

Understanding visitor behavior in sustainable agritourism: a structural equation modeling approach in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

Mahachai Sattayathamrongthian^{1*} and *Yingsak Vanpetch*²

¹Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, 96 Moo 3, Phutthamonthon Sai 5, Salaya, Phutthamonthon, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

²Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, 1 U-Thong Nok rd., Dusit, Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract. This study examines the effects of sustainable agritourism practices on tourists' destination image perception, perceived value, and behavioral intention in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand. While agritourism is widely known as a major strategy for rural development, environmental conservation, and cultural protection, there has been little research on tourists' psychological and behavioral responses to sustainability in Southeast Asia. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior and value-based tourism models, the study uses Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze data from 265 organic farm and eco-village tourists. Results indicate a strong but counterintuitive negative effect of sustainable actions on destination image, suggesting that tourists might think eco-measures equate to lower comfort or more traditional conditions. Furthermore, neither destination image nor perceived value predicted behavioral intention significantly, supporting the existence of an attitude–behavior gap. The SEM fitted extremely well (CFI = 0.988, RMSEA = 0.047), validating model reliability. Theoretically, the study rebuts assumptions about sustainability always proving beneficial to the attitudes of tourists and highlights the context-specific nature of visitor decisions. Pragmatically, it underscores agritourism operators' pivotal role in aligning environmental actions with tourists' expectations of comfort, beauty, and experiential value—all key to developing sustainable tourism and rural development targets.

1 Introduction

Agritourism has emerged as a critical model of sustainable rural development that combines synergistically agricultural and tourist activities.

Not only does it ensure that farmers earn incomes from diversified sources but also works as an environment and cultural preservation mechanism [1].

In Thailand, agritourism has developed extensively, particularly under national policy agendas promoting sustainable development and rural revitalization [2]. However, with or without policy intentions, the majority of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the

* Corresponding author: mahachai.sat@rmutr.ac.th

agritourism sector remain to concentrate on short-term profitability at the cost of long-term environmental management [3].

Nakhon Pathom, lying at the heart of Thailand, offers a compelling argument for joining local economic development and agritourism. With robust agricultural culture—ranging from organic production farms, orchards of fresh fruits, and traditional craftsmanship, the province offers authentic countryside experience. Facilitated schemes such as government-approved agro-tourism trail through Khlong Mahasawat have worked to attract the tourist from cities and the tourist from overseas shores, enhancing cultural appreciation, and environmental awareness.

Despite the growth of the industry, empirical research examining tourist attitudes and behavioral responses in sustainable agritourism settings is scarce, particularly in Southeast Asia.

Early studies predominantly focused on agritourism's economic effects, or on the management issues of farm-based tourism enterprises [4]. However, there is an immediate need to examine the perceptual and psychological factors conditioning tourist involvement—such as perceived value, destination image, and intention to behave—since these variables are a determining factor for specifying proper marketing strategy and sustainable development policies. The COVID-19 pandemic has further altered tourism behavior, with increasing demand for health-conscious, environmentally responsible, and experience-driven travel [5].

In this post-pandemic landscape, understanding how tourists evaluate and respond to sustainability practices in agritourism is essential for enhancing sector resilience. Nakhon Pathom, as a key agritourism hub, offers a timely and relevant setting for such an investigation. Recent studies emphasize the importance of integrating community-based and culture-embedded practices in sustainable tourism development. [6] emphasized the importance of gastronomy tourism through organic farming in Nakhon Pathom, emphasizing local food and cultural heritage as a primary means of enhancing visitor satisfaction. [7] also devised an eco-friendly tourism model in the Bang Luang community, with emphasis on sustainable practices rooted in Thai Chinese cultural identity.

These findings attest to the importance of local authenticity, community participation, and sustainability in building good tourist experiences. Nevertheless, the technological readiness and ability to implement sustainability by tourist operators is varied most times depending on local constraints, impacting agritourism product consistency. While the role of agritourism in sustainable development has been well documented, there is limited knowledge regarding the interrelationship between perceived value, destination image, and behavioral intention—particularly in Thailand.

There are a few studies that use Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine these relationships in sustainability-focused tourism. Furthermore, the psychological drivers of tourist decision-making, otherwise self-acclaimed for sustainability—remained to be comprehensively grasped. That renders it challenging for providers and policymakers to construct engaging, behaviorally founded agritourism programs.

The present study fills that void by investigating the inter-influences among SAP, DI, PV, and BI in Nakhon Pathom.

