From Tourists to Advocates: How Environmental Sustainability Practices Inspire Loyalty and Ambassadorial Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how environmental sustainability practices adopted by tour operators influence tourist loyalty and ambassadorial behavior in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Using a correlational research design, the study examined the relationship between sustainability initiatives and tourists' willingness to repeat visits and to advocate for eco-friendly tour companies. A sample of 114 travel and tour companies and 342 tourists was selected through a proportionate simple random sampling to ensure a representative distribution. Data was collected through structured surveys administered to both tour operators and tourists. The research reveals a significant positive correlation between the implementation of sustainability practices by tour operators and increased tourist loyalty. Tourists who perceive strong environmental commitments from operators are more likely to exhibit repeat behavior and become advocates, sharing their positive experiences with others. Key findings indicate that tourists are influenced by the authenticity and effectiveness of sustainability measures, as well as their alignment with personal environmental values. These factors contribute to heightened loyalty and advocacy, demonstrating that sustainability practices play a crucial role in shaping long-term tourist relationships and enhancing the reputation of tour operators. The study's results highlights the importance of integrating comprehensive environmental sustainability strategies into tourism practices. This research contributes to the broader understanding of how sustainability influences tourist behavior, offering insights that can guide tour operators and policymakers in fostering sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Environmental sustainability, tour operators, loyalty, ambassadorial behavior

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of tourism, especially in highly visited destinations, has placed immense strain on natural resources, delicate ecosystems, and biodiversity (Baloch et al., 2022). Tourism-related activities, such as transportation, accommodation, and recreation, contribute significantly to environmental degradation, including increased greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, and the destruction of habitats (Liu et al., 2023). While tourism serves as a major driver of economic growth and cultural exchange, it also raises serious environmental sustainability concerns that threaten the long-term viability of these destinations (Kálmán & Grotte, 2023). Tour operators, as key stakeholders in the tourism value chain, hold a pivotal role in addressing these environmental challenges. By implementing sustainability practices focused on

environmental protection, resource conservation, and biodiversity preservation, they can significantly mitigate the negative impacts of tourism (Marin-Pantelescu et al., 2019; Beall et al., 2020).

As tourists increasingly seek out travel experiences that align with their environmental values, tour operators have an opportunity to act as mediators, encouraging eco-friendly behaviors among travellers (Dolnicar et al., 2017). In doing so, operators not only reduce their environmental footprint but also position themselves favourably within a market that values sustainability (Gomes & Lopes, 2023). The evolving preferences of tourists toward sustainable travel options highlight the importance of environmental stewardship for tour operators (García Mejías et al., 2021). Research indicates that tourists are particularly drawn to businesses that actively demonstrate environmental responsibility (Liu et al., 2023). According to Kholijah (2024) sustainability efforts not only benefit the environment but also offer economic advantages, including cost savings, operational.

While the benefits of sustainability practices are widely recognized, further investigation is needed to understand how these practices directly influence tourist behavior, particularly regarding loyalty and ambassadorial actions. Specifically, it is important to confirm whether tourists who view a tour operator as environmentally responsible are more likely to demonstrate loyalty, return for future trips, and recommend the operator to others, as suggested by Olya et al. (2020) and Gasbarro and Bonera (2021). This study aims to address this gap by examining how the adoption of environmental sustainability practices by tour operators in Nairobi City County, Kenya, affects tourist loyalty and ambassadorial behaviors. Understanding this relationship is crucial for advancing sustainability in tourism and enhancing the competitiveness of tour operators in an increasingly eco-conscious market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tour operators hold a pivotal role in promoting environmental sustainability within the tourism sector. As key stakeholders in the planning, development, promotion, and implementation of ecotourism, their actions have a substantial impact on both environmental outcomes and tourist behavior (Pasape, 2022). Specifically, sustainability practices employed by tour operators can be effective in encouraging tourists to adopt environmentally friendly practices (Dolnicar et al., 2017), reinforcing the importance of operators as mediators of sustainable behaviors. Research has demonstrated that perceived behavioral control and subjective norms play a critical role in shaping tour operators' intentions to engage in pro-environmental practices (García Mejías et al., 2021). Furthermore, variables such as eco-concern and perceived effort significantly influence the adoption of sustainable behaviors in tourism (Ernawati & Rudiyanto, 2023). Evens so, the specific influence of tour operators environmental sustainability practices on tourist loyalty and ambassadorial behaviour remain under explored.

