

Branding Kathmandu: The Impact of Image, Awareness, and Value on Tourists' Visit Intentions

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Abstract

Utilizing the theory of planned behavior and brand equity theory, this study proposed and empirically tested a conceptual model of destination branding that encompasses the constructs of destination brand image, brand awareness, brand equity, and tourists' visiting intention. The analysis was conducted through a quantitative examination of empirical data collected from tourists who have travelled or are potentially traveling to Kathmandu. The study investigated how brand image, brand awareness, and brand equity influence tourists' behavioral intentions to visit Kathmandu. Overall, findings indicate that brand image, brand awareness, and brand equity exert significant positive effects on tourists' visiting intentions. Notably, the results suggest that the value of the destination brand has the most substantial impact among the constructs associated with destination branding. This research contributes to the existing literature on destination branding by providing evidence that the three-dimensional constructs of a destination brand are observable in real-world contexts and can effectively influence tourists' behaviors. In this context, the Model of Destination Branding has been situated within the framework of a developing South Asian destination. The findings offer both theoretical insights and practical implications for tourism planners and marketers aiming to establish or enhance the Kathmandu brand within the highly competitive global tourism industry.

Keywords: Visit Intention, Brand Image, Brand Value, Brand Awareness, Kathmandu

1. Introduction

In the contemporary context, cities and nations are engaged in a competition for attracting global visitors. Many countries have advanced beyond viewing tourism solely as an economic activity, perceiving it instead as a deliberate strategy to enhance global identity, showcase cultural heritage, and foster economic development. Tourism is esteemed as a vital mechanism for economic diversification and artistic representation, particularly in developing nations such as Nepal. In 2023, more than one million international visitors traveled to Nepal, indicating a full recovery from the pandemic. With tourism's direct contribution to the national GDP estimated at 6.7 percent and an evident intrinsic role in economic growth, its contribution to overall economic development is substantial (MoCTCA, 2023). Nevertheless, despite Kathmandu's wealth of natural and cultural assets, the city continues to face challenges in establishing a coherent and effective tourism destination brand.

Destination branding is regarded as essential for ensuring both the recognition and development of tourists' emotional attachment to a destination (Florek, 2005). Destination branding is very

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similar to product branding. Product branding began to create differentiation in a more competitive context, and now destinations are expected to leverage their branding in a way that affects the behavioral outcome of tourists (Ndlovu, 2023). Researchers have observed that destination branding is about much more than the promotional façade; it is about building emotional and cognitive connections with prospective tourists (Damnjanović et al., 2022). The concept of destination brand equity has been explored; researchers identified brand image, brand awareness, and brand value as the significant elements influencing tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and future intentions to visit a destination (Garanti et al., 2019; Boo et al., 2009). The constructs illustrate how tourists perceive and evaluate a destination before deciding to travel.

The destination brand image, which consists of belief, impression, and feelings regarding a location, is the most crucial element for travelers in creating travel expectations for their trips (Crompton, 1979; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Brand awareness is merely recognizing a destination and what associated tourism experiences this place offers (Aaker, 1991). Perceived brand value refers to the perspective of tourists regarding the benefits they receive in relation to the costs associated with visiting, such as time, money, or energy. Increasing amounts of studies show that when these three elements are made stronger by branding, the likelihood of a tourist choosing and recommending a specific destination is significantly higher (Rachmad, 2024). Kathmandu, unlike niche destinations like Lumbini or the Everest region, offers depth of heritage, spirituality, metropolitan development, and modern urbanity. These factors fit into the various dimensions of tourist rationale; however, the breadth is its weakness, as there is no distinct brand or identity for Kathmandu (Kanno & Koto, 2006; Bhandari, 2009). As global tourism shifts toward authenticity (an emotional connection with a destination), promoting individual landmarks becomes inadequate. This study explores the role of Kathmandu's destination brand equity—brand image, awareness, and value—in impacting international tourists' destination-rational intention to visit. The study, grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and brand equity theory (Aaker, 1991), contributes to the analysis of Kathmandu's offerings as a multidimensional urban-cultural brand. It also provides destination marketers with additional strategic avenues for proactive marketing. The objective of this study is to examine the influence of destination brand dimensions (brand image, brand value, and brand awareness) on visit intention, as well as the factors that contribute to or hinder it.

