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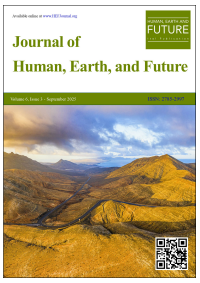

Ecotourism Choice Drivers: Role of Green Marketing, Green Innovation, and Receptivity to Green Communication

Ha Nguyen-Van [1*], Loi Duc Nguyen [1], Truong Pham-Hong [1], Huyen Thanh Thi Nguyen [1], Diep Ngoc Thi Hoang [1], Hue Thanh Nguyen [1], Huong Lan Thi Nguyen [1]

[1] *Faculty of Business Administration, Banking Academy of Vietnam, Hanoi, Vietnam.*

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Abstract

Ecotourism has grown in prominence in recent years, given that people have become more conscious of climate change and its consequences. In this scenario, ecotourism destinations also engage in efforts by incorporating green marketing tactics in their operations to generate knowledge as well as attract tourists and encourage their behavioral intentions toward responsible tourism. The study aimed to investigate the factors that drive the intention and actual behavior of tourists towards ecotourism by integrating green marketing and green innovation elements with receptivity to green communication, attitudes, and social norms. The study implemented a quantitative method using a questionnaire survey with 558 valid responses collected from Vietnamese tourists who have been exposed to ecotourism destinations' green marketing initiatives. The results highlighted a favorable relationship between green marketing and green innovation, as well as green marketing and attitudes, leading to enhanced tourist intention and behavior. Interestingly, receptivity to green communication also fosters intention, yet it does not moderate the attitude-intention gap, and the role of descriptive norms is rejected while injunctive norms are significant in the framework. The study aims to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to ecotourism destinations on the necessity of greening efforts in the context of sustainability.

Keywords: Ecotourism; Green Marketing; Green Innovation; Receptivity To Green Communication; Tourism Destination.

1. Introduction

Ecotourism is emerging as a prominent tendency within the context of the ongoing issues of climate change and global warming, which encourages travelers to seek experiences that bring them closer to nature while simultaneously contributing to sustainable development. In the past, the concept of "ecotourism" originated to represent the nature-based tourism phenomenon [1]. Over the years, the term "ecotourism" has expanded with further attributes, encompassing issues including sustainable development, conservation, education, awareness, creation, and equal distribution of benefits [2, 3]. According to a synthesis by The Business Research Company [4], global ecotourism has grown significantly, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13.5%, reaching $249.16 billion in 2024 and projected to continue increasing. Ecotourism shows its significant potential in promoting sustainable behavior and supporting conservation efforts [5-7] and gradually received more attention in research that more gravitates toward the concern of sustainability. Nonetheless, awareness of the factors that drive ecotourism behavior remains limited in the existing literature.

First and foremost, previous studies mostly consider ecotourism from the perspective of nature-based tourism with the emergence of the terms "nature-based tourists" or "destinations" [8, 9]. Therefore, studies on tourists' ecotourism

* Corresponding author: hanv@hvnh.edu.vn

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intentions are being more inspired by the motivations stemming from environmental concerns [10, 11], environmental beliefs [12], environmental knowledge [13], or tourists' interest [14]. In other words, it reflected an approach from the traveler's perceptions or values more. On the other hand, since tourists become more sensitive to environmental issues, tourism service providers are also under pressure to conduct business in a more ethical manner [15]. That is, efforts need to be inclusive, including how destinations themselves strive to promote eco-behavior, which remains an approach that has much to explore. One of the most widely known approaches is to employ "green marketing". Marketing initiatives are being pressured to shift to being green as regulations tighten and stakeholders put more emphasis on sustainable development [16]. Important as it is, green marketing still seems to be a disregarded area of service marketing, including ecotourism and sustainable destinations [17]. Moreover, previous studies on green marketing in tourist behavior have focused almost exclusively on the image aspect, such as promoting labels, advertising, or architectural design [18, 19], leading to limitations in green marketing actions in the field of ecotourism. Accordingly, other aspects of green marketing practices in offering and encouraging tourists' actual behavior at tourism destinations seem to be overlooked. On top of that, the study implies that green innovation can provide a more far-reaching and development-oriented viewpoint than solely assessing destination image, which has been limited in earlier studies on tourism destinations. This is in line with the highlight that green innovation serves as an opportunity to achieve sustainable performance in tourism operations [20], typically in an ecotourism context [21].

Following that, the relationship between green initiatives and social interactions has previously been pointed out mainly in e-WOM [22], but has not gone further to social norms. Meanwhile, green marketing can be actively implemented by businesses to normalize green behavior [23], and tourism is no exception. Therefore, this relationship needs to be verified. In parallel, for tourism operations to achieve their objectives in green marketing strategies, the receptiveness of tourists to green communications plays a critical role. The ability to receive environmental protection information influences tourist behavior, as those who understand green communication messages are more likely to engage in environmental protection activities and choose responsible tourism activities [24]. However, numerous studies have been conducted separately on green marketing [18, 25] and the receptivity to green communication [26, 27], which would hinder the assessment of inclusiveness involvement. In the tourism context, it is important to acknowledge the appreciation of the integration approach combining both perspectives to encompass and demonstrate the correlation between tourists and the destination itself, which has not been adequately emphasized.

Lastly, although the concept of multidimensional concept has received significant attention in recent tourism-related studies [28-30], its application in the area of ecotourism remains relatively underexplored. It was emphasized that the complexity of forecasting behavior based on attitude and norms, which are modulated not only by individual features but also by social and contextual elements, necessitates the integration of multidimensional concepts in studying [31]. In the tourism context, the multidimensional concept can provide an in-depth understanding of tourists' behavior [29]. Therefore, the use of multidimensional concepts for attitudes and social norms in ecotourism is meaningful and needs to be developed in practical research.

