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FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE SUSTAINABILITY CAMPAIGNS IN INFLUENCING ECOTOURISM CHOICES IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This research explores how online sustainability campaigns influence travel behavior among young Indonesian tourists, especially in the context of growing interest in ecotourism. As digital content becomes the main source of information for Gen Z travelers, social media campaigns around sustainability have the potential to shape tourism choices. The study aims to understand whether exposure to environmental messages online truly affects their interest in choosing eco-friendly destinations, accommodations, or experiences. Using a quantitative method, the research surveyed 140 respondents aged 18 to 28 who had previously come across sustainability-themed tourism content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. The survey measured how often they encountered these campaigns, how much they trusted the message, and whether it influenced their travel preferences. The results showed that campaigns that are visually engaging, emotionally appealing, and delivered by relatable figures tend to have a stronger impact. Many respondents said they became more curious or even started considering switching to more sustainable travel options after seeing such content. However, the study also found that not all awareness leads to action. Factors like cost, limited availability of eco-friendly options, and unclear information can still hold travelers back. In conclusion, while online sustainability campaigns can effectively raise awareness and spark interest, stronger efforts in communication clarity, affordability, and accessibility are needed to turn that awareness into real behavior change. This insight is useful for tourism marketers, destination managers, and environmental advocates aiming to build more impactful messages that resonate with modern travelers and support broader goals in sustainable finance and responsible consumption.

Keywords: sustainability campaigns; ecotourism; digital communication; tourist behavior; Indonesia

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has experienced a significant transformation worldwide, with sustainability becoming a cornerstone in shaping the industry's trajectory. Increasingly, the adverse impacts of mass tourism—ranging from environmental degradation to cultural commodification—have spurred destinations and stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices and frameworks (Miller & Torres-Delgado, 2023; Streimikiene et al., 2021). The rise of ecotourism marks a strategic realignment within tourism policy and planning, framed by international agendas and supported by measurable sustainability indicators (Hamidi et al., 2023)

In Indonesia, these shifts are institutionalized through national policy instruments such as the Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy No. 4 of 2021 on Ecotourism Areas and other legislative frameworks promoting conservation-based tourism. The expansion of super-priority destinations, like Borobudur and Mandalika reflects state-backed ambitions to integrate sustainability into mainstream tourism (Desembrianita et al., 2024; Ritonga et al., 2024). Furthermore, community-based ecotourism has emerged as a key modality in managing conservation areas and empowering marginalized groups, particularly those adjacent to national parks (Indira Anggraini & Gunawan, 2021; Sisriany & Furuya, 2024).



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Importantly, the role of digital ecosystems in promoting ecotourism is paramount. Indonesia's Gen Z population digital natives aged 13–28 comprises approximately 28% of the national demographic (BPS, 2021). Characterized by high digital engagement and socio-environmental consciousness, Gen Z travelers are heavily influenced by content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Studies by Lauvelia et al. (2024) and Wachyuni et al. (2024) underscore that these platforms not only shape destination choices but also travel motivations, with a growing inclination toward authenticity, wellness, and eco-centrism.

The intersection of social media and sustainability is further evidenced in research on influencer marketing and green messaging. Platforms amplify environmental narratives, turning hashtags like #EcoTravel and campaigns by @wonderfulindonesia into touchpoints for ecological awareness (Kilipiri et al., 2023; Pop et al., 2022; Ummar et al., 2023). Firman et al. (2023) find that social media-based ecotourism promotion significantly contributes to awareness and sustainable tourism development, particularly when coupled with policies around eco-innovation and stakeholder collaboration.

Nevertheless, a persistent gap exists between intention and behavior. Despite endorsing sustainability, tourists often fail to align actions with beliefs due to cost, convenience, or cognitive dissonance (Viglia & Acuti, 2023; Wut et al., 2023). Nieto-García et al. (2024) criticize overreliance on self-reported data, calling for behavioral metrics and field-based evaluations. Their notion of "green consumer hypocrisy" echoes in local contexts where social media discourse does not always translate into sustainable action (Ritonga et al., 2024).

