

Tourist' Behavior and Its Impacts to The Sustainability of Tours and Travel Operation: Evidence from Indonesia

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Abstract

Amid growing concerns over environmental degradation, cultural erosion, and social inequality, the behavior of tourists has undergone a notable transformation. In Indonesia, one of the world's most visited archipelagic nations, tourism businesses must adapt to shifting tourist expectations that increasingly prioritize sustainability. This study employs a qualitative-exploratory case study design across three major Indonesian destinations: Yogyakarta, Bali, and Labuan Bajo. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving travel agents, guides, and domestic and international tourists. Findings reveal that tourists, especially younger and international travelers, are becoming more critical of the social and environmental implications of their visits. Travel agents are responding by integrating sustainability narratives, building strategic local partnerships, and redesigning tour products to reflect ethical and ecological values. Notably, tour guides serve as key mediators, educating travelers and promoting responsible behavior. However, gaps in infrastructure, uneven stakeholder understanding, and increased operational costs remain significant barriers to full implementation. This study contributes a micro-level perspective on how tourist preferences directly impact the operational strategies of travel agents. It proposes a three-pillar framework, continuous education, community-based partnerships, and value-driven innovation, as a roadmap for sustainable transformation. A key limitation lies in the qualitative scope, which may not fully capture behavioral shifts at scale.

Keywords: tourist education; travel business operations; sustainable tourism; tourist behavior; business strategy



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INTRODUCTION

Background

Global issues such as digitalization, climate change, and health crises have had a significant impact on the way people travel. Over the past decade, there has been a significant shift in traveler behavior. As travelers seek more authentic, ethical, and sustainable experiences, travel agents around the world, including those in Indonesia, have had to deal with both positive and negative outcomes (Haxton, 2019; Ollivaud & Hill & Gale, 2009; Lesmana et al., 2022; Peaty, 2011).

As one of the countries with great tourism potential, Indonesia is faced with the challenge of accelerating the growth of the tourism sector to be more balanced with the principles of sustainability. Travel agents, tour operators and tour guides are companies that play a role in creating and managing travel experiences, which in turn influence the perceptions and behaviors of tourists. The sustainability of tourism sector operations in Indonesia will not be achieved if the preferences and values of travelers are not taken into account (Cahyadi & Newsome, 2021; Enea, 2011; Frigidis et al., 2022; Ismayanti et al., 2011; Mayuzumi, 2021; Purwanto et al., 2021; Purwoko et al., 2022).

The impact of vacations on society and the environment is now a top consideration. Indonesian travelers have started to behave differently. They want to research online, choose eco-friendly locations, and give back to the community. These new signals are forcing entrepreneurs to re-evaluate their product marketing strategies and eco-friendly packaging for travel-related goods (Krisnitalia et al., 2022; Lemy et al., 2021; Wang & Li, 2023;).

Travelers are becoming more discerning and are beginning to wonder whether eco-friendly travel packages are really offered by travel agents or are they just marketing gimmicks. Most current research still focuses on sustainability issues

at the macro policy or destination level. Despite their importance in the tourism value chain, Prawira et al., (2024) claims that there is still a lack of discussion about the day-to-day activities of travel agents. However, these business owners have a great opportunity to teach, guide and even change the behavior of visitors during their stay, because they are the ones who interact with guests and influence their travel experience. According to the author, this effort is very relevant and urgent to be carried out in Indonesia.

Visitors' perspectives have changed, businesses have had to develop more sustainable yet competitive operational methods. For example, they are concerned about their carbon footprint, want to participate in community tours, and are very interested in ecotourism (Kumar & Yadav, 2024; Made et al., 2024; Machnik, 2021; McCool, 1995; Rakhmonov, 2024; Ventriglia & Rios-Morales, 2013).

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to analyze how tourist behavior affects the operational sustainability of travel businesses in Indonesia and to propose implementable strategies that can be used by travel agents in achieving the goal of sustainable tourism activities in various destinations. Although there is literature discussing the importance of sustainability in tourism in general, there is a research gap related to how tourist behavior affects the operational practices of travel agents in Indonesia. Most previous studies have focused on the destination aspect, national policies, or other macro perspectives, without delving deeper into the dynamics of the relationship between tourist preferences and operational responses of travel agents as front-line actors in the industry. Thus, this article is expected to provide empirical and conceptual contributions to fill this gap through a data-based approach from the local Indonesian context, as well as presenting applicable strategic recommendations for the sustainability of the travel industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Changing Global and Local Traveler Behavior)

Traveler behavior globally and locally has changed dramatically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Personality traits such as openness and discipline have been found to influence travel behavior: cautious travelers are more likely to change their travel plans and prioritize hygiene and safety, while bold travelers show less concern about safety and are less likely to cancel trips. This study shows how important it is to understand these behavioral changes given heightened perceptions of risk during the pandemic (Kovačić et al., 2023).

