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Factors Affecting Tourists' Intentions to Visit and Willingness to Pay a Premium for Green Destinations

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A green footprint destination is regarded as a core element of sustainable tourism, and all the effort to build a green tourism site is deserved. The study focuses on tourists' perspectives and intent to identify factors that contribute to the visit intention and willingness to pay more for visiting a green footprint destination. Employing the theory of planned behavior, the study proposes green activities, including green knowledge, green publicity, and green practices, will influence tourists' attitude, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness, which will later explain their intention and willingness to pay more for visiting green tourism sites. A survey is conducted to collect data from Vietnamese tourists, and 464 were qualified for verification research hypotheses using SPSS and AMOS software. The results reveal that tourists' attitude, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness mediate the influence of green activities and their visit intention as well as willingness to pay more for visiting green footprint destinations. The findings provide valuable insight for scholars and practitioners in understanding and encouraging pro-environmental behaviors among Vietnamese tourists.

Keywords: visiting intention, willingness to pay premium, green footprint destination, Vietnamese tourists, green actors.

Introduction

Over the past decades, environmental issues have been global challenges, and they have called warning bells for all countries. Global warming, climate change, pollution, or ecological imbalance, to name just a few, are harming human life and all natural creatures (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020). Environmentalists postulate that dramatic negative problems are predicted if there is no effective action from us, who are living and directly generating carbon emissions, excessively consuming energy and water, and continuously creating waste disposal (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020). It is hardly found in any industry that is not harmful to the environment since it almost requires the use of natural resources, and some are abusively using them (Esfandiar et al., 2022). Given the fact that tourism brings considerable advantages for a single country, the rapid growth is equivalent to more seriousness on the biophysical system (Yousaf et al., 2021). One feasible solution that is widely acknowledged and promoted in this industry is sustainable tourism (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020).

Sustainable tourism, or eco-friendly tourism, is the concept of the tourism industry aiming at achieving both economy and long-term development. Sustainable tourism supports tourism activities that create the least detrimental impacts on the local environment but still contribute to the local inhabitants in terms of economic benefits and cultural preservation (Leonidou et al., 2015). The practices of sustainable tourism require the harmonious cooperation among stakeholders and the effortless implementation of all activities. Green destination is one aspect of sustainable tourism in which it mobilizes local governments, companies, residents, and tourists to be built and grown. While the local government is responsible for the green footprint destination overall program, the practices of green activities are encouraged and responded to by companies and residents. However, the success of a green footprint destination is mainly decided by the engagement of tourists since they will actually bring revenues and profits to tourism sites. Line et al. (2018) highlight that the destination can significantly green behaviors, but the divergence in tourists' intention and willingness to pay more for visiting green footprint destinations is a dilemma for enterprises investing large amounts of resources in green practices (Line et al., 2018).

Jones (2021) points out that people act differently when they travel, and they tend to respond more favorably to pro-social projects such as eco-friendly activities. Statistics report that 87% of global tourists want to be green travelers, and even environmentally savvy tourists look for zero-footprint sites for their destinations (Ashraf et al., 2020). Nonetheless, research has indicated that tourists perform sustainably only when they perceive their green actions as meaningful and believe in green practices; otherwise, they will return to normal tourism when hedonic values are the main motivations (Farahat, 2024). Consequently, it is always a challenge for scholars and policymakers to explore ways to promote green behaviors since they vary greatly among tourists from different countries, and their behaviors are influenced by multiple determinants. Thus, research focuses on identifying antecedents of tourists' intention to visit and willingness to pay a premium for visiting green footprint destinations that are worth conducting since the results will be expected to realize the sustainability development.

Recent studies have shown growing global interest in sustainable and green tourism, with destinations increasingly implementing green practices to appeal to environmentally conscious travelers. However, while the concept of green footprint destinations is gaining traction, empirical evidence on how such practices influence tourists' behavioral intentions, particularly their intention to visit and willingness to pay a premium, remains inconclusive and underexplored. For instance, while some studies have found a positive relationship between tourists' intention to visit and their willingness to pay more for green destinations (Hao et al., 2019; Winter et al., 2021), others report negative or insignificant effects (Han and Kim, 2010; Zhang et al., 2018). This inconsistency signals a critical need for further research to unpack the psychological mechanisms and contextual factors that shape tourists' pro-environmental behaviors. Moreover, recent literature emphasizes that perceptions, attitudes, and trust play crucial roles in shaping tourists' adoption of environmentally responsible behaviors (Liu et al., 2020). However, the integration of these psychological constructs in understanding green tourism behaviors is still limited.

Notably, existing studies are heavily concentrated in developed countries, where institutional and consumer awareness of sustainability is typically high. In contrast, research on sustainable tourism in emerging markets, such as Vietnam, remains scarce (León-Gómez et al., 2021), despite the pressing environmental challenges and the country's growing tourism sector. Vietnam, as a rapidly developing nation facing significant environmental pressures, offers a timely and relevant context to examine how green tourism practices can shape consumer behavior and contribute to sustainable development goals. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to address these research gaps by identifying the key antecedents influencing Vietnamese tourists' intentions to visit and their willingness to pay more for green footprint destinations. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How do green practices influence tourists' attitudes, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness toward green footprint destinations? (2) Which factors significantly predict Vietnamese tourists' intention to visit and willingness to pay more for such destinations? and (3) Does the intention to visit positively affect their willingness to pay a premium? The study's findings are expected to enrich the behavioral literature in sustainable tourism and offer actionable insights for policymakers and tourism practitioners in

designing effective strategies to promote green tourism in emerging economies like Vietnam.

