Place Attachment on City Square Spaces in Chiang Mai Old City in Social Media Era

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Abstract

This study examines the place attachment as conveyed through social media, specifically focusing on significant square spaces in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Analyzing social media posts related to the Three Kings Monument Square, Tha-Pare Gate Square and Chiang Mai Gate Square through Instagram application. —evaluating seven factors: demographics, frequency of visits, importance of place (IM), meaning of place (ME), functions and social activities (FU), knowledge of place, and insights from photographic analysis. The study utilized multiple-choice questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and Photo Elicitation Interviews (PEI). A total of seventy-five participants were recruited on-site, including residents of Chiang Mai Old City, aged over twenty, with a balanced representation of genders. The data collection involved interviews lasting over twenty minutes each, during which participants were prompted to share their perceptions and memories related to the photographs they had taken and gave captions in a social media platform. Findings indicate that individuals tend to feel a stronger attachment to familiar places; however, there is a general lack of awareness regarding the historical importance of these sites. Instead, the attachment of places in social media appears to be more significantly affected by the practical uses of the spaces and the daily activities taking place there. The study concludes that social media is an insightful tool for understanding the changing identities of urban spaces, which are predominantly shaped by public perception and usage rather than historical context that interplay between social, cultural, and economic dimensions of place. The findings reveal that participants generally exhibit a neutral understanding of the places they feel attached to, with greater knowledge correlating to stronger connections, particularly among residents. However, limited historical awareness among short residency participants raises concerns about the potential loss of heritage value within the local community, the findings underscore the importance of functionality and memory in fostering place attachment in both physical and virtual contexts. This research contributes to understanding the dynamic relationship between urban spaces and digital platforms, offering insights for urban planning, heritage preservation, and the integration of social media in promoting place identity.

Keywords: *Keywords: Place Attachment, social media, Chiang Mai, Streetscape, Square Spaces*

1. Introduction

Currently, social media platforms broadly perform a vital role in human living, as they can connect the social and community of humanity in everyday life. Nowadays, the interaction between society and humans is infused with technology and information, forming social dynamism. Media technology and its applications are redefining urban spaces, exerting transformative effects across multiple scales, including individuals, social groups, urban environments, nation-states, and the broader human society [1]. Moreover, understanding the integration between place attachment and social media may allow scholars to understand factors and reasons of human expression through square spaces in a virtual world. The virtual world can be communicated through various platforms through text, images, and animations. All of this can shape the sense of place; it begins with the study by Plunkett [2] which questioned the development of a sense of place and place attachment in a virtual realm through an avatar and second life in social media. Moreover, supports by the research of Olafsson et al. [3], which said that the connection between human space, society, and the environment could be created by using online society as a component to attract humans to the area.

For instance, Instagram application is a locative media which provide visual and meaning of urban spaces and activities [4], people who engaged in Instagram also acquire knowledge of physical setting, surrounding and social context of urban spaces [5]. Moreover, Gatti & Procentese [6] suggested Instagram use to look for photos about social places and gatherings in users' cities and its potential role in enhancing their Sense of Community and Sense of Place towards them, through raising their awareness about local places and social opportunities and bringing their attention back on their social dimensions. Andromeda et al. [7] also suggested that Sense of Place can shape virtual realms through individual's experience consisting of seven factors which related to the attachment to places. These statements lead to challenge of urban space understanding in virtual realm as it provides another perspective to acknowledge the contribution process of sense of place in social media.

The emergence of internet platforms in this century brought Thailand to rank 17th globally in internet usage following the Digital 2024: Global Overview Report [8] which increases people's engagement with places in virtual world. Following the statement and questioning the relation between physical space and virtual space, the study question on the gather public space [9] such as square space that appears in every city in the world. Especially, Chiang Mai Old City is a perfect example as "square space" or "Kuang Muang" has been used since 1296 AD. until the present [10]. Following the observation of the characteristics of the sample area for study, the city square area in Chiang Mai Old City can be divided into three characteristics: traditional and cultural space, market space, and tourist destination. Generally, the purpose of the city square area is to be an assembly point and gathering area for people [9],[11]. It holds various activities representing the vitality of their tradition and culture. However, it challenges urban studies to describe the relationship between place attachment and human cognition in the virtual realm, as the real-world differential may provide divergent cognition to places. The study examines the relationship between humans and social media through Instagram applications to explain the bonding of place attachment (Place Attachment) or PPP, which consists of processes (Process), physical buildings (Physical Setting), and characteristics of

people (Person) [12] to understand the utility of space through online society. Moreover, the study interrelationship with the Sense of Place and online society theory [7] consists of three main categories and seven factors related to the sensitivity to time, knowledge of place, physical elements, social interactions, personal preference, comprehension of captured elements, and function understanding which recreate the forming the information of place values on virtual realm. The result may advocate changes in humans and future areas connected to the virtual world and contribute to the urban value development of the old Lanna city square. Furthermore, to define the integration of theories to describe the place attachment in a virtual realm this could support the understanding of place attachment in both the real-world and the social media universe.

2. Literature review

2.1 Place Attachment to social media

Place Attachment Theory is one of the components of Sense of Place Theory, one of the four sub-components of place perception [13] which is related to the emotions that people attach to places and culture [14] where attachment to places is a symbol of relationships towards an area that can indicate emotion and meaning or a person's social connection to a place [2], [12], [15], [16]. The emotional importance of a person is an essential factor in explaining the social roots of a place [2], [14]. Furthermore, the factor of the length of stay in a place can explain the relationship between individuals related to the length of time [17]. Social science research considers human culture. The social process uses culture as a tool to create meaning and perception of the identity of an area. Scannell and Gifford [12] proposed a three-part theoretical framework to explain place attachment: person, process, and place.

