

UNDERSTANDING THAILAND'S TOURISM THROUGH THE 4A'S: HOW TOURISM COMPONENTS SHAPE IMAGE AND TOURIST SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to examine the relationships among tourism components, destination image, and tourist satisfaction in Thailand from a nationwide perspective. It focuses on four core destination components—attractions, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services—to identify which elements most strongly enhance destination image and contribute to tourist satisfaction.

Methodology – Data were collected through an online questionnaire from tourists who had recently visited Thailand. Structural model analysis was employed to examine the interactions among tourism components, destination image, and tourist satisfaction. The study used responses from a diverse group of visitors across Thailand rather than focusing on a single city or event, allowing for a broader understanding of the national tourism context.

Results – The findings reveal that although attractions remain an important element of tourism, amenities and ancillary services have the strongest influence on destination image. Destination image, in turn, positively contributes to tourist satisfaction. These results highlight the importance of combining tangible destination features, such as facilities and infrastructure, with intangible aspects related to convenience, comfort, and service experience.

Originality/Value – The originality of this study lies in its nationwide scope and its contribution to understanding tourist behavior as a form of consumer decision-making. The findings provide useful insights for tourism authorities and industry stakeholders in enhancing destination competitiveness, strengthening destination image, improving visitor satisfaction, and supporting sustainable tourism development in Thailand.

Keywords: Tourism components, Destination image, Tourist satisfaction, Consumer behavior, Thailand tourism

Research Type: Research Article

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is a critical pillar of Thailand's economy, globally recognized for its rich cultural heritage and stunning natural landscapes. Key provinces such as Bangkok, Phuket, and Chiang Mai rely heavily on tourism revenues, which also strengthen international cultural and economic linkages, positioning Thailand as a leading global destination (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024). In 2019, tourism contributed approximately 18% of GDP, driven largely by international arrivals, while domestic tourism played an essential role in redistributing income to local communities. Even after the unprecedented disruption of COVID-19, the tourism sector has re-emerged as one of the strongest drivers of Thailand's economic recovery and growth, welcoming nearly 28 million international visitors in 2023, a significant rebound that generated

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approximately 1.2 trillion baht in tourism revenue. Importantly, the pandemic has also shifted tourist expectations, with greater emphasis on safety, digital convenience, and sustainable practices, requiring destinations to adapt rapidly.

In an era of intense competition and rapidly evolving traveler preferences, understanding how to meet these expectations has become crucial. Destinations must then be prepared in such aspects to enhance the country's image and, in turn, tourists' satisfaction, which is widely recognized as a key determinant of tourist loyalty and repeat visitation (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Jebbouri et al., 2023). Moreover, as the key agency responsible for promoting and developing tourism, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) can utilize such findings to formulate evidence-based strategies aimed at attracting both domestic and international travelers. Moreover, these insights can guide the continual adaptation of TAT's functions to align with shifting visitor demands and global tourism dynamics (Zhang & Guo, 2022).

This study aims to analyze the relationships among tourism components, destination image, and tourist satisfaction using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Hair et al., 2010). Specifically, it investigates how key tourism components can enhance destination image and, in turn, shape overall satisfaction, which is widely recognized as a critical determinant of tourist loyalty and repeat visitation (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Jebbouri et al., 2023). Moreover, beyond its implications for tourism development, this study also contributes to the broader field of consumer behavior by providing insights into how tourists—acting as consumers—evaluate destination attributes, form perceptions of image, and translate these perceptions into satisfaction. Such understanding can enrich both tourism marketing strategies and consumer behavior theory. Moreover, unlike previous studies (McDowall, 2010; Raden Ahmad et al., 2021; Daskin & Aşan, 2022) that often focus on a specific region or event organized in Thailand, this research adopts a nationwide perspective, examining the tourism industry of Thailand as a whole. Existing studies remain limited to specific regions or events, leaving a gap at the national level. This study addresses that gap by applying the 4A's framework and SEM across Thailand's major tourism regions to examine how all four components collectively influence destination image and tourist satisfaction. By employing SEM, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how satisfaction can be fostered from these complex interrelationships. In doing so, it contributes to tourism management literature by offering insights for fostering satisfaction and improving tourism policies that support Thailand's long-term economic stability. Moreover, by focusing on Thailand—one of the world's most visited destinations—the study provides insights that may hold comparative value for other emerging economies that depend heavily on tourism as an engine of development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explores the influence of tourism components on destination image and tourist satisfaction, thereby contributing to Thailand's competitiveness as a leading tourism destination. It employs the 4A's Tourism Model as the conceptual framework.

