

RESIDENT'S PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BUDDHA'S FOOTSTEPS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Tourism experts have considered the local perspective as an important area of research involving the tourist sector. Residents of places where sharing and preserving their culture are essential can experience both positive and negative effects from tourism. This study examined how Indian Buddhist circuit residents felt about tourism using a benefits-based approach. The paper's primary goal is to investigate residents' perceptions of tourism development in the Buddhist circuit in India. Data were collected using a five-point Likert scale from 175 Buddhist circuit residents in India, who had 31 statements. The researcher used a convenience sampling approach. The study took place over 24 weeks from January to July 2022. According to the results, people living in Buddhist circuits are more sensitive to tourism's economic effects than its cultural and social aspects. The local community will support tourism growth if it brings about considerable personal benefits.

Keywords: tourism; perceptions; Buddhist circuit; residents; development

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INTRODUCTION

With its ability to provide wealth, jobs, and exposure to many cultures, tourism has developed into the largest industry in the world. India is on its way to becoming one of the world's

leading tourism destinations. Regarding long-term development, India's travel and tourism sector is anticipated to rank second globally in employment by 2019 (World Economic Forum, 2019). India's rapidly growing tourism sector is

crucial to the nation's economy. The WTTC estimates that in 2018, tourism supported 42.67 million jobs, or 8.1 percent of all employment in the country, and added 16.91 lakh crore (US\$240 billion) to India's GDP.

In tourism research, residents' perceptions are a hot topic (Woo et al., 2018). Tourism has been a key factor in the growth of the local economy, while the growth of a location brings about big changes for its residents. Residents' reactions to tourism are effective for various reasons, not the least of which is the host community's quality of life (Josiassen et al., 2022). Excessive negative resident opinion toward this growth may stymie or even kill economic tourism operations. Over the past decade, much research has been done on how residents react to tourism development and its effects (Suprina et al., 2023; Peters, 2018; Gursoy, 2019; Wang, 2016; Armenski, 2011). To understand how tourism affects locals, one must examine how different components of the industry and the local environment interact. When residents know why they oppose or support the sector, choosing developments with

the least harmful social consequences and the most support for such alternatives will be feasible. In light of the impact of tourism of the community, residents' quality of life can be improved or, at least preserved. This study aims to investigate the factors that affect local tourism development in India by shedding light on residents' perceptions of the tourists who visit India. An international co-authorship between the Czech Republic and India conducted this research. The Czech researcher was interested in discovering what aspects of rural tourism in India influence interactions between locals and visitors. In this manner, the Czech author aimed to get inspiration and lessons from the Indian case study to see what could be transferred to the Czech tourism context.

The world's most famous religious travel destination is India. Buddhism started in India and has spread worldwide today in Sri Lanka, China, Myanmar, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Korea, Singapore, Laos, Thailand, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, Vietnam, and so on (see Figure 1).