Literature review

Green footprint destinations in Vietnam

Tourism keeps a vital role in driving Vietnam's economy since it contributes more than 6% to the national GDP annually and is expected to grow steadily in the following decades (Mai et al., 2020). Vietnam has sufficient resources to develop various types of tourism, ranging from natural landscapes and cultural heritage to experience and MICE tourism (Milla et al., 2020). Therefore, sustainable tourism is considered a compulsory solution for the country's sustainable development (Pham et al., 2021). Supported by the government, Vietnam is developing green destinations for multiple tourism sites throughout the country (Milla et al., 2020). Some are named as Con Dao Island (Ba Ria–Vung Tau), Sapa (Lao Cai), Na Hang (Tuyen Quang), Hoi An ancient town (Quang Nam), and Cai Rang floating market (Can Tho) (Thai and Nguyen, 2022). A green tourism destination is formally understood as a site that still remains with both natural and ecological characteristics (Hammoud et al., 2024). Green footprint destination is regarded as one branch of a green tourism destination on which the site focuses tourism activities that create the minimal detrimental effect on the local environment (Pan et al., 2018). Schianetz et al. (2007) define that a green destination requires integrating a wide range of green activities and managements, such as water and air quality, fauna and flora preservation, and habitat, visitor, and community (Hammoud et al., 2024). A green footprint destination in Vietnam are managed under authorized local government and co-executed by local companies and inhabitants, with the main objective being to attract green tourists, or tourists who reflect a high level of environmental values (Mai et al., 2020). Understanding how green practices in promoting green footprint destinations influence tourists' perceptions and behaviors is imperative for local governments to sharpen their policies as well as prioritize productive techniques to call for eco-friendly behaviors from tourists (Pham et al., 2021).

Underlying theory

To develop the research framework, this study draws upon both the theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) and core principles from attitude theory. Attitude theory posits that individuals' evaluations, favorable or unfavorable, toward a specific object or behavior are critical predictors of their behavioral responses (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2000). Attitudes in turn are shaped by cognitive beliefs and emotional reactions, and they serve as a key component in understanding human decision-making. In sustainable tourism, a tourist's attitude toward green destinations reflects not only their awareness of environmental issues but also their values and emotional references toward eco-friendly practices. Building on attitude theory, the TPB framework further refines the prediction of behavior by introducing three core determinants: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Numerous studies confirm that a favorable attitude toward environmentally responsible tourism is strongly associated with tourists' intentions to engage in such behaviors (Han and Kim, 2010; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006).

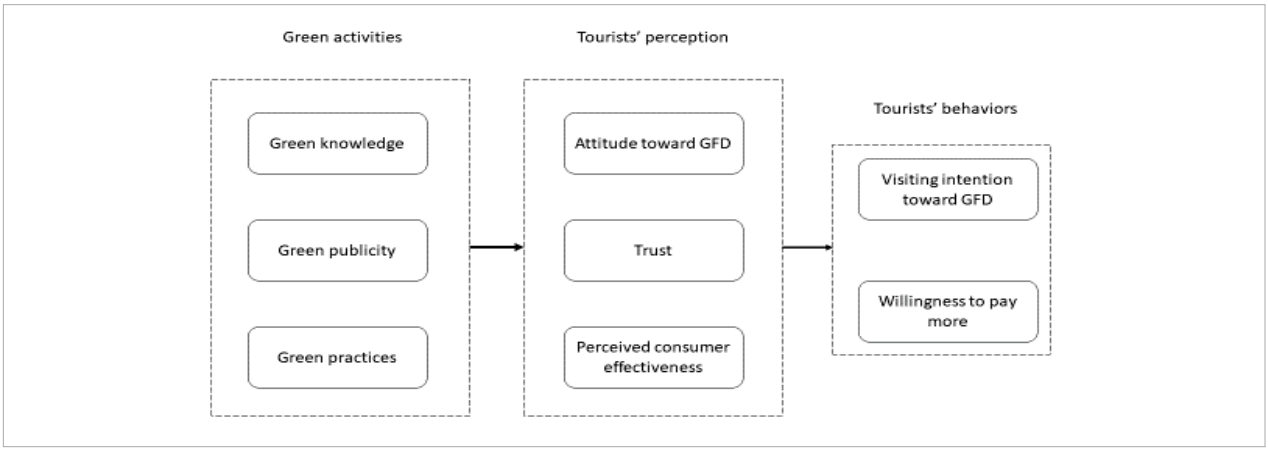
In this study, TPB is employed to explain tourists' intention to visit green footprint destinations and their willingness to pay a premium for such experiences. The model is extended by incorporating external antecedents such as environmental knowledge, green publicity, green practices, and subjective norms, which are hypothesized to influence behavioral outcomes indirectly through attitude, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness. This approach integrates the evaluative component of attitude theory with the predictive structure of TPB, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of pro-environmental travel behavior. It also reflects the complexity of consumer decision-making in the context of green tourism, particularly in emerging markets like Vietnam, where both awareness and practices for sustainable tourism are still developing.

Theoretical definitions and hypotheses development

Tourists' intentions to visit green footprint destinations

Ajzen (2015) defines intention as a person's willingness to take action when the appropriate conditions arise. In this study, tourists' intention to visit green footprint destinations is understood as the willingness to visit green footprint destinations (Wan et al., 2014). Theoretically, the higher the intention of the tourists to visit green footprint destinations, the higher the actual visit of tourists to those destinations (Nowacki et al., 2023).