The 4a's Tourism Model

The 4A's framework identifies key elements driving destination success (Lamsfus et al., 2015). Tourism destinations attract visitors through unique features, products, and services (Koo et al., 2016), as well as supporting facilities like entertainment, accommodation, and dining (Buhalis, 2000; Buhalis, 2014). The 4As are:

1. Attractions are the unique features that motivate tourists to visit a destination. They may include cultural, historical, and natural sites that are open to the public and provide opportunities for recreation, entertainment, or learning (Tran et al., 2017). These elements serve as the primary drivers of tourist interest and are central to a destination's appeal.
2. Accessibility refers to the ease with which tourists can reach and navigate a destination. High levels of accessibility ensure that visitors can participate in tourism activities with minimal difficulty (Kurniawan et al., 2017). This dimension encompasses transportation

networks, terminals, and various modes of public transit, both within and beyond the destination (Medeiros et al., 2010; Ebrahimzadeh, 2014; Fernández-Díaz et al., 2023).

3. Amenities represent the supplementary facilities and services that support the tourist experience. These include accommodation, restaurants, public utilities, and commercial centers that enhance convenience and comfort during a visit (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014). Well-developed amenities not only improve satisfaction but also extend tourists' length of stay and spending.

4. Ancillary services refer to additional services that, while not directly tied to tourism activities, contribute to a more seamless travel experience. Examples include communication services, internet access, banking and ATM facilities, medical assistance, and postal services (Buhalis, 2014; Vengesai et al., 2009; Tran et al., 2017). These services are particularly important in meeting diverse tourist needs and ensuring overall satisfaction.

The 4A's model has been widely applied in tourism research to identify key factors for destination development. Kanjanaratana and Pookaiyaugom (2020) employed the framework to examine the four tourism components shaping interest in nostalgic tourism among Thai residents of Bangkok. Their study further compared demographic characteristics that influence this type of tourism, concluding that Attractions and Amenities exerted a significant and positive effect on tourist interest. Similarly, Ardiansyah and Fortuna (2020) applied the model in conducting a SWOT analysis of SnowBay Waterpark in Jakarta, Indonesia, to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in destination management. Meanwhile, Andrianto and Sugiana (2016) used the framework to investigate the tourism components of Selasari, Indonesia, identifying its potential for development. Their findings emphasized the crucial role of Accessibility and Amenities—particularly the quality of transportation infrastructure, accommodation standards, and restaurants—in enhancing the competitiveness of the destination. More recently, Utomo et al. (2024) applied the framework to Sade Tourism Village, Indonesia, similarly finding that well-developed attractions and amenities were central to formulating effective facility-planning recommendations for sustainable destination development.

In the Thai context, several studies have also highlighted the relevance of tourism components in shaping satisfaction. McDowall (2010), for example, examined international tourists in Bangkok and found that attractions such as cultural sites, architecture, and shopping opportunities strongly influenced overall satisfaction and destination loyalty, particularly among repeat visitors. Raden Ahmad et al. (2021) investigated tourist satisfaction in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, demonstrating that satisfaction levels varied significantly across demographic groups such as age, gender, and education, thereby underlining the importance of tailoring services to diverse tourist profiles. Similarly, Daskin and Aşan (2022) explored cognitive destination image and satisfaction at the Sisaket Fruit Festival, reporting positive correlations between image attributes and tourist satisfaction, with notable differences between domestic and international visitors. These findings confirm the broader applicability of the 4A's model in understanding satisfaction but also reveal that most studies remain limited to specific regions or events within Thailand.