A thorough review of the literature is placed, and destination branding (Hanna et al., 2020) identified brand identity, brand image, and brand equity as salient issues; but noted that there was a lack of empirical research into the ways these dimensions may drive a tourist's visit intention in urban areas that exhibit cultural diversity. Although empirical models exist linking destination image and brand value to revisit intentions in general (García, 2012), none have examined the multicultural context of destinations such as Kathmandu. To fill this gap, data were collected from a sample of 395 national and international tourists through site visits to the various locations of Kathmandu as well as LinkedIn. The findings supported that all three components of destination brand equity had significant effects on the tourists' visit intentions. In addition, brand value was found to have the most influence, followed by brand awareness and brand image. The findings indicated that tourists' perceptions of valuable and meaningful experiences, as well as their relevance to the cultural experience in Kathmandu, positively enhanced their visit intentions. In conclusion, this study illustrated the importance of strategically managing Kathmandu's brand to increase its competitive advantage in the global tourism market.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Emergence of Destination Branding

Destination branding is increasingly becoming a significant tool for tourism stakeholders to foster a unique identity for destinations to create differentiation in a competitive landscape (Morgan et al., 2011). It utilizes both the tangible and intangible attributes that comprise the cultural, historical, and environmental components of the destination into a whole brand identity. Due to the growth of the tourism and hospitality sectors, it is necessary to develop a destination brand that is recognizable and specific. It differentiates the destination particularly in a digitally connected and global market (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). In addition, it is essential to involve all stakeholders in the development of a destination brand to create a brand experience that genuinely resonates with the community residents and visitors (Morgan et al., 2011). If done successfully, destination branding can increase perceived legitimacy of the destination, promote customer retention, promote positive word of mouth, and create value for the destination (Morgan et al., 2011).

2.2 Impact of Branding Dimensions on Visit Intention

Destination image has cognitive (e.g., attractions, amenities) and affective (e.g., excitement, reassurance) components and is an important element in a tourist's decision-making process to visit (Aaker, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). A positive destination image for Kathmandu would be based on many things about religion, culture, and nature that relate to the intention to visit that destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Similarly, brand awareness can increase the likelihood that a tourist chooses the destination. Dialogue and/or images from various media will also enhance recall and trust and help the tourist interact with that destination via tourism intermediaries and direct tourism, thus spurring a potential visit (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). Awareness can be seen as a factor that influences visit intentions (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Destinations with high brand value, such as Kathmandu, attract tourists by fulfilling and even exceeding guest expectations, thereby fostering loyal visitors and encouraging repeat visitations (Chen & Myagmarsuren, 2011; Lee et al., 2010). Additionally, positive perceptions of value improve visit intention and increase word-of-mouth recommendations.

2.3 The Role of Emotional and Cognitive Influences in Visit Intention

Visitors' emotional relationships with the brand image of a destination significantly shape their intentions to visit. Where destinations are highly emotive due to cultural or spiritual significance, such as in the case of Kathmandu, affective factors play a fundamental role in convincing a tourist of the likelihood of visiting (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Likewise, both social norms and subjective norms contribute to shaping visit intentions. Recommendations from friends, family, and influencers increase the likelihood of tourists choosing to visit. In the case of Kathmandu, the use of social media and word-of-mouth was found to affect tourists and their likelihood to visit the destination (Keni et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2020).

2.4 Destination Branding and Behavioral Outcomes

Destination branding can foster satisfaction and loyalty for tourist behaviors that promote repeat visits and recommendations (Ilkhanizadeh et al., 2019). A destination that provides a positive brand experience is more likely to foster a connection and loyalty as a destination brand. The concept of branding is not just a visual identity and associated ads. Emotional and experiential factors are responsible for thoughts, brand impressions, and emotional engagement. For

destinations such as Kathmandu, an authentic brand experience allows for memorable experiences that encourage travel intentions and emotional attachment (Kanwel et al., 2019; Rasul et al., 2024).