These three relationships can explain the development of a detailed and positive sense of an area [18]. This theory can lead individuals to recall or use memories of places that offer people the ability to express feelings of stability [19]. It is explained that people develop relationships with other people and places through direct personal experiences and through people they care about [20]. Human-related activities occur at the location and man to man in unique places, which are linked to feelings, knowledge, beliefs, and behavior within a particular area [21]. In addition to these three components, [13] proposes six factors promoting the theory of place attachment, which consists of physical factors, social factors, cultural factors, memories and experiences, place satisfaction factors, factors of interaction and activity features and time factors can explain deep and appropriate place attachment to culturally relevant areas such as urban public space in cultural cities.

However, the study by Shen & Wall [1] Gatti & Procentese [6] and Liu et al., [22] suggest the change of perception on physical and social through social media are typically, transient and primarily encountered on an individual level. Therefore, place attachment can be an instrument to define the attachment in physical and social changes in places through social media [1]. As discussed earlier, individuals with a strong attachment to a place may value its existing state, perceiving the introduction of virtual elements as potentially disruptive to its essence or a threat to its authenticity and often linked to the perception of a space as a distinct environment that stands apart from others [23]. Place attachment encompasses not only emotional connections but also a sense of identity and continuity with a specific location. Individuals with a deep connection to a place may exhibit reluctance toward the use of social media, fearing that it could disrupt their experience and undermine their relationship with the location, especially, the context of culturally or historically significant sites, where the use of social media may be perceived differently experienced [1], [24].

2.2 Social media and Perception on Urban space

The relationship between social media and the perception of urban space elucidates the transformative impact of innovation and rapid urban development [25]. Social media serves as a catalyst for altering the behaviors of contemporary city dwellers, reshaping both the form and function of urban areas and challenging the boundaries between reality and virtuality. When viewed through the lens of online social theory, the perception of intricate urban spaces can be conceptualized as the convergence of "two flows," illustrating the interconnectedness between virtual networks and physical environments [1]. Mobile technologies inherent to online societies facilitate real-time exchange of information, catalyzing the evolution of urban systems [26].

Andromeda et al. [7] outline the concept of virtual network spaces, exemplified by platforms like Instagram, where users' images contribute to the fabric of the online community. Within the Instagram environment, users can curate their presence, shaping their experience within this virtual realm. However, the essence of a place on Instagram varies, influenced by individual experiences and knowledge. The platform's features, such as liking and following, also play a role in shaping the type of content users engage with. Andromeda et al. [7] introduces seven elements elucidating the theory of sense of place through social analytics in figure 3: 1. Capturing the entirety of the place's forming components 2. Cohesiveness of physical elements 3. Social interactions 4. Personal preferences 5. Comprehension of captured elements 6. Sensitivity to temporal aspects 7. Understanding of overall functionalities.

The emergence of online society has reshaped individuals' perceptions of physical locations, influencing how media portrays and subsequently shapes experiences of these places [1], [27]. Integrating mobile phones into daily routines has further entrenched this shift, as advancements in information technology and telecommunications have made accessing information from home more convenient, leading to a decline in public space activities [27]. Social media has profoundly altered people's understanding and connection to places, acting as a powerful catalyst for fostering a sense of place [6], [7]. Dameria et al. [25] and Getti & Procentese [6] highlight the need to revisit the theory of sense of place concerning urban heritage in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of understanding the evolving meanings attributed to these places. Especially, in the realm of urban heritage study, the concept of place must also consider the dynamic interactions of people within these spaces.

2.3 Square in Northern Thai region

The research focused on studying in urban space such as city square space which Carmona et al. [9] explained that a city square is an area surrounded by buildings that is an area for city activities which can divided into three types: firstly, a city square that is created through official spaces and official buildings, a city square that is created through informal buildings and finally, informal city squares. In Town and Square by Paul Zucker's urban space typology, city squares are divided into five types: closed squares, nuclear squares, dominated squares, grouped squares, and amorphous squares. However, explained in terms of use, Sittiporn Bhiromruen [28] explains that “city square or plaza” means a public open space in the city where the surface of the courtyard is paved by stable and strong construction materials (hardscape) in more significant proportion than soft ground or grass (softscape). It plays a role in social functions such as being the central meeting place for communities and cities, ceremonies, entertainment, food areas, and commerce.

The square space area of the Northern Thai region is often called "Khuang Mueang” Dumrikul [29] explains that it is a wide-open field located within the city and performs a ritual space of the town. Moreover, the physical shape and surroundings of the city square affect the

location of the city which is significant for placing monuments and sculptures and a public event space where people meet and socialize [30], [31]. The essential principles of city square design are defining the boundary of the available space, creating a transparent enclosure, and creating a sense of place [28], which can be explained through the theory of Place Attachment and Sense of Place and online society.

2.4 Instagram: dimensions on people perception

Instagram requires particular attention in the context of how individuals engage with their local communities, as it represents a locative, content-oriented social media platform [4], [6] meaning, activities, experiences and reflect identity of users [32]. In terms of urban space, Instagram engaged local events and activities which reflects users' identities and daily life through media [33]. It can be called a tool to define spontaneous people in urban space through medias which shape the life experience of people in local communities [34] social and environmental surroundings (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Moreover, Instagram application provides the platform for users to express their self-in-community [6] through experiences and activities which fostering users' awareness of the social dimensions of their communities, enabling the reinvigoration of community spaces with social meanings and representations—spaces that have traditionally been the foundation of shared uses, social identities, and local interactions [6], [35].

