

Travel intention as a mediator and the intersection of Social Networks, Sustainability Perception and Destination Decision

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Abstract- The study aims to identify the mediating role of travel intention and denote the theoretical intersection of Social networks, Sustainability Perception and Destination Decision to Vietnam in general. Sustainability perception of the development of tourist destinations is globally recognized, so Vietnam should not be an exception. The booming of Social networks from the internet, IoT, technology 4.0, and artificial intelligence have pushed businesses or fields wide-ranging changed both positively and negatively from communications, entertainment, marketing, sales and even to social lives. Tourism is a smoke-free industry, which is one of the primary sources of foreign currency transactions. Therefore, the relationship between the three concepts mentioned is presented in the theoretical intersectional model. The study is conducted in a qualitative method in combination with theoretical foundations as well.

Index Terms- Travel intention, Social networks, Sustainability Perception in Tourism, Destination decision.

I.

INTRODUCTION

The intends to conduct behaviour that is a strong predictor of actual behaviour (Pasafaro, 2019). According to the theory of planned actions - TPB, cognitive behavioural control, along with behavioural intention, could be used to predict actual behaviour in travel purchases. A response of travellers includes a travelling intention to a specific tourist destination (Ramkissoon, 2015).

According to Bose et al. (2019) and Shankar (2018), travellers will refer a destination as a good brand when there is a collection of multiple suppliers and services destinations there. Before travelling, visitors often visualize the image of the destination in their heads, list a set of expectations based on their previous experience, and also consider eWOM sources. They read articles, advertisements of destinations for reference. Others' beliefs about the destination influence the decision. Their overall impressive destination image formed after the visit is such an importance for the local community. Therefore, tourism operators should pay attention to the inter-cooperation to gain positive development for the destination (Buhalis et al., 2012; Ramkissoon, 2015).

Considered as the strong dominance of social networks, the research of Yazdanifard and Yee (2014) about social networks can play as a case study. They regarded the popularity of social networking sites as a phenomenon of the internet web platform. The increase in the number of people accessing the internet has led to the rise in the ability of users to join social networks and thereby significantly affect the social network.

Twumasi and Adu-Gyamfi (2013) argue that online interaction plays an essential role in determining visitor decision-making processes and their consumption behaviours. Tourism social networking sites contain all the information in need about tourism products and services. Thanks to this, visitors can compare and make decisions through the reviews and feedbacks of other users in the online environment. Therefore, social media is a powerful potential vehicle that can influence visitors' travelling decisions. And it is also a useful tool for marketers and business owners on the tourism industry that helps them shape consumer behaviours and their attitudes toward both products and services. Social networks are believed to be a reliable source of information that many travellers refer to in the process of travel planning.

In terms of sustainable tourism, Zhang and Zhang (2018) identified the path to promote small and medium-sized businesses in tourism that perform social responsibility through the promotion of sustainable development. These businesses are in the honour of the locals to introduce their culture and the ones who carry out the government's tourism policies.

On the other hand, consumers are increasingly willing to pay higher prices for products and services that commit to take advance the environmental guarantee (Dangi and Jamal, 2016; Teerakapibal, 2016; Wang et al. , 2018; Kim and Park, 2017). Local resources become central assets for tourism suppliers, and their sustainability plays a core role in tourism destination marketing strategies. Thus, whether from the perspective of the supply or demand side, the perception of sustainability is increasingly important in determining whether a tourist destination is attractive or not.

To uphold the sustainable development concept, Vietnam's tourism needs to pay attention to preserving cultural heritage, cultural environment by prioritizing forms of sustainable tourism that share the benefits among stakeholders (tourism enterprises, destination management organizations, local community, visitors). Goal allocation and assessment would preserve and restore the

environment, ecosystem, cultural values , and to develop green tourism, adapt to the global climate change (Research Institute for Tourism Development, 2018).

The successful development of sustainable tourism should be ensured with the participation of the stakeholders and cooperation among members with shared interests (Vu Minh Tam and Nguyen Van Tien, 2017).