In response, this study investigates the influence of online sustainability campaigns on the ecotourism preferences and behavioral intentions of Indonesian Gen Z travelers. While prior research explores either social media or sustainability behaviors in isolation, few studies offer empirical insight into how digital campaign exposure shapes actual behavioral intent, particularly in emerging economies. Therefore, the central research question is: How do online sustainability campaigns influence the ecotourism preferences and behavioral intentions of Indonesian Generation Z travelers?

This study leverages Indonesia's evolving ecotourism landscape and digitally active youth to inform sustainable tourism communication. The findings are expected to help policy makers, content creators, and destination managers refine strategies that bridge value-based intentions

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sustainable tourism behavior has become a central focus in both academic and policy circles. As the environmental costs of travel gain attention, theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the Norm Activation Model (NAM), and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) offer interpretative lenses for understanding pro-environmental choices (Octafiola & Yuliati, 2023; Salinero et al., 2022).

TPB, developed by Ajzen (1991) posits that behavioral intention is shaped by attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms. In ecotourism contexts, TPB has been validated across diverse demographics, including applications in Southeast Asia where moral norms enhance the model's utility (Luong & Nguyen, 2025; Luongo et al., 2024) However, critics note that TPB underestimates affective and value-driven influences, which are central to Gen Z decision-making. The NAM complements this by emphasizing moral obligations and responsibility awareness as key drivers of behavior (Han et al., 2021; Oh & Ki, 2023). Salinero et al. (2022) and Assaker (2025) apply NAM to Gen Z, demonstrating that personal norms aligned with SDGs significantly impact their travel choices, particularly when altruistic motivations are activated.

To understand how these motivations are communicated, ELM becomes useful. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) describe two routes to persuasion; central (rational) and peripheral (emotional). On social media, both routes are triggered simultaneously. Cheng et al. (2024) and Erkli (2022) show that Instagram and



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TikTok campaigns that blend data with emotive imagery drive deeper engagement among Gen Z. Homer et al. (2023) and Ragab (2022) further emphasize the importance of content credibility and influencer authenticity in establishing trust.

Trust, therefore, functions as a crucial mediating factor between message exposure and behavioral outcomes (Pop et al., 2022). Content creators and influencers act as trust brokers, shaping consumer perception through visual appeal, storytelling, and ethical alignment (Ummar et al., 2023). According to Firman et al. (2023), such digital campaigns when embedded within policy frameworks can directly influence sustainable tourism development in Indonesia.

Still, a disconnect remains between intention and actual behavior. Viglia & Acuti, (2023) identify rationalization, cost sensitivity, and limited eco-options as barriers, while Nieto-García et al. (2024) urge a shift from aspirational survey data to behavioral observation. In Indonesian contexts, recent work by Salouw et al. (2024) and Hamidi et al. (2023) highlights uneven ecotourism research coverage and a need for spatial mapping to inform regional planning. Sisriany & Furuya (2024) address this gap using geospatial tools and big data to visualize ecotourism distribution, reinforcing the importance of regional context.

This study builds on these insights by integrating TPB, NAM, and ELM into a unified model to assess the role of digital communication in shaping Gen Z ecotourism behavior. By contextualizing these frameworks within Indonesian policy and socio-digital landscapes, the study seeks to advance both theoretical integration and empirical rigor.

Hypotheses:

H1: Frequency of exposure to online sustainability campaigns positively influences trust in the campaign content. H2: Trust in sustainability campaign content positively influences attitudes toward sustainable tourism. H3: Attitudes toward sustainable tourism positively influence behavioral intention to choose eco-friendly destinations. H4: Trust in sustainability campaign content mediates the relationship between frequency of exposure and behavioral intention.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative explanatory research design aimed at testing causal relationships among key constructs: exposure to online sustainability campaigns, trust in campaign content, attitudes toward sustainable tourism, and behavioral intention. The research employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze both the measurement and structural models.

PLS-SEM was selected due to its suitability for exploratory research, small-to-medium sample sizes, and its ability to handle non-normal data distributions (Hair et al., 2021). The model facilitates prediction-oriented analysis, which aligns with the study's objective to evaluate behavioral intentions based on social media exposure.

3.2 Population and Sampling Technique

The target population comprises Indonesian Generation Z individuals aged 17–28 who are active users of Instagram or TikTok and have encountered sustainability-related tourism content. This age group represents digital natives with high social media engagement and increasing eco-consciousness.