The study integrates factors of green marketing practices with green innovation in order to explore the relationship between these two key elements influencing tourists' intention towards ecotourism destinations through the mediating role of attitude and social norms. Furthermore, in an attempt to obtain a comprehensive grasp of the interaction between destinations and tourists, receptivity to green communication is incorporated into the conceptual framework, with the function of not only being direct but also moderating the relationship between tourist attitude and travel intention. The investigation focuses on individuals who have perceived green marketing practices of ecotourism destinations, regardless of whether they have directly experienced the destination. The research questions addressed are: "How do green marketing practices and green innovation enhance tourists' intention and behavior toward ecotourism destinations" and "How does tourists' reception of green communication influence their travel intention and the relationship of their attitude-intention towards ecotourism destinations?". In addition, Vietnam is appropriate to be the spatial scope of the study as it stands as the nation with considerable development in ecotourism and is funded by a GEF-funded project to preserve Vietnam's natural heritage and provide jobs for the locals [32], yet there are not many studies on ecotourism. Despite facing several tourism-related problems, Vietnam has significant potential for developing ecotourism since it is known for having various destinations with diverse nature and heritage, as well as a variety of interesting ecotourism activities [32, 33].

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Green Marketing Practices

Green marketing is one of the most widely applied topics in research in recent years. However, previous studies on green marketing have been mainly conducted with tangible products [34], which are easy to innovate based on established criteria. In the tourism and hospitality industry, it is mostly explored in the hotel sector [19, 35]. Green marketing can be defined as all activities designed and facilitated to satisfy human needs or desires while having the least possible impact on the environment [36]. It is obtained as a comprehensive effort at producing, pricing, distributing, and promoting products in such a way as to ensure they produce no negative environmental impact but still positively satisfy all customer and social requirements [37]. Applied in the context of tourism destinations, it can be drawn as all efforts in the destination's operations to attract and fulfill all of the demands of tourists while also

maintaining environmental protection and avoiding negative or causing harm to the environment. Based on the research of Cheng et al. [25], the study argues that green marketing practices need to enhance tourists' perception of the destination's efforts towards environmental protection and sustainability.

One of the primary drivers of innovation is recognized as environmental sustainability, which has been promoted to the forefront of the worldwide political agenda [38]. Accordingly, green marketing contributes to strategies for guaranteeing the sustainability of business through green innovation [39]. On the other hand, the enhancement of the brand image and customer loyalty can be achieved through the efforts to implement green strategies simultaneously by focusing on green innovation, green processes, or green alliances [40]. The aforementioned arguments go toward determining that green marketing is a cornerstone of pursuing green innovation. The parallel between green marketing and green innovation in the context of ecotourism destinations is believed to be essential in the era of sustainable consumption. Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed as:

H1: *Green marketing practices positively impact green innovation.*

Many businesses in the tourism sector are striving to implement green marketing initiatives to attract more customers, especially green-conscious tourists [41]. This could emerge from the belief that a business's efforts to maintain sustainability tend to encourage positive attitudes among customers. Furthermore, increased green awareness from green marketing will result in shifts in attitudes and "greening" behavioral intentions [42, 43]. According to Chin et al. [18], tourist attitudes and readiness toward green purchasing behavior in tourism can be improved by implementing green marketing. Applied in the context of ecotourism destinations, the hypotheses are proposed as:

H2: *Green marketing practices positively impact tourists' attitudes toward ecotourism destinations.*

H2a: *Green marketing practices positively impact tourists' experiential attitude towards ecotourism destinations.*

H2b: *Green marketing practices positively impact tourists' instrumental attitude towards ecotourism destinations.*

Zhu & Sarkis [44] argued that, as social norms and customs evolve, developing green markets would benefit operations. The greener the norms evolve, the higher the demand for green consumption, and the more firms must rapidly learn how to change their operations in greater greening ways [45]. However, it is acknowledged that firms and policymakers tend to establish green marketing efforts as positioning a green segment, which inhibits societal normalization and popularization [23]. On the other hand, Burchell et al. [23] also stated that green marketing can be proactively used to make "green" normal since individuals will be influenced by what everyone does. As businesses prioritize sustainability, consumers are introduced to new standards, and as products/services become marks of responsible consumption, social norms are heading toward more environmental responsibility [46]. These findings demonstrate green marketing strategies possess the potential to change social norms, and tourism service providers can take the initiative in this process. Thus, the hypotheses are established as:

H3: *Green marketing practices positively impact social norms toward ecotourism destinations.*

H3a: *Green marketing practices positively impact injunctive norms toward ecotourism destinations.*

H3b: *Green marketing practices positively impact descriptive norms toward ecotourism destinations.*

2.2. Green Innovation

Green innovation is considered a new and promising development, which can help tourism businesses diversify services, improve service quality and reduce costs [47]. Moreover, it has recently demonstrated a rising relevance as part of sustainable development. The term "green innovation" was defined by OECD as "the creation or implementation of new, or significantly improved, products (goods and services), processes, marketing methods, organizational structures and institutional arrangements which - with or without intent - lead to environmental improvements compared to relevant alternatives" [48]. Moreover, green innovation is all that can benefit firms in developing new market opportunities and enhancing competitiveness [49]. In summary, green innovation can be defined as all new and significant applications that can add benefits to operations while ensuring that they do not harm the environment. The application of green innovation in tourism can guarantee pollution reduction, energy saving, and encourage social responsibility of stakeholders.

