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**Assessing the Impact of Destination and Individual-Level Factors on
Visitors' Pro-Sustainable Behaviours and Donation Intentions**

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Statement of Declaration

I, Yiren Wu, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

List of abbreviations

DSR- Destination Social Responsibility

CSR- Corporate Social Responsibility

PSB - Pro-sustainable behaviour

NAT- Norm Activation Theory

AC - Awareness of Consequence

AR – Ascription of Responsibility

PN – Personal Norm

TALC -Tourism Area Life Cycle TALC

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Abstract

This research examines the crucial role of stakeholder engagement and individual factors in promoting sustainable behaviours among visitors in declining fragile ecosystems. At the destination level, the study develops a model predicting visitors' pro-sustainable behaviours (PSB) based on their trust in government and tour operators, as well as perceptions of destination social responsibility (DSR). It also investigates the moderating role of destination decline on the relationships between DSR, trust, and PSB. At the individual level, the research explores the influence of situational activators (awareness of negative environmental consequences and ascription of responsibility), personal norms, and nature relatedness on PSB and donation intentions. The study employed a survey of 416 visitors in the Yellow River Delta. Results show that DSR enhances trust in tour operators, relationship commitment, and PSB, while trust in government mediates the DSR-PSB relationship. Destination decline negatively moderates the DSR trust in tour operators' relationships. At the individual level, personal norms mediate the relationship between situational activators and PSB/donation intentions, with nature relatedness moderating the ascription of responsibility-personal norms connection. The findings contribute to business ethics research by introducing new discourses on accountability and psychological factors influencing sustainable behaviours in fragile ecosystems.

Keywords: Destination Social Responsibility, Pro-sustainable Behaviour, Trust, Relationship-Commitment, Chinese Ecological Civilisation, Awareness of Negative Environmental Consequence, Ascription of Responsibility, Personal Norm, Destination Decline, Nature Relatedness, Donation Intention.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the urgent need for sustainable management of fragile ecological destinations to balance and protect their economic, social, and environmental benefits. It highlights the potential of visitors to act as agents of positive change through their pro-sustainable behaviours, aiming to understand collaborative management practices among business, government, and visitors. The research delves into how such actions can help combat climate change and other unsustainable issues, emphasising the importance of stakeholder roles in ecosystem hotspot management at both the destination and individual levels.

The study adopts a survey questionnaire to investigate the influence of destination social responsibility, trust in tour operators and local governments, and relationship commitment on sustainable tourism practices. It also examines how personal norms, awareness of negative environmental consequences, and ascription of responsibility shape pro-sustainable behaviours and donation intentions, factoring in the moderating role of nature relatedness. By addressing these dual aspects, the research aims to bridge existing gaps in sustainable tourism literature, providing insights into effective strategies for promoting conservation efforts and sustainable tourism development in critical ecosystems, thereby fostering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in maintaining the delicate balance of fragile ecological destinations.

1.2 The problem of ecologically fragile destinations

1.2.1 Research Background

An interplay across economic, social, and environmental responsibility can generate a synergistic effect for the advancement of sustainability, such as through implementing eco-friendly initiatives and promoting environmental justice. In order to manage fragile ecological destinations, business and local authorities should collaborate responsibly to prioritise socioeconomic and environmental improvements, ultimately delivering exceptional experiences for visitors (Buckley, 2012; Jiang, Wang and Zhou, 2023; Lane, 2009). However, a rapid influx of visitors to such destinations has caused major environmental problems. So, there is an urgent problem of destination management regarding developing policies and strategies that both optimise tourism's economic, social, and environmental benefits and establish robust measures for safeguarding and monitoring destinations. This includes protecting the well-being of local communities and enhancing the travel experience of visitors, especially in fragile ecosystems, which demands a greater emphasis on sustainability through strategic management and support indicators. (e.g., Gao, Huang and Zhang, 2017; Marinello et al., 2023; Olya, Kim and Kim, 2023).

Tourism has the potential to suffer from and contribute to economic growth and environmental sustainability at multiple levels, ranging from local to global. Visitors can serve as agents of positive change, contingent upon their expenditure patterns and adopting behaviours aimed at reducing their detrimental impacts on communities and the natural environment (Boley, 2015). Furthermore, the decisions made by visitors in favour of sustainable practices can catalyse business and other stakeholders to adopt environmentally friendly initiatives, underscoring the importance of collaborative efforts among diverse participants in the tourism sector. The destination-level stimulus is important because of the asymmetric information between visitors and the destination (Su et al., 2020a). Consequently, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the

behaviours that promote sustainability and the factors that encourage their adoption is imperative. In this research, the motivation for the destination-level (i.e., tour operator and local government) research stems from the critical need to understand the roles of key stakeholders, namely business, government, and visitors, in responsible management of such ecosystem hotspots.

1.2.2 Research Gap

Recent studies increasingly indicate that visitors can influence environmental sustainability by adopting pro-sustainable behaviours (e.g., Landon, Woosnam, and Boley, 2018; Lee, Lee, and Yoo, 2020; Olya, Kim, and Kim, 2023). Since visitors' actions are both a significant contributor to and a potential solution for current environmental challenges (Xie et al., 2017), reducing the negative environmental impacts of tourism-related activities and promoting sustainable practices among visitors is essential (Wu et al., 2021a). Visitors' interactions with and connections to natural resources serve as key drivers for fostering pro-sustainable behaviour (Mayer and Frantz, 2004; Olya, Kim, and Kim, 2023). As a result, there is a growing need to explore the factors that encourage such behaviours and understand their full range. This awareness has prompted scholars to model the psychological and emotional mechanisms that lead visitors to engage in sustainable practices (Chen and Tung, 2014; Landon, Woosnam, and Boley, 2018). Therefore, the motivation for the current research conducted at the individual level (i.e., visitors), specifically focusing on visitors, arises from the urgent necessity to comprehend the contribution of visitors in fighting against climate change and other unsustainable issues (Constantino et al., 2022), aiming to mitigate the environmental problems.

The existing body of literature, including studies by Liu, Ma, Qu, and Ryan (2020), Park, Lee, Lee, and Reisinger (2022), and Qin and Hsu (2022), emphasises the urgency of promoting pro-environmental behaviours to counteract the environmental damage caused by tourism and to foster the sustainable development of visitor destinations.

Moreover, the negative impact of environmental degradation on a destination's reputation and trust, as noted by Su et al. (2020b), alongside the potential for it to cultivate adverse perceptions and deviant behaviours among visitors instead of pro-sustainable behaviour (Fan et al., 2014), underscores the necessity for comprehensive strategies and collaborative effects from different stakeholders. In essence, enhancing pro-sustainable practices among visitors is not just about destination social responsibility but also about visitors' internal attributes to secure destinations' long-term viability and attractiveness.

The pertinent studies collectively provide valuable insights into the dynamics of visitors' trust and their commitment to further contributing to promoting sustainable practices, the challenges of destination decline, and the roles of key stakeholders in advancing the sustainability agenda (Li and Wu, 2020; Ndegwa, Maingi and Ndubi, 2022; Park et al., 2022). In this vein, Boukas, Ziakas and Boustras (2012) discuss that bringing a large group of visitors may trigger the decline of destinations due to various negative implications such as congestion, ecological degradation, socio-cultural tensions, and economic imbalances. Therefore, strategic management of visitors' flow and their engagement in pro-sustainable behaviours are essential for the development of critical destinations (Miller et al., 2015). However, stimulating pro-sustainable behaviours of visitors are fuelled by their level of trust in business and government (Pahlevi and Suhartanto, 2020; Song, Daryanto and Soopramanien, 2019; van der Werff, Steg and Keizer, 2013). With this realisation, governments and business must creatively communicate their responsible management practices to the visitor to instil their trust.

Governments are pivotal in planning and reinforcing policies and actions such as the promotion of community-based management and investment in green innovations and infrastructures (Aquilino, Armenski and Wise, 2018; Gorica et al., 2012). Business such as tour operators, as a front-line sector, could play an instrumental role in fostering trust among visitors by disseminating information about successful sustainable practices and policies, showcasing relevant case studies, and providing clear instructions and

examples of visitor-friendly sustainable behaviours (Khairat and Maher, 2012). These collective efforts of governments and business can contribute to the engagement of visitors in PSB (Olya et al., 2023). To this end, there is a need for empirical studies that shed light on the cause and implication of trust in government and business in the sustainable management of a declining destination. Because destination decline, often due to irresponsible management, can exacerbate inequalities and environmental injustices, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of mechanisms promoting environmental justice (Romano and LaVanchy, 2021). Sustainable management of a hotspot ecosystem and engaging visitors in both public and private-led initiatives heavily depend on their trust in government and business. Therefore, there is a need for empirical research that assesses visitors' perceptions of who is in charge and whom to blame when a destination is declining, as well as how trust in government and business is established.

At the individual level, previous research on sustainable tourism in contemporary China has recently drawn attention to the norm activation theory (Zhao, Wang and Ji, 2020) and the role of environmental sustainability values associated with the concept of Chinese Ecological Civilisation (Weaver et al. 2020). An enduring effort in sustainable tourism literature has been to understand and predict the pro-sustainable behaviour of visitors (Lee and Moscardo, 2005; Miller, Merrilees, and Coghlan, 2015; Olya, Kim and Kim, 2023). Although numerous researchers have examined the environmental attitudes of visitors (Dolnicar, 2010; Winter, 2007) and attempted to identify the reasons behind visitors' adoption of pro-environmental behaviours (Juvan and Dolnicar, 2014), further investigation is required to understand the factors that drive such actions and the variety of behaviours undertaken by visitors to promote the sustainability of the tourism industry, local communities, and environments.

Promoting pro-sustainable behaviours among visitors has become a pressing concern for both governmental bodies and tourism industry professionals (Liu et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022). To counter unsustainable practices (Constantino et al., 2022), personal norms have emerged as an effective tool for encouraging sustainable actions

and altering travel behaviours (Landon et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021), despite individuals often being unaware of the strong influence norms have on their actions (Nolan et al., 2008). This study examines internal drivers such as awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, personal norms, and nature relatedness. Researchers have developed models to understand the psychological mechanisms that underpin visitors' engagement in pro-sustainable behaviours (Chen and Tung, 2014; Powell and Ham, 2008). Additionally, there has been growing interest in evaluating these behaviours and donation intentions to foster sustainable tourism practices.

1.3 Research questions

This research combines the research questions at the destination and individual levels, aiming to bridge the gap in the existing research. Therefore, the research questions at the destination and individual levels work together to provide a holistic view of the factors that shape visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour in the Yellow River Delta destination, considering both the external influences of the destination's management and the internal motivations of the visitors themselves. This research aims to answer the question of *How to promote the visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour in Chinese fragile ecosystem?*

Specifically, the present study at the destination level adds considerably to our understanding of visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour by putting trust in tour operators and local government, relationship commitment, and destination decline together into one comprehensive conceptual framework. The following destination-level research questions examine the factors that contribute to the processes of visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour, which the Commitment-Trust Theory can further support. (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). In addition, this research, at the individual level, aims to address the research gaps by developing and testing a conceptual model that examines the impact of awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of

responsibility on visitors' personal norms, and contributing to their PSB and donation intentions. The following individual-level research questions examine the factors that contribute to the processes of visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intention, which can be further supported by the Norm Activation Theory (Schwartz, 1977).

As such, in order to answer the big research question, this research proposes the sub-research questions:

Research question 1: How factors at destination levels and individual levels drives pro-sustainable behaviours in Chinese fragile hotspot?

Research question 2: What are the mechanisms of enacting pro-sustainable behaviours in Chinese fragile hotspot?

Research question 3: What are the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in achieving sustainable tourism management in Chinese fragile hotspots?

1.4 Study aim

At a destination level, this research addresses the research mentioned above gaps by developing and investigating a conceptual model that assesses the impact of Destination Social Responsibility (DSR) on tourism visitors' trust in tour operators and local government, their relationship commitment to tour operators, and their propensity to undertake pro-sustainability behaviours. The novelty of this research lies in disentangling the impacts of DSR on PSB through fostering trust in government and trust and relationship commitment with tour operators in critical ecosystems in China. This empirical research compares the interactions of DSR with destination decline in building trust in government relative to tour operators. It sheds new light on the accountability of key stakeholders from visitors' perspectives when a destination is declining by investigating its moderating effect in the relationship between DSR and trust (government vs. tour operators).

In addition, at the individual level, this study examines the influence of factors (i.e., awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, and personal norms) on adopting pro-sustainable behaviours and donation intentions amongst tourism visitors to the Yellow River Delta destination. The novelty of this research lies in disentangling the impact of awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility on PSB and donation intentions through fostering visitors' personal norms in the critical ecosystem in China. It sheds new light on the accountability of visitors' personal norms from their perspectives when visitors' nature relatedness is high by investigating its moderating impact on the relationship between awareness of negative environmental consequences/ascription of responsibility and personal norms. Furthermore, it also addresses the moderating effect of nature relatedness on the relationship between personal norms and donation intentions.

This study adopts a quantitative methodology to explore the relationships among destination social responsibility, trust, relationship commitment, destination decline, awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, personal norms, nature relatedness, pro-sustainable behaviour, and donation intentions. Employing a survey questionnaire, informed by the extensive literature on the effects of destination social responsibility and related variables on visitors' behaviours, this approach facilitates the examination of research hypotheses and the validation of the proposed research model.

1.5 Objectives of the study

The current research was conducted with the following research objectives:

Research objective 1: Firstly, to examine the impact of destination social responsibility (DSR), trust, and relationship commitment on sustainable tourism development in the Yellow River Delta Destination, particularly when a destination is in decline.

Research objective 2: Secondly, to evaluate the personal norms, awareness of negative

environmental consequences and ascription of responsibility impact on sustainable tourism development in Yellow River Delta Destination.

Research objective 3: Thirdly, to suggest sustainable strategies and alternatives for minimising negative environmental impact of tourism to achieve sustainable development.

Research objective 4: Finally, to explore how visitors perceive the contributions of local government and tour operators towards sustainable tourism development in the Yellow River Delta Destination, highlighting the significance of collaboration between both entities.