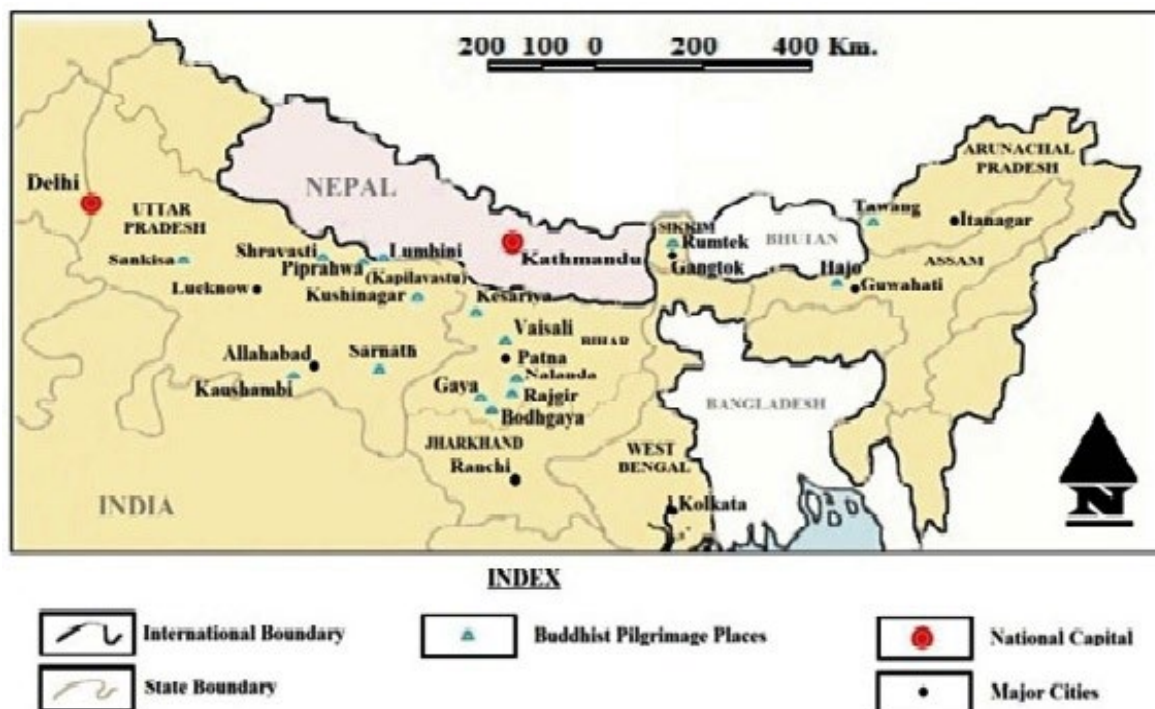


Figure 1. Buddhist Circuit

Source: Bhonsale, 2019

India is a South Asian nation with 3.287 million square kilometers of land. Historical and urban settlements there date back to more than 5000

BCE, making India one of the oldest continuously significant civilizations in the world. It has a long human history and is home to several

archaeological sites (Harappa Civilization) and 40 UNESCO World Heritage sites. There are countless historical sites in India, many of which have yet to be discovered. Of these 40 World Heritage sites, the selection criteria used by the organization identify seven as natural, 32 as cultural, and one as mixed (UNESCO, 2021). India has the sixth-highest sites worldwide and is a junction of cultures. The Indian religions of Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Hinduism have all gained popularity worldwide.

As of 2010, there were 488 million Buddhists worldwide, or 7% of all people (Pew Research

Centre, 2018). Buddha was born in Lumbini, Nepal, and enlightened in Bodhgaya, India. Most of the life of the Buddha was spent in India: Bodh Gaya in Bihar, where he acquired enlightenment; Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh, where he delivered his first speech; and Sarnath, also in Uttar Pradesh, where he attained Mahaparinirvana. Four more locations in the area are connected to some of the most critical moments in the life of the Buddha: Rajgir and Vaishali in Bihar, as well as Sravasti and Sankasia in Uttar Pradesh. As can be seen in Table 1, the Buddha traveled extensively throughout India.

Table 1. Buddha's Footstep

Destination	Country	Significance	Major Site
Lumbini	Nepal	Birth of Sakyamuni Buddha	Mayadevi Temple*, Tilaurakot, Devdaha
Kapilvastu (Piprahwa)	Nepal	Gautama Buddha spent his early years as Siddhartha.	Stupa and Museum where Buddha's ashes lie buried.
Bodh Gaya	India	Enlightenment under Bodhi tree	Mahabodhi Temple*, Pragbodhi Caves
Rajgir	India	Monsoon Retreat for 12 years	Saptaparni Caves, Vishwa Shanti Stupa, Venu van
Sarnath	India	Turned the Wheel of Law	Deer Park, Stupas erected by Ashoka
Shravasti	India	Buddha spent 24 rainy seasons here.	Jetavana Monastery, and PakkiKuthi.
Nalanda	India	Ancient university Where Buddha preached	Remains of the Nalanda Vihar*.
Sankisa	India	Descended from heaven through a ladder of gold	The shrine marks the descent.
Kesariya	India	Delivered the Kalama Sutta	Stupa commemorating Kalama Sutta
Kaushambi	India	Spent sixth and ninth Years after enlightenment	Buddhist-related stupa and sculptures.
Vaishali	India	Buddha held his last sermon.	Stupa and Ashokan pillar.
Kushinagara	India	Mahaparinirvana	Nirvana Stupa.

*UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Source: Self-Authored

The Buddhist circuit comprises these eight locations from which Buddhism would eventually expand. The central government, as well as the state government, invests in infrastructure development of the Buddhist circuit in the following, concrete ways: (1) The Union government launched the Dekho

Apna Desh scheme Buddhist Circuit Train FAM Tour at Rs 3255.3 million, whose itinerary includes stops in Gaya and Bodhgaya, Nalanda and Rajgir in Bihar, and Varanasi and Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh; (2) The Road Transport and Highways Ministry has invested Rs 1000 million to build

highways in several locations throughout Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, including Bodh Gaya, Vaishali, Rajgir, Patna, Nalanda, Kahalgaon, and Vikramshila, among other Buddhist pilgrimage sites; (3) IFC (International Finance Corporation), the Tourism Ministry, state governments (Bihar and UP), and private sector stakeholders decided together to invest in the Buddhist circuit, part of which sees the low-income areas of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh expected to receive \$200 million in public sector investments and an extra \$200 million in hotel investments, creating more than 10,000 employees; (4) The government of India and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) signed a contract to provide \$1,350 billion in support for a highway project in Bihar that is part of the Buddhist circuit; (5) the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) has approved a soft loan for the Uttar Pradesh government of Rs 6800 million to create Buddhist circuits in the state of Uttar Pradesh; (6) Japan's Overseas Economic Common Fund (OECF) has offered a loan of Rs 1490 million to develop the Nalanda-Rajgir and Nagarjunakonda - Amaravati tourist circuits in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh into major Buddhist tourist attractions, where the state, federal, and local governments have also made significant investments in the development of Buddhist circuits. As a result, residents get more opportunities and better infrastructure.

Not surprisingly, a region's sustainable tourism development starts with listening to the voices of the locals. Local government might provide the necessary infrastructure, authority, policy, and planning processes to maximize benefits for their communities. Local governments are crucial to the growth of a community since they serve as a conduit between the residents and the federal or state government to deal with issues and problems specific to that community. In this sense, the local government serves as a middleman in bringing the framework of government to each community in order to achieve positive results (Javier & Elazigue, 2011). Residents' attitudes

towards tourism have been linked to effective, sustainable tourism development in previous studies (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005; Rastegar, 2010; Shen et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2011), which also revealed that host communities and residents may go through different stages and experiences of development. However, studies on locals' opinions of tourism are often undertaken in one or a limited number of villages, and very few studies have looked at many communities at various phases of tourism development and economic growth (Gannon, 1994; O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002; Wijijayanti et al., 2020). This study expands a model of residents' perceptions of tourism developed by (Muresan et al., 2016) to investigate residents' attitudes toward tourism development in several Midwest communities at various stages of tourism and economic development to fill this gap in the literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academics, decision-makers, and leaders in the tourist industry are becoming increasingly interested in how locals think about the growth of the tourism industry. There are questions concerning the economic viability of tourism and its costs and advantages for the host society (Afthanorhan et al., 2017; Meyer, 2021). One of the post-industrial age's new ideas is community participation, which comes from the political sector. Tourism community involvement is a crucial component of sustainable tourism development (Thetsane, 2019); (Saufi et al., 2014) (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). Giampiccoli and Saayman (2018) built a reciprocal interaction between the various parts driving tourism development by utilizing the TALC model, tourist typologies, issues of community involvement, CBT, and different tourism development stages. Moyo and Michaawa's (2017) study aims to shed light on how much community involvement and participation there is in the growth of the tourism industry. Very little involvement and participation were identified in the study, which also sheds light on how keen locals are to support ongoing tourism growth and get involved in the industry. Visarado (2021) defined the goal of the community's development of Buddhist tourism as building a network of Buddhist tourism that includes government agencies, communities, temples, and schools to impact the welfare of residents through recreational opportunities, as

well as the improvement of transportation services, road conditions, and basic amenities.

The ratio between how visitors behave and how locals interpret their conduct in and around tourist sites determines the connection between locals and visitors (Armenski, 2011). The kind of tourist who comes to a place and the type of tourism that grows there are primarily the locals' responsibility. The degree of overt or covert conflict brought on by progress is also ultimately their fault (Bimonte & Bunzo, 2016; Styliadis et al., 2022). Culture is playing an increasingly large role in the tourism industry, helping locations stand out in a congested global market. The promotion of culture and the creation of funds that can sustain and enhance cultural output, heritage, and creativity are both made possible by tourism (Adom, 2019). Most tourism-related studies classify locals' views towards tourism development under "culture" (Richards, 2018; Barts & Adlwabinga, 2020). The growth of tourism alters the host community, affecting residents' routines, beliefs, and values, given that residents and tourists exchange their cultures with each other (Dorcheh & Mohamed, 2013). Residents agreed that tourism brings job prospects and can assist in stimulating the economy in the area; however, they felt it needed to produce more economic advantages for locals. Some previous studies have outlined the economy's role in residents' development through tourism (Gursoy et al., 2019; Uchinaka, 2019; Gannon et al., 2021), supposing that families of residents involved in the tourism business reported a more favorable opinion. According to Lekgau et al. (2020), the wildlife tourism industry has grown into a significant economic sector that can help communities by creating much-needed jobs. According to various studies (Chang et al., 2020), views of the effects of tourism and economic dependency on it are correlated. Huh and Vogt (2008) claim that locals who view the tourism industry as a vital part of the economic prosperity of their community are more likely to support the business's expansion because they see more positive benefits and fewer negative ones.