However, Buhalis (2000) extended the framework into the 6A's model, identifying six components of tourism. In addition to the four dimensions previously discussed, the model incorporates Available Packages and Activities, particularly within the context of strategic marketing and destination management. For the purposes of this study, however, Available Packages largely overlap with Ancillary Services, while Activities closely correspond to Attractions. Accordingly, these elements are consolidated in the present framework to provide a more coherent basis for examining tourist behavior and to generate insights that can guide the formulation of tourism promotion policies and strategies.

Destination Image

Destination image generally refers to the attitudes and perceptions formed by tourists, consisting of their beliefs, thoughts, and impressions about a destination (Crompton, 1979). According to

Gunn's (1988) seven-phase tourism experience model, destination image is initially formed in Phase 1 and Phase 2 through the imagination of the destination based on both commercial and non-commercial secondary information. It is then reshaped in Phase 7, when tourists adjust their perceptions based on direct travel experiences. As destination image influences how tourists perceive and evaluate destinations, it has become one of the most widely studied concepts in tourism research. Numerous studies have shown that destinations with a clearly defined and positive image are more likely to be considered and selected during tourists' destination choice processes, while also contributing to higher levels of tourist satisfaction (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Guzman-Parra et al., 2016; Girish et al., 2021).

Given the significant influence of destination image on tourists' evaluations and satisfaction, understanding the factors that contribute to its formation has become an important area of tourism research. Among these factors, the key components of the 4A's tourism model discussed earlier can significantly influence the formation of destination image throughout different phases of the tourist experience. Moreover, destination image has been recognized as an important mechanism through which destination characteristics influence tourist outcomes, particularly tourist satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008; Manyangara et al., 2023). Collectively, these findings reinforce the role of destination image as a critical link between tourism attributes and tourists' overall satisfaction. Collectively, these findings reinforce the role of destination image as a critical link between destination attributes and tourist satisfaction.

Building upon this perspective, the present study examines how the core tourism components that contribute to destination success influence Thailand's destination image and how destination image, in turn, affects tourist satisfaction. Understanding these relationships can provide valuable insights for tourism policymakers and destination managers in designing strategies that enhance visitor experiences, strengthen destination competitiveness, and improve tourist satisfaction.

Tourist Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction represents the most critical outcome of the tourism process, as it reflects the extent to which experiences meet or surpass visitor expectations (Oliver, 1980; Chi & Qu, 2008). Satisfied tourists are more inclined to revisit the destination, extend their length of stay, and engage in positive word-of-mouth promotion, thereby strengthening destination competitiveness (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008). Recent studies continue to confirm that tourist satisfaction plays a central role in shaping future behavioral intentions and destination competitiveness (Wei et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). Conversely, unmet expectations often reduce loyalty and diminish the likelihood of return visits.

By analyzing the interrelationships among tourism components, destination image, and tourist satisfaction, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how specific destination attributes influence visitor experiences. Such insights can guide tourism authorities and policymakers in prioritizing investments—for example, improving accessibility, enhancing amenities, or strengthening destination branding—to maximize satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, the findings can serve as an evidence-based foundation for designing targeted marketing campaigns, developing sustainable tourism strategies, and shaping policies that ensure long-term economic benefits for local communities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Model

The research model for this study is presented in Figure 1 and illustrates the hypothesized relationships among the key constructs. Tourism features—specifically attraction, accessibility, amenity, and ancillary service—are proposed to directly influence destination image. In turn, destination image is expected to function as mediators that strengthen customer satisfaction. This framework is built on prior research in tourism and consumer behavior, highlighting destination image as central psychological mechanisms through which tourism features shape tourists' behavior.