It is highlighted that products and services are provided and promoted by implementing green processes and initiatives that help attract new customers to the business [50]. It may stem from the idea that customers may seek an innovative implementation for what they intend to spend money on [51]. In other words, the intention toward green and eco-options is influenced by green and eco-innovation. This has been shown to be relevant in the hotel industry, as when hotels design their operations to be eco-friendly and green, tourists express fewer worries about the harm to the environment and more positive behavioral intentions toward the hotel [25]. The study concludes that ecotourism destinations could potentially increase tourist intentions when destinations embrace green innovation to alleviate tourists' anxieties. Hence, the hypothesis is proposed as:

H4: *Green innovation positively impacts tourists' intention towards ecotourism destinations.*

2.3. Attitudes and Social Norms

Attitude represents a favorable or unfavorable mental response that stimulates an intention towards a particular behavior [52], which can be divided into experiential attitude - feeling and emotional aspects, and instrumental attitude - benefit and function aspects [30, 53]. Attitudes are crucial to social psychology and consumer behavior literature since it is widely believed that attitudes drive behavior, yet there are probably deviations in different situations. Tourists' intention towards sustainable choices has been proven to enhance once they have higher positive green or eco-friendly attitude [12, 19, 54]. On the other hand, tourists tend to have a positive attitude and are afraid of harming the environment, yet the attitude's predictability has been called into doubt since it was discovered there is an "attitude-behavior" gap, meaning that tourists may unintentionally harm the environment during their travel [24]. Therefore, the understanding of this gap in ecotourism needs to be further addressed. As a result, the hypotheses are proposed as:

H5: *Tourists' attitudes positively impact their intention towards ecotourism destinations.*

H5a: *Tourists' experiential attitude positively impacts their intention towards ecotourism destinations.*

H5b: *Tourists' instrumental attitude positively impacts their intention towards ecotourism destinations.*

Social norms have become a frequently considered concept in sustainable tourism. Social norms is defined as "rules and standards that are understood by members of a group, and that guide and/or constrain human behavior without the force of laws" [55]. It refers to social pressures that are widely perceived and approved by group/society members in order to encourage or restrain certain behaviors of members [56]. The most common approach to social norms encounters two aspects: descriptive norms, which are perceptions of what others do to a behavior; and injunctive norms, which are beliefs about whether or not a person should execute a behavior based on the expectations of others [57]. Social norms are identified as being able to promote tourists' eco-behavioral intentions in tourism destinations [58], and are even more effective than conventional appeals [59]. Therefore, the hypotheses are proposed as:

H6: *Social norms positively impact tourists' intention towards ecotourism destinations.*

H6a: *Injunctive norms positively impact tourists' intention towards ecotourism destinations.*

H6b: *Descriptive norms positively impact tourists' intention towards ecotourism destinations.*

2.4. Receptivity to Green Communication and Travel Intention-Behavior

Receptivity to green communication can be defined as the degree to which consumers pay attention, readiness to accept and react to the green marketing messages they receive [60]. However, consumers (tourists) will respond differently to particular green messages since their ability and level of receptivity to green communication are not the same [61]. It has been proven that the more receptive consumers are to green communication, the greater their intentions toward eco-options by encouraging them to look into alternatives that are beneficial to themselves and the environment [60, 62]. Furthermore, individual receptivity to green communication is proposed to reinforce the features, such as attitude, that contribute to the intention [27]. In other words, tourists' receptivity to green communication may enable the attitude to influence their travel intention more strongly given that they are more aware of their choices. Subsequently, tourists with higher intention to visit a certain destination will strive to make efforts to come to the destination [63]. Hence, the hypotheses are proposed as:

H7: *Receptivity to green communication positively impacts tourists' intention towards ecotourism destinations.*

H8: *Receptivity to green communication positively moderates the relationship between tourists' attitudes and their intention towards ecotourism destinations.*

H9: *Higher tourists' intention will lead to higher actual behavior towards ecotourism destinations.*

3. Conceptual Framework and Research Method

3.1. Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which posits that an individual's behavioral intention is primarily determined by their attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms. TRA has been widely applied in tourism research to understand decision-making processes, including predicting tourists' green travel intention [30]. While TRA provides a robust framework for predicting behavioral intention, it does not fully account for external stimuli that may influence tourists' attitudes or perceived norms, especially in the context of destination marketing. Therefore, this study extends the TRA by incorporating two additional constructs: (1) destination green marketing efforts and (2) tourists' message receptivity. This theoretical extension provides a more comprehensive understanding of tourists' decision-making processes that is not just a single effort and enhances the explanatory

power of the TRA in the tourism context. Based on the literature review and hypothesis development, the conceptual framework of the study is illustrated in Figure 1.