Tourist behavior in Northern Cyprus is increasingly oriented towards responsible tourism practices, with many tourists becoming aware of their environmental and societal impacts. Common behaviors include reducing energy consumption, conserving water, and minimizing waste. Additionally, tourists are willing to pay a premium for sustainable experiences, indicating a shift towards more responsible choices. However, challenges such as limited sustainable options and lack of awareness remain, requiring further education and stakeholder collaboration to improve responsible tourism practices globally and locally (Bozdaglar, 2023; Olli, 2013; Weeden, 2014).

Sustainability in the Travel Industry

Sustainability in the travel industry encompasses environmental, economic, and social practices that improve a company's financial performance while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and society. This study highlights that macro-level sustainability practices significantly influence the sustainability concerns of tourism companies in both developed and developing countries. By adopting sustainability practices, such as resource efficiency and social responsibility, companies can improve their financial results and align with stakeholder

expectations, ultimately contributing to long-term success in the tourism sector (Battaglia, 2017; Camilleri, 2020; Nagen-drakumar et al., 2022; Tončev, 2014).

Sustainability in the travel industry involves addressing challenges such as CO2 emissions, water consumption, landscape degradation, and biodiversity loss. The concept of sustainable tourism is rooted in sustainable development, which aims to balance economic, social, and environmental impacts. Future research should focus on changing tourist behavior and implementing solutions such as legal frameworks, quality standards, and promoting resource conservation. Effective planning, management, and collaboration among stakeholders are essential to achieving sustainability in tourism and reducing its environmental impacts (Battaglia, 2017; Grizane, 2023; Miočić et al., 2016; Nicholls et al., 2021; Slivar, 2018).

Sustainability in the travel industry involves connecting travelers to local communities and projects, fulfilling their needs for participation, creation, and identity, while addressing ecological and social challenges. Shared living accommodations exemplify this shift towards more sustainable tourism practices (Valva, 2014).

Operational Dimensions and Innovation by Business Actors

Key operational dimensions of sustainability in the travel industry, emphasizing the role of tour operators in navigating challenges such as regulatory constraints, market dynamics, and resource management. Innovations include adopting sustainable practices such as waste reduction and energy efficiency, leveraging digital platforms for marketing, and engaging in stakeholder collaboration through community initiatives. By implementing these strategies, tour operators can enhance their sustainability efforts and contribute positively to environmental, socio-cultural, and economic outcomes in tourism (Arica, 2021; Nicholls et al., 2021; Slivar, 2018).

Sustainable tourism practices, such as low-carbon transport and energy-efficient accommodation, can significantly reduce the tourism sector's carbon footprint by 40%. Innovations such as water-saving technologies can reduce water use by up to 30%. Additionally, destinations with sustainable certification see a 20% increase in per capita tourism expenditure, demonstrating how operational innovation not only improves environmental sustainability but also drives economic growth and community engagement in the tourism sector (Xing, 2024).

Operations in the tourism industry involve interconnected services, where various actors, including travel agents, hotels, and airlines, collaborate and compete. Innovation is essential to enhance customer experience and maintain authenticity. This highlights the importance of employee creativity and the role of service personnel in creating shared value with customers. By focusing on experiential innovation, businesses can enhance their market image and create competitive advantage through synergy between stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem (Kandampully et al., 2023).

The Relationship between Tourist Behavior and Business Strategy)

The direct relationship between travel behavior and perceived sustainability suggests that understanding traveler behavior is critical to developing effective tourism business strategies. By improving perceived sustainability, managers can adjust their marketing strategies based on traveler feedback, ultimately influencing their intention to recommend and revisit a destination. This alignment between traveler behavior and perceived sustainability can drive satisfaction and loyalty, which are important goals for tourism businesses aiming to attract and retain customers in a competitive market (Conti et al., 2023).

