

# Exploring Entrepreneurial Intentions among Sabah's Dark Tourism Operators: A Sustainability Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The sustainable development of dark tourism provides a unique feature for entrepreneurial opportunities. In the state of Sabah, south of the capital city of Kota Kinabalu, committing to sustainable tourism can go a long way in contributing to the growth of economy, culture, and even innovation at the sites of historical interest. Grounded on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Resource-based View and Stakeholder Theory, this study examines the effects of sustainability orientation, attitude toward self-employment and propensity to innovate on entrepreneurial intention among Sabah's dark tourism operators. The findings show that attitude toward self-employment and propensity to innovate have positive effects on the entrepreneurial intention. Conversely, sustainability orientation has a negative impact on entrepreneurial intention, indicating that while sustainability continues to be an essential element of tourism, challenges such as regulatory obstacles and operational expenses from sustainability endeavours might lessen entrepreneurial motivation. These findings provide useful recommendations to ensure sustainable and innovative tourism to companies, policymakers, stakeholders and entrepreneurs. This study extends TPB in the niche tourism context, supporting balanced approaches that align entrepreneurship with sustainable-driven policies in the sustainability-based economic and cultural resilience of the region.

**Keyword:** Entrepreneurial intention, sustainability orientation, attitude toward self-employment, propensity to innovate, Sabah dark tourism

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a foundation of global economic growth based on culturally sustainable development, job creation, and community development without just generating revenue (Shandidy, 2023; Vachhani, 2024). In this sector, dark tourism defined as visits to sites related with death, tragedy or historical significance that have emerged as a niche sector of great interest. With limitless possibilities from memorials and war museums to historic battlegrounds, dark tourism ventures allow for tourists to have a unique experience while illuminating historical and cultural narratives (Huang, 2024; Arvind, 2024; Vorina et al., 2024). Although dark tourism growing in popularity, the implications of dark tourism projects on local economies and sustainability practices remain underexplored, particularly in the states of the developing countries, such as in Sabah, Malaysia (Kunjuraman, 2024; James & Hussin, 2022; Masanti, 2016).

Located in the heart of East Malaysia, the state of Sabah is one of the biggest contributors to Malaysia's tourism ecosystem, where natural gorgeousness meets culture and heritage (Abdullah & Ramamoorthy, 2019). Its varied attractions from pristine beaches to lush rainforests with colorful cultural experiences draw millions of tourists each year (Yusoh et al., 2023). Lately, Sabah has become a destination for dark tourism, where people visit locations tied to tragedy or historical significance such as World War II memorials, indigenous burial grounds and other dark tourism sites (Abd Khalid et al., 2023). The growth of dark tourism in Sabah creates opportunities but also faces challenges, including the delicate balance of addressing cultural sensitivity, maximizing economic benefits, and ensuring sustainable development (Stone & Grebenar, 2022). These challenges align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 and SDG 11, which emphasize the need for inclusive economic growth and sustainable cities and communities (Arvind, 2024).

The study provides a foundation for further investigation of sustainability in dark tourism, but its value is limited in the context of Sabah as it does not adequately explore the specific sustainability challenges in the region (Arvind, 2024; Tedong et al., 2024). The other issue is due to regulatory and policy gaps, which are problematizing the integration of tourism sustainability practice due to the difficulty in enforcement of existing policies and incentives (Sani et al., 2023). Funding obstacles continue to be significant, with small-scale dark tourism operators facing challenges to secure finance to invest in green infrastructure and conservation support. Local community engagement is equally important, as some dark tourism sites are of deep cultural and historical importance to indigenous groups, making it important to collaborate carefully to ensure tourist development is sensitive to the local culture and heritage (Pimid et al., 2024; Sukri et al., 2024; Kunjuraman, 2024). Therefore, our study offers a deeper insight into the constraints and prospects to attain dark tourist sustainability in Sabah by tackling these obstacles.