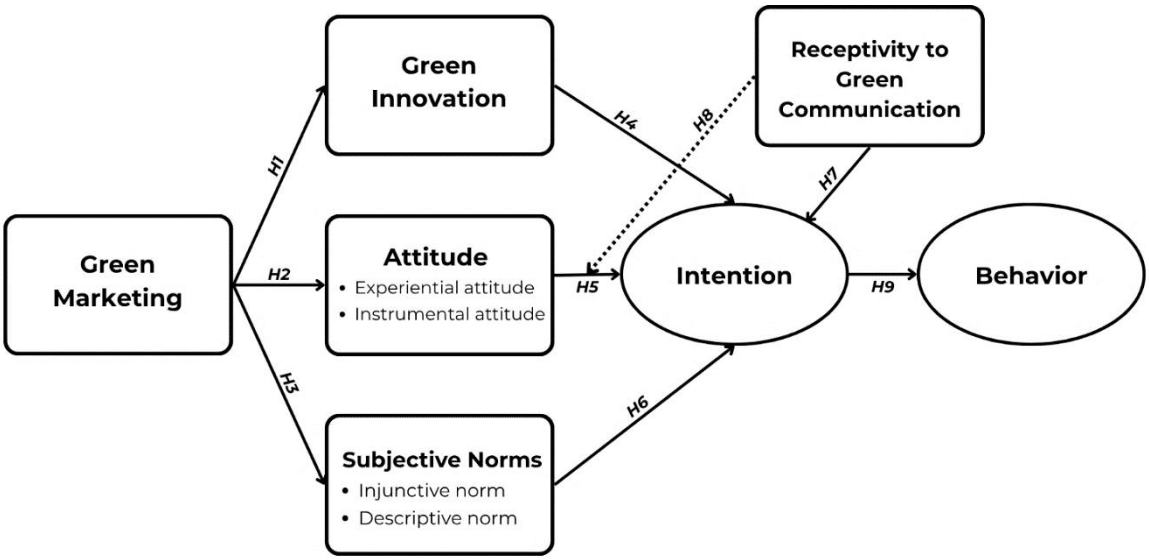

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

3.2. Research Method

The study used the quantitative research method using a questionnaire survey to empirically assess factors of green marketing, green innovation, experiential and instrumental attitudes, descriptive and injunctive norms, receptivity to green communication, and intention-behavior towards ecotourism destinations in Vietnam. The cross-sectional research design is applied to prove assumptions in the context of study, with the purpose of better comprehension of concepts in the current research surroundings. The measurement items for all constructs used in the study are validated scales applied from prestigious studies, and slight adjustments were made to be more relevant in the context of ecotourism destinations. Overall, the study's official scale applied consisted of 36 items. Accordingly, 6 measurement items for green marketing were adopted from Cheng et al. [25]; 4 items to measure green innovation were adopted from Asadi et al. [20]; 7 items to measure tourists' attitudes (both experiential and instrumental) were adopted from Ru et al. [30]; 6 items to measure social norms (both descriptive and injunctive) were adopted from Jun & Arendt [64] and Ru et al. [30]; 6 items to measure the receptivity to green communication were adopted from Latip et al. [27]; 4 items to measure intention towards ecotourism destinations were adopted from Ashraf et al. [65] and Wu et al. [66]; and 6 measurement items for behavior towards ecotourism destinations were adopted from Ghaderi et al. [67]. All the constructs and items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with anchors of "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree". The items for each construct applied to the study are presented in Appendix I.

In order to ensure that all questions are easy to understand, the questionnaire after completion on Google Forms was tested on 20 respondents including 04 researchers and experts in the field of tourism and marketing, 05 employees working in the tourism industry, and 11 domestic tourists in Vietnam. All respondents were assured that their participation was completely voluntary and that the information provided would serve research purposes only and not for any other purpose, and this commitment was clearly stated to all participants in the separate opening of the survey. The survey collected 600 responses, with 558 responses determined to be valid when respondents confirmed that they had received the green marketing practices of ecotourism destinations (either in the destination or online), through non-profit sampling methods, including convenient sampling and snowball sampling. The study analyzed the data using SPSS 26 and AMOS 24 software, using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the reliability of the scales and using EFA, CFA, and SEM factor analysis to verify the relationship between the variables in the model. In addition, the study investigated the role of the moderator variable, indirect relationships, and the differences across identity variables to discover novel and valuable findings relevant to the research context. The authors claim the study is truthful, no major portions of the investigation are neglected, and any deviations from the plan are explained.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 reveals that, among the 558 valid responses, 38.9% of the participants are male, 60.7% are female, and the remaining 0.4% identify as other. In terms of age distribution, the largest group is tourists aged 18-25 years old (53.4%), followed by those aged 26-35 years old (27.6%), 36-45 years old (11.8%), and the smallest group is those

over 45 years old (7.2%). It can be seen that the data collected with young tourists is relatively large. Regarding occupation, the majority of respondents are office workers (29.0%), followed by college/university students (26.9%), non-office workers (18.1%), freelancers (11.3%), particular jobs (10.4%), engineers/scientists (2.3%), and others (2.0%). Regarding income, most participants are tourists with an average monthly income of less than 400 USD (10 million VND) (54.7%), followed by those with an income of 400-800 USD (10-20 million VND) (31.2%); fewer participants have higher incomes, with 9.0% earning 800-1200 USD (20-30 million VND) per month and over 1200 USD only accounting for 5.2%.

Table 1. Description of the sample

Characteristics		Quantity	Proportion (%)
Gender	Male	217	38.9
	Female	339	60.7
	Other	2	0.4
Age	18 - 25 years old	298	53.4
	26 - 35 years old	154	27.6
	36 - 45 years old	66	11.8
	Over 45 years old	40	7.2
Work sector	Office Worker (all ranks)	162	29.0
	Engineer/Scientist	13	2.3
	Freelance Worker	63	11.3
	Particular Jobs (Doctor/Teacher/Police, etc.)	58	10.4
	Non-office Workers (Service staff, manual workers, artisans, etc.)	101	18.1
	College/University Student	150	26.9
	Other	11	2.0
Income	Less than 400 USD/month (Less than 10 million VND/month)	305	54.6
	From 400 to 800 USD/month (10-20 million VND/month)	174	31.2
	From 800 to 1200 USD/month (20-30 million VND/month)	50	9.0
	More than 1200 USD/month (More than 30 million VND/month)	29	5.2

Multiple-choice questions were also used to explore more about respondents' travel behavior. The survey findings show that most participants had experienced various types of tourism besides ecotourism, including cultural tourism (24.9%), entertainment tourism (24.1%), culinary tourism (18.6%), or adventure tourism (18%), etc. In terms of travel companions, most tourists traveled with family (36.5%), followed by friends or partners (34.8%), colleagues (17.3%), solo (8.4%), and other companions (3.1%). Respondents were also asked which ecotourism destination was the most impressive (or most wanted to visit) for them, and the results received a wide variety of destinations mentioned such as Ba Vi National Park, Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex, Ba Na - Suoi Mo Ecotourism Complex, Cat Tien National Park, etc. Thereby, it can be seen that the tourism behavior of tourists in Vietnam is relatively diverse and reflects the potential of nature-based tourism in this country.

On top of that, as shown in Table 2, the average value of green marketing practices ranges from 3.90-4.07 and green innovation ranges from 4.09-4.15, thereby showing that tourists perceive green marketing activities and the innovation of the destination as relatively positive. The average values of attitudes and social norms are also at a good level. Meanwhile, with the range of 3.99-4.20, although showing a slight difference, in general, the attention and reaction of tourists to the green messages is relatively favorable. Hence, leading to higher tourists' intention (4.15-4.21) and behavior (4.11-4.14).