Dai et al. (2018) found that residents emphasized the harmful effects of tourism and sought cultural conservation more strongly. They believed in their local culture and felt a sense of community: long-term inhabitants demonstrated a high sense of place attachment

and had a very negative opinion regarding the growth of the tourism industry (Carter, 2007); residents who worked in the tourism industry or profited from it exhibited more positive attitudes and wanted to get involved in tourism planning and development (Yuliarni et al., 2023). The residents' location and the specific property owners were factors in the negative image of tourism growth. There was a strong negative attitude among the occupants if the area was occupied by people outside of the local region (Rozmiarek, 2022). The most significant study and studies on local perception were then developed. He and Wang (2022) learned that Buddhist tourism has a positive impact on regional economic development; for example, if Buddhist tourism grows by 1%, local economic development will expand by 0.053%.

According to a review of related literature on local perceptions of the development of the industry, understanding and measuring tourism development in communities is crucial for the long-term survival and performance of the tourism sector. This segmentation analysis's most significant finding is that people who are the least optimistic about tourism give community issues the lowest ratings. Supposing that efforts are made to convince cynics of tourism's advantages, their values must be considered because it is commonly acknowledged that tourism requires the support of the host community. Still, most of the studies on this subject have been done outside of India, so applying them to the Indian context might not be appropriate. The local government is one of the most important institutions for managing tourism development policies (Rahmafritria et al., 2020). These policies differ from nation to nation because of political, economic, and constitutional system variations. The government invests in tourism expansion for socio-economic and financial reasons, but the community must participate in tourism expansion if sustainable tourism is to be achieved. The potential benefits to residents are contingent upon their attitudes toward tourism growth.

METHODOLOGY

The conceptual framework for this study's investigation is shown in Figure 2. The framework states that support for tourism development is influenced by inhabitants' socio-demographic traits, perceptions of the effects of

tourism, and overall assessment of the impacts of tourism framework. All of the study's variables were drawn from tested earlier scales. The scale of resident support was adapted from (Peters et al. 2018; Mannaa, 2020; Gannon et al., 2021). Resident perceptions consist of 5 variables, including welfare impacts (3 statements), social

interaction with tourists (3 statements), cultural impacts (4 statements), economic (5 statements), and negative interference (9 statements).