Entrepreneurial intention (EI) refers to the decision to diffuse, manage, and grow one's own business, which is a crucial determinant of innovation and economic development in tourism (Sujood et al., 2024; Huang & Huang, 2024). This phenomenon indicates that the example of dark tourism operators in Sabah strategized creative and sustainable business models as their entrepreneurial intended orientation and mindset (Robin et al., 2023; Dias et al., 2023). Such intentions are influenced by personal characteristics, market forces and regional social culture (Triansyah et al., 2023).

In this study, sustainability orientation is defined as an approach to integrate environmental, social and economic considerations into business practices (Frimpong et al., 2024; Claudy et al., 2016). Operators of dark tourism in Sabah must tread these dimensions carefully to conserve the cultural and natural resources that form the backbone of their offerings. Sustainability enables them to improve long-run profitability while protecting the state's history and environment for generations (Chan, 2023; Latip et al., 2015). The sustainability orientation also aligns with SDG 8, which promotes sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, cultivating entrepreneurial ecosystems (Alamsyahbana et al., 2024). In the same way, this orientation executes SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) by saving cultural heritage and protecting the environment (Audretsch et al., 2023; Ruiz-Ortega et al., 2023).

Attitude towards self-employment has a very important role in entrepreneurial behavior (Al-Qadasi et al., 2024; Huang & Huang, 2024; Gielnik et al., 2020). Entrepreneurship is a path taken by people who have a realistic view of self-employment, and they are more likely to pursue and succeed in entrepreneurial endeavors (Sorgner & Fritsch, 2018; McKenzie, 2002). This is vital in the Sabah tourism sector to foster a positive attitude towards self-employment among potential tourism entrepreneurs in the dark tourism field, ultimately creating more new and sustainable businesses (Robin et al., 2023; Jamin et al., 2020).

Another essential element is the propensity to innovate, which describes the willingness of an individual or company to generate and apply novel ideas (Iliashenko et al., 2023). In Sabah, tourism operators cannot afford to be self-satisfied and must ensure their offers provide innovative and properly positioned products and services that would be appealing to niche tourists, especially for Sabah dark tourism operators (Philipp &

Eckert, 2022; Hohenhaus, 2021). However, creative strategies like interactive storytelling or transformative experiences can increase the value of dark tourism (Lin et al., 2024; Tercia et al., 2022).

Utilizing the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the current study examines the effect of sustainability orientation, self-employment attitude, and innovativeness propensity towards entrepreneurial intention of dark tourism operators in Sabah (Dong & Chang, 2024; Kumari et al., 2024). For enhancing the theoretical perspective, the Resource-Based View (RBV) role is integrated to explain the significance of internal resources and capabilities which drive sustainable innovation, while observations from Stakeholder Theory reveal the importance of external stakeholders, specifically policymakers, local communities, and tourists in shaping sustainable entrepreneurship (Mailani et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2024; Ozdemir et al., 2023). Collectively, this systematic review facilitates a holistic framework on the factors underlying how and why tourism operators innovate and respond sustainably.

This study aims to examine the entrepreneurial intentions of dark tourism entrepreneurs in Sabah, Malaysia through the lens of sustainability. The objectives are to:

- a. propose hypotheses or conceptual relationships explaining how sustainability orientation, attitude towards self-employment, and propensity to innovate influence entrepreneurial intention.
- b. identify the challenges and opportunities to develop sustainable business models in Sabah's dark tourism industry.
- c. adopt measures to promote entrepreneurship while maintaining regional sustainability.
- d. develop synergies with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 that encourages sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, by facilitating entrepreneurial businesses that align with sustainable economy building in Sabah.
- e. promote Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 with sustainable cities and communities. This goal able to motivate Sabah tourism operators' commitment to practices that preserve our culture and avoid harm to the environment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theory