1.1 Significance of the findings

Despite being specific to Nakhon Pathom, the findings apply to similar rural tourism destinations in Southeast Asia.

The findings contradict the argument that sustainability unconditionally enhances tourist perception. Instead, it may harm destination image if not combined with comfort, beauty, or

amusing experiences. This adheres to the "sustainable dissonance" effect [8], whereby environmentalism is endorsed but tourist behavior doesn't correspond consequently.

1.2 Research questions

-How do sustainable agritourism practices affect tourists' perceptions of destination image, perceived value, and their behavioral intention?

-To what extent does destination image influence perceived value and behavioral intention among agritourism visitors?

-What is the impact of perceived value on tourists' behavioral intention in sustainable agritourism settings?

1.3 Research objectives

-To examine the influence of sustainable agritourism practices on tourists' destination image, perceived value, and behavioral intention.

-To analyze the effect of destination image on perceived value and tourists' behavioral intention in the context of agritourism.

-To investigate the role of perceived value in shaping tourists' behavioral intention toward agritourism destinations (fig.1).

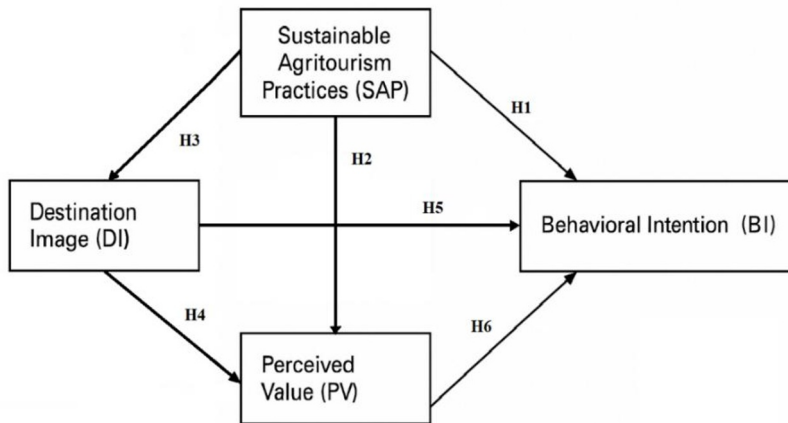


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

1.4 Research hypotheses

H1: Sustainable agritourism practices have a positive effect on tourists' behavioral intention.

H2: Sustainable agritourism practices have a positive effect on perceived value.

H3: Sustainable agritourism practices have a positive effect on destination image.

H4: Destination image has a positive effect on perceived value.

H5: Destination image has a positive effect on tourists' behavioral intention.

H6: Perceived value has a positive effect on tourists' behavioral intention.

2 Literature review

Sustainable agritourism supports rural economic development, environmental preservation, and cultural preservation [4]. Agritourism integrates recreation and educational activities on farms that engage tourists and encourage local economies and environmental goals. With the rise in demand for authentic and responsible travel, most agritourism businesses have integrated sustainability into their operations. Perceived value, or the judgment of benefits over sacrifices on the part of the customer [9] is central to comprehending tourist response.

Perceived value in agritourism involves affective, moral, and hedonic aspects [10]. Tourists may value learning, recreation, and conservation and livelihood support [9]. Empirical research links perceived value high to outcomes like revisit intention and word-of-mouth [9]. Destination image, as tourists' cognitive and affective impressions [3] is also a key factor—particularly in sustainable settings that emphasize organic farming, cultural immersion, and eco-education.

These images promote authenticity, conservation, and community involvement [7]. A positive image influences both perceived value and behavioural intention, routinely mediating tourist loyalty and satisfaction [7]. Behavioural intention, for instance, to refer or revisit, is best explained by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), tracing intentions back through perceptions of control, norms, and attitudes [11]. In tourism, TPB outlines how perception and values create behavior [12].

Destination image and perceived value would have a tendency to create behavioral intention in sustainable tourism. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is an alternative method of measuring these relationships because it defines higher-order routes between latent variables and permits the examination of direct and indirect effects [7]. More recent SEM studies verify these connections—e.g. [9] showed that sustainability boosted destination image, which raised value and behavior intention. Similarly, [10] showed that image mediated satisfaction and revisit intent.

