

FACTORS AFFECTING GREEN TOURISM CHOICE IN VIETNAM AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Tourism plays a key role in globalization. Serious environmental problems caused by tourism have received great attention from the public. Green tourism was defined as responsibility to natural areas, especially to environmental conservation and maintaining the prosperity of the local people. This research focus on the theoretical basis of green tourism and its characteristics. The proposed research model consists of 8 factors affecting green tourism: tourism products, accommodation facilities, human resources for tourism, green marketing, experiencing based travel, destination administration, destination transportation, green tourism supporting policies. The study gathered 581 interview results, using regression analysis to conclude 5 influencing factors including: tourism products, destination transportation, accommodation facilities, human resources and green tourism supporting policies, and among these, green tourism supporting policies are considered to have the strongest impact on tourists' green tourism choice.

KEYWORDS: *Tourism Products, Accommodation Facilities, Human Resources for Tourism, Green Marketing, Experiencing Based Travel, Destination Administration, Destination Transportation, Green Tourism Supporting Policies*

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INTRODUCTION

Today, tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and one of the fastest growing industries. Tourism has countless impacts, both positive and negative, on socio-cultural, economic and environmental issues (Cheng, Chiang, Yuan, & Huang, 2018; Stelios & Melisidou, 2010). Concerns about sustainability in the tourism industry have led to the emergence of a new form of tourism, called green tourism; This form promotes the idea of sustainability and conservation of natural resources (Butarbutar & Soemarno, 2013; Hwang & Lee, 2018). Vietnam has great potential for green tourism, demonstrating the diversity of biodiversity and culture in different regions. However, focus has not been put on the management and development of green tourism. Its activity is still limited to certain natural areas. Green tourism destinations are mostly related to natural flora and fauna, while a small percentage involves local culture (Butarbutar & Soemarno, 2013). Therefore, research on the factors that influence green tourism is important and urgent.

Rationale

Overview of Green Tourism

There is no general consensus on the exact definition of green tourism, but most people think of it a type of tourism associated with nature and nature protection. "Green tourism is tourism to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural

heritage are major attractions; where climate impacts are minimized with the aim of respecting and conserving resources. Green tourism is designed to adapt to the context of resources” (NCC, 1996; Graci and Dodds, 2008). “Green tourism tells customers that the destination they will visit is beautiful and not devastated. Green tourism or other terms related to environmental concerns are primarily used as natural brands for destinations.” (Wight, 1994). The concept of green tourism is expanded not only in relation to the natural environment, but also in the activities of human beings to create the color green. According to Thanh Le (2018), “Green tourism is not only about producing tourism products based on available resources but also creating this color by planting trees everywhere in tourist destinations, even artificial trees.”

Therefore, it can be seen that each concept of green tourism presents a different aspect of this type of tourism. However, as a whole, green tourism is understood to be an important part of sustainable tourism. Green tourism not only brings positive economic impacts such as traditional tourism, environmental protection and building awareness of environmental protection, but also preserves cultural and social values aiming to ensure continual development in the far future.

Research Model

Research Overview

One of the most commonly applied models in tourism development is the ECOS model of Butler and Boyd (1996). The ECOS model is an acronym for the ecotourism Opportunity Spectrum (Ecotourism Opportunity Spectrum) approach. In this model, Butler and Boyd (1996) emphasize that sustainable tourism must be placed in relation to economic efficiency and environmental and social impacts. At the same time, the ECOS model also provides eight groups of factors to evaluate green tourism in any destination (Figure 4).