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is one of the most popular conceptual approaches for understanding human behavior and entrepreneurship. According to TPB, an individual would engage in an action under the influence of three factors, which are attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Amrizal et al., 2024; Botetzagias et al., 2024). For dark tourism, TPB gives a more organized insight into how one's beliefs, societal norms, and perceptions of control affect entrepreneurial intention (Kumari et al., 2024). Entrepreneurial intention is one of the key aspects of TPB, as it enables understanding of an individual's willingness to start and manage a business (Anjum et al., 2024). Sabah explores the dark tourism sector, niche but growing, in which entrepreneurs are engaging in the commercialization of sites associated with historical tragedies, so the need to fully understand its entrepreneurial motivation, challenges and barriers faced by tourism operators is fundamental. Such insights can be precious in designing policy interventions and stakeholder engagement strategies aimed at fostering sustainable and innovative entrepreneurship (Reynolds, 2024).

This study incorporates Resource-Based View (RBV) as well as Stakeholder Theory to add richness to the theoretical foundation. RBV holds that firms derive a competitive advantage by drawing on unique, valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources, including knowledge, networks, and sustainability-oriented capabilities (Mailani et al., 2024; Ozdemir et al., 2023). For Sabah's dark tourism operators, this means sustainability practices, innovative tourism experiences, and culture heritage preservation becoming premium assets that set them apart from their competition in tourism ideology. Stakeholder Theory emphasizes this need by recognizing the importance of stakeholders, including local communities, policymakers, and tourists in determining effective sustainable business models. The theory also seeks to maintain a balance

between economic viability, stakeholder expectations and environmental responsibility results in long-term business success (Reynolds, 2024; Gao et al., 2024; Ozdemir et al., 2023).

This is consistent with Zhang et al. (2023) in which they stated that sustainability orientation affects entrepreneurial intention by showing the degree to which individuals or firms align their decisions and activities with sustainability principles. Sustainability is the backbone of the dark tourism industry as it supports in keeping history and culture alive while taking minimum environmental tolls and preserving ethics and respect in tourism practices (Arvind, 2024; Chan, 2023). Utilizing TPB, this study examines the role of sustainability orientation on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control that account for entrepreneurial motivation (Islam & Mehdi, 2024). Moreover, RBV emphasizes how businesses focused on sustainability can create competitive advantages through environmentally friendly innovations, and Stakeholder Theory illustrates how tourism boards, policymakers, and local communities play roles in ensuring that sustainability complements business growth and societal needs (Islam, 2024; Zybareva et al., 2024; Mailani et al., 2024).

Another important aspect of entrepreneurial behavior is attitude towards self-employment that is influenced by perceived benefits like autonomy, high financial independence and job satisfaction (Yasir et al., 2022; Robin et al., 2023; Steffens et al., 2006). Sabah's dark tourism operators should overcome specific obstacles, such as cultural sensitivities, niche market dynamics, and regulatory constraints. According to the TPB model (Zhou & Wang, 2024), people with a better attitude toward self-employment are more likely to engage in entrepreneurship in the face of uncertainty. RBV complements this focus on industry-specific strengths and innovation with the recognition of internal resources, while Stakeholder Theory identifies the role of external networks including mentors, investors, tourism associations, and tourism councils that can facilitate or inhibit entrepreneurship (Mailani et al., 2024; Ozdemir et al., 2023).

Innovation is an important factor in niche tourism markets to ensure differentiation and success, which can be determined by the propensity to innovate of entrepreneurs (Truong, 2024). In Sabah, dark tourism operators rely on innovative approaches, including interactive storytelling, augmented reality, and unique visitor engagement strategies to enhance the tourism experience (Robin et al., 2023; Montañés-Del-Río & Medina-Garrido, 2020). TPB asserts that a higher intention towards innovation would increase the feels for perceived behavioral control, which in turn would increase confidence in entrepreneurial success (Kiriakidis, 2017; Zolait, 2014). Likewise, RBV reinforces organizational innovation as a vital resource to gain competitive advantage, Stakeholder Theory focuses on the inter-organizational collaborative innovation process between the business, the local communities, and the policymakers that enhance sustainability efforts toward responsible tourism (Ozdemir et al., 2023; Barakat et al., 2022).