The research objectives essentially provide a roadmap for how the research question will be addressed and answered. In the present research, the research objectives and research questions are closely aligned, with each objective addressing specific aspects of the overarching research questions. Research objective 1, which examines the impact of destination social responsibility, trust, and relationship commitment on sustainable tourism development, directly addresses research question 1, focusing on factors at the destination level that drive pro-sustainable behaviours. Research objective 2, which evaluates the influence of awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, and personal norms on visitors' behaviour, also addresses research question 1, but from the perspective of individual-level factors. Research objective 3, which aims to suggest sustainable strategies and alternatives for minimising negative environmental impacts, addresses research question 2 by exploring the mechanisms through which pro-sustainable behaviours can be enacted. Finally, research objective 4, which investigates the contributions of local government and tour operators towards sustainable tourism development, addresses research question 3 by examining the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in achieving sustainable tourism management in the fragile ecosystem of the Yellow River Delta.

1.6 Significance of the Study

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This research represents a pioneering exploration into the interplay of Destination Social Responsibility (DSR), trust, and pro-sustainable behaviour (PSB) within the delicate context of the Yellow River Delta, a significant ecotourism destination. Diverging from existing literature which has largely scrutinised the direct predictors of PSB, such as DSR's influence on environmental behaviours and visit intentions through the lens of various scholars (Lee et al., 2021; Olya, Kim and Kim, 2023; Su, Gong and Huang, 2020; Su, Lian, and Huang, 2020), this research is unique in its empirical investigation into how DSR impacts trust in both government and tour operators. Thereby, it fills a notable gap by delineating the mechanisms through which stakeholders' activities not only minimise their adverse effects on the local environment but also foster social, economic, and environmental benefits. Particularly, Olya, Kim, and Kim (2023) develop a conceptual model that combines destination-level factors, such as destination social responsibility (DSR), and individual-level factors, like climate change perception, to shape visitors' intentions and actions related to climate change, including willingness to sacrifice, eco-behaviour and support for localism. The current study expands and strengthens the conceptual model created by Olya, Kim, and Kim (2023) in order to more accurately forecast visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour.

Integrating Commitment-Trust theory with Norm Activation theory (NAT), the research framework developed for this study goes beyond conventional applications. While Commitment-Trust theory has previously underpinned the understanding of individual attitudes towards environmental behaviours (Hossain, Nekmahmud and Fekete-Farkas, 2022; Hua, Dong and Goodman, 2021), its application here extends to elucidate the effects of destination environmental factors like DSR on trust and commitment towards sustainable tourism amidst destination decline. By drawing on Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), this study incorporates DSR

alongside visitors' trust and commitment to both tour operators and local governments as key predictors of pro-sustainable behaviour.

By introducing the ecological civilisation framework, this research not only contributes new insights into sustainable ecosystem management involving multiple stakeholders but also critically examines trust and commitment relationships. It suggests that while DSR enhances PSB through trust in both tour operators and local government, destination decline could impair trust. Furthermore, this empirical study innovatively compares the effects of DSR and destination decline on trust in tour operators versus the government, thus offering a fresh perspective on stakeholder accountability during destination decline. This research introduces the concept of destination decline as a moderating factor, given tourism during market downturns (Villacé-Molinero et al., 2021; Naeem et al., 2023), and poorly implemented DSR activities that can erode trust in these entities (Su et al., 2020). This approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics influencing pro-sustainable behaviour in tourism contexts.

Similarly, although personal norms have been acknowledged for their positive impact on pro-environmental behaviour (Gupta and Sharma, 2019) and the perception of tourism's negative impacts on the ascription of responsibility (Gao, Huan, and Zhang, 2017), this research ventures further. This research builds on and extends the conceptual model developed by Wu, Wu, Hsieh, and Ramkissoon (2022), who explored the role of face consciousness in visitors' environmentally responsible behaviour (ERB) by examining its moderating effect on the relationship between personal norms (PN) and ERB within the framework of norm activation theory. Expanding on this theoretical foundation, the present study introduces an integrative model that incorporates the concept of nature relatedness. This model investigates how personal norms related to pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intention are influenced by nature relatedness (Anders, 2023). Specifically, the study examines the intricate relationships between

visitors' psychological factors and their PSB, particularly emphasising the role of personal norms and nature relatedness. This nuanced approach uncovers how the connection visitors feel towards nature amplifies their propensity for environmentally sustainable actions and their willingness to support sustainability initiatives through donations.

Furthermore, this research makes a significant contribution to the theoretical understanding of sustainable tourism development by exploring donation intention as a crucial type of individual behavioural intention that supports sustainability efforts (Hehir et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2015). Given that many natural environments popular with visitors suffer from insufficient funding for optimal conservation management and considering the often inadequate government support for protected areas (Weaver and Lawton, 2017), this study underscores the critical need for diverse funding sources. By examining how visitors' donation intentions can contribute to conservation goals, this research highlights the essential role of tourism in enhancing the financial sustainability of natural environments.

Aiming to address these research gaps, the study sets forth to 1) evaluate the influence of DSR, trust, and commitment on sustainable tourism in the declining Yellow River Delta; 2) dissect the roles of environmental awareness, assignment of responsibility, and personal norms in promoting sustainable tourism in the area; 3) devise strategies to mitigate tourism's environmental footprint for sustainable development; and 4) probe into visitors' perceptions regarding the roles of local government and tour operators in fostering sustainable tourism, underlining the necessity of their collaborative efforts.

Overall, this research contributes to the growing realm of knowledge regarding pro-sustainable behaviour in sustainable tourism by offering a comprehensive and integrated approach that considers both destination-level and individual-level factors. By bridging the gap between these two levels of analysis, this research provides a more

holistic understanding of the complex interplay among DSR, trust, personal norms, and nature relatedness in shaping visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions in critical ecosystems. The research findings have significant implications for the development of effective strategies to promote sustainable tourism and encourage visitor engagement in conservation efforts in critical ecosystems, both in China and beyond.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

Tour operators play a pivotal role in shaping visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour (PSB) through effective Destination Social Responsibility (DSR) strategies. By implementing eco-friendly practices, supporting local communities, and educating visitors on responsible tourism, tour operators can influence positive environmental actions. Transparency in sustainability efforts, such as providing regular updates, sustainability reports, and educational programs, builds trust with visitors and encourages engagement in sustainable practices. Additionally, tour operators can enhance their marketing efforts by highlighting their environmental and social contributions, attracting eco-conscious travelers who value responsible tourism.

Governments are equally important in promoting sustainable tourism by fostering public participation, providing incentives for businesses that adopt sustainable practices, and enforcing environmental regulations. Collaboration between governments and tour operators in areas such as waste management and wildlife protection is essential for developing a comprehensive approach to ecological sustainability. By working together, governments and businesses can promote an ecological civilisation, encouraging sustainable tourism practices and fostering community involvement in preserving natural resources and cultural heritage.

Charitable organisations also have a significant role in supporting sustainability efforts through effective fundraising strategies. By conducting targeted campaigns that

highlight the impact of donations, providing transparent reporting on how funds are utilized, and maintaining personalized communication with donors, these organizations can increase engagement and contributions. Offering easy-to-use donation platforms and demonstrating the tangible effects of donations helps donors understand the importance of their contributions and motivates them to support environmental conservation efforts.

1.7 Overview of methodology and findings

By investigating visitors' perceptions of a destination, those of local government and tour operators and visitors themselves, the current study constructs a multiple moderated mediation model, examined through the PROCESS macro and Amos in SPSS on data collections, gathering from 416 survey questionnaires from visitors (e.g., Olya, Kim and Kim, 2023; Wu et al., 2022), the present research first explores destination social responsibility (DSR) resulting in the pro-sustainable behaviour of visitors through their trust in local government and tour operators and their commitment relationship, especially, when destination decline. Additionally, the current study adopts a sustainable perspective to examine awareness of negative environmental consequences and ascription responsibility. It enhances the theoretical framework by incorporating considerations of nature relatedness and personal norms, investigating mediation and moderation path relationships in addition to direct relationships, and conducting the analysis within the distinctive, emblematic context of Chinese fragile ecosystems.

1.8 Thesis structure

This thesis is structured into eight chapters, each addressing a specific aspect of the research on sustainable tourism development in the Chinese Yellow River Delta Destination.

Chapter 1 introduces the research background, highlighting the importance of

sustainable tourism practices and the challenges faced by the Yellow River Delta. It presents the research questions, research objectives, along with the importance of the study.

Chapter 2 provides a thorough literature review, exploring key concepts and theories underpinning the study. It examines the Chinese Ecological Civilisation, Destination Social Responsibility (DSR), Commitment-Trust Theory, Pro-Sustainable Behaviour (PSB), Destination Decline, Norm Activation Theory, and Nature Relatedness. The chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for the research.

Chapter 3 presents the conceptual model and the development of hypotheses, integrating both destination-level and individual-level factors. The model draws upon the Commitment-Trust Theory and the Norm Activation Theory to shed light on the relationships between various constructs and their influence on visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions.

Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology, outlining the underlying philosophical assumptions, research design, the methods of data collection, and the techniques applied to the data analysis in the study. It also addresses ethical considerations, the process of obtaining ethical approval, and the tourism context of the Yellow River Delta.

Chapter 5 presents the quantitative results of the research at both the destination and individual levels. It employs structural equation modelling (SEM) to examine the proposed hypotheses to delve into the nuances and complexities of the relationships between various stakeholders and visitors' attitudes and behaviours.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings of the study, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between various factors influencing sustainable tourism development in the Yellow River Delta. It utilises quantitative results to offer a holistic approach to understanding visitors' pro-sustainable behaviours and donation intentions.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings, highlighting the theoretical and practical implications of the research, and providing recommendations for sustainable tourism development in the Yellow River Delta. It also acknowledges

the limitations of the research and suggests avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review of key concepts and theories related to the development of sustainable tourism in the Yellow River Delta, China. It begins by discussing the Chinese Ecological Civilisation, which emphasises the importance of balancing economic growth with ecological sustainability and social equity. The chapter then explores the concept of DSR, which extends the principles of CSR to the tourism industry, highlighting the importance of stakeholder engagement, i.e. the role of local government and tour operators and visitors' perception in the promotion of sustainable tourism.

The literature review also examines various theories and concepts, including the Commitment-Trust Theory, Pro-Sustainable Behaviour (PSB), Destination Decline, and the Norm Activation Theory. These theories offer a foundation for analysing the interactions among visitors, tour operators, and local governments within the framework of sustainable tourism. Additionally, they help explain the psychological mechanisms that drive visitors' pro-sustainability behaviours and their donation intentions. The chapter concludes by discussing the concept of nature relatedness and its relevance to sustainable tourism, emphasising the importance of fostering emotional and psychological connections with nature to promote pro-sustainable behaviour.

2.2 Chinese ecological civilisation

The Chinese government has recognized the conflict between economic growth and ecological sustainability, and thus focus on sustainable development and establish Chinese Ecological Civilisation (Rodríguez et al., 2016; Tong et al., 2018). Previously, China implemented the "extensive" economic growth which led to significant resource waste and environmental pollution (Sun and Wang, 2021). However, as living standards in China improve, there's a growing public demand for environmental protection,

evidenced by increased complaints about pollution (Dai et al., 2017).. The ecological civilisation espouses a refined set of values, namely, Respecting Nature, Sustainability, Equity, Interdependence, and Stewardship. These values emphasise the need for responsible natural resources management, collaboration and cooperation to address environmental challenges and a balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity. These values underscore the importance of collaboration and cooperation among various stakeholders to address environmental and economic challenges, which is directly related to stakeholder engagement, particularly the roles of government and tour operators in influencing visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour. The tourism industry encompasses a range of activities, including transportation mode of travel, hotel, restaurants, and tourism destinations (Szpilko 2017; Bakhriddinovna and Qizi 2020), which can stimulate the economy, create jobs, generate revenue, and support tourism development by enhancing infrastructure (Baloch et al., 2022).

The Chinese government has established strategic goals for the new era that focus on shifting the economic development model towards ecological civilisation, aiming to construct "a beautiful China" (Bryan et al., 2018). In recent decades, the concept of Chinese Ecological Civilisation has garnered a great deal of recognition and interest and has been deemed a crucial component of China's national development strategy. Tourism development involves planning, implementing, and promoting strategies to establish and enhance tourism in a specific area or destination (Mandić et al. 2018). These principles align with my research focus on promoting sustainable behaviours among visitors in fragile ecosystems. In addition, tourism, as one of the fastest-growing industries, is a dynamic force that drives people to explore nature, seek adventures, discover new cultures, experience different traditions, promote interaction with diverse societies, attracting visitors to specific destinations (Baloch et al., 2022). Tourism growth and environmental sustainability are interdependent. The series of activities in tourism adds value by stimulating the economy, creating jobs, generating revenue, and developing infrastructure (Baloch et al., 2022). However, tourism expansion, while

offering socio-economic benefits to host communities, has been shown to incur significant ecological costs. In China, over fifty-eight major tourism destinations are calling for immediate policy measures to reduce air pollution and enhance environmental sustainability (Zhang et al. 2020).

Following the 17th National Congress, China aimed to “build an ecological civilisation by basically forming an energy-and-resource-efficient and environment-friendly structure of industries, pattern of growth, and mode of consumption”, leading to nationwide government efforts to support the development of an ecological civilisation. The 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasised ecological civilisation, integrating it into a comprehensive "five-in-one" strategy that includes economic, political, cultural, social, and environmental development (Don et al., 2021). Therefore, the Chinese government has effectively advanced environmental protection while concurrently achieving economic growth through the implementation of ecological civilisation development. From this perspective, the principles of ecological civilisation have driven the adoption of sustainable tourism practices, emphasising green infrastructure, eco-friendly transport, and sustainable lodging. This shift towards environmentally responsible tourism aims to reduce ecological footprints and enhance conservation efforts. Overall, China aims to create a sustainable and environmentally responsible tourism sector by implementing comprehensive policies, developing green infrastructure, promoting eco-tourism and cultural tourism, educating stakeholders to raise public awareness, encouraging tourism projects that involve and benefit local communities, leveraging technology, and ensuring continuous monitoring and evaluation the sustainability of tourism practices and their impact on the environment (Bécherel, 2001; Butowski 2021; De Grosbois and Fennell, 2021; Schönherr, Peters, and Kuščer, 2023).

