FACTORS AFFECTING ECOTOURISM INTENTION TO MANG DEN OF GEN Z IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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Abstract

Ecotourism is rapidly expanding in Vietnam, leveraging the country's natural beauty and cultural heritage for sustainable development and local community benefits. Mang Den, with its biodiversity and cool climate, offers significant opportunities for growth, supported by local authorities' investments in infrastructure. The demand for ecotourism among environmentally conscious Gen Z is increasing as they seek authentic experiences that align with their values. Yet, research on ecotourism intentions, especially regarding Gen Z, is still limited. This study aims to identify the factors influencing Gen Z's ecotourism intentions toward Mang Den in Ho Chi Minh City. Using a quantitative approach, findings indicate that Perceived Behavior Control, Subjective Norms, Environmental Attitude, Eco-destination Image, Hedonism in Ecotourism, and Ecotourism Identity significantly affect ecotourism intention. The study also suggests implications to enhance ecotourism intention to Mang Den among Gen Z in Ho Chi Minh City.

Keywords

Ecotourism intention, Gen Z, Mang Den, Vietnam

JEL Classification

L83, Q56, M31
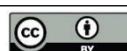
Introduction

Ecotourism is regarded as one of the fastest growing forms of tourism in recently years, creating enormous revenues for many countries (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2012). Vietnam's ecotourism is no exception, experiencing a dynamic growth, with the country's natural beauty and cultural heritage. With a variety of landscapes ranging from mountainous terrains to expansive national parks, Vietnam offers a ground for ecotourism development. This form of tourism not only supports conservation and cultural preservation but also contributes to sustainable development and local community benefits.

Mang Den, a well-known ecological destination in Vietnam's Central Highlands (formerly part of Kon Plông District, Kon Tum Province), is known for its cool climate, rich biodiversity, and natural landscapes. The local authorities have recognized Mang Den's potential, investing in infrastructure and service diversification. Tourism revenue has been climbing steadily, with 2023 marking a milestone of over 170 billion Vietnamese Dong and 1 million tourists (Ha Nam, 2024). This highlights Mang Den's economic promise and the potential of ecotourism as a sustainable development model.

The demand for domestic tourism among Gen Z in Vietnam is on an upward growth, with a concentration towards ecotourism. This environmentally conscious and digitally savvy generation is increasingly seeking authentic, nature-based experiences that align with their values of sustainability and adventure (Barbey, 2021). They are drawn to the interactive aspects of ecotourism, which offer conventional tourism and provide opportunities for environmental learning, and meaningful cultural exchanges. This trend reflects a broader shift in travel preferences, with Gen Z leading the charge towards more responsible and impactful forms of tourism within their own country. Therefore, it is undeniable that focusing on attracting Gen Z is a must in many ecotourism destinations.

Yet, research on ecotourism intention in Vietnam remains limited, especially regarding Gen Z. The lack of empirical evidence restricts effective strategic planning for destinations like Mang Den and increases the risk of unsustainable development. Therefore, this study aims to examine factors affecting ecotourism intention to Mang Den of Gen Z in Ho Chi Minh City, providing insights that support both theoretical understanding and practical strategies for ecotourism development.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Theoretical framework

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape an individual's intention, which then predicts actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In ecotourism, TPB can be applied to understand how these factors determine the intention of individuals to visit ecotourism destination. The attitudes include the personal evaluation towards to benefits of ecotourism or environmental problems, subjective norms can involve the influence of one's social circle's views on sustainable travel, and perceived behavioral control might reflect the availability of resources or opportunities a person is possessing, which affect their total confidence about the capability of participating in ecotourism.

The Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory, developed by Stern et al. (1999), offers a framework for understanding the psychological factors that lead to environmentally responsible behavior. The core is the idea that an individual's values influence their beliefs, creating a personal norm that motivates action. In the context of ecotourism, a person with strong biospheric values may believe that ecotourism supports conservation efforts. This belief can lead to a personal norm to engage in ecotourism, resulting in the intention to choose eco-friendly travel options.