Fig. 1. *The proposed conceptual model of the study*



Willingness to pay more for green footprint destinations

Consumers' willingness to pay more is understood as the willingness of consumers to pay a premium (Wei et al., 2018). It can be referred to as the maximum amount of money that a person agrees to sacrifice for a change (Gomes et al., 2023). In this study, willingness to pay more is defined as the highest cost that a tourist is willing to give up when visiting a green footprint destination (de Araújo et al., 2022). These costs are various, such as costs for accommodations, transportation, food and beverages, tickets, etc., and Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez (2016) proved that tourists were willing to pay a premium toward a more sustainable tourism destination. To find a maximum specific extra cost for visiting a green footprint destination, the study conducted a survey test with 50 tourists and estimated a highest additional 30% when they visited green tourism sites. This number is aligned with previous studies researching willingness to pay more for green services (Agag et al., 2020). Thus, this study finalizes with the willingness to pay at most 30% for green footprint destinations to measure the willingness to pay more of the tourists.

Attitude toward green footprint destinations

Attitude refers to a consistent evaluation, feeling, or predisposition an individual holds toward an object or action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2000). Because attitude is an overall subjective assessment, it often reflects in favorability or unfavorability level. In this study, attitude is defined as tourists' general evaluative judgment, either positive or negative, toward green footprint destinations. Within behavioral and environmental psychology, attitude has been extensively documented as a critical predictor of pro-environmental behaviors, particularly in tourism settings (Ortega-Rodríguez et al., 2024). Empirical evidence supports the central role of attitude in shaping both intentions to visit and willingness to pay for sustainable tourism experiences. For instance, Eid et al. (2021) emphasized the pivotal role of attitude in forecasting tourists' behavioral intentions in ecotourism contexts. Similarly, Nowacki et al. (2023) found that attitude significantly influenced intention to visit ecotourism sites among Gen Z tourists in Poland and India, while de Araújo et al. (2022) found that ecotour attitudes positively affected willingness to pay for sustainability among Portuguese tourists. Thus, it is proposed that:

H1-a: Attitude toward green footprint destinations will positively influence on tourists' intentions to visit those destinations.

H1-b: Attitude toward green footprint destinations will positively influence on tourists' willingess to pay at most 30% for visiting green footprint destinations.

Tourists' trust toward green footprint destinations

Trust is defined as a human state that reflects the willingness to accept risks based on positive beliefs (Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen, 2017). Trust is commonly conceptualized as the belief or confidence in the reliability and integrity of a person, organization, or system (D'Souza et al., 2021). In tourism, particularly within the domain of ecotourism, trust plays a pivotal role in shaping visitors' perceptions and behavioral responses (Waris et al., 2024). Specifically, trust in a green

footprint destination refers to a tourist's confidence that the destination adheres to authentic and reliable environmental practices (Chen and Chang, 2012). Prior studies have underscored that such trust not only increases the perceived credibility of green initiatives but also fosters tourists' pro-environmental behaviors (Hossain et al., 2022; Ali and Hassan, 2023). Empirical evidence supports the argument that trust serves as a central mechanism influencing tourism behavior: for instance, Cheng et al. (2022) found that trust significantly predicted tourists' intention to visit environmentally responsible destinations, such as hot-spring hotels, while Tan et al. (2024) demonstrated its positive impact on tourists' willingness to financially support environmental protection. Thus, it is proposed that:

H2-a: Trust toward green footprint destinations will positively influence on tourists' intention to visit those destinations.

H2-b: Trust toward green footprint destinations will positively influence on tourists' willingess to pay at most 30% for visiting green footprint destinations.

Perceived consumer effectiveness

Perceived consumer effectiveness refers to an individual's belief in their ability to make a meaningful impact through personal actions, particularly within pro-social and environmental contexts (Kovacs and Keresztes, 2022). Conceptually, perceived consumer effectiveness is often regarded as a sub-dimension of perceived behavioral control, reflecting the extent to which individuals feel capable of influencing environmental outcomes through their choices. In the context of sustainable tourism, it reflects tourists' confidence that their engagement in green initiatives, such as choosing eco-friendly accommodations or participating in conservation programs, can lead to environmental benefits (Han and Kim, 2010; Arias and Trujillo, 2020). When tourists believe that their individual contributions are effective, they are more likely to develop favorable intentions toward green behaviors and to support such initiatives financially (Gautam, 2020). Empirical research consistently demonstrates that higher levels of perceived consumer effectiveness are associated with a greater likelihood of engaging in environmentally responsible behaviors. For example, Arias and Trujillo (2020) confirmed this relationship in the context of reusable bag usage, while Kovacs and Keresztes (2022) found similar results in the domain of sustainable food consumption. These findings suggest that tourists' belief in the effectiveness of their own actions is a critical antecedent to their behavioral intentions. Thus, it is proposed that:

H3-a: Perceived consumer effectiveness will positively influence on tourists' intention to visit those destinations.

H3-b: Perceived consumer effectiveness toward green footprint destination will positively influence on tourists' willingess to pay at most 30% for visiting green footprint destinations.