Ecotourism seeks to mitigate tourism's impact on a destination's resources, including physical, social, and psychological consequences (Baloch et al., 2022). It encourages visitors and hosts to take positive and responsible initiatives to conserve and preserve

the environment. On the other hand, ecotourism encourages visitors to learn and care about the environment and effectively participate in the conservation of nature and cultural activities (Baloch et al., 2022). This perspective aligns well with my research focusing on visitors' perceptions of DSR, visitors' trust and commitment, visitors' awareness of negative consequences, ascription of responsibility and personal norms, and how these factors influence their pro-sustainable behaviours. Previous studies have shown that international tourism growth increases visitor arrivals, energy consumption, CO₂ emissions, and air pollution, contributing to climate change (Aslan et al. 2021). Pulido-Fernández et al. (2019) and Simo-Kengne (2022) warn that there is an urgent need to transform Pakistan's tourism areas into eco-friendly destinations due to tourism infrastructure consuming natural resources, causing air and water pollution, and loss of nature and biodiversity. Particularly, Khoi et al. (2021) demonstrate that Singapore, a popular visitor destination, faces negative ecological impacts and seeks a balance between tourism development and environmental sustainability.

Numerous researchers have developed a human-centric indicator system to track the advancement of ecological civilisation, employing indicators such as the physiological balance, psychological imbalance, human–environment imbalance, human development, disharmony between the economy and the environment, and ecological civilisation index (Hu et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2017). Additionally, existing research investigates factors such as the quality of economic development, nature conservation, investments in clean energy, urban water supply, utilisation of foreign investment, land resource protection, and the quality of population education which significantly impact the advancement of ecological civilisation (Dong et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Besides, Don et al. (2021a) investigates how China's ecological civilisation performs and analyse the factors that influence it. Furthermore, scholars found that various factors, including industrial structure, market liberalisation, governmental awareness of environmental risks, green initiatives by the government, residents' well-being, corporate environmental responsibility, investment in culture and education, promotion

of green travel, and efforts towards ecological construction, positively influence ecological civilisation's effectiveness (Chen et al., 2022; Dong et al., 2021).

However, there are a number of questions that need to be addressed: “How can the level of ecological civilisation development be scientifically and reasonably evaluated? What are the factors influencing the development of ecological civilisation? How can ecological civilisation be better developed?” (Chen et al., 2022). As part of its efforts to protect the environment and foster sustainable development, the Chinese government has been advancing ecological civilisation. This increased emphasis on environmental protection and sustainable development has improved the country’s growth and development of sustainable tourism (Yan et al., 2021). Tourism is a diverse and multifaceted industry, requiring comprehensive and integrated planning (Cloquet, et al., 2017; Streimikiene et al., 2020), while sustainable tourism, as a key concept in environmentally responsible tourism development, aims to meet the current needs of visitors and host communities while ensuring future opportunities are protected and enhanced (Liu and Nepal, 2009). This approach balances economic, social, and aesthetic needs with the preservation of cultural integrity, ecological processes, biodiversity, and essential life support systems.

Sustainable tourism, a form of tourism that prioritises the preservation of the environment, cultural heritage, and community development (Shi et al., 2018), aligns well with the values of Chinese Ecological Civilisation, such as the importance of maintaining the balance between humans and nature. This alignment contributes to the promotion of environmentally and culturally responsible behaviour. So far, the construction level of ecological civilisation in wetlands in China has not been properly studied due to the various characteristics of wetland environments. Ecological civilization emphasizes sustainable practices in industrial structure, growth, and consumption, contrasting with traditional models that overconsume resources and energy (Don et al., 2020). Additionally, the implementation of the river chief system in

China exemplifies the incorporation of Chinese Ecological Civilisation values into various facets of society, including tourism. Li et al. (2020) show that the river chief system reflects Chinese characteristics in the processes of biodiversity conservation, rural revitalisation, and integrated watershed management. This system reflects the Chinese society's emphasis on values such as environmental respect and the importance of maintaining harmony between humans and nature. In the context of tourism destinations, it underscores the need to balance human-nature interactions to avoid ecological degradation. Accordingly, this research explores the development of ecological civilisation within the Chinese Yellow River Delta.

Scholars suggest that the natural ecosystem is fundamental to ecological civilization and advocate for ecological compensation mechanisms to protect vital resources like forests, wetlands, river basins, and marine environments (Xie, Cao, Lu and Zhang, 2015). Implementing these principles at tourism destinations ensures the preservation of natural landscapes and the sustainability of the local environment. To achieve destination prosperity, tourism destinations are advised to implement policies and actions aimed at sustainable development, highlighting the critical role of environmental and cultural resource management in this process (Byrd et al., 2009; Su, Huang, and Huang, 2016). Sustainable tourism can be fostered through implementing socially responsible initiatives within destinations (Su and Swanson, 2017). As a result, numerous studies have emphasised the importance of Destination Social Responsibility (DSR) as a critical factor in promoting sustainable development within tourism regions (Su et al., 2016; Su and Swanson, 2017). Su, Huang, and Pearce (2018) created a comprehensive model demonstrating how DSR influences both the positive and negative effects of tourism, enhances overall community satisfaction, and directly or indirectly fosters environmentally responsible behaviour (ERB) among residents of Gulangyu Island, Xiamen, China.

Furthermore, stakeholders play a pivotal role in the sustainable tourism development

process (Su, Huang, and Pearce, 2018). Many organisations are now implementing sustainable business strategies to respond to the growing concerns of both stakeholders and enterprises (El-Kassar and Singh, 2019). Given the environmental harm tourism can cause, it is essential to minimize its negative impacts and encourage eco-friendly behaviours among visitors (Hindley and Font, 2017; Juvan and Dolnicar, 2014). A key objective of the Chinese government's efforts to promote ecological civilisation has been encouraging visitors to engage in environmentally responsible travel practices. Su and Swanson (2017) indicate that responsible management of destinations will engage visitors in positive environmental behaviours. In response to the detrimental effects of over-tourism before the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a call for research aimed at educating Chinese visitors to act responsibly and adopt environmentally friendly behaviours (Yang et al., 2021). The results show that the decision of stakeholders to embrace environmentally responsible behaviour has significant consequences for the destination's natural environment (Cheng and Wu, 2015; Lee et al., 2021; Su and Swanson, 2017).

Behaviour is shaped by both external factors, such as knowledge, cost, alternatives, and social norms, and internal factors, including early cognitions, perceptions, moral motivations, personal norms, and habits (Steg and Vlek, 2009). The literature on sustainable tourism frequently underscores the normative expectations for how visitors and organizations should engage with the environment and local communities. Moral values influence both individual and organization's collective actions in the public sphere (Adger et al., 2017). Caton (2012) defined morality as "The human imaginative and discursive capacity for considering how things should be, " and Beets (2012) suggests that morals are societal rules and standards that guide us in determining the right behaviour. Besides, moral values guide both individual and collective behaviours. Individuals tend to conduct moral actions aligning their actions with personal moral standards through self-regulatory mechanisms (Bandura, 2002). Meanwhile Corporations have a responsibility to pursue social justice that extends beyond legal

compliance and are capable of making intentional decisions that demonstrate moral responsibility (Dempsey, 2013; Wu, Font and Liu, 2020). A significant amount of research has focused on encouraging such behaviours through moral considerations (Han 2015; Han and Hyun 2017), with moral obligation highlighted as a critical motivator (Dolnicar and Leisch 2008; Han, Meng, and Kim 2017). Wu, Font and Liu (2020) find that moral obligation positively influences the intention to participate in pro-environmental behaviours (PEBs), whereas moral disengagement significantly hampers it in the context of National Nature Reserves in China. Prior research indicates that norm activation theory (NAT) is an effective tool for explaining and forecasting environmentally responsible behaviour (Han, 2014; Onwezen et al., 2013). For example, in nature-based destinations, the environment, natural landscapes, and wildlife are integral to the visitor experience (Li and Wu, 2019). Visitors who choose these destinations often demonstrate a strong moral commitment to environmental preservation. This sense of responsibility activates a normative goal frame, motivating them to engage in pro-environmental behaviours (PEB) driven by a deep-seated sense of duty and obligation.

Besides, Wu et al. (2022) enhance norm activation theory by incorporating face consciousness and analysing how it moderates personal norms related to environmentally responsible behaviour in West Lake tourism, China. Li and Wu (2020) explore various perspectives within social capital theory and pinpoint three key factors of social interaction: affective attachment, in-group norms, and cooperative trust, and investigate how these elements influence visitors' intentions to participate in pro-environmental behaviours. Overall, the values of Chinese Ecological Civilisation and the government's initiatives to foster ecological civilisation shape the philosophy and practices of sustainable tourism in China significantly. By promoting environmental and cultural awareness and encouraging environmentally responsible travel practises among stakeholders, sustainable tourism aligns with the principles of the Chinese Ecological Civilisation and contributes to the preservation of the natural balance.

Given the exiting research gap, future studies should investigate what leads to moral disengagement or examine other factors that could mediate between moral considerations and sustainable actions. Additionally, the insights gained could help in designing practical experiments to understand the relationship between PEB intentions and actual behaviours (Wu, Font and Liu, 2020). Social interaction factors significantly impact visitors' intentions to engage in both low-effort and high-effort pro-environmental behaviours (PEBs), with a more pronounced effect on high-effort PEB intentions. Meanwhile, visitors' environmental values and concerns are positively linked only to their high-effort PEB intentions, while environmental knowledge appears to have no correlation with their PEB intentions (Li and Wu, 2020). In summary, previous research employed three fundamental constructs (i.e. environmental value, environmental concern, and environmental knowledge) as indicators for the comparison, but future research should consider other important attitudinal factors, including personal norms and behavioural attitude for the development of sustainable tourism (Li and Wu, 2020).

One of the most significant factors that can ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism in a destination is its constant competitiveness and attractiveness (Nadalipour, Imani Khoshkhoo and Eftekhari, Aet al., 2019). For a destination to achieve sustainable tourism, it must utilize its environmental resources effectively while also considering the economic and social well-being of the community. In addition, achieving sustainable competitiveness requires addressing all these factors and involving all stakeholders, including visitors, locals, businesses, and organizations. Tourism competitiveness starts with the experiences of visitors, as the images they perceive at destinations, encompassing visitors' beliefs, opinions, and perceptions of the destination's attractiveness, and the attitudes of internal stakeholders toward tourism, form the core product of tourism (Andrades–Caldito et al., 2013, Angelkova et al., 2012).

In the dynamic global marketplace, the influences of globalisation and technical breakthroughs have reshaped the competitive environment in all industries, bringing forth a new era of both challenges and opportunities for business. For example, the proliferation of online platforms, social media, and mobile technology has a significant impact on visitors' destination choices and travel experiences (Naveed et al., 2023). As a result, tourism businesses must leverage these technologies to enhance customer engagement, personalise experiences, and build a strong digital footprint. Moreover, businesses face numerous challenges, including intense competition (Turoń, 2022; Mendon et al., 2019), evolving consumer preferences (Boneva, 2018), and increasing pressures from various stakeholders (Zhang and Zhu, 2019; Nguyen and Adomako, 2022). Additionally, advancements in technology have significantly transformed how tourism services are marketed, experienced, and assessed by visitors.

In response to these challenges, organisations are actively searching for strategies to maintain their competitiveness and survival, placing greater emphasis on the impact of customers on organisational success (Priem et al., 2018; Mostaghel and Chirumalla, 2021). Developing a strong consumer-brand relationship has become a crucial factor to distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive environment. Specifically, the tourism industry, known for its fierce competition and sensitivity to visitors' preferences and global trends, must navigate these intricacies with flexibility and anticipation. In order to successfully overcome these challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that they offer, tourism business should prioritise the establishment of strong consumer-brand connections, embrace technological advancements, and demonstrate a strong dedication to sustainable and responsible tourism practices. Therefore, sustainable tourism provides opportunities for distinguishing themselves and gaining a competitive advantage by targeting a specific but growing group of consumers that is interested in eco-friendly travel experiences, such as meeting varied cultural expectations and preferences (Naveed et al., 2023).

The concept of 'better' tourism, traditionally aligned with sustainable tourism in scholarly discussions, has evolved amidst ongoing debates and practical challenges related to the intricate concepts of sustainability and responsibility in the tourism sector, as observed by Mihalič et al. (2021). This evolution reflects the dynamic nature of the sustainable development paradigm within the context of tourism. Therefore, tourism businesses have to reconsider their operations, marketing strategies, and product/service offerings to correspond with the preferences of environmentally and ecologically concerned visitors. Fakeye and Crompton (1991) propose that initial visitors often assess a destination by relying on external sources of information, such as friends and relatives. Repeat visitors are those who are familiar with the destination and have expectations shaped by past experiences (McKercher and Wong, 2004; Morais and Lin, 2010). Prior research indicates that people tend to depend on personal sources of information and a growing interest in using generative AI in tourism contexts, such as recommendations and verbal communication when making purchasing decisions (Big Commerce 2022; McCaskill 2015; Tarik, Line and Zhang, 2023). Therefore, a strong relationship between business and customers is particularly applicable to service business, particularly the tourism business, in which consumers are unable to test or experience services before purchasing (Walz and Celuch 2010). In such cases, personal sources of information related to DSR, trust-commitment relationships, awareness of negative environmental issues, ascription of responsibility, and personal norms become increasingly crucial.

2.3 Destination social responsibility

The concept of social responsibility has gained considerable recognition within the tourism industry, particularly through the framework of Destination Social Responsibility (DSR). According to Su and Huang (2012), DSR encompasses the duties and actions carried out by various stakeholders within a tourist destination, such as visitors, local governments, communities, service providers, and businesses involved

in tourism. Su et al. (2018a) expands on this by describing DSR as the shared values and collective efforts of destination stakeholders to participate in socially responsible practices, as perceived by local residents.

Su and Huang (2012) emphasise that stakeholders play a key role in safeguarding and advancing the destination's interests, particularly concerning sustainability in social, environmental, cultural, and economic aspects. Rodríguez and Cruz (2007) note that a destination's commitment to social and environmental responsibility has a direct influence on tourist loyalty. Fatma, Rahman, and Khan (2016) introduced three sub-scales—economic, social, and environmental—to measure consumers' perceptions of corporate social responsibility in the tourism sector. Although these sub-scales were initially developed to evaluate DSR, they also offer a valuable framework for tourists to assess DSR initiatives at destinations.