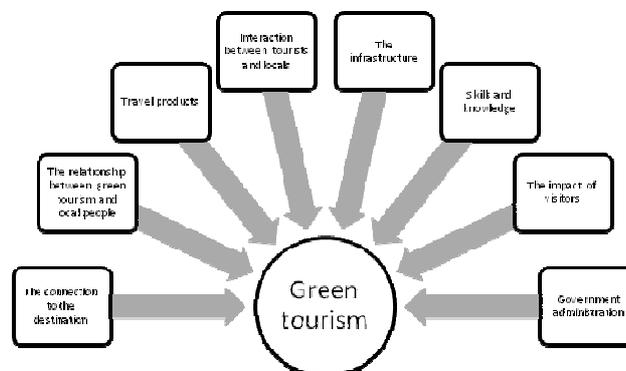


Figure 1: ECOS Green Tourism Assessment Model, (Boyd & Butler, 1996)

From Figure 4, it can be seen that the ECOS model evaluates green tourism based on the following 8 criteria: the connection to the destination, the relationship between green tourism and the locals, tourism products, infrastructure, social interaction between tourists and locals, skills and knowledge, the impact of tourists on destinations, the administration of the government.

The first criterion according to ECOS is the connection to the destination. According to ECOS, local governments must ensure convenient transportation to tourist sites. In addition, the ECOS model also assesses the issue of visas for foreign visitors so that international visitors can reach their destinations more easily. *The second criterion* is the relationship between green tourism and local people. Here, ECOS is concerned about people's participation in the tourism service supply chain. People take part in their own local tourism activities and benefit from it economically. *The third criterion* is related to tourism products. Here, ECOS emphasizes a variety of travel products that the destination can offer. Travel

products will depend on the natural conditions as well as the culture of the destination. Tourism products may include: resort tourism, discovery tourism such as mountain climbing, cave exploration, forest tours, experiential tourism such as local village experience, and local cultural experience. *The fourth criterion* relates to the interaction between residents and visitors. ECOS wants to emphasize the attitude and behavior of local people when interacting with or communicating with visitors.

The fifth criterion is infrastructure. ECOS makes this criterion because it is a basic condition for tourism services in general and green tourism in particular. Infrastructure, according to ECOS, includes roads, hotels, public utilities, and living amenities. *The sixth criterion* is related to skills and knowledge. Here, ECOS wants to emphasize the knowledge and skills of travelers before arriving at a particular tourist destination. Butler and Boyd (1996) argue that tourists should be equipped with the necessary knowledge about the local area as well as understanding the local culture to avoid being surprised upon arrival. *The seventh criterion* relates to the impact of visitors on destinations. According to ECOS, green tourism needs to bring local economic benefits as well as minimize the harm to the natural landscape. *The eighth criterion* is the management of local governments including support policies. In addition, according to ECOS, governments must strengthen the oversight of tourism business activities so that the quality of tourism is maintained and improved.

Thus, ECOS has given 8 practical evaluation criteria for green tourism. However, the ECOS model still has some limitations when it has not mentioned specifically about environmental protection, as well as emphasizing the participation of people and tourists to protect the environment. Some researchers also recognize the limitations of the ECOS model. Gültekin (2010), for example, argues that environmental protection should be at the forefront, in order to preserve the natural landscape of the destination and go towards sustainable local tourism. Indeed, the reality shows that people only really care about tourism when they are a link in the tourism service supply chain and benefit from this service.

Factors Promoting Green Tourism in Vietnam

In a high-level tourism forum in 2018 held in Hanoi, many international and domestic experts made comments on the factors that Vietnam needs to pay attention to the promotion of tourism development in general and green tourism in particular. Factors affecting green tourism mentioned are as follows.

Firstly, experts and managers think that the first factor lies in tourism products. For Vietnam, the natural landscape element is a favorable factor for Vietnam to provide diverse and attractive tourism products associated with the natural landscape which is pivotal and is the factor that initiates and promotes tourism in general, and green tourism in Vietnam in particular. *Secondly*, economic experts including Mr. Truong Gia Binh - Chairman of FPT Corporation - believe that transport and infrastructure factors have a strong impact on tourism development in general and green tourism in particular. Visitors tend to want to save travel and transportation time, so modern transportation options are always preferred by customers. In addition to transportation, destinations need to pay attention to basic infrastructure for tourism such as electricity and water and internet connection. *The third* is hotel and accommodation factors. For green tourism, hotel and accommodation factors play a particularly important role in customer satisfaction in this segment. *The fourth* is the trend of experienced tourism as a factor that positively affects green tourism of Vietnam. The first is about tourist locations, green tourism and experiential tourism all geared towards places with wild, untapped natural landscapes. Secondly, both types of tourism emphasize the understanding and preservation of cultural identities and local landscapes.