Understanding uncivil tourist behavior is essential for effective tourism business strategies. It emphasizes that

behavioral intention, influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, significantly predicts actual behavior. By addressing cognitive dissonance and using neutralization techniques, tourism businesses can manage and reduce uncivil behavior, ultimately promoting sustainable development in tourism destinations. Thus, integrating insights from tourist behavior into business strategies is essential to enhance visitor experience and maintain a positive image of tourism sites (Zhang & Cao, 2023).

Ecotourism behavior, influenced by factors such as awareness of consequences and personal norms, is critical to developing effective tourism business strategies. By identifying ecotourists' motivations, attitudes, and expectations, businesses can tailor their marketing strategies to enhance ecological practices and meet consumer demand. The proposed model helps in predicting ecotourism intentions, enabling tourism professionals to improve their ecological marketing strategies and ultimately promote sustainable tourism practices (Lorenzo-Romero et al., 2021).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with an exploratory case study method to deeply understand the relationship between tourist behavior and the operational sustainability of travel companies in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore phenomena contextually and deeply in real-life situations, as stated by (Yin, 2018) for social research with a focus on organizational dynamics and professional practice.

The research locations and informants were conducted in three main tourist destinations in Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Bali, and Labuan Bajo, each of which represents the segmentation of cultural tourism, mass tourism, and ecotourism. The location selection used purposive sampling, considering the existence of active tour

businesses that have direct interaction with tourists and show indications of sustainable practices. The informants consisted of tour business owners/managers, professional tour guides, domestic and international tourists.

The data collection technique used was semi-structured interviews, in order to capture the perceptions and practices of business actors adapting to sustainable tourism trends Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), participant observation, with researchers participating in several tour packages to understand first-hand the sustainability practices implemented and tourists' reactions to them. Document analysis includes travel brochures, travel agency digital platforms, and internal company policies related to sustainability.

In this study, data was analyzed manually using the Reflective Thematic Analysis approach developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). This approach was chosen because it is flexible yet systematic, and is well suited to understanding the deeper meanings in participants' narratives, particularly in social and cultural contexts such as tourist behavior in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in the context of the Indonesian tourism industry, with a primary focus on the dynamics that develop between tourist behavior and the operational sustainability practices of travel business actors. As the largest archipelagic country in the world, Indonesia is blessed with diverse cultural richness and extraordinary natural beauty, ranging from mountainous landscapes, tropical rainforests, exotic beaches, to unique underwater life. All of these elements make Indonesia one of the leading tourist destinations, both in the Southeast Asian region and on a global scale. However, this great potential is also accompanied by challenges that are not easy, especially in terms of managing tourism sustainability that considers environmental, social, and economic aspects

holistically. and complex challenges in efforts to achieve sustainable tourism.

In recent decades, the phenomenon of globalization, increasing purchasing power of the community, and the development of information technology have driven a surge in the flow of tourists, both domestic and international, visiting various destinations in Indonesia. This growth has triggered the growth of travel businesses that have mushroomed in various cities and regions, making this sector increasingly important in the value chain of the tourism industry. Therefore, this study aims to explore how travel business actors not only act as travel facilitators, but also as agents of change in directing tourist behavior towards more responsible and sustainable tourism practices.

The research locations were selected purposively in three main tourism areas, namely Yogyakarta, Bali, and Labuan Bajo. Each destination represents different characteristics and tourism segmentation, which provides a diverse and contextual scope of empirical data. Yogyakarta was chosen because of its identity as the center of cultural tourism and Javanese historical heritage, where travel agents play an important role in managing visits to cultural sites and local community interactions. Bali, as an international tourism icon, represents a form of mass tourism with high complexity of sustainability challenges due to massive tourist pressure. Meanwhile, Labuan Bajo represents a developing ecotourism model, with strong emphasis on environmental conservation and local community involvement.

These three locations were chosen not only because of their popularity, but also because of the indications of active involvement of travel agents in designing and implementing more socially and ecologically responsible tourism strategies. The existence of travel businesses that have demonstrated sustainability initiatives, whether in the form of partnerships with communities, innovations in environmentally friendly products, or educational

approaches to tourists, was a primary consideration in determining the locations. In addition, the differences in geographic context and market segmentation in each region provide a rich comparative space to see the variation in practices and responses to the preferences of increasingly environmentally conscious tourists.

In addition, the differences in geographical context and tourism market segmentation in each region provide a rich comparative space to observe variations in practices and responses to the preferences of increasingly environmentally conscious tourists. Yogyakarta, for example, tends to attract domestic tourists and students who are interested in historical and cultural values. This opens up space for travel agents to develop thematic tour packages based on cultural education. On the other hand, Bali attracts a global tourist segment from various backgrounds, who demand international standard services but also show a tendency towards eco-conscious travel. Labuan Bajo, with its tourist profile that tends to be adventurous and nature-loving, becomes a testing ground for more experimental and conservation-based ecotourism models.