But outcomes may differ by destination type, segment, and culture. Empirical research on the impact of sustainability on tourist psychology in Thailand has yet to be formulated. [12] designed an eco-tourism model on natural and cultural identity in Nakhon Pathom, while [9] centered on gastronomy and organic farming as the key to rural experiences. These studies refer to local culture and community participation in successful agritourism. Nonetheless, enormous gaps exist.

For one, there are no empirical Thai studies that model sustainability, destination image, perceived value, and behavioral intention all at the same time.

For another, context-bound limitations like few resources and technological preparedness are under researched.

Third, while tourists may be pro-sustainability, they do not necessarily behave that way—a gap between attitude and behavior.

This study bridges the above-mentioned gaps by testing a SEM model among Sustainable Agritourism Practices (SAP), Destination Image (DI), Perceived Value (PV), and Behavioral Intention (BI). On the basis of TPB, Destination Image Theory and the Value-Attitude-Behavior model, the study provides a model to test the influence of sustainability on tourist behavior. The agritourism industry of Nakhon Pathom is utilized as the case study in the research, targeting the shift in demand of Thai tourists in the post-pandemic era.

3 Research methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to explore the relationships among sustainable agritourism practices (SAP), destination image (DI), perceived value (PV), and behavioral intention (BI) in rural tourism.

SEM was chosen for its capacity to test complex relationships among latent variables and assess both direct and indirect effects [13]. The study's theoretical base integrates the Theory of Planned Behavior, Destination Image Theory and the Value-Attitude-Behavior model.

A structured questionnaire was designed using validated instruments and divided into five sections: (1) demographics, (2) SAP, (3) DI, (4) PV and BI. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Data was collected from 265 domestic tourists visiting agritourism sites in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, between January and February 2025. Purposive sampling targeted individuals with recent experience in agritourism, including visits to organic farms, eco-villages, and cultural markets. Key data sites included Don Wai Floating Market, Salaya Organic Farm, and Mahasawat Canal clusters. Respondents completed surveys via paper or QR-coded digital forms. A pilot study with 30 participants confirmed item clarity and reliability. All constructs had Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80.

The final sample (N = 265) meets SEM adequacy criteria, exceeding the recommended 200 cases and maintaining a subject-to-parameter ratio above 10:1 ensuring statistical power and model stability.

Following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) validated the measurement model—ensuring convergent (factor loadings ≥ 0.60 , AVE ≥ 0.50 , CR ≥ 0.70) and discriminant validity. Subsequently, the structural model was tested to assess hypothesized paths among latent constructs. Model fit was evaluated using CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR, and χ^2/df , based on recommended cutoffs.

4 Research results

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 265)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	119	44.9
	Female	146	55.1
Age	16–30 years	115	43.4
	31–45 years	61	23
	46–60 years	51	19.2
	Over 60 years	38	14.3
Education	High school	49	18.5
	Vocational certificate	53	20
	Bachelor's degree	107	40.4
	Master's degree or higher	56	21.1
Career	Private sector employee	156	58.9
	Government officer	33	12.5
	Self-employed	44	16.6
	Other	32	12.1
Monthly Income	Less than 15,000 THB	41	15.5
	15,001–30,000 THB	62	23.4
	30,001–45,000 THB	44	16.6
	45,001–60,000 THB	60	22.6
	More than 60,000 THB	58	21.9
Marital Status	Single	168	63.4
	Married	97	36.6

Among the 265 respondents, gender was balanced, with a majority aged 16–30. Most held at least a bachelor's degree and worked in the private sector. Income levels were varied, and most participants were single (tab. 1).

Descriptive statistics showed high agreement across all items (means = 4.22–4.83), with low standard deviations indicating limited variability. Skewness and kurtosis were within ± 2 , confirming univariate normality. Behavioral intention received the highest ratings, followed by perceived value and sustainable practices, indicating strong positive attitudes and readiness for CFA and SEM.

4.1 Preliminary correlation analysis

A Pearson correlation matrix was used to examine linear relationships among 32 observed variables grouped under four constructs: SAP, DI, PV, and BI. Strong, significant correlations ($p < .01$) were observed within each construct (e.g., SAP1–SAP8, BI1–BI8), confirming internal consistency.

Between-construct correlations (e.g., SAP–DI, DI–PV, PV–BI) were moderate and significant, supporting convergent validity. No correlations exceeded .90, indicating no multicollinearity issues and justifying progression to structural modeling.