The integration of TPB, RBV, and Stakeholder Theory provides a holistic perspective on entrepreneurial intention that contributes to our understanding of Sabah's dark tourism operators. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) first considers how attitudes towards behavior, social norms, and perceived behavioral control lead to intention, which is a prerequisite for actual behavior, such as entrepreneurship, serving as the ultimate objective. As for Resource-Based View (RBV) of a firm shows how one can drive organizational levels of innovation towards sustainability, which ultimately results in a competitive advantage of having clean and green capabilities through internal resources. Through this point of view, Stakeholder Theory further emphasizes the significance of external communities, thus relating to community engagement, policy direction, and ethical development of tourism. The alignment helps to understand the challenges and opportunities to develop sustainable and innovative tourism enterprises so that they can ensure economic growth without compromising cultural heritage and environmental sustainability (Islam, 2024; Zybareva et al., 2024; Mailani et al., 2024; Ozdemir et al., 2023).

## Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial intention refers to the mental and emotional state that motivates an individual to start and run a business venture (Taneja et al., 2024). It is a critical predictor of entrepreneurial behavior and an essential



component for actualizing ideas into business action, ultimately leading to sales (Mabhena & Ncube, 2024). Entrepreneurial intention is a key aspect of the tourism sector as it promotes innovation and addresses gaps in the market (Sujood et al., 2024). For Sabah's dark tourism entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial intentions go beyond economic gains, reflecting concerns of cultural preservation and sustainable development (Yong et al., 2024).

Entrepreneurial intention is influenced by both internal and external forces such as individual motivation, market opportunities, and social pressure (Thuc, 2024; Xu, 2024; Cekule et al., 2024). Aspiration is an internal drive to the desire for independence and the goal of financial success, both closely related to employee motivation (Thuc, 2024). On the other hand, these intentions are reinforced by external factors, such as the current market trend of dark tourism, and a supportive environment including aspects such as government policies or community network (Liu & Yao-Ping Peng, 2025; Anjum et al., 2024). On the other hand, a favorable attitude towards self-employed facilitates the applications of positive consequences as benefits of entrepreneurial intention (Yasir et al., 2022). Those traits such as proactiveness, risk-taking ability, and innovative mindset can lend to dynamism, giving operators confidence and tools for overcoming challenges and making their entrepreneurial visions happen.

### **Sustainability Orientation**

Sustainability orientation focuses on the integration of environmental, social, and economic dimensions in business activities (Ruiz-Ortega et al., 2023). It demonstrates a commitment to practices that generate profits at the same time as they address wider social and ecological problems (Cantele et al., 2024). For the tourism operators in Sabah, especially those that participate in dark tourism, sustainability orientation is fundamental in achieving a balance between utilizing distinctive automotive historical locations but also conserving this historic and natural value (Arvind, 2024; Chan, 2023).

This orientation transforms into practices like implementing sustainable business practices, promoting community-based projects and ensuring cultural acceptability in tourism offerings (Zybareva et al., 2024). Operators that prior to sustainability can also establish a positive reputation, making them more appealing to tourists and stakeholders who are conscious of the environment (Ndegwa, 2022). Furthermore, sustainability orientation connects with global efforts like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which promote inclusive growth and responsible economic behavior (Asri, 2025).

On the other hand, sustainability orientation influences the entrepreneurial intention through shaping attitudinal beliefs and social norms (Chowdhury et al., 2024). For operators who are heavily weighted on sustainability, entrepreneurship is more likely to be viewed as a path by which they can build meaningful and impactful businesses (Paiva et al., 2024). In the context of dark tourism, it highlights the importance of maintaining balance when the sustainability of cultural and natural assets is at risk (Arvind, 2024). Thus, a sustainability-driven attitude able to enhance the view of entrepreneurship and increase the willingness to stay committed to the business for a longer time (Dandotiya et al., 2024).