2.5 Brand Image and Visit Intention

Agapito et al. (2013) undertook an empirical analysis to confirm the cognitive-affective-conative aspects of the model of destination image, which proposes that image is formed through both rational (cognitive) and emotional (affective) aspects, as well as being collectively linked to the other conative aspects, such as the intention to visit the destination. Their findings suggest that effective destination branding should incorporate both rational elements and emotional appeals to drive the intention to visit the destination. Styliadis (2020) presented a detailed framework for evaluating place image and place image's impact on tourism-related behavior. The study discerns place image in three domains: destination image, community image, and residential image, and presents a conceptual model, which embraces Wang's (2016) concept of destination brand image as that which shapes the behavior of the tourist, especially intention to visit. The applied survey data and structural equation modeling demonstrate that those tourists who regard a destination as authentic, attractive, and emotionally evocative will have a high intention to visit or revisit that destination. This study highlights how destination marketers can manage destination image attributes (i.e., cultural offerings, local hospitality, natural environment, etc.) to produce emotional appeal along with behavioral response.

H1: Destination brand image has a significant positive effect on tourists' visiting intentions to Kathmandu.

2.6 Brand Value and Visit Intention

Sharma, et al. (2020) also studied the brand equity dimensions, including perceived value for money, that contribute to destination loyalty and intention to visit. They demonstrated that, even with a positive brand image and brand awareness, brand value had a mediating effect on the relationship between destination reputation and actual behavioral intention. They further noted that a positive image, on its own, does not guarantee that a tourist would revisit the destination unless the image is supported by a positive feeling of value, both emotional and either tangible or intangible value. Khan, et al. (2020) introduced the concept of destination brand love as a mediating variable situated between brand experience and tourist attitudes. The results indicated that when tourists perceive high value in their experiences with the destination (e.g., authentic, unique, emotional), they can create an emotional attachment or love for the brand, which further strengthens the intention to visit or visit again.

Rather (2021) investigates brand value as multi-dimensionality through the concept of experiential marketing. Rather examined tourism destinations, arguing that brand value emerges from sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral experiences that contribute to tourists' engagements and visit intentions. The study demonstrates that brand value functions as an emotional filter identifying destinations for tourists, particularly in initial decision-making experiences. The perceptions tourists have, both emotionally and cognitively, of a destination may have important implications in tourist behavior, including purchase intention and brand loyalty. Chi and Giao (2024) studied the relationship between destination brand value and tourists' visit intentions in Quang Binh Province, Vietnam. They established that positive relationships exist between brand image, brand awareness, and brand quality as aspects of value destination brand and tourists' intentions to visit

the destination. The authors suggested that incorporating other emotional aspects, such as passion and love for the destination, alongside branding attributes, could enhance brand loyalty and visit intention. They concluded that destination brand value is considerable.

H2: Destination brand value has a significant positive effect on tourists' visiting intentions to Kathmandu.

2.7 Brand Awareness and Visit Intention

According to Papadimitriou et al. (2018), branding has been examined within the context of city tourism, and their results demonstrated that a significant association exists between "destination brand awareness" and both "perceived value" and "destination intention to visit." The authors concluded by saying that "it is evident that effective campaigns of destination branding will create awareness, and the higher the awareness, the greater the emotional connection to the destination and thus behavioral intentions on all levels will increase." Awareness of a travel destination's availability and perceptions increases the likelihood that the tourism destination will be considered, thus increasing the likelihood that the tourists will visit. Chaulagain, et al. (2019) examined how effective the branding of U.S. destinations is to international tourists. Their study found that brand awareness is positively related to intention to visit. They found that awareness involved more than just knowing a name; they needed a rudimentary awareness of the destination's offerings and experiences. They determined that if tourists were aware of a destination's brand, soliciting from that brand a unique item, heritage, or safety profile, they would be more likely to make plans to visit.

H3: Destination brand awareness has a significant positive effect on tourists' visiting intentions to Kathmandu.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Measurement

A structured questionnaire was designed and distributed both online (LinkedIn and WhatsApp) and offline (at a popular tourist spot) to reach the maximum possible number of respondents. The final sample consisted of 395 valid responses. The questionnaire consisted of different sections, starting with an introductory section, followed by screening questions. The main part of the questionnaire consisted of 23 items from the four constructs of the present study, which are destination brand image, destination brand awareness, destination brand value, and visiting intentions. The Destination Brand Image (DBI) items were adapted from Qu et al. (2011), the Destination Brand Awareness (DBA) items from Konecnik and Gartner (2007), and the Destination Brand Value (DBV) items from Boo et al. (2009). The Visiting Intention (VI) items were sourced from Artigas et al. (2017). All items were measured using established scales validated in prior tourism and branding studies to ensure content reliability and conceptual alignment with destination branding research. Each of these constructs was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), ensuring content validity.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