The fifth is the marketing element. Destinations must actively implement marketing activities to understand customer needs as well as promote local tourism products. In particular, Green Marketing needs to capture the needs of travelers by focusing on activities such as promoting the wild pristine beauty of the destination, promoting hotels that meet environmental standards, introducing recreational services, or nature-friendly picnic activities. In short, Green Marketing is an important factor in promoting green tourism. The sixth is a factor related to people. According to Mr. Craig Douglas - Vice President of Lodgis Hospitality Group, human factors have a direct impact on the development of tourism. Local people need to improve their skills and knowledge to provide highly qualified human resources for tourism. The seventh is the government's support policy for tourism. International experts say that, in order to develop tourism in general and green tourism in particular, it is necessary to shorten the procedures for granting visas for foreign visitors, and at the same time, develop tourism-friendly policies. The eighth is the administrative activity in tourism. At the 2018 tourism seminar, Prime Minister Vu Duc Dam highlighted the role of governance in tourism because it is the factor that helps tourism develop in a sustainable way. Currently, Vietnam has applied new regulations to improve the products of the tourism industry. To develop tourism, and green tourism in particular, the state and local governments need to strengthen governance, thereby promoting tourism development in a green and sustainable way.

Research Model

In order to provide a green tourism development model for Vietnam, it is necessary for it to be based on the common theoretical bases that researchers have introduced in the past decades. However, it is also necessary to combine these theories with the comments of domestic and foreign experts to model green tourism development to be in line with the actual situation of Vietnam. In other words, the model of green tourism development needs to be a combination of theory and practical judgment, which can best identify the factors affecting green tourism in Vietnam. In that sense, the factors affecting green tourism can be summarized as follows.

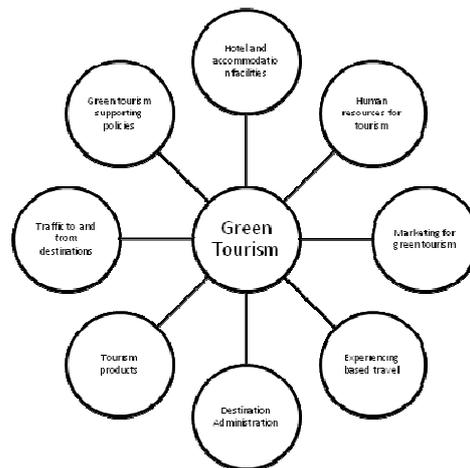


Figure 2: Research Model Affecting Green Tourism Options (Proposed Study Team)

Research Model

Research Sample

Research team distributes questionnaires through online surveys to those who are interested in green tourism. Valid survey questionnaire was 581. Characteristics of research sample: Interviewees in study are mostly female, accounting for 77.3% of survey subjects, 22.7% of survey subjects were male. The majority are young people aged 18 to 25 years old, accounting

for 93% of sample, and 90% are students, 96% have college and university degrees. 94.1% not yet married & common income is less than 5 million/ month, accounting for 79.5% of survey subjects.

The research team distributed questionnaires through online surveys to those interested in green tourism. The survey consisted of 581 questions. Characteristics of the survey: Females accounted for 77.3% of respondents and males 22.7 %. 18–25-year-olds accounted for 93%, out of which 90% were students. 96% had college or university degrees. 94.1% were single. 79.5% had income less than 5 million Dong / month.

Research Result

Quality Verification of Scales by Cronbach Alpha Coefficient

Results of the scale test show that the scales used in the study are to ensure the reliability in measuring factors with Cronbach Alpha coefficient greater than 0.8, the measurement components of all factors have met required application.