### **Attitude Towards Self-employment**

Self-employment attitude is the extent to which entrepreneurship is viewed as a preferable and achievable avenue for employment (Iyortsuun et al., 2021). This attitude is driven by the perceived advantages of independence, flexibility, financial gain and personal satisfaction (Steffens et al., 2006). In the Sabah context, where tourism is important to the economy, promoting positive perception to self-employment will encourage operators to explore some new segment such as dark tourism (Robin et al., 2023).

For tourism operators, the appeal of self-employment lies in the autonomy it offers. They can create business models that resonate with their own vision and values (Dias et al., 2023; Richards, 2021). For example, providing immersive experiences that tell an historical story, or offering sustainable tour packages. This self-employment confidence is often validated by success stories, availability of resources and supportive policies that mitigate the risks and costs of entrepreneurship (Zhou & Wang, 2024).

Attitude towards self-employment positively affects entrepreneurial intention (Tulipa et al., 2024). Entrepreneurship appeals to those who value independence and opportunities that come with it. It helps tourism operators become motivated, able to solve hurdles like money risks or market obstacles (Ukufah et al., 2024). When it integrates with sustainability orientation, it enhances the desirability to create ventures and be more responsible to contribute positively to society in dark tourism (Yasir et al., 2022).

### Propensity to Innovate

Propensity to innovate refers to the capacity and desire to develop and implement new ideas, solutions, or processes (Figueiredo & de Matos Ferreira, 2020). It is an essential trait for entrepreneurs, especially in fast-moving sectors such as tourism. Innovation is vital for Sabah's tourism operators looking to diversify their itineraries and cater for niche markets, around concepts like dark tourism (Robin et al., 2023; Montañés-Del-Río & Medina-Garrido, 2020).

Innovations in dark tourism can include immersive experiences, virtual trips, and storytelling that connect visitors to a location's history (Santoso et al., 2024; Popova, 2023). Innovative operators are willing to take calculated risks, thoughtfully challenge the status quo, and bring creativity to the fold of their business practices (Sari et al., 2024; Korableva & Shakolyukova, 2024). This ability able to adapt and continue improvement, which is important for keeping up with changes in visitors' tastes and desires, as well as increasing competitive advantage (Sari et al., 2024).

Entrepreneurial intention is directly affected by the propensity to innovate by increasing the perceived behavior control (Pramesti & Kuswati, 2024). The high self-efficacy of the operators generating innovative solutions increases their perception of entrepreneurship as a realistic and rewarding endeavor (Setiawan et al., 2024). Innovations and sustainability are interconnected, as many emerging approaches contribute not only to meeting the market demand, but also to protect cultural and natural assets (Ilieva & Todorova, 2023). These elements combined serve to aid the desire to forge and maintain successful tourism business practices in Sabah (Chan, 2023).

## METHODOLOGY

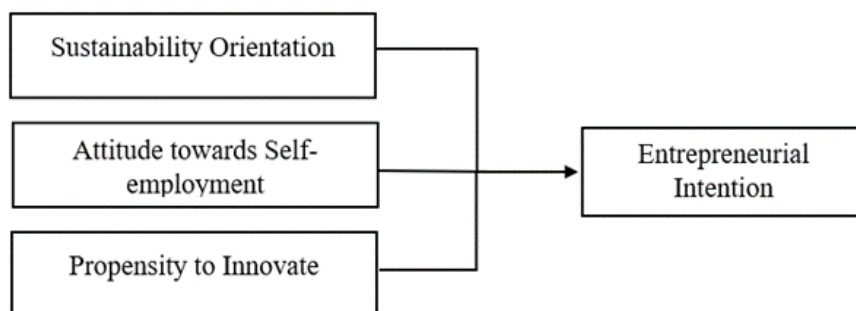


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) with the Resource-based View (RBV) and Stakeholder Theory, this study develops a theoretical model to explore the relationships between sustainability orientation, attitude towards self-employment, propensity to innovate, and entrepreneurial intention. Figure 1 serves as a foundation to understand the interplay between the psychological and contextual factors, driving entrepreneurial behaviors by Sabah's tourism operators with a focus on dark tourism. This analysis aligns with the study because it examines the implications of these factors on entrepreneurial intention while reducing the challenges faced in dark tourism and enhancing the sustainable initiatives in Sabah.