The Value-Identity-Personal Norms (VIP) Model, developed by Werff & Steg (2016), builds on the established VBN theory by integrating the concept of self-identity. This model suggests that our

deeply held values inform our identity, which in turn influences our personal norms and consequent behavior. Specifically, it posits that if we identify with being environmentally responsible, this identity strengthens our personal norms to act in an eco-friendly manner. In the context of ecotourism, the VIP Model can help explain why individuals might choose to engage in ecotourism. It suggests that those who see themselves as part of the eco-friendly movement are more likely to feel personally compelled to support sustainable tourism practices.

The research hypotheses

Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), which is from TBP, is defined as a personal perception on the ease of performing or not performing a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, this factor represents the extent to which Gen Z are confident about their capacity of participating in ecotourism in Mang Den. According to TBP, PBC positively affects behavioral intention, which subsequently drive actual behavior. In the context of ecotourism, Lee & Jan (2017) concluded that this factor positively influences ecotourism intention, supporting the TBP. This finding aligns with the conclusion by Hassan et al. (2021), which states that PBC has a strong and positive impact on ecotourism intention. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: PBC has a positive effect on the ecotourism intention to Mang Den of Gen Z living in Ho Chi Minh City

Subjective norms (SN), as defined in the TPB, represents a person's perception of social pressure to participate in a specific action. Tailored to the context of ecotourism, SN assesses Gen Z's belief about whether their significant others such as family and friends would approve of them engaging in ecotourism activities in Mang Den. Like PBC, SN also has a positive impact on intention, as in the framework of TPB. In ecotourism context, Lee and Jan (2017), suggested that TPB effectively anticipates behavioral intention in ecotourism studies. Specifically, they implied that three factors in TPB, including SN positively affects ecotourism behavioral intention. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2021) affirmed the applicability of TPB in the ecotourism context and the positive effect of SN on ecotourism intention. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: SN has a positive effect on the ecotourism intention to Mang Den of Gen Z living in Ho Chi Minh City

Attitude in the TPB refers to the degree of favorability of the evaluation the person makes on the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, environmental attitude (EA) reflects Gen Z's concern on environmental problems and willingness to solve them. Lee and Jan (2017) have demonstrated in their research that EA is a determinant factor that positively influences individuals' ecotourism intention. This finding is consistent with the work of Hassan et al. (2021), which also confirms that a positive EA significantly impacts ecotourism intention. These studies provide empirical support for the notion that individuals with a positive view of ecotourism's environmental benefits are more likely to intend to engage in ecotourism activities. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: EA has a positive effect on the ecotourism intention to Mang Den of Gen Z living in Ho Chi Minh City

Hosany et al. (2007) stated that destination image refers to the impression, beliefs of a person about a destination. On the other hand, Jeong and Kim (2019) define eco-destination as the assessment of individual characteristics of a destination and the comprehensive overall impression created by a destination. In the context of this research, eco-destination image can be understood as the overall awareness of the preservation activities, sustainability degree and the natural beauty of an ecotourism destination. Luong (2023) has shown that eco-destination image has a direct, positive and significant

effect on ecotourism. Pham and Khanh (2021) also came up with the same results, emphasizing the positively direct impact of eco-destination image (EDI) on ecotourism intention. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: EDI has a positive effect on the ecotourism intention to Mang Den of Gen Z living in Ho Chi Minh City

Hedonism in Ecotourism (HE) is the perceived enjoyment of a person upon engaging in ecotourism. Much research has shown that pro-environmental factors are not the only determinant of ecotourism intention; in other words, hedonistic motivation influence engaging in tourism such as ecotourism (Chang & Chung, 2018). Sanchez - Torres et al. (2023) studied the impact of HE, along with environmental attitude and ecotourism identity on ecotourism intention. The results show that all three factors have positive influence on intention, which in turn affect ecotourism practice. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: HE has a positive effect on the ecotourism intention to Mang Den of Gen Z living in Ho Chi Minh City

Ecotourism identity (EI) refers to an individual's emotional attachment linked to positive ecotourism beliefs, reflecting self-worth, self-identity, and social identity within the ecotourism context (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2017). Sanchez-Torres et al. (2023) found that ecotourism identity, together with environmental attitudes and hedonistic motivation, significantly influences ecotourism intention and participation. Individuals with a stronger ecotourism identity and enjoyment of nature are more likely to engage actively in sustainable tourism. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: EI has a positive effect on the ecotourism intention to Mang Den of Gen Z living in Ho Chi Minh City.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed research model.