Ultimately, this may be a particular involvement of people and communities to remain the social entity of community which engages their relationships with both the community and its physical spaces [36]. In this context, examining how Instagram and place attachment theory can express their sense of place, the growing practice of using Instagram to view photos of social places and gatherings within one's local community has been framed as a strategy for accessing local social meanings [6]. However, the research question still argues that the sense of place and place attachment in the real world can still be portrayed as the same perception on social media or the attachment to places in the social media realm could change the perception of the real world which is described communities' meaning in various perspectives. These theories show similar aspects to describe the internal elements of a sense of place in social media platforms, which concern the deep description of the place in terms of knowledge, the understanding of the place's function and elements of the place through human participation The influence of online society extends beyond perceptions, impacting various aspects of society, including the economy, social dynamics, tourism, and lifestyles [26], [7], [37]. Consequently, it can be inferred that online society significantly shapes community dynamics. This research underscores the significance of community attachment to places, particularly in areas like the city square, emphasizing the pivotal role of individuals in driving urban life within both physical and virtual realms.

3. Methodology and Analysis Process

The research study has applied three methods, which consist of multiple-choice questionnaire; in-depth interviews; and Photo Elicitation Interviews method (PEI). The process of the study concentrated on defining the attachment factors to those places.

3.1 Multiple-choice Questionnaires and in-depth interviews

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, using a questionnaire to evaluate individuals' knowledge of each square space. The multiple-choice questionnaire consisted of five questions per square and served as a research tool to gather data from participants [38], suggested that questionnaire in survey study is vital and can be used in any type of research. Additionally, the study incorporated an in-depth interview method for data collection, engaging participants individually to explore their unique perspectives. This method allows for follow-up questions and the opportunity to provide further clarification if participants encounter any confusion [39]. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using open-ended questions and the PEI (Photo Elicitation Interview) technique.

3.2 PEI (Photo Elicitation Interviews)

In ethnographic and social studies research, the Photo Elicitation Interview (PEI) is used as a method to prompt participants to share their memories and engage in discussions during interviews [40], [41], [42], [43]. Photo-elicitation interviews also contribute wider perspective from participants following fluently talking through their memory to pictures, stimulating participants 'memories [42]. The method can be performed in two approaches: "auto-driven process" which refers to the process that the researcher chooses and shows sample pics to participant, secondly, participants take pics by themselves called "participant-driven process" [42]. In this study, the PEI framework involved participants taking photographs of the squares they frequently visit and analyzing the caption of their feelings toward those spaces when posting on social media. The photographs were then refined using any type of photography to define accuracy and enhance the effectiveness of the data collected towards people's perception.

3.3 Sample size

In qualitative research, sample sizes are generally smaller than in quantitative studies because qualitative research focuses on meaning and analytical depth, which often necessitates more intensive investigation [45]. Bertaux [44] recommends a minimum of fifteen participants for qualitative studies, while Ritchie et al. [46] suggest that sample sizes should ideally be under fifty. Morse [47] suggests that interviews typically require thirty to fifty respondents. However, for this study, which involved three sites, it was decided to recruit seventy-five respondents on-site. Eligible participants were residents of Chiang Mai Old City, aged over twenty, and included a mix of genders. The data collection process involved interviews lasting more than twenty minutes per person, during which respondents were asked about their perceptions and memories associated with the photographs they had taken.

3.4 The creation of questionnaire

Fig.1 describes the creation of the question in the research considers both theories which link the three main factors, firstly, personal information including demography, time, and frequency, secondly, place and understanding of physical place, social and elements captured, and social activities—lastly, the process of understanding which refers to preference, understanding of function, cognition and feelings. Figure 3 begins with place attachment theory, person aspect question on the demographic of participants (P1) and relevant to time sensitivity (T) of sense of place and social media theory which raises the question on frequency of visit and personal information of participants. Secondly, the place attachment on place aspect (P2) concerns physical and social interaction with a place which describes the physical settings and social activities aspects. This aspect is related to Spatial knowledge (SK) of sense of place and social media theory which aims to understand the elements and social activities in pictures in terms of historical knowledge which use multiple choices questionnaire. Finally, the Process (P3) on place attachment concentrates on feeling, emotion, and cognitive behavior on places which relevant to preference and understanding of its function (A) on sense of place and social media theory. The question defines answer of four stages consisting of the effect of demographic of person on place, important of place (IM), meaning of place (ME) and function of place and social activities (FU) by using multiple-choice, open-ended questionnaire and face to face interviewing.