4.2. Assessment of Measurement Model

The study obtained relatively positive results when the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of all constructs reached values greater than 0.8 (Table 2) and the total correlation value for all observed items was greater than 0.3, achieving very high reliability. The study used indicators including CR, AVE, and MSV to determine the validity of all variables in the model. Following Fornell and Larcker's instructions [68], the results reveal no concern regarding convergent validity, since all AVE values are above 0.5 and all CR values are larger than 0.7. Simultaneously, the discriminant validity for all variables is ensured by all MSV values being less than AVE (Table 2). Additionally, as shown in Table 3, the Square Root of the AVE values of each construct is greater than the correlations between the pair of variables tested within each construct.

Table 2. Statistics, reliability and validity testing of all constructs

Constructs		Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	MSV
Green Marketing Practices	GMP1	4.06	0.884	0.920	0.921	0.661	0.301
	GMP2	3.92	0.943				
	GMP3	4.00	0.941				
	GMP4	4.07	0.951				
	GMP5	3.90	0.958				
	GMP6	4.01	0.906				
Green Innovation	GI1	4.14	0.787	0.877	0.878	0.644	0.367
	GI2	4.12	0.836				
	GI3	4.09	0.852				
	GI4	4.15	0.863				
Experiential attitude	EAT1	4.22	0.822	0.922	0.922	0.748	0.217
	EAT2	4.22	0.816				
	EAT3	4.20	0.859				
	EAT4	4.22	0.796				
Instrumental attitude	IAT1	4.02	0.903	0.864	0.870	0.691	0.305
	IAT2	4.06	0.838				
	IAT3	3.87	1.016				
Injunctive norms	IN1	3.92	0.913	0.888	0.889	0.727	0.388
	IN2	3.94	0.909				
	IN3	4.07	0.901				
Descriptive norms	DN1	4.12	0.878	0.840	0.842	0.641	0.317
	DN2	4.08	0.850				
	DN3	3.93	0.929				
Receptivity to green communication	RGC1	4.20	0.768	0.932	0.933	0.697	0.301
	RGC2	4.03	0.820				
	RGC3	3.99	0.878				
	RGC4	4.03	0.858				
	RGC5	4.05	0.848				
	RGC6	4.06	0.817				
Intention towards ecotourism destinations	ITED1	4.21	0.754	0.887	0.888	0.664	0.388
	ITED2	4.18	0.739				
	ITED3	4.19	0.798				
	ITED4	4.15	0.787				
Behavior toward ecotourism destinations	BTED1	4.11	0.827	0.872	0.873	0.696	0.367
	BTED2	4.14	0.815				
	BTED3	4.14	0.885				

Another point to consider is that the KMO value reached 0.920 > 0.5, and the Sig. Bartlett's value reached 0.000 < 0.05, indicating that the data was consistent. On top of that, the Total Variance Extracted reached 77.067% > 50%, indicating correlationality among variables and explaining 77.067% of the data variation of the 36 observed items participating in the EFA. The EFA results for 36 observations were classified into 9 factors with no defective items, so that the convergence and discrimination of the scale were ensured [69]. In parallel, Harman's single-factor test was applied and the result showed that a single factor explained 30.633% of the total variation (smaller than 50%), thereby showing that Common Method Bias (CMB) does not exist and the data is favorable [70]. Lastly, in order to verify the correlation between variables, we conducted a CFA analysis and obtained excellent results, specifically CMIN/df reached 2.132 < 3; CFI reached 0.955 > 0.95; TLI reach 0.949 > 0.9; GFI scored 0.875 > 0.8; RMSEA scored 0.045 < 0.06 and PCLOSE scored 0.989 > 0.05, reflecting that the pattern is consistent and the model has a good close fit [71, 72].

Table 3. The Square Root of AVE of multi-item constructs

	GMP	RGC	EAT	ITED	GI	DN	IN	IAT	BTED
GMP	**0.813**								
RGC	0.549***	**0.835**							
EAT	0.211***	0.088*	**0.865**						
ITED	0.252***	0.258***	0.466***	**0.815**					
GI	0.393***	0.222***	0.297***	0.565***	**0.803**				
DN	0.437***	0.263***	0.076	0.285***	0.467***	**0.801**			
IN	0.223***	0.197***	0.387***	0.623***	0.490***	0.218***	**0.853**		
IAT	0.343***	0.220***	0.246***	0.455***	0.552***	0.416***	0.378***	**0.831**	
BTED	0.418***	0.251***	0.239***	0.555***	0.606***	0.563***	0.436***	0.533***	**0.834**

**** = p < 0.001; ** = p < 0.01; * = p < 0.05*

4.3. Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing Results

A relationship is supported if the p-value is less than 0.05. Table 4 demonstrates that green marketing is effective in promoting green innovation (β = 0.422), tourists' attitudes with both instrumental (β = 0.376) and experiential attitude (β = 0.225), and social norms with both descriptive (β = 0.458) and injunctive norms (β = 0.254). Besides, travel intention towards ecotourism destinations is most positively influenced by injunctive norms (β = 0.402), followed by green innovation (β = 0.288), experiential attitude (β = 0.249), instrumental attitude (β = 0.153), and receptivity to green communication (β = 0.084). It can be assessed that, among the factors that can enhance positive changes in intention, receptivity to green communication has the weakest capability when the impact coefficient is the smallest. Thereby, tourists with higher intention will have higher actual behavior in choosing ecotourism destinations (β = 0.556). In contrast, descriptive norms do not show their role in fostering tourists' intention (p-value > 0.05). The results also indicated that the moderate capacity of receptivity to green communication in the attitude-intention relationship is not significant, with p-value scored 0.097 > 0.05. Thus, the final results revealed only partial support for the H6 hypothesis, due to the rejection of H6b, and rejected the H8 hypothesis.

