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Visiting Intentions of Young Malaysian Tourists Towards Eco-Friendly Destinations

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Abstract
Sustainability in tourism is a rising trend that has gained importance in many parts of the world, particularly in developed economies. Of late, there is a growing awareness of sustainable tourism in developing economies. This paper reports the findings from a study on the determinants of visiting intentions of young Malaysian tourists towards eco-friendly destinations. Through the literature review, the identified determinants are attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, future time perspective and perceived green image. A multiple regression analysis was performed to ascertain the influence of each determinant on visiting intentions of young Malaysian tourists towards eco-friendly destinations. Attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control each exerts positive significant influence while future time perspective and perceived green image turned out to be insignificant factors. Perceived behavioral control appears to be the strongest predictor. The implication of the study for the practice is that eco-friendly concepts are in demand by young Malaysian tourists.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The environment is susceptible to harm caused by global warming, pollution, acid rain, ozone layer and natural resources depletion, loss of biodiversity, waste disposal, overpopulation and deforestation. These factors arise mostly due to the unsustainable use of natural resources. Singh and Singh (2017) believe that a majority of environmental changes stem from the advent of globalization and human civilization. Thus, the promotion of sustainable consumption as part of the pursuit towards sustainable development has gained great importance. Measures to achieve long term economic growth should also be implemented as they are critical for sustainable development. Since all United Nations member states have adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is no surprise that there is an extensive number of researches conducted relating to sustainable development. For example, research on sustainable cities (Sodiq et al., 2019), sustainability in health sector (Chen et al., 2020), sustainability in banking (Mohammad et al., 2017), sustainability in agriculture (Bilali & Allahyari, 2018) and many more. The present study focuses on ecotourism which is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (What Is Ecotourism - the International Ecotourism Society, 2019). In particular, this study examines the visiting intentions of young Malaysian tourists towards eco-friendly destinations and looks into the influence of attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, future time perspective and the perceived green image of a destination.

Malaysia has embarked on the journey towards sustainability in tourism as early as 1977 when Malaysia's Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism introduced the national ecotourism plan. This plan described the government's involvement in the travel industry and its support for ecotourism in Malaysia. The ecotourism concern in Malaysia revolves on the management of marine environment, wildlife and forestry. The government has also designed various laws relating to the protection of cultural heritage, environment and wildlife (Noor, 2017).

Malaysia's tourism sector is an important contributor to GDP. In 2019, 15.9% of its GDP was contributed by Gross Value Added of Tourism Industries (Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, 2020). The tourist receipts totalled RM86,143.5 million and 26,100,784 tourists arrived in Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2021). In 2021, due to border closure in many countries as a result of the covid19 pandemic, only 134,728 arrived in Malaysia, bringing in an expenditure totalling merely RM238.7 million. On the domestic front, in 2019, 332.4 million trips were made by domestic travellers amounting to an expenditure growth rate of 11.5% or RM103.2 billion in equivalent. The covid19 pandemic adversely affected the tourism industry and Malaysia was not spared. The receipts dropped in 2020 by 85.27% and the arrivals by 83.4% (Tourism Malaysia, 2021). In 2021, the domestic tourism expenditure dropped 54.5% with only RM18.4 billion expenditure recorded as compared to RM40.4 billion recorded in 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, 2022).

The importance of sustainability in tourism cannot be denied. The accuracy of this statement is underlined by the fact that ecotourism is of growing interest to academics and practitioners due to increased environmental concern and climate change (Pham & Khanh, 2020). In addition, ecotourism offers a lot of benefits, most important of all is the prevention of environment degradation. It also empowers the local residents through positive economic impacts. The locals could obtain additional earnings directly through tour fees, admission and accommodation fees. Furthermore, the World Tourism Organization stated that when tourism is responsibly planned and managed, it has the potential to create jobs, promote social integration inclusivity, protect natural and cultural heritage, conserve biodiversity, generate sustainable livelihoods and improve human welfare.