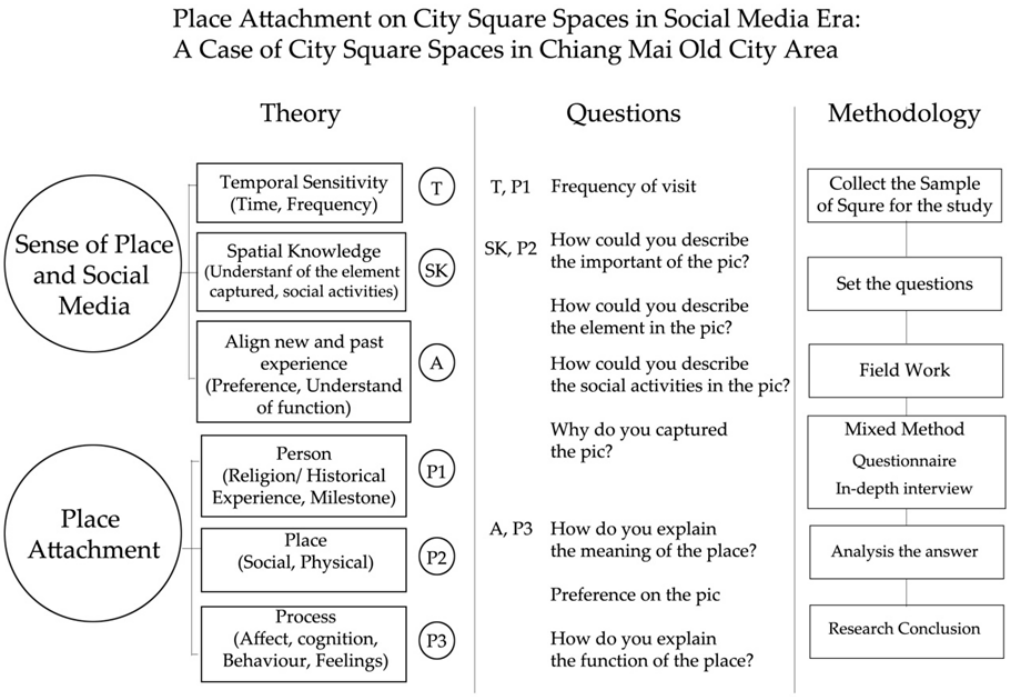


Fig 1: Methodology of the research study related to the interrelationship of theories.

3.5 Measure and analytic framework

As mentioned, the study used three methods which applied the three main factors in multiple-choice questionnaire and interview questions (fig. 1). The analytic framework of the research result is divided into three parts, beginning with a multiple-choice questionnaire on historical knowledge of squares, and coding the verbal answer from the interview process following the study by Raymond Gordon [48] which will be described in table 1. The questionnaire is designed in multiple choices type and the pics which were taken by participants that will analyzes through the three-messages theory by decoding the linguistic message, denoted image and rhetoric of the image following the study of Roland Bartes [49]. The sample picture analysis process will be described in table 2.

Table 1 describes the coding process of the verbal interview part which concentrates on open-ended response to be coded and obtain quantitative results. Firstly, defining the coding categories process requires the definition related to the meaning from verbal interview. Secondly, assigning category symbols to define and grouping by classified individual words, phrases, thoughts, feelings, themes or problems by coding in categories [48]. In this study will be categorized into three parts consisting of important (IM), meaning (ME) and function and social activities (FU).

Tab 1: The sample of coding the verbal interview analysis process (Author).

Group Site	Three Kings monument square	Tha-Pare gate square	Chiang Mai gate square
Important (IM)	Answer1 (IM), Answer 2 (IM)	Answer1 (IM), Answer 2 (IM)	Answer1 (IM), Answer 2 (IM)
Meaning (ME)	Answer 1 (ME), Answer 2 (ME)	Answer 1 (ME), Answer 2 (ME)	Answer 1 (ME), Answer 2 (ME)
Function and social activities (FU)	Answer 1 (FU), Answer 2 (FU)	Answer 1 (FU), Answer 2 (FU)	Answer 1 (FU), Answer 2 (FU)

Tab 2: The sample of picture analysis process (Author).

SAMPLE: TAPHA 20	**The Three messages**	**Signified**
	M1- Linguistic Message	Hotel M Chiang Mai, Tha-Pare Gate (ประตูท่าแพ) (in Thai)
	M2 - Coded Iconic Message (requiring a cultural knowledge)	Colors: orange, gray, yellow -> "Tha-Pare gate wall's materials" Aesthetics of the <urban life>-> food vendor, urban artifact and tourist destination
	M3-Non-CodedIconic Message (the elements that we can see in the photograph)	-Tha-Pare gate -Hotel building -Food vendor -Human -Tree -Sky

4. Site Selection

The researcher identified ideal demonstration sites, with Chiang Mai Old City being a prime candidate for this study. The squares in

the old city are integral to traditional urban planning, which reflects the utility and social hierarchy of city life [31]. Situated in the basins of the Chiang Mai-Lamphun slope and the Ping River in northern Thailand, Chiang Mai, the former capital of the Lanna Kingdom, embodies the core principles of Lanna culture and traditional lifestyles. The city's urban planning seamlessly integrates Lua beliefs (Ancient Hilltribes Ethnicity) and Chai Mongkol principles (The seven aspects of Chai Mongkol), highlighting a respect for nature and the idea that a city mirrors the human body, a concept known as the "Thaksa" ideology [31]. "Thaksa" concept, it is believed that the city's soul is in the centre which symbolizes the "navel" and is the location of the Inthakin Pillar. The significance of the Inthakin Pillar is marked "Suea Muang" (spirit of the city) and the integration of the anatomy of the human body ideology into planning by dividing its key areas into "head, body, navel, and feet". This belief was also combined with the Buddhist "perimeter of the universe" concept. [43]. Squares, or "Khuang Mueang" in the Northern Thai dialect, are predominantly located at the gates and the center of the city [30]. These spaces are regarded as sacred and serve as venues for traditional and religious rituals [50]. Additionally, Chiang Mai's urban lifestyle continues to uphold the socio-cultural values of "Lanna Wisdom" and reinforces a strong sense of "Spiritual Identity" among its residents.

4.1 The selection of square spaces in the study: Chiang Mai Old City, Thailand

These three squares were selected based on their typical function and the physical of its space. The sample sites for the study showed in Fig.2 consist of: Three Kings monument square (a); Tha Pare Gate square (b); and Chiang Mai gate square (c).

(a) (b) (c)

Fig 2: (a) Three Kings monument square (Author) (b) Tha Pare Gate square (Author) (c) Chiang Mai gate square (Author)

Fig 3: The location of site study

5. Research result

5.1 Demographic of participants

The findings show that more females (67%) visited the squares. In addition, most respondents were between 21 and 25 years (82.6%), bachelor's degree (85.3%), earns between 8,000-12,000 Thai Baht (57.3%), mostly are Buddhist (85.3%), undergraduate student (41.3%) and inhabited in the old city between 1-5 years (82.6%). See Table 3 for detailed statistics.