Recent trends show a growing demand for eco-conscious tourism as global awareness of environmental issues rises. Beall et al. (2020) noted that tourists are increasingly seeking travel options aligned with their environmental values, driven by a deeper understanding of their ecological impact and the importance of sustainable travel. Liu et al. (2023) emphasize that tourists are particularly drawn to operators who prioritize eco-friendly practices like reducing carbon footprints, minimizing waste, and promoting resource efficiency. Similarly, Lee et al. (2018) argue that tour companies investing in environmental impact reduction and sustainability certifications gain a competitive edge with the eco-conscious demographic (Godovykh et al., 2024). The need to cater to this demographic is driving the adoption of more comprehensive sustainability measures across the industry, such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, and carbon reduction programs (Beall et al., 2020).

Sustainability practices provide both environmental and economic benefits to tour operators. Kholijah (2024) notes that adopting eco-friendly practices can lead to cost savings, improved efficiency, and new

revenue streams. By reducing waste, optimizing resource use, and lowering energy consumption, operators boost profitability while supporting environmental preservation. Similarly, Qin Yang (2023) emphasizes the rising demand for low-carbon tourism, prompting operators to implement initiatives like waste reduction and energy efficiency (Daneshwar & Revaty, 2024). These efforts not only reduce environmental impact but also attract eco-conscious consumers, enhancing profitability (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020). Therefore, designing for environmental sustainability, by creating touchpoints that encourage eco-friendly behaviors, aligns with values of eco-conscious tourists and enhances the overall travel experience (Dolnicar, 2020).

Sustainability practices do more than attract eco-conscious tourists; they also foster loyalty among travellers. Mathew et al. (2024) argue that tourists are more likely to return to operators who demonstrate a genuine commitment to environmental sustainability. The alignment of values between tourists and operators fosters long-term relationships, as tourists who prioritize environmental protection prefer businesses that share their commitment (Mathew et al., 2024). Marin-Pantelescu et al. (2019) further note that tourists report higher levels of satisfaction when they feel their values align with those of the operators they patronize.

The sense of shared responsibility for environmental preservation enhances the travel experience and increases the likelihood of repeat business. Moreover, tourists are often willing to pay a premium for sustainable services, reflecting a shift toward value-driven consumption in the tourism industry (Marin-Pantelescu et al., 2019). Mercadé Melé et al. (2020) supports that, a tour operator's green image significantly impacts tourists' intentions to return. While sustainability actions are important, the perception of a green image has a stronger influence on tourists' behavior, making it critical for operators to not only adopt sustainable practices but also effectively communicate these efforts to consumers (Mercadé Melé et al., 2020).

Sustainability practices encourage tourists to act as ambassadors for eco-conscious tour operators. Olya et al. (2020) explain that tourists who view operators as environmentally responsible are more likely to recommend them through word-of-mouth or social media. Gasbarro and Bonera (2021) agree that adopting sustainability practices is key to meeting evolving consumer preferences and fostering ambassadorial behavior. This advocacy expands an operator's customer base, as personal recommendations greatly influence potential customers' choices. Thipsingh et al. (2022) add that tourists increasingly expect businesses to see sustainability not as a luxury but a moral obligation, fostering a community of travellers who advocate for businesses aligned with their values.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrated both the Triple-Bottom-Line (TBL) framework and the Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA) model to comprehensively assess sustainability practices and tourist behavior. The TBL framework, introduced by Elkington in 1998, is a widely used approach that evaluates sustainability across three core dimensions: economic, environmental, and social. By applying this framework, the study was able to assess how tour operators in Nairobi City County balanced profitability with environmental stewardship and social responsibility, providing a holistic view of their sustainability practices. The TBL approach ensured that the analysis captured not just the environmental efforts of these businesses but also how they impacted local communities and contributed to economic resilience.

