

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES: TOURIST SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOR INTENTION IN NORTH SULAWESI INDONESIA

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Abstract

The emergence of sustainable tourism aims to balance of meeting the needs of tourists, preserving the environment, and the well-being of local communities. This study examines tourists' sustainable behavioral intentions when visiting destinations in North Sulawesi, focusing on the relationships between destination personality, destination attachment, and self-congruity. This study employed a quantitative research approach and utilized a correlational research design to examine the relationships among the proposed variables. To ensure the findings could be generalized, a sample of 250 respondents was selected using a convenience sampling method. The findings confirm that destination personality influences both destination attachment and self-congruity, however, destination personality, destination attachment and self-congruity do not directly drive sustainable behavior intention.

Keywords: Sustainable Behavioral Intention; Destination Personality; Destination Attachment; Self-Congruity.

1. INTRODUCTION

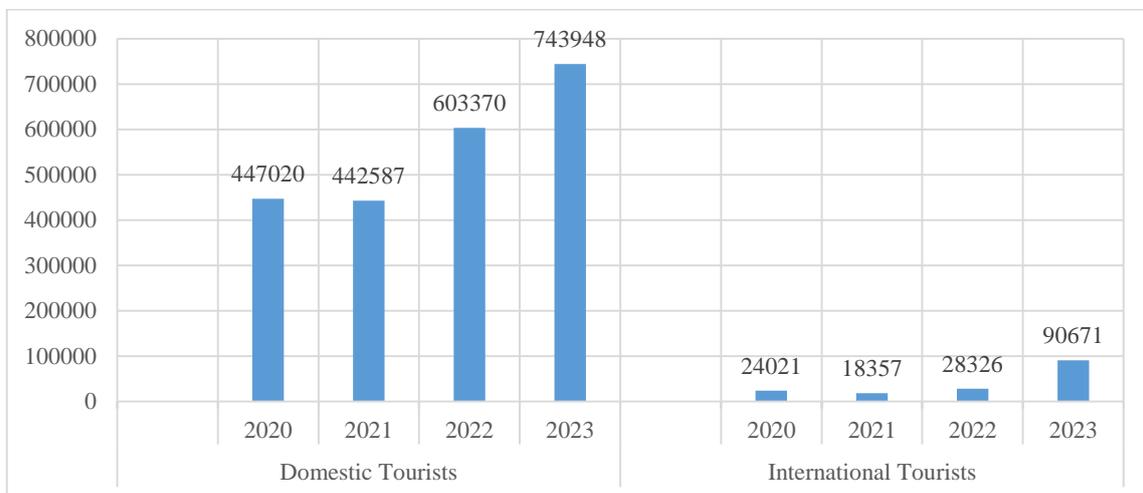
Tourism economics is one of the key drivers of economic growth, forming part of the blue economy concept, which emphasizes sustainable economic development through the responsible use of natural resources. However, in practice, the tourism sector faces numerous challenges, particularly those stemming from mass tourism, which often results in negative impacts on both the natural environment and social community. This has led to the emergence of sustainable tourism, which aims to strike a balance between meeting the needs of tourists, preserving the environment, and enhancing the well-being of local communities.

Sustainable tourism is rooted in the broader concept of sustainable development. It is defined by UN Tourism, as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities". Sustainable tourism entails managing all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic requirements can be met while preserving cultural integrity, fundamental ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems (Mak, 2004).

Sustainable tourism is regularly linked with environment conservation, human welfare, and economic networking (Bramwell et al., 2017). Sustainable tourism recognizes that tourism can have significant impacts – both positive and negative – on the environment, local communities, and the economy. Therefore, it seeks to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive contributions, ensuring that tourism benefits both visitors and the host community in the long term.

North Sulawesi is one of Indonesia’s top tourism destinations, renowned for its eco-friendly and community-based tourism initiatives. Marine tourism known for their beautiful coral reefs and abundant marine biodiversity. Nature tourism include waterfall, lake, beach, and mountains provide unusual travel experiences. Furthermore, traditional dances, music, and festivals are drivers of cultural tourism. Tourism in North Sulawesi has seen significant growth in recent years, supported by infrastructure development, extensive destination promotion, and strong government support. Table 1 illustrates the number of domestic and international tourists visiting North Sulawesi over a four-year period from 2020 to 2023. The number of domestic tourists fluctuates slightly between 2020 and 2022. The number peaks significantly in 2023 showing a steady growth in domestic tourism during this period. The international tourist numbers see a significant increase in 2023 indicating a post-pandemic recovery and growth in international tourism. This table also highlights the much stronger presence of domestic tourists, while international tourist numbers see substantial growth in 2023.