Table 4. Results of testing the research hypotheses

	Hypotheses	Estimate	p-value	Remark
H1	Green marketing practices → Green Innovation	0.422	***	Supported
H2	Green marketing practices → Attitudes		Fully Supported	
H2a	Green marketing practices → Experiential attitude	0.225	***	Supported
H2b	Green marketing practices → Instrumental attitude	0.376	***	Supported
H3	Green marketing practices → Social norms		Fully Supported	
H3a	Green marketing practices → Injunctive norms	0.254	***	Supported
H3b	Green marketing practices → Descriptive norms	0.458	***	Supported
H4	Green innovation → Intention	0.288	***	Supported
H5	Attitudes → Intention		Fully Supported	
H5a	Experiential attitude → Intention	0.249	***	Supported
H5b	Instrumental attitude → Intention	0.153	***	Supported
H6	Social norms → Intention		Partially supported	
H6a	Injunctive norms → Intention	0.402	***	Supported
H6b	Descriptive norms → Intention	0.042	0.313	Rejected
H7	Receptivity to green communication → Intention	0.084	0.037	Supported
H8	Receptivity to green communication moderates Attitudes-Intention	-0.080	0.097	Rejected
H9	Intention → Behavior	0.556	***	Supported

**** = p < 0.001*

Aside from direct associations, indirect relationships were also examined to understand the mediating role of the studied variables (shown in Table 5). As a result, descriptive norms are basically unimportant in the context of current research when green marketing and receptivity to green communication have no indirect impact on tourists' travel intention (p-value > 0.05). In other words, descriptive norms serve no mediating role. Other indirect relationships, on

the other hand, are verified positively (p-value < 0.05, β > 0), demonstrating that indirect relationships and the mediating role of these factors have practical significance. When combined with the direct impact assessment results, green marketing practices continue to play a more important role than the ability to receive messages from tourists themselves, with the indirect impact coefficient in general still being higher.

Table 5. Results of testing indirect relationships

Indirect path	Upper	Lower	p-value	Standardized Estimated	Significant
GMP → GI → ITED	0.157	0.062	0.001	0.122***	Yes
GMP → IN → ITED	0.146	0.049	0.000	0.102***	Yes
GMP → EAT → ITED	0.090	0.021	0.001	0.056***	Yes
GMP → DN → ITED	0.055	-0.016	0.398	0.019	No
GMP → IAT → ITED	0.085	0.024	0.000	0.057***	Yes
GI → ITED → BTED	0.206	0.085	0.001	0.160***	Yes
IN → ITED → BTED	0.261	0.138	0.000	0.223***	Yes
EAT → ITED → BTED	0.183	0.082	0.000	0.139***	Yes
DN → ITED → BTED	0.071	-0.019	0.410	0.023	No
IAT → ITED → BTED	0.117	0.036	0.000	0.085***	Yes
RGC → ITED → BTED	0.085	0.007	0.043	0.047*	Yes

**** = p < 0.001; ** = p < 0.01; * = p < 0.05*

4.4. Differential Inspection

Though not mentioned in the initial objectives, an exploration of differences is applied to have deeper discoveries about tourism behavior in Vietnam towards ecotourism destinations. The results from the One-Way ANOVA inspection have shown that there is a difference in actual behavior in selecting ecotourism destinations for future tourism of tourists, which is inferred from the examination of the Sig Levene value of the Test of Homogeneity of Variances reached 0.857 > 0.05, and the Sig F. value of the ANOVA test recorded a value of 0.002 < 0.05. As illustrated in Figure 2, higher-income tourists are more likely to choose ecotourism destinations. Nonetheless, individuals in the highest income group are less likely to be as passionate regarding considering ecotourism destinations as others in middle-levels, albeit the average value remains relatively high. In more detail, the income group with the highest behavior is from 800-1200 USD/month (4.43), 400-800 USD/month (4.21), more than 1200 USD/month (4.15) and finally less than 400 USD/month (4.03). This result contributes to creating a new emphasis on the practical significance of the research.

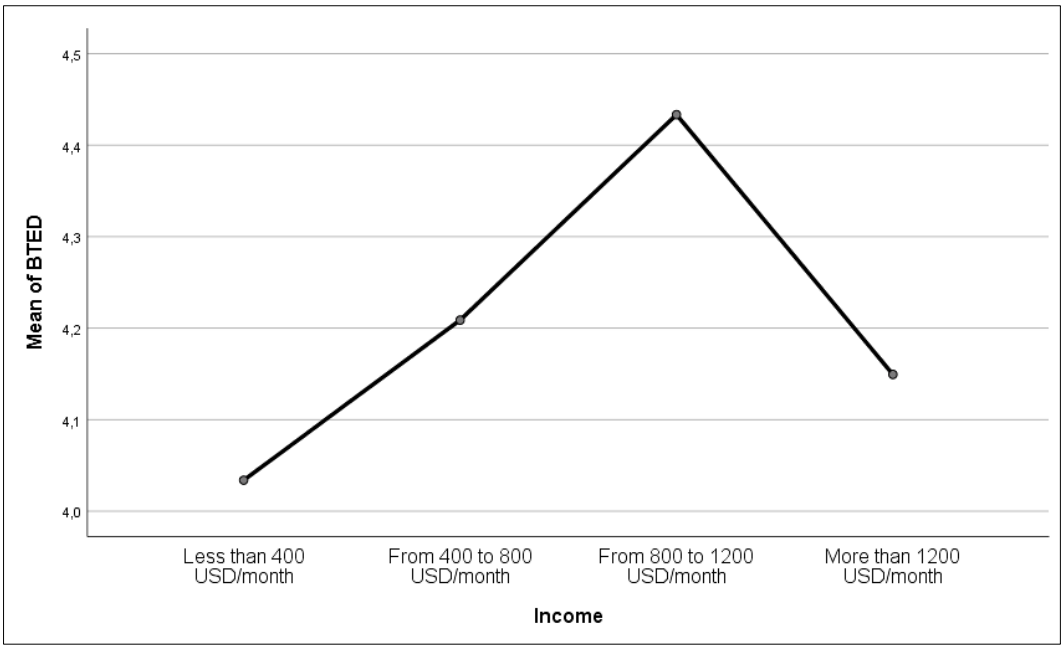

Figure 2. Differential inspection in behavior towards ecotourism destination between different income groups

5. Discussion and Implications

The conceptual framework of the study includes 7 major factors and 9 major hypotheses. After the analysis, relatively positive results were obtained, and the specific criteria studied were completely consistent with reality. 7/9 major hypotheses proposed by the study were supported, 1 hypothesis was partially supported and 1 hypothesis received a rejection. The research results show some agreement with previous literature, at the same time adding new and more complex aspects related to tourists' intention and behavior towards ecotourism destinations, as well as the approaches of green marketing, green innovation, and receptivity to green communication in the tourism sector.