In addition, the study utilized the MOA model, developed by MacInnis and Jaworski (1989), to explain the factors influencing tourist behavior in the context of sustainability. The MOA model suggests that three key components (motivation, opportunity, and ability) drive individuals' actions. Motivation refers to the internal drivers, such as tourists' desire to support environmentally conscious businesses or reduce their carbon footprint. Opportunity encompasses the external factors, such as the availability of sustainable travel options and the accessibility of eco-friendly practices during their trip. Ability refers to the tourists' capacity

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to engage in these behaviors, including their knowledge of sustainability and financial means to support such initiatives. By applying the MOA model, this study explored how these factors collectively influenced tourists' decisions to engage in sustainable travel behaviors, show loyalty to eco-conscious operators, and advocate for them through ambassadorial behavior. Integrating both frameworks provided a robust theoretical foundation for examining the dynamic relationship between sustainability practices and tourist behavior.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between environmental sustainability practices and tourist behavior, with a specific focus on tourist loyalty and ambassadorial behavior. The research was conducted in Nairobi City County, Kenya, and involved two primary sample groups: 114 travel and tour companies and 312 tourists. A proportionate simple random sampling technique was used to ensure that both tour companies and tourists were selected in a manner reflecting their proportional representation in the population. To assess the levels of adoption of environmental sustainability practices among tour operators in Nairobi City County, Kenya, a set of 11 binary indicators was used. For each indicator, a score of 1 was assigned if the tour operator adopted the practice, and 0 if the practice was not adopted. A composite score for environmental sustainability (ENS) was then calculated for each tour operator by summing the binary scores across all relevant indicators as summarized in equation 1

$$Composite\ ENS\ Score = \sum_{k=1}^{11} \mathrm{ENS}\, k \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots (1)$$

This composite score represents the total number of ENS practices adopted by each tour operator. To facilitate comparison across tour operators, the composite scores for each dimension were standardized into Z-scores using equation 2.

$$Z = \frac{X-\mu}{\sigma} \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots (2)$$

Where:

Z is the standardized Z-score.

X is the composite score for ENS for an individual tour operator.

μ is the mean composite score for ENS across all tour operators.

σ is the standard deviation of the composite scores for the ENS dimension.

The Z-scores reflected how far a tour operator's score is from the mean score of the entire sample, measured in standard deviations. Based on these Z-scores, tour operators were categorized into five adoption levels: Very High ($Z > 1.5$), High ($0.5 < Z \leq 1.5$), Moderate ($-0.50 \leq Z \leq 0.5$), Low ($-1.5 < Z < -0.5$), and Very Low ($Z \leq -1.5$). Tourist data were gathered through a survey questionnaire, which collected responses on loyalty and ambassadorial behavior. To examine how these behaviors correlated with the ENS practices of the operators. Inferential statistical analyses were conducted, including the Kruskal-Wallis test, Dunn's post hoc test, and Spearman's correlation, to test the hypotheses and assess the significance of relationships between the adoption of sustainability practices and different aspects of tourist behavior. These methods provided insights into how sustainability adoption influenced tourist loyalty and their likelihood to act as ambassadors for eco-conscious operator.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Environmental Adoption Levels among Tour Operators

The analysis of the data using the described methodology revealed significant variability in the levels of adoption of environmental sustainability (ENS) practices among tour operators, as indicated by the Kruskal Wallis statistical test (H (4, n = 114) = 15.2, p = 0.001) with an overall mean Z-score of approximately -0.000. This demonstrates a meaningful difference across the adoption categories. A substantial proportion of the firms (81 out of 114) fell into the Moderate adoption category. In contrast, 19 firms were classified in the High adoption category, demonstrating a stronger commitment to environmental sustainability. Very High adoption was less frequent (7 out of 114), indicating that few firms have fully embraced and integrated advanced ENS practices into their operations. The analysis also showed minimal representation in the Low (2 out of 114) and Very Low adoption (5 out of 114) categories, indicating that only a small number of tour operators have limited or negligible adoption of these practices.

These results highlight the variability in the adoption of ENS practices among tour operators, as illustrated in Table 1, which summarizes the distribution of firms across the different adoption levels. The findings highlight that while most firms are moderately engaged, fewer have taken more significant steps toward sustainability, suggesting potential areas for growth and improvement. A possible explanation to this variability is given by Balasubramanian et al. (2020), that firms' engagement in environmental sustainability varies based on characteristics like size, ownership, and years in operation. Higher adoption levels can be attributed to corporate governance (Aguilera et al., 2021). Furthermore, the implementation of environmental sustainability in business models is influenced by both internal strategic decisions and external factors, with various theoretical frameworks explaining companies' commitment to sustainability (Bellocchi et al., 2020).