Environmental knowledge

Environmental knowledge refers to an individual's awareness and understanding of environmental systems, issues, and potential solutions (Zhang and Chan, 2021). It is a foundation component in shaping environmentally responsible behavior. Theoretically, environmental knowledge is broader than environmental concern, as it encompasses general understanding about environmental processes and actions, whereas environmental concern focuses more narrowly on emotional responses to environmental degradation (Tan, 2023). In the tourism context, tourists who possess greater environmental knowledge are more likely to recognize the value of green initiatives and to evaluate such programs more positively (Rehan et al., 2024; Rita et al., 2024). Empirical evidence has shown that environmental knowledge is a key antecedent to various pro-environmental psychological constructs. For instance, it has been found to influence green attitudes (Manopo et al., 2021), build green trust (Sultana et al., 2022), and enhance perceived consumer effectiveness (Natakoesoemah and Adiarsi, 2020). Thus, it is proposed that:

H4-a: Environmental knowledge will positively influence on attitude toward green footprint destinations.

H4-b: Environmental knowledge will positively influence on trust toward green footprint destinations.

H4-c: Environmental knowledge will positively influence on perceived consumer effectiveness.

Green publicity

Government publicity plays a crucial role in shaping public awareness, attitudes, and behaviors, especially when introducing new policies or social programs. From a policy communication perspective, effective publicity serves not only to disseminate information but also to foster public understanding and acceptance faster (Gao et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2021). Green

government publicity refers to the strategic promotion of environmental values, green behaviors, and practices through various media channels. Such publicity increases citizens' awareness of environmental issues, enhances their perceived responsibility, and encourages them to adopt environmentally friendly behaviors. In tourism, this includes promoting green destinations, highlighting their environmental values, and encouraging tourists to support these destinations even at a higher cost (Ma et al., 2021). Prior empirical studies have confirmed that green government publicity significantly contributes to fostering green attitudes, building trust in green claims, and enhancing perceived consumer effectiveness (Lin et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). Thus, it is proposed:

H5-a: Green publicity will positively influence on attitude toward green footprint destinations.

H5-b: Green publicity will positively influence on trust toward green footprint destinations.

H5-c: Green publicity will positively influence on perceived consumer effectiveness.

Green practices

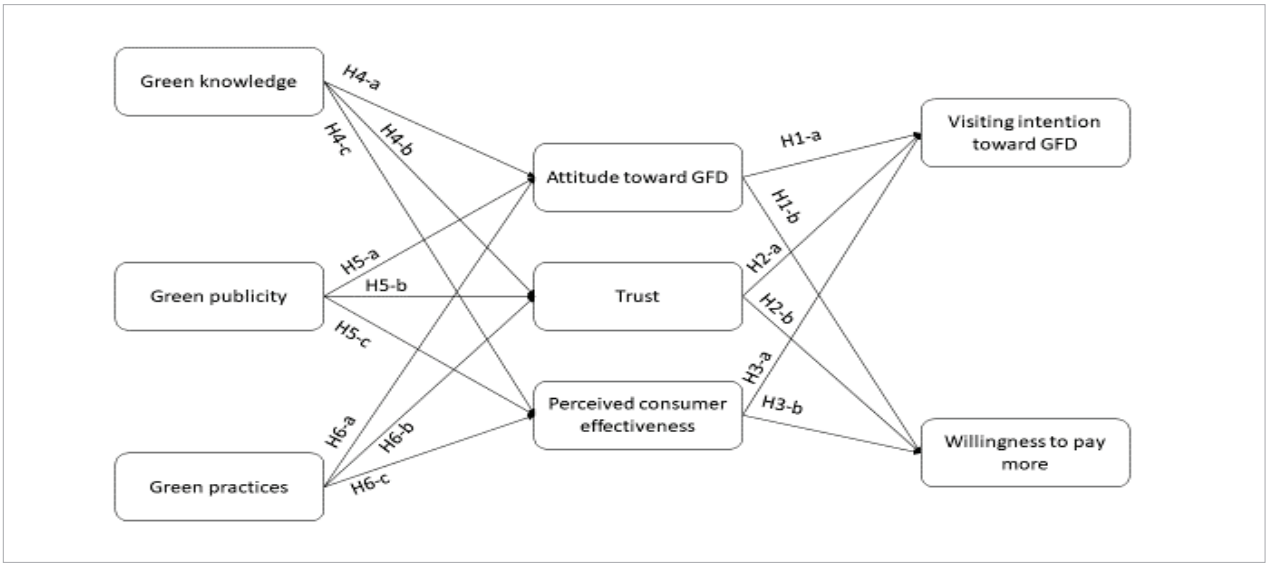
Green destinations maintain a prominent, important role in developing the ecotourism industry (Basendwah et al., 2024). Green destinations require numerous practices and efforts to manage the destination image among stakeholders (Robin et al., 2017). Brand experts elucidate that green practices in tourism cover a wide range of activities such as green space preservation, waste management and recycling programs, green community involvement, green public transportation initiatives, support for eco-friendly accommodations, and educational campaigns (Mazhenova et al., 2016; Merli et al., 2019). Because a green destination in the tourism industry is a holistic brand of a specific site, it is often the responsibility of the local government or administrative departments (Merli et al., 2019). Green practices, when well managed, improve tourists' attitudes toward green-footprint destinations and enhance tourists' trust toward those destinations (Hashim et al., 2013; Huh and Chang, 2017). In the study of Jeong et al. (2014), they acknowledged eco-friendly practices positively influenced consumers' attitudes toward a café store, while Ali and Hassan (2023) revealed that green practices strengthen trust among tourists. Additionally, Riva et al. (2022) confirmed that green practices in restaurants strengthened perceived consumer effectiveness toward green practices. Thus, it is proposed that:

H6-a: Green management practices will positively influence on attitude toward green footprint destinations.