This study used non-probability convenience sampling and targeted domestic and international tourists traveling within Kathmandu. The convenience sampling allowed the researcher to recruit

participants who were available and willing to participate. The survey was administered in a convenience sample of cultural heritage sites, airports, or any other location or tourist destination where tourists may be present. The total sample of about 500 questionnaires distributed (150 printed, 350 online) resulted in 395 usable responses for analysis. The final sample allowed for a combination of participants by age group, nationality, and travel purposes, assuring variety and transferability. The measurement model was evaluated, and the structural relationships among the constructs were tested in SPSS. SPSS has different standards of reporting for structural analysis, which is based on more complex models, and is suitable for exploratory research.

3.3 Theoretical Foundation

The conceptual model draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Brand Equity Theory; both are widely applied in tourism research to explain visit intentions. According to TPB (Ajzen, 1991), tourists' behavioral intentions are shaped by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, which together determine their likelihood of visiting a destination. Studies by Lam and Hsu (2006) and Quintal et al. (2010) have applied TPB to demonstrate that positive attitudes and social influence significantly predict travel intention. Meanwhile, Brand Equity Theory (Longwell, 1994; Keller, 1993) explains how brand-related constructs such as image, value, and awareness strengthen tourists' emotional attachment and loyalty toward destinations (Yang et al., 2019). Integrating both theories, this study posits that destination brand image, value, and awareness serve as antecedents influencing tourists' attitudes and emotional responses, which in turn drive visit intention, consistent with TPB's attitudinal and behavioral pathways.

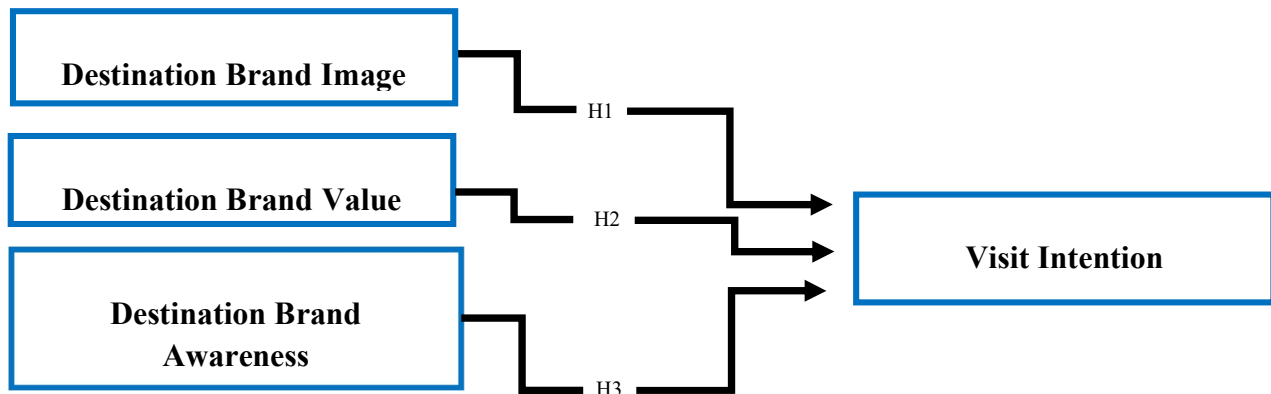


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

4. Results and Analyses

A total of 395 responses were collected that covered a diverse demographic mix of age, gender, nationality, occupation, familiarity with travel, and travel motives. This spectrum offered the opportunity for valuable comparisons and inferences about destination branding and visiting intention to Kathmandu. A young adult cohort characterized the findings we documented, with 56.3% within the 25–34-year-old range, and 31.2% within the 18–24-year-old range. Given the digital engagement of these younger cohorts (e.g., social media), they are more likely to respond to branding campaigns. The gender breakdown is skewed, with 65.7% men and 34.3% women.