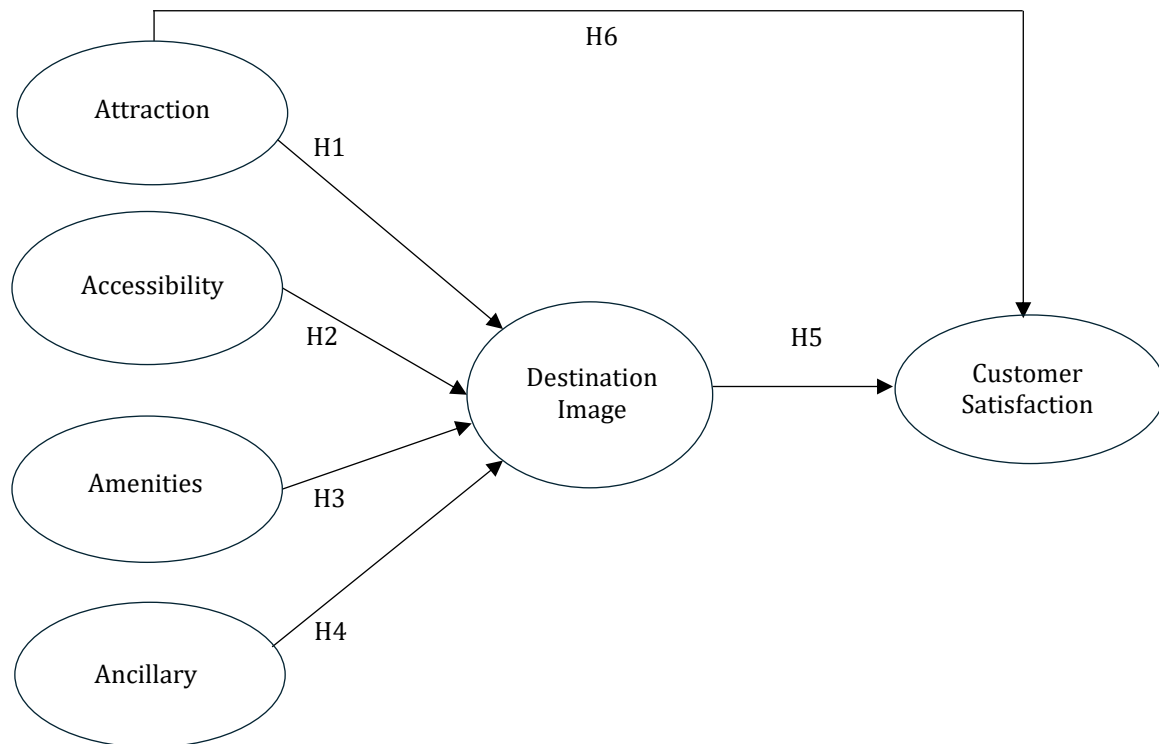


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Tourism Features, Destination Image, and Customer Satisfaction

Research Hypotheses

The research hypothesized a relationship between variables are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Hypothesis

No	Hypothesis
H1	Attraction has a positive influence on destination image
H2	Amenity has a positive influence on destination image
H3	Accessibility has a positive influence on destination image
H4	Ancillary service has a positive influence on destination image
H5	Destination image has a positive influence on customer satisfaction
H6	Destination image positively mediates the relationship between tourism features and customer satisfaction

Data Collection

In this study, quantitative research methods that include a questionnaire survey were used to conduct a quantitative survey design. interpretive study. The questionnaire contained five sections: 1) demographic, 2) 4A's tourism feature (attraction, accessibility, amenity, and ancillary service), 3) destination image, and 4) customer satisfaction. The primary research instrument was an online questionnaire, using snowball sampling was adopted as a practical approach for reaching recent visitors to Thailand through online networks, given the absence of a comprehensive tourist sampling frame (Ting et al., 2025). Before collecting data from the main study sample, the questionnaire was subjected to a pilot test to assess validity and reliability, as well as to ensure that respondents clearly understood the questions. The variables and questions were adopted from related studies. The measurement instrument used a five-point Likert scale as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

To evaluate and validate these variables, the study identifies a total of 24 observed variables, which are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Latent and Observed Variables for SEM Analysis