Thus, the present study aims to examine the factors that influence the visiting intentions of young Malaysian tourists towards eco-friendly destinations and determine the best predictor of visiting intentions. The factors that are expected to influence the visiting intentions are attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, future time perspective and perceived green image. The Theory of Planned Behavior and the Time Perspective theory form the underlying basis of the study.

In this study, young tourists born between 1983 and 2002 (millennials and generation Z who have travelled in 2019-2020 period) are the respondents as the researchers believe that they form an important group for the tourism industry to focus on. In 2018, 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals were recorded, greater than the number forecasted (*International Tourist Arrivals Reach 1.4 billion Two Years Ahead of Forecasts | UNWTO*, 2019). This huge number was attributed to a few factors namely younger generations (millennials and generation Z) that see travelling as a top aspiration (The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2019,2019) and more affordable and accessible travel due to the invention of digital technologies and platforms (Srivastava, 2019).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

A global survey conducted over 12000 respondents in 2018 indicated that 87% of them wanted to travel in sustainable manner and 39% of respondents have always travelled in that fashion (Lock, 2019). These figures imply there is a huge potential for sustainable tourism. Several studies were conducted in the past to examine the visiting behaviors/intentions of tourists in the ecotourism context. Ashraf and others (2019) emphasized the importance in also considering the eastern perspective on eco-friendly tourism. Hence, their study on eco-tourism gathered information from respondents in China.

Ashraf and others state that the intention to visit eco-friendly destinations refer to a behavior that is pro-social and/or pro-environmental. Another view on this is that the intention to visit eco-friendly destinations is out of self-interest or self-involvement. Pham and Khanh (2020) define eco-tourism intention as "a tourist's intention to visit an ecotourism location in the near future".

A survey of other literature shows that much discussion centered on the factors that influence the visiting intentions towards eco-friendly destinations. These factors were examined as they were proposed by theories or their importance was emphasized by existing studies. The theory of planned behavior or TPB (Ajzen, 1985), (Ajzen, 1991) which explains how behavioral intentions develop in the context of self-interest behaviors have been applied in studies by Ashraf and others (2019), Ashraf and others (2020), Verma and Chandra (2018), Joo and others (2020), and Han and others (2010), to name a few. Thus, it makes sense to adopt the theory as the

underlying basis of the present study and examine the factors such as Attitude, Subjective Norm and Perceived Behavioral Control. Attitude considers the degree a person evaluates or appraises a behavior as unfavorable or favorable (Ajzen, 1991). Subjective Norm considers that (not) performing a certain behavior depends on perceived social pressure (Ajzen, 1991). Perceived Behavioral Control meanwhile refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and is assumed to reflect past experience and anticipated impediments and obstacles.

Another independent variable examined in the present study, Future Time Perspective, is related to the time perspective theory. It refers to an individual's view on the significance of future, present and past time. A study cited by Pham and Khanh (2020) reveal that responsible attitude towards the environment is strongly influenced by time perspective. People who are future oriented are often more concerned with the environment than people with present time orientation and they work to solve environmental problems (Pham & Khanh, 2020).

Meanwhile, image is the most significant component during the process of decision making and a destination's perceived green image is included by other researchers as a motivational factor when examining behavioral intention (Ashraf et al., 2020b). Ashraf et al. (2020a) investigated the positive effects of TPB factors and perceived green image as well as personal values of Schwartz on young tourists' intentions to visit eco-friendly sites in Beijing. Using the structural equation modeling, they found that these variables positively affect their intentions to visit. Another study which applied the same technique of analysis also proved that a positive relationship exists between a green image and intention to revisit small and medium sized towns. In addition, Ahmad and others (2020) examined tourists' intentions to visit eco-friendly destinations in China and discovered all TPB factors positively affect the intentions to visit. In yet another study using the structural equation model but conducted in India, findings point out that attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control positively influence the intentions to visit. Joo and others (2020) investigated sustainable rural tourism in South Korea, with TPB factors and trip experience sharing and intensity of social media use forming the research framework. Their findings suggest attitude is insignificant while subjective norm and perceived behavioral control are.