Participants were nearly equally distributed by nationality, which allowed for cross-cultural lessons. Employees (48.5%), students (38.3%), and self-employed individuals (7.7%) exemplify Kathmandu's popularity as a destination for both business and academia. To add context, 50.3% of participants were repeat visitors to Kathmandu and selected it for diverse purposes (education 31%, vacation 24.1%, visiting friends/relatives 22.3%, business 14%, religious 5.6%), attesting to its appeal as a multipurpose destination.

4.1 Reliability

To assess reliability, Cronbach's alpha was computed for each construct. Table 1 displays the results. The destination brand image had an alpha of 0.888, brand awareness had an alpha of 0.855, brand value had an alpha of 0.908, and visiting intention had an alpha of 0.928. All alpha values were above the acceptable level of 0.70, indicating a level of internal consistency in each construct (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha

S. No	Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Destination Brand Image	0.888
2	Destination Brand Awareness	0.855
3	Destination Brand Value	0.908
4	Visit Intention	0.928

4.2 Normality Test

Both tests indicated that the dependent variables deviate significantly ($p < .001$) from normality, so the null hypothesis of normal distribution was rejected. K-S statistics ranged from $D = .093$ to $.122$, and Shapiro-Wilk statistics ranged from $W = 0.932$ to 0.951 , all resulting in $p = .000$, which confirms non-normality. Still, a strong rationale exists for justifying the use of parametric tests. In large, non-normal samples (i.e., $N = 394$), Pearson product-moment correlation and regression, which are common in social psychological research, tend to be robust and revealing even in non-normal distributions (Razali et al., 2011). Although the results provide support for the continued use of parametric methods, caution is warranted when interpreting significance values. In studies employing smaller samples, results indicate that some form of non-parametric methods or transformation of the data may yield more accurate results.

Table 2. Normality test results

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
DBI	0.122	394	0.000	0.947	394	0.000
DBA	0.093	394	0.000	0.951	394	0.000
DBV	0.117	394	0.000	0.949	394	0.000
VI	0.109	394	0.000	0.932	394	0.000

4.3 Correlation Analysis

A higher correlation value indicates that there is a stronger relationship between the two data sets (Field, 2013). The Pearson correlation of ($r = .680, p < 0.01$) indicates a strong positive relationship between destination brand image and visiting intention. The significant p-value suggests that a more favorable image of Kathmandu among tourists is positively associated with intentions to visit and revisit. There is a strong positive correlation ($r = .669, p < 0.01$) for both brand awareness and destination visit intention. The low p-value shows robust evidence for a significant correlation. As brand awareness increases, so does the likelihood of intending to visit Kathmandu. The product-moment correlation ($r = .818, p < 0.01$) indicates a robust positive linear relationship between destination brand value and visiting intention. This was the highest correlation of all the variables, and the significance level shows a reasonable level of confidence that this is a statistically significant relationship. This interface suggests that when Kathmandu is considered to provide high value for time and money, visitors were more likely to indicate they would travel there. The three branding dimensions of image, awareness, and value are positive determinants of visit intention. Among them, destination brand value has the strongest relationship ($r = .818$), and it is the most critical determinant of tourist interests. These findings support the fact that raising the perceived value, image, and familiarity of Kathmandu can significantly amplify visit intentions.

Table 3. Correlation analysis

Variable	DBI	DBA	DBV	VI
DBI	1			
DBA	.609**	1		
DBV	.723**	.653**	1	
VI	.680**	.669**	.818**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.4 Regression Analysis

This section depicts the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and explains the variability in the outcome. Linear regression was employed to examine the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables. Table 6 shows that the VIF values range from 1.872 to 2.465, and the Tolerance values range from 0.406 to 0.534. These values are well within the acceptable thresholds recommended by Hair et al. (2019) and Sharma and Pyati (2022), where $VIF < 10$ and $Tolerance > 0.10$ indicate trivial existence of multicollinearity issues. Since all predictors meet these criteria, this incidence substantiates unidimensionality of the predictor variables.