Table 1: Tourism Arrival Data for North Sulawesi



Source: Immigration and API Sam Ratulangi Airport

The rise in tourism to North Sulawesi has sparked concerns, primarily centered on overcrowding at popular sites and environmental damage. Bunaken, a heavily visited area, exemplifies the challenges facing sustainable tourism in the region. Specifically, studies have documented coral reef damage (De Vantier and Turak, 2004; Hakim et al., 2012; Kholil and Tangian, 2012), illegal coral harvesting, and coastal deforestation to accommodate marinas and resorts (Hakim et al., 2012). Moreover, mass tourism has led to increased litter, the illegal

capture of protected marine species, and overall environmental degradation (Kamagi, et al., 2022). These issues underscore the critical importance of adopting sustainable practices across all facets of tourism. It is not only essential for the environment but also for the long-term viability of the tourism sector itself. Within the tourism context, sustainability principles is applied through tourist sustainable behavior, deliberate actions by tourists to maintain the ecological and cultural integrity of tourist destinations. Sustainable tourist behavior is a conscious action taken by minimizing ecological footprint, supporting local communities, respecting local cultures, and protecting natural ecosystems.

This type of behavior is driven by an intention to act sustainably that such intention arises from an understanding of the positive or negative impacts tourism can have on the destinations visited. Intention is considered as precursor to and best predictor of behavior (Ajzen, 1991). This means that the higher the intention, the higher the chances for the individual to take action. Sustainable tourist is someone who appreciates the notion that they are a visitor in another person's culture, society, environment and economy and respects this unique feature of travel (Dinan and Sargeant, 2000). When tourists recognize that their actions can either conserve or harm ecosystems, they are more likely to adopt responsible behaviors.

This study examines tourists' sustainable behavioral intentions when visiting destinations in North Sulawesi, focusing on the relationships between destination personality, destination attachment, and self-congruity. Destinations with a strong personality, a deep emotional connection to tourists, and a strong alignment with tourists' self-congruity foster a heightened sense of responsibility to preserve the destination. Consequently, this alignment strengthens tourists' intention to act sustainably.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is one of the most widely used frameworks in studies of sustainable tourist behavior (Li et al., 2023). According to TPB, an individual's intention to engage in a specific behavior is the primary predictor of actual behavior, and this intention is influenced by three factors: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). In the tourism context, various empirical studies have applied TPB to examine topics such as tourists' pro-environmental intentions (Clark et al., 2019), intentions to revisit destinations (Abbasi et al., 2021), intentions to visit destinations (Pahrudin et al., 2021), environmentally responsible behavior intentions (Qiu et al., 2022), and sustainable tourism intentions (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Sustainable Behavior Intention

Sustainable tourism behavior encompasses actions and consumption patterns that promote social, environmental, and natural benefits while minimizing negative impacts (Alazaizeh et al., 2019). It serves as a foundation for fostering and supporting sustainable practices among tourists. According to Bonnes and Bonaiuto (2002), sustainable behavior consists of intentional and effective actions aimed at preserving the socio-physical environment for the benefit of both current and future generations. Similarly, Corral-Verdugo et al. (2011) describe sustainable

behavior as human activities designed to protect and conserve the physical and social environment, ensuring quality of life for present and future generations without compromising the biosphere's resources. Tapia-Fonllem et al. (2013) emphasize that sustainable behavior prioritizes safeguarding the natural environment and promoting the social welfare of local communities.