Figure 1: The proposed research model
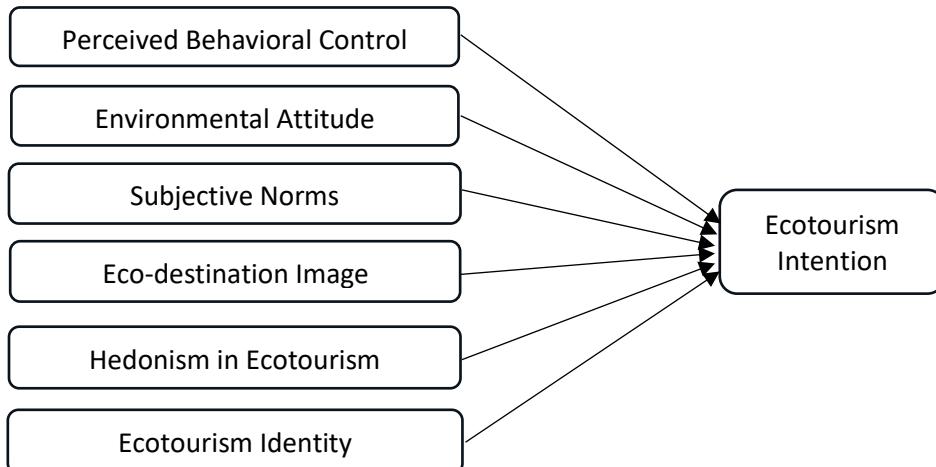
Source: synthesized by authors

Methodology

Quantitative methods form the backbone of methodology in this study. For the collection of primary data, survey questionnaire is applied, playing an important role in the research methodology. The survey will be carefully created to ensure accurately capturing Gen Z's ecotourism intention. The process of survey distribution, scheduled to occur between April and May 2024, will target Gen Z

individuals with an interest in ecotourism living in Ho Chi Minh City. The survey will be distributed to target audience via social media and university email.

The measurement scale in this study was modified from earlier empirical studies to fit the research topic. Scale of PBC, SN, from the research of Lee & Jan (2017); EA from the study of Gurbuz and Ozkan (2019); EDI, ecotourism intention from study of Luong (2023); HE, EI from the work of Sánchez-Torres et al. (2023). The questionnaire consists of 30 Likert-scale questions (responses are evaluated on a range from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree), four demographic questions, and three screening questions.

Upon gathering the survey responses, data analysis will be conducted using SPSSv20 software. The analysis process will start with testing the reliability of the survey questions using Cronbach's Alpha. This step ensures the items in the questionnaire are consistent and reliable. Next, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) will be performed to detect any underlying relationships between variables and refine the factors for further analysis. After that, Pearson correlation analysis will be applied to determine the correlation between independent and dependent variables. The last step involves using multiple linear regression to determine how each factor impacts the ecotourism intention.

Results

Descriptive statistics

In terms of Gender, a notable majority of the participants is female, making up 59.0% of the respondents, while male participants account for 41.0%. This gender distribution indicates a higher engagement rate among female respondents within the survey. The Education level of the respondents was predominantly at the University or College level, with an overwhelming 83.5% of participants reporting this as their highest level of education. This suggests that the survey was particularly represented by individuals with higher education backgrounds. Other educational attainments were less common among respondents, with High School education at 9.0%, Master or PhD level at 7.5%. When examining the Age distribution, the survey results were heavily weighted towards younger individuals, with 78.0% of respondents aged between 18-22 years. This indicates a strong presence of young adults, who are likely to be in their university years. The other age categories, including those 13-17 (4%), 22 -27 (10.0%), and 23 - 27 (8.0%), accounted for smaller segments of the survey population. The dominant percentage of respondents belonging to the "University/ College" Education level and "18-22" age group is understandable regarding the distribution of the survey, which concentrates on students' email, the author's social network (which mostly consist of people of the 18-22 age group) and students' group.

