings about the destination. (Giles et al., 2013; Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015; Qu, kim, & 2011). Especially for religious sites, having a positive image not only promote personal beliefs and maintain mental health but also promote unity in society and stability.

Hence, there could be some debate as to whether maintaining or creating a good destination image would still be essential for the development of religious tourism sites to maintain popularity. In general, the opinions of tourists about destinations are built on the relationships they have kept in their memories of experiences. These experiences can be affected by different sources of information that influence the conceptual imagination of the image.

In addition, when it comes to gaining experience, several times, travelers can get information from referrals through telling or reading other visitors' travel posts. Recent studies show that most travelers enjoy sharing their knowledge, emotions and moments of their experiences in online communities (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). All of these studies suggested that word of mouth is a major tool in defining a destination image (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Getting travel information before the actual trip is so important that (Pearce, 2011) tends to enable travelers to virtualize their destination image (Cohen, 1979).

Besides, the great experience will be the main objective of the traveler which is related to the behavior of the person in the promised attraction and the nature of the location such as the aesthetics, history and culture of the landscape, through the synthesis of personal experiences of tourists which is closely related to their own characteristics, personality and prior knowledge. Therefore, it can be stated that the traveler experience will shape the behavior and psychology of the destination image in the views of the traveler before traveling.

Although the process is categorized as a purposeful or measurable tourist destination for activities, expenses and general travel deals, the psychological component is a traveler's personal perception of the friendliness of the atmosphere and the quality of service. The process can be regarded as a traditional cognitive aspect or as the knowledge of the travel destination image (Stabler, 1995).

Recently, the awareness of the importance of emotional elements in relation to the psychological characteristics of the tourist attraction image have been increasingly emphasized nowadays (Chen & Uysal, 2002; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Martin. & Bosque, 2008; Qu et al., 2011). In addition to the cognitive and emotional components, Son and Pearce (2005) addressed several sensory components. It is a predictable imagination about the sensory possibilities of the place which can help assess multiple aspects of the destination image. Overall, the image that tourists perceive about the destination is an ongoing matter and it is built in a society of different backgrounds (Henderson & Frelke, 2000; Pearce & Pabel, 2015; Son & Pearce, 2005; Stokowski, 2002; Trauer & Ryan, 2005; Williams, 2002).

Religious tourist experience

In holy places, people can experience a unique culture and seek spiritual support and make life meaningful. (Fletcher, 2004; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). In the past, researchers noted that both cultural and natural environments played a direct role in impacting visitor experiences. Physical arrangements such as natural beauty and traditional temples with statues and images will influence visitors' perceptions of beliefs, ideals and spirituality (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). In such an environment, travelers may experience a sense of enlightenment or the existence of their beliefs, which Yagi & Pearce (2007) argued that environments with symbolic properties that induce strong emotional reactions will have a great impact on cultivation of human values. At the present time; however, it leads to the view that specific places of worship can help individuals create their own group identity (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). Past research has highlighted that traveler experiences are influenced by the behavior of others (Belhassen et al., 2008; Pearce, 2005; Yagi & Pearce, 2007). Pilgrimages are often shared with others. They are generally positively influenced by the behavior of similar groups. Hence, thanks to its positive energy, people in many places of worship tend to create a feeling of belonging, gaining respect and love from others. Besides, there are a lot of merit making offerings. This is to achieve the belief that they will gain happiness and progress in all aspects (Fletcher, 2004). Upon further consideration, the most meaningful experiences for religious tourists may arise from their own (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Self-experiences are affected by the nature of the visitor (Poria et al., 2003) that characterizes a spiritual need or motivation.

H1: The image of religious tourist attractions directly influences the religious tourism experiences.

H2: The image of religious tourist attractions directly influences the satisfaction of religious tourist attractions.

H3: The image of religious tourist attractions directly influences the revisit intention.

Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction is essential to improving product quality presented to tourists, specifically in religious tourism which is expressed as satisfaction in a form of a reflective perception. That is, an opinion that will be a valuable information for managing and planning the religious tourism development. This will create certain level of satisfaction and will cause the intentional behavior concerning word of mouth and the tourist's satisfaction will contribute to solving a problem. Chuah et al. (2017) pointed out that product and service quality are the key factors affecting traveler satisfaction in the form of word of mouth (Dawi et al., 2018). This, by word of mouth, has been recognized as having an influence in the transmission of

information between individuals (Martensen & Grønholdt, 2016) that will influence the decision to visit temples in Phra Nakhon District, Bangkok.

H4: Satisfaction in religious tourist attractions directly influences the revisit intention.

H5: Religious tourism experiences directly influences the satisfaction in religious tourist attractions.