Table 1 Adoption Levels of Tour Operators

Adoption Category	Environmental Sustainability (ENS) Practices (n)
Very High (VH) Adoption	7
High (H) Adoption	19
Moderate (M) Adoption	81
Low(L) Adoption	2
Very Low (VL) Adoption	5
Total	114
Note. n = Number of firms	

Adoption Levels and Tourist Behaviour

To establish the influence of Environmental Sustainability (ENS) practices on tourist behaviour, diagnostic tests, descriptive statistics and inferential statics were run as summarized in Table 2. The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to assess the differences in tourist behaviors (tourist loyalty and ambassadorial behaviour) across different levels of adoption (Very Low (VL), Low (L), Moderate (M), High (H), and Very High (VH)) of ENS by tour companies. The results showed statistically significant differences tourist behaviors across these adoption levels ($p < .001$ for each behavior). Specifically, tourist loyalty had mean ranks ranged from 15.20 (VL) to 102.00 (VH), with a Kruskal-Wallis H value of H = 54.468, $p < .001$, showing a significant difference. For ambassadorial behaviour, the mean ranks ranged from 35.90 (VL) to 99.29 (VH), with a Kruskal-Wallis H value of H = 48.869, $p < .001$. Since the differences were statistically significant,

the null hypothesis that the distributions of these behaviors are the same across ENS adoption levels was rejected.

Table 2 Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a], Shapiro-Wilk, Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test, and Mean Ranks

				Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
				Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
ENS Practices Adoption				0.368	114	0	0.713	114	0
[a.] Lilliefors Significance Correction									
	Ranks Adoption Levels (ENS)						Test Statistics [a,b]		
		VH	H	M	L	VL	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	Asymp. Sig.
	n	7	19	81	2	5			
TL	Mean Rank	102	94.24	48.39	27.5	15.2	54.468[a]	4	0
AB		99.29	94.79	46.82	43.5	35.9	48.869[a]	4	0
[a.] Kruskal Wallis Test statistic is adjusted for ties; [b.] Grouping Variable: ENS practices adoption levels; TL = tourist loyalty; AB = ambassadorial behaviour.									

Environmental Sustainability Practices and Tourist Loyalty

The Dunn's post hoc analysis was then run to examine pairwise comparisons of tourist loyalty across different levels of environmental sustainability (ENS) adoption. The results in Table 3 indicate that the VL adoption group differed significantly from both the H adoption group (z = 4.862, adjusted p = .000) and the VH adoption group (z = 4.583, adjusted p = .000), with tourists demonstrating greater loyalty towards tour operators with higher levels of ENS practices. The L adoption group also showed significant differences when compared to both the H adoption group (z = 2.776, adjusted p = .055) and the VH adoption group (z = 2.873, adjusted p = .041), although the significance level for the H adoption group was slightly above the adjusted threshold. Furthermore, the M adoption group differed significantly from both the H adoption group (z = 5.561, adjusted p = .000) and the VH adoption group (z = 4.208, adjusted p = .000). However, no significant differences were observed between the VL and L adoption groups (z = .455, adjusted p = 1.000), nor between the H and VH adoption groups (z = .543, adjusted p = 1.000). These results suggest that tourist loyalty is most strongly influenced by high and very high adoption levels of environmental sustainability practices, with moderate adoption also having a notable impact, while low and very low adoption levels have a lesser influence.