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	Sources
(1) Tourism Features		
Attraction (ATT)	ATT1: This destination promotes uniqueness and possesses cultural value	Buhalis (2000); Chi and Qu (2008); Dwyer and Kim (2003)
	ATT2: The destination promotes an outstanding model in painting and sculpture.	
	ATT3: The destination promotes historical sites and significant historical events.	
	ATT4: The destination promotes demonstrations of the traditional lifestyle of local people.	
Amenity (AME)	AME1: The destination provides a service center that offers information and publicity.	Buhalis (2000); Chi and Qu (2008); Enright and Newton (2004)
	AME2: The destination provides convenient and safe pathways to tourist venues.	
	AME3: The destination provides leisure facilities such as video displays, map locations, and information headphones.	
Accessibility (ACC)	ACC1: The destination provides a public transport system for traveling to tourist attraction sites.	Buhalis (2000); Chi and Qu (2008); Dwyer and Kim (2003); Enright and Newton (2004)
	ACC2: The destination provides internal vehicles that allow visitors to access all areas within the attraction.	
	ACC3: The destination provides service infrastructure such as parking, seating, and restrooms.	
Ancillary Service (ANC)	ANC1: The destination promotes restaurants that serve unique local cuisine.	Buhalis (2000); Dwyer and Kim (2003); Enright and Newton (2004)
	ANC2: The destination promotes clear price displays for products such as tickets, food, and souvenirs.	
	ANC3: The destination promotes souvenir shops that offer unique and locally made products.	
(2) Destination Image (DNI)		Sources
	DNI1: The destination promotes the image of friendly and hospitable people.	Chi and Qu (2008); Beerli and Martín (2004)
	DNI2: The destination promotes the image of beautiful beaches.	
	DNI3: The destination promotes the image of appetizing local food.	
	DNI4: The destination promotes the image of diverse shopping options.	
(3) Customer Satisfaction (SAT)		Sources
	SAT1: The experience in Thailand has met my expectations.	Petrick (2002); Sanchez et al. (2006)
	SAT 2: At present, I am satisfied with my visit to Thailand.	
	SAT 3: Overall, I am satisfied with my visit to Thailand.	

RESULTS

The data collected through the surveys were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to evaluate the relationships in the causal pathway model and to test the hypotheses among the variables. SEM is a statistical methodology that adopts a confirmatory (hypothesis-testing) approach to analyzing structural

relationships among observed and latent constructs (Kline, 2005). A common rule of thumb suggests that a minimum sample size of 150–200 respondents, or at least 10 cases per estimated parameter, is sufficient for stable SEM results (Hair et al., 2019). In this study, a total of 189 complete questionnaires were received, which falls within this recommended range and therefore provides an adequate basis for SEM analysis. This sample size is also consistent with prior studies in tourism and hospitality research that successfully applied SEM with similar samples—for example, Chi and Qu (2008) with 184 respondents, and Prayag and Ryan (2012) with 190 respondents. Data analysis was conducted in two stages: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. SPSS AMOS 20.0 was used to test the hypothesized relationships among independent, mediating, and dependent variables, while also assessing the adequacy of the measurement items and the interrelationships among constructs.

Descriptive Statistical Perspective

As shown in Table 3, the study surveyed 189 respondents, most of whom were female (50.8%), and mainly Millennials (40.2%) and Gen X (33.3%), with smaller shares of Gen Z and Baby Boomers. Geographically, the majority were from Southeast Asia (56.6%), followed by East Asia and South Asia, while other regions contributed less than 5%.

Table 3. Demographic information of respondents

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	79	41.8
	Female	96	50.8
	Others	14	7.4
Generation (years old)	Baby Boomers (61-79)	10	5.3
	Gen X (45-60)	63	33.3
	Gen Y (29-44)	76	40.2
	Gen Z (20-28)	40	21.2
Continents	Americas	2	1.1
	East Asia	46	24.3
	Europe	6	3.2
	Oceania	2	1.1
	South Asia	26	13.8
	Southeast Asia	107	56.6

Reliability Verification

Reliability refers to the extent to which a measurement tool is free from random error, focusing on the consistency of results. Internal consistency, often assessed using Cronbach's alpha, is one of the most widely applied approaches to evaluate reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). An alpha value of 0.70 or above is generally considered acceptable. In this study, SPSS analyses showed that all constructs exceeded this threshold, confirming the instrument's satisfactory reliability, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Cronbach's alpha reliability results

Constructs	No. Of Items	Cronbach Alpha (α)
Attraction (ATT)	4	0.94
Amenities (AME)	3	0.97
Accessibility (ACC)	3	0.94
Ancillary Service (ANC)	3	0.94
Destination Image (DNI)	4	0.86
Customer Satisfaction (SAT)	3	0.85

Validity Test

Construct validity refers to the extent to which an operational measure accurately represents the theoretical concept being studied. In this research, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to evaluate the measurement models and to test both convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019).