Destination Personality

Destination personality refers to a set of characteristics or traits associated with a destination, much like the personality traits possessed by individuals. In tourism marketing, this concept plays a crucial role in shaping a destination's image, making it more appealing to tourists whose profiles align with its identity and unique attractions. Ekinci and Hosany (2006) describe destination personality as a set of human traits associated with a destination, perceived from the perspective of tourists rather than local residents, and characterized by three main dimensions: sincerity, excitement, and conviviality. Chen and Phou (2013) equate destination personality to brand personality within the tourism sector, using human traits to portray destinations, such as being unique, engaging, exciting, or welcoming. Murphy et al. (2007) note that destination personality aims to create an appealing image, serving as a means to differentiate a destination from its competitors. The human qualities attributed to the destination based on tourists' perspective are described as the destination personality (Hankinson, 2004, Ekinci and Hosany, 2006; Uşaklı and Baloğlu, 2011). The personality traits of a destination are directly related to local people, hotel staff, restaurants, tourist attractions and experiences (Xie and Lee, 2013). Destination personality plays a critical role in shaping tourists' perceptions and fostering emotional connections. It has been shown to positively impact place attachment (Šagovnović, 2022).

H1: Destination personality has a significant influence on destination attachment

Self-congruity plays a significant role in shaping tourists' decisions when choosing a destination, as they are more likely to be drawn to places that reflect their identity, values, and personality. A clearly defined destination personality that aligns with tourists' self-image can strengthen their sense of self-congruity. Tourists are more likely to select destinations that reflect their personal values and identity. Huang et al. (2017) discovered that the Excitement and Charming dimensions of destination brand personality (DBP) positively influenced self-congruity, encompassing both actual and ideal self-congruity, whereas the Outdoorsy dimension had a negative effect. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that destination personality has a positive impact on self-congruity (Chi et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2022).

H2: Destination personality has a significant influence on self-congruity

If a destination has a strong personality in terms of sustainability and environmental responsibility, environmentally conscious travelers are more likely to be interested in visiting that destination. Long and Chan (2024) destination personalities strongly predicts tourists' pro-environmental BI.

H3: Destination personality has a significant influence on sustainable behavior intention

Destination Attachment

In tourism, the term “place attachment” is often used interchangeably with “destination attachment” (Suntikul and Jachna, 2016). Destination attachment signifies a positive and enduring bond between visitors and a specific destination (Huang and Lin, 2023). Place attachment is characterized by emotional and psychological connections that develop through interactions between individuals and particular locations, including tourist destinations (Page, 2014). A strong sense of destination attachment can encourage tourists' loyalty and promote environmentally responsible behaviors (Lee et al., 2019). Travelers with a profound connection to a destination often feel a greater sense of accountability for its sustainability (Bozic and Šagovnović, 2022). Tourists who are strongly drawn to and attached to a destination are more inclined to adopt sustainable practices. Research consistently highlights the connection between place attachment and intentions to engage in pro-environmental behaviors (Tonge et al., 2015; Subramaniam et al., 2020; Manaf, 2024).

H4: Destination attachment influences sustainable behavior intention

Self-Congruity

Self-congruity is the degree of match between the consumer's self-image and brand, store, product, or user image (Sirgy, 2018). In the context of tourism, self-congruity refers to the alignment between a tourist's self-image and the image of a destination. Self-congruity is the degree of fit between a visitor's self-concept and the destination image (Chon, 1992). The self-congruity effect involves four key components that reflect different dimensions of an individual's self-perception: the actual self (how one sees oneself), the ideal self (the self-image one aspires to), the social self (how one believes others perceive them), and the ideal social self (the way one wishes to be perceived by others) (Gonzalez-Jimenez et al., 2019). Further, Confente et al. (2020), self-congruity affects how consumers relate to and behave towards products. Tourists perceive that acting sustainably aligns with their self-concept (e.g., being an eco-conscious individual), they feel a moral obligation to adopt sustainable behaviors. Confente et al. (2020) found that self-congruity did not have a direct effect on customer intentions toward bio-plastic products. Self-congruity exerts a positive and significant impact on tourists' pro-environmental behavioral intentions (Rao et al., 2022).