Table 1: Quality Verification of Scales by Cronbach Alpha Coefficient

| No | Item | Variable Number | Cronbach Alpha |
|----|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1 | Tourism products | 5 | 0.887 |
| 2 | Destination transportation | 5 | 0.765 |
| 3 | Accommodation facilities | 5 | 0.861 |
| 4 | Human resources in green tourism | 5 | 0.942 |
| 5 | Green marketing | 5 | 0.926 |
| 6 | Experiencing based travel | 5 | 0.875 |
| 7 | Destination administration | 4 | 0.911 |
| 8 | Green tourism supporting policies | 5 | 0.916 |

Identifying Impact Factors

Performing the Varimax rotation to extract the factors that obtained 5 impact factors, reflecting 66.85% of the value of the representative variables.

Table 2

| Component | Initial Eigenvalues | | | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings | | |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1 | 20.173 | 51.724 | 51.724 | 20.173 | 51.724 | 51.724 |
| 2 | 2.224 | 5.703 | 57.428 | 2.224 | 5.703 | 57.428 |
| 3 | 1.380 | 3.538 | 60.966 | 1.380 | 3.538 | 60.966 |
| 4 | 1.226 | 3.144 | 64.111 | 1.226 | 3.144 | 64.111 |
| 5 | 1.074 | 2.755 | 66.865 | 1.074 | 2.755 | 66.865 |
| 6 | .932 | 2.390 | 69.255 | | | |
| 7 | .886 | 2.271 | 71.526 | | | |

Identify factors that influence travelers' green travel choices

Results show that there are 5 factors influencing the choice of travelers to use green tourism in Vietnam as below:

Table 3

| No | Factor | Number | Meaning |
|----|--------------------------------------|--------|---|
| 1 | Human resources for tourism industry | HR2 | Local people who are environmentally conscious will contribute to increasing visitor satisfaction. |
| | | HR4 | Individuals providing tourism services with green tourism knowledge and environmental awareness will increase visitors' satisfaction with the destination |

| | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|------|--|
| | | HR3 | Guides knowledgeable about local culture and customs will help increase the value of the trip |
| | | HR5 | Staff at the property are knowledgeable about green tourism and environmentally conscious |
| | | HR1 | Guides with knowledge of green tourism will contribute to increasing visitor satisfaction: Guides with knowledge of green tourism will contribute to increasing visitor satisfaction |
| 2 | Green tourism supporting policies | PLC4 | Localities need support on rents and land ownership for green tourism. |
| | | PL2 | Localities need to formulate policies to train human resources for tourism |
| | | PL3 | Travel companies need preferential loans, and administrative support to develop green tourism in remote areas |
| | | PL5 | Fast visa issuance and longer visa duration can attract international tourists |
| 3 | Tourism products | PRD2 | Green Travel Products Tourists are interested in and tourism products associated with the natural landscape of the destination |
| | | PRD3 | Tourists prefer tourism products associated with environmental protection and maintenance of biodiversity |
| | | PRD5 | Tourists interested in tourism products preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the destination |
| | | PRD1 | A diverse tourism program (combining experiential tourism, community, discovery, relaxation ...) will attract the attention of visitors |
| | | PRD4 | Experiencing village life is a tourist favorite |
| 4 | Accommodation facilities | FAC2 | Green Accommodation Establishments are particularly interested in contribution to the economic development of the local people. |
| | | FAC4 | When deciding to book a room, travelers prioritize accommodations with green labels |
| | | FAC3 | Travelers are concerned about the accommodation's impact on the environment |
| 5 | Destination transportation | TP4 | Water transport is an important factor that greatly influences the tour's booking decisions |
| | | TP3 | Rail transport is an important factor that greatly influences guests' booking decisions |
| | | TP2 | Air traffic is an important factor that greatly influences guests' booking decisions |

Level of Impact of Each Factor

The factors that influence tourists' choice of green tourism are positive, and the strongest level of impact is the green tourism support policy factor (FAC2-1), followed by the human factor in tourism industry (FAC2-1), to Green Tourism Products (FAC3-1), to Green Accommodation Facility (FAC4-1), and the weakest impact is destination transportation.