H6-b: Green management practices will positively influence on trust toward green footprint destinations.

H6-c: Green management practices will positively influence on perceived consumer effectiveness

Fig. 2. *The research model*



Research methodology

Measurement development

Employing the TPB, the research model included eight constructs. Environmental knowledge, green publicity, and green practices were proposed as independent variables, which hypothetically influenced attitude, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness toward green footprint destinations, and those in turn facilitated tourists' intention to visit and their willingness to pay more for visiting green footprint destinations. All latent constructs were adapted from previous prominent reflective measurement scales. *Table 1* provides the measurement items for the proposed constructs in the study.

Table 1. *The construct measurement items*

Construct	Item	Measurement items	Author
Green knowledge	GK1	I am aware that pollutants are produced from tourism activities.	Khare (2023)
	GK2	I am aware that air pollution can occur from tourism activities.	
	GK3	I am aware that tourism activities harm natural resources.	
	GK4	I am aware that it is very difficult to recycle the waste from tourism activities.	
Green Publicity	GPU1	I see the government publicity of green footprint destinations every day.	Gao et al., (2017)
	GPU2	I see the publicity of green footprint destinations in public places.	
	GPU3	I think the government has done a lot to publicize the green footprint destinations.	
Green Practices	GP1	The destination is committed to the reduction and proper management of waste.	Merli et al., (2019)
	GP2	The destination adopts water-saving practices.	
	GP3	The destination adopts energy-saving practices.	
	GP4	Organic or seasonal food are available.	
	GP5	The destination is committed to the protection of the surrounding natural environment.	
Attitude	ATT1	For me, staying at a green footprint destination when traveling is extremely good.	De Leeuw et al., (2015)
	ATT2	For me, staying at a green footprint destination when traveling is extremely pleasant.	
	ATT3	For me, staying at a green footprint destination when traveling is wise.	
Trust	TR1	Green footprint destinations are more reliable than other destinations.	Chen and Chang (2012)
	TR2	Green footprint destinations are more trustworthy than other destinations.	
	TR3	Green footprint destinations are more secure and keep commitments for environmental protection than other destinations.	
Perceived consumer effectiveness	PCE1	It is worth for individuals to do something about protecting environment.	Han and Kim (2010)
	PCE2	An individual's behavior has significant effect on pollutions and natural resource problems.	
	PCE3	An individual's behavior has a positive impact on society if he/she visits green footprint destinations.	
Visiting intention to green footprint destinations	VI1	I am willing to choose a green footprint destination when traveling	Wan et al. (2014)
	VI2	I plan to choose a green footprint destination when traveling	
	VI3	I will make an effort to visit a green footprint destination when traveling	
Willingness to pay at most 30% for green footprint destinations	WTP1	I would pay at most 30% for green footprint destinations that are commited for environmental protection	Wei et al., (2018)
	WTP2	I am willing to spend at most 30% money in order to visit green footprint destinations that are environmentally friendly.	
	WTP3	I believe it is acceptable to spend extra money to visit green footprint destinations that are environmentally friendly.	

Each evaluative item was measured by a 5-point Likert scale anchoring from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The updated scales were initially developed in English, then translated into Vietnamese, and subsequently back-translated into English to ensure consistency and compatibility between the two versions. Moreover, the scales were sent to five experts, including two academics and three administrative officers who were responsible for local green tourism programs. The expert review was conducted to revise the scales for their best fit with the practice in Vietnam and to add needed items.

Questionnaire design and pilot test

A survey was used to collect data from target respondents. The questionnaire was designed for participants to give their evaluative answers and demographic information. The demographic section was placed at the end of the questionnaire, and closed-ended answers were employed. An e-questionnaire was developed to be aligned with the aim of this study, which was to enhance eco-friendly projects. A pilot test was conducted with 10 respondents to minimize errors and misunderstandings.

Sample and data collection

The target respondents of this study were young Vietnamese tourists, as the objective was to identify determinants of tourists' intention to visit and their willingness to pay more for visiting green footprint destinations. To reach the target respondents, the questionnaire was uploaded on tourism fan pages and communities. The convenience sampling was employed to achieve the highest number of respondents that the sample could get. To reduce biases due to using this method, the expected number of respondents was at least 500.

Measure validation and data analysis

Before examining the research hypotheses, each construct had been checked for reliability and validity. Reliability, including internal consistency and composite reliability, was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (>0.6) and composite reliability (CR > 0.6). Validity, including convergent and discriminant validity, was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE > 0.5) and maximum shared variance (MSV) compared with the maximum squared average (MSA). Analyses were conducted using SPSS and AMOS, with model fit for both CFA and SEM evaluated according to the threshold values suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). Hypotheses were considered supported if p-values were less than 0.05.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The survey was conducted over three months, and 464 returned questionnaires were deemed qualified. Among them, 285 respondents were male (61.4%), while 179 were female (38.6%). In terms of age, 123 respondents were under 25 years old, 147 were between 26 and 35 years old, 138 were between 36 and 45 years old, and the remainder were over 45. Regarding income, 233 had a monthly income of less than 10 million VND, 165 earned between 10 and less than 20 million VND, and 46 earned between 20 and less than 30 million VND. *Table 2* shows the demographic information of the sample.