The concept of sustainable development is considered suitable for the development of tourism destinations and the smokeless industry (Atun et al., 2018). Sustainable tourism requires ensuring the sustainable development of the entire tourism industry, contributing to society and the economy, including the sustainable use of resources and the environment (Fodness, 2017).

Vietnam's technical infrastructure has dramatically improved to ensure the development of social networks. Currently, over 94% of the territory has 3G and 4G signals with the number of personal internet users increased from 44% to 53%. In other words, online tourism and natural resources-related searches are also growing in Vietnam while promoting investment and business in the country and tourism development. Research by Google (2016) has shown that about 70% of people travelling in Vietnam search for information via mobile phone with the most popular application group is hotel booking (48%), survey destinations (42%) and buy air tickets (37%). The Vietnamese tourism industry is catching the trend and developing properly by promoting online tourism business activities to take advantage of existing advantages.

II.

FUNDAMENTAL THEORIES

Travel intention

Intention to travel is considered a mental process of turning motivations into tourism behaviours (Jeon et al., 2017). Travel intention is a traveller's perception of a specific destination (Ahn et al., 2013; Pesonen and Pasanen, 2017). Intention arises from an individual's beliefs when evaluating tourism products, resulting in confidence in standards and situational factors arising from the time of travel planning or commitment (Ballantyne et al., 2018). For each visitor, one's intention, hence, dominated by word of mouth, purchase travel products/services, the price factors, and the impact of others.

Intention to conduct behaviour is a strong predictor of actual behaviour (Passafaro, 2019; Abubakar et al., 2016). According to planned behavioural theory, cognitive behavioural control, along with behavioural intentions, can be used to predict actual behaviour. Camilleri (2017), Lin et al. (2014) show that the selection process is sequential and continuous, directly related to the impact on intentions related to behaviours.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a classic psychology theory that has been widely used in the field of accommodation and travel to understand behaviour and travel intention. For example, choosing a tourist destination (Hsu & Huang, 2010), a restaurant (Gao et al., 2016) and attending a conference (Aliakbar et al., 2012).

Destination decision

According to the geographical approach, a tourist destination is a defined geographic area, such as a country, an island or a preferred city, where there are adequate facilities like accommodation, places for dining and entertainment purposes (Zehrer and Hallmann, 2015; Buhalis et al., 2012; Jovicic, 2019; Kozak, 2019). A destination usually consists of the following five components: Attractive characteristics, destination facilities, accessibility, destination image and price (Kozak, 2019).

According to the traditional definition, destinations are defined as geographic areas, such as a country, an island, or a city (Gössling et al., 2016; Kozak, 2019). Destinations provide the market with a mix of travel products and services under the brand name as a whole.

Liu et al. (2017) explain that destinations are places where every visitor chooses to come and stay for a while to experience certain unique features or facets - a perception of attractiveness about some type of destination.

The destination can be a continent (according to the statistics of the World Tourism Organization such as America, Africa, Europe), or an area like ASEAN, a country or a locality, city, town.

Social networks

Social network theory stated that social networks are defined by behavioural patterns and the meaning of relationships between the components of this network (Chung et al., 2016).

Social network theory explains how networks work, analyses complex sets of relationships in a web of individuals or organizations, and considers individual attributes less important than relationships and their connection with other entities in the network (Panzer-Krause, 2019; Raskolnikov and Tempo, 2017).

Social network analysis considers social relationships as points and links, the points are individual agents in networks, and the links are the relationships between actors. The social network analysis method treats systems as a measurable entity with different indicators, including direction, frequency of interaction, size, centrality and density.

Social networks have their way of surviving the growth of online media. A social network includes members of the same social group as family, peers, colleagues and classmates; However, the advent of the online environment has created many new opportunities. Researchers have highlighted the ever-growing level of network interaction, especially in the context of online and virtual communities.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is the technology acceptance model to put in use by Davis (1989) to theorize the behaviour of using technology. These computer applications are a model of many reference researchers to explore consumer technology adoption behaviour. The TAM theory argues that an individual's perception of usability and usefulness are the two cognitive factors that determine their acceptance of information on the online environment.