Tourist behavior affects the operational sustainability of tourism businesses in Indonesia as well

Changes in the behavior of Indonesian and foreign tourists have begun to be felt by tourism business actors. From the results of interviews with a number of travel agencies, it is known that consumers are now increasingly selective in choosing tourism products. They are no longer fixated on popular destinations that are Instagrammable, but are starting to question aspects of sustainability, whether the trip involves local communities, how waste is managed, and its impact on the environment and local culture. This shows that tourist preferences have evolved towards a more ethical and reflective direction, as explained by Lesmana et al. (2022) and reinforced in field findings. This change is

actually the result of the influence of globalization of values and the growth of digital literacy. Today's tourists have wider access to information about global issues such as climate change, social inequality, and the destruction of local cultures due to overtourism. As a result, in determining their choice of destination, they not only consider the visual beauty factor, but also question the social and ecological footprint of their visit. This is where values such as responsible travel, slow tourism, and regenerative tourism begin to play an important role in consumer considerations.

Specifically in Indonesia, travel agencies have noted that this phenomenon is beginning to challenge traditional business models. Travel agents who previously focused on mass sales with homogeneous packages must now develop more personalized, transparent, and educational products. The growing awareness that tourism is not just about consuming experiences, but also ethical interactions with places and people, has become the driving force for change in their operational strategies. This can be seen, for example, in the decision to include information on waste management in tourist villages or choosing local partners who have adopted environmentally friendly practices.

Foreign tourists, especially from Europe and Australia, have been noted to be more vocal in asking about local community involvement and environmental impact management during tourism activities. Some have even asked for more environmentally friendly facilities such as electric vehicles, refillable gallons, and a ban on single-use plastics. On the other hand, domestic tourists, although still more focused on comfort, have shown increased awareness, especially the younger generation who are starting to be interested in culture-based and community-based tourism. This phenomenon is in line with Lemy et al., (2021) which chronicles the transition of environmental awareness among local travelers in the digital age.

For local business actors, this is both an opportunity and a challenge. On the one hand, the presence of ethical tourists opens up space for long-term collaboration based on values, not just transactions. On the other hand, travel agencies need to make significant adjustments, both in terms of tour package content, HR training, and marketing methods. In this context, a sustainability-based approach can no longer be considered an add-on strategy, but must become the core of the narrative of the contemporary tourism business. Travel agencies reported that the response to their sustainability efforts tended to be positive. Tourists appreciated efforts such as the use of local guides, collaboration with village cooperatives, and contributions from tour packages to social programs. Some tourists even reported returning to the same destination because they felt an emotional bond with the local community. This shows that the sustainability practices carried out not only have an impact on the environment, but also build consumer loyalty. In this context, field results strengthen the argument Cahyadi & Newsome (2021) that direct involvement of business actors in the tourism social chain is the key to effective sustainability.

In fact, many travel agents now realize that integrating sustainability values can be a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive industry. Interviews with a number of business people found that agencies that promote the principles of transparency, economic justice, and cultural preservation actually gain a better reputation in the eyes of consumers. They are not only selling products, but also stories, values, and social impact. Efforts such as creating local-based travel narratives and community involvement are considered to be able to create a more memorable experience for tourists. In one case study, a travel agency in Flores created a "Living with Locals" program, where tourists stayed with local families and participated in daily activities. The impact was not only on increasing the income of

residents, but also on creating strong social relationships between guests and hosts.

Travel agencies are also starting to design more niche packages that are tailored to specific traveler interests, such as conservation tourism, holistic health tourism, and spiritual value-based tourism. More and more agencies are realizing that not all travelers are looking for luxurious comfort; most want authentic and meaningful connections. Not only at the product and strategy level, travel agencies are also actively pushing for change at the local policy level. They encourage local governments to provide incentives for destination managers who prioritize sustainability principles. In some cases, travel agents even act as mediators between local communities and investors, ensuring that the tourism development process does not violate cultural values and ecological balance.