Table 2. *The demographic information of the sample*

Criteria	n	%
Gender		
Male	285	61.4
Female	179	38.6
Age range		
<25	125	26.9
26–35	147	31.7
36–45	138	29.7
>45	54	11.7
Income level		
Less than 10 million VND	233	50.2
Between 10 – <20 million VND	165	35.6
Between 20 – <30 million VND	46	9.9
Between 30 – <50 million VND	20	4.3
Education level		
High school or below	29	6.3
Vocational	16	3.4
Undergraduated	343	73.9
Post-graduated	76	16.4

Source: from this study's analysis

Reliability and validity

Constructs were checked for internal consistency by calculating Cronbach's Alpha, and all achieved values higher than 0.7. The EFA was performed to explore underlying factors. The KMO was 0.854 (> 0.6), and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant. There were eight factors that explained 58.86% of the variance.

Then the CFA was performed to assess eight extracted factors in terms of their reliability and validity. The composite reliability (CR) of all constructs was higher than 0.6, while the average variance extracted was higher than 0.5, supporting the constructs' convergent validity. The discriminant validities of constructs were achieved when MSV < maximum squared correlation. The model fit of CFA was satisfactory: (1) Cmin/df = 1.069; (2) CFI = 0.996; (3) PCFI = 0.831; and (4) RMSEA = 0.012. *Table 3* provides the construct measurements.

Table 3. *The constructs measurements*

	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	VIa	GKa	GPUa	GPa	ATTa	TRa	PCEa	WTPa
VIa	0.809	0.585	0.260	0.136	0.765							
GKa	0.834	0.627	0.228	0.087	0.460	0.792						
GPUa	0.768	0.525	0.094	0.037	0.177	–0.040	0.724					
GPa	0.836	0.506	0.228	0.101	0.444	0.192	–0.160	0.711				
ATTa	0.796	0.566	0.228	0.079	0.416	0.478	0.021	0.233	0.752			
TRa	0.880	0.710	0.092	0.024	0.165	0.013	0.303	–0.027	–0.122	0.843		
PCEa	0.775	0.535	0.163	0.055	0.221	0.095	0.120	0.404	0.067	0.016	0.731	
WTPa	0.830	0.619	0.260	0.137	0.510	0.350	0.307	0.477	0.274	0.186	0.382	0.787

Source: from this study's analysis

Hypotheses examination

All factors met their reliability and validity; the structural equation modeling was continuously performed by AMOS. The model fit was achieved satisfactorily: (1) Cmin/df = 1.591; (2) CFI = 0.965; (3) PCFI = 0.834; and (4) RMSEA = 0.036. *Table 4* reports the standardized path estimates and hypotheses testing in the study.

H1-a and H1-b are supported, which state that attitude toward green footprint destinations positively influences visiting intention and willingness to pay more for visiting green footprint destinations. The attitude has a stronger impact on visiting intention (β = 0.478***) than on willingness to pay more (β = 0.325***).

H2-a and H2-b are supported, which state that trust in green footprint destinations positively influences visiting intention and willingness to pay more for visiting green footprint destinations. The trust has a comparative impact on visiting intention (β = 0.205***) and willingness to pay more (β = 0.213***).

H3-a and H3-b are supported, which state that perceived consumer effectiveness positively influences visiting intention and willingness to pay more for visiting green footprint destinations. The perceived consumer effectiveness has a stronger impact on willingness to pay more (β = 0.409***) than on visiting intention (β = 0.242***).

Among the three hypotheses of H4, only H4-a is supported, which states that green knowledge has a favorable impact on attitude toward green footprint destinations at β = 0.489***. The influences of green knowledge on trust (H4-b) and perceived consumer effectiveness (H4-c) are not supported.

Among the three hypotheses of H5, H5-b and H5-c are supported, which state that green publicity has a favorable impact on trust and perceived consumer effectiveness. The influence level is stronger on trust (β = 0.308***) than on perceived consumer effectiveness (β = 0.222***). The influence of green publicity on attitude toward green footprint destinations is not supported.

Table 4. *Standardized path estimates and hypotheses testing in the study*

Structural paths	Standardized regression weight	p-value	Conclusion at p < 0.05
H1-a: Attitude → visting intention	0.478	***	Supported
H1-b: Attitude → willing to pay more	0.325	***	Supported
H2-a: Trust → visting intention	0.205	***	Supported
H2-b: Trust → willing to pay more	0.213	***	Supported
H3-a: Perceived effectiveness → visting intention	0.242	***	Supported
H3-b: Perceived effectiveness → willing to pay more	0.409	***	Supported
H4-a: Green knowledge → Attitude	0.489	***	Supported
H4-b: Green knowledge → Trust	0.015	ns	Rejected
H4-c: Green knowledge → Perceived consumer effectiveness	0.033	ns	Rejected
H5-a: Green publicity → Attitude	0.075	ns	Rejected
H5-b: Green publicity → Trust	0.308	***	Supported
H5-c: Green publicity → Perceived consumer effectiveness	0.222	***	Supported
H6-a: Green practices → Attitude	0.195	***	Supported
H6-b: Green practices → Trust	0.022	ns	Rejected
H6-c: Green practices → Perceived consumer effectiveness	0.481	***	Supported

Note: **** p-value < 0.001; ns: non-significant*

Source: from this study's analysis

Among the three hypotheses of H6, H6-a and H6-c are supported, which state that green practices have favorable impacts on attitude toward green footprint destinations and perceived consumer effectiveness. The influence level is higher on perceived consumer effectiveness (β = 0.481***) than on attitude (β = 0.195***). The influence of green practices on trust is not supported.