On a slightly different angle, Pham and Khanh (2020) consider the influence of time perspective, environmental concern and destination image on eco-tourism visiting intentions in Vietnam. The results indicate that these factors affect visiting intentions positively. Doran and others (2017) found that time perspective, efficacy beliefs and value orientations explain about 53% of the behavioral intentions' variance. Also, Eastman and others (2020) who included future time perspective in their study found the factor to positively influence sustainable behaviors.

The literature review suggests that the TPB is most apt and has often been used in studies pertaining to sustainable tourism with most of the TPB factors oftentimes positively influencing visiting intentions. Future time perspective and green image also appear important in determining tourists' intentions to visit eco-friendly destinations. Thus, the present study examines all these five factors' influence on visiting intentions of tourists towards eco-friendly destinations in the Malaysian context. It is reasonable to include the following hypotheses in this study:

H1: There is a positive relationship between the attitude of tourists and the visiting intention towards eco-friendly destinations.

H2: There is a positive relationship between the subjective norms of tourists and the visiting intention towards eco-friendly destinations.

H3: There is a positive relationship between the perceived behavioral control of tourists and the visiting intention towards eco-friendly destinations.

H4: There is a positive relationship between future time perspective and the visiting intention towards eco-friendly destinations.

H5: There is a positive relationship between a destination's perceived green image and the visiting intention towards eco-friendly destinations.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The five hypotheses developed were tested to ascertain whether or not Attitude, Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioral Control, Future Time Perspective and Perceived Green Image significantly influence visiting intentions of young Malaysian tourists towards eco-friendly destinations. Within this research, no sampling frame exists as the target population consists of all young Malaysian tourists and not every member of this population can be listed. For this reason, non-probability sampling is applied (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Questionnaires were designed by adopting and adapting previous studies with similar objectives. They were distributed online to reach out to Malaysians born between 1983 and 2002 easily due to the Covid19 lockdown in the country. Non-probability sampling such as convenience, snowball and purposive sampling techniques were used to gather the data.

Regarding the sample size Tabachnick & Fidell (2014, p. 159) provide two formulas as simple rules of thumb:

m = Number of independent variables

a. $N \geq 50 + 8m$ to test multiple correlation

b. $N \geq 104 + m$ to test individual predictors

Within this research both – multiple correlation as well as individual predictors – are of interest in which case Tabachnick & Fidell (2014) suggests applying both calculations and use the higher result. A sample size of 200 respondents were targeted, in line with extant literature and clearly above the suggested sample size (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). The questionnaire contains filter questions to ensure only Malaysian nationality born between 1983 and 2002 and who traveled within the years 2019 – 2020 at least once took part in the survey.

The TPB factors were measured through different items. Attitude was measured by four items adopted and adapted from Verma and Chandra (2018). Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioral Control were adapted from Ashraf and others (2019). Future Time Perspective was measured by five items used in Pham and Khanh (2020) while Perceived Green Image was measured by four items as found in the article by Ashraf and others (2019). The dependent variable was represented by items that measure 'visiting an eco-friendly destination', adapted from Verma and Chandra (2018). A five-point Likert scale was applied for the measurement of all the variables. Reliability analysis was conducted to ensure the instrument of measurement is consistent and stable.