From the tour guides' perspective, it is clear that they play an important role as educational agents. They actively convey information related to local culture, tourist ethics, and environmental issues to guests. Several guides stated that tourists often show appreciation for this knowledge, and feel more "connected" to the destinations they visit. However, guides also acknowledge the challenges in conveying sustainability messages to tourists who are simply looking for entertainment. For this reason, narrative approaches and direct experiences, such as workshops or village visits, have proven to be more effective in building awareness. In practice, tour guides are the ones who interact most directly with tourists in the field. Therefore, their role is not merely technical as interpreters of travel routes, but also as cultural and environmental educators. Through warm interpersonal interactions and strong narratives, they can change the way tourists view the places they visit. A guide who understands the historical context, social dynamics, and ecological challenges of an area has the power to trigger deep reflection for tourists.

Some travel agencies have recognized this potential and invested in increasing the capacity of guides through training that includes storytelling techniques, cultural diplomacy, cross-cultural communication, and empathetic delivery of complex issues. Such training is crucial so that guides can convey the sustainability narrative without appearing to be patronizing or blaming tourists for their behavior. The interpretive guiding method, which emphasizes creating meaning in the tourism experience, is an approach that is starting to be widely applied. In this approach, guides do not only convey data or facts, but also connect this information to the personal values of tourists. For example, when explaining the importance of conserving mangrove forests, guides not only mention their ecological function, but also relate it to the life experiences of humans who depend on natural resources.

However, not all tourists are open to an educational approach. Guides often face audiences who have high expectations for entertainment and comfort. In such conditions, they are required to have flexible communication skills—combining humor, empathy, and emotionally touching narratives. For example, inserting folk tales or touching personal experiences can be much more effective than normative lectures. Guides are also often the guardians of ethics during the tour. They must be able

to politely reprimand tourists if they violate local norms, such as dressing inappropriately in sacred places, taking pictures without permission, or littering. In this case, the guide plays the role of a cultural mediator who maintains a balance between the needs of tourists and the interests of the local community.

However, being a sustainability agent is not an easy job. Many guides say they face pressure from agencies or clients who demand efficiency and instant gratification. Some also face limited access to up-to-date information or contextual educational materials. Therefore, it is important for the tourism ecosystem—including governments, NGOs, and educational institutions—to create a sustainable support system for the tour guiding profession.

However, challenges remain. One of the main obstacles to implementing sustainable operations is the additional costs and limited capacity of local partners. Not all business actors or communities have the same understanding of sustainability, so the education process must be carried out continuously. In addition, some tourists still have expectations of modern facilities that are sometimes not in line with ecotourism principles. Even so, most industry players believe that this trend will continue to grow, and that sustainability will be a key differentiating value in future business competition, as stated (Made et al., 2024).

Table 1. Thematic Comparison Table: Tourists, Operators and Tour Guides

Aspect	Traveler	Travel Agency	Tour Guide
Environmental Awareness	Increasing, especially foreign tourist. Refuse plastic, care about habitat	Replace plastic, use gallons, and collaborate with local cooperatives	Providing environmental & ethical briefing before the tour starts
Interest in Local Culture	Interested in workshops, local cuisine, and history	Adapting programs: tourist villages, local narratives, cultural interactions	Historical stories, traditional norms and local philosophy are delivered in an educational way
Response to Education	Appreciative; feel more “connected” when given conservation information	Train guides, compile informative package narratives	Leveraging local humor & narratives to insert sustainability messages

Aspect	Traveler	Travel Agency	Tour Guide
Impact on Operations	Small, unique and personalized request are on the rise	Reduce the number of tour participants, choose eco-friendly vendors, overtourism -free locations	Design intimate and meaningful experiences with communities
Constraint	Less patient with "natural" or traditional concepts (local tourist	High costs, partner education, varying tourist expectations	Tourists are not necessarily ready to accept educational narratives in the context of a vacation

Source: Processed by Researcher (2025)

The reality on the ground shows that the ideal concept of sustainability often clashes with economic and social realities. For example, the use of local materials or independent waste management is indeed more environmentally friendly, but in terms of costs it can be more expensive than conventional options. This is a dilemma for micro and medium business actors in the tourism sector who are still struggling to maintain business continuity post-pandemic. Not to mention the issue of perception. Many local partners in tourist villages or informal economic actors do not fully understand the holistic concept of sustainability. Some think that "green tourism" is enough to plant trees or use bamboo, without considering broader social and ethical aspects, such as gender inclusion, fair benefit sharing, and preservation of local values. Continuous education and technical assistance are very important so that the principles of sustainability are not just jargon, but are internalized in practice.