4.4.1 Multiple Regression Model

The findings of the regression analysis between independent and dependent variables indicate a strong positive relationship, with an R value of .842 and an R Square of .708, which signifies that the model can explain 70.8% of the variability in visiting intention. The Adjusted R Square (.706) adjusts based on the relevance of predictors. Furthermore, the standard error (.52526) suggests that the prediction error is low and that the model is reliable and valid. Table 4 shows the overall significance of the regression model. The overall F-test results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant at $F = 315.900, p = .000$, which is less than the conventional significance

level of .01. This indicates that the set of independent variables together has a statistically significant predictive effect on the dependent variable.

According to the coefficients and significance (p) values, all three independent variables have a positive slope for coefficients and a p -value less than the 0.05 significance level, which indicates they have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable (Field, 2013). Destination Brand Image ($p = 0.002$), Destination Brand Awareness ($p = 0.000$), and Destination Brand Value ($p = 0.000$) are found to significantly and positively predict tourists' visiting intentions, as indicated by the p -values. The standardized beta values show Destination Brand Value as the strongest predictor, i.e., Beta = 0.593, Destination Brand Awareness as the second strongest predictor, i.e., Beta = 0.205, and Destination Brand Image as the third strongest predictor, i.e., Beta = 0.127. The 95% confidence intervals indicate that all three variables were statistically significant, as they excluded zero. Destination Brand Value has the largest confidence intervals (0.541–0.720), indicating its contributions to the visiting intention were strong. It suggests that the three dimensions of destination branding image, awareness, and value significantly influence tourists' intentions to visit Kathmandu. Destination Brand Value has the most significant influence, confirming the importance of providing value and meaningful experiences to potential visitors.

Table 4. ANOVA table of the model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	261.47	3	87.155	315.90	0.000
Residual	107.60	390	0.276		
Total	369.06	393			

Table 5. Explanatory power of model

Model	R	R Square	Adj. R Square	SE
1	.842 ^a	0.708	0.706	0.52526

Table 6. Analysis of coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		t-stat	P-value	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.033	0.133	0.25	0.803		
Destination Brand Image	0.144	0.046	3.09	0.002	0.445	2.248
Destination Brand Awareness	0.227	0.041	5.47	0.000	0.534	1.872
Destination Brand Value	0.630	0.046	13.82	0.000	0.406	2.465

4.5 Hypothesis Testing Summary

Based on the results and analysis, the following summary of the pre-developed hypothesis is made.

Table 7 indicates that the regression analysis confirms all three hypotheses, as evident by all three unstandardized coefficients being positive and the *p-values* being less than 0.05, which confirms that the relationships were statistically significant. Hypothesis 1: The B value of 0.144 and *p-value* of 0.002 indicate that having an enhanced brand has a significant positive impact on tourists' intentions to visit, with a confidence interval of 0.052 to 0.235 at the 95% interval. Hypothesis 2 indicates a strong relationship with brand awareness (B = 0.227, *p* = 0.000), creating a consistent and statistically significant impact based on the confidence interval of 0.145 to 0.308. Hypothesis 3 demonstrates the most significant influence with brand value (B = 0.630, *p* = 0.000), resulting in the most significant and most stable effect on visiting intention (confidence interval of 0.541 to 0.720).

Table 7. Hypothesis testing summary

Hypothesis	B	Sig	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
H1= DBI → VI	0.144	0.002	0.052	0.235
H2= DBA → VI	0.227	0.000	0.145	0.308
H3= DBV → VI	0.630	0.000	0.541	0.720

5. Discussion

Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and Brand Equity Theory (Keller, 1993), this study investigated how travelers' intentions to visit Kathmandu are influenced by destination brand image, awareness, and value. The results are consistent with both frameworks, confirming that travelers' behavioral intentions are directly influenced by their attitudes, perceived norms, and control beliefs, which are influenced by perceptions related to the brand. Visit intention was found to be highly influenced by all three branding constructs: image, awareness, and value, with brand value having the most impact. This result supports the claims made by Pike (2009) and Chen & Myagmarsuren (2011) that perceived value is a key factor in determining travel decisions, especially in places with a diverse range of cultures. Zhang et al. (2020) highlighted that travelers are increasingly seeking genuine and significant experiences in developing countries like Nepal, a trend further supported by the significant influence of brand value.