Cronbach's Alpha analysis

Table 1 that follows will demonstrate the internal consistency of this scale. The reliability results show that all seven scales meet the accepted standards and can be used for the next stages of analysis. The Cronbach's Alpha values are all above the acceptable threshold, and the corrected item–total correlations exceed 0.3, indicating that the items align well with the constructs they are meant to measure. In addition, the "Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted" values are all lower than the overall alpha, meaning that removing any item would weaken the scale. For these reasons, all items are retained across the six scales.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis results

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Perceived Behavior Control (Cronbach Alpha = 0.637)				
PBC1	12.505	1.518	0.430	0.559
PBC2	12.505	1.477	0.464	0.533
PBC3	12.375	1.492	0.414	0.572
PBC4	12.520	1.778	0.367	0.603
Subjective Norms (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.694)				
SN1	11.570	2.317	0.442	0.652
SN2	11.495	2.171	0.489	0.622
SN3	11.485	2.100	0.497	0.618
SN4	11.155	2.333	0.487	0.626
Environmental Attitude (Cronbach's Alpha = 0. 846)				
EA1	17.625	3.070	0.709	0.801
EA2	17.720	3.258	0.626	0.823
EA3	17.550	3.033	0.651	0.816
EA4	17.335	3.008	0.685	0.806
EA5	17.370	3.028	0.608	0.829
Eco-destination Image (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.819)				
EDI1	16.820	3.837	0.632	0.778
EDI2	16.955	3.812	0.612	0.783
EDI3	16.875	3.869	0.579	0.793
EDI4	16.845	3.639	0.647	0.773
EDI5	16.805	3.766	0.586	0.792
Hedonism in Ecotourism (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.784)				
HE1	8.360	1.086	0.673	0.650
HE2	8.345	1.192	0.597	0.734
HE3	8.455	1.114	0.599	0.734
Ecotourism Identity (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.832)				
EI1	15.905	4.529	0.647	0.794
EI2	15.895	4.597	0.629	0.799
EI3	15.910	4.957	0.625	0.801
EI4	16.010	4.663	0.670	0.787
EI5	15.900	4.734	0.590	0.810
Ecotourism Intention (Cronbach Alpha's = 0.754)				
INT1	12.485	2.522	0.465	0.743
INT2	12.265	2.548	0.529	0.710
INT3	12.460	2.260	0.624	0.656
INT4	12.380	2.136	0.595	0.672

Source: synthesized by the authors from SPSS

Exploratory Factor analysis

EFA with independent variables

As an integral part of the EFA, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were used to verify the data's factorability. The results indicated a KMO measure of 0.859, which surpasses the minimum requirement of 0.5, demonstrating the adequacy of the sample size. This high KMO value suggests that the proportion of variance among the variables is sufficiently large for a satisfactory factor analysis. The result agrees with the sample size above-mentioned.

Furthermore, Bartlett's test yielded a significance level of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 criterion, confirming that the variables are correlated well enough for a reliable factor analysis.

The EFA yielded a total of six factors with eigenvalues of 1.044, and explained 60.422% of the total variance. Together, these factors accounted for 60.422% of the total variance, which is notably higher than the acceptable threshold of 50% scientific research. These results suggest that the data set is suitable for factor analysis and the factors extracted are significant and relevant to the model.

After that the authors examined the Rotated Component Matrix to interpret the factor loadings of the 26 items across the six independent factors. The rotation method applied helps to achieve a simpler and more interpretable structure, where each item ideally loads highly on one factor and has minimal loading on others, clarifying the relationships between variables. This matrix is crucial for understanding the contribution of each item to its respective factor and for confirming the factor structure within the study, with the results shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Rotated Component Matrix

	Component					
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
EI4	0.775					
EI2	0.759					
EI3	0.745					
EI1	0.710					
EI5	0.633					
EA4		0.806				
EA5		0.786				
EA1		0.739				
EA3		0.738				
EA2		0.644				
EDI1			0.743			
EDI3			0.727			
EDI2			0.670			
EDI4			0.661			
EDI5			0.582			
SN3				0.712		
SN2				0.706		
SN4				0.649		
SN1				0.570		
HE1					0.759	
HE2					0.750	
HE3					0.641	
PBC3						0.693
PBC4						0.683
PBC1						0.619
PBC2						0.542