A purposive sampling technique is employed to ensure that only respondents who are active social media users and have been exposed to content about sustainable or eco-tourism are included. To ensure data quality, responses from individuals who fall outside the specified age range or fail screening questions are excluded during the data cleaning phase. A minimum sample of 100 valid responses is required for PLS-SEM analysis, in line with the "10-times rule" and statistical recommendations (Hair et al., 2021).



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3.3 Data Collection Method

Data will be collected through an online self-administered questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Dissemination will take place through social media channels such as WhatsApp, Instagram Stories, and relevant online communities. A pilot test involving 10 Generation Z participants will be conducted to assess the clarity, reliability, and usability of the questionnaire. Minor adjustments will be made based on feedback.

3.4 Variables and Measurement

This study includes four main latent variables, each measured using reflective indicators and adapted from validated instruments:

Table 1: Variables, Number of Items, Sources, and Measurement Scales.

Variable	No. of Items	Source	Measurement Scale
Frequency of Exposure	3	Lauvelia et al. (2024)	5-point Likert (1–5)
Trust in Campaign Content	4	Pop et al. (2022)	5-point Likert (1–5)
Attitude Toward Sustainable Tourism	4	Salinero et al. (2022)	5-point Likert (1–5)
Behavioral Intention	3	Salinero et al. (2022)	5-point Likert (1–5)
Cost Considerations (additional)	4	Developed for this study	5-point Likert (1–5)

An operationalization table is available in Appendix A to clarify the constructs and indicators.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis will be conducted using SmartPLS 4.0 software. The following analytical procedures will be implemented:

Descriptive Statistics: Demographic profiling and frequency analysis Measurement Model Evaluation:

1. Indicator reliability (outer loadings > 0.70)
2. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability > 0.70)
3. Convergent validity (AVE > 0.50)
4. Discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.90)

Structural Model Testing:

1. Hypothesis testing through bootstrapping with 5000 resamples
2. Assessment of path coefficients, t-values, and p-values
3. Evaluation of R^2 (coefficient of determination), f^2 (effect size), and Q^2 (predictive relevance)

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All participants will provide informed consent prior to participation. The survey is anonymous, and no personally identifiable information will be collected. Data will be stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes in accordance with ethical research guidelines. No personal identifiers will be collected, and Google Forms will not record email addresses, ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality.



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4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

A total of 140 Indonesian Generation Z respondents (aged 17–28) participated in the survey. The majority were frequent users of platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, with over 65% spending more than two hours daily on social media. Despite moderate exposure to sustainability-related content, respondents exhibited relatively positive views toward sustainable tourism. Table 2 presents the descriptive summary for each construct based on item means:

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Constructs Based on Mean Scores.

Construct	Number of Items	Mean Score	Category
Frequency of Exposure	3	2.788	Moderate
Trust in Campaign Content	4	3.068	Moderate
Attitude Toward Sustainable Tourism	4	4.159	High
Behavioral Intention	3	3.727	High
Cost Consideration	4	3.08	Moderate

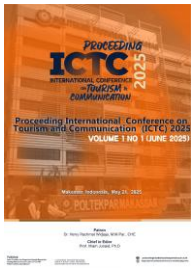
These results suggest that although exposure to sustainability content on social media is not extremely high, it correlates with moderate trust and notably strong pro-sustainability attitudes and intentions.

4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was assessed through indicator reliability, construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator Reliability: Most indicators displayed outer loadings above the recommended threshold of 0.70. However, two indicators for Attitude (ATT1 = 0.235; ATT2 = 0.182) were substantially below acceptable levels, warranting caution. Table 3 summarizes all item loadings.

Table 3: Outer Loadings, T-Values, and P-Values for Each Indicator.

Indicator	Outer Loading	T-Value	P-Value
ATT1	0.235	0.921	0.357
ATT2	0.182	0.714	0.475
ATT3	0.732	3.815	0
ATT4	0.768	4.067	0
BEH1	0.649	2.36	0.018
BEH2	0.528	1.692	0.091
BEH3	0.773	2.531	0.011
FREQ1	0.808	15.195	0
FREQ2	0.769	12.69	0
FREQ3	0.684	8.85	0
TRUST1	0.633	6.243	0
TRUST2	0.615	6.307	0
TRUST3	0.634	6.966	0



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TRUST4	0.694	6.581	0

Construct Reliability: Composite reliability (rho_c) exceeded 0.70 for most constructs, with the exception of Attitude (0.569), which reflects weak internal consistency. Convergent Validity: Two constructs (Frequency and Trust) had AVE values above 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Attitude (0.304) and Behavior (0.432) fell below the recommended threshold.

