TOURISTS' PERCEPTION OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM: A STUDY IN NINH BINH CITY, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Responsible tourism is considered a suitable form of tourism to promote sustainable tourism development. These issues are increasingly being researched in the tourism industry, but there is a lack of studies approaching them from the perspective of tourists' perception. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present the theory of responsible tourism and present the results of a survey on tourists' perception of responsible tourism in Ninh Binh. The research method includes examining relevant literature to present the relationship between sustainable tourism and responsible tourism and discussing the principles of responsible tourism. Tourists' perception is analyzed through a questionnaire survey conducted in 2017. The sampling method used in the survey is random selection. We need a responsible tourism industry that provides a way to minimize ecological impacts, benefit local communities, and reduce poverty - a responsible tourism industry reflected in the organization and practice in the economic, environmental, and cultural sectors. The results show that responsible tourism is still a new trend in Ninh Binh. Tourists have a low awareness of this issue. Therefore, education about responsible tourism is particularly important through knowledge sharing and building awareness of responsible tourism.
Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Responsible Tourism, Responsible Tourism Perception.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become a significant source of income in many countries, including those considered developed. However, general tourism development also comes with various risks, such as negative cultural and environmental impacts. Therefore, the tourism industry increasingly discusses "responsible tourism" to sustain balanced benefits across economic, environmental, and social aspects.

In recent trends, tourists' interest in ecotourism has increased, and tourism authorities have also recognized the benefits of ecotourism and nature-based tourism. These forms of tourism help raise awareness of environmental protection while sharing benefits with local communities. Some of the income generated from tourism businesses can be used for nature conservation and better protection against the negative impacts of rapid tourism growth.

The concept of responsible tourism, closely linked to sustainable development, calls for finding a compromise, avoiding conflicts between economic development on the one hand and social and environmental factors on the other. However, achieving a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development mentioned above requires understanding their interactions, both in scope and intensity. Among the issues faced by tourist areas, we can include transportation development, landscape destruction due to rapid and improper planning, natural resource exploitation management, precious natural area conservation, climate change mitigation, and social issues. Responsible tourism encompasses activities that allow for growth in a way that does not harm the current environment and preserves the culture, history, heritage, and achievements of the local community. According to this concept, the increasing emphasis is placed on sustainable tourism management and its resources that contribute to creating better-quality tourism products. People can use the environment during their travels and positively or negatively impact it. However, through responsible tourism, this environment can not only be effectively protected but also enriched. It is important that tourists cooperate with local authorities and tourism businesses in their efforts to engage in responsible tourism. However, many studies on responsible tourism have been conducted with a lack of a tourist perspective. Therefore, we conducted a study on tourists' perceptions of responsible tourism to provide more effective solutions for promoting responsible tourism.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

Theoretical Framework

The concepts of responsible tourism and sustainable tourism are related, so there is a certain overlap of common assumptions. The concept of sustainable tourism originates from the idea of responsible tourism developed by Hetzer in 1965. The concept of responsible tourism focuses on minimizing intervention in the natural environment, respecting cultural diversity, maximizing the involvement of local people in providing tourism services, and satisfying tourists (Weeden C., 2013). According to Wheller, tourism should be developed by local communities in control and maintained in small-scale groups of tourists. This approach, in turn, refers to alternative tourism, characterized by various forms of small-scale implementation of tourism programs. However, many authors, including Gaworecki, Kousis, and Goodwin, emphasize that sustainable tourism is...
seen only as small-scale tourism and is considered an alternative to mass tourism. According to A. Spenceley, sustainable tourism aims to integrate tourism activities with natural protection and develop a new ethical attitude among tourists. Therefore, the concept of sustainable development in tourism mainly addresses the following two aspects: popularization of forms of tourism related to the natural and social environment and the integration of tourism with the local community's social and economic life.

The connection of tourism with the concept of sustainable development, popularized in the past three decades, has led to the emergence and spread of the concept of "sustainable tourism." The definition cited by Mapjabil and Marzuki focuses on the three essential elements of sustainable tourism: environmental, social, and economic. According to these authors, sustainable tourism should be understood as tourism that is economically viable but does not harm resources, especially the natural environment and the local community. In 1993, the World Tourism Organization defined sustainable tourism as a company that meets the needs of modern tourists and regions while protecting and supporting tourism opportunities for future generations. In return, according to the European Commission's definition, sustainable tourism is a profitable tourism industry for economic and social development that does not harm the environment and the local culture. Thus, sustainable tourism reflects economic success and financial concern for the environment, protection, and development, as well as responsible behavior towards the cultural and social values - these three elements are interdependent.