For the statistical analysis, both correlation and multiple regression techniques were used to ascertain the strength of association and influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Furthermore, the multiple regression technique enables the best predictor for visiting intentions of young Malaysian tourists be uncovered. Before conducting the multiple regression analysis, the assumptions of multiple regression would be checked. It is important not to violate them. The preliminary test of the assumptions considers outliers, sample size, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics of all variables as shown in Table 1 indicate that Subjective Norms has the lowest mean and highest standard deviation. Visiting Intention has the highest mean. Five of the six variables have a mean exceeding four on the Likert scale. Thus, this implies that the sample show greater agreement with the items in the questionnaire.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of all variables

		ATT	SN	PBC	FTP	PGI	VI
Mean		4.3244	3.5106	4.2146	4.0449	4.2293	4.3512
Std Dev		0.5482	0.8122	0.5327	0.5372	0.5450	0.5709
Variance		0.301	0.660	0.284	0.284	0.297	0.326
Minimum		2.00	1.00	2.67	2.67	2.00	3.00
Maximum		5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Percentile	25	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.60	4.00
	50	4.25	3.67	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.33
	75	5.00	4.00	4.67	4.40	4.75	5.00
Skewness		-0.222	0.015	-0.073	0.015	-0.071	-0.403
Kurtosis		-0.881	-0.283	-0.735	-0.373	-0.548	-0.660
z-score		-2.208	-0.709	-1.842	-0.935	-1.373	-1.654

Preliminary test of the assumptions indicates that there are seven outliers identified by using the box plots. Based on Pallant (2016), five of these outliers were deleted as the outliers were rather extreme and correcting them to fewer extreme values would mean a major change to the real values. This deletion means that the sample size is 204. For normality, the mean and the 5% trimmed mean for all variables in the sample seemed very similar, hinting at normality. Skewness and Kurtosis statistics further confirm that the assumption of normal distribution is not violated. The assumption of linearity is not violated as none of the scatterplots reveals any curvilinear relation.

The assumption of homoscedasticity requires one to observe the residual scatterplots. From the observation, the assumption of homoscedasticity can be accepted as the majority of the points are found in the center of the scatterplots and there is no curvilinear or a distinct pattern which is higher on one particular side. Finally, there seems to be no evidence of multicollinearity as none of the independent variables show a correlation of ≥ 07 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) with another independent variable. The reliability analysis conducted also reveals that the values of Cronbach's Alpha of each variable supports the assumptions of reliability

4.1. Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation was conducted and the outcome is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

		ATT	SN	PBC	FTP	PGI	VI
ATT	Pearson Correlation	1	0.407**	0.371**	0.295**	0.461**	0.491**
SN	Pearson Correlation	0.407**	1	0.159*	0.376**	0.255**	0.324**
PBC	Pearson Correlation	0.371**	0.159*	1	0.251**	0.470**	0.585**
FTP	Pearson Correlation	0.295**	0.376**	0.251**	1	0.281**	0.304**
PGI	Pearson Correlation	0.461**	0.255**	0.470**	0.281**	1	0.421**
VI	Pearson Correlation	0.491**	0.324**	0.585**	0.304**	0.421**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results show that there is highest association between VI and PBC (0.585), followed second by the association between VI and ATT (0.491), third by the association between VI and PGI (0.421), VI and SN (0.324) and VI and FTP (0.304). The correlation coefficients imply that the association between VI and each factor range between very weak to strongly considerable. They are all positive and significant at 1%.

4.2. Multiple Regression Analysis

The output from the multiple regression analysis is presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: Model Summary of Multiple Regression

Model Summary[b]				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.673[a]	0.453	0.439	0.42869

a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Green Image, Subjective Norms, Future Time Perspective, Perceived Behavioral Control, Attitude
b. Dependent Variable: Visiting Intention

Table 4: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30.102	5	6.020	32.759	0.000[b]
	Residual	36.388	190	0.184		
	Total	66.490	203			

a.Dependent Variable: Visiting Intention
b.Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Green Image, Subjective Norms, Future Time Perspective, Perceived Behavioral Control, Attitude