Revisit and word of mouth

The willingness of tourists to return to use the service again or to revisit is a widely studied issue that leads to a positive effect on the competitive environment. However, from the past literature reviews, it was found that the intentions of returning and word of mouth mostly involved in the business sector. There is little study of these issues in religious tourism, therefore, it is necessary to study the reasons why tourists return to religious tourism. In the relevant issues, there are scholars stated that repeat tourism is considered as a sense of loyalty of tourists towards their travel destination before returning to use the service again, that is to attract the target group to realize the worthiness of having the opportunity to revisit (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). Chen & Tsai, 2007 stated that this will affect the occurrence of word-of-mouth behavior, a long-used method of transmitting information (Dellarocas, 2003) and there are multiple forms of referrals. Arndt (1967) suggested that word of mouth is a means of communication between the messenger and the recipient which perceives the information obtained about a product or an opportunity to gain experience such as from religious tourism. Meanwhile, word of mouth is defined as being free from commercial influence (Litvin et al., 2008). The exchange between tourists will provide access to the information related to religious tourism rather than official advertising (Brown et al., 2007). Therefore, word of mouth is recognized as one of the most influential forms of information transmission to travelers (Martensen, A. and Grønholdt, L., 2016) that are relevant to the travel or purchase decisions of the consumer.

H6: Religious tourism experiences directly influence the revisit intention.

H7: Religious tourism experiences directly influence the word of mouth intention.

Methodology

Population and sample groups used in the research.

Tourists who visit temples in Phra Nakhon District Bangkok: Wat Chetuphon Wimonkalaram Ratchaworamahawihan, Wat Bowon Niwet Worawihan, Wat Suthat Thepwararam, Wat Chana Songkhram Ratchaworamahawihan, and Wat Ratchanatdaram Worawihan. The researcher selected the sampling technique regardless of the probability. (Non-Probability) by using Accidental Sampling and determining the number of samples that can represent the population from the sample size by specifying the sample size in the test query with 40 samples and calculate Partial R² for estimation of sample size using program G * Power 3.1 Faul et al, (2007, 2009). From the estimation of the sample with the effect size of 0.3, calculated from 40 samples from the use of statistics in the goodness of fit test group. The probability of error in one type of test (α) is 0.05, the test power ($1-\beta$) is 0.95 (Cohen, 1977), resulting in a sample size of 400 population.

Research Instruments

The nature of the tools used in this research, a type of tools was used according to the nature of the research method. Quantitative research tools with the characteristics of the research tools were divided into 3 parts as follows:

Part 1: General Status Questionnaire

The purpose of the visit of those who traveled to the study area. The nature of the questionnaire is in the form of a check list.

Part 2: The Questionnaire on the issues in this study consisted of 5 components: 1) Image of the tourist attraction 2) Repeated travel experiences 3) Satisfaction 4) Word-of-Mouth Intention 5) The revisit intention A questionnaire with a rating scale which has the criteria for giving the weight of the assessment at 7 levels According to the Likert Scale Method, the rating for each scale was 1 with the least opinion level to 7 with the highest degree (Olya & Al-ansi, 2018). Part 3: A Questionnaire on comments and suggestions for religious tourism

Research tools

The researcher used the questionnaire as a research tool as follows: 1) Study the principles of questionnaire construction according to the research concept. 2) Study information from relevant books, documents, articles, and research to guide and form questions. 3) Determine the issue and scope of the questions in accordance with the objectives and bring the questionnaire to the 5 Experts with knowledge and experience in the field of study in order to find out the quality of the tool. The next process, the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) consistency index was examined, in which the results of this audit of the consistency index between the question and the research objective were between 0.80. - 1.00. 4) The questionnaire was used to analyze the discrimination power with items in the part of questions in the form of a checklist with the standard deviation and questionnaire with a scaled nature, estimated with a correlation coefficient and the reliability of the questionnaire.

The scaled questionnaire was estimated using Cronbach Alpha (Sinjaru, 2020). The results of the analysis of the discrimination power by each item were between 0.51 - 1.97 and the questions that were in a scaling type were estimated by analysis of Corrected Item – Total Correlation Values were between 0.41–0.78. The reliability analysis of the questionnaire with Alpha Coefficient of Cronbach was 0.928.

Statistics used in data analysis

This research includes the beginning process in data analysis, explanation of basic information, descriptive and statistical explanation in the form of Multivariate Statistic with a software package that analyzes the Structure Equation Model (SEM) of the issues studied. The analysis of the model has been developed by the Component or Latent Variable Adjustment to be complete with criteria for determining the consistency assessment of latent variables containing CMIN-DF, NFI, GFI, CFI, and RMSEA values (Arbuckle, 2016).