Travel agencies also face challenges in bridging the gap between traveler expectations and destination capacity. Some travelers, especially those from the upper middle class, still expect international standard accommodation and facilities. This is often at odds with conditions in community-based destinations, where infrastructure is rudimentary and the service approach is more personal. This situation requires good expectation management, including transparency from the start about the nature of the travel experience being

offered. Another common obstacle is the fluctuation in demand that makes sustainability difficult to operate consistently. For example, conservation or education-based tour packages are often only of interest to certain market segments and are seasonal. This forces agencies to subsidize their operating costs from more popular but less environmentally friendly mass programs. This hybrid business model is often seen as a compromise, although not ideal.

Even in terms of policy, local and national government support for sustainable tourism is still very diverse. Some regions show high initiative, with zoning regulations and incentives for green businesses. However, in other regions, destination development is still often driven by investor interests without mature ecological and social considerations. Travel agencies are in a dilemma: between following the rapid development trend, or sticking to the principle of sustainability at the risk of losing the market. Many business actors have begun to form cross-sector cooperation networks to share knowledge, strengthen capacity, and reduce costs through collective efficiency. This collaborative initiative creates a more resilient ecosystem and is able to respond to challenges with a participatory approach. For example, through village tourism cooperatives, local actors can access training, digital marketing support, and more transparent partnerships with travel agents in big cities.

Implementation strategies that can be used by travel agents in achieving sustainable tourism activity goals in various destinations

Based on these findings, the implementation strategy to achieve operational sustainability of travel agents in Indonesia can be directed at three main pillars: continuous education, strategic local partnerships, and value-based tourism product innovation. Education needs to be carried out not only to tourists but also to local partners through integrated training that explains the real impacts of tourism practices on the environment and socio-culture.

Partnerships with local communities, whether through village cooperatives, arts groups, or culinary MSMEs, can form a fair and resilient tourism supply chain. Meanwhile, product innovation must consider the preferences of increasingly ethical and reflective tourists, such as participatory tourism, cultural education-based trips, and environmentally friendly packages that are communicated transparently. These three pillars, if integrated systematically and sustainably, will form the foundation of the Indonesian tourism industry that not only grows economically, but is also socially and ecologically responsible.

Tourist Behavior Toward Travel Business Operations

Key Findings:

1. Environmentally conscious tourist behavior is steering businesses toward more eco-friendly operations.
2. There is a growing demand for community-based and culturally immersive travel experiences.
3. Challenges include high operational costs and diverse tourist expectations.

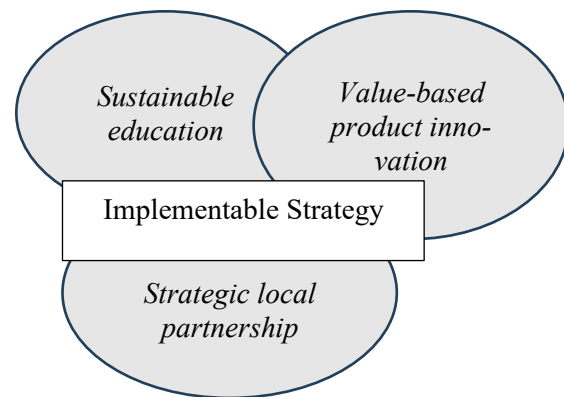


Figure 1. Tourist Behavior towards the Sustainability of Travel Business Operations
(Source: Processed by Researcher, 2025)

1. Continuous Education

The first pillar emphasizes the importance of consistent and ongoing education for all stakeholders, especially tourists and local partners. This education must be transformative, not just informative, with the aim of driving real behavioral change in travel practices. For tourists, travel service providers need to insert educational narratives in every element of the service—from promotional materials, travel guides, to short briefings before the activity begins. For example, when offering a tour package to a nature conservation area, agents can convey the importance of maintaining a low carbon footprint, avoiding

direct interactions that damage habitats, or limiting the use of single-use plastics. Such activities will form critical awareness that will ultimately influence tourists' consumption patterns in the long term.

Meanwhile, education for local partners plays a strategic role in ensuring that the entire tourism supply chain works within a sustainable framework. Integrated training programs, such as waste management training, environmentally friendly product packaging, or the use of digital technology for marketing, must be designed collaboratively with educational institutions, NGOs, and local governments. These training activities will create an even

transfer of knowledge and empower local communities to be able to compete while maintaining local wisdom. It is important to remember that education is not a one-time activity. It must be carried out periodically, following the development of global trends, new regulations, and shifts in tourist interests. Travel agents who are adaptive to these educational needs will find it easier to maintain customer loyalty while consistently improving service quality.