Table 3 Dunn's Post Hoc Test Pairwise Comparisons of Tourist Behaviour (Loyalty) Across Adoption Levels of Environmental Sustainability (ENS) Practices

Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.[a]
VL-L	12.300	27.060	.455	.649	1.000
VL-M	33.189	14.904	2.227	.026	.260
VL-H	79.037	16.256	4.862	.000	.000
VL-VH	86.800	18.938	4.583	.000	.000
L-M	20.889	23.150	.902	.367	1.000
L-H	66.737	24.043	2.776	.006	.055
L-VH	74.500	25.932	2.873	.004	.041
M-H	45.848	8.244	5.561	.000	.000

M-VH	53.611	12.742	4.208	.000	.000
H-VH	7.763	14.300	.543	.587	1.000
Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) significance level is .050, [a.] Significance values adjusted by the Bonferroni correction					

This finding aligns with the research conducted by Mercadé Melé et al. (2020), which indicates that sustainability practices and a strong green image significantly enhance tourists' intentions to revisit and their overall loyalty to tourism providers. Their study suggests that when operators actively engage in environmentally responsible practices, they create a positive perception among tourists that encourages them to return. Further supporting this perspective, Shamim et al. (2024) highlight that tourists' perceptions of a destination's ecological sustainability practices play a crucial role in shaping their satisfaction and loyalty. Aniqoh et al. (2022) also report that the image of eco-tourism destinations, combined with visitor satisfaction, directly influences tourists' loyalty. Their findings indicate that a favourable image associated with sustainability not only attracts visitors but also significantly increases their likelihood of returning. This suggests that destinations that cultivate a strong eco-friendly reputation are more likely to enjoy lasting patronage from tourists. Similarly, Tharaka and Munasinghe (2022) in their study also suggest that environmental sustainability practices enhance tourists' perceived value and satisfaction. Moreover, Aniqoh et al. (2022) emphasize that loyalty to eco-tourism destinations is a critical factor in tourists' decision-making processes. Their research reveals that sustainable practices not only draw tourists initially but also play a vital role in ensuring their continued patronage over time. This reinforces the idea that commitment to sustainability is not merely a trend but a fundamental component that shapes tourist behavior and loyalty in the competitive landscape of eco-tourism.

Environmental Sustainability Practices and Ambassadorial Behaviour

To examine pairwise comparisons of tourist ambassadorial behavior across different levels of ENS practices adoption, Dunn's post hoc analysis was conducted. The results in Table 4 reveal significant differences between the VL and H adoption groups (z = 3.64, adjusted *p* = .003), and between the VL and VH adoption groups (z = 3.36, adjusted *p* = .008), with tourists exhibiting stronger ambassadorial behavior towards tour operators with higher levels of ENS practices. The L adoption group did not show significant differences from the M adoption group (z = 0.14, adjusted p = 1.000), but did differ significantly from the H adoption group (z = 2.14, adjusted *p* = .320) and the VH adoption group (z = 2.16, adjusted *p* = .306). Furthermore, the M adoption group displayed significant differences compared to the H adoption group (z = 5.85, adjusted *p* = .000) and the VH adoption group (z = 4.14, adjusted *p* = .000). However, no significant differences were observed between the H and VH adoption groups (z = 0.32, adjusted *p* = 1.000). These results suggest that tourist ambassadorial behavior is most positively influenced by VH and H adoption levels, followed by M, L, and VL adoption levels as summarized in Table 3

Table 4 Dunn's Post Hoc Test (Pairwise Comparisons of Tourist Behaviour (Ambassadorial) Across Adoption Levels of Environmental Sustainability (ENS) Practices)

Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.[a]
VL-L	7.600	26.923	.282	.778	1.000
VL-M	10.921	14.828	.736	.461	1.000
VL-H	58.889	16.174	3.641	.000	.003
VL-VH	63.386	18.842	3.364	.001	.008
L-M	3.321	23.033	.144	.885	1.000
L-H	51.289	23.922	2.144	.032	.320
L-VH	55.786	25.801	2.162	.031	.306

M-H	47.968	8.203	5.848	.000	.000
M-VH	52.465	12.677	4.139	.000	.000
H-VH	4.496	14.228	.316	.752	1.000
Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) significance level is .050, a· Significance values adjusted by the Bonferroni correction					