Hypothesis 1: Sustainability orientation positively affects the entrepreneurial intention of Sabah's dark tourism operators. This connection underscores the importance of incorporating environmental, social, and

economic factors into business practices, allowing operators to protect intangible cultural heritage, minimize environmental footprints, and maximize long-term profits (Chan, 2023; Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010).

Hypothesis 2: Attitude toward self-employment has a positive effect toward entrepreneurial intention. Affiliation towards self-employment builds upon the desire for independence, financial return, and personal gains of entrepreneurialism when the avenue of entrepreneurship is itself physically distinguishable in regards of sustainability, which obliquely its operators to try to become an entrepreneur (Tulipa et al., 2024; Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010).

Hypothesis 3: The propensity to innovate positively influences entrepreneurial intention. Such orientation reinforces entrepreneurship commitment and sustainable practices in the tourism sector by promoting innovation for differentiation (Indhirapratha & Thavaraj, 2024; Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010).

In summary, the theoretical framework (Figure 1) highlights that the promotion of entrepreneurial intention increases in Sabah's tourism operators with the virtue of sustainability, innovation, and positive feelings toward self-employment. Through connecting these factors with Theory of Planned Behavior, Resource-based View, and Stakeholder Theory, the framework presents empirical insights favorable for policymakers as well as stakeholders in developing an enabling environment for sustainable and innovative tourism enterprises. Not only does this initiative promote local economic development, but it also helps to preserve the cultural and environmental heritage of Sabah in line with the wider aim of sustainable development.

## RESULTS

In Table 1, the measurement items and sources for four key constructs central to understand entrepreneurial activity among Sabah's tourism operators are summarized, namely: Entrepreneurial intention, sustainability orientation, attitude toward self-employment, and propensity to innovate. Entrepreneurial intention measures how committed the participants are at starting up businesses, including items like "I am willing to do anything to be an entrepreneur," adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009). Sustainability orientation adapted from Kuckertz and Wagner (2010) assess the alignment of environmental and social value with business practices, its items include "Corporate social responsibility is one of the basic principles of my company's values". Attitude toward self-employment explores the attractiveness of entrepreneurship with items including "I prefer to work for myself than having a secure job," also adapted from Kuckertz and Wagner (2010). Finally, propensity to innovate assesses the tendency to create and apply new ideas with items like "My company always comes up with new ideas when it faces challenges", adapted from Foxall and Hackett (1992). Therefore, these constructs offer a validated approach to studying entrepreneurial intentions and related practices.

Table 1: Measurement Items and Source

Code	Question	Source
<b>Entrepreneurial Intention</b>		
E1	I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur.	Liñán & Chen (2009)
E2	My professional goal is to become an entrepreneur.	
E3	I will make every effort to start and run my own company.	
E4	I am determined to create a firm in the future.	
E5	I have very serious thoughts about starting a company.	
E6	I have the firm intention to start a company someday.	
<b>Sustainability Orientation</b>		
S1	My company has taken a leading role in the field of environmental protection.	Kuckertz & Wagner (2010)
S2	My company has an advantage in attracting and retaining qualified employees due to its environmental orientation.	
S3	My company incorporates cultural preservation into its business strategies.	
S4	Corporate social responsibility is a fundamental part of my company's values.	