According to Professor Harold Goodwin, "Responsible tourism is about responsibility for achieving sustainable development through tourism. It is identifying important economic, social, and environmental issues locally and addressing them." Responsible tourism also seeks to maximize the natural, economic, social, and cultural benefits of tourism but looks through the lens of individual and organizational responsibility. Responsible tourism recognizes the impact of tourism on a destination and seeks ways to maximize positive impacts while minimizing negative ones. Responsible tourism is about "making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit." Responsible tourism aims to appreciate the culture, traditions, cuisine, and heritage of local people in a respectful manner and always strives to contribute to the development of responsible and sustainable tourism. Therefore, the term responsible tourism focuses on nurturing tourists' awareness of responsibility for the places they visit. As pointed out by H. Goodwin, responsible tourism is not a separate, isolated form; instead, it intermingles with all forms of human activities and evolves with human needs, attitudes, and changes. The growing interest in responsible tourism is closely linked to increasing social sensitivity. Daily behaviors, such as littering, plastic bag distribution, or concern about the origin of food products, have become requirements for tour operators.

**Principles of Responsible Tourism**

Two primary documents present the principles of responsible tourism: the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism published by the World Tourism Organization (United Nations World Tourism Organization - UNWTO) and the principles of responsible tourism (Cape Town Declaration, 2002).

The principles of responsible tourism from the Cape Town Declaration are among the most important documents regarding responsible tourism principles. This document was developed at a
conference organized in 2002 by the Responsible Tourism Partnership and Tourism Western Cape as a pre-event for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The conference involved representatives from various interest groups in the tourism industry worldwide, including travel agents, tourism businesspeople, national park representatives, government officials, experts in the tourism field, non-governmental organizations, hotel groups, and many other organizations. According to the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism, the purpose is:

- Minimizing negative impacts in the economic, environmental, and social domains.
- Creating greater economic benefits for the local community and supporting the well-being of the host community.
- Improving working conditions and access to the tourism industry.
- Engaging with local residents in decisions that will affect their lives and opportunities.
- Supporting the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, thereby contributing to biodiversity conservation.
- Providing tourists with exciting experiences through close interaction with local residents, enabling them to learn and experience, and increasing their understanding of local culture, society, and the environment.
- Providing convenient infrastructure to support disabled individuals during their tourist visits.
- Building mutual respect between tourists and the host community, fostering local pride.

All signatories to the statement commit to developing a unified approach to responsible tourism for all parties involved in organizing tourism. Policy actions are grouped around economic, social, and environmental areas.

Economic Responsibility: Before taking action on tourism development, the economic impact can be significant, so tourism business activities need to be assessed to select forms of development that benefit the local community and simultaneously reduce negative impacts on the local livelihoods. Note that tourism is not always the best solution for community economic development. Increasing economic benefits should be achieved while ensuring that the local community genuinely participates in this process and that these benefits are truly allocated to them. Wherever possible, tourism should be used to alleviate poverty through the implementation of strategies for the poor.

Social Responsibility: The impact assessment in the social sphere needs to be considered at all stages of tourism projects, starting with their planning, to enhance positive effects and reduce negative ones. In addition, ensuring the participation rights of all parties, including the local community in planning and decision-making, is essential. Tourism activities should be linked to the local culture to maintain and emphasize cultural and social diversity.

Environmental Responsibility: The assessment of environmental impacts in the area should be considered at all stages of tourism projects, starting with their planning, to enhance positive impacts and reduce negative ones. Special attention should be given to the responsible use of resources to minimize waste and overconsumption. All relevant parties should be empowered and benefit from best practices, and they should seek advice from environmental and nature protection
experts when necessary. The diversity of the natural environment needs to be managed sustainably, and restorative actions should be taken when needed. Existing ecosystems and protected areas should be treated with respect.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

The research was conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The theoretical frameworks were synthesized from research literature and scientific articles. In particular, the study conducted a survey to assess tourists' awareness of responsible tourism. The survey was conducted, and the data collected were processed using SPSS statistical analysis software. The study performed descriptive statistical analysis and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify the factors influencing tourists' awareness of responsible tourism and propose solutions to enhance this awareness.