5.2 Frequency of visit

Most participants visit Three Kings Monument Square (36%) and The-Pare Gate Square (32%) once a month in the evening to join the activities on the squares such as walking the street and enjoying food vendors. However, Chiang Mai Gate Square is the most frequently visited compared of the three squares, participants visit every day (36%) due to in the evening Chiang Mai Gate Square is allowed by local officers to transform into a food market following the square location is close to the Pratu-Chiang Mai market (Chiang Mai gate market). It can be concluded that participants mostly visit the place with specific purpose such as joining activities on walking street that close to the Three Kings monument and finding local foods at Chiang Mai Gate Square.

5.3 Importance (IM)

Following the in-depth interview in the importance section (SK, P2), participants provided a perception of the images that they decided to post on Instagram in various categories. Three Kings Monument Square was memorized as the heart of the city, a colonial landmark, a charmed space and an enchanted space. Participants also perceived Tha-Pare Gate Square as a transit place through time, a good environment place, a cultural space without local, a public space and space for expression. Chiang Mai Gate Square was mentioned as a market, a place for cheap food, Street food, a historical space, an important space for a local community, Good Northern food. In the importance of place factor can be summarized that participants recognized the built environment of places in specific of its function and surrounding context.

5.4 Meaning (ME)

The meaning sections (A, P3) in the in-depth interview allow participants to express their perception of the Meaning of places. Three Kings Monument Square was memorized as a Space for the religion of Chiang Mai, a Sacred space of Chiang Mai, a Space of transition between the old and new, and the light of the Three Kings. Participants revealed the meaning of Tha-Pare Gate Square as a mixed-used space, an ancient space, and also mentioned that Tha-Pare gate is the gateway through the heart of Chiang Mai

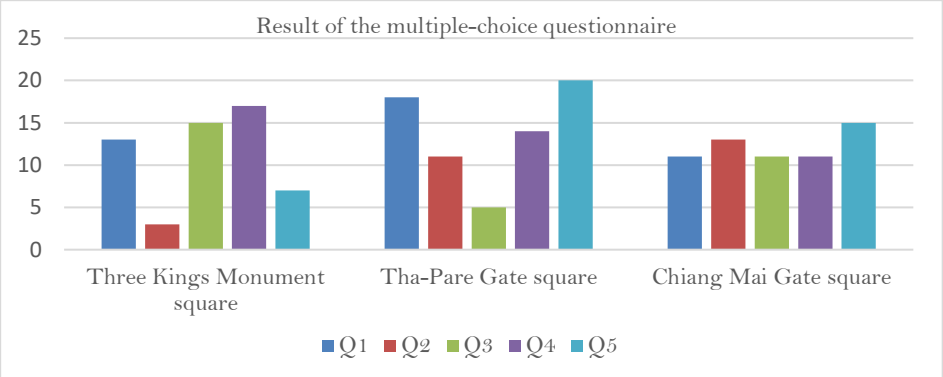
city, a creative space, a recreation space. Chiang Mai Gate Square was revealed as a market, cheap food, street food, a historical space, an important space for local community, Good Northern food. The meaning of these squares was summarized through their function and built environment which relevant to the importance of places.

5.5 Function and Social activities (FU)

The result of function and social activities of place part (A, P3 and SK, P2) in the interview shows that participants who engaged in Three Kings Monument Square describe the function of the place as an assembly point, public Music event, skateboarding, worship the statue, sports, selfie, place for taking photos, check-in point. Tha-Pare Gate Square was recognized as a tourist destination, a space for political protest, a recreation space, a playground, space for photos, and food vendors. Participants reveals their perception on function section of Chiang Mai Gate Square as a place for sell Northern food and bargain space, in terms of social activities section participants feels the place is a nice merchant, a market of Northern food, Bargain space, Gathering space of local food and local things. Entire of function and social activity's part, participants replied to the function of place that related to communities in the context which variously appears in diverse purpose on the squares.

Tab 3: The result of in-depth interview process

	Three Kings monument square	**Tha-Pare Gate square**	**Chiang Mai gate square**
(T,P1) Frequency of visit	Once a month in evening 36%, 2-3 times a week 32%, Not usually visit the place 24% Depend on special occasion 16%	Once a month in evening 32%, 2-3 times a week 32%, Not usually visit the place 2% Depend on special occasion 32%	Everyday 36%, 2-3 times a week 28%, Not usually visit the place 24% Depend on special occasion 0%
Milestone (Demography)	Since birth 16% 10-20 years 8% 5-9 years 8% 1-4 years 52%	Since birth 4% 10-20 years 8% 5-9 years 16% 1-4 years 72%	Since birth 0% 10-20 years 4% 5-9 years 12% 1-4 years 84%
(SK,P2) Importance (IM)	Heart of the city, Colonial, Charmed space, Enchanted space, Landmark	Transit place through time, Good day, Cultural space without local, Public space, Space for expression	Market, Cheap food, Street food, Historical space, Important space for local community, Good Northern food
Religion experience	Make a wish at the place, Worship the statue	Non-religion space	Non-religion space
Historical experience	Historical place of Chiang Mai, Lanna civilization of Mae Khong Basin, Remind the importance of Three Kings	Historical place of Chiang Mai, The element of the city wall narrates the history of the city	Historical place of Chiang Mai
Elements	Tree branches, Beautiful lighting, Beautiful sky, Three Kings, My daughter, Little child	Shading on the wall, Lighting, Color of the orange bricks, Shops, Tourists, Birds	Market, crowed people, Excitement, Scents of market
Perception	Good, Safe, Satisfied, Respect, Appreciate	Too many tourists and pigeons, Multipurpose space of Chiang Mai, Uncomfortable, Lively, Chiang Mai dystopia, Dirty, Freedom space, Good	Feel good space, Jolly space, Hot, Stinky, Happy, Lively
(A,P3) Meaning (ME)	Space for religion of Chiang Mai, Sacred space of Chiang Mai, Space of transition between old and new, The light of three kings	Mix-used space, ancient space, Tha-Pare gate is the gateway through the heart of Chiang Mai city, Creative space, Recreation space	Popular market, Food space of the city, Crowed space
Function (FU)	Assembly point, Public Music event, Skateboarding, Worship the statue, Sports, Selfie, take photos, Check-in point	Tourists' destination, Political protest, Recreation space, Playground, Take photos, Food vendors	Sell Northern food, Bargain space
Social activities (FU)	Assembly point, Public Music event, Skateboarding, Sports, take photos, Check-in point	Tourists' destination, Political protest, Chinese New Year event, Playground, Take photos, Food vendors	Nice merchant, Northern food, Bargain space, Gathering space of local food and local things