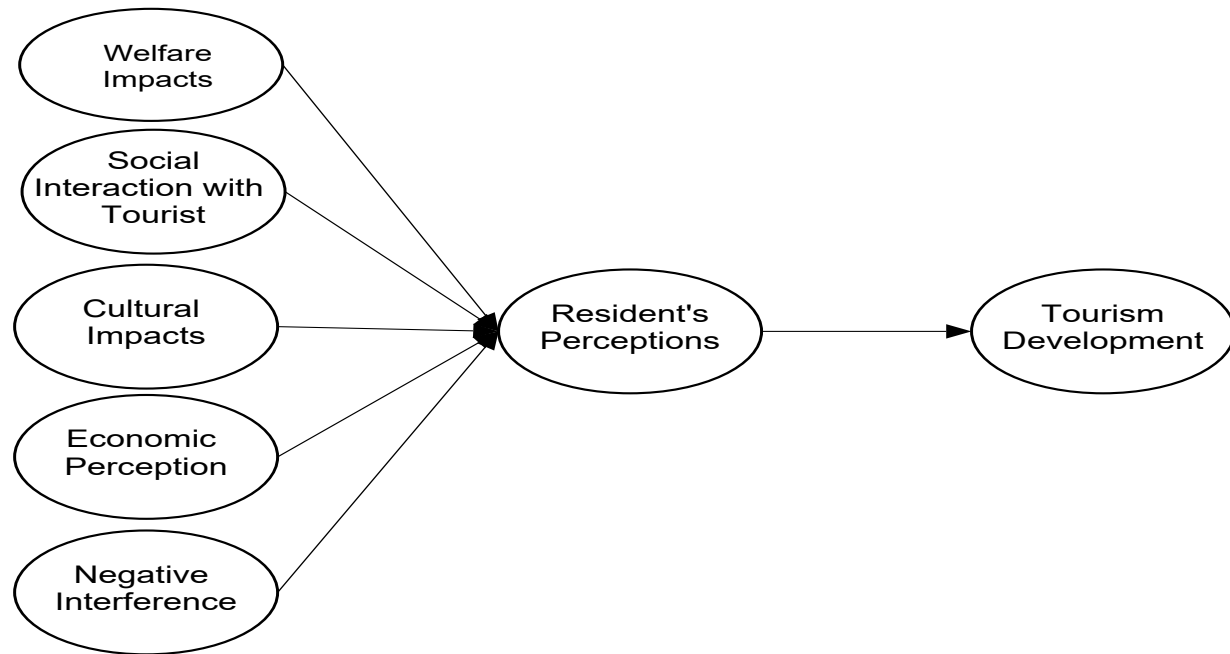


Figure 2. Framework explaining resident's perceptions

A five-point Likert scale, from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," was used to conduct the surveys (Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2016). 175 Buddhist circuit inhabitants in India participated in this research. The researcher used a

convenience sampling approach that relies upon convenience and access. The study took place over 24 weeks, from January to July 2022. The steps of doing this research are shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Research Process

There are 31 statements in all, divided into six categories. Six questions about the socio-demographic makeup of the respondents were included in the first segment. The second section examined three claims on the welfare impacts of tourism. In the third segment, three questions regarding the social interactions with locals are presented. Four questions about the cultural influence of tourism are included in the fourth

section. The fifth section comprises five questions about the locals' economic opinions, while nine questions about negative interference are presented in the sixth section. Both primary and secondary sources were used to compile the study's data. According to an analysis of related literature on local perceptions of the development of the industry, understanding and quantifying tourism development in

communities is essential for the long-term survival and performance of the tourism sector. The questionnaires were handed to the respondent to complete. Secondary data was acquired on the websites of the National Commission of Higher Education, the Ministry of Tourism, the Government of India, and the Bihar Tourism Development Corporation, as well as other official studies, research reports, and working papers. Data analysis was performed using SPSS-21 on the gathered information. Using Cronbach's alpha method, the veracity of claims regarding the effects of tourism was evaluated (Gonzalez et al., 2018). Means and standard deviations are the descriptive statistics used to discuss how the research's results were

distributed. For each variable, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test and the Barlett test for sphericity were also assessed to determine the normality of the data distribution.

RESULTS

The characteristics of the respondents are given in Table 2. At 119, most respondents were male (68%), while 56 were female (32%). As to the age of the respondents, about 134 respondents (76.6%) were between 20 and 40 years, 22 (12.6%) respondents were 40 to 50 years old, and respondents aged 50 years and above were 10 (10.9%).

Table 2. Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable		Frequency	(%)	Variable		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	119	68.0	Edu. Qua.	Below 10th	21	12.0
	Female	56	32.0		12th	62	35.4
Job	Related to tourism	18	10.3	Graduation	55	31.4	
	Agriculture/Business	86	49.1		Other	37	21.1
	Government/Private Service	22	12.6	Age	20-30 years	67	38.3
	Unemployed	49	28.0		30-40	67	38.3
			40-50		22	12.6	
Resident Status	Born	59	37.7	50 years and above	19	10.9	
	Living in the area for 20 years	37	21.1				
	Living in the area for 15 years	25	14.3	Income	Below 5000	84	48.0
	Living in the area for ten years	23	13.1		5000 - 10000	25	14.3
	Living in the area for five years	31	17.1		10000 - 20000	23	13.1
					20000 - 25000	27	15.4
			Above 25000	16	9.1		

There were 59 (37.7%) respondents born near the Buddhist circuit, 37 (21.1%) respondents living in the area for 20 years, 25 (14.3%) living in the area for 15 years, 23 (13.1%) living in the area

for ten years, and 31 (17.1%) were living in the area for five years. Most respondents were 12th grade, which is a high school diploma (35.4%), while only 18 (10.3%) respondents were doing

tourism-related work. Otherwise, 86 (49.9%) were doing agriculture or business, 22 (12.6%) were working in government or private jobs, and 49 (28%) were unemployed.

In terms of education, a large number of respondents, 62 (35.4%) were 12th grade (high school) out, 55 (31.4%) respondents had graduation degrees, and 21 (12%) respondents were below 10th standard. 84 (48%) respondents earned below Rs 5000 per month, 25 (14.3%) respondents' income was Rs 5000 to Rs 10000, and Rs 25000 and above income had 16 (9.1%) respondents.