H5: Self-congruity influences sustainable behavior intention

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach and utilized a correlational research design to examine the relationships among the proposed variables. To ensure the findings could be generalized, a sample of 250 respondents was selected using a convenience sampling method. Destination attachment was adapted from Huang et al. (2022). Destination personality was adapted from the framework of Chen and Phou (2013). Self-congruity was measured using two components: actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity (Zhou et al., 2020). Sustainable behavior intention was measured based on the approach by Sugiarto et al. (2022). All items were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least

Squares (PLS), a robust variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique. This approach enabled simultaneous assessment of the measurement model—evaluating the validity and reliability of constructs—and the structural model, which tested causal relationships and predictive hypotheses.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic data were collected using questions related to respondents' gender, age, and occupation. The survey findings indicated that the majority of respondents were female, totaling 136 individuals (54.4%), while male participants accounted for 114 individuals (45.6%). In terms of age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents fell within the >40 years, comprising 105 individuals (42%). This was followed by those aged 30–39 years (98 individuals, 39.2%), and <30 years (47 individuals, 18.8%). Occupationally, most respondents were employed by private companies (103 individuals, 41.2%), civil servants (98 individuals, 39.2%), and those in other occupational categories (49 individuals, 19.6%).

Analysis of Structural Equation Model

Assessing Measurement Model

Table 2: Factor Loading, Cronbach Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Destination Personality		0,909	0,930	0,689
Sustainable tourism-based destinations following the latest trends in sustainable tourism	0,791			
Visiting sustainable tourism-based destinations provides a highly enjoyable and fulfilling experience	0,882			
Sustainable tourism-based destinations have an imaginative nature in combining sustainability with innovation	0,781			
The uniqueness of sustainable tourism-based destinations lies in the combination of sustainable tourism with distinctive attractions	0,889			
Sustainable tourism-based destinations create a cheerful atmosphere that makes me feel happy and connected to nature	0,871			
Sustainable tourism-based destinations have sentimental value as they connect me with nature and local culture	0,753			
Destination Attachment		0,946	0,953	0,671
I feel visiting sustainable tourism-based destinations is part of my life	0,722			

I identify strongly with sustainable tourism-based destinations	0,799			
Visiting sustainable tourism-based destinations has a special meaning in my life	0,757			
I like visiting sustainable tourism-based destinations more than any other destinations	0,840			
For me, sustainable tourism-based destinations cannot be substituted by other destinations	0,893			
sustainable tourism-based destinations can meet my needs more than other destinations	0,845			
For the activities that I enjoy most, the settings and facilities provided by sustainable tourism-based destinations are the best	0,728			
sustainable tourism-based destinations means a lot to me	0,779			
I am very attached to sustainable tourism-based destinations	0,896			
I have a strong sense of belonging for sustainable tourism-based destinations	0,904			
Self-Congruity		0,899	0,922	0,666
The typical tourist visiting sustainable tourism-based destinations is the same kind of person as me	0,791			
The typical visitor visiting sustainable tourism-based destinations is like me	0,877			
The typical tourist visiting sustainable tourism-based destinations is very much like me	0,790			
The typical visitor visiting sustainable tourism-based destinations reflects the kind of person I want to be	0,893			
The typical tourist visiting sustainable tourism-based destinations is the kind of person I hope to see.	0,805			
The typical tourist visiting sustainable tourism-based destinations is the kind of person I want to be	0,729			
Sustainable Behavior Intention		0,821	0,868	0,569
Intention to be responsible for green	0,720			
Intention to do green	0,752			
Intention to contribute to green	0,873			
Intention to reduce the comfort of the workspace	0,710			
Intention to save electricity, water, and paper	0,704			

The factor loadings are above 0.70. The Cronbach' Alpha values are above the threshold value (> 0.70). CR values are above 0.80 and AVE values are above 0.50. These fit indices indicate the measurement model has good convergent validity. In addition, discriminant validity was also examined by the estimated correlation between constructs with the variance extracted.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Destination Personality	Destination Attachment	Self-Congruity	Sustainable Behavior Intention
Destination Personality	0.830			
Destination Attachment	0.616	0.819		
Self-Congruity	0.625	0.601	0.816	
Sustainable Behavior Intention	0.074	0.063	0.013	0.755

The square root value of AVE in each construct is greater than the correlation value between constructs. Therefore, the measurement model is reliable and meaningful to test the structural relationships among the construct.