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis summary: sampling adequacy, variance, communalities, and pattern matrix

Item	Communality (Extraction)	Factor 1 (SAP)	Factor 2 (BI)	Factor 3 (PV)	Factor 4 (DI)
SAP2	0.854	0.927			
SAP3	0.914	0.955			
SAP4	0.93	0.959			
SAP5	0.885	0.941			
SAP7	0.921	0.96			
SAP8	0.92	0.961			
BI1	0.817		0.899		
BI3	0.812		0.902		
BI8	0.834		0.913		
BI2	0.886		0.94		
BI4	0.854		0.927		
BI7	0.876		0.935		
PV4	0.91			0.959	
PV8	0.906			0.942	
PV2	0.895			0.948	
DI2	0.866				0.922
DI4	0.888				0.934
DI5	0.889				0.941
DI8	0.891				0.943

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = .835. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: $\chi^2 (171) = 6511.718$, $p < .001$. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization. Loadings $< .40$ are suppressed (tab. 2).

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis and Promax rotation was conducted to assess the structure of the measurement items. Sampling adequacy was confirmed by a strong KMO value of .835, exceeding the .80 threshold [14]. Bartlett's

Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(171) = 6511.72$, $p < .001$, indicating factorability of the correlation matrix.

A four-factor solution based on eigenvalues > 1.0 explained 88.16% of the variance: Factor 1 (SAP) = 31.81%, Factor 2 (BI) = 25.01%, Factor 3 (PV) = 17.97%, and Factor 4 (DI) = 13.37%. Communalities ranged from .812 to .961, indicating strong shared variance. Clean, high factor loadings supported the discriminant validity of the constructs, confirming the model's readiness for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and SEM.

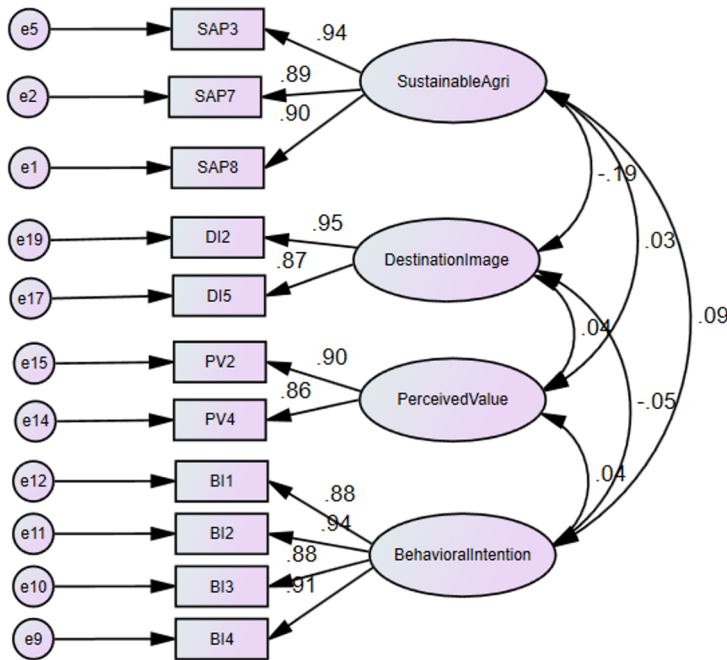


Fig. 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) model for sustainable agritourism and behavioral intention

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (fig. 2) showed strong loadings (.86–.95) for all observed variables, confirming excellent construct validity. Each latent variable, Sustainable Agritourism, Destination Image, Perceived Value, and Behavioral Intention—was well measured. Low to moderate inter-construct correlations (–.19 to .09) indicated good discriminant validity, supporting the model's readiness for structural equation modeling (SEM).

All item loadings exceed 0.85, indicating strong indicator reliability. CR values are greater than 0.70 and AVE values exceed 0.50, meeting recommended thresholds for construct reliability and convergent validity. These results confirm that each construct is internally consistent and adequately represents its indicators within the structural equation model.

Tab. 3-4 demonstrates discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The diagonal values ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) exceed the inter-construct correlations, confirming that each construct is distinct and not overly correlated with others. This supports the structural model's adequacy in measuring separate latent variables with acceptable discriminant power.