While much of the existing DSR literature emphasizes specific outcomes such as destination reputation (Su and Huang, 2012) and environmental responsibility (Su et al., 2018b), there is limited research exploring the integrated impact of the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions of DSR. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the combined effects of these dimensions on destination outcomes, contributing to the broader body of DSR literature.

2.3.1 Tourism Impact on environmental concerns

The impact of tourism on natural and social environments has become a significant concern, leading to discussions about alternatives to mass tourism, as noted by Krippendorf (1987). Visitors' awareness and understanding of tourism's environmental impact, coupled with their capability to enact this knowledge can promote sustainable tourism practices (López-Sánchez and Pulido-Fernández, 2016). These sustainable tourism practices, aimed at being more responsible toward the environment and local communities, have been labelled with various terms, including 'alternative,' 'soft,' 'eco,'

'green,' 'ethical,' and 'responsible' tourism, according to Goodwin (2016) and Mihalič (2016). There is significant academic focus on different aspects of sustainability in tourism, including general sustainable tourism practices, sustainable destination development, and sustainable heritage tourism, exploring these themes from the standpoint of different stakeholders in the field (Edgell Sr, 2016; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Kato and Prozano, 2017; Stevenson, 2016; Kim, Whitford, and Arcodia, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020).

The modern economy is marked by intense competition across various industries, including tourism. Tourism is a dynamic and prospective industry globally, which holds great importance to strategically and sustainably plan and develop tourism (Streimikiene et al., 2021). The effects of tourism can be analysed from various perspectives, including economic, social, cultural, and environmental. Within each of these domains, the impacts can range from positive to negative (Kim, Uysal and Sirgy, 2013). Tourism brings economic benefits but also poses significant challenges. Mihalič (2020) suggests that the keys to promoting responsible tourism are linked to three main areas: the social and psychological aspects of the tourism supply side (like the well-being of local residents), the demand side (such as the quality of visitors' experiences), and the socio-political framework (including policies and initiatives). These elements play a crucial role in helping destinations observe and control risks associated with unsustainable tourism practices, including the issue of overtourism. Tourism has the potential to raise awareness about environmental protection and contribute to the cleanliness of the local community environment (Su, Huang and Pearce, 2018). Tourism has the potential to enhance public infrastructure and contribute to the development of recreational facilities (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011).

However, it is important to note that tourism can also harm the natural environment (Var and Kim, 1989). Organisations promoting tourism may harm the environment through overcrowding, waste generation, damage to wildlife and plants, human rights

violations, and unfair trade practices (Su and Swan, 2017). Commercialisation can boost tourism, but it can also have detrimental effects on the ecosystem and biodiversity and put significant pressure on the local environment (Hatipoglu et al., 2016). This, in turn, may result in a decline in the overall service quality, which can be detrimental to any visitor destination (Jasrotia, Kamila and Patel, 2021). Besides, visitors' behaviours, including collecting specimens or polluting, can harm the ecosystem, regardless of their awareness or ignorance of the consequences (Su and Swan, 2017). Apart from, tourism also creates some serious problems as excessive energy consumption and increasing negative environmental effects including climatic change (Streimikiene et al., 2021).

Some view tourism as a way to revitalize cultures (Wang, Fu, Cecil, and Avgoustis, 2006), while others argue it can act as a "cultural exploiter," contributing to the decline of traditional cultures (Andereck et al., 2005). Additionally, the expansion of tourism and travel has led to environmental degradation, with popular destinations experiencing overcrowding and a negative impact on the quality of life for local residents (Streimikiene et al., 2021). Visitors' consumption choices can result in negative environmental, social, and economic outcomes, such as increased waste, resource depletion (Mbaiwa, 2003), and the commercialization of local cultures (Devine, 2017). On a global scale, tourism contributes to fossil fuel consumption and carbon emissions due to travel-related activities (Scott and Becken, 2010). However, tourism also plays an important role in promoting local biodiversity, which helps maintain the ecological balance in visitor destinations (Jasrotia, Kamila, and Patel, 2021). Certain destinations are heavily dependent on their biological and geographical features, making it imperative for local and institutional bodies to develop ecosystems that support tourism in those regions (Gretzel et al., 2015). In conclusion, tourism can produce a variety of effects—both positive and negative—at different scales, from local to global. Addressing the harmful impacts of tourism is essential to ensuring the sustainability of these destinations. This study aims to explore the factors that encourage visitors to adopt pro-sustainable behaviours.

Initially, studies on destinations primarily concentrated on economic aspects, such as revenue and employment (Perdue, Long, and Kang, 1999), while literature in past of decade pointed out, it is essential to consider non-economic viewpoints when assessing how visitors perceive tourism impacts (Andereck and Nyaupane, 2011; Su, Huang and Huang, 2018). Reputation signifies quality and ethical conduct toward stakeholders, encompassing elements like admiration, respect, trust, consistent performance, and effective communication (Braun, Eshuis, Klijn, and Zenker, 2018; Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, and Beatty, 2009). The satisfaction of visitors and the meaningful experiences they have are influenced by both economic equality and the thrive of ecosystems (Henderson, 2007; Lund-Durlacher, 2015). Tuan et al. (2019) revealed that CSR in tourism has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty and engagement. A study conducted on tourism agencies in Tehran revealed that customers who strongly identify with a company's CSR initiatives are more likely to have increased trust and loyalty towards the brand (Akbari et al., 2019). Above all, visitors' trust or loyalty thus plays crucial role in the tourism industry.

Implementing measures to mitigate the negative impact of tourism on the environment and fostering visitor's environment friendly behaviour aimed at conserving resources and protecting the environment can significantly enhance the overall enjoyment of the destination experience (Tezer and Bodur, 2020). He and Li (2011) argue that the integrated impact of service quality and corporate social responsibility influence brand identification, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Recent literature has highlighted an interaction effect between service quality and the attribution of social responsibility motives in relation to consumer trust and satisfaction (Gao and Mattila, 2014). A destination with high level of satisfaction is a composite reflection of opinions, knowledge, and attitudes held by all stakeholders, including visitors, hosts, and the local community (Christou, 2003). The high level of destination satisfaction stands as a more stable performance indicator from a visitor's perspective, surpassing brands or images

(Dastgerdi and De Luca, 2019). Specifically, a good destination reputation indicates that the destination offers high-quality products and services, which can help decrease visitors' perception of risk and bolster their trust in the destination, ultimately improving their intentions to travel there (Su, Lian and Huang, 2020).

Overall, tourism has significant negative impacts that need to be reduced, not only for the well-being of the physical and social ecosystems but also for the industry's sustainability (Kasim, 2006). DSR is an effective method to achieve sustainability. It is crucial for all stakeholders to have a deep understanding and awareness of DSR. Increasing awareness promotes tourism benefits through visitors' sustainable behaviours and helps reduce negative consequences, including environmental degradation and overtourism (Su, Huang, and Pearce, 2018; Mihalič, 2020). Improving stakeholders' understanding of DSR can help destinations establish a sustainable tourism model that considers both visitors' requirements and the well-being of local communities and the environment (Agopito, Kronenburg and Pinto, 2022). This highlights how visitors' perceptions of DSR are linked to their behaviours and how this impacts tourism sustainability. It emphasises the critical role of DSR in creating an environmentally friendly tourism culture that benefits both destinations and visitors.

2.3.2 The development of DSR originating from CSR

Various environmental issues, such as depletion of natural resources, significantly threaten environmental sustainability (Wang et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020). These challenges are largely attributed to environmentally irresponsible human behaviours (Hopkins, 2020; Xu et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2020). Researchers demonstrate that addressing and mitigating environmental issues necessitates a shift towards environmentally sustainable human behaviours (Han, 2020; Steg and Vlek, 2009). Specifically, altering individual consumption patterns in an environmentally friendly manner is crucial for achieving environmental sustainability (Halder et al., 2020; Wang

et al., 2020).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) incorporates a wide range of concepts, such as corporate responsibility, social responsibility, business sustainability, and stakeholder accountability (Blowfield and Murray, 2008; Carroll and Shabana, 2010). This concept signifies a commitment to improving the well-being of the community by implementing ethical business strategies (Kotler and Lee, 2002). In other words, CSR is the practice of companies incorporating social and environmental considerations into corporate operations beyond only financial gains. Mahmud et al. (2020) emphasise that CSR is crucial for attaining sustainable development and promoting measures that are advantageous for both business and society. They contend that only approaches that result in mutually beneficial outcomes can ensure the long-term sustainability of a business, dismissing any approaches that might benefit one company at the expense of another. Besides, Kotler and Lee (2004) define CSR as a commitment to enhancing community well-being through ethical business practices and providing corporate resources. Corporate social responsibility, as defined by Kotler and Lee (2005), refers to a dedication to enhancing societal well-being through voluntary business practices and the allocation of corporate resources. It strives to achieve a harmonious balance of social, environmental, and economic outcomes, known as the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profits (Aguinis, 2011; Madanaguli et al., 2021). Companies are increasingly allocating significant resources to social initiatives, including community engagement, environmental conservation, and ethical business practices (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2010).

The motivation behind these extraordinary CSR initiatives is not only based on the view that business may have a significant and beneficial impact on society but rather on the various business benefits that firms can possibly gain from their CSR endeavours (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2010). Numerous academic studies support these findings, and they confirm the various advantages that a company can gain from participating in CSR

(e.g., Du et al. 2007; Lichtenstein et al. 2004; Sen et al. 2006). Besides, Droppert and Bennett (2015) highlight how business is modifying and improving their CSR strategies due to increasing societal expectations for ethical corporate behaviour. This worldwide phenomenon demonstrates an attempt to bring together business operations with the evolving societal expectations. Frey and George (2010) also observed that CSR initiatives aim to minimise waste and encourage the sustainable utilisation of limited natural resources. Besides, companies can derive significant business advantages from CSR through engagement with a specific stakeholder group, namely customers. Through exhibiting strong corporate social responsibility, an organisation has the ability to cultivate consumer loyalty and transform consumers into advocates and champions of the company/brand (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2010). These advocates participate in behaviours such as spreading favourable word-of-mouth, being prepared to pay a higher price, and remaining resilient in the face of negative company news (Du et al., 2007).

Tourism can serve as a catalyst for economic development, but it can also present threats to the environment and society (Chilufya et al., 2019). The tourism industry has progressively embraced CSR strategies in order to acknowledge and address the significance of balancing these consequences (Madanaguli et al., 2021). Naveed et al. (2023) also highlight that CSR in tourism plays a pivotal role in balancing human activity with environmental protection and navigating the challenges and successes that arise. By incorporating CSR into their operations, visitor organisations are not only committing to adopt sustainable practices but also aiming to make a beneficial influence on the social and economic development of the destinations in which they operate. Companies are adopting sustainable approaches to tourism, encompassing eco-tourism, green tourism, environmentally friendly travel, and alternative tourism (Madanaguli et al., 2021; Nyahunzvi, 2013). This includes endeavours to preserve natural habitats, strengthen local economies, protect cultural heritage without causing harm or commodification, and promote ethical engagements between visitors and the

destination they visit (Lund-Durlacher 2015). The importance of building a responsible tourism industry is paramount, as CSR practices mean committing to sustainable and equitable growth, highlighting the significant progress achievable through collective responsibility and a common vision for the future that is more inclusive (Naveed et al., 2023). In other words, the implementation of CSR activities in the tourism industry demonstrates its growing dedication to promoting a sustainable environment.

Previous research has focused on how customers' internal factors, like emotions, satisfaction, and loyalty, shape their perceptions of CSR (Madanaguli et al., 2022). Ahn (2020) found that promoting CSR activities to hotel customers in the U.S. boosts their engagement and behavioural intentions. Besides, Alvarado-Herrera et al. (2019) demonstrate that visitors of Mexico perceive both direct and indirect impacts of CSR on brand reputation and commitment. In addition, CSR initiative not only benefits environmental sustainability but also enhances the visitor experience, as noted by Chung et al. (2019). Furthermore, Madanaguli et al. (2022) suggest that CSR initiatives in the tourism industry mostly concentrate on community engagement and environmental conservation. Environmental endeavours have emerged as a vital aspect, encompassing projects targeted at diminishing ecological harm, such as carbon offsetting, combating poaching, and rehabilitating ecosystems. Companies strive to reduce their environmental footprint by producing and marketing carbon offsets to tourism firms, along with other strategies.

The development of tourism raises concerns about the simultaneous deterioration of natural attractions, serving as both ecological habitats and tourism destinations (Su et al., 2018). Tourism-related activities can exert detrimental effects on a destination. Notably, visitors' actions can directly harm the environment, whether through the unintended consequences of their leisure activities or through deliberate but misguided interactions with nature. Initially, organisations aiming to encourage and profit from tourism may conduct operations leading to environmental degradation, including

overcrowding, waste accumulation, the declining number of wildlife, vegetation damage, human rights violations, and unjust trade practices (Ștefănică et al., 2021). Secondly, visitors can have a negative impact on the ecosystem through their engagement in activities such as gathering flora and fauna specimens, disturbing wildlife habitats, and causing pollution (Choi et al., 2017). Overall, whether these actions stem from ignorance or deliberate disregard, the ultimate outcome is detrimental to the destination's long-term well-being (Cavallaro, Galati and Nocera, 2020).

Besides, tourism is frequently viewed as both affected by and responsible for climate change, as climatic change impacts the demand for tourism and the selection of destinations (Olya and Alipour, 2015). Tourism is a vulnerable industry because it relies heavily on the natural environment, which is one of the primary factors that determine the attraction of a destination (Scott et al., 2012a). Tourism-related activities can exert detrimental effects on a destination. Initially, organisations aiming to encourage and profit from tourism may conduct operations that cause harm to the environment, such as overcrowding, the accumulation of waste, the depletion of wildlife, damage to vegetation, violations of human rights, and unfair trade practices. Secondly, visitors themselves may adversely affect the environment by their engagement in activities such as the collection of flora and fauna specimens, disturbance of wildlife habitats, and pollution.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which originates from the corporate sector, represents a company's voluntary initiative to make positive contributions to both society and the environment. This is achieved by incorporating social, environmental, and economic considerations into its business practices (Dwyer, 2015). In recent years, the concept has evolved further with the emergence of Destination Social Responsibility (DSR), which broadens the scope of CSR to include entire tourism destinations. This extension has been explored in several studies (Su, Lian, and Huang, 2020; Hassan and Soliman, 2021; He et al., 2022; Su, Huang and Huang, 2018; Lee et

al., 2021).