Sustainability perception

According to Almuhrzi and Al-Azri (2019), "Sustainable development is a process that meets the needs of the present without affecting the responsiveness of future generations." Therefore, sustainable development is to create a better life for everyone feasible now and in the future. In other words, sustainable development is based on sound principles of world resources, based on how they are used in a way that shares benefits.

On the positive side, tourism can provide a viable source of opportunities for business development and job creation as well as stimulate investment and support for local services, even in remote areas. It also brings tangible economic value to natural and cultural resources. This means increasing the direct income from visitors spending on conservation in local communities.

On the negative side, tourism can exert direct pressure on weak ecosystems, degrade the physical environment and disrupt wildlife habitats. Moreover, it can put significant pressure on local communities and lead to an imbalance of traditional communities; and makes the difficulty of using scarce resources, especially land and water as well.

The result is that all tourism operators have a great responsibility to realize the importance of sustainable development. However, tourism can harm society and the environment if it developed without regarding sustainability. For the government, tourism policies can help to solve economic, social and environmental issues when accompanied by an awareness of both harm and benefit of sustainable tourism development. Economically, sustainability can ensure that the factors of business viability and their ability to operate will be maintained in the long run.

III.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used for the research is qualitative, developing the regression model based on the previous study on related matters, both domestic and abroad precede ones. The relevant data analytics and research technique were used along with extensive operational and research years' experience in the tourism industry.

IV.

RESEARCH MODEL

The model of Fishbein and Ajzen (1976) applied to the tourism sector has found out the relationship between "perception," "belief," "attitude," "intention" and "behaviour," in which "travel intention" is a predetermined factor and lead to the act of deciding the destination.

From Wangari's view (2017), travelling motivation drives the entire decision-making process followed by the traditional stages, seeking information, evaluating other options and making final decisions. Thereby it is easy to see that the intention has a positive impact on the choice of choosing a destination.

➤ *First relationship: Traveling intention has a positive impact on the destination decision.*

A would-be buying or paying intention of a product/service or a travelling intention is always going through a personal assessment of the benefits that the customer/visitor could get themselves which often in the form of self-wondering: "Is it true that people will pay more or be willing to pay for products/services of tourism operators that highly evaluate workers or tend to preserve the local environment?" And that intention has a significant influence on the final decision of consumers. In other words, the quality of products/services is influenced by the perception of sustainability (Dolcemascolo and Martina, 2011).

Many travellers who are aware of sustainable destination development tend to care about environmental preservation, indigenous culture conservation, tourism that respect the local culture as well as to promote regional economic development. The destination area will pay much attention to the image of its destination related to environmental issues, as well as cultural preservation, and so will have a significant influence on the decision to choose their destination (Huang and Liu, 2017).

➤ *Another relationship: Sustainability perception has a positive impact on travelling intention.*

According to Sharpley (2010), sustainable tourism development meets the needs of current tourists and local communities but still protects and sustainably enhances opportunities for the future. Sustainable development is considered one of the millennium goals of the world and for Vietnam today.

➤ *Third relationship: Sustainability perception has a positive impact on destination decisions.*

According to Zhang and Zhang (2018), social communication positively affects the relationship between the sustainability perception and future travelling intentions visitors, especially social networks affecting awareness. Moreover, the future business intention is affected by the conservation and promotion of indigenous culture.

➤ *The fourth relationship: Social networks have a positive impact on visitors' sustainability perception.*

Visitors, especially the young generation, are very likely to be active in finding what they require, primarily to fulfil their eating and travelling desire. It is discovered on social networking sites by proactively sharing information with similar-interests people as well, so social media plays a vital role in shaping consumer intention, or in other words, forming the plan to travel to a destination. (Bilgihan et al., 2014).

Moreover, the positive impact of marketing using social networking for a targeted tourism destination is vast, because social networks can help destination management its units, and to build a positive image for the destination. Furthermore, it helps motivate travellers who intend to travel but not decide yet.