Table 5: Coefficients of Multiple Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable: Visiting Intention		Unstd. Coeff. B	Std. Error	Standardized Coeff. Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	0.390	0.336		1.161	0.247
	ATT	0.251	0.069	0.233	3.630	0.000
	SN	0.091	0.046	0.121	2.001	0.047
	PBC	0.473	0.067	0.434	7.098	0.000
	FTP	0.068	0.063	0.063	1.081	0.281
	PGI	0.067	0.070	0.061	0.949	0.344

The R-square coefficient indicates that 45.3% of the variation in VI can be explained by the entire model. Thus, nearly half of the variance of VI can be explained and this can be seen as quite a good fit of the model. The F statistic in Table 4.5 is significant (p-value = 0.00) which implies that a significant proportion of the variance in VI can be explained by the model. In Table 4.6, the significant values < 0.05 for the independent variables Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behavioral Control imply that they are important factors influencing Visiting Intention while Future Time Perspective and Perceived Green Image are not (significant values > 0.05). The most important factor would be Perceived Behavioral Control as it has the largest standardized beta coefficient among the five factors examined.

Based on the findings, the significant factors influencing young Malaysian visitors' intentions towards eco-friendly destinations in the country are in line with the findings of Verma and Chandra (2018), Ahmad and others (2020) and Hwang and others (2020) where these TPB factors exert significant positive influence. Nevertheless, the insignificant Perceived Green Image result obtained appear to be inconsistent with findings from previous studies such as Melé and others (2020), Ashraf and others (2019). and Pham and Khanh (2020). Furthermore, contrary to findings by Pham and Khanh (2020), Doran and others (2017) and Eastman and others (2020), Future Time Perspective does not influence young Malaysian's visiting intentions towards eco-friendly destinations.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section concludes the present study and provide some recommendations which may be useful to policymakers to encourage more tourist visits to eco-friendly destinations. The aim is to embrace eco-tourism so that the nation's environment is not harmed while at the same time generating profit to local businesses and the tourism industry. Tourism industry players must recognize that eco-friendly tourism concepts help to protect its resources – nature, environment, wildlife, climate and others – and eco-friendliness and sustainability safeguard the future of the industry. Most of the young Malaysians involved in the study stated that they would like to visit eco-friendly destinations in the future. Furthermore, small businesses whose survival depends on the surrounding community were badly hit due to the economic impact of the pandemic (Amizahanum, Roshidi & Hasnida, 2021). Many tourist operators are small businesses that need to be assisted through implementation of effective government policies and mechanisms should there be such disease outbreaks in the future.

The objective of the present study is to ascertain the influence of TPB factors such as Attitude, Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioral Control, including Future Time Perspective and Perceived Green Image. It appears that young Malaysians find Attitude, Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioral Control positively and significantly influence their visiting intentions towards eco-friendly destinations.

Based on these findings, Malaysian travel agencies and tour operators should apply eco-friendly and sustainable concepts in their offering and promote this competitive advantage. Resorts and hotels could implement higher green standards in their service offering. Marketing campaigns to increase young Malaysians' visiting intentions could also target their Perceived Behavioral Control as this is the best predictor found from the regression analysis. A good customer relationship management should be applied to provide the best experience to customers and strengthen their loyalty for future visits. It is also highly important for the country to further protect its environment to safeguard nature for locals and tourists of future generations.

6.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The sample used is convenience sampling technique which means that the generalizability of the findings could come into question. The R-square from the multiple regression also shows only approximately 50% of the variance in the visiting intentions variable could be explained by changes in attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, future time perspective and perceived green image. This implies a somewhat low explanatory power.

Due to the limitations, the present study suggests these to be done in the future. First, similar research could be conducted using a larger sample size or using a different sampling technique to ensure that the data better represents the general population in Malaysia. Second, besides focusing only on quantitative study, future research could look into conducting a qualitative study for example, through interviews. This could enable the researchers to better discover what drives tourists in their intentions to eco-friendly destinations. Third, future research could include more or different independent variables as a part of the model determining visiting intentions to eco-friendly destinations. This could potentially improve the explanatory power of the current model.

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