Source: synthesized by authors from SPSS

The Rotated Component Matrix analysis revealed that the six independent factors significantly contribute to explaining Generation Z's intentions towards ecotourism in Mang Den. The factor loadings for each item were all well above the 0.5 benchmark, indicating strong associations with their respective factors. Factor loadings across the scales indicate solid construct validity, with EI ranging

from 0.633 to 0.755 and other key constructs such as EA and EDI also showing consistently strong values. SN, HE, PBC all demonstrated acceptable loadings, confirming their relevance in shaping ecotourism intention. Overall, this robust factor structure supports the distinctiveness of each construct and strengthens the validity of the research model.

EFA with dependent variables

The data's appropriateness for factor analysis was evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO measure yielded a value of 0.739, which is above the threshold of 0.5, indicating that the sample size is adequate. Bartlett's Test showed a significance level of 0.000, affirming that the variables are sufficiently correlated for EFA. Furthermore, the dependent variable explains for 57.877% of the variance, which suggests that the dependent variable is eligible and each item in the scale is relevant to the model. After that, the Component Matrix of the dependent variable, which will examine the convergence of each item, will be illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Component Matrix of the dependent variable

Variable		Component
		1
	INT1	0.654
	INT2	0.756
Ecotourism Intention	INT3	0.804
	INT4	0.818

Source: synthesized by authors from SPSS

As inferred from Table 4, the factors loading for each item is all above the 0.5 threshold. These results suggest that the dependent variable is well-defined and that the items provide a comprehensive representation of the scale underlying structure. This analysis provides a solid foundation for understanding the dimensions that comprise the dependent variable in the research.

Pearson's correlation analysis

In assessing the relationships between independent and dependent variables within the EFA framework, the Pearson correlation coefficient was applied. The significance (Sig.) values ascertain the strength of the connections between variables, with values below 0.05 indicating statistically significant relationships. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) serves to gauge the degree of linear association between the variables. As the value of r approaches 1, it suggests an increasingly strong linear relationship. The results of Pearson's Correlation analysis are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Pearson's Correlation analysis results

		PBC	SN	EA	EDI	HE	EI	INT
PBC	Pearson Correlation	1	0.367	0.364	0.440	0.304	0.270	0.452
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
SN	Pearson Correlation	0.367	1	0.277	0.412	0.334	0.452	0.527
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
EA	Pearson Correlation	0.364	0.277	1	0.457	0.452	0.261	0.479

	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
EDI	Pearson Correlation	0.440	0.412	0.457	1	0.551	0.468	0.587
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000
HE	Pearson Correlation	0.304	0.334	0.452	0.551	1	0.478	0.601
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000
EI	Pearson Correlation	0.270	0.452	0.261	0.468	0.478	1	0.576
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000
INT	Pearson Correlation	0.452	0.527	0.479	0.587	0.601	0.576	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	

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

Source: synthesized by authors from SPSS

Pearson's correlation coefficient revealed that each of the independent variables has a significant relationship with ecotourism intention. This is evidenced by all sig. values of the independent factors below the 0.05 threshold. Regarding the strength of these relationships, HE showed the most substantial positive correlation with ecotourism intention (r = 0.601). EDI and EI also had strong correlations (r = 0.587 and r = 0.576, respectively), indicating these aspects significantly shaped the ecotourism decision-making process for this cohort. SN and EA were similarly linked to ecotourism intention, with correlations of r = 0.527 and r = 0.479, respectively, pointing to the impact of societal expectations and environmental values. PBC was also a considerable factor (r = 0.452), reflecting the role of feasibility in participating in ecotourism.

Multiple linear regression analysis

The results indicate an Adjusted R^2 value of 0.581 which suggests that the model explains 58.1% of the variability in the dependent variable, demonstrating a strong relationship between the model and the variables. This result indicates that the independent variables have a substantial impact on the dependent variable. However, it also implies that there is 41.9% of the variance in ecotourism intention that is not accounted for by the model, which could be due to other factors not included or random error. The standard error of the estimate is 0.31918, which provides an estimate of the standard deviation of the regression model's errors. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.768 suggests that there is no sight of autocorrelation, which is desirable for a regression analysis.