Results

The study indicated that the majority of tourists were 282 women (70.5 %) and followed by 118 men (29.5 %). There were 196 people, 21-25 years old (49.0 %). 291 people were single (72.8 %). 260 people graduated with a bachelor's degree or equivalent (65.0%). 189 people were students (47.3%). 171 people had average monthly income of 5,001-15,000 baht (42.8%), followed by 87 people (21.8 %) with the average income of 15,001-25,000 baht. 244 people have permanent residences in Bangkok (61.0%), and followed by 89 people who have permanent residences in provinces in the central region (22.3%).

The results of analysis of the differences of satisfaction levels of religious tourism behavior of Thai people concerning temples in Phra Nakhon District, categorized according to demographic factors, it was found that men were more satisfied than women to use word-of-mouth information when deciding about repeat travel, however, the satisfaction of tourism behavior in terms of tourism experience, image of religious tourism sites and overall satisfaction for men and women were not different. Moreover, it was found that a level of satisfaction in tourism behavior in terms of tourism experience, the satisfaction of tourism behavior, religious tourism sites, overall satisfaction, and the word-of-mouth intention of the sample group between 26-40 years old were higher than the sample group who were not over 25 years old and who were older than 40 years old.

Table 1 Statistical values, obtained from structural equation model analysis after modifying the model, the results showed that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001.***

Variables	Estimate		Variance	R ²	C.R.	P
	Standard	Unstandard				
Destination Image			0.563			
-> Experience	0.929	0.932	0.078	0.863	16.917	***
-> Satisfaction	0.019	0.020	0.099	0.843	0.143	0.887
-> Revisit Intention	0.127	0.197	0.323	0.763	0.922	0.356
Experience			0.078	0.863		
-> Satisfaction	0.900	0.951	0.099	0.843	6.363	***
-> Intention	0.886	1.100	0.188	0.785	18.554	***
-> Revisit Intention	0.150	0.233	0.323	0.763	0.589	0.556
Satisfaction			0.099	0.843		
-> Revisit Intention	-0.107	-0.157	0.323	0.763	-0.880	0.379
Intention			0.188	0.785		
-> Revisit Intention	0.717	0.895	0.323	0.763	7.096	***
Destination Image			0.563			
-> Image1	0.804	1.000	0.308	0.646	N/A	
-> Image2	0.812	1.061	0.328	0.659	18.409	***
-> Image3	0.796	1.066	0.369	0.634	17.930	***
-> Image4	0.197	0.814	9.265	0.039	3.818	***
-> Image5	0.863	1.221	0.288	0.744	13.499	***
-> Image6	0.637	0.671	0.371	0.406	13.499	***
Experience			0.078	0.863		
-> Exp1	0.728	0.890	0.399	0.530	16.171	***
-> Exp3	0.816	1.078	0.330	0.666	18.920	***
-> Exp4	0.707	0.803	0.365	0.500	15.580	***
-> Exp5	0.809	1.000	0.298	0.655	N/A	
Satisfaction			0.099	0.843		
-> Sat1	0.881	1.000	0.181	0.777	N/A	
-> Sat2	0.871	0.932	0.174	0.759	24.055	***
-> Sat3	0.886	0.993	0.171	0.785	24.862	***
Intention			0.188	0.785		
-> Int1	0.905	1.000	0.192	0.820	N/A	
-> Int2	0.908	1.087	0.220	0.824	27.440	***
Revisit Intention			0.323	0.763		
-> Cb2	0.945	1.000	0.162	0.894	N/A	
-> Cb3	0.920	0.963	0.228	0.847	30.849	***

From Table 1, it was found that the structural equation model of religious tourism behavior of Thai tourists concerning temples in Phra Nakhon District Bangkok after modifying the model consists of 5 Latent Variables, divided into 1 Exogenous Latent Variable, namely the image of religious tourism and 4 Endogenous Latent Variables. These include the religious tourism experience, satisfaction, the intention of revisiting religious tourism, and word-of-mouth intention.

Image component of religious tourism sites after modifying the model consists of 6 Observed Variables. It was found that the Variance of 0.563 directly influences on the component of religious tourism experience, the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.929 and leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001, this resulted in the Squared Multiple Correlation (R^2) of 0.863 and the Variance of 0.078. However, it did not directly influence the satisfaction component and the intention of revisiting religious tourism, and it leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. The image elements of religious tourism sites consist of 6 Observed Variables of Standardized Regression Weight sorted in descending order as follows: The religious attraction variable had a new and unique image (Image5), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.863, the Squared-Multiple Correlation (R^2) of 0.744, and the Variance of 0.288. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. Entertainment variables in religious tourism sites such as annual events, and traditional festivals (Image2), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.812, the Squared Multiple Correlation (R^2) of 0.659, and the Variance of 0.328. The quality of service in religious tourism sites (Image1), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.804, the Quadratic Multiple Correlation (R^2) of 0.646, and the Variance of 0.308, and including the quality and diversity variables. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. (Image3) This resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.796, the Quadratic Multiple Correlation (R^2) of 0.634, and the Variance of 0.369. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. The architectural and building variables in the religious tourism site is unique and remarkable (Image6), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.637, the Quadratic Multiple Correlation (R^2) of 0.406, and the Variance of 0.371. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. The variables of traveling to religious sites, such as by bus, by private car, (Image4), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.197, the Square Multiple Correlation (R^2) of 0.039 and the Variance of 0.265. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001.