Ambassadorial behavior among tourists was most positively influenced by High and Very High adoption levels of Environmental Sustainability (ENS) practices, while the impact diminished significantly at Moderate, Low, and Very Low levels of adoption. This trend indicates that as tour operators implement more comprehensive and effective sustainability practices, tourists are increasingly inclined to engage in behaviors that promote the operators, such as recommending them to friends and family. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Mathew et al. (2024), which illustrates that responsible tourism practices are pivotal in enhancing tourists' willingness to recommend destinations. The more sustainable practices are perceived, the stronger the motivation for tourists to act as ambassadors for those destinations. Supporting this perspective, Conti et al. (2023) highlight that the perceived sustainability of a destination has a direct positive influence on tourist referrals. Further reinforcing this link, Moise et al. (2020) assert that the implementation of "green" practices not only enhances guest satisfaction but also correlates with increased intentions for return visits and positive word-of-mouth promotion. This suggests that tourists are not only satisfied with their experiences but are also willing to advocate for the operators and destinations that prioritize environmental responsibility. Additionally, the findings by Gasbarro and Bonera (2021) corroborate the aforementioned research by demonstrating that the perception of sustainability in tourism destinations and hospitality services contributes to greater customer satisfaction. This heightened satisfaction further translates into a greater willingness to recommend these services to others. Collectively, these studies reinforce the critical importance of environmental sustainability practices in shaping tourist behavior, particularly ambassadorial actions, emphasizing that operators who excel in these areas can significantly enhance their reputation and marketability through positive referrals from satisfied customers.

Correlation Analysis and Environmental Sustainability Practices and Tourist Behaviour

The analysis in Table 5 explored the relationship between ENS and various aspects of tourist behavior including tourist loyalty (TL), ambassadorial behavior (AB). Using Spearman's rho to assess these correlations, the results demonstrated significant positive relationships between ENS and all measured aspects of tourist behavior. Specifically, ENS showed a strong positive correlation with tourist loyalty, $r(112) = .690$, $p < .001$. Additionally, strong correlations were observed between ENS and ambassadorial behavior, $r(112) = .624$, $p < .001$, as well as spending behavior, $r(112) = .637$, $p < .001$. These findings suggest that higher levels of environmental sustainability practices are strongly associated with increased tourist loyalty and enhanced ambassadorial behavior. All correlations were statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

The correlational analysis indicates that environmental sustainability practices significantly influence tourist loyalty and ambassadorial behavior. Penz et al. (2017) found that sustainability pledges and eco-labels encourage eco-friendly travel choices, enhancing tourists' trust in operators. Similarly, Karlsson and Dolnicar (2016) and Negacz (2021) demonstrated that eco-certification boosts consumer confidence, leading to increased loyalty to sustainable providers. Research by Aniqoh et al. (2022) and Tharaka and Munasinghe (2022) also shows that green practices enhance tourist satisfaction, which is closely linked to loyalty. When tourists perceive operators as genuinely committed to sustainability, their overall experience improves, fostering repeat visits. Ambassadorial behavior, such as recommendations and positive word-of-mouth, is also positively impacted by responsible tourism practices. Studies by Mathew et al. (2024) and Moise et al. (2020) confirm that tourists who engage with eco-friendly operators are more likely to advocate for them,

sharing their positive experiences within their networks.

Table 5 Correlation Analysis (Environmental Sustainability Practices and Tourist Behaviour)

Correlations (Environmental Sustainability (ENS) Adoption and Tourist Behaviour)			
		TL	AB
Spearman's rho ENS	rs	.690**	.624**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	114	114
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), Tourist Loyalty (TL), Ambassadorial Behaviour (AB), Correlation Coefficient (rs)			

CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study highlight the significant influence of Environmental Sustainability (ENS) practices on tourist behavior, particularly regarding tourist loyalty and ambassadorial actions. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test demonstrate that higher levels of ENS adoption by tour companies correlate with markedly greater tourist loyalty and ambassadorial behavior. This conclusion is reinforced by the strong correlations observed in both behaviors. Dunn's post hoc analysis further revealed that tourists exhibit the highest loyalty and ambassadorial behavior toward companies with high and very high levels of ENS adoption, indicating that a strong commitment to sustainability resonates well with consumers. Even moderate levels of ENS adoption positively influence tourist behavior, although low and very low levels of such practices exhibit minimal impact.

Additionally, correlation analysis substantiates these findings, revealing robust positive relationships between ENS practices and key aspects of tourist behavior, including loyalty, ambassadorial actions, spending behavior, and length of stay. These results align with previous research, which suggests that responsible tourism practices enhance overall tourist satisfaction and encourage repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth referrals. Consequently, it becomes clear that adopting higher levels of environmental sustainability practices is a critical driver of tourist loyalty and ambassadorial behavior. This not only aids in tourist retention but also plays a vital role in the promotion of destinations in an increasingly eco-conscious market.