DSR is a modern concept that focuses on social responsibility initiatives at destination levels rather than within business (Agapito, Kronenburg and Pinto, 2022). This transition expands the concepts of CSR beyond the organisational scope to include the broader tourism destination, recognising the distinct difficulties and possibilities offered by the tourism industry. In addition, the shift from CSR to DSR in the realm of responsible tourism marks a move towards a more unified and collaborative effort to attain sustainability across entire tourism destinations. This approach recognises that the effects of tourism extend beyond individual business and impact the broader destination environment. DSR emphasises the significance of collective efforts among all stakeholders, including business, local communities, and governments, to work together towards a sustainable tourism future (Agapito, Kronenburg and Pinto, 2022; Su and Swanson, 2017). It highlights a mutual dedication to practices that protect the environment, benefit local communities, and fairly distribute economic gains, ensuring a balanced approach to tourism development. As such, DSR has gained significant prominence among destinations compared with CSR.

2.3.3 The role of stakeholders in DSR and their perception of DSR (referring to CSR)

DSR represents a commitment by destination stakeholders, including local communities, business, and governments, to engage in sustainable development practices (Su et al., 2018; Su and Swanson, 2017). This involves implementing strategies that mitigate the adverse effects of tourism on the environment while optimising the benefits to local communities. Mihalič (2020) and Volgger and Huang (2019) suggest that stakeholders' perceptions of DSR can positively impact tourism destinations. DSR studies are increasingly urging for further research to comprehensively evaluate and comprehend its benefits for destinations (Hassan and Soliman, 2021; Khan et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of additional research

on how DSR practices impact the general welfare of tourism locations. As the concept of DSR evolves, it calls for a multifaceted approach that integrates economic, social, and environmental strategies to address the complex challenges faced by tourism destinations. This approach seeks to balance the immediate economic benefits of tourism with the long-term health and prosperity of the destination (Su, Huang and Pearce, 2018).

It is important to identify key stakeholders and their perspectives of DSR as it measures how group's view destinations in terms of social responsibility (Agopito, Kronenburg and Pinto, 2022). DSR emphasises the need for collaborative efforts to protect and preserve ecological habitats, cultural integrity, and the rights and well-being of local populations (Su, Huang and Huang, 2018). DSR advocates for the protection of local cultures and traditions, ensuring that tourism does not result in cultural homogenisation or exploitation. Engaging local communities in decision-making processes, respecting indigenous rights, and providing equitable access to the benefits of tourism are critical components of socially responsible tourism (Su and Swanson, 2017). By adopting DSR principles, stakeholders can ensure that tourism development does not come at the expense of environmental and social values but rather contributes to the enduring sustainability and resilience of destinations (Su et al., 2018). CSR is a concept where companies voluntarily choose to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment by integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations into their operations (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). In the last decade, the development of DSR has transferred the rationale of CSR to the level of the entire tourism destination (e.g. C. Lee et al., 2021; Hassan and Soliman, 2021). Specifically, while CSR, originating in organizational behaviour, is not entirely applicable to destinations (Su, Huang, and Huang, 2018), DSR focuses on stakeholder activities that protect and enhance the social and environmental interests of a whole destination, alongside the economic interests of individual organizations, to achieve sustainable tourism development (Su and Swanson, 2017). Besides, compared to CSR, which

focusses on individual tourism organisations and sectors such as airlines, accommodations, and restaurants (Font and Lynes, 2018; Su, Huang, and Pearce, 2018), DSR takes a broader approach, encompassing all stakeholders within a destination (C. Lee et al., 2021; Hassan and Soliman, 2021). Su and Swanson, (2017) demonstrated that DSR encompasses stakeholder activities aimed at protecting and enhancing the social and environmental well-being of an entire destination, alongside the economic interests of individual organizations, to achieve sustainable tourism development. As there is limited research on DSR, this research develops and further understands DSR based on CSR literature in the context of sustainable tourism development.

Sustainable business practices are crucial in the tourism industry as visitor destination growth strongly depends on natural and cultural resources (Sheldon and Park, 2011). These resources must be managed and enhanced sustainably towards achieving sustainable development. The existing literature emphasises the importance of visitors, company owners, employees, government, non-governmental institutions, and inhabitants in destinations (Goodwin, 2016; Mihalič, 2016; Su, Swanson, and He, 2020). Visitors' behavioural intentions at travel destinations are greatly influenced by their perception of the destination's overall image, as discussed by Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou and Apostolopoulou (2015). Visitors can practice environmentally friendly behaviours to minimise or prevent harm to the environment (Chiu, Lee, and Chen, 2014). Lee, Kim, Lee, and Li (2012) found that visitors demonstrate environmentally responsible behaviours by actively working to reduce negative environmental impacts and engaging in environmental protection efforts throughout their travels. However, tourism activities at destinations can be influenced by various groups with various interests (Freeman, 1984). Because the collective actions of all stakeholders involved determine the influence of tourism development in a destination. This overall effect, as perceived by visitors, influences their attitudes and can lead them to either support or oppose behaviours relating to the destination (Su and Swanson, 2017).

Sustainable business practices have emerged as a growing concern for companies and their stakeholders worldwide, highlighting the concept of corporate social responsibility (Su, Huang and Huang, 2018). CSR is defined as a process in which individuals acknowledge stakeholder expectations for their organisations and determine the extent of their commitment to the overall welfare of society, the environment, and the economy (Dahlsrud, 2008). Ethical principles are essential in business practices, as they encompass not only the financial achievement of business but also the welfare of individuals and society as a whole (Sheldon and Park, 2011). Business are increasingly expressing and justifying their CSR initiatives regarding being good for business and how it benefits the company's bottom line (Moon, 2007). Companies may certainly gain in terms of their reputations with investors, staff satisfaction and innovation (Lantos, 2001). CSR activities not only serve as sources of innovation and competitive advantage for individual business but also contribute to enhancing the overall sustainability and competitiveness of the destination (Sheldon and Park, 2011). Font and Lyns (2018) break through the limitations of earlier corporate sustainability approaches by offering empirical evidence reinforcing the significance of incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives and requirements through planning, implementing, and assessing CSR initiatives.

There are four primary factors that drive corporate social responsibility (CSR), including market, social, governmental, and globalisation (Moon, 2007). CSR is seen as a way for companies to gain a competitive advantage, as consumers increasingly prefer socially responsible products and services. Additionally, employees consider a company's CSR practices when making job choices and mainstream investment funds and stock exchanges with increasing attention to risk and governance factors, further promoting the growth of CSR. While social drivers can be expressed through consumers, investors and employees, it's essential to differentiate them from the broader collective social drivers, encompassing media scrutiny, general societal expectations, and business associations dedicated to CSR. In addition, in contrast to the

traditional notion that CSR is distinct from government requirements, numerous governments have exhibited a strong interest in promoting and advocating CSR (Ward, 2004). Furthermore, globalisation presents opportunities for business to take advantage of certain conditions, but companies are responding by implementing CSR codes to ensure responsible practices across countries and supply chains (Moon, 2007). Therefore, companies tend to actively invest in CSR activities so as to fulfil their societal obligations and to improve their profits and sustainability (Kim, Kim and Kim, 2014).

Melubo and Carr (2019) investigated the impact of institutional forces on the adoption of CSR in the tourism industry, identifying six key motivations: the influence of the parent company, maintaining social legitimacy, meeting community expectations, attracting visitors, environmental concerns, and personal values of managers. Their findings emphasise the influence of both external institutional pressures and internal motivations on the implementation of CSR initiatives. There are a large number of research investigating the influence of CSR on firm performance. For instance, research on travel and tour operators in Nepal by Baniya et al. (2019) showed that CSR activities contribute to a positive perception among visitors. Besides, research has also indicated that CSR might have a positive effect on companies' financial performance in the short term by diminishing expenses and/or increasing income (Brammer and Millington, 2008; Moneva et al., 2020). Additionally, Anser et al. (2020) conducted a study on hotels and tourism business. They discovered that the level of CSR engagement by enterprises was a strong predictor of their environmental and social performance. Moreover, Inoue and Lee (2011) examined the correlation between specific aspects of CSR and corporate financial performance (CFP) in industries related to tourism. Their findings revealed that all dimensions of CSR had a positive effect on financial outcomes. However, the effects varied regarding their short-term and long-term profitability. Furthermore, research has provided evidence of positive outcomes of DSR, which can be beneficial towards the entire destinations (Agapito, Kronenburg and Pinto, 2022).

Therefore, we argue that the tourism business highlights the importance of DSR motivated by improved firm performance.

CSR activities in different sectors of the tourism industry, including the airline companies (Park, 2019), restaurants (Siu, Zhang, and Kwan, 2014), and hotels (Gao and Mattila, 2014; Inoue and Lee, 2011), might potentially influence customer attitudes and behaviours in a positive way. However, a significant portion of prior research has predominantly focused on the CSR efforts of individual business. As a result, there is limited research on social responsibility from the perspectives of an entire destination (Su, Huang and Pearce, 2018). Destinations are characterised as geographic areas that encompass all the services and infrastructure required for visitors, providing them with a complete visitor experience (Buhalis, 2000). According to Su et al. (2016), DSR emphasises the obligation of pertinent destination stakeholders to produce economic benefits for residents of the destination, improve their standard of living, and lessen adverse effects on the environment, economy, and society. To obtain the most from the benefits of DSR, visitors may engage in environmentally responsible behaviour to maintain the destination's natural environment and culture, thereby contributing to the destination's sustainable development.

On the one hand, studies show that consumers' positive attitudes and behaviours are significantly impacted by their perceptions of the effectiveness of CSR efforts (Hofenk et al., 2019). Visitors' experiences and outcomes in the tourism industry are greatly influenced by how they perceive DSR efforts, as stated by Su and Swanson (2017). Besides, visitors' perception of DSR initiatives directly impacts their willingness to participate in pro-sustainable behaviours and their decision to revisit a location. Multiple empirical research has shown that visitors' intention to revisit a destination is the most common outcome of DSR (e.g. Hassan and Soliman, 2021; Su and Huang, 2019). Visitors' perceptions of the DSR play a significant role in influencing their environmentally friendly actions and decisions related to destination loyalty. Following

the discussion of DSR, the impact of DSR on environmentally responsible behaviour is explored with studies by Lee et al. (2021). Particularly, Su and Swanson (2017) indicate that DSR can mitigate the negative impact of low service quality on visitors' sustainable behaviour (He et al.,2022). Above all, DSR requires a consistent and collective dedication to protect and improve the community and organisations within a destination by implementing practices encompassing economic, environmental, social, cultural, voluntary, and stakeholder-related responsibilities with the goal of achieving sustainable tourism (Agapito, Kronenburg and Pinto, 2022).

On the other hand, it is challenging to define corporate social responsibility (CRS) because it encompasses a variety of different approaches and changes depending on the context, time, and culture (Aksak, Ferguson, and Duman, 2016). However, scholars define DSR as “perceptions of obligations and activities that are applied to all stakeholders, including visitors, community residents, employees, investors, governments, suppliers, and competitors (Su, Gong and Huang, 2020; Su, Hsu and Boostrom, 2020, and Su, Lian and Huang, 2020)”. DSR expands on the concept and definition of CSR in the tourism industry by emphasising stakeholder, economic, social, and environmental aspects (Su, Huang and Pearce, 2018). In fact, the development of a tourism destination is primarily the result of the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders, encompassing governments, residents, tourism enterprises, and more (Su, Lian and Huang, 2020). As destination development heavily relies on environmental and cultural resources, companies in the tourism industry, particularly, require achieving sustainable development for visitors’ destinations by developing resources in a responsible way (Su, Huang and Huang, 2018).

Some scholars have further discovered that how visitors perceive a destination's social responsibility activities directly affects the visitors' attitudes toward and evaluations of that destination (Su et al., 2018a, b, c; Su and Swanson, 2017). Besides, DSR can induce visitors' positive emotions and destination identification and, in turn, strengthen the

visitors' environmentally responsible behaviour (Su and Swanson, 2017). Therefore, DSR is mutually beneficial for visitors and destinations since implementing social responsibility principles in all stakeholders' activities in any destination will mitigate negative effects, generate economic benefits, and enhance the well-being of visitors' experience (Hassan and Soliman, 2021). In addition, the satisfaction of visitors and their meaningful experiences are influenced by both economic equality and the health of ecosystems (Henderson, 2007; Lund-Durlacher, 2015). In brief, as visitors are willing to support sustainable business and purchase eco-friendly products (Smith et al., 2014), DSR can both enhance the destination's reputation and drive economic growth (Su, Lian and Huang, 2020).

The visitors tend to visit sustainable areas as they are curious about the prevalent traditions and culture of the region and are willing to learn their customs (Jasrotia, Kamila and Patel, 2021). It attracts the local institutional bodies to create cultural clubs and guest houses and make the best-connected roads and communication systems, which contributes to the growth of local tourism development (Lee and Jan 2019). The result of a significant and meaningful experience observing the sustainable feature is a high degree of smooth satisfaction among visitors. It is about drawing in visitors as well as locals in order to provide them with excellent, innovative visitor services (Jasrotia, Kamila and Patel, 2021). A destination's economic sustainability could attract more visitors by providing higher-quality services to visitors when visitors feel as if they are getting the best value for their money (Franzoni, 2015). The satisfaction of visitors is based on the landscape of the area, environment, geological location and the friendly behaviour of the locals (Jiang et al., 2018). The visitors' satisfaction and loyalty increase when they receive better quality services at reasonable prices (Wang et al., 2017). Therefore, DSR's positive impact on destination trust and reputation promotes favourable visitor behaviours, making it an effective tool for sustainable tourism recovery strategies, especially post-COVID pandemic (Hassan and Soliman, 2021).