Religion tourism experience components after modifying the model consist of 4 Observed Variables. This resulted in the Variance of 0.078 with direct influence on the satisfaction component, the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.900, the Squared Multiple Correlation (R^2) of 0.843, and the Variance of 0.099. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. It directly influences the word-of-mouth component, this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.886, the Squared Correlation (R^2) of 0.785, and the Variance of 0.188. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. However, it did not directly influence the revisit intention component of religious tourism. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. The elements of religious tourism experience consist of 4 Observed Variables of Standardized Regression Weight in descending order as follows: The variables which learned something about themselves from this religious tourism experience (Exp3), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.816, the Squared Multiple Correlation (R^2) of 0.666, and the Variance of 0.330. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. The variables have discovered things that have psychological value, during this religious tour (Exp5), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.809, the Quadratic Multiple Correlation (R^2) of 0.655, and the

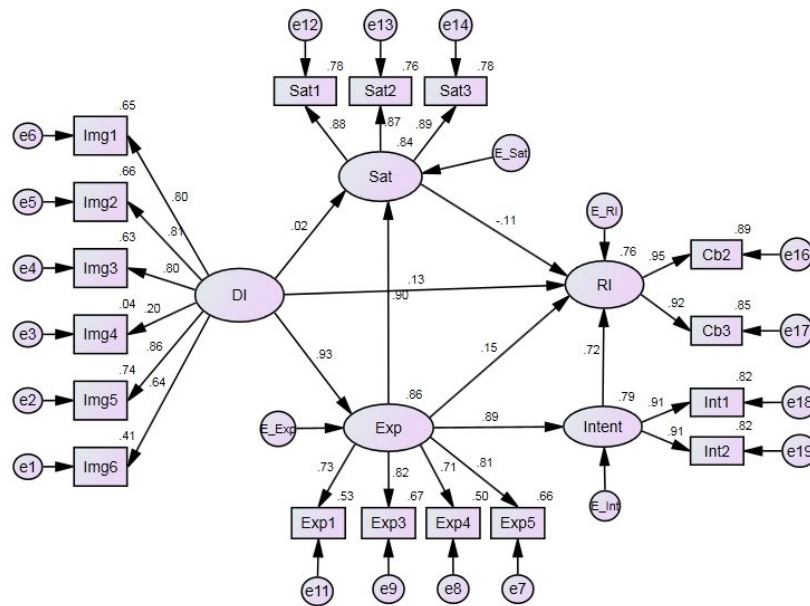
Variance of 0.298. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. The variables enjoyed this religious tourism experience (Exp1), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.728, the Squared Multiple Correlation (R²) of 0.530 and the Variance of 0.399. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. The variables had the opportunity to experience the art and culture of religious tourism sites closely (Exp4), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.707, the Quadratic Multiple Correlation (R²) of 0.500, and the Variance of 0.365. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001.

The satisfaction component after modifying the model consists of 3 Observed Variables, this resulted in the Variance of 0.099, without direct influence with the statistical significance of the relegation intention component at the level of 0.001. The satisfaction component consists of 4 Observed Variables of the Standardized Regression Weight in descending order as follows The variables were satisfied with this travel experience (Sat3), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.886, the Squared multiple correlation (R²) 0.785, and the Variance of 0.171. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. The variables were impressed with this travel experience (Sat1), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.881, the Quadratic Multiple Correlation (R²) of 0.777, and the Variance of 0.181. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. The variables enjoyed this expedition (Sat2), this resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.871, the Squared Multiple Correlation (R²) of 0.759, and the Variance 0.174. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001.

The word-of-mouth component after modifying the model consists of 2 Observed Variables with direct influence on the intention component of revisiting religious sites, resulted in a Variance of 0.188 at the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.717, the Squared Multiple Correlation (R²) of 0.763 and the Variance of 0.323. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. The word-of-mouth component consists of 2 Observed Variables of Standardized Regression Weight in descending order as follows: The variables will convince friends and family to visit the tourist attractions (Intent2). This resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.945, the Quadratic Multiple Correlation (R²) of 0.894, and the Variance of 0.162. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. In addition, the variables will recommend places they have visited to their friends and family. (Intent1) This resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.920, the Square Multiple Correlation (R²) of 0.847, and the Variance of 0.228.