Overall, this study successfully identified key antecedents of Vietnamese tourists' intention to visit and willingness to pay more for green footprint destinations. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior, the findings highlight that tourists' attitude, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness significantly predict both behavioral intentions. Furthermore, green knowledge, green publicity, and green practices are found to positively influence these psychological factors. These insights contribute to a better understanding of environmentally responsible behavior in tourism and offer practical implications for promoting sustainable travel choices.

Discussion

The results reveal that tourists' intention to visit and willingness to pay more for green footprint destinations are significantly influenced by their attitude, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness. These findings are consistent with prior research, including Gautam (2020), Hossain et al. (2022), Ortega-Rodríguez et al. (2024), and Tan et al. (2024). While earlier studies have predominantly emphasized pro-environmental intentions, limited attention has been given to tourists' willingness to pay a premium for environmentally friendly destinations. This study addresses that gap by demonstrating that willingness to pay more is also shaped by the same psychological factors including attitude, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness. Among these, attitude exerts the strongest influence on visiting intention, whereas perceived consumer effectiveness has the greatest impact on willingness to pay more. Trust exhibits a relatively balanced influence on both

outcomes. These insights underscore the importance of developing strategies that enhance tourists' positive attitudes, strengthen their trust in green initiatives, and increase their sense of personal effectiveness in order to foster both greater visitation and premium payment intentions toward green footprint destinations among Vietnamese tourists.

Unlike previous studies, which emphasized norms (Nowacki et al., 2021; Nowacki et al., 2023), values (Song et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023), or traits (Kesenheimer and Greitemeyer, 2021; Giancola et al., 2023) to explain individual pro-environmental behaviors, this study focuses on green-related activities, including green knowledge, green publicity, and green practices. This aspect is an underexplored in emerging contexts where green practices are scant and incoherent. The study finds that green knowledge, green publicity, and green practices favorably influence attitude, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness. Past studies also discovered similar results, such as Jeong et al. (2014), Gautam (2020), and Ali and Hassan (2023). In this study, attitude toward green footprint destination is driven by green knowledge and green practices, but green knowledge is the most influential factor. The findings are comparable with Gautam (2020) and Hossain et al. (2022) when green knowledge helps promote a favorable attitude toward green footprint destination. On the other hand, trust is only driven by green publicity in this study, which is supported in the study of Lin et al. (2022). Additionally, perceived consumer effectiveness is driven by green knowledge and green practices, in which green practices pose a stronger influence. The findings are similar to the studies of Natakoesoemah and Adiarsi (2020) and Riva et al. (2022) in supporting green knowledge and green practices as prominent antecedents. The findings are believed to provide valuable recommendations for local administrators and policymakers in launching friendly environmental programs to build a successful tourist-based green footprint destination.

According to the findings, green publicity does not significantly influence tourists' attitudes toward green footprint destination. This suggests that while green publicity may increase awareness, it is insufficient in shaping favorable attitudes among Vietnamese tourists. One possible explanation is that general green communication, particularly when broadly targeted or lacking destination-specific relevance, does not effectively translate into positive evaluations of particular green destinations. In other words, merely exposing tourists to environmental messages may not be enough to foster meaningful attitudinal change without more personalized, context-specific, or experiential content. Furthermore, the results reveal no significant relationship between environmental knowledge or green practices and tourists' trust in green footprint destination. This diverges from prior findings by Hossain et al. (2022) and Sultana et al. (2022), who found trust to be influenced by environmental knowledge, and by Ibe-enwo et al. (2019), who observed that green practices fostered trust. A possible interpretation is that trust in sustainable tourism, particularly within the Vietnamese context, may require more than subjective knowledge or exposure to isolated green experiences. Tourists might rely on credible endorsements, consistent policy enforcement, or verifiable certifications to build trust, rather than individual-level understanding or occasional green participation. This aligns with the empirical result that green publicity positively affects trust, supporting the notion that reliable and authoritative communication sources are more effective in fostering trust than internal or experiential cues alone. Finally, environmental knowledge did not significantly predict perceived consumer effectiveness. This indicates that even when tourists have a strong understanding of environmental issues, they may not necessarily feel that their actions can make a meaningful difference. This suggests that perceived consumer effectiveness may depend more on external structural supports (e.g., visible impact feedback, peer influence, or institutional support) than on knowledge solely. Tourists may need concrete evidence that their participation contributes to environmental goals before they feel empowered to act, highlighting a potential gap between cognitive awareness and perceived behavioral control.

Theoretical implications

This study offers several key theoretical contributions to the literature on pro-environmental behavior and sustainable tourism. First, it extends and empirically validates the TPB within the context of the tourism industry in an emerging economy. By applying TPB to explain Vietnamese tourists' pro-environmental behavioral intentions, the study affirms the robustness

of the theory in the research setting. The satisfactory model fit and reliable construct measurements further demonstrate the theoretical soundness of the proposed relationships among attitude, trust, perceived consumer effectiveness, and behavioral intention.

Second, the study enriches TPB by incorporating green-related external factors, namely, green knowledge, green publicity, and green practices, as influential antecedents of key psychological constructs. These variables serve as contextual extensions to the TPB framework, offering deeper insight into how environmental communication, education, and behavioral experiences shape tourists' attitudes, trust, and sense of consumer effectiveness. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how external factors interact with internal psychological mechanisms to drive sustainable travel decisions.