Assessing Structural Models

Table 4: R-Square, F-Square and Q-Square

R-Square				
	R-Square		R-Square Adjusted	
Destination Attachment	0.379		0.377	
Self-Congruity	0.391		0.389	
Sustainable Behavior Intention	0.535		0.526	
F-Square				
	Destination Personality	Destination Attachment	Self-Congruity	Sustainable Behavior Intention
Destination Personality		0,611	0,642	0,444
Destination Attachment				0,211
Self-Congruity				0,125
Sustainable Behavior Intention				
Q-Square				
	Q² (=1-SSE/SSO)			
Destination Attachment	0,575			
Destination Personality	0,518			
Self-Congruity	0,525			
Sustainable Behavior Intention	0,300			

The R-square values for destination attachment and self-congruity are substantial, while that for sustainable behavior intention is moderate. The F-square values indicate a large effect of destination personality on destination attachment, self-congruity, and sustainable behavior.

In contrast, the effects of destination attachment and self-congruity on sustainable behavior are of medium and small magnitude, respectively. Additionally, the Q-square values are above zero, confirming that the values are well-reconstructed and that the model possesses predictive relevance.

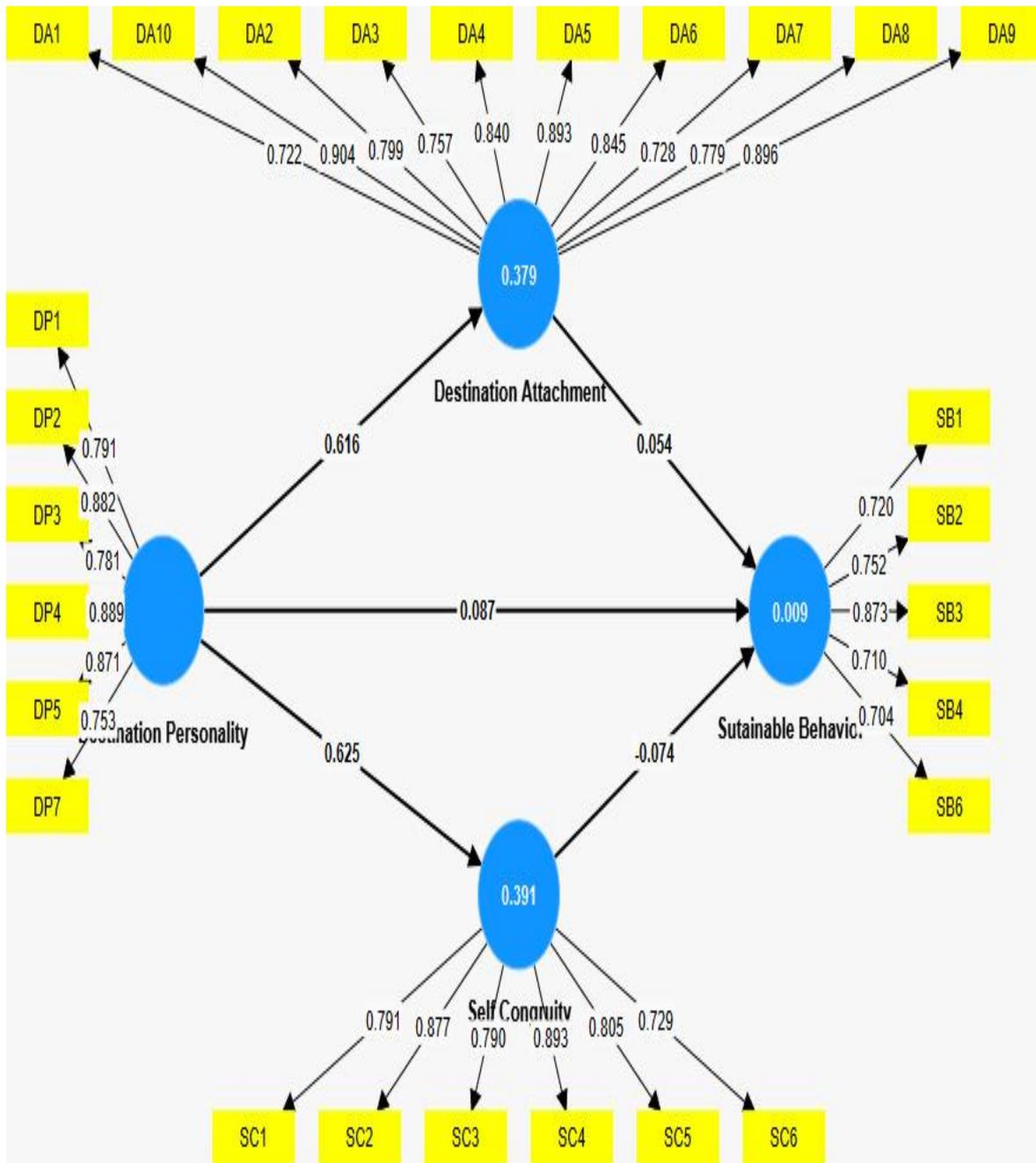


Figure 1: Adjusted Structural Equation Model

Figure 1 illustrates the adjusted structural equation model (SEM), presenting standardized path coefficients among the latent constructs: Destination Personality, Destination Attachment, Self-Congruity, and Sustainable Behavior Intention. The model demonstrates the direct and indirect relationships among variables, with all observed indicators showing strong factor loadings.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 5: Direct, Indirect Effects, and Total Effects of Relationship

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Destination Personality -> Destination Attachment	0,616	0,620	0,035	17,591	0,000
Destination Personality -> Self Congruity	0,625	0,629	0,038	16,467	0,000
Destination Personality -> Sustainable Behavior Intention	0,087	0,094	0,113	0,773	0,439
Destination Attachment -> Sustainable Behavior Intention	0,054	0,059	0,112	0,482	0,630
Self-Congruity -> Sustainable Behavior Intention	-0,074	-0,086	0,119	0,624	0,533
Destination Personality -> Destination Attachment -> Sustainable Behavior Intention	0,033	0,036	0,070	0,477	0,634
Destination Personality -> Self Congruity -> Sustainable Behavior Intention	-0,046	-0,054	0,075	0,615	0,538

Discussion