2. Strategic Local Partnerships

Partnerships with local communities are the second essential pillar in realizing inclusive and equitable tourism activities. Travel agents operating in tourist destinations cannot operate alone. They must build a mutually beneficial collaboration network with local parties, such as tourist village cooperatives, traditional arts groups, craftsmen, and culinary MSMEs. Through this partnership pattern, a more equitable distribution of economic benefits occurs. Travel agents, instead of just being package sellers, also act as value brokers who connect tourists with authentic experiences offered by local communities. For example, collaboration with local dance groups in presenting exclusive cultural performances not only increases the value of tour packages, but also becomes a means of sustainable cultural preservation.

In the context of socio-economic resilience, these local partnerships can form a more resilient tourism supply chain. When disruptions occur on a national or global scale—such as a pandemic or natural disaster—empowered local communities will still be able to support tourism activities on a micro scale, even making community-based tourism a resilient alternative. Travel agencies must have a clear stakeholder map and make local partnerships part of their business strategy, not just an add-on. This can be realized by creating long-term memorandums of understanding, fair profit-sharing schemes, and empowerment in decision-making. In addition to strengthening social legitimacy, this

approach also increases the likelihood of successful implementation of CSR and responsible tourism programs.

3. Value-Based Tourism Product Innovation

In the context of globalization and digitalization, tourism products are no longer just about destinations, but the value offered. Today's travelers are increasingly reflective in choosing travel experiences. They seek meaning, not just visual beauty or comfortable facilities. Therefore, innovation in value-based tourism products is an important foundation for travel agents to remain relevant and competitive. One innovative approach is the development of participatory tourism, where tourists are not only spectators but also contribute. For example, tourists can be involved in organic farming activities, craft training, or mangrove ecosystem restoration. Such activities create deep emotional connections and extend the duration of tourists' stay, which ultimately has a positive impact on the local economy.

Other innovations involve culturally-based educational trips, such as themed tours of local history, explorations of colonial narratives in architecture, or local language classes as part of an itinerary. This is important because travelers are no longer satisfied with generic activities; they want to return with new understanding, even personal transformation. Travel agents can design micro-curricula for each trip—making travel a fun learning experience. On the other hand, transparency in communicating sustainability values is also a form of innovation. For example, information about the carbon footprint of a travel package, the local contributors involved, or the donation mechanism integrated into the package price should be communicated openly to potential travelers. This practice builds trust while strengthening the travel agent's brand positioning as an ethical travel actor.

Innovation also needs to be supported by the use of technology. Digital platforms can be used to tell the story behind tourism products, measure social impact in real-time, and connect travelers directly with local partners through reviews and post-trip interactions. Travel agents must develop content that inspires, not just sells. Authentic and relevant sustainability narratives will strengthen emotional bonds with consumers and increase loyalty.

4. Systemic Integration and Long-Term Sustainability

The three pillars above, if integrated systematically and consistently, will form a solid foundation for the travel industry in Indonesia. Economic activities can continue to grow healthily without having to sacrifice social and ecological values. This integration is not just technical work, but also ethical work—where sustainability becomes a moral principle in running a business. Travel agents must think as facilitators of change, not just operators. This includes internal introspection processes, regular evaluation of operational impacts, and openness to input from tourists and local partners. Sustainability practices must be built from within, starting from organizational structure, HR management, to marketing strategies.

It is important to note that this strategy is not a one-size-fits-all strategy. Each destination has unique characteristics that require local adaptation. However, by using the general principles of these three pillars, travel agents can develop a contextual approach that remains grounded in the universal values of sustainability. Furthermore, the success of this strategy will depend on cross-sector synergy—between industry players, academics, regulators, and civil society. Regulatory support from governments, such as incentives for sustainable tourism packages or green certification, will accelerate the adoption of good practices. Meanwhile, academic research can provide a basis for more targeted decision-making.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of transformation in tourist behavior as a major driver of change in the operation of tourism businesses. The exploration results show that today's tourists, both domestic and international, are increasingly paying attention to the sustainability aspect of their tourism activities. Preferences for services that pay attention to the environment, local socio-culture, and transparency in business practices are becoming new references in developing adaptive and responsible tourism business strategies. This preference is no longer just a trend, but has become a real need that is a major consideration in making travel decisions. Many tourists now question the origin of the products they consume, the impact of tourism activities on the surrounding environment, and the extent to which business actors have empowered local communities. This indicates that consumer tourism behavior has undergone a fundamental shift from hedonistic consumption to reflective and impact-conscious consumption.