The elements of intention of revisiting religious tourism after modifying the model consist of 2 Observed Variables of Standardized Regression Weight in descending order as follows: The variables plan to revisit the attraction within 1 year (CB2). This resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.945, the Square Multiple Correlation (R²) of 0.894, and the Variance of 0.162. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001. You will attempt to revisit the attraction within 1 year, (CB3). This resulted in the Standardized Regression Weight of 0.920, the Quadratic Multiple Correlation (R²) of 0.847, and the Variance of 0.228. It leads to a conclusion that it was statistically significant at the level of 0.001.

Structural equation model analysis results



CMIN/DF = 1.978, GFI = .938, NFI = .961, TLI = .976, CFI = .980, RMSEA = .050, RMR = .024

Figure 2 Structural equation model
(Source : Researcher, 2023)

The consistency assessment results showed that the Chi-Square Probability Level was 0.980, the relative Chi-Square Probability Level (CMIN / DF) was 1.978, and the Conformity Index (GFI) Value was 0.938 and the root index of the mean square of the estimation of the error. It leads to a conclusion that the Criterion-Based Suitability Index (NFI) is 0.961 and the RMSEA is 0.050. Therefore, it can be concluded that it passed the assessment criteria and was in accordance with the empirical data (Arbuckle, 2016). As shown in table 2

Table 2 Conformity Assessment Results

Statistics	Criteria for consideration	Analysis results
CMIN/DF	is less than 2	1.978
CFI	is greater than 0.90	0.980
GFI	is greater than 0.90	0.938
NFI	is greater than 0.90	0.961
RMSEA	is less than 0.08	0.050

Table 3 Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Decision
H1	The image of religious tourist attractions directly influences the religious tourism experience.	Significant (p = 0.000)
H2	The image of religious tourist attractions directly influences the satisfaction of religious tourism sites.	Unsignificant (p = 0.887)
H3	The image of religious tourist attractions directly influences the revisit intention.	Unsignificant (p = 0.356)
H4	Satisfaction in religious tourism directly influences the revisit intention.	Unsignificant (p = 0.379)
H5	Religious tourism experiences directly influence satisfaction in religious tourist attractions.	Significant (p = 0.000)
H6	Religious tourism experiences directly influence the revisit intention.	Unsignificant (p = 0.556)
H7	Religious tourism experiences directly influence the word-of-mouth intention.	significant (p = 0.000)

Discussions

There were important issues found from the research results, the researcher presented the issues for discussion by referring to the relevant research papers, including supporting data, and giving different reasons as follows. Thai religious tourists who came to visit temples in Phra Nakhon district had good overall satisfaction with the concept of Dawi (2018). Martensen and Grønholdt, L. (2016) said that satisfaction is the level of a person's feelings of being satisfied or disappointed. As a result of the comparison between the results that differ from those received, tourists were satisfied with visiting temples in Phra Nakhon district, since most of the temples used in the study were temples in the Phra Aram Luang group which have been well maintained and restored all the time by the government, this makes the place clean and convenient for travelling. Additionally, they also enshrine important Thai Buddha images and chedis. As a result, tourists who come to visit the place will surely be impressed and wish to revisit when they have an opportunity. Regarding religious tourism experience, the overall image was good, which is in agreement with the concept of Otto & Ritchie (1996), who stated that the experience of a traveler is a state of mind, a feeling in which service recipients participate in the service. Religious tourists who come to visit temples in Phra Nakhon District will experience stunning and beautiful architectures of religious places and artifacts with a distinctive and unique ancient style that remain intact and also gain spiritual experience from participating in religious activities such as paying respect to the Buddha images, making a donation, or giving the offerings dedicated to the monks. As a result, tourists will be contented and mentally respected and also impressed by visiting temples in Phra Nakhon district.

Regarding the image of the religious sites, the overall image is good, which is in agreement with the concept of Neuhofer & Buhalis (2014). The image of tourism stems from two major ways: 1) From the tourists who travel by themselves, and referrals of friends or acquaintances, and 2) From advertisements and public relations of various types of media such as radio, television and Internet. As the religious sites have peaceful, beautiful and sacred atmosphere, most tourists who come to visit the temple focus on its beauty and sacredness for making a wish. Moreover, the temples used in conducting the research are quite famous for