The results from the ANOVA show an F statistic of 46.956, which is a measure of the model's overall fit. Furthermore, the significance level of Sig = 0.000 confirms that there is a linear relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables included in the regression model.

The research hypotheses are tested to examine the effect of six independent variables on the ecotourism intention. The Table 6 reports the unstandardized coefficients, standardized coefficients, t-values, significance levels, and collinearity statistics for each predictor variable.

Table 6. Regression coefficients results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Test	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-0.505	0.303		-1.668	0.097		
PBC	0.162	0.067	0.130	2.425	0.016	0.739	1.354
SN	0.203	0.057	0.195	3.575	0.000	0.708	1.412
EA	0.163	0.063	0.142	2.606	0.010	0.705	1.419
EDI	0.147	0.065	0.142	2.272	0.024	0.543	1.842
HE	0.237	0.058	0.243	4.062	0.000	0.589	1.697
EI	0.217	0.053	0.234	4.102	0.000	0.648	1.543

Source: synthesized by authors from SPSS

All independent variables have significance values (Sig.) below the 0.05 threshold, indicating statistically significant relationships with the dependent variable. The VIF values are all below the threshold of 5, suggesting that multicollinearity does not pose a concern for the model. The Beta coefficients indicate the relative impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable, with higher values signifying a greater influence. All six hypotheses are supported. PBC ($\beta = 0.130$, $p = 0.016$), SN ($\beta = 0.195$, $p < 0.001$), EA ($\beta = 0.142$, $p = 0.010$), and EDI ($\beta = 0.142$, $p = 0.024$) all show significant positive effects on ecotourism intention. Hedonism has the strongest impact ($\beta = 0.243$, $p < 0.001$), followed by Ecotourism Identity ($\beta = 0.234$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H1 through H6 are all accepted.

In summary, the analysis supports all proposed hypotheses at the 5% significance level. The standardized regression equation for the model is:

$$INT = 0.130*PBC + 0.195*SN + 0.142*EA + 0.142*EDI + 0.243*HE + 0.234*EI + \varepsilon$$

Where: INT stands for Ecotourism Intention; PBC stands for Perceived Behavioral Control; SN stands for Subjective Norms; EA stands for Environmental Attitude; EDI stands for an Eco-destination Image; HE stands for Hedonism in Ecotourism; EI stands for Ecotourism Identity; ε is the standard error

Discussions and implications

Discussions

PBC is a significant, yet the least influential factor towards ecotourism intention of Mang Den, with $\beta=0.130$. This results closely aligns with findings of Lee & Jan (2017), in which PBC is the least impactful among 3 factors in the TPB. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2021) confirmed the impact of PBC on ecotourism intention; based on the research analysis results, PBC also has the lowest Beta, indicating the lowest impact. Furthermore, it is apparent that Gen Z's ecotourism intention is associated with their confidence on the perceived ease of visiting Mang Den. Particularly, if Gen Z feel that they have time, information, money and strength to visit Mang Den, they are likely to pay a visit.

SN significantly affects ecotourism intension, with a modest $\beta=0.195$. Although this differs from Hassan et al. (2021), it aligns with Lee & Jan (2017). The higher the degree of agreement from

important people around, the more actively they will participate in ecotourism activities in Mang Den. In ecotourism, it is important to create good image and memorable experience, so that travelers become the promoters themselves, which evidently has significant impact on ecotourism intention of people around them.

EA has a slightly low β=0.142. This implies that EA has a statistically significant impact on ecotourism, yet the impact is not considerable regarding the overall model. The study of Lee & Jan (2017), Gurbuz & Ozkan (2019) and Sanchez-Torres et al. (2023) prove the same results, which implies that EA significantly affects ecotourism intention. The more Gen Z feel they need to protect the environment, the more likely they choose the ecotourism. Therefore, an understanding of this feature of young generation is needed to transform their intention into the action of participating in ecotourism, creating a sustainable development in the sector (Sanchez-Torres et al., 2023)

Similar to EA, Eco-destination Image has a relatively modest β=0.142, yet it is sufficient to conclude that this factor has a significant influence on ecotourism intention. Regarding this results, Luong (2023) and Pham & Khanh (2021) also find out that Eco-destination Image has a positive impact on ecotourism intention. To attract more visitors to Mang Den, maintaining the natural landscape, ecological system, ensuring the safety as well as promoting its unique identity can help strengthen tourists' interest in the destination.