Field findings show that business actors who are responsive to the dynamics of tourist preferences show a tendency to increase consumer loyalty, local community involvement, and a more positive business reputation. This change in tourism consumption patterns also encourages travel agencies to review their operational models, including in terms of partner selection, tour narratives, and the use of more environmentally friendly facilities. All of these patterns form a synergy that supports each other between tourists, travel agents, and local communities. The success of integrating sustainability into operational practices is not only seen from the perspective of short-term profitability, but also from efforts to maintain environmental sustainability and local economic sustainability in the long term. In this context, many business actors have begun to apply the triple bottom line principle—profit, people, planet—in their framework. By balancing

financial gain, social concern, and environmental preservation, a more holistic and inclusive business model can be realized.

However, integrating sustainability into operations is not without challenges. Obstacles in the form of disparities in understanding among stakeholders, limited infrastructure, and additional cost burdens are important notes. Therefore, systematic and collaborative efforts are needed in the form of ongoing education and capacity building of local partners. Experience-based and narrative approaches have proven to be more effective in internalizing sustainability values to heterogeneous tourists. Therefore, systematic and collaborative efforts are needed in the form of ongoing education and capacity building of local partners. Experience-based and narrative approaches have proven to be more effective in internalizing sustainability values to heterogeneous tourists. Educational programs that involve local communities, such as folklore-based tourism or cultural workshops, not only increase tourists' understanding but also strengthen the identity and bargaining power of local communities.

Theoretical and Practical Contribution

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by shifting the analytical lens from macro-level sustainability frameworks—such as national policies or destination-level strategies—to the micro-level dynamics of travel business operations. Specifically, it illuminates the direct interplay between evolving tourist behaviors and the operational responses of travel agents in Indonesia. This focus enriches the discourse on sustainable tourism by emphasizing how front-line actors mediate and influence sustainability outcomes in real-world settings.

Furthermore, the study introduces a contextualized framework grounded in empirical findings from three diverse Indonesian destinations—Yogyakarta, Bali, and Labuan Bajo. It highlights how traveler preferences for authenticity, transparency,

and ecological responsibility have become critical factors influencing tourism consumption. By articulating the growing importance of “meaningful travel” experiences, particularly among Millennials and Gen Z travelers, the study expands theoretical understanding of post-consumption behavior within the sustainable tourism paradigm.

On the practical side, this study presents a clear and actionable strategic model consisting of three integrated pillars: continuous education, strategic local partnerships, and value-based tourism product innovation. The model serves as a roadmap for tourism practitioners, particularly travel agents, to realign their operations toward sustainability without compromising competitiveness. Continuous education emphasizes ongoing training for both tourists and local stakeholders to nurture ecological awareness and promote responsible travel behavior. Strategic local partnerships function as mechanisms to ensure inclusive benefit-sharing and community empowerment, fostering collaboration and mutual growth. Meanwhile, product innovation is conceptualized not merely as market adaptation but as an ethical form of entrepreneurship that embeds cultural authenticity and environmental values at the heart of tourism offerings.

By integrating these three pillars into their daily practices, travel agencies can effectively respond to the growing demand for ethical consumerism while enhancing their long-term resilience, credibility, and legitimacy within the tourism value chain.

Future Research

For future research directions, quantitative studies are needed to measure the specific influence of sustainability elements on satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability of tourism businesses. In addition, comparative research between regions and across countries with different socio-cultural contexts will enrich the understanding of variations in tourist behavior and

adaptive strategies used by business actors. Longitudinal studies are also important to see how these changes develop in the long term and to what extent sustainability can become a core value in the travel industry. In addition, comparative research between regions and across countries with different socio-cultural contexts will enrich the understanding of variations in tourist behavior and adaptive strategies used by business actors. For example, a comparative study between European tourists who tend to be very environmentally conscious with Southeast Asian tourists who may have different orientations in choosing tourism products. This kind of research can clarify market segmentation and allow for more accurate marketing strategy design.

Longitudinal studies are also important to see how these changes develop over the long term and to what extent sustainability is able to become a core value in the travel industry. Such research can monitor changes in travelers' perceptions of sustainability practices over time, as well as assess the effectiveness of educational programs and policy interventions in shaping a more responsible travel culture.

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