making a wish in such topics as love and wealth which encourages the tourists who come to make a wish there to have more confidence and more spiritual anchor. The intention of using word-of-mouth for the religious Thai tourists arises from the fact that the person has used the product or service and after that the person feels satisfied. As religious Thai tourists have great experience and satisfaction from visiting temples in Phra Nakhon district, they will tell people around them about the place or others by word-of-mouth or through posting on social media. This point, therefore, is in agreement with the concept of Loureiro (2014) who stated that word of mouth is the transmission of information that is beneficial to an individual who wants to travel to visit the attraction, especially religious tourism which is in agreement with this study. Regarding the intention of revisiting the attraction for Thai religious tourists, it was found that the overall image is good, which is in agreement with the concept of Tung & Ritchie (2011). They stated that memorable travel experiences are essential because remembering good experiences influences future travel decisions and it is based on the results of the behavioral structural equation model analysis. Regarding the religious tourism of Thai people, it found that when religious tourists are satisfied with the image of the temple, the tourists will feel that they will have a good experience while visiting the tourist attraction. As a result, tourists are satisfied to visit the religious attraction and willing to tell other people about it, including willing to bring people close to them to revisit the attraction.

Conclusion and suggestions

It could be said that traveling to temples in Phra Nakhon district is very convenient, however, the results of the study indicated that the group of tourists aged over 40 had a low level of satisfaction in traveling to this area. This could be due to the fact that the cars and buses are quite far from the temple and the walkway to the temple is not designed in the universal design which causes inconvenience for the elderly. Therefore, the government should build suitable ramps and passageways for the elderly in the temples.

New knowledge and the effects on society and communities

The research results suggest that religious tourism in Phra Nakhon district is positively perceived by Thai tourists. The well-maintained and restored temples, with their unique and ancient architecture, create a peaceful and spiritual atmosphere that provides tourists with a good overall satisfaction. This satisfaction is likely to lead to repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and increased tourist traffic in the area. The positive impact of religious tourism can be seen in various aspects of society and communities. Firstly, it can contribute to the economic growth of the area. As more tourists visit, they will require services such as accommodation, food, transportation, and souvenirs, which will generate revenue for local businesses and create job opportunities. This, in turn, will lead to more significant investments in the area, which will benefit the community and its infrastructure. Moreover, religious tourism can have a positive impact on the preservation and maintenance of cultural heritage sites. As these sites become more popular, they may attract more funding for conservation and restoration work, ensuring that the sites remain accessible and well-maintained for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Religious tourism can also contribute to the social and cultural aspects of the community. The influx of tourists from different backgrounds and cultures can promote understanding and tolerance, leading to increased cultural exchange and dialogue.

Additionally, the participation of tourists in religious activities can create a sense of belonging and community, both for the tourists and the local people. However, it is also essential to ensure that the negative impacts of tourism are minimized. For example, overcrowding and excessive commercialization can degrade the spiritual and cultural significance of religious sites, causing discomfort for visitors and residents alike. Therefore, it is crucial to balance tourism development with the preservation of cultural and spiritual heritage, ensuring that the local community benefits from tourism in a sustainable and responsible manner. The research results suggest that religious tourism in Phra Nakhon district has a positive impact on society and communities. By creating economic, cultural, and social benefits, religious tourism can contribute to the sustainable development of the area while preserving its unique heritage and spirituality.

Acknowledgments

Issarapong Poltanee : Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft.

Umaporn Boonphetkaew : Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft.

References

- Abbate, C. S., & Nuovo, S. D. (2013). Motivation and personality traits for choosing religious tourism: A research on the case of Medjugorje. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 16(5), 501-506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2012.749844>
- Arbuckle, J. L. (2016). *IBM SPSS Amos 22 user's guide*. Mount Pleasant, SC: Amos Development Corporation.
- Argyle, M. (2002). *The psychology of happiness* Methuen, London.
- Arndt, J. (1967). Role of product-related conversations in the diffusion of a new product. *J. Mark. Res.*, 4, 291–295. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3149462>
- Askin, D. (2012). *Religious tours and spiritual travel Retrieved, The Independent Traveler*, Retrieved from <http://www.independenttraveler.com/travel-tips/none/religious-tours-and-spiritual-travel>
- Badone, E., & Roseman, S. (2004). *Intersecting journeys: The anthropology of pilgrimage and tourism*, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL.
- Berli, A., & Martin, J. D. (2004). Factors influencing destination image. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(3), 657-681. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2004.01.010>
- Belhassen, Y., Caton, K., & Stewart, W. P. (2008). The search for authenticity in the pilgrim experience. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35(3), 668-689. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2008.03.007>
- Brown, J., Broderick, A. J., & Lee, N. (2007). Word of mouth communication within online communities: conceptualizing the online social network. *J. Interact. Mark.*, 21, 2–20. DOI:10.1002/dir.20082
- Buhalis, D., & Law, R. (2008). Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the internet the state of e-tourism research. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 609-623. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.01.005>
- Chen, C. F., & Tsai, D. C. (2007). How destination image and evaluate factors affect behavioral intentions. *Tourism Management*, 28, 1115- 1122.