Q1-Q3: Knowledge of history of the space Q4-Q5: Knowledge of function of the space

Table chart 1: Result of the multiple-choice questionnaire

5.6 Knowledge of Places

The study also examined participants' fundamental historical knowledge about the squares, focusing specifically on their understanding of the history and function of these spaces. The questionnaire consists of five questions. Questions on the history of squares (Q1, Q2, and Q3) assessed historical knowledge with queries such as: Who is the statue modeled after? (Q1) What is the name of the kingdom they ruled? (Q2) What is the significance of the location in 'Thaksa' ideology? (Q3) Questions on the function of squares (Q4, Q5) addressed the functions of these spaces, asking: What is the purpose of the place? (Q4) What is the former function of the place? (Q5). The results indicated that participants generally lacked historical knowledge about these locations, as evidenced by their below-average scores. Notably, half of the participants could not identify the kings depicted at the Three Kings Monument and could not name the kingdom they ruled. Despite this, participants were aware of the functional aspects of the places. The Tha-Pare Gate Square was most frequently recognized, though historical knowledge about it remained weak, and its function was understood similarly to that of the Three Kings Monument square. Interestingly, responses for Chiang Mai Gate Square showed equal difficulty, with participants struggling to answer both historical and functional questions. This suggests that participants have limited historical knowledge and a poor understanding of the function of these locations.

5.7 Analytic pictures process: Three Kings Monument Square

The result illustrates two different contexts, firstly the research explains the attachment of people to those places in terms of physical and location following the PEI result. Secondly, the in-depth interview result describes the attachment of people to squares through analytic process of picture analysis (Three Messages). Overall, Tab.4 depicts that most of the participants (21 people) took pictures that included the Three Kings statue with museum building on the background. However, the surroundings of the square attracted participants' perceptions such as a colonial-design pillar (2 people), neo-classic building (2 people), and urban furnitures. Moreover, the participants realized that activities on the square capably released the vividness of the square. The three messages describes those pictures on figure 10 in M1- Linguistic Message as Thai sentences describe the history of Three Kings Monument and M2 - Coded Iconic Message as a significant space for formal events and M3-Non-CodedIconic Message describes elements on those pictures such as Three Kings statue, a museum building, a flag, an Electric pole, Humans, Trees and sky which analyzed in tab 4.

Tab 4: The result of analytic pictures of Three Kings Monument Square.

The Three messages

M1- Linguistic Message	M2 - Coded Iconic Message (requiring cultural knowledge)	M3-Non-CodedIconic Message (the elements that we can see in the photograph)	
	Signified		
Thai sentences describe the history of Three Kings Monument	Colors: white, red, grey, black, green, yellow -> "building, tile, marble, statue, tree and fabric decoration" Aesthetics of the <historic square space>-> space for formal events <square decoration>-> Museum, Three Kings statue, fence, electric pole, tree, flag, yellow truck	-Three King statue -Museum building -flag -Electric pole -Human -Tree -Sky	-Human with bicycle -Decoration column -Yellow truck

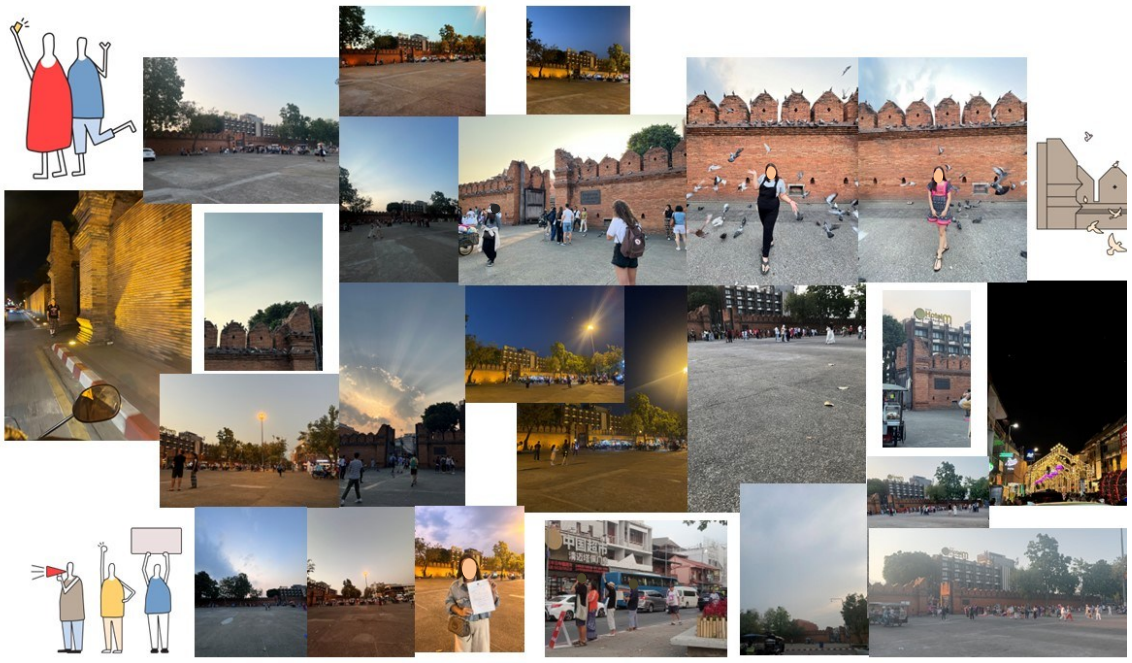
5.8 Analytic pictures process: Tha-Pare Gate Square