Firstly, green marketing has emerged as an integral part of ecotourism destinations' marketing efforts. In the context of the current study, it not merely affirms its importance in increasing attitudes towards ecotourism destinations [18, 41, 42, 43], but also shows its influence in changing social norms in a positive way. Thereby, affirming that the proposals on the relationship between green marketing and social norms are reasonable and well-founded [23, 44, 45, 46]. A further important outcome is that, while green innovation is acknowledged as a critical aspect in capturing the image of a sustainable tourism destination, green marketing is one "tool" used to accomplish this breakthrough. This result has contributed to affirming the role of green marking in increasing green innovation in literature [39, 40], and at the same time suggesting that greening must occur throughout the process rather than as a single phase. Compared to prior literature, the current study has emphasized the importance of ecotourism destinations themselves proactively practicing green marketing initiatives first, as it directly promotes green innovation, attitudes and social norms. This may stem from the fact that proactive implementation of green marketing is a controllable factor, while receptivity is more difficult, and receptivity can only occur if there is something worth receiving. Ecotourism destinations need to increase their green marketing strategies through the integration of many activities such as encouraging sustainable choices, setting up notice to promote green practices, being proactive in environmentally friendly activities, or using friendly inputs, etc. It is essential to recognize that such initiatives must positively change tourists' perceptions of the destination to facilitate in shaping its image, such as whether this destination uses environmentally friendly materials, has a good waste treatment and recycling process, improves packaging, etc., to attract and enhance tourists' behavioral intentions.

Secondly, the study also emphasizes the importance of using multidimensional concepts to comprehensively explore tourists' attitudes and perceived norms that influence tourists' intention and behavior toward ecotourism sites. Despite acknowledging the role of green innovation and attitudes towards increasing the intention of tourists, social norms have become more complicated. Previous studies have shown the importance of social norms in the actual travel perception and behavior of tourists [58, 59], but the current study rejects the role of descriptive norms. Accordingly, tourists are only influenced by how the people who are important to them will encourage and support them in going to ecotourism destinations, not by whether the people around them have actually traveled or not. In contrast, both aspects of attitude were found to be meaningful when both experiential attitude and instrumental attitude directly increased intent, i.e., when tourists responded better to the benefits that ecotourism brings, as well as the feeling that ecotourism is worthwhile, they will show more effort towards this type of tourism. On the other hand, receptivity to green communication only has an immediate effect on tourists' intention, not changing the influence of attitude on intention and thereby the proposal from Latip et al. [27] is rejected. This might be due to measurement limitations, or alternatively, it might be that receptivity alone is not a sufficient moderator in such a context. Consumers were found to appreciate green communication using credibility cues, such as the source of the message [73], but have not been fully approached in the context of ecotourism. But overall, it can be concluded that tourists who pay more attention and receive a better green message will have a higher intention to go to ecotourism destinations directly. In implication, further to digging into and figuring out ways to stimulate positive tourist attitudes and navigate social norms through green marketing initiatives, ecotourism destinations must also formulate messages that are easily understood and accessible to all audiences with varying levels of receptivity to green messages.

Finally, the study's findings revealed an average difference in actual behavior in ecotourism destination selection across income levels. In more detail, tourists with greater incomes are more likely to consider ecotourism destinations for their future travels. However, individuals in the highest income group exhibited less action. This clarifies the complexity of tourism psychology among tourists. This result can be considered reasonable given that ecotourism or nature-based tourism can be more costly because it is demanding and operating costs are higher, which leads to the expectation that tourists can be willing to pay more [74, 75]. Drawing from the fact that Vietnam is a highly price-sensitive country, it is understandable that tourists with higher incomes are found to be willing to pay more to consider and participate in ecotourism experiences. Nonetheless, a notable point is the highest-income group's lower consideration. For the income-segment-based differentiation, middle- to high-income tourists may more closely align personal desires with green tourism ideals, while tourists with significantly higher incomes may approach ecotourism more as a lifestyle choice or convenience, i.e., they place greater personal value because they can better afford services that satisfy them without necessarily being "green", which might reflect that they desire more from their experiences, such as integrating smart experiences, as nature-based initiatives alone will be hard to satisfy them. This complexity in tourism behavior requires ecotourism destinations to put more effort into researching tourists and emerging tourism trends. It is not only about finding solutions to lower operating costs and offering favorable prices to attract tourists with lower incomes but also about having tour programs or activities designed separately for higher demand.

6. Conclusion

The strong development of ecotourism in recent years has reflected the growing trend of environmental awareness and desire to participate in sustainable forms of tourism, in which tourists and service providers are well aware of the importance of preserving natural resources and ecosystems in order to contribute to sustainable development. The research objectives have been completed and the study has succeeded in figuring out the factors that drive the behavioral intentions of tourists in Vietnam towards ecotourism destinations. Accordingly, the research findings have brought important contributions to the field of ecotourism, both theoretical and practical implications. The results have affirmed the importance of applying green marketing to destination strategies when highlighting its significance in increasing green innovation of the destination, positive attitudes of tourists, as well as orienting social norms in a more "green" direction. These implementations have a beneficial impact on tourists' inclinations to visit and actual behavior in choosing ecotourism destinations for their travels. In addition, the study has clarified the question of the role of receptivity to green communication when integrated with green marketing and determined that it has a direct impact on travel intentions, with individuals with better awareness and readiness of green messages having higher intentions toward green options, such as ecotourism destinations. Yet it should be noted that, from a practical perspective, priority should be placed on proactive and tangible actions rather than waiting for increased reception or uptake from tourists. Furthermore, the study also assessed the complexity of travel behavior when detecting differences in behavior between different groups of travelers, which is income. These findings have become useful premises for destinations to develop green marketing strategies to attract tourists and increase the competitiveness of destinations while ensuring that they do not harm the environment and ecosystems.