The survey research consisted of a sample of 175 people. A varimax rotated principal component analysis on 31 questions was performed to derive general categories of residents' perceptions about tourism in the Buddhist circuit. As measured by the Barlett test, sphericity is significant (Chi-square = 2113.74, $p < 0.000$). The data was adequate for factor analysis, according to an evaluation of correlation among the items and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistics of 0.714. (SPSS). Items were included in the factor interpretation at a cut-off value of 0.5 (see Table 3).

Table 3. Varimax Rotation, Factor Loading

Domain	Item	Factor Loading
Welfare Impacts (WI)	WI1	0.842
	WI2	0.705
	WI3	0.804
Social Interaction with Tourists (SIT)	SIT1	0.584
	SIT2	0.685
	SIT3	0.560
Cultural Impact (CI)	CI1	0.668
	CI2	0.662
	CI3	0.659
	CI4	0.908
Economic Perception (EP1)	EP1	0.892
	EP2	0.679
	EP3	0.906
	EP4	0.598
	EP5	0.635
Negative Interference (NI)	NI1	0.580
	NI2	0.544
	NI3	0.513
	NI4	0.741
	NI5	0.759
	NI6	0.591
	NI7	0.838
	NI8	0.815
	NI9	0.851

After reviewing factor loadings, elements that either loaded on many factors or had low loadings were deleted to improve the solution. So, further investigation into these artifacts was discontinued. After several runs, the data gave five clean factors with eigenvalues equal to or

greater than 0.5 (Table 4). The five variables were identified as harming daily life (Factor 5), social interaction with tourists (Factor 2), cultural impact (Factor 3), economic impacts of tourism (Factor 4), and welfare impacts (Factor 1).

Table 4. Eigenvalue and Factors Explain Variation

Domain Alpha	Eigenvalue	Variance
Welfare Impacts ($\alpha = 0.91$)	1.88	37.51
Social Interaction with Tourists ($\alpha = 0.81$)	1.02	20.31
Cultural Impact ($\alpha = 0.78$)	0.86	17.28
Economic Perception ($\alpha = 0.78$)	0.72	14.39
Negative Interference ($\alpha = 0.75$)	0.53	10.51

The domain findings after the first principal domain analysis are listed in Table 4: Domain 1 comprises three variables (0.91 alpha), Domain 2 comprises three variables (0.81 alpha), Domain 3 comprises four variables (0.78 alpha), Domain 4 comprises three variables (0.78 alpha), and Domain 5 comprises five variables (0.75 alpha).

The items concerning community welfare and social interaction with tourists, as well as cultural, economic, and harmful interference of tourism, were evaluated in terms of how the locals felt about them. According to descriptive

statistics, most respondents agreed with the explicit assertions about the impacts of the associated issues. Table 5 displays how the local population feels about each factor, with the most favored constructs by residents being "economic perception (mean= 19.59)," including "Increase in price of land (mean = 4.23)," "more employment opportunity (mean=4.15)," and "Opportunity to sell a local product (mean=4.14). Residents' second most favorable construct is "Social Interaction with Tourists" (mean 14.33).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Domain	Item	Mean		SD	
Welfare Impacts (WI)	WI1	3.83	11.67	1.26	3.39
	WI2	3.93		1.18	
	WI3	3.90		1.26	
Social Interaction with Tourists (SIT)	SIT1	4.03	12.06	1.08	2.83
	SIT2	4.07		1.18	
	SIT3	3.96		1.08	
Cultural Impact (CI)	CI1	3.59	14.33	1.17	3.57
	CI2	3.56		1.08	
	CI3	3.17		1.25	
	CI4	4.01		1.10	

Table 5. Continued

Economic Perception (EP1)	EP1	4.15	19.59	0.83	3.45
	EP2	3.98		0.68	
	EP3	4.14		0.83	
	EP4	4.23		0.81	
	EP5	3.09		1.42	
Negative Interference (NI)	NI1	3.55	33.83	1.26	7.29
	NI2	3.67		2.66	
	NI3	3.76		1.21	
	NI4	3.81		1.29	
	NI5	3.76		1.21	
	NI6	3.79		1.00	
	NI7	3.77		1.13	
	NI8	3.86		1.06	
	NI9	3.89		1.13	