Table 3. Measurement Model Summary: factor loadings, reliability, and convergent validity

Construct	Indicator	Std. Loading (λ)	CR	AVE
Sustainable Agritourism	SAP3	0.936	0.903	0.904
	SAP7	0.891		
	SAP8	0.902		
Destination Image	DI2	0.948	0.874	0.874
	DI5	0.873		
Perceived Value	PV2	0.895	0.902	0.902
	PV4	0.856		
Behavioral Intention	BI1	0.882	0.845	0.845
	BI2	0.94		
	BI3	0.877		
	BI4	0.907		

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Construct	SAP ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}=.95$)	DI ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}=.93$)	PV ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}=.95$)	BI ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}=.92$)
Sustainable Agritourism (SAP)	0.95	-.19	0.04	0.08
Destination Image (DI)	-.19	0.93	0.04	-.04
Perceived Value (PV)	0.04	0.04	0.95	0.04
Behavioral Intention (BI)	0.08	-.04	0.04	0.92

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) demonstrated that the measurement model exhibited excellent fit across multiple indices, indicating that the observed variables reliably and validly represented the underlying latent constructs. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) was 1.595, which falls well below the commonly accepted threshold of 3.00, reflecting good model parsimony.

The Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI = 0.957) and the Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI = 0.936) both exceeded the recommended cutoff of 0.90, suggesting a strong overall fit of the model to the data [9]. Incremental fit measures also indicated excellent performance: the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.988 and the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.985, both surpassing the 0.95 benchmark for excellent model fit. Similarly, the Incremental Fit Index (IFI) reached 0.988, consistent with [6] criteria for acceptable comparative model performance.

In terms of error-based indices, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.047, below the 0.06 threshold, indicating a close approximate fit [8]. The Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) was 0.007, further supporting the minimal residual discrepancy between the observed and predicted covariance matrices.

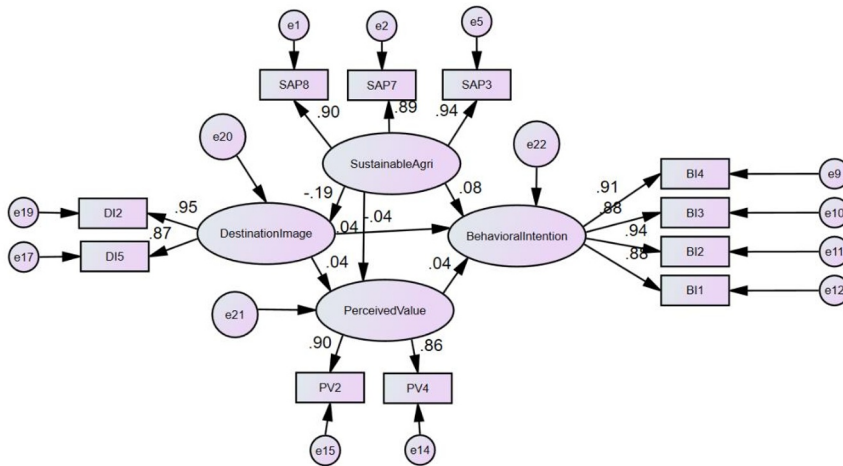


Fig. 3. Structural equation model of the effects of sustainable agritourism on behavioral intention

The model fit the data extremely well (fig 3). The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) was 1.595, significantly lower than the threshold limit of 3.00, which determined the strength of parsimony of the model. Goodness-of-fit indices also supported this: GFI = 0.957 and AGFI = 0.936, both significantly higher than the benchmark of 0.90, which determined high correspondence between the model and observed covariance matrix.

Table 5. Standardized Path Coefficients and Significance (Structural Equation Model)

Path	Standardized Estimate (β)	p-value	Interpretation
Destination Image ← Sustainable Agritourism Practices	-.194	0.003	Significant, negative effect
Perceived Value ← Destination Image	0.044	0.528	Not significant
Perceived Value ← Sustainable Agritourism Practices	0.04	0.566	Not significant
Behavioral Intention ← Sustainable Agritourism Practices	0.077	0.246	Not significant
Behavioral Intention ← Perceived Value	0.038	0.573	Not significant
Behavioral Intention ← Destination Image	-.041	0.543	Not significant

Incremental fit indices were also robust. CFI = 0.988 and TLI = 0.985 both exceeded the 0.95 benchmark, which means that the hypothesized model was a better fit than a null model. IFI also reached 0.988, strengthening the finding of improved model fit (tab. 5).

Error approximation measures corroborated these findings. RMSEA = 0.047 indicated a good fit model [8], and RMR = 0.007 was well below the 0.08 threshold, signifying minor residual differences between observed and estimated values.