The awareness is that business and governments have common interests in sustainable

development, social welfare, and environmental protection. Governments promote CSR to ensure that company actions contribute favourably to society's goals, including economic growth, social equity, and environmental stewardship. This collaborative strategy between the commercial and public sectors aids in aligning corporate operations with the larger goals of societal well-being and sustainability.

2.3.4 The role of government in promoting DSR

Many governments and commercial enterprises work together to promote social agendas, particularly during periods of severe unemployment and instability in many different countries. According to Kinnear (2020), CSR began as a voluntary private-sector formula, but the government is gradually becoming more involved. As a result, collaboration between the government and private business is crucial for addressing some of society's issues. The concept of governments actively promoting CSR is not recent. This is because fulfilling business goals in any society requires a certain degree of government involvement, whether through voluntary initiatives or legal mandates (Wirba, 2023). The European Commission emphasises the importance of government support in fostering CSR, even though it relies on companies' voluntary commitment to accountability and responsibility (Wirba, 2023). This support is crucial for advancing CSR across both developed and developing nations to promote overall well-being through collaborative efforts. Another study conducted by Bhave (2009) emphasise that the government has a responsibility to ensure that business operate in accordance with the rules and norms of the society in which they operate and that they generate profits from CSR activities.

Governments are able to create information portals, offer technical support, and establish professional networks (Albareda et al., 2007). Besides, Governments influence behaviour and set norms, and research suggests that their engagement might

improve responsible corporate practices, notably through the potential development of more strict regulations (Kitzmueller and Shimshack, 2012). Governments are the primary societal actors with the ability to enforce CSR practices in business employing diverse practices (Podsiadlowski and Reichel, 2014; Zueva and Fairbrass, 2021). Moon (2004) argues that the UK government encourages CSR in response to documented social governance gaps, market vulnerability, and changing societal requirements. He also explains that the government's efforts to institutionalise CSR are motivated by recognising that it cannot tackle all societal problems, particularly in urban areas. As a result, there is a strong emphasis on the private sector's role in improving societal welfare and tackling these challenges.

Besides, the recommendations for governments in developing countries on how to promote CSR include: (1) increasing awareness of CSR and its consequences, (2) improving the ability to influence the CSR agenda, (3) creating a consistent and transparent environment that supports CSR-focused investments, (4) involving the private sector in public policymaking, and (5) developing methods for prioritising and strategising CSR efforts. In brief, the government ought to foster CSR by enhancing awareness of its value and offering long-term sustainability incentives, thereby ensuring corporations' mutual benefits (Škare and Golja, 2014). It is essential for the government to possess a definitive vision and an established strategy for sustainable growth. Furthermore, the government can motivate companies to join public programs that define social and environmental benchmarks, oversee adherence, encourage reporting and auditing on social and environmental matters, certify exemplary practices, and facilitate discussions involving various stakeholders (Škare and Golja, 2014).

The initial discussion about governments' roles primarily focused on whether they should enforce regulations and legislate to mandate CSR actions (Albareda et al., 2008). Many researchers indicate that public CSR policies should use softer government interventions to influence companies' voluntary behaviour (e.g., Lepoutre et al., 2004).

The emergence of soft law regulations is driven by an increasing focus on CSR and the perceived decline in nation-state power, leading to gaps in local, enforceable hard law regulations (Schrempf-Stirling, 2018). Soft law regulations serve to enhance awareness and motivate corporations towards more responsible behaviour (Zerk 2006), as well as influence corporate governance practices (Muchlinski 2012). Refer to CSR and aforementioned relationship between CSR and DSR, the government should enact legislation, foster collaboration, promote business, and support best practices to enhance the development of DSR. Even when the government is actively involved, DSR governance occurs in networks that extend beyond the boundaries of regulatory or legislative command and control (Lepoutre et al. 2007).

Furthermore, government intervention can help minimise power gaps between enterprises, suppliers, and non-profits, allowing for greater collaborative efforts for mutual benefit (Porter and Kramer, 2011). While shareholders, who invest their capital into a business, collectively own it and deserve to be served by its management, the government holds the power to further reform business governance laws, aiming to broaden the management's responsibility to cater to the interests of a wider group of stakeholders (Taylor, 2023). This suggests that there are enormous prospects for beneficial government intervention in promoting responsible behaviours. At its core, DSR aims to balance the various impacts of tourism activities, addressing the needs and benefits of a diverse group of stakeholders, including employees, shareholders, customers, and the broader community (Wirba, 2023). Therefore, governments consider DSR as a strategic and competitive advantage for tourism companies, both domestically and internationally. The British government believes that DSR contributes to competitiveness by improving business' reputations and encouraging competitors to operate in the same field (Albareda et al., 2008).

2.3.5 Sustainable Development Barriers

Sustainable development emphasizes the balance between economic progress, environmental protection, and social equity, ensuring that we do not deplete the resources and opportunities available to future generations. (Moon, 2007). Environmental management practices play an essential role in sustainable development within different industries. However, the environmental management initiatives of business to be hampered by certain barriers that usually prevent business from enhancing their sustainable development (Hillary, 2004). Internal barriers in companies are characterized by constraints in financial and organisational resources dedicated to sustainability, limited innovation capacity, lack of stakeholder incentives, inflexible production processes and inadequate employee training in sustainable development (Brío and Junquera, 2003; Perez-Sanchez et al., 2003; Puppim de Oliveira and Jabbour, 2017). In addition, there is deficient implementation due to challenges in embracing environmentally friendly technologies and practices and managers in business with limited environmental awareness (Perez-Sanchez et al., 2003).

On the other hand, external barriers are crucial challenges for business sustainable development, such as economic uncertainty, the absence of appropriate national environmental laws and policies, and a lack of specialized service providers or business associations (Brío and Junquera, 2003). Effective environmental policies, government initiatives, and incentives from the public sector can serve as key mechanisms enabling companies to enhance their environmental performance (Zhu and Geng, 2013). Furthermore, adopting sustainable business practices can lead to improved business financial performance through reducing costs, creating new products, adopting more efficient processes, and improving the quality of their products as an environmentally responsible business (Puppim de Oliveira and Jabbour, 2017; Yang, Lin, Chan and Sheu, 2010).

2.3.6 Sustainable Development Benefits

The quality of our ecosystems is declining, and there is a growing risk of pushing the biosphere into a state where sustaining human civilisation could become extremely challenging or even impossible (e.g., Broman and Robèrt, 2017; Steffen et al., 2015). Continued growth of visitors in a destination could increase the challenge of sustainable development (e.g. Edelman, 2015). For example, a lack of trust also indicates a reduced potential to collectively tackle ecological and social challenges (Broman and Robèrt, 2017). Taking proactive measures to address the interests of all stakeholders can result in substantial benefits for the entire destination (Formica and Kothari, 2008). Integrating stakeholder perspectives and addressing their concerns can considerably decrease conflicts over the long term (Yuksel et al., 1999).

Effective management of sustainable tourism development should prioritize maintaining high levels of visitor' satisfaction, providing meaningful experiences for visitors, raising awareness about sustainability issues, and promoting sustainable tourism practices among them (Streimikiene et al., 2021). Innovations in tourism industry are anticipated to play a crucial role in achieving breakthroughs for achieving international success, improving competitiveness, and addressing sustainability challenges (Streimikiene et al., 2021). They can influence companies to adopt more efficient organisational structures, thereby gaining a competitive edge and unlocking new opportunities in the tourism sector (Agyeiwaah et al., 2017). Therefore, the pursuit of sustainable tourism development is intricately connected to enhancing competitiveness by fostering innovations across all aspects relevant to business operations.

Engaging in good DSR activities can greatly contribute to sustainable practice that can improve the trust of visitors, the government, local communities and other partner companies in their operation (Zorpas, 2010; Puppim de Oliveira and Jabbour, 2017). Besides, good sustainable practice can mitigate environmental risks faced by

organisation (Zorpas, 2010). Overall, enhancing sustainable practice can improve business competitiveness more broadly (Morad, 2007). Furthermore, from the perspective of economies of scale, companies can benefit from taking part in joint action initiatives including business, government and visitors and supported organisations (Puppim de Oliveira and Jabbour, 2017). In addressing the pressures from stakeholders (Zhang and Zhu 2019; Nguyen and Adomako 2022), tourism business are also recognizing the importance of integrating stakeholder interests into their strategic planning. This includes working closely with local communities, governments, and other partners to ensure that tourism development is sustainable, ethical, and beneficial to all parties involved (Naveed et al., 2023).

Academic research generally implies study participants' awareness of CSR, whereas empirical evidence from the real world indicates that external stakeholders (such as visitors) frequently have limited knowledge about a company's CSR initiatives. The limited knowledge on this issue presents a major obstacle for companies seeking to get strategic benefits from their CSR efforts (Bhattacharya et al. 2008; Du et al. 2007; Sen et al. 2006). In addition, emotions, satisfaction, customer citizenship, commitment, customer identification behaviour, and destination loyalty are internal factors that significantly enhance customers' perceptions of CSR (Chubchuwong, 2019; Wang et al., 2018). Specifically, visitors regarded hotels' adoption of green technologies as a CSR initiative, recognizing its positive contributions to environmental sustainability and enhancing the tourism experience (Chung et al., 2019). Referring to exiting research on CSR, this research assumes that visitors' awareness of tour-operators' DSR play significant role in pro-sustainable behaviour in sustainable tourism.

Su, Huang, and Huang (2018) conducted an investigation that examined the relationships among DSR, the various effects of tourism (both positive and negative), residents' support for tourism, and their perceived quality of life. Further, Su, Huang, and Pearce (2018) developed a comprehensive framework that demonstrates the influence of DSR on many factors such as visitor impacts, community satisfaction, and

environmentally responsible behaviour among residents, drawing from stakeholder and social exchange theories. In addition, Lee et al. (2021) conducted a research investigation to evaluate the impact of sustainable intelligence, DSR, biospheric values, and visit experiences on pro-environmental behaviour in the Upo Wetland eco-tourism site in South Korea. Accordingly, the effectiveness of DSR in generating economic benefits is highly contingent upon the level of stakeholder awareness of a tour-operators' DSR efforts.

2.4 Commitment-Trust theory

2.4.1 Relationship commitment

Building on the foundation established by Morgan and Hunt (1994) about relationship commitment, more investigation into the intricacies of commitment exposes its many characteristics and substantial consequences in several contexts, such as social commerce and tourism management. The commitment-trust hypothesis, as proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994) presented in **Figure 1**, emphasises the significance of commitment in fostering trust and loyalty in relationships. This theory extends its relevance not just to interpersonal connections but also to consumer-brand interactions. This theory asserts that commitment and trust play a pivotal role in attaining cooperative advantages, indicating that these factors are crucial in cultivating enduring relationships between consumers and companies.

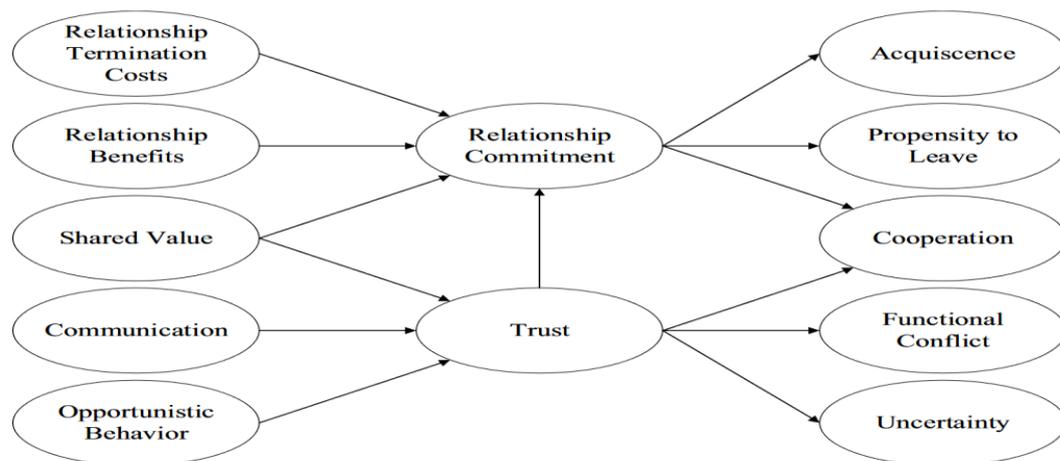


Figure 1 Thematic analysis themes and subthemes (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Laying a foundational understanding of commitment-trust theory that is further enriched by the socio-technical theory, as elucidated by Bostrom and Heinen (1977), which offers additional insights into how the interplay between social and technical elements in shaping degrees of commitment. This idea suggests that the social context, which is defined by cooperative norms and shared principles, has a significant impact in strengthening commitment. Within the realm of social commerce, this setting enables

the exchange of information and the construction of communities, ultimately cultivating a feeling of inclusion and dedication among consumers (Tajvidi et al., 2018). The amalgamation of social and technological elements on platforms fosters a greater level of user involvement with companies, resulting in heightened levels of commitment.

Within the field of tourism management, the notion of commitment pertains to the connection between visitors and destination managers. The principles of the socio-technical theory align with the strategies employed in destination management, as both emphasise the importance of promoting a feeling of community and shared goals among visitors, which can ultimately increase their dedication to the destination (Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil, 2018). Similarly, Tajvidi and colleagues (2018) indicates that a positive social atmosphere, fostered via teamwork and shared beliefs, might result in higher levels of dedication among visitors. This level of dedication not only improves the overall satisfaction of visitors, but also promotes sustainable tourism by fostering return visits and positive recommendations.

Previous studies have confirmed that visitors' trust will influence visitors' emotional attachment to a destination (Chen and Phou, 2013). In consumer-brand partnerships, affective commitment generates loyalty and advocacy, as customers create a deep-seated emotional connection with the brand (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005). The establishment of this emotional connection is crucial in converting casual consumers into brand champions, who not only make frequent purchases from the brand but also actively endorse it to others. In order to develop enduring relationships, organisations and brands must endeavour to maintain a harmonious equilibrium between these factors, creating a conducive atmosphere where trust, common values, and emotional bonds flourish (Stefan, Oriol, Jatinder and Vicenta, 2018). The interaction between emotional and rational aspects of commitment emphasises the intricacy of sustaining connections in the contemporary business environment (Rita and Pierre, 2020).