In line with Stepchenkova & Mills (2010) and Echtner & Ritchie (2003), high evaluations for Kathmandu's cultural brand image reinforce the significance of cognitive image components. However, the comparatively lower emotional or affective image scores point to a weakness in Kathmandu's emotional branding approach. This disparity underscores the need for more captivating, emotionally impactful narratives that can engage travelers on a deeper level and create a stronger emotional connection. The significance of brand salience, as emphasized by Aaker (1996) and Boo et al. (2009), is supported by tourists' moderate brand knowledge, especially their low top-of-mind recall. Nonetheless, Tasci & Gartner (2007) contend that awareness by itself does not ensure behavioral intention unless it is reinforced by emotional attachment, and the weak emotional connection despite moderate awareness is consistent with their findings.

Young adults between the ages of 18 and 34, including students and those just starting their careers, made up many respondents. This result is consistent with Solomon's (2008) assertion that age-specific psychological and social demands impact travel preferences, frequently pushing younger populations toward novelty and exploration. Kotler's (2003) theory of consumer behavior, which emphasizes the relevance of experience in influencing future behavior, is further supported by the impact of previous visits on revisit intention. Respondents' familiarity with Kathmandu further supports Keller's (1993) claim that firsthand, lived experiences build brand equity. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is further supported by the incorporation of image, awareness, and value with attitudes, subjective standards, and perceived behavioral control, which increases the theory's relevance in tourism branding contexts. This lends credence to the notion that branding components affect travelers not just intellectually but also through perceived ease of action and normative ideas.

Additionally, the results corroborate the findings of Ferns & Walls (2012) and Jimenez-García et al. (2025), who highlight the significance of experiential equity and emotional branding in transforming brand awareness into concrete behavioral intentions. According to the study's moderate preference score ($M = 3.56$), Kathmandu's brand is good yet undifferentiated. This supports the argument made by Kavartzis & Hatch (2013) that emotional storytelling is essential to brand uniqueness. Although Kathmandu's adaptability as a multipurpose location is a strength, the results suggest that identity erosion could occur in the absence of brand consistency, reflecting concerns raised by Morgan et al. (2011) and Freire (2011). Lastly, large sample size and associated statistical techniques enable the use of parametric testing, despite modest normality issues. This is in line with Zhang et al. (2014)'s recommendations about statistical reliability in tourist studies.

6. Conclusion

The study investigated the relationship between destination brand image, awareness, and value, and tourists' intentions to visit Nepal's capital city of Kathmandu, which was based on the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Brand Equity Theory. The results showed Kathmandu was attracting a younger, diverse audience, a larger proportion of whom were repeat visitors, suggesting the beginnings of brand loyalty. Of the three branding variables examined, brand value was found to be the strongest predictor of tourists' intentions to visit. Indeed, the tourists were drawn to the cultural value and affordability that Kathmandu provided. Neither emotional nor experiential value was indicated as helpful in determining whether tourists would undertake a visit. The study highlighted that while Kathmandu has strong associations with heritage, spirituality, and authenticity, the city has relatively weak emotional branding and global presence, which limits its potential to differentiate itself in a competitive tourism market. Thus, to increase Kathmandu's appeal, improvements in its emotional storytelling, physical state of its structure and services, and international brand marketing would have to be addressed - improving these areas may help it avoid going from a recognized destination to a preferred destination, ultimately increasing the visitor's enjoyment and loyalty.

7. Implications

This research provides valuable insights for tourism practitioners and policymakers to strengthen Kathmandu's competitive and culturally meaningful positioning. Findings show that destination brand equity—including brand image, awareness, and value—significantly influences visit intention, emphasizing the need to integrate branding into tourism strategy rather than using it

solely as promotion. Young, digitally connected travelers are increasingly motivated by emotional and experiential value, highlighting the importance of transformational branding that evokes spiritual depth, cultural richness, and immersive experiences. Despite moderate brand awareness and weak unprompted recall, the emotional connection suggests a need for storytelling rooted in local heritage, festivals, rituals, and community life to enhance emotional branding and visitor loyalty.

Digital engagement, such as multimedia content, influencer collaborations, and social media, must align with authentic on-ground experiences supported by infrastructure, service quality, and cultural accessibility. Psychographic segmentation can help tailor campaigns to value-driven, culturally curious travelers. The study also bridges Brand Equity Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, showing that cognitive evaluations and emotional connections shape destination choice. Culturally adaptive branding, emotional storytelling, and authentic experiences are therefore essential for building lasting visitor engagement and loyalty; these are critical for Kathmandu's growth and sustainable tourism development.