- Chen, J. S., & Uysal, M. (2002) Market positioning analysis: A hybrid approach. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(4), 987-1003.
- Chuah, S. H., Rauschnabel, P. A., Marimuthu, M., Thurasamy, R., & Nguyen, B. (2017). Why do satisfied customers defect? A closer look at the simultaneous effects of switching barriers and inducements on customer loyalty. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 27(3), 616–641. DOI:10.1108/JSTP-05-2016-0107
- Cohen, E. (1979). A phenomenology of tourist experiences. *Sociology*, 13(2), 179-201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385790130020>
- Cohen, J. (1977). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. New York: Academic.
- Collins-Kreiner, N. (2010). Researching pilgrimage: Continuity and transformations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37(2), 440-456. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2009.10.016>
- Dawi, N. M., Jusoh, A., Streimikis, J., & Mardani, A. (2018). The influence of service quality on customer satisfaction and customer behavioral intentions by moderating role of switching barriers in satellite pay TV market. *Economics and Sociology*, 11(4), 198-218. DOI: 10.14254/2071-789X.2018/11-4/13
- Dellarocas, C. (2003). The digitization of word of mouth: promise and challenges of online feedback mechanisms. *Manag. Sci.*, 49(10), 1407–1424. DOI: 10.1287/mnsc.49.10.1407.17308
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A. G., & Buchner, A., (2007). G*Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, 39(2), 175-191. DOI:10.3758/BF03193146
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A., & Lang, A. G. (2009). G*Power 3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analysis. *Behavior Research Methods*, 41(4), 1149-1160. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3758/BRM.41.4.1149>
- Fletcher. S. K.. (2004). Religion and life meaning: Differentiating between religious beliefs and religious community in constructing life meaning. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 18(2), 171-185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2004.01.005>
- Gabor. M. T. (2016). *Faith-based tourism*. *Business Mirror*. Retrieved from <http://www.businessmirror.com.ph/faith-based-tourism/>
- Gallarza, M. G., Saura, I. G., & García, H. C. (2002). Destination image: Towards a conceptual framework. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(1), 56-78. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(01\)00031-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(01)00031-7)
- Giles, E. L., Bosworth, G., & Willett, J. (2013). The role of local perceptions in the marketing of rural areas. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 2(1), 4-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2012.11.004>
- Harris, D. (2004). *Key concepts in leisure studies* Sage. The Cromwell Press, London.
- Henderson, K., & Frelke, C. E. (2000). Space as a vital dimension of leisure: The creation of place. *World Leisure*, 42(3), 18-24. DOI:10.1080/04419057.2000.9674192
- Huang, K., Pearce, P. L., & Wen, J. (2017). Tourists' attitudes toward religious commercialization. *Tourism Culture & Communication*, 17(4), 259-270. <https://doi.org/10.3727/109830417X15072926259397>
- Jacobsen, J. K. S., & Munar, A. M. (2012). Visitor information search and destination choice in a digital age. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 1, 39-47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2011.12.005>
- Kasim, A. (2011). Balancing tourism and religious experience: Understanding devotees' perspectives on Thaipusam in Batu Caves, Selangor. *Malaysia Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 20(3–4), 441-456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2011.562437>

