

An Exploratory Study on the Tourist Intention to Visit Behaviour: A Case of Eco-Tourism Development within Cities at Papua Pegunungan Province Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Eco-tourism is gaining prominence as a sustainable approach to tourism development, especially in regions with rich natural and cultural resources. This study explores the factors influencing tourists' intentions to visit eco-tourism destinations within cities in Papua Pegunungan Province, Indonesia. Using an exploratory approach, this research examines key determinants such as environmental awareness, destination attractiveness, local community engagement, and infrastructure availability. Data were collected through surveys and interviews with potential tourists and stakeholders. The findings suggest that perceived environmental benefits, unique cultural experiences, and accessibility significantly impact tourists' visit intentions. The study also highlights challenges in eco-tourism development, including infrastructure limitations and the need for greater community involvement. These insights provide valuable implications for policymakers, tourism planners, and local stakeholders in enhancing eco-tourism initiatives. The study concludes with recommendations to strengthen sustainable tourism strategies and improve tourist experiences in Papua Pegunungan Province.

KEYWORDS: eco-tourism development, Papua Pegunungan province, exploratory study

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Profiling Papua Pegunungan Province of Indonesia

Papua Pegunungan Province, officially established in 2022 as part of Indonesia's regional expansion, is one of the newly formed provinces in the Papua region. The province is predominantly mountainous, characterized by its rugged terrain, vast highland ecosystems, and rich biodiversity (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022). The region is home to indigenous communities such as the Dani, Lani, and Yali, who have preserved their traditional lifestyles,

including subsistence farming and intricate social structures (Suparlan, 1995). Papua Pegunungan's economy is primarily based on agriculture, forestry, and small-scale trade, with potential for eco-tourism due to its unique landscapes and cultural heritage (BPS Papua Pegunungan, 2023). However, infrastructure challenges, including limited road access and connectivity issues, remain key concerns for development (Setyawati et al., 2023). The region also holds significant ecological importance, being part of the Lorentz National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its diverse flora and fauna (UNESCO, 1999). As the province undergoes development, there is a growing emphasis on sustainable economic growth that balances environmental conservation with socio-economic progress (Widjaja & Rahawarin, 2023).

B. Defining Eco-Tourism Business Development

Eco-tourism business development refers to the strategic planning and implementation of tourism activities that emphasize environmental conservation, local community involvement, and sustainable economic growth. According to Honey (2008), eco-tourism is a responsible form of travel that prioritizes the preservation of natural environments while providing socio-economic benefits to host communities. Developing an eco-tourism business requires a balance between environmental sustainability and profitability, which can be achieved through eco-friendly accommodations, nature-based attractions, and cultural heritage experiences (Weaver, 2001). Furthermore, sustainable eco-tourism businesses integrate local stakeholders in decision-making processes, ensuring that tourism development aligns with the ecological and cultural values of the region (Fennell, 2020). In the context of emerging eco-tourism destinations, proper infrastructure, policy support, and marketing strategies play a crucial role in attracting responsible tourists while mitigating negative environmental impacts (Buckley, 2012). Thus, eco-tourism business development is a multidimensional process that necessitates collaboration between governments, private sectors, and local communities to create long-term benefits for both the environment and the economy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theory of Reason Action on the Tourist Visit Intention

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), is a widely used psychological framework for understanding human behavior, including tourist visit intention. The theory posits that an individual's behavioral intention is primarily influenced by two factors: attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms. In the context of tourism, a tourist's intention to visit a destination is shaped by their attitude, which reflects their overall evaluation of the place, and subjective norms, which involve perceived social pressures from family, friends, or society (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Several studies have applied TRA to tourism behavior, demonstrating that positive perceptions of eco-tourism destinations—such as environmental sustainability, cultural uniqueness, and destination attractiveness—can significantly enhance tourists' visit intentions (Han & Kim, 2010). Moreover, social influences, including recommendations from peers and online reviews, also play a crucial role in shaping travel decisions (Lam

& Hsu, 2006). Understanding these factors can help tourism stakeholders develop effective marketing strategies to promote eco-tourism in destinations such as Papua Pegunungan Province, Indonesia.

B. Theory of Planned Behaviour on the Tourist Visit Intention

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) is a widely used psychological framework for understanding and predicting human behavior, including tourist visit intention. According to TPB, an individual's intention to perform a behavior is influenced by three key factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of tourism, a tourist's attitude toward a destination, such as eco-tourism sites, is shaped by their perception of its attractiveness, environmental sustainability, and personal benefits (Han & Kim, 2010). Additionally, subjective norms, which refer to social influences from family, friends, or travel communities, play a crucial role in shaping tourists' decisions (Lam & Hsu, 2006). Lastly, perceived behavioral control, which reflects an individual's perceived ease or difficulty in visiting a destination—such as affordability, accessibility, or safety—can significantly impact visit intention (Chen & Tung, 2014). Empirical studies have validated TPB in various tourism contexts, emphasizing that positive attitudes, strong social support, and high perceived control enhance tourists' intentions to visit destinations, including those in eco-tourism settings (Paul et al., 2016). Understanding these psychological drivers provides valuable insights for tourism planners and policymakers in promoting sustainable travel behavior and increasing tourist arrivals in eco-tourism destinations.

III. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

A. Hypothesized Tourist Intention to Visit Eco-Tourism Destination

Tourist intention to visit eco-tourism destinations is influenced by various factors, including environmental attitudes, perceived destination attractiveness, and social influences (Han & Kim, 2010). The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) suggests that an individual's behavioral intention is shaped by their attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of eco-tourism, tourists with pro-environmental attitudes are more likely to visit destinations that promote sustainability and conservation (Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013). Additionally, destination image plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' visit intentions, as positive perceptions of an eco-tourism site, such as its natural beauty and cultural authenticity, enhance its attractiveness (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Furthermore, government policies and local community involvement in eco-tourism development can significantly impact tourists' decision-making processes (Lee, 2011). By understanding these factors, tourism planners and policymakers can create effective strategies to promote eco-tourism and enhance visitor experiences in environmentally sensitive destinations.

B. Hypothesized Intention to Visit Behaviour on the Eco-Tourism Destination

Tourist intention to visit eco-tourism destinations is influenced by multiple factors, including environmental attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and destination attractiveness. According to Ajzen's (1991) Theory of

Planned Behavior (TPB), individuals are more likely to visit a destination if they have a positive attitude toward eco-tourism, perceive social support for such travel, and believe they have the necessary resources to undertake the trip. Studies have shown that environmental awareness and sustainable tourism values positively influence travel intention (Han & Kim, 2010). Additionally, the unique cultural and natural attractions of eco-tourism sites contribute to stronger motivation among tourists (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015). However, external barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, high costs, and safety concerns can hinder visit intention despite strong personal motivation (Lee, Jan, & Yang, 2013). Understanding these factors is crucial for tourism planners and policymakers aiming to enhance eco-tourism development, particularly in emerging destinations like Papua Pegunungan Province, Indonesia.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

A. A Success Factors on the Tourist Intention to Visit Eco-Tourism Destination

Tourist intention to visit eco-tourism destinations is influenced by various success factors, including environmental awareness, destination attractiveness, accessibility, and local community engagement. Studies suggest that tourists are more likely to visit eco-tourism sites when they perceive strong environmental sustainability practices and unique natural attractions (Borges et al., 2017). Additionally, well-developed infrastructure, such as transportation and accommodation, significantly enhances the appeal of eco-tourism destinations (Kim et al., 2019). Local community involvement is another crucial factor, as authentic cultural experiences and community-led tourism initiatives contribute to higher tourist satisfaction and revisit intentions (Jalani, 2012). Moreover, destination marketing and digital engagement play an increasing role in shaping tourists' perceptions and travel decisions (Méndez-Gutiérrez et al., 2021). Understanding these success factors is essential for stakeholders to develop effective strategies that promote sustainable tourism and enhance visitor experiences.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. A Critical Success Factors on the Tourist Intention to Visit Eco-Tourism Destination

Tourists' intention to visit eco-tourism destinations is influenced by several critical success factors, including destination attractiveness, environmental awareness, infrastructure development, and local community involvement. Destination attractiveness, such as unique natural landscapes and cultural heritage, plays a vital role in motivating tourists to choose eco-tourism sites (Lee, 2020). Additionally, environmental awareness and tourists' attitudes toward sustainability significantly impact their decision-making, as travelers increasingly seek destinations that align with eco-friendly values (Dolnicar et al., 2021). Proper infrastructure, including transportation, accommodation, and accessibility, is essential for enhancing the tourist experience and ensuring convenience (Sharif et al., 2022). Furthermore, the active participation of local communities in eco-tourism development fosters authenticity, cultural exchange, and sustainable practices, which, in turn, strengthen tourists' positive perceptions

and willingness to visit (Zhang & Lei, 2019). Understanding these success factors is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to develop eco-tourism destinations that attract and retain visitors while promoting environmental and socio-economic sustainability.

B. A Confirmatory Factors on the Intention to Visit Behaviour on the Eco-Tourism Destination

Understanding the confirmatory factors influencing tourists' intention to visit eco-tourism destinations is essential for sustainable tourism development. Prior research suggests that destination attractiveness, environmental awareness, and perceived behavioral control significantly affect tourists' decision-making processes (Ajzen, 1991; Chen & Tung, 2014). According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), intention is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control over the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of eco-tourism, studies have shown that travelers with higher environmental consciousness and positive perceptions of eco-friendly initiatives are more likely to visit sustainable destinations (Han, 2015). Moreover, the role of local community engagement and infrastructure development has been identified as critical factors influencing eco-tourism appeal (Su & Swanson, 2017). A study by Chiu, Lee, and Chen (2014) also found that tourists' emotional connections with nature play a significant role in fostering eco-tourism visit intentions. These findings suggest that a combination of personal attitudes, social influences, and destination characteristics must be considered when developing strategies to enhance eco-tourism participation.

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