In the domain of tourism research, the concepts of relationship commitment and the

commitment-trust theory have been pivotal in understanding and enhancing the dynamics between visitors, destinations, and service providers. Scholars have applied these theories to explore how trust and commitment influence visitor behaviours, including their decisions to revisit a destination, recommend it to others, and their level of engagement with the local culture and economy (e.g., Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Styliadis, Woosnam and Tasci, 2021). Some research found that when visitors develop a strong commitment to a destination, facilitated by trust in the service providers and the quality of their experiences, it leads to higher levels of loyalty and advocacy (Molinillo, Japutra and Ekinici, 2022; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). This commitment is often cultivated through consistent, positive interactions that build trust over time, highlighting the crucial role of trust in forming and sustaining these relationships. In this context, the commitment-trust theory has not only shed light on the psychological underpinnings of visitor loyalty but also on strategies for destination marketing and management to foster long-term relationships with visitors (Almeida-Santana and-Gil, 2018). Aforementioned research emphasizes trust as a cornerstone of commitment in tourism, including its dimensions, determinants, and impacts on visitor behaviour and destination loyalty.

2.4.2 Trust

Trust, defined by Rotter (1967), refers to a broad expectation that an individual holds on the reliability of another person's word. Expanding on this concept, modern definitions frequently characterise trust as a readiness to rely on a business collaborator whom one has confidence in (Huang and Wilkinson, 2013). The literature on trust provides a clearer understanding of this idea by highlighting that the trusting party's confidence arises from a strong conviction in the confidence and integrity of the trusted party. These attributes, including consistency, competence, honesty, fairness, responsibility, helpfulness, and sensitivity, are all related with this idea and contribute to developing a sense of trustworthiness.

2.4.2.1 The Evolved Concept of Trust

In the tourism research domain, trust is characterized by visitors' perceptions of a destination's reliability and credibility, which are seen as pivotal to their travel decisions (Artigas et al., 2017; Marinao et al., 2012). Numerous important factors that influence travel decisions are driven by trust, including commitment, loyalty, repeat business, and visitor satisfaction (Eastlick, Lotz, and Warrington, 2006; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000; Su, Hsu, and Marshall, 2014). Attributes, including consistency, competence, honesty, fairness, responsibility, helpfulness, and sensitivity, are all related with this idea and contribute to developing a sense of trustworthiness (Han and Hyun, 2015). Visitors are prone to visit destinations they believe to be reliable and trustworthy (Han and Hyun, 2015; Roodurmun and Juwaheer, 2010). Over time, visitors can develop special connections with reliable destinations (Thomson, McInnis and Park, 2005).

Trust continues to evolve as a significant aspect within the field of marketing management. The increasing interest with relationship marketing has led to a focus on trust as an important factor in fostering long-lasting consumer connections (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Researchers contend that partnerships established on trust have a longer life span and also free both parties from the pressures of immediate transactions, enabling them to concentrate on long-term considerations. Barney and Hansen (1994) argue that trust in relationships allows business to reduce transaction costs associated with activities such as negotiation and management (Sohn, 1994). The tourism sector primarily consists of visitors, who are the consumers of services and products, and intermediaries such as tour operators, who facilitate the availability of these services and products to the visitors. This research examines the trust that visitors have in tour operators, suggesting that this trust significantly influences their willingness to interact with and visit destinations.

2.4.2.2 The Antecedents of Trust

Familiarity with a service provider builds trust, as it helps consumers form clear

expectations about future interactions drawing on their accumulated experience and knowledge of the provider and understand what to expect from the provider (Gefen, 2000). Familiarity with how business partners operate, and their limitations is a crucial factor in establishing trust in ongoing business relationships (Kumar, 1996). Besides, Structural assurance refers to the trust consumers place in the institutional environment, which includes legal protections, guarantees, and regulations that create a sense of security (McKnight, Choudhury, and Kacmar, 2002). Consumers are more likely to trust business services because they perceive the transactions as being conducted in a secure environment with minimized uncertainty (Wang, Waros and Chia-Hung, 2015). In the context of sustainable tourism, the significant impact of structural assurance indicates that an effective strategy to help visitors overcome their concerns and increase their confidence in the safety and sustainability of their experience is crucial. By establishing clear environmental protections, transparent regulations, and guarantees of responsible practices, destinations can enhance visitors' trust and promote sustainable tourism initiatives (Bushell and Bricker, 2017).

Furthermore, situational normality, refers to how typical or expected the situation appears to be, is another antecedent of trust (Gefen et al., 2003). Trust is generally developed when visitors 'experiences align with previous interaction, reinforcing predictability and reliability in the destination's sustainable practices. Conversely, if visitors encounter unexpected procedures or are asked for unusual information, it can lead to distrust in the destination's commitment to sustainability and the overall visitor experience (Wang, Waros and Chia-Hung, 2015). Moreover, calculative-based trust involves making rational evaluations of the costs and benefits within a relationship (Gefen et al., 2003; Shapiro, Sheppard, and Cheraskin, 1992). Specifically, trust is established when visitors perceive that the potential costs of a destination or provider engaging in unsustainable or opportunistic behaviour outweigh the benefits, thereby discouraging such actions. This calculation reinforces visitors' trust, as they believe it is in the best interest of the destination to adhere to sustainable practices.

2.4.2.3 Trust in Tourism Context

Trust in the marketing field is continuing to grow. Traditionally, research on loyalty in destinations for visitors has predominantly focused on analysing how destinations interact with visitors to foster long-lasting and beneficial relationships (Almeida-Santana and Sergio Moreno-Gil, 2018; Tchetchik, 2023). Destination competitiveness refers to a tourism destination's ability to attract potential visitors to its area and effectively meet their requirements and desires (Enright and Newton, 2004). According to Dawes, Romaniuk, and Mansfield (2009), tourism locations compete with one other to attract visitors and become their first choice for a specific trip or multiple journeys. Destinations that succeed in nurturing trust and loyalty in their visitors are better positioned to thrive in the competitive landscape of the tourism industry (Mariani et al., 2014). In the fierce arena of destination competition, the importance of trust is amplified. Trust is not merely a facilitator for initial visitation but is a crucial determinant in fostering visitor loyalty. This loyalty, which is deeply rooted in the trust that visitors develop towards a destination, is a key driver of their intention to return. It means that visitors will not only return but will also become advocates for the destination, sharing their positive experiences with others and thus contributing to the destination's reputation and perceived value.

Trust in a visitor destination can be described as a multifaceted concept, encompassing the qualities of honesty, benevolence, and competence in local residents and both public and private institutions (Marinao, Torres and Chasco, 2012). Trust in a destination has a significant impact on various aspects of individual behaviour, including attitudes, perception of risk, satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, attachment to a specific destination (Eastlick et al., 2006; Su, Hsu and Swanson, 2017). Building and strengthening the connection between visitors and a destination requires improving their experience through direct engagement with the destination's products and services (Kim et al., 2009). Higher perceived service quality leads to greater overall satisfaction with the destination and increased trust in its service providers (Su, Hsu, and Swanson,

2017). Consequently, heightened trust in destination service providers positively influences visitors' commitment to the destination, as demonstrated by supportive behaviours toward it (Loureiro and González, 2008).

2.4. The Consequence of Trust---Loyalty

Trust cultivates loyalty through consistent positive experiences, reliability of service, and the fulfilment of promises made to visitors (Zhang et al., 2014). An essential positive result of the tourism industry's behaviours is the development of customer loyalty and consumer engagement conduct (Tuan et al., 2019). Visitors expect their destination to be engaging, enjoyable, friendly, and exciting (Nicoletta and Servidio, 2012). They also plan to form a positive affective perception of the destination based on their emotional experiences there (Yuksel, Yuksel and Bilim, 2010). In other words, when visitors trust that a destination will deliver a valuable and enjoyable experience, they are more likely to develop an emotional attachment, leading to loyalty (Chen and Phou, 2013). Visitors' perceptions of trust during the travel interaction as a consequence of visitors' loyalty (Smith, Bolton and Wagner, 1999; Su, Hsu and Swanson, 2017). In summary, loyalty significantly impacts a tourism destination's success, as it is reflected in visitors' intentions to return and recommend the destination, while unfavorable behaviours can have adverse effects (Mohamad et al., 2011).

To create a positive perception among visitors, a destination must offer a well-balanced combination of public and private services (Gallouj and Savona, 2009). This entails ensuring the comfort and convenience of facilities like hotels and restaurants, maintaining a safe environment in terms of public order and transportation, and providing compelling and distinctive historic and cultural events and attractions, such as folklore and local customs (Hernández-Mogollón, Folgado-Fernández and Duarte, 2014; Kim, 2014). Particularly, to improve visitors' perceived levels of relationship quality, continuous monitoring and auditing of the dimensions that affect satisfaction

and trust are important (Su, Hsu and Swanson, 2017). Visitors can gain a sustained competitive advantage by establishing a service culture that is focused on the needs of visitors and is built on successful relationship marketing strategies.

Furthermore, the influence of trust on commitment can be seen not only as a psychological state but also as a strategic asset in relational exchanges. When parties in a relationship perceive high levels of trust, they are more likely to engage in behaviours that reinforce the relationship, such as sharing sensitive information, investing in joint initiatives, or making concessions during negotiations. This behaviour fosters a stronger, more resilient connection, which is especially important in long-term collaborations where the potential for risk and uncertainty is higher (Touboulic, Chicksand and Walker, 2014). In the present research, it has been demonstrated that cultivating loyal customers yields a number of advantages including lower marketing expenditures for attracting new clients, better client acquisition, improved customer retention, and higher profits and brand equity (Smit, Bronner and Tolboom, 2007; Su, Hsu and Swanson, 2017).

For the purpose of the study, we define trust as the belief that stakeholder (i.e., business and government) will fulfill their obligations in the relationship and specifically examine trust toward destination service providers in a tourism context (Hsu and Swanson, 2017). In tourism, destination loyalty includes favourable word-of-mouth recommendations and intentions to revisit the destination (Mohamad, Ali, and Ghani, 2011; Oppermann, 2000). Destination business organisations aims to develop and implement market-oriented strategies to enhance customer satisfaction and trust by prioritizing factors such as visitors' perception of service fairness, destination image, and service quality (Su, Hsu and Swanson, 2017). It is often acknowledged that fostering customer satisfaction is crucial to developing high-quality relationships (Huang, Huang, Hsu, and Chang, 2009). Therefore, visitors' overall destination satisfaction is both a more fundamental indicator of visitors' experience and a better predictor of visitors' behavioural intentions (Jiang and Rosenbloom, 2005).

Trust in a destination contributes to the formation of a positive image among visitors

during their visits but damage the destination in light of increasing visitors harassment incidents and cheating practices at some destinations (Chew and Jahari, 2014). Activities such as overpricing and unethical behaviour by tour guides can lead to trust crises (Chang, 2014). Given these challenges, understanding the impact of visitor trust on a destination's image is essential for effective tourism destination management (Liu et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there has been a limited emphasis on examining loyalty from the perspective of visitors and their relationships with destinations (Ullah et al., 2021). Therefore, the present research investigates both the direct and indirect impact of trust in visitors' pro-sustainable behaviours.

2.4.3 Commitment

Trust can make tourism destination more comfortable environments to which visitors are more likely to maintain a long-term commitment with tour-operators (Wang et al., 2020). Commitment is a crucial element for building enduring relationships and trust and satisfaction are the key determinants of commitment (Bricci, Fragata, and Antunes, 2016). Relationship commitment is characterized by one exchange partner considering a long-term relationship with another as highly significant, deserving of utmost efforts to sustain it. In essence, the committed party believes that the relationship is worth the continuous dedication and work (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Therefore, Relationship commitment has been usually defined and measured as affective commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

In the field of organisational commitment, three distinct components are commonly recognized: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment (Meyer et al., 2002). Affective commitment grows over time as a result of customers becoming accustomed to feeling comfortable about themselves, which increases relationship security (Casalo, Flavián and Guinalú, 2007; Roberts et al., 2003). When individuals have affective commitment to an organisation or brand, they feel a deep connection and enjoyment in their affiliation with it. This may even manifest as expressions of "love" for a destination or service provider, or a sense of being in a

friendship-like relationship with them (Fullerton, 2011). Affective commitment is rooted in psychological identification and attachment, playing a fundamental role in effective marketing relationships.

Continuance commitment relates to the extent to which a customer feels bound to a relational partner (Bansal et al., 2004). It originates from factors like dependence, switching costs, and side-bets (Fullerton, 2011). Consumers may often feel trapped, even when the organisation is trying to enhance the relationship's positive aspects. Continuance commitment comes into play when consumers perceive significant economic or psychological switching costs and few viable alternatives outside the existing relationship. In addition, normative commitment is defined as the extent to which a customer feels morally obligated to do business with a partner (Bansal et al., 2004). When individuals are normatively committed to an organisation, they believe that continuing involvement with that organisation is the morally right thing to do. This commitment can be built through the concept of reciprocity, where customers feel obliged to support organisations that align with their values and principles. Normative commitment can manifest as a moral duty or an indebted obligation. Therefore, it holds potential significance in shaping customer relationships through moral and ethical considerations (Fullerton, 2011).

Trust holds significant importance in relational exchanges as relationships as it fosters valued relationships, motivating parties to willingly invest in and commit to these relationships (Hrebiniak, 1974). Relationship is based on a visitor's perception of how well the entire relationship meets their expectations and goals, encompassing all interactions within that relationship. Commitment indicates a willingness to make short-term sacrifices to achieve longer-term benefits (Wong and Sohal, 2002). Given that commitment involves a level of vulnerability, parties naturally seek trustworthy partners (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). This concept is reinforced by the idea that trust is a fundamental factor influencing relationship commitment, as indicated by various scholars (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Wong and Sohal, 2002). In this research, tour-

operators develop relationships with its customers to enhance trust and commitment appears compelling on the surface (Wong and Sohal, 2002). This approach, when successful, leads to elevated trust and commitment levels among visitors, ultimately resulting in increased visitors' retention and, consequently, greater business profitability.