Residents agree to "enjoy interacting with tourists" (mean= 4.07), and residents residing in the Buddhist circuit agree to "learn about tourists' own countries and cultures" (mean= 4.03). Findings about welfare impacts show that the most favored items by residents are "tourism improves transportation services in our community" (mean= 3.93) and "Buddhist Circuit roads are better due to tourism" (mean= 3.90). The negative aspects of the Negative Interference facets are "tourists cause my town to be crowded

with people" (mean= 3.89), "tourism only benefits a few residents" (mean= 3.86), and "most people I know do not like tourism" (mean= 3.81). The item with a negative economic impact is "increase income" (mean= 3.09). Nonetheless, the cultural effect category's lowest mean score is "because of tourism development, I have a better appreciation of my culture" (mean 3.17); on the other hand, "I now enjoy visiting tourist areas" (mean 3.96) is the lowest score for interacting with tourists.

Table 6. Results of T-test Analysis of Gender

Construct	Male (x)	Female(x)	t-value	Sig.
Welfare Impacts	12.65	9.81	5.70	0.000
Social Interaction with Tourists	12.82	10.66	5.14	0.000
Cultural Impact	14.91	13.23	3.04	0.003
Economic Perception	20.26	18.33	3.65	0.000
Negative Interference	35.42	30.87	4.10	0.000

An independent t-test was conducted to compare the five constructs between male and female respondents. For inhabitants' perceptions of tourist development of the above five constructs (Table 6), the mean values between males and females were significantly different, and the significance of these constructs was less than 0.05 (Table 6), indicating that there is a significant difference between male and female

Buddhist circuit residents' perceptions towards tourism development.

The study's findings have several implications for tourism development and community engagement, as detailed below:

Tailored Approaches: The study suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to tourism development might not be effective. Policymakers should consider the diverse demographic characteristics and tailor strategies

to address specific concerns and preferences within the community.

Community Involvement: Understanding residents' perceptions can enhance community involvement in decision-making. By addressing concerns and leveraging some of the positive aspects highlighted by the study, policymakers can foster a sense of ownership among residents.

Cultural Preservation: The relatively lower scores in the "Cultural Impact" domain indicate a need to prioritize cultural preservation efforts. Strategies to ensure that tourism respects and enhances local cultures should be a cornerstone of development plans.

Equitable Distribution: The concerns expressed in the "Negative Interference" domain highlight the importance of ensuring that tourism benefits are distributed equitably. Community benefits should extend beyond a select few and positively impact the broader population.

Gender-sensitive Planning: The gender-based differences underscore the need for gender-sensitive planning. Efforts should be made to address the unique concerns and perspectives of both male and female residents in tourism development projects.

Sustainable Development: Leveraging the positive perceptions in domains, like "Welfare Impacts" and "Social Interaction with Tourists," can contribute to sustainable tourism development. Enhancing infrastructure and promoting positive interactions can lead to both economic growth and community well-being.

DISCUSSION

This study's main goal was to investigate how locals in and around the Buddhist circuit felt about the growth of their local communities and the tourism industry. Lepp (2007) suggests residents had favorable opinions on tourism. Positive attitudes were associated with the conviction that tourism fosters local economic growth, job possibilities, and more robust agricultural markets. The sound economic effects of tourism are valued and appreciated by the locals. Researchers conducted a t-test to find out the perception of gender towards tourism development. The results discussed all five constructs, i.e., welfare impact (t-value= 5.70, p=0.000), social interaction with tourists (t-value= 5.14, p=0.000), cultural impact (t-value=

3.04, p=0.003), economic perception (t-value= 3.65, p=0.000), and negative interference (t-value= 4.10, p=0.000). All of them were significantly different, meaning that male and female perceptions of tourism development were unequal across genders. This study revealed a prevailing favorable attitude toward tourism growth among the locals living close to Buddha's footsteps, which saw tourism as having larger benefits than the average local drawbacks (Muresan et al., 2016). Numerous types of research have shown that locals who benefit from tourism-related activities are more willing to support its growth and emphasize the benefits of tourism more (Lee, 2013; Perdue et al., 1990).