Finally, by distinguishing between two forms of pro-environmental behavioral intention, including intention to visit green footprint destinations and willingness to pay a price premium, this study provides a more comprehensive behavioral framework. It highlights not only cognitive and affective drivers but also economic dimensions of tourist behavior in support of sustainability. These findings offer theoretical insight for future scholars aiming to refine behavioral models in ecotourism, particularly within the context of emerging markets such as Vietnam, where environmental awareness and sustainable tourism are still evolving.

Managerial implications

The findings of this study provide valuable practical implications for local administrators and hospitality businesses involved in the co-creation of green footprint destinations. As a strategic pillar of sustainable tourism, green footprint destinations require not only environmentally responsible infrastructure but also the active engagement of tourists. As Vietnam actively promotes sustainable tourism, encouraging tourists to both visit and pay more for green destinations is not only environmentally necessary but also economically strategic. Drawing from the study's theoretically grounded model and incorporating context-specific external factors, it is recommended that destination marketers prioritize fostering favorable tourist attitudes, building trust, and enhancing perceived consumer effectiveness because these three psychological mechanisms have been shown to significantly influence pro-environmental behavioral intentions.

To achieve this, local authorities and tourism stakeholders should invest in interventions that align with the antecedents validated in this study: improving tourists' green knowledge, expanding the reach and depth of green publicity, and actually involving green practices in business operation. For example, green knowledge can be effectively disseminated through coordinated efforts between public institutions and private hospitality providers such as displaying environmental information in hotel lobbies, guest rooms, and dining areas, or integrating educational messages into tourism campaigns.

Moreover, green publicity, when delivered by credible and authoritative sources, reinforces trust and strengthens the perceived legitimacy of green initiatives. Local governments can utilize public media to communicate both environmental concerns and the benefits of sustainable tourism practices. Simultaneously, green practices such as visible recycling systems, the use of eco-friendly products, or organized community clean-up events and other green activities even with small shops, enhance tourists' attitude and reinforce their perceived consumer effectiveness toward green footprint destinations.

Importantly, this study demonstrates that tourists may be willing to pay up to 30% more to visit green footprint destinations when these psychological and contextual factors are effectively addressed. This underscores not only the market potential for sustainable tourism but also the need for coordinated strategies among stakeholders. This study shows that Vietnamese tourists are not only aware of sustainability but are also willing to support it financially, provided they are engaged meaningfully. Therefore, close collaboration between local authorities and tourism providers is essential to deliver both educational and experiential value, thereby fostering supportive behaviors toward green footprint destinations and aligning with Vietnam's long-term strategy for sustainable tourism development.

Limitations and future directions

While this study offers several valuable implications, there are important limitations that should be acknowledged to inform future research. First, although the study investigates tourists' intention and willingness to support green footprint destinations, it does

not capture actual behaviors. Despite a well-established link between behavioral intention and actual action, this relationship is not always consistent (Wang et al., 2018). Future studies are encouraged to examine actual behavioral outcomes through longitudinal or observational methods to bridge this limitation.

Second, this study incorporates external green-related factors (e.g.: green knowledge, green publicity, and green practices) as antecedents of attitude, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness. While these variables contribute meaningfully to the model, other relevant constructs such as environmental values, green marketing exposure, or destination image could also be influential. In addition, this study does not examine potential moderating effects, such as environmental experience or education level, which may influence how tourists process and respond to green initiatives. Future research is encouraged to explore these additional factors to deepen theoretical understanding and enhance model accuracy.

Third, the sample structure presents potential bias due to the overrepresentation of younger participants, particularly students, relative to senior or older tourists. This skew may limit the generalizability of the findings across demographic groups. Moreover, although the study acknowledges demographic diversity, it does not segment tourists into meaningful sub-groups for deeper analysis. Future research should consider analyzing the model across distinct demographic segments such as age groups, income levels, or educational attainment, to generate more tailored insights. For example, comparing high-educated, high-income tourists with low-educated, low-income ones could reveal important behavioral differences and help refine green marketing strategies.

Finally, the use of a convenience sampling method presents a notable limitation in this study. While convenient sampling is widely used in exploratory research due to its accessibility and cost-effectiveness, it often leads to sample imbalances and limited representativeness. This demographic skew may have influenced the overall findings, because younger individuals may exhibit different levels of environmental awareness, media exposure, and responsiveness to green initiatives than older age groups. This bias reduces the generalizability of the results to the broader tourist population in Vietnam, especially when making managerial or policy recommendations aimed at diverse traveler segments. Future research should aim to correct this imbalance by balancing the numbers among age groups.

Conclusion

This study confirms that tourists' intention to visit and willingness to pay a premium for green footprint destinations are significantly influenced by their attitude, trust, and perceived consumer effectiveness. By integrating green-related factors into the theoretical framework, the research deepens understanding of how these elements shape key psychological drivers in the emerging context. The findings highlight the pivotal role of enhancing tourists' environmental knowledge and active green experiences in fostering favorable attitudes and perceived consumer effectiveness, while credible green publicity builds trust. Importantly, the willingness of Vietnamese tourists to pay more for green destinations underscores the economic viability of sustainable tourism initiatives. These insights offer valuable guidance for policymakers and tourism stakeholders to design targeted interventions to support the successful development of green footprint destinations and contribute to Vietnam's sustainable tourism goals.

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