This study examines the role of destination personality, destination attachment and self-congruity in developing sustainable behavior intention from the perspective of tourist. Destination personality plays a role in shaping destination attachment, as tourists' perceptions of a destination's character or personality can strengthen their emotional connection to the place. This study found that destination personality influences destination attachment and supports previous research that destination personality positively shaped place attachment (Šagovnović, et al., 2023). When tourists visit a destination, they do not only experience it physically but also develop perceptions about its unique characteristics. When a destination's personality aligns with tourists' values and preferences, they are more likely to feel emotionally attached to the place, fostering a long-term relationship with it. This concept also applies to sustainable tourism destinations. A destination with a personality that aligns with sustainability principles can enhance tourists' attachment, particularly among those who are highly concerned about environmental and social issues.

When evaluating a destination, tourists tend to compare the personality associated with that destination to their own self-image. The stronger the alignment between destination personality and self-congruity, the more likely they are to choose that destination. This study found that destination personality significantly influences self-congruity. Tourists who perceive a destination's personality as aligning with their own identity are more likely to develop a sense of self-congruity. This connection becomes even more significant when sustainability values

come into play. Travelers increasingly prefer destinations that reflect their commitment to sustainability. A destination with a strong sustainability-oriented personality appeals to tourists who want to reinforce their self-image as individuals who care about environmental and social responsibility. This sense of alignment makes them feel that their visit contributes positively to the destination, further strengthening their emotional connection to the place.

This study found that destination personality does not influence tourists' intentions to engage in sustainable behavior, even in destinations that promote sustainable tourism. As a result, these findings do not support previous research (Long and Chan, 2024). While the primary goal of sustainable tourism destinations is to create environmentally friendly and socially responsible travel experiences, the personality traits associated with a destination do not necessarily determine tourists' willingness to adopt sustainable practices during their visit. When choosing a destination, tourists do not always prioritize sustainability as a key factor. Instead, they are often more influenced by other attractions, such as natural beauty, unique experiences, and accessibility. This suggests that while sustainability is increasingly promoted in the tourism industry, tourists' sustainable behavior is not solely driven by a destination's sustainability image.