Tale 5 describes the popularity of the location of Tha-Pare Gate Square which is located on the famous node of the city, participants generally captured pictures that included the wall of the gate (21 people). Most of them took pictures that included

themselves in the pics and defined the shot caption in the Instagram post as “A Landmark of Chiang Mai”. Interestingly, a participant captured a political activity (1 person) that rarely attracted other participants. This can describe the multi-purpose of Tha-Pare Gate Square’s function.

The three messages describes those pictures in tab.5 explains M1- Linguistic Message as Hotel M Chiang Mai and the Tha-Pare gate (ประตูท่าแพ) and M2 - Coded Iconic Message as a significant space for urban life and M3-Non-CodedIconic Message describes elements on those pictures such as Three Kings statue, a Tha-Pare gate, M Hotel building, food vendors, humans, trees and sky which analyzed in table 5.

Tab 5: The result of analytic pictures of Tha-Pare Gate Square



The Three messages

M1- Linguistic Message	M2 - Coded Iconic Message (requiring cultural knowledge)	M3-Non-CodedIconic Message (the elements that we can see in the photograph)	
	Signified		
-Hotel M Chiang Mai -Tha-Pare gate (ประตูท่าแพ) - Chinese Alphabets	Colors: orange, blue, gray, yellow -> "Tha-Pare gate wall’s materials", Twilight, Lighting Aesthetics of the <urban life>-> food vendor, urban artifact and tourist destination, assembly point for multi-activities	-Tha-Pare gate -Hotel building -Food vendor -Human -Tree -Sky	-shophouse -Lighting, -Motorcycle side-view mirror -birds -a group of protesters

5.9 Analytic pictures process: Chiang Mai Gate Square

Chiang Mai Gate Square boasts a unique location and diverse uses, situated near the Chiang Mai Gate market and directly opposite the square. Tha-Pare Gate Square, located at a prominent city intersection, often sees participants taking photos that prominently feature the gate's wall. Many of these photos include the participants themselves and are often shared on Instagram with the caption “A Landmark of Chiang Mai.” Interestingly, one participant even captured a political event, a rare occurrence among other photos, highlighting the square's versatility in usage.

The three messages describes those pictures in tab.6 explains M1- Linguistic Message as-Pee Poo Shop (ร้านพี่ปู), Tarad Pratu Chiang Mai (ตลาดประตูเชียงใหม่) and M2 - Coded Iconic Message as a significant space for merchant and M3-Non-CodedIconic Message describes elements on those pictures such as Chiang Mai gate, Market building, Food vendors, Buddha shirts, Tents, humans, trees and sky which analyzed in table 6.

Tab 6: The result of analytic pictures of Chiang Mai Gate Square

The Three messages			
M1- Linguistic Message	M2 - Coded Iconic Message (requiring cultural knowledge)	M3-Non-CodedIconic Message (the elements that we can see in the photograph)	
Signified			
-Pee Poo Shop (ร้านพี่ปู) -Tarad Pratu Chiang Mai (ตลาดประตูเชียงใหม่) -Chai See (ร้านชายสี่) -Tarad Pratu Chiang Mai (ตลาดประตูเชียงใหม่)	Colors: multi colours -> "wall bricks, products for tourists, trees, tents" Aesthetics of the <market, merchant>-> foods, destination for street foods and tourists' market	-Chiang Mai gate -Market building -Food vendors -Human -Tree -Sky -Buddha shirts	-Tables and chairs -Tents

6. Discussion

The place attachment on social media examines how people connect with physical environments and seeks to apply these insights to the virtual realm. The discussion concentrates on seven factors consisting of the demography and frequency of visits that affect the perception of people in the virtual realm, the importance of place (IM), the meaning of place (ME), function and social activities (FU), knowledge of place and result from the three messages theory on pictures analysis. The results from the questionnaire specifically concern on knowledge of participants which indicates participants have a neutral understanding of the places they feel attached to, with greater knowledge reflecting a stronger connection, especially among residents. However, the findings also show that participants often lack awareness of the historical significance of these places, suggesting that their historical importance may not be widely acknowledged or remembered within the local community, which could lead to the loss of historical value [52] that hang on the combination of human activity and knowledge on the heritage value of places [51].

According to the diversity of participants and their knowledge, the distinctive value of these places might not be fully assessed. However, participants recognize the importance (IM) of these squares and their unique identity shaped by the activities and experiences associated with them. The finding relevant to the study by Phetsuriya and Heath [53] mentioned urban activities such as religious and cultural activities, street food markets in temples, walking streets, and other activities that incorporate places, social and economic [54] can represent the identity of place. For instance, the Three Kings Monument Square is primarily seen as a gathering spot, hosting public music events, skateboarding, worship of the statue, sports activities, selfies, and check-in—reflecting the public's perception. Similarly, Tha-Pare Gate Square is recognized for its roles as a tourist destination, a site for political protests, a recreational area, a playground, a place for photography, and a hub for food vendors. Chiang Mai Gate Square is known as a venue for selling Northern food and a bargaining space, with the area bustling with food vendors. This indicates that the functions of these places as depicted on social media are closely linked to their real-world activities, aligning with the findings of Shen & Wall [1], who discussed the interconnectedness between virtual networks and physical environments. People seem to recognize and embrace the authentic identity of these squares through their social media posts that highlight everyday functionality, rather than focusing on historical significance. This aligns with the study by Dameria et al. [26], which noted that media not only portrays but also shapes experiences of these places, with the dynamic interactions of people within these spaces adding to their value.