Most respondents, however, anticipated more financial advantages from tourism, particularly when those advantages were increased land prices. Still, many of them argued that, rather than helping the residents of the Buddhist circuit, tourism had increased the number of jobs for outsiders. Concerning welfare and cultural impacts, most residents agreed that road conditions should be improved due to tourism and the idea that culture is preserved through tourism (Kenzhebekov et al., 2021). Regardless, most of these respondents support the growth of tourism in the region. In terms of social interaction with tourists, most of the residents surveyed said they enjoy interacting with others but still worried about the changes that tourism would bring about, including how it would harm their peaceful life because of increased tourist inflow (Andereck et al., 2005), particularly when towns could become crowded, and this kind of tourism only benefits some people. The results of the interviews confirm those of the questionnaire survey, according to which the Buddhist circuit resident respondents felt that tourism had a beneficial effect on their communities and that it could, in theory, contribute to the growth of the local economy; however, some residents expressed concerns about the potential negative consequences of tourism growth, such as increased crowding and the perception that only a few residents benefit from tourism. The study highlights the need for sustainable tourism planning that addresses potential negative impacts while maximizing the positive ones.

Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of how residents near the Buddhist circuit perceive tourism development

in their communities. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders involved in tourism planning, emphasizing the importance of sustainable development that considers both the positive and negative impacts of tourism on local communities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results of this study point to many crucial elements that are necessary to comprehend the perceptions of tourism held by residents of the Buddhist circuit. The residents' perception of welfare, social interaction with tourists, and cultural and economic impacts of tourism in the Buddhist circuit have been studied in this research. The results show that respondents positively perceived tourism's economic benefits, which were followed by cultural impacts, social interactions with tourists, and welfare impacts. Although locals acknowledged that tourism had created job possibilities and could assist in boosting the economy in the area, many felt that it needed to sufficiently benefit the local economy. Regarding harmful interference, while residents think that the development of tourism will encourage the preservation of their cultural heritage, it was discovered that the adverse effects of these tourism impacts included crowded public spaces that only benefited a few inhabitants, among other impacts.

Indian locals on and around the Buddhist circuit have great expectations and a vision of a promising future for the growth of Buddhist circuit tourism. Due to its impact on the regional economy and subsequent creation of new employment possibilities, tourism growth enhances the quality of life for these residents. Buddhist circuit residents view tourism as a chance to improve their welfare and the community's overall quality of life. If the perceived personal benefits from tourism growth are significant, the Buddhist circuit residents will support it. The Buddhist circuit residents are more supportive of developing future tourist plans, then the more significant the anticipated economic, infrastructure, and socio-cultural benefits will be.

This study clarified various concerns with tourism development that positively and negatively affect communities. It is crucial for decision-makers, including policymakers and

tourism authorities, to further examine and comprehend the entire chain of local communities' perceptions. In addition to managing a friendly host community, these decision-makers must optimize local support for tourism-related infrastructure and products.

Tourism officials should constantly monitor attitudinal changes to control how communities feel about tourism growth. The socio-demographic profile and attitudinal status of the local population within the region are vital for future planning, especially for places like the Buddhist circuit.

To anticipate local support, a cost-benefit balance and equitable distribution are necessary. Therefore, tourism planners need to increase public knowledge of the costs and benefits for the Buddhist circuit residents. The advantages of tourism should be emphasized and promoted in the area through practical techniques like internal and domestic branding and equitable resource sharing between residents and visitors. Such promotion could boost favorable attitudes toward the growth of tourism. On the other hand, addressing and eradicating the harmful effects resulting from local displeasure and residents' concerns in a practical way is imperative.

This study's findings could serve as a best practices model for managing rural tourism in the Czech Republic and Central and Eastern Europe, including by investing more into rural tourism, creating more jobs, and engaging the local communities in the regional development of rural tourism. Rural tourism in the Czech Republic could benefit similarly to the Buddhist circuit case.

The empirical components of this study, however, do contain a statistical error, which is the study's most critical fault. Because convenience sampling was used, the results are impossible to generalize broadly, in keeping with the previously stated approach to dealing with the low response rate. Since the sample is not chosen through random selection, that sample cannot possibly be fully representative of the population being studied, and getting responses only from the participants who are easiest to contact and recruit leaves out many respondents. A few villagers declined to speak with the researchers because of time restraints. The authors, therefore, suggest a random sampling method to be used in future research.

Several areas require more research focus. First, the study focuses only on the Buddhist circuit in India, which is a limitation for this research paper because the results cannot be generalized to other circuits, especially since India is diverse in culture, and every circuit has its own culture. Nevertheless, there is a chance to investigate inter-regional operations in the future. Second, a longitudinal study could monitor local changes in attitude and behavior. A qualitative study with decision-makers, including lawmakers, opinion leaders, and representatives of tourism organizations in the Buddhist circuit, would also be helpful to compare and contrast the perceptions of these stakeholders with those of the local population.

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