Destination attachment refers to the emotional bond tourists develop with a place. Although previous studies have shown a link between destination attachment and tourist behavior (Bandiani et al., 2024; Manaf et al., 2024; Subramaniam et al., 2020; Tonge et al., 2015), this study found no significant relationship between destination attachment and sustainable behavior intention. This indicates that not all forms of emotional connection to a destination necessarily encourage sustainable actions. Tourists' emotional attachment is often shaped by their happiness, enjoyment, experiences, and satisfaction with a destination, rather than by a motivation to behave sustainably—even when visiting an eco-friendly destination.

Most tourists perceive travel as an opportunity for relaxation and leisure, rather than as an act of responsibility toward environmental and social sustainability. Ideally, emotionally attached tourists would feel a sense of responsibility toward preserving the local environment and culture, leading to more sustainable behaviors. However, in some cases, strong attachment can have the opposite effect. For example, tourists may continue to visit a destination despite issues like overtourism, contributing to its degradation rather than its sustainability.

Self-congruity is often considered a key driver of sustainable behavior, as individuals are more likely to act in ways that align with their self-image. Ideally, tourists who experience high self-congruity with sustainable destinations would be more inclined to adopt sustainable practices. However, this study found that self-congruity does not significantly influence the intention to engage in sustainable behavior.

This suggests that other factors play a more crucial role in determining tourists' sustainable actions beyond merely aligning their self-image with a destination's identity. Furthermore, when tourists perceive a mismatch between their self-image and the ideal image they aspire to, they may be less motivated to engage in sustainable behavior, as they do not see it as a genuine reflection of who they are.

There is an assumption that destination personality fosters emotional attachment, which in turn influences sustainable behavior. However, this relationship does not always hold true. In other words, destination personality does not necessarily have a direct impact on sustainable behavior intention through destination attachment. Tourists visit destinations for different reasons, and sustainability is not always their primary motivation. If a tourist's main reason for travel is not linked to sustainability, even a strong attachment to a destination may not encourage them to adopt sustainable practices. Additionally, even if tourists perceive a destination's personality as aligned with their values and feel emotionally connected to it, they may still not engage in sustainable behavior if the destination lacks proper infrastructure, policies, or regulations supporting sustainable tourism—such as waste management, energy conservation, and water resource management.

From an empirical perspective, destination personality can influence self-congruity, as tourists tend to develop a stronger psychological bond with destinations that reflect their identity and values. However, when it comes to sustainable behavior, the connection between destination personality and self-congruity in this study was not strong enough to directly drive sustainable actions. Even if tourists perceive a destination as aligning with their self-image, this does not necessarily lead to eco-friendly behavior, participation in sustainability efforts, or an increased sense of environmental responsibility. Instead, tourists' behavior is more influenced by convenience, the availability of sustainable facilities, and social norms rather than by self-congruity.

This highlights the need for tourism destinations to implement concrete sustainability measures rather than relying solely on branding and perceived alignment with tourists' identities. This study does not support the findings of Long and Chan (2024), which suggest that actual self-congruity mediates the relationship between sincerity, a dimension of destination personality, and tourists' pro-environmental behavioral intentions. Overall, these findings suggest that while branding a destination with strong personality traits can enhance emotional connection and self-identification among tourists, it is not sufficient to drive sustainable behavior. Tourism stakeholders should focus on practical sustainability initiatives, such as policy enforcement, infrastructure development, and social influence, to encourage responsible tourism behavior.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the relationships between destination personality, destination attachment, self-congruity, and sustainable behavior intention from a tourist perspective. The findings confirm that destination personality influences both destination attachment and self-congruity, as tourists form emotional bonds with places that reflect their values and self-image, especially regarding sustainability. However, destination personality does not directly drive sustainable behavior intention, nor does destination attachment, as tourists prioritize enjoyment and convenience over sustainability. Similarly, self-congruity does not significantly impact sustainable behavior intention, suggesting other reasons such as infrastructure or policies play a role in shaping responsible tourism practices. The findings of this study suggest the need for a more practical approach to promoting sustainable tourism. While destination personality can

enhance emotional attachment and self-congruity among tourists, it does not directly influence their intention to engage in sustainable behavior. Therefore, tourism stakeholders are encouraged to implement concrete and measurable initiatives such as developing environmentally friendly infrastructure or enforcing environmental regulations.

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