S5	My company recognizes that environmental problems are among the biggest challenges for society.	
S6	My company actively engages with local communities to promote sustainability.	
<b>Attitude towards Self-employment</b>		
A1	I would rather be my own boss than have a secure job.	Kuckertz & Wagner (2010)
A2	I believe that big financial success is more achievable through self-employment.	
A3	I would rather establish a new tourism venture than manage an existing one.	
<b>Propensity to Innovate</b>		
P1	My company always comes up with new ideas when facing challenges.	Foxall & Hackett (1992)
P2	My company prefers creating new solutions rather than improving existing ones.	
P3	My company offers fresh perspectives on old problems.	
P4	My company is willing to stand out and disagree with the group when necessary.	
P5	My company is stimulating and encourages creativity.	
P6	My company frequently develops innovative packages that align with the historical and cultural significance of dark tourism sites.	
P7	My company easily varies set routines at a moment's notice.	
P8	My company prefers gradual and steady changes.	
P9	My company can manage several new ideas at the same time.	
P10	My company incorporates emerging trends in tourism to differentiate our offerings in the niche market.	
P11	My company explores sustainable ways to innovate while maintaining the authenticity of dark tourism sites.	
P12	My company thrives on adapting to frequent changes in the tourism industry to maintain relevance and competitiveness.	

Table 2 assessed the reliability of the constructs measured in this study, including attitude towards self-employment, entrepreneurial intention, propensity to innovate, and sustainability orientation. Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (rho\_and rho\_c), and average variance extracted (AVE) are used to assess the reliability. All constructs show high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability greater than 0.90 and AVE greater than the suggested 0.50. This implies that the items used to measure the concepts are reliable and provide a good representation of the underlying constructs.

Table 2. Results of Reliability Analysis

Construct	Item	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Attitude Self-employ	A1	0.856	0.866	0.871	0.918	0.790
	A2	0.876				
	A3	0.932				
Entrepreneurial Intention	E1	0.884	0.931	0.931	0.946	0.743
	E2	0.861				
	E3	0.835				
	E4	0.829				
	E5	0.857				
	E6	0.903				
Propensity to Innovate	P1	0.718	0.954	0.960	0.960	0.666
	P2	0.835				
	P3	0.809				
	P4	0.771				
	P5	0.764				



	P6	0.704				
	P7	0.852				
	P8	0.809				
	P9	0.900				
	P10	0.850				
	P11	0.910				
	P12	0.840				
Sustainability Orientation	S1	0.899				
	S2	0.843				
	S3	0.852	0.933	0.938	0.947	0.749
	S4	0.818				
	S5	0.891				
	S6	0.888				

Table 3 shows the discriminant validity of constructs that suggest the constructs are distinct from one another. As seen, the diagonal elements represents the square root of AVE (average variance extracted) and it needs to be higher than the correlations of the off-diagonal elements. The results show each construct is significantly distinct from the others as diagonal values such as attitude towards self-employment (0.918) and entrepreneurial intention (0.925) are larger than their respective off-diagonal correlations. This indicates that the constructs have been accurately measured for distinct dimensions of the research model.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity of Constructs

	Attitude Self-employ	Entrepreneurial Intention	Propensity to Innovate	Sustainability Orientation
Attitude Self-employ	<b>0.918</b>			
Entrepreneurial Intention	0.889	<b>0.925</b>		
Propensity to Innovate	0.894	0.862	<b>0.928</b>	
Sustainability Orientation	0.804	0.802	0.816	<b>0.866</b>

Note: Diagonals represent the square root of the AVE while the off diagonals represent the correlations

The results of structural equation modeling to test the hypothesis are shown in Table 4. It examines the relationship of attitude towards self-employment, propensity to innovate and sustainability orientation with entrepreneurial intention. The results show that both attitude towards self-employment ( $\beta = 0.410$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and propensity to innovate ( $\beta = 0.872$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) positively influence entrepreneurial intention, confirming the hypotheses. Sustainability orientation has a negative effect on entrepreneurial intention ( $\beta = -0.338$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which also makes sense because, while sustainability is important, it might come with challenges that hinder building up entrepreneurial intentions.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values	Decision
Attitude Self-employ → Entrepreneurial Intention	0.410	0.398	0.064	6.428	0.000	Supported
Propensity to Innovate → Entrepreneurial Intention	0.872	0.872	0.065	13.440	0.000	Supported
Sustainability Orientation → Entrepreneurial Intention	-0.338	-0.325	0.074	4.560	0.000	Supported

## CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study examines the factors influencing entrepreneurial intentions among Sabah's dark tourism operators, with emphasis on sustainability orientation, attitude towards self-employment, and propensity to innovate. This study obtained these insights from its empirically based estimation and interpretation (tables 2 to 4). Significantly, both attitude towards self-employment and propensity to innovate have strong positive effects on entrepreneurial intention, suggesting that individuals who view self-employment favorably and are willing to innovate are more likely to start entrepreneurial experiments. The results draw attention to an important tension between sustainability and entrepreneurial motivation, where barriers may prevent some entrepreneurs from engaging in sustainable practices, including regulatory or financial barriers.

The results are closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities). Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all are all enshrined in SDG 8 (Escario-Sierra et al., 2022; Boluk et al., 2019). This quantitative study demonstrates how encouraging entrepreneurial aspiration and ambition for sustainability tourism among dark tourism entrepreneurs can result in job creation, bolstering local economies and equitable growth through creating innovative business models. At the same time, SDG 11, which aims to ensure that cities and human settlements are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable is also addressed through sustainable practices in dark tourism (Arvind, 2024). By engaging local stakeholders in decision-making and reinvesting profits, these practices also contribute to preserving cultural heritage, minimizing negative environmental impact, and improving the quality of life for the local community (Stone & Grebenar, 2022).

This study has important implications for policymakers, tourism operators and stakeholders. First, fostering a positive perception of self-employment through training, mentorship, and financial incentives can improve entrepreneurial involvement in dark tourism. Second, innovation is essential, including the adoption of new technologies, unique storytelling approaches, and experience-based tourism offerings that give operators a competitive edge. Lastly, while sustainability is crucial for tourism development, efforts should be made to prevent it from becoming a barrier to entrepreneurship. One way to counteract this negative impact on entrepreneurial intention is to offer financial incentives such as tax benefits or funding for environmentally friendly projects that can encourage entrepreneurs to adopt sustainable business models without discouraging innovation.

The study contributes the theories by extending the applicability of TPB, RBV and Stakeholder Theory in the field of dark tourism, highlighting its usefulness for linking entrepreneurial behaviours with sustainability outcomes (Arvind, 2024). In essence, the results offer practical implications for stakeholders. Some ideas include sustainable certifications, engaging local communities, and innovating offerings that provide an experience that can achieve the dual goals of economic viability and sustainability (Rossi et al., 2024; Spenceley, 2018). Policymakers can encourage this process by providing incentives for environmentally sustainable practices, improving capacity-building programs, and developing infrastructure to support sustainable tourism development (Minikhanova et al., 2024).

Additionally, direct input from tourism operators and policymakers could provide eye-range perspectives on the lack of supporting policy frameworks and practical challenges of sustainable dark tourism in Sabah, augmenting the depth of analysis. Tourism operators generally struggle with factors like high operational cost for sustainable practices, lack of government support for sustainable tourism practices, and the challenge in balancing heritage preservation with commercial viability. On the other hand, policymakers are essential in creating regulatory frameworks to reduce incentives and encourage cooperation between stakeholders. Further empirical analysis could use qualitative techniques such as interviews and case studies with relevant tourism board officials, local government representatives and industry stakeholders. This would support the identification of policy gaps, assess the feasibility of sustainability-driven business models and explore community involvement in tourism development. Enhancing these insights will complement the progress

toward SDG 8 and SDG 11, and cement Sabah as the benchmark for sustainable and inclusive dark tourism development.

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