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity refers to the extent to which multiple indicators designed to measure the same construct are correlated and operate consistently (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In CFA, convergent validity is commonly assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE), which indicates the proportion of variance captured by a construct relative to measurement error. Convergent validity is established when composite reliability (CR) exceeds 0.70 and AVE is above 0.50 (Hair et al., 2014). All standardized factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2014), indicating that each indicator strongly reflected its corresponding latent construct. As shown in Table 5, all constructs in this study satisfied these thresholds, confirming adequate convergent validity.

Table 5. Convergent Validity

Constructs	Factor Loading	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attraction (ATT)		0.83	0.55
ATT1	0.908		
ATT2	0.922		
ATT3	0.974		
ATT4	0.914		
Amenities (AME)		0.80	0.53
AME1	0.897		
AME2	0.967		
AME3	0.885		
Accessibility (ACC)		0.78	0.52
ACC1	0.947		
ACC2	0.975		
ACC3	0.915		
Ancillary Service (ANC)		0.85	0.57
ANC1	0.942		
ANC2	0.962		
ANC3	0.933		

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity refers to the degree to which a construct is distinct from other constructs in the research model (Straub et al., 2004). It is commonly assessed by comparing the square root of each construct's AVE with the inter-construct correlations. The validity assumption is supported when a construct's AVE exceeds the squared correlations with other constructs (Hair et al., 2019). As shown in Table 6, the square roots of the AVEs (diagonal values) were greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, confirming adequate discriminant validity.

Table 6. Discriminant validity result

Constructs	ACC	ATT	AME	ANC
ACC	0.74			
ATT	0.59	0.74		
AME	0.61	0.52	0.71	
ANC	0.64	0.49	0.78	0.75

Hypothesized Structural Model

The hypotheses were evaluated using structural models. To ensure robust results for mediation and indirect effect testing, bootstrapping was applied (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Specifically, 2,000 bootstrap resamples were generated with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval, and two-tailed significance levels were reported (* $p = 0.05$, ** $p = 0.01$, *** $p = 0.001$). Bootstrapping estimates standard errors by repeatedly resampling the observed dataset, where each subsample relates to the original sample in much the same way as the observed sample represents the population (Cameron & Trivedi, 2009). The hypothesized model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 781.02$, $df = 235$, $\chi^2 / df = 3.32$; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.87; normed fit index (NFI) = 0.85; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05; and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.01. Although CFI and NFI fall slightly below 0.90, values in this range are acceptable for complex models (Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1999; McDonald & Ho, 2002), and the RMSEA of 0.05 and SRMR of 0.01 further support adequate fit. Figure 2 illustrates the full structural model's causality path in correspondence with the standardized parameter estimates and the goodness-of-fit indices. The hypotheses were tested through a hypothesized model, and the results are summarized in Table 7.