The structural model revealed that Sustainable Agritourism Practices significantly and negatively predicted Destination Image ($\beta = -.194, p = .003$). However, no other paths in the model were statistically significant. Sustainable Agritourism had weak, nonsignificant effects on Perceived Value ($\beta = .040$) and Behavioral Intention ($\beta = .077$). Similarly, Destination Image and Perceived Value showed negligible, nonsignificant impacts on Behavioral Intention ($\beta = -.041$ and $\beta = .038$, respectively).

4.2 Summary of hypothesis

The study tested six hypotheses regarding the influence of sustainable agritourism practices (SAP), destination image (DI), and perceived value (PV) on tourists' behavioral intention (BI):

H1 & H2: SAP had no significant effect on BI ($\beta = .077$, $p = .246$) or PV ($\beta = .040$, $p = .566$), indicating that sustainability alone does not strongly drive future intentions or perceived value.

H3: SAP had a significant but negative effect on DI ($\beta = -.194$, $p = .003$), suggesting that eco-friendly practices may reduce destination appeal, possibly due to minimalism or lack of amenities.

H4 & H5: DI had no significant effect on PV ($\beta = .044$, $p = .528$) or BI ($\beta = -.041$, $p = .543$), showing that image alone does not strongly shape value perception or intent to revisit.

H6: PV did not significantly affect BI ($\beta = .038$, $p = .573$), meaning tourists who perceive high value do not necessarily plan to return or recommend the destination.

5 Theoretical and practical implications

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to tourism and sustainability research by applying the Theory of Planned Behavior to sustainable agritourism, complemented by Destination Image Theory and the Value-Attitude-Behavior model. While earlier studies had confirmed positive relationships between sustainability practices, destination image, perceived value, and behavioral intention, this study illustrates that these relationships are context dependent.

Sustainable Agritourism Practices (SAP) had a significant, though negative impact on Destination Image (DI) ($\beta = -.194$, $p < .01$), contradicting the notion that environmental actions always improve attitudes. Simplicity rural settings may conflict with tourist conceptions. In addition, the nonsignificant correlations of Perceived Value (PV) and DI with Behavioral Intention (BI) [11] suggest the presence of mediating variables like novelty-seeking or emotional involvement. Such findings provide an argument for updating SEM-based models in sustainable tourism contexts.

5.2 Practical implications

Comfort, interaction, and emotional appeal should be married to sustainability. Cultural tourism and ecotourism can boost DI and PV. The SAP–DI negative relationship highlights the marriage of aesthetics and sustainability as well as local culture immersion. Against weak PV–BI relationships, firms are compelled to emphasize emotional and ethical value—genuine authenticity and stories regarding people and their relationships rather than economic gain. Promotion is directed toward environment-conscious and family travelers and associating sustainability with wellness and health-focused lifestyle. Government support through training, certification, and policy frameworks still underlies trust attainment in sustainable tourism destinations.

6 Discussion and conclusions

This study offers empirical findings on the interconnections between SAP, DI, PV, and BI in Thai agritourism. SAP did not significantly affect PV or BI ($\beta = .040$, $p = .566$; $\beta = .077$, $p = .246$), in contrast to past studies. The negative SAP \rightarrow DI route ($\beta = -.194$, $p = .003$) supports

the sustainable dissonance theory, which holds that perceived inconvenience decreases image appeal. In accordance with Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory, unfulfilled expectations regarding sustainability may result in image degradation. The nonsignificant DI and PV to BI ($\beta = -.041$, $\beta = .038$) suggest disruption of the value–attitude–behavior chain, as found in the much-discussed attitude–behavior gap. The gap could be the result of absent variables such as emotional involvement or perceived behavioral control [1, 11].

The sample—youth, city Thais—may associate sustainability with thriftiness rather than prestige. Agritourism in Thailand is normally afflicted by poor infrastructure and mixed quality [29, 28], despite mounting operator readiness. Although model fit was satisfactory (CFI = .988, RMSEA = .047), ceiling effects and socially desirable response may have constrained variability. Longitudinal or experimental designs should be used in future research, and segmented tourist profiles should be examined in order to gain more nuanced understanding.

7 Limitations and future recommendations

This research is confined to Nakhon Pathom and possibly cannot be generalised to other areas. The cross-sectional approach limits understanding about changes over time, and exclusion of variables such as satisfaction or authenticity reduces scope for explanation. Social desirability bias is implied by high mean scores; future research must use behavioral or experimental approaches. Extension of models using mediators and tourist segmentation according to eco-awareness or motivation would improve theoretical accuracy and utility.

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