- Kim, H., & Richardson, S. L. (2003). Motion picture impacts on destination images. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30(1), 216-237. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(02\)00062-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(02)00062-2)
- Litvin, S. W., Goldsmith, R. E., & Pan, B. (2008). Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *Tour. Manage.* 29(3), 458-468. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.05.011>
- Loureiro, S. M. C. (2014). The role of the rural tourism experience economy in place attachment and behavioral intentions. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 40, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2014.02.010>
- Marchiori, E., & Cantoni, L. (2015). The role of prior experience in the perception of a tourism destination in user-generated content. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 4(3), 194-201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2015.06.001>
- Martensen, A., & Grønholdt, L. (2016). The effect of word-of-mouth on consumer emotions and choice: Findings from a service industry". *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, 8(3), 298-314. DOI:10.1108/IJQSS-04-2016-0037
- Martin, H. S., & Bosque, I. R. D. (2008). Exploring the cognitive–affective nature of destination image and the role of psychological factors in its formation. *Tourism Management*, 29(2), 263-277. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.03.012>
- Mazumdar, S., & Mazumdar, S. (2004). Religion and place attachment: A study of sacred places. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 24(3), 385-397. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2004.08.005>
- Neuhofer, B., & Buhalis, D. (2014). Experience, co-creation and technology: Issues, challenges and trends for technology enhanced tourism experiences In: S. McCabe (Ed.). *The Routledge handbook of tourism marketing*. (pp. 124–139).
- Nisco, A. D, Mainolfi, G., Marino, V., & Napolitano, M. R. (2015). Tourism satisfaction effect on general country image, destination image, and post-visit intentions. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 21(4), 305–317. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135676671557750>
- Oktadiana, H., & Pearce, P. L., & Chon, K. (2016). Muslim travellers' needs: What don't we know. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 20, 124-130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2016.08.004>
- Olya, H. G., & Al-ansi, A. (2018). Risk assessment of halal products and services: Implication for tourism industry. *Tourism Management*, 65, 279–291. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.10.015>
- Otto, J. E., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (1996). The Service Experience in Tourism. *Tourism Management*, 17(3), 165-174. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177\(96\)00003-9](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177(96)00003-9)
- Qu, H., Kim, L. H., & Im, H. H. (2011). A model of destination branding: Integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image. *Tourism Management*, 32(3), 465-476. DOI: 10.1016/j.tourman.2010.03.014
- Pearce, P. L. (2011). *Tourist behaviour and the contemporary world Channel View*. Bristol: UK.
- Pearce, P. L., Wu, M.-Y., Carlo, M. D., & Rossi, A. (2013). Contemporary experiences of Chinese tourists in Italy: An onsite analysis in Milan. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 7, 34-37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2013.04.001>
- Pearce, P. L., & Pabel, A. (2015). *Tourism and humour Channel View*. Bristol: UK.
- Pearce, P. L. (2005). *Tourist behaviour: Themes and conceptual schemes*. Channel View, Clevedon.
- Poria, Y., Butler, R., & Airey, D. (2003). Tourism, religion and religiosity: A holy mess. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 6(4), 340-363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500308667960>

- Poria, Y., Reichel, A., Biran, A. (2006). Heritage site management: Motivations and expectations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33(1), 162-178.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2005.08.001>
- Prayag, G., Hosany, S., Muskat, B., & Del Chiappa, G. (2017). Understanding the relationships between tourists' emotional experiences, perceived overall image, satisfaction, and intention to recommend. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(1), 41–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287515620567>
- Raj, R., & Morpeth, N. D. (2007). *Religious tourism and pilgrimage festivals management: An international perspective* CABI, Wallingford.
- Sharpley, R., & Sundaram, P. (2005). Tourism: A sacred journey? The case of ashram tourism, India. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 7(3), 161-171.
DOI:10.1002/jtr.522
- Shoemaker, S., & Lewis, R. C. (1999). Customer loyalty: the future of hospitality marketing. International. *Journal of Hospitality Management*, 18(4), 354-370.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0278-4319\(99\)00042-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0278-4319(99)00042-0)
- Singh, S. (2004). Religion, heritage and travel: Case references from the Indian Himalayas. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 7(1), 44-65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500408667972>
- Sinjaru, T. (2020). *Research and analysis of statistical data with SPSS and AMOS*. 18thed. Bangkok: R&D Business Ordinary Partnership. (In Thai)
- Son, A., & Pearce, P. L. (2005). Multi-faceted image assessment. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 18(4), 21-35. DOI:10.1300/J073v18n04_02
- Stabler, M. J. (1995). The image of destination regions: Theoretical and empirical aspects B. Goodall, G. Ashworth (Eds.), *Marketing in tourism industry: The promotion of destination regions*, Routledge: London, 133-159.
- Stokowski, P. A. (2002). Languages of place and discourses of power: Constructing new sense of place. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 34(4), 368-382.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2002.11949977>
- Trauer, B., & Ryan, C. (2005). Destination image, romance and place experience: An application of intimacy theory in tourism. *Tourism Management*, 26(4), 481-491.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2004.02.014>
- Tung, V. W. S., & Ritchie, J. R. (2011). Exploring the essence of memorable tourism experiences. *Res.*, 38(4), 1367-1386. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2011.03.009>
- Walmsley, D. J., & Young, M. (1998). Evaluative images and tourism: The use of personal constructs to describe the structure of destination images. *Journal of Travel Research*, 36(3), 65-69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004728759803600307>
- Williams, D. R. (2002). Leisure identities, globalization, and the politics of place. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 34(4), 351-367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2002.11949976>
- Wong, C. U. I., Ryan, C., & McIntosh, A. (2013). The monasteries of Putuoshan, China: Sites of secular or religious tourism. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(6), 577-594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.810996>
- Yagi, C., & Pearce, P. L. (2007). The influence of appearance and the number of people viewed on tourists' preferences for seeing other tourists. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 15(1), 28-43. <https://doi.org/10.2167/jost528.0>