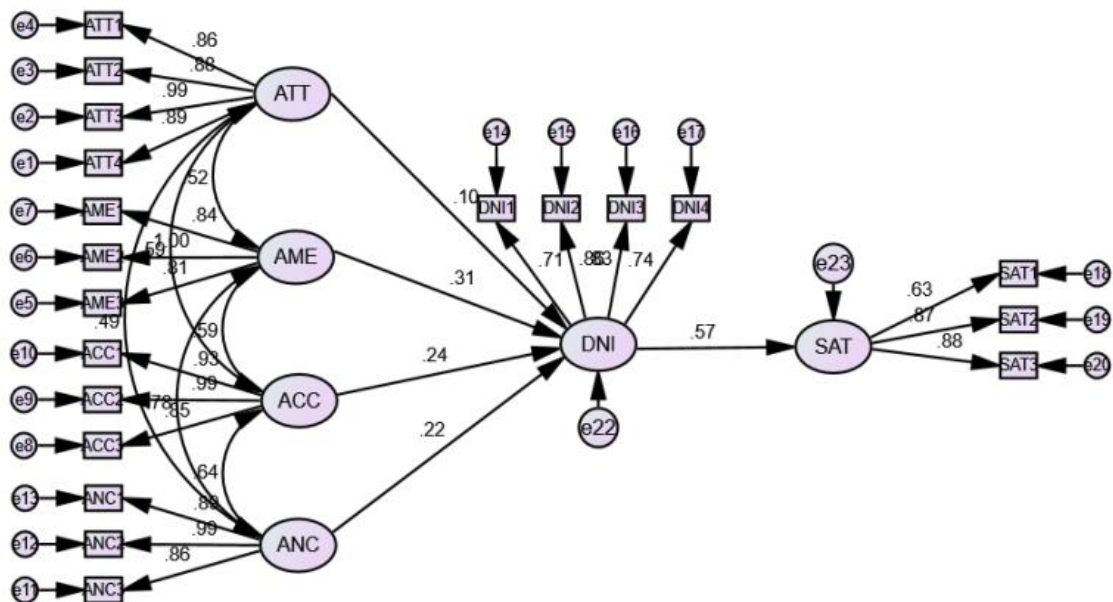


Figure 2. Hypothesized structural model

Table 7. Hypothesis testing results

Hypotheses/Path	Finding		Results
	β	p -value	
H1 (ATT $\rightarrow$ DNI)	0.057	0.179	Not supported
H2 (AME $\rightarrow$ DNI)	0.085	0.001*	Accepted
H3 (ACC $\rightarrow$ DNI)	0.054	0.004*	Accepted
H4 (ANC $\rightarrow$ DNI)	0.082	0.026*	Accepted
H5 (DNI $\rightarrow$ SAT)	0.101	<0.001	Accepted

* $p < 0.001$.

The results show that attraction (ATT) did not significantly influence either destination image (DNI) ($\beta = 0.057$, $p = 0.179$), leading to the rejection of H1. In contrast, amenity (AME) significantly affected destination image ($\beta = 0.085$, $p = 0.001$), thus supporting H2. Similarly, accessibility (ACC) had a positive and significant impact on destination image ($\beta = 0.054$, $p = 0.004$), supporting H3. Ancillary service (ANC) positively influenced destination image ($\beta = 0.082$,

$p = 0.026$), providing support for H4. Finally, the effect of destination image (DNI) on customer satisfaction is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.101$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5.

Finally, the mediation effect of destination image (H6) on the relationship between tourism features and customer satisfaction was examined using standardized effects from SPSS AMOS. The indirect effects of tourism features on destination image, in turn, on customer satisfaction ranged from 0.04 to 0.23, with amenities and ancillary services showing the most substantial mediated effects. Given that destination image also had a significant direct impact on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.399$, representing the standardized total path coefficient from AMOS; the bootstrapped coefficient reported in Table 7 is $\beta = 0.101$), these results support H6, indicating that destination image significantly mediates the relationship between tourism features and customer satisfaction.

Table 8 presents a summary of the direct and indirect effects of tourism features (i.e., attraction, amenity, accessibility, and ancillary services) on customer satisfaction, mediated by destination image.

Table 8. Hypothesis testing, mediation, direct and indirect effects.

Hypothesis/Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
H6. SAT $\leftarrow$ Tourism Features (through DNI)			
SAT $\leftarrow$ ATT (through DNI)	0.00	0.23	0.04
SAT $\leftarrow$ AME (through DNI)	0.00	0.09	0.20
SAT $\leftarrow$ ACC (through DNI)	0.00	0.20	0.09
SAT $\leftarrow$ ANC (through DNI)	0.00	0.04	0.23

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study provide important insights into how the 4A's of tourism features (i.e., attraction, amenities, accessibility, and ancillary services) shape customer satisfaction through destination image. The analysis shows that amenities and ancillary services have the most decisive influence on destination image. This finding aligns with Dwyer and Kim (2003), Enright and Newton (2004), as well as more recent evidence from Arici and Köseoglu (2025), who emphasized that services and infrastructure are crucial to maintaining destination competitiveness. It also resonates with Chi and Qu (2008), who highlighted that service quality and supporting facilities are central to tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