This regression model explains 76.7% of the variation.

Solutions for Developing Green Tourism in Vietnam in the Coming Years

Thus, the factors affecting green tourism in Vietnam: green tourism support policies, human resources for the tourism industry, green tourism products, green accommodation establishments, and destination transportation. This is the implication for policy makers and research groups in making solutions for developing green tourism in Vietnam. Based on the research results of the model of impact factors, to develop green tourism in Vietnam in the coming years, it is necessary to improve the following issues

Develop and Complete Policies to Support Green Tourism Development

At the national level, the priority should be to attract tourists who are interested in and choosing green tourism, especially international tourists. In order to attract this international group of tourists, it is necessary to facilitate immigration procedures for tourists to be carried out easily, quickly and conveniently. The visa exemption for travelers from the target market has proven to be feasible over the recent period as the number of visitors from these countries has continued to increase. In order to promote the existing successes, the State needs to expand the list of countries exempting visas for tourists. For those countries that need a visa, it is necessary to simplify the administrative procedures, shorten the process and improve the service capacity so that the time for issuing a visa for visitors is shortened to within a few hours. Moreover, the visa period should be longer, instead of being measured in days the limit should be extended to weeks or months to encourage visitors to stay longer in Vietnam or return in the future.

In each locality, it is necessary to improve policies to promote and create conditions for businesses in the tourism industry to develop in a green direction, increasing the ability to meet the needs of tourists, preserving heritage, culture, nature and promote diversity. Specific policies aim to support businesses in the tourism industry, such as support on tax rates and land ownership fees to encourage businesses to join the industry. Support travel businesses to access capital to expand their operations if they provide green tourism products. Similar support for restaurants and hotels when they provide and commit to serving green services or units and organizations that have been granted green labels.

Strengthen Human Resources for Green Tourism Development

To develop green tourism in the long term, it is necessary to focus on training and fostering green tourism-savvy employees to create human resources that meet the quality and quantity requirements and to provide green services and ensure sustainable development. Human resources in this sense are understood to include individuals involved in the process of providing green tourism services such as tour guides, travel agent staff, accommodation staff, local people.... These workers are trained, knowledgeable about green tourism, aware of, and ready to protect the environment, preserve the cultures and heritage in the areas where they live and provide services that form a basis for the conservation of the green tourism environment. Professional and knowledgeable service staff will help increase visitor satisfaction and contribute to the sustainable development of the destination.

Complete and Diversify Green Tourism Products

Developing Green tourism also means completing and developing a variety of green tourism products to attract tourists to use this product line. In order to develop and diversify green tourism products, localities should aim to provide tourism products associated with exploitation and introducing the natural landscapes of the destination. Products are diversified in the direction of discovery but aiming to maintain, preserve and develop local biodiversity if diversity is the advantage of the destination. Development of products aimed at preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of the destination should be encouraged. Products can also be completed in the direction of diverse tourism programs by combining experiential tourism, community, discovery, relaxation ... Developing craft villages of each locality is also one of the methods to attract Tourists to Green tourism. With the focus on the above diversity, the shift to green tourism will be promoted and sustainable development of the local areas will be ensured.

Develop and Expand Accommodation Facilities to Provide Green Certification Services

When a property provides accommodation services that take into account environmental protection factors such as economical use of water, no harmful discharge to the environment, practical activities to protect the environment and biodiversity and the preservation of local heritage, it will become attractive to visitors. Through this, tourists can give their contributions to the local development and the economy of the local people, not only causing no harmful effects but also helping the locality to develop sustainably..

CONCLUSIONS

This study clarifies rationale for green tourism as well as characteristics of green tourism compared to conventional tourism. It also identifies five influencing factors including: tourism products, destination transportation, accommodation facilities, human resources in green tourism and green tourism support policies. The element of green tourism support policy is considered to have the strongest impact on tourists' green tourism choice. These are important policy implications to provide solutions for developing green tourism in Vietnam.

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