**RESULTS**

The survey on awareness of responsible tourism in Ninh Binh City relates to the need to specify specific actions in tourists' responsible behaviors. In this survey, we focused on the factors influencing tourists' behavior regarding awareness, cultural respect, and environmental considerations at tourist destinations. The main objective of the survey was to assess the level of awareness and behavior of tourists regarding responsible tourism and identify the factors influencing tourists' awareness. The sampling method used in the survey was a simple random selection, with 225 complete questionnaires collected in 2017. The survey results allowed for measuring the level of awareness of responsible tourism and identifying the most significant activities influencing tourists' responsible behavior.

**Assessment of Tourists' Awareness of Responsible Tourism**

The characteristics of respondents by gender showed a predominance of women in the survey (54.67%). In contrast, men constituted a slightly smaller group (45.33%). People aged 18-30 were the largest group among the surveyed samples (44.46%), followed by those aged 31-50 (30%), 30-35 (4.20%), over 50 (16.67%), and under 18 accounted for only 8.67%. The majority of tourists surveyed came from the central provinces (46%), with 28% from the northern region and 26% from the southern region.

From the statistical results, it is evident that 39.33% of tourists had never heard of the concept of responsible tourism, and 44.67% of tourists had heard of it but did not understand it accurately. Only 16.67% of tourists had a genuine understanding of responsible tourism. This indicates that responsible tourism is still unfamiliar to tourists, and they have limited knowledge of this concept. The table below provides statistical figures related to tourists' awareness of responsible tourism, divided by age groups to highlight potential variations in awareness among different age groups.

The awareness of tourists is divided into age groups. For tourists under 18, the majority had never heard of responsible tourism, which is understandable since this age group is relatively young and has limited knowledge, and responsible tourism is still a relatively new concept in Vietnam. Even among those aged 18 to 30, there is a tendency similar to the younger age group, with the majority having heard of responsible tourism but not fully understanding it (56.72%), and only 13.43% of tourists in this age group had a genuine understanding of responsible tourism. Similarly, for the age group 31-50, most tourists had heard of responsible tourism but had limited understanding (6.67%), and only 52.03% expressed a desire to communicate with local people, while 64% wanted
to learn about the local culture. These purposes demonstrate tourists' respect for local culture, indicating that they understand their responsibility in respecting the local community's culture and promoting its preservation.

Tourists evaluate their activities during their travel. While 49.33% of tourists properly dispose of trash, 26.66% still do not fully comply with this regulation. However, a significant number of tourists do not use biodegradable packaging, primarily using single-use plastic bags. This has a negative impact on the environment. Most tourists follow the rules at protected areas and do not harm the ecosystem. Moreover, they also conserve resources such as electricity and water effectively. It can be said that the majority of tourists follow environmental protection regulations well, except for the habit of using single-use plastic bags, which still exists and seriously affects the environment. Therefore, tourists need to change their thinking and behavior to better protect the environment.

Regarding tourists' respect for local culture, the majority of tourists respect the local culture, with 50% having the intention to introduce the local culture of the tourist destination to other tourists, and 50% being able to adapt to the local people's way of life. However, the proportion of tourists who rent local people's houses or travel together with them is not very high. This may be because some tourists book package tours that do not include interaction with local residents during the trip. Additionally, 48% of tourists purchase local products, while 19.33% are hesitant, and 32.67% do not buy local products. This aspect needs improvement because buying local products contributes to sharing the benefits of tourism with the local community and encourages them to continue producing traditional products and preserving their cultural values.

Factors Influencing Tourists' Awareness of Responsible Tourism

Table 5 shows that the statistical F value calculated from the R square of the model with a very small observed significance level (sig = 0) indicates that the multiple linear regression model is suitable for the dataset and can be used. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.762 means that the multiple linear regression model constructed is appropriate for the dataset, explaining 76.2% of the observed differences in tourists' awareness. In other words, approximately 76.2% of the variance in tourists' awareness can be explained by differences in four components: demographics, information reception processes, interaction among tourists, and cost-related issues.

Table 1
Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis Indices of Independent Variables on Tourists' Awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Summaryb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Independent variables: Demographics, information processing, interactivity among tourists, and cost issues.
b. Dependent variable: Tourists' perception.

ANOVAb
Next, the F-test is conducted to assess the overall fit of the linear regression model, examining whether the dependent variable has a linear relationship with the entire set of independent variables. The null hypothesis $H_0$ is set as follows: $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = 0$.

From the table above, it is shown that the p-value (sig.) is very small, with a value of 0.000. This allows us to reject the null hypothesis $H_0$, indicating that the combination of the variables present in the model can explain the variation in $Y$ - the general assessment of festival quality. The model constructed is suitable for the dataset, with an adequacy level of 65.1%.