In contrast, attractions, which Buhalis (2000) identified as a key element of a destination's appeal, did not show a substantial direct effect in this study. This outcome differs from the findings of Beerli and Martín (2004), who demonstrated that attractions play a dominant role in shaping destination image and loyalty. Thailand's attractions are widely known in advance, making them a baseline expectation rather than a differentiating factor (Gunn, 1988; Jebbouri et al., 2023). Once on-site, it is the quality of amenities and ancillary services that shapes tourists' updated image, consistent with expectation-disconfirmation theory, whereby factors that merely meet expectations have less influence on overall evaluations than those that exceed or fall short of them (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Oliver, 1980; Wang et al., 2025). The difference suggests that while attractions remain essential, they may not be sufficient on their own to drive tourist satisfaction. Tourists appear to evaluate destinations more holistically, placing greater importance on service quality and features that enhance the overall travel experience.

Another important finding concerns the mediating roles of destination image. The significance of destination image as a mediator is consistent with the theoretical foundation set out by Crompton (1979) and later validated by Chi and Qu (2008), who argued that image serves as the bridge between destination attributes and behavioral outcomes. By revealing that image mediates the impact of tourism features, the study extends existing knowledge. It suggests that customer satisfaction is shaped through a combination of emotional impressions and value judgments.

In relation to theoretical contribution, the study extends the application of the 4A's framework beyond its traditional conceptual use and empirically testing its influence on destination image and customer satisfaction. By incorporating both destination images as a mediator in a single model, the study offers a more comprehensive explanation of how functional features are translated into tourist loyalty. This integrated perspective adds originality by showing that psychological evaluations are not secondary but central in linking tangible features to behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, applying the framework in Thailand provides evidence that the relative importance of the 4A's may vary across settings, thereby strengthening the model's generalizability and opening avenues for cross-cultural validation.

From a practical perspective, this study offers valuable implications for tourism policymakers and industry practitioners. The finding that amenities and ancillary services strongly influence destination image suggests that investment in supporting infrastructure, such as accommodation, dining, health and safety services, and tourist information, should be prioritized alongside attractions. Since destination image was confirmed as a mediator, marketing strategies should not only highlight iconic sites but also communicate the quality and reliability of services that shape positive impressions. By addressing both functional features and tourists' psychological evaluations, destination managers and local businesses can enhance satisfaction, encourage repeat visits, and strengthen competitive positioning in the global tourism market. These findings suggest that the Tourism Authority of Thailand and private-sector stakeholders should prioritize investment in amenities and ancillary services, such as accommodation, dining, and digital connectivity, as these yield the greatest returns in perceived image and tourist loyalty.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 189 respondents, although sufficient for SEM, limits the generalizability of the results. Second, the use of snowball sampling, adopted due to the absence of a comprehensive tourist sampling frame, may have introduced bias toward younger and Southeast Asian respondents. Third, cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time and cannot explain how attitudes or tourist satisfaction may evolve over time. Fourth, the nationwide scope may obscure regional variation in how individual components are experienced across destinations such as Bangkok, Phuket, and Chiang Mai. Future research should employ larger samples drawn through probability-based sampling, conduct destination-specific or cluster-level analyses that differentiate major tourism hubs from secondary destinations, and apply multi-group SEM to explore differences across regions and tourist segments. Comparative studies across different destinations would further validate the findings, while incorporating emerging themes such as sustainability practices and digital tourism could extend the 4A's framework and offer richer explanations of tourist behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence on the importance of the 4A's framework in shaping tourist perceptions and behaviors. While attractions remain central to tourism, it is amenities and ancillary services that most strongly enhance destination image, which in turn encourage tourist satisfaction. The findings emphasize the importance of considering both tangible features and intangible perceptions when building sustainable destination competitiveness. In practice, investments in accommodation, digital connectivity, and tourist information services strengthen destination image, reduce perceived risk, and encourage repeat visitation, reinforcing the long-term competitiveness of Thailand as a tourism destination.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest found in this research.

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