Moreover, these three squares represent diverse values, such as traditional values, cultural values, and merchandising values. The results describe the meaning (ME) of each Three Kings Monument Square is recognized for its roles as a Space for the religion of Chiang Mai, the Sacred space of Chiang Mai, the space of transition between old and new, The light of three kings. Tha-Pare Gate Square is recognized for its roles as a mixed-used space, and ancient space, Tha-Pare Gate Square is the gateway through the heart of Chiang Mai city, a Creative space and a recreation space. Chiang Mai Gate Square is known as a popular market, a food space in the city, and a crowded space. In terms of the meaning that describes the attachment to places which could be described through participants' experience [2], this could be assumed that participants recognized the meaning of places following their functionality and memory of the places. The

result is relevant to the study by Phetsuriya [43] who defines the memory or recollection, and the function of places can derive the identity of places. The findings can explain the significance of place's function and human memory which both represent attachment in the online realm.

Interestingly, the function and social activities (FU) part is a significant factor that participants are highly concerned. Every square in the study is specified as a space for social gathering for a community that concludes the social and economic purpose. For the entire function and social activity's part, participants replied to the function of place that related to communities in the context which variously appears in diverse purposes on the squares and can instigate place attachment through the quality of place and providing various activities [43], [55]. It could be concluded that the function and social activities of squares in Chiang Mai Old City can reveal their purpose parallel to the real world and online platforms. However, this is slightly against the theory proposed by Andromeda et al. [7], which emphasizes that understanding the functional aspects of a place is not always necessary in urban settings.

Perception and preference aspects resulted in the Three Kings Monument square being the highest and being described as Good, Safe, Satisfied, Respect, and Appreciate. However, Tha-Pare Gate Square and Chiang Mai Gate Square are described as neutral, too many tourists and pigeons, Multipurpose space of Chiang Mai, Uncomfortable, Lively, Chiang Mai dystopia, Dirty, Freedom space, Good, Feel-good space, Jolly space, Hot, Stinky, Happy, Lively. In addition, while demography and frequency of visits significantly influence knowledge of places, they do not play a crucial role in shaping a sense of attachment in both physical and social media. According to participants, this attachment is more strongly influenced by the functions, religious significance, and historical experiences associated with these places [12].

Demography and frequency of visit factors are parts of the association with place attachment that contribute the meaning and emotions of participants [43]. Lewicka (2011) [16] also mentioned that long-time residents can emerge with a genuine sense of community and a stronger attachment to places. However, in this study, it was found that most of the participants rarely resided in the old city, they lived for about 1-4 years. This could be suggested in the limitation of the research study that recruitment requires a longer residency. This demonstrates that the relationship between people who inhabit a place becomes meaningful following the local respondents deeply rooted in the place's values [16]. The analysis of photographs taken by participants in the study revealed a focus on functional aspects and social activities that are pertinent to both the real world and social contexts. Given that Instagram is a locative social media platform, it offers visual cues and conveys meanings related to urban spaces, local events, and gatherings [6].

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of place attachment by integrating insights from physical and virtual environments. It underscores the role of social media in shaping and reflecting the identity of urban spaces, emphasizing the interconnectedness between functionality, social activities, and collective memory.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the concept of place attachment within the realm of social media, focusing on how individuals connect with physical spaces and the translation of these connections into the virtual realm. By investigating three key squares in Chiang Mai Old City—Three Kings Monument Square, Tha-Pare Gate Square, and Chiang Mai Gate Square—the research evaluates seven factors: demographics, frequency of visits, importance of place (IM), meaning of place (ME), functions and social activities (FU), knowledge of place, and the three messages theory derived from photographic analysis.

In conclusion, the study on place attachment in social media reveals that participants have a stronger connection to places they are more knowledgeable about, particularly among local residents. However, there is a noticeable lack of awareness regarding the historical significance of these locations, suggesting that their historical importance may not be widely recognized within the community. This supports the theory that understanding the functional aspects of a place, rather than its history, plays a more crucial role in urban settings. The unique identities of spaces like the Three Kings Monument Square, Tha-Pare Gate Square, and Chiang Mai Gate Square are shaped by their everyday activities and public perceptions, as reflected in social media posts. The study also highlights that the importance (IM), meaning (ME) and function and social activities (FU) factors to these places are largely driven by their functionality and the participants' experiences, rather than demographic factors or frequency of visits. Ultimately, this research underscores the complex interplay between physical environments and their representation in social media, showing how these platforms shape and reflect people's connections to these spaces.

The study's limitations include the relatively short residency duration of participants (1–4 years), which may have influenced their depth of attachment and historical awareness. Long-term residents, as noted by Lewicka (2011), often develop a more profound sense of community and attachment, which was underrepresented in this research. Additionally, the reliance on visual analysis through social media images may not fully capture the historical or emotional dimensions of place attachment.

Future studies should aim to recruit participants with longer residency durations to better understand deep-rooted place attachment. Longitudinal studies could explore how attachment evolves over time with changes in urban functionality and historical awareness. Furthermore, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or ethnographic studies could provide richer insights into the emotional and historical connections to these spaces. Expanding the study to other urban areas with varying socio-cultural contexts would also enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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