Not only that, when taking advantage of social networks to make positive communication about the destination image, it also motivates tourists' intention to return to the destination next time.

➤ *The fifth relationship: Social networks positively impact tourists' travelling intentions.*

According to Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil (2017), most people admit that searching for information plays a critical role in the decision of a tourist destination. Most of the contents posted on the web, as well as the feedbacks, are the central part appearing in the visitors' information search process.

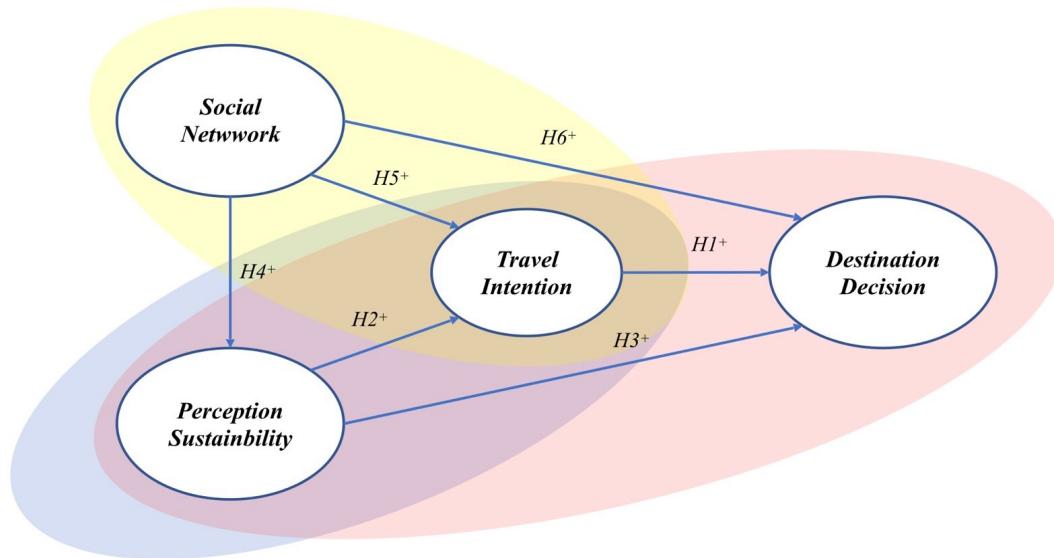
➤ *The sixth relationship: Social networks positively influences the tourists' destination decision.*

V.

RESEARCH'S RESULTS

After summarizing the research relationships presented above, the author proposes the research model in Figure 1.

The model with six relationships is drawn from previous studies, describing the fundamental relationship between social networks, sustainability perception and destination decision through the mediator, travelling intention.



Source: Author's withdrawing

Figure 1: Research model of the relationship between social networks and sustainability perception to destination selection decisions and the mediating role of travelling intention

VI.

CONCLUSION

From the theories of tourism destination, the method of social networks, the theory of sustainability perception and the theory of travelling intention, the research model is established to show the relationship between social networks, sustainability perception, travelling plan and tourists' destination decisions. The author withdraws from precede papers and exposes the model that contains a positive impact of social networks on sustainability perception, travelling intention and destination decisions, as well as positive impact of tourism sustainability perception on travelling intention and later on the destination decision.

The intermediary role of travelling intention in relationships of social networks, sustainability perception in tourism, and destination decision has been presented. Also, through the model, we can see the intersection between social networks theories, the theory of planned behaviour and technology acceptance model theory.

The study will provide updated research as the foundation for more follow-up studies to apply in a specific field. Various applications can be used, such as field surveys, developing appropriate scales with reliability testing, confirmatory factor analysis, factors explored and tested more deeply using linear structure model (SEM). Thus, the research could aid in meaningful administrative implications for two emerging issues in the new era, social networks and sustainability perception in tourism; which is vital for the counterparts: tourists, tourism operators, and the locality that has a tourist destination and a state-run tourism management apparatus contributing to the development of a smokeless industry for Vietnam with full tourism potential.

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