7.1 Scope for Future Research

While this study enhances understanding of the relationship between destination branding and visit intention, several limitations constrain its generalizability. The sample lacked broader demographic diversity, and the study only examined brand image, brand awareness, and brand value, omitting other relevant constructs such as brand personality and emotional attachment. Its cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, and key external influences such as political instability, global crises, or infrastructure limitations were not addressed. Future research should adopt a more segmented approach, analyzing tourists by age, nationality, and travel motivation to better understand how brand perception varies across groups. Incorporating mediators and moderators like trust, satisfaction, and digital engagement would offer more profound insights into behavioral intention. Qualitative methods, such as interviews or ethnographic case studies, can uncover the symbolic and emotional dimensions of branding often missed by quantitative surveys. Moreover, as digital branding grows in influence, especially among younger travelers, future studies should explore the role of influencer marketing, virtual touchpoints, and immersive technologies (AR/VR) in shaping brand equity and travel intention. Ultimately, future research must treat destination branding as a culturally embedded, emotionally driven process. For cities like Kathmandu, this approach can help craft tourism identities that are both globally competitive and locally meaningful.

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APPENDIX

Survey Instrument

Dear Respondent,

Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary, and your responses will remain anonymous and confidential. The information collected will be used strictly for academic purposes. The survey will take approximately 5-7 minutes to complete. Your honest and thoughtful responses will be highly valuable for the success of this research. Thank you for your time and support.

Screening Questions

1. Have you ever visited Kathmandu before?
☐ Yes
☐ No
2. If yes, how many times have you visited Kathmandu?
☐ Once
☐ 2–3 times
☐ More than 3 times
3. Are you a domestic or international tourist?
☐ Domestic
☐ International
4. How did you first hear about Kathmandu as a travel destination?
☐ Friends/Family
☐ Social Media
☐ Travel Agency
☐ News/Media
☐ Other

Note: Respondents selecting “No” for Question 1 were automatically directed to the end of the form.

Section A: Demographic Profile

Please fill in or tick (✓) the most appropriate options.

1. Age

- ☐ 18–24
- ☐ 25–34
- ☐ 35–44
- ☐ 45–54
- ☐ 55 and above

2. Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. Nationality

(Please specify your nationality)

4. Occupation

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Other: _____

5. Travel History

- ☐ Never visited Kathmandu
☐ Visited once
☐ Visited 2–4 times
☐ Frequent visitor

6. Purpose of Visit

- ☐ Leisure / Holiday
☐ Business
☐ Pilgrimage / Religious
☐ Visiting Friends / Relatives
☐ Education
☐ Other: _____

Section B: Destination Brand Image

Please rate the following statements using the scale below:

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
DBI1 Kathmandu has beautiful natural scenery.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBI2 It offers attractive cultural experiences.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBI3 The destination has unique features that distinguish it from other places.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBI4 Kathmandu provides a relaxing and peaceful atmosphere.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBI5 Kathmandu offers a wide range of tourist activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBI6 Kathmandu has modern infrastructure and amenities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBI7 The residents are friendly and welcoming.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C: Destination Brand Awareness

Please rate the following statements using the scale below:

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
DBA1 I am familiar with this destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBA2 I can quickly recognize this destination among others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBA3 I can recall this destination without help.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBA4 I have heard a lot about this destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBA5 When thinking of travel destinations, Kathmandu comes to my mind.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section D: Destination Brand Value*Please rate the following statements using the scale below:***1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree**

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
DBV1 This destination offers good value for the money.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBV2 The overall value of visiting this destination is high.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBV3 Visiting this destination is worth the time and money.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBV4 The destination provides valuable experiences.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DBV5 I perceive Kathmandu as a trustworthy destination for tourists.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section E: Visiting Intention*Please rate the following statements using the scale below:***1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree**

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
VI1 I intend to visit this destination in the near future.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
VI2 I will recommend this destination to others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
VI3 I am likely to revisit this destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
VI4 I prefer this destination over others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
VI5 I plan to revisit Kathmandu in the next 2 years.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
VI6 I have a strong desire to experience Kathmandu as a destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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