Regarding the assumption of independence of residuals, the Durbin-Watson statistic is observed to be 1.601, falling within the range $[du; 4-du]$. This allows us to conclude that the residuals are independent of each other.

### Table 2

**Regression Analysis of the Four Factors on the Dependent Variable**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>24.745</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.847</td>
<td>11.504</td>
<td>0.000a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>88.542</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>0.509</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126.268</td>
<td>225</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix

#### Model Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R squared</th>
<th>Adjusted R squared</th>
<th>Standard error of the model.</th>
<th>Durbin-Watson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.805a</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>0.762</td>
<td>0.52734</td>
<td>1.712</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


b. Dependent Variable: Tourists' Perception.

With a high level of tolerance (Tolerance > 1) and low variance inflation factor (VIF) values (VIF < 10), there are no signs of multicollinearity, and it is therefore safe to use the regression equation
The purpose of the t-test is to examine whether the regression coefficient of the variable being introduced is equal to 0. Regarding the significance level (sig.) of the independent variables, all four variables have significance levels less than 0.05. This indicates that there is enough statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis H0 for these factors, with a significance level of 95%. Therefore, it can be concluded that all four independent variables have an impact on tourists' awareness of responsible tourism. These factors are significant in the model and have a positive effect on tourists' awareness, as indicated by the positive regression coefficients.

The regression analysis results provide us with the predictive equation for the General Assessment of Tourists' Awareness of Responsible Tourism as follows:

\[
Y = 1.932 + 0.098x_1 + 0.237x_2 + 0.434x_3 + 0.328x_4
\]

General assessment of tourists' awareness = 1.932 + 0.098 Demographics + 0.237 Information Processing + 0.434 Interaction Among Tourists + 0.328 Cost Issue.

Based on the regression model of factors influencing tourists' awareness of responsible tourism, the coefficient \(\beta_0 = 1.932\) reflects the level of tourists' awareness when not influenced by the factors included in the model. The coefficient \(\beta_1 = 0.098\) means that when the "Demographics" factor changes by 1 unit while other factors remain unchanged, it leads to a corresponding change of 0.098 units in tourists' awareness. A similar explanation applies to the remaining variables (assuming the other factors remain constant). Through standardized regression coefficients, we can understand the importance of each factor in the equation. Specifically, "Interaction Among Tourists" has the most significant influence (0.434), followed by the "Cost Issue." In general, all four factors have an impact, and any variation in one of the four factors can create changes in tourists' "Awareness of Responsible Tourism." This serves as the basis for developing recommendations to enhance tourists' awareness of responsible tourism.

**CONCLUSION**

The study has synthesized theoretical foundations related to responsible tourism. Additionally, it has assessed the awareness of tourists about responsible tourism through a questionnaire survey. The results show that the majority of tourists are either unaware of responsible tourism or have a limited understanding of it. Therefore, when evaluating the responsible tourism behaviors of tourists, they may be surprised by their own results.

The study used factor analysis to identify factors influencing tourists' awareness of responsible tourism, including "demographics," "information processing," "interaction among tourists," and "cost factors." Different age groups of tourists demonstrated varying levels of awareness of responsible tourism, with higher-educated groups showing greater awareness. In the information processing aspect, tourists who regularly access information tend to be more aware of responsible tourism, and those with better information processing skills have a deeper understanding of it. However, tourists' awareness can also be influenced by interactions with other tourists. Notably, the "interaction among tourists" factor has the most significant impact, emphasizing the importance of tourists influencing each other and rapidly spreading awareness of responsible tourism.

While many tourists may not have a comprehensive understanding of responsible tourism, their behaviors often demonstrate responsibility towards the environment and local culture at their travel
destinations. However, certain criteria indicate that tourists have not fully grasped and implemented responsible tourism practices, such as limited usage of biodegradable products while the widespread use of plastic bags persists. Some tourists also fall short in properly disposing of trash and purchasing and consuming local products.

Local authorities, tourism businesses, and tour guides play crucial roles in encouraging and guiding tourists to better fulfill their responsibilities during their travels. Tourism authorities can conduct educational campaigns on responsible tourism in the city by disseminating relevant information and providing specific guidelines to tourists. Moreover, tour companies should incorporate responsible tourism activities into their tour programs, such as home-stays or cultural exchange experiences with locals. Tour guides, being instrumental in conveying the concept of responsible tourism, should directly instruct tourists on how to fulfill their responsibilities during their trips.

Ultimately, every tourist should raise their awareness of responsible tourism and actively participate in protecting the environment, respecting local communities, and improving our way of life.

References