Hedonism stands out as the most influential factors on ecotourism intention of Mang Den of Gen Z in Ho Chi Minh City, with β=0.243. This result aligns with the conclusion of Sanchez - Torres et al. (2023), in which Hedonism in Ecotourism also plays the most important roles in formulating ecotourism intention. In the context of this research, there is an association between the perceived entertainment gained from ecotourism in Mang Den and ecotourism intention of Gen Z.

Coming second in terms of the most impactful determinants of ecotourism intention of Gen Z is EI with β=0.234. In the research by Sanchez - Torres et al. (2023), EI is also a strong determinant of ecotourism intention among young people. The results that ecotourism is not just a pastime, but a dimension of personal identity among Gen Z. It also indicates a deeply rooted motivation and a fundamental demand of attachment to ecotourism activities. This association illustrate the important role of personal identity and values in shaping ecotourism intention, showcasing the immersive and transformative nature of ecotourism engagement.

Implications

Perceived Behavioral Control, although the least influential factor, remains important for promoting ecotourism in Mang Den. Operators should maximize accessibility for Gen Z in Ho Chi Minh City by providing flexible, affordable packages and online booking options, while enhancing the availability of ecotourism information across websites, apps, and social media.

Subjective Norms also contribute modestly to ecotourism intention; therefore, local authorities and marketers should enhance community engagement through university-company partnerships, as well as community events that encourage tourists to share their experiences online as well as create positive social influence.

Environmental Attitude can be enhanced by encouraging eco-friendly behavior through rewards for conservation activities, green purchases, and low-impact tours. Operators should include tree planting or cleanup activities to appeal to environmentally conscious Gen Z, while authorities collaborate with universities to strengthen environmental education and run campaigns highlighting the importance of environmental protection.

For Eco-destination Image, operators should emphasize Mang Den's unique features-its climate, landscapes, eco-friendliness, and pristine nature-using storytelling and authentic testimonials. Local authorities must uphold strict environmental protection and integrate educational programs into tourism activities, reinforcing Mang Den as a responsible ecotourism destination.

Hedonism is the most influential factor, so operators should diversify enjoyable experiences such as adventure sports, wildlife viewing, and cultural encounters to increase Gen Z's enjoyment while fostering awareness of conservation. Authorities can promote ecotourism as a "natural classroom" to highlight its educational and cultural value.

Ecotourism Identity also plays a strong role; thus, operators should create online communities for sharing travel experiences and design personalized ecotourism activities that align with Gen Z's values. Customizable itineraries and hands-on conservation experiences can help ecotourism become a meaningful expression of personal identity and environmental commitment.

Conclusions

This study aimed to develop a model explaining the key factors influencing ecotourism intention to Mang Den among Generation Z in Ho Chi Minh City, yielding an adjusted R^2 of 0.581, indicating that the variables accounted for 58.1% of the variation in intention. Among the six variables, Hedonism in Ecotourism had the strongest effect, showing that Gen Z is highly motivated by enjoyment and positive experiences. Ecotourism Identity was the second most influential factor, indicating that many Gen Z individuals view ecotourism as part of their personal values. Subjective Norms, Environmental Attitude, Eco-destination Image, and Perceived Behavioral Control also contributed to intention, though to a lesser extent - reflecting the roles of social influence, environmental concern, destination appeal, and perceived ease of participation.

There are some limitations to this study. First, data was collected only from Ho Chi Minh City which may not limit the generalizability due to regional difference in living standard, infrastructure, culture and demand in tourism. Future research should expand to a broader geographic sample. Second, with 200 valid respondents, the sample is academically adequate to conduct analysis, but it should be bigger to illustrate a big picture of Gen Z. Further study should concentrate on building a larger and more diverse sample. Third, the research incorporates factors derived from empirical research rather than widely acknowledged theoretical frameworks. Further study should balance between theoretical and empirical studies when developing model.

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