The study still has some limitations that can be further developed in future studies. First, although the study has succeeded in evaluating the integration between factors originating from the destination, such as green marketing and green innovation, as well as from the tourists themselves, such as receptivity to green communication, there are many other factors derived from tourists that can be further integrated, such as personal value (e.g., altruism or biospheric value) or motivation (e.g., escape, learning or status). Additionally, the rejection of the moderator indicates the obviousness of the attitude-intention-behavior relationship. Nevertheless, this gap has been identified in the context of travel behavior, suggesting that an expansion of the framework using another moderator may possess better practical applications. Finally, although this study contributes to understanding tourists' behavioral intentions in the ecotourism context, its findings are based on data from Vietnam and may be difficult to directly generalize to other cultural or regional contexts without taking into account cultural, institutional, and market maturity differences. Future studies are encouraged to apply and compare this framework across different cultural contexts to determine whether the effects of green marketing, green innovation, and receptivity to green communication remain consistent. In short, by delving deeper into these approaches, both theoretical and practical implications may be fulfilled, allowing for a more comprehensive assessment of tourism behavior in the context of ecotourism in particular and sustainable tourism in general.

7. Declarations

7.1. Author Contributions

Conceptualization, H.N-V., L.D.N., and T.P-H.; methodology, H.T.T.N. and D.N.T.H.; software, L.D.N. and T.P-H.; validation, H.N-V. and L.D.N.; formal analysis, T.P-H., H.T.T.N., D.N.T.H., H.T.N., and H.L.T.N.; investigation, T.P-H., H.T.T.N., D.N.T.H., H.T.N., and H.L.T.N.; resources, H.N-V.; data curation, L.D.N.; writing—original draft preparation, L.D.N., T.P-H., H.T.T.N., D.N.T.H., H.T.N., and H.L.T.N.; writing—review and editing, H.N-V. and L.D.N.; visualization, H.T.N. and H.L.T.N.; supervision, H.N-V.; project administration, H.N-V., L.D.N., and T.P-H.; funding acquisition, H.N-V. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

7.2. Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

7.3. Funding

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7.4. Institutional Review Board Statement

The Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Business Administration, Banking Academy of Vietnam, Hanoi, Vietnam, has approval for this study.

7.5. Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

7.6. Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest concerning the publication of this manuscript. Furthermore, all ethical considerations, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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Appendix I

Table A1. Measurement Items

Constructs		Items
Green Marketing Practices	GMP1	This ecotourism destination has set up environmental notices to promote green practices (such as saving water, recycling paper, saving electricity, etc.)
	GMP2	This ecotourism destination offers green marketing discounts (e.g., unused services will not be charged)
	GMP3	This ecotourism destination's eco-friendly marketing caught my attention
	GMP4	This ecotourism destination encourages customers to take public transportation and provides shuttle services
	GMP5	This ecotourism destination has the Green Mark, meaning that food and beverages, accommodation, decorations, and building materials were chosen as they pollute the environment less
	GMP6	This ecotourism destination maximizes surrounding facilities, such as using local organic ingredients for food and beverages and including the natural landscape in ecotourism itineraries
Green Innovation	GI1	Ecotourism destinations use less or non-polluting/toxic materials
	GI2	Ecotourism destinations improve environmentally friendly packaging for existing and new products
	GI3	Ecotourism destinations recover their end-of-life products and recycle
	GI4	Ecotourism destinations use eco-labelling
Experiential attitude	EAT1	Ecotourism is/will be good
	EAT2	Ecotourism is/will be useful
	EAT3	Ecotourism is/will be responsible
	EAT4	Ecotourism is/will be sensible
Instrumental attitude	IAT1	Ecotourism reduces carbon dioxide and PM2.5 emissions
	IAT2	Ecotourism alleviates energy shortage issues
	IAT3	Ecotourism saves money
Injunctive norms	IN1	Most people who are important to me are likely to think I should travel to ecotourism destinations
	IN2	Most people who are important to me would approve of my travel to ecotourism destinations
	IN3	Most people who are important to me want me to travel to ecotourism destinations
Descriptive norms	DN1	My friends have taken actions to travel to ecotourism destinations
	DN2	Some neighbors in my community that I know have participated in travel to ecotourism destinations
	DN3	Others who are important to me have been involved in travel to ecotourism destinations
Receptivity to green communication	RGC1	I support a brand that promotes environmental sustainability
	RGC2	I tend to pay attention to advertising messages that talk about the environment
	RGC3	I am excited when I see an advertisement about green products and services
	RGC4	Green messages in advertisements affect my attitude towards the advertisements
	RGC5	I respond favourably to brands that use green messages in their advertising
	RGC6	I think green advertising is effective in influencing consumer purchase intention
Intention towards ecotourism destinations	ITED1	I am willing to visit ecotourism destinations in the future
	ITED2	I plan to visit ecotourism destinations in the future
	ITED3	I will expend effort on visiting ecotourism destinations in the future
	ITED4	I am willing to recommend my family, relatives, and friends to participate in ecotourism experiences
Behavior toward ecotourism destinations	BTED1	I prefer ecotourism destinations rather than traditional ones
	BTED2	I will select ecotourism destinations for future trips
	BTED3	Ecotourism destinations have more to offer compared to traditional destinations, hence I get more experiences and fun