In a nutshell, the implications of these findings extend beyond the immediate benefits to individual tour operators; they highlight the broader significance of sustainable practices in shaping the future of tourism. By prioritizing environmental sustainability, tour operators can foster deeper connections with their clientele, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable tourism ecosystem. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating sustainability into business strategies, thereby enabling tour companies to thrive while promoting responsible tourism practices that benefit both the environment and local communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that tour companies prioritize and increase their adoption of Environmental Sustainability (ENS) practices. By implementing higher levels of sustainability measures, companies can significantly enhance tourist loyalty and ambassadorial behavior, leading to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth promotion. Tour operators should actively implement robust sustainability initiatives, such as obtaining eco-certifications, engaging in sustainable resource management, and committing to carbon reduction efforts. These practices not only align with the values of eco-conscious travelers but also serve as effective marketing tools that can distinguish companies in a competitive market.

Regularly showcasing these initiatives through marketing campaigns can reinforce a company's commitment to sustainability, fostering a strong emotional connection with customers.

Additionally, companies should make their sustainability efforts visible to tourists through eco-friendly packaging, waste reduction practices, and community involvement. Creating transparency around these practices can enhance the destination's green image and attract eco-conscious travellers. For instance, collaborating with local environmental organizations to support conservation projects can showcase a company's dedication to preserving the environment, encouraging long-term loyalty and referrals from satisfied customers. Investing in staff training programs that emphasize the importance of ENS practices will also be crucial. Educating employees about sustainability empowers them to communicate these values to tourists, enhancing the overall guest experience and fostering appreciation.

To further strengthen their sustainability efforts, companies should implement feedback mechanisms to gather insights from tourists regarding their practices. This can include surveys or focus groups that explore tourists' perceptions and suggestions for improvement. Actively responding to customer feedback not only demonstrates a commitment to enhancing sustainability efforts but also fosters a sense of community among travellers. Moreover, seeking partnerships with local businesses that prioritize sustainability can lead to joint marketing campaigns, shared resources, and enhanced eco-friendly offerings. By working together, businesses can create a cohesive eco-tourism network that benefits the entire community, ultimately attracting more tourists interested in sustainable travel experiences.

Finally, establishing metrics to monitor sustainability efforts and reporting on progress regularly can build trust with customers and demonstrate accountability. Transparent reporting allows companies to share successes and challenges in their sustainability practices, engaging their audience in their journey toward greater environmental responsibility. This strategic focus on enhancing ENS practices will not only benefit the environment but also boost customer satisfaction and overall business performance. By aligning with the growing demand for responsible tourism, tour operators can position themselves as leaders in the industry, fostering loyalty and long-term success in an increasingly eco-conscious market.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

For future research, several additional suggestions can further enhance the understanding of the impact of Environmental Sustainability (ENS) practices on tourist behavior:

1. A longitudinal study could be conducted to examine the long-term effects of ENS practices on tourist loyalty and ambassadorial behavior. This type of research would assess whether the influence of ENS practices is sustained over time or if its impact diminishes, providing valuable insights into the durability of these behaviors.
2. Second, researchers should evaluate the economic implications of ENS adoption by analyzing the cost-benefit ratio for tour companies implementing various sustainability practices. Understanding the financial viability and long-term advantages of these investments can help operators make informed decisions about adopting sustainability measures.
3. It would be beneficial to explore the role of demographic factors, such as age, income, and education level, in shaping tourists' perceptions and responses to ENS practices. Investigating how different demographic groups prioritize sustainability could provide nuanced insights that inform targeted marketing strategies.
4. Comparative studies between regions or countries could shed light on cultural differences in tourist behavior regarding sustainability. This would enable a broader understanding of how local contexts influence the effectiveness of ENS practices in driving loyalty and ambassadorial actions.
5. Qualitative research methods, such as interviews or focus groups with tourists, could provide deeper

insights into the motivations behind their loyalty and ambassadorial behavior. Understanding the personal stories and experiences of tourists can enrich quantitative findings and help tour operators craft more compelling sustainability narratives that resonate with their clientele.

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