Table 4: Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Construct	Composite Reliability	AVE
Attitude	0.569	0.304
Behavior	0.691	0.432
Frequency	0.799	0.571
Trust	0.74	0.416

Discriminant Validity: HTMT values between most constructs were acceptable (< 0.90), except: Frequency ↔ Behavior: 0.992 and Trust ↔ Frequency: 0.944. These results indicate possible overlap in constructs and limited discriminant validity between them.

4.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples, structural path coefficients were analyzed. Table 5 displays the results:

Table 5: Path Coefficients, T-Values, P-Values, and Hypothesis Testing Results.

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Result
H1	Frequency → Trust	0.551	7.467	<0.000	Supported
H2	Trust → Attitude	0.313	3.012	0.003	Supported
H3	Attitude → Behavior	0.261	2.066	0.039	Supported
H4	Frequency → Trust → Attitude → Behavior	0.045	1.345	0.179	Not Supported

The model's explanatory power was evaluated using R^2 values for each endogenous variable. The model explains 53.1% of the variance in Trust ($R^2 = 0.531$), 31.7% in Attitude ($R^2 = 0.317$), and 37.3% in Behavioral Intention ($R^2 = 0.373$), indicating moderate predictive accuracy. The indirect effect of Frequency of Exposure on Behavioral Intention through Trust and Attitude (H4) was positive ($\beta = 0.045$) but not statistically significant ($p = 0.179$). This suggests that while exposure impacts trust and attitude individually, the full mediating path to behavioral intention is not supported in this model.



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4.4 Discussion

Findings support the relevance of TPB and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) in understanding how digital campaigns influence sustainability-related attitudes and behaviors. Frequency of exposure to sustainability content on social media platforms had a substantial influence on trust, reinforcing the importance of content credibility. Trust was shown to significantly influence attitudes, in line with existing literature on digital persuasion and influencer credibility. Attitudes in turn shaped behavioral intentions, confirming core tenets of TPB. However, several measurement issues emerged:

a. Two attitude indicators (ATT1, ATT2) had very low loadings.

b. CR and AVE for Attitude and Behavior were below ideal thresholds.

c. Discriminant validity concerns suggest conceptual overlap, especially between Frequency and Behavior.

These results suggest that although online sustainability messaging can drive behavioral intentions among Gen Z travelers, future studies should refine construct measures, address multicollinearity, and explore moderating variables such as cost sensitivity. The study advances our understanding of how digital ecosystems influence sustainable tourism behavior and emphasizes the need for precise, trustworthy, and engaging sustainability communication online.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined how online sustainability campaigns influence the ecotourism preferences and behavioral intentions of Indonesian Generation Z travelers. Using constructs from the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the model tested the effects of exposure frequency, trust in content, attitude, and behavioral intention. Three of four hypotheses were supported: exposure increased trust (H1), trust shaped attitudes (H2), and attitudes influenced behavioral intention (H3). The full mediation path (H4) was not significant. The model showed moderate explanatory power (R^2 = 0.531 for Trust, 0.317 for Attitude, 0.373 for Behavior), highlighting the influence of persuasive digital content in shaping pro-environmental mindsets.

This research contributes to TPB by identifying trust as a key mediator and applies ELM in a tourism sustainability context. For practice, the findings suggest that credible and emotionally engaging social media content rather than frequent exposure alone can meaningfully shape eco-conscious travel attitudes and intentions.

However, several limitations remain. The use of self-reported data risks social desirability bias. Two attitude items had low loadings, and discriminant validity was weak between some constructs. The sample, focused on digitally active Gen Z users, also limits generalizability. Future studies should explore behavioral data, cost-related moderators, and cross-cultural differences to better understand the long-term impact of sustainability messaging in tourism.

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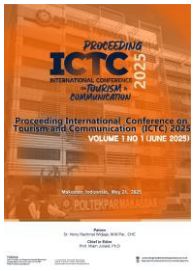
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