Visitors interact with other stakeholders, particularly, business and local government during destination favourable experience development. Relationships can be viewed as a sequence of interactions that gradually foster a sense of shared relationship, primarily achieved through trust and commitment, among various other contributing elements (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Therefore, long-term relationships between visitors and tour-operators facilitate high level of destination satisfaction. Without such close relationships, visitors may not find it relevant to make the effort to actively participate in sustainable development of tourism. Cooperation in tourism sustainability involves all stakeholders work together to achieve the mutual goal of creating destination satisfaction (Wang et al., 2020). Tour-operators aim to enhance their competitive advantage by fostering good tourism environments, while visitors seek to enhance their product/service experiences. Therefore, visitors proactively engage in destination satisfaction by interacting with tour-operators and local government.

2.4.4 The role of tour-operators in sustainable practices through their impact on visitors' trust

Tour operators play a crucial role as intermediaries between visitors and their diverse experiences. These companies or business offer a range of packages, experiences, and services to facilitate visitors' exploration. However, the tour operating market has witnessed fierce competition, raising concerns about destination sustainability (Cronjé and Plessis, 2020). The detrimental effects of mass tourism have prompted inquiries into how tour operators direct visitors towards different destinations. As tour operators prioritize profitability, there's a growing trend where increasing numbers of people

utilize their services to venture to new places and discover novel experiences. Being intermediaries in the supply chain several authors have highlighted the interest of tour operators in promoting environmental management in visitor destinations (e.g., Lozano, Arbulú and Rey-Maqueira, 2016; Ramesh, 2005; Romero and Tejada, 2011). Several studies (e.g., Font, Elgammal and Lamond, 2017; Font, English, Gkritzali and Tian, 2021) show that tour operators can play a significant role in employing sustainable practices in the tourism sector as mentioned by Font (2005).

In addition, tour operators are essential in visitors travel experience, creating specific packages and services that accommodate a diverse range of preferences and requirements (Liao and Chuang, 2020). Nevertheless, the intense rivalry within the tour operating industry, has resulted in heightened examination of the long-term sustainability of visitors' destinations. The pursuit of profitability frequently leads to negative consequences for the environment and local communities, which are further intensified by the increase in mass tourism supported by tour operators. This trend highlights the need for a balanced approach that takes into account both the economic benefits and the welfare of destinations.

Tour-operators are motivated to adopt an organisation commitment to sustainable development and to integrate the assessment of environmental, cultural, and social factors into the planning and implementation of their tours and entire business practices. Tepelus (2005) examines the dimensions of 'good practice' in the tour operating sector, with the goal of evaluating its thoroughness and effectiveness in promoting the sustainability of mass tourism. These sustainable practices have led to enhanced visitors' experiences, which in turn have boosted their repeat and referral business. The highlighted benefit in the aforementioned example is diverse, encompassing enhancements in environmental performance, strengthened partnerships with local authorities, preservation of local environments and cultures, improved service quality, and heightened visitor loyalty.

Tour operators' dedication to sustainable practices not only ensures the long-term

sustainability of tourism destinations but also meets the growing visitors need for responsible and sustainable travel choices. Prior research has shown that visitors' commitment is positively influenced by their perception of corporate social responsibility (CSR), namely through the brand's reputation (Alvarado-Herrera et al., 2019). An investigation conducted on managers of tourism units revealed that a strong commitment to CSR was a reliable predictor of active involvement in CSR activities. Drawing upon the literature on DSR, we propose that DSR initiatives have significantly impacted the social and environmental outcomes of tourism organizations (Anser et al., 2020). Therefore, tour operators play a crucial role in sustainable tourism by shaping the experiences of visitors and influencing the sustainability of destinations. However, government intervention and regulation are likely to be necessary, in order to establish efficient management systems for sustainable tourism (Bramwell and Lane, 2009).

2.4.5 The role of local government in sustainable practices through their impact on visitors' trust

Destinations aiming to encourage sustainable tourism are more likely to succeed with efficient governance (Bramwell, 2011). One challenge in managing sustainable tourism is that it involves various industries and policy areas, including planning, transportation, climate change, employment, and regional development (Bramwell, 2011). Governance involves a broad range of activities that emphasize the collaboration of governmental and non-governmental organisations. The concept encompasses different forms such as hierarchical government institutions, networks beyond government, and market-based procedures (Newman and Clarke, 2009). The emphasis is on the decision-making processes and power distribution within governance institutions, recognizing the significant power dynamics and how certain society groups may have greater influence on policymaking than others (Dredge and Jenkins, 2007). Bramwell (2011) demonstrate that government typically plays a significant role in governance, particularly in policymaking for sustainable development. Besides, individuals rely on the government

to enhance collaboration across numerous issues and policy domains related to sustainable tourism.

The government can significantly impact sustainability by offering incentives to motivate individuals to alter their behaviour or by enforcing specific activities through regulations (Bramwell, 2011). Incentives can be either direct or result from broader fiscal policies that impact the tourism sector indirectly. Without government engagement, achieving sustainable tourism goals may rely on voluntary initiatives or self-regulation, which may not be universally accepted by all parties involved. Additionally, Researchers argue that the government continues to hold significant power in modern governance, maintaining regulatory authority over numerous organisations and functions that might initially seem independent or beyond its control (Bramwell, 2010; Jessop, 2008). This influence is often exerted through indirect means, such as guiding the action priorities of newly formed agencies and partnerships, ensuring the state's objectives are subtly advanced. Relevant research within the political economy framework includes Bianchi's (2004) analysis of tourism planning politics as implemented by local government in Spain's Canary Islands. The materialist perspective emphasizes the government's crucial role in promoting capital accumulation and economic growth, as argued by Bevir (2009) and its effectiveness of maintaining its legitimacy, (Goodwin and Painter, 1996).

The role of the government in development has shifted from a focus solely on economics to encompass wider aspects like as socio-cultural impacts, political responsibilities, power relationships, and ecologic sensitivity (Kerr, Barron and Wood 2001). Governments at various levels have taken on more responsibility and engagement in planning and developing tourism destinations (Ruhanen, 2013). Studies on sustainable tourism often highlight the industry's potential for self-regulation, which encompasses non-governmental creation and enforcement of regulations, rules, or standards governing the behaviour of the industry, visitors, and communities (Bramwell and Lane, 2009). Governments have tended to adopt a more interventionist approach to

tourism relative to other service sectors. According to the existing literature by Roxas, Rivera and Gutierrez (2020) and Zielinski and Botero (2020), there is a research gap in terms of investigating the roles of local government in acting to develop and implement viable solutions to the various crisis and in governing tourism destinations to boost sustainable tourism. Therefore, this research explores the visitors' trust in local government regarding their regulatory and governance on sustainable tourism.

Yet over time, governments' involvement extended beyond economic concerns and revenue generation to address the physical and social ramifications of tourism activity. Initially this stemmed from an ardent interest in tourism's economic returns, and it was justified in terms of capitalising on the taxes paid by business and visitors and of the employment opportunities created (Middleton, 1974). To further stimulate the financial returns governments set about actively developing tourism-related infrastructure and services, and they committed considerable funds to the promotion of towns, regions and countries (Charlton and Essex, 2000; Laws, Scott and Parfitt, 2002). Therefore, government involvement in development, particularly in emerging economies, is primarily evident in tourism, where the government directly influences planning and promotion (Yang, Wall and Smith, 2008).

In most developing countries the government plays a crucial role in both fostering tourism and formulating legislation related to ethnicity (Yang, Wall and Smith, 2008). Governments are able to use ethnic image to promote tourism and design visitor strategies around the improvement of ethnic resources, traditions, and artefacts (Yang, Wall and Smith, 2008). For example, the local government determined the involvement of minority identities in marketing and development and controls the selection of images to improve a destination's attractiveness (Henderson, 2003). However, there is a growing concern regarding the efficacy of these policies in generating employment and wealth, promoting environmental preservation, and protecting cultural identities. Furthermore, there is concern that these policies could result in unforeseen negative consequences (Xie 2003).

The involvement and guidance of local government are critical in achieving sustainable development within tourism destinations, presenting both significant opportunities and complex challenges. Local and community levels are typically where the adverse effects of tourism are most intensely experienced, necessitating proactive governmental intervention to mitigate environmental harm and social disruptions (Aronsson, 2000). Local governments bear considerable responsibility in safeguarding against overt environmental degradation and ensuring that the negative impacts on host communities are minimised. Besides, local government unique position allows them to drive the sustainable tourism development agenda effectively, ensuring that growth is managed responsibly and in harmony with the needs and values of the community. Timothy (1998) argues that local governments, due to their intrinsic understanding of local dynamics, are more adept at fostering tourism development that aligns with regional cultures and conditions, compared to distant central administrations.

Local governments, which are typically made up of democratically elected bodies like councils and municipalities, play a crucial role in the management and development of tourism. They operate within a framework of laws and regulatory structures (Elliot, 1997; Ruhanen, 2013). Their active involvement in the tourism industry is based on their close proximity to, and deep understanding of, the complex nature of tourism development (Aronsson, 2000). Local governments have a unique advantage in aligning national priorities with local interests and coordinating urban and rural visitor efforts with wider national development objectives (Jenkins, 2001).

The primary responsibility for planning the essential requirements for visitor development lies with local authorities. They are authorised by legislation to create land-use regulations and regulate local development activities (Dredge and Jenkins, 2007; Dredge and Moore, 1992). Their extensive understanding of the local environment gives them an edge over central institutions, allowing them to adopt a sophisticated approach to visitor management that takes into consideration the unique requirements and features of the region (Timothy, 1998). Hence, the achievement of

sustainable visitor development is inherently connected to the proactive engagement of local governments. Their ability to execute comprehensive planning and regulatory policies is essential for guiding tourism towards sustainability (Ruhanen, 2013). Without local government direct engagement and authoritative planning, efforts to achieve sustainable tourism objectives may be significantly hindered. Given these capabilities and insights, local government is often viewed as the most appropriate authority to spearhead sustainable tourism initiatives at the local level (Bramwell, 2011; Hall, 2007).

However, local governments encounter many challenges in achieving sustainable tourism. Local governments are responsible for representing the interests of the local community in a fair and unbiased manner (Ruhanen, 2013). It is possible that local government do not consistently advocate for democracy, operate in the most advantageous manner for society, and advance the goals of sustainable tourism (Bramwell, 2011). Ruhanen (2013) discovered that an overbearing presence of local government in the development of tourism inhibits the achievement of sustainable tourism. Governments have faced criticism for their short-term implementation of tourism policies and their lack of overall direction and coordination (Liu et al., 2020; Madrigal, 1995). Additionally, they have been blamed of passively involving communities in tourism development (Godfrey, 1998). Governments have been discovered to participate in corrupt activities in the development and planning of tourism (Nunkoo, 2015). Corrupt practices in tourism development can involve awarding contracts to favored companies without a fair bidding process, accepting bribes to approve environmentally harmful projects, or misappropriating funds intended for community development and conservation (e.g., Mekinc, Kociper and Dobovšek, 2013; Nomishan, Tubi and Gubam, 2023). These actions erode public trust and have lasting negative effects on the environment and local communities. Also, such activities provide a risk to the legitimacy of government institutions, leading to political and social instability. According to Bramwell (2011), researchers have noticed a decrease in public trust in government regarding the development of tourism. Given China's

national conditions and the government's influence, this study also needs to evaluate the power of the Chinese government to see whether the government or business hold more decisive power in the development of sustainable tourism.

2.4.6 Government Power

Governments at all levels have increasingly taken on more responsibility and involvement in the planning and development of tourism destinations (Ruhanen, 2012). Initially, the involvement of government was motivated by the economic benefits of tourism, such as tax revenue and job creation. Then, governments have increasingly adopted an interventionist role in tourism, extending their involvement beyond economic concerns to address the physical and social impacts of tourism (Ruhanen, 2012). As negative effects and anti-tourism sentiments grew in some destinations, governments began implementing planning efforts to control tourism development and mitigate adverse socio-economic and environmental consequences (Bramwell, 2011).

Local government actions play a crucial role in preventing environmental degradation and minimizing negative impacts on the host community (Ruhanen, 2012). As elected representatives, local governments have a mandate to protect and promote the interests of the broader destination community. In most countries, local governments consist of democratically elected bodies, such as councils and municipalities, supported by laws and regulations that enable their operation (Church, 2004). In tourism destinations, local governments can wield their power to coordinate stakeholders, mediate disputes, and prevent potential conflicts, ensuring a more harmonious and sustainable development process (Beritelli and Laesser, 2011).

In the Chinese tourism industry, the economic output generated by visitor attractions is significant and keep growing by China visitor attraction. (Wu, 2011). Local governments frequently use cultural and natural assets as drivers for regional economic development, particularly in many of China's less developed regions (Wang and Xu

2014). The fact that many of these high-quality natural or cultural resources are recognized as national or international heritage sites, combined with a growing awareness of environmental concern, highlights the critical need to find a balance between utilizing these resources for regional development and their conservation (Wang and Xu, 2014). For example, while tourism attractions like national parks can indeed offer economic benefits and funding for environmental preservation (Bultjens et al., 2005), these advantages are only realized if there is a successful diversion of business and multiplier effects from the attractions, and when the governance system managing the natural and/or cultural resources is efficient (Wang and Xu, 2014).

In recent years, tourism development has emerged as a top economic focus for the Central Government and officials across various administrative levels (Huang et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2009; Zhong et al., 2008). During the early stages of tourism development, government institutions assumed various roles, such as establishing, owning, regulating, managing, and operating attractions, due to the substantial risks involved in private sector involvement in the development of national cultural and natural resources (Wang and Xu, 2014). Research in China suggests the government may offer supportive assistance or net positive effects, including political or financial resources (Tian and Estrin, 2008; Le and Buck, 2011). While in as tourism growth moves into its late stages, the limitations of financial constraints, declining service quality, and environmental damage become evident (Wei, 2009).

In other words, government can successfully leverage all available resources for the development of tourism attractions, such as securing government financial support for infrastructure, obtaining permits for business activities within parks, and negotiating community agreements (Wang and Xu, 2014). In addition to direct support from government, indirect support involves improving the accessibility of visitor destinations through visitor-focused macroeconomic infrastructure, enhancing efforts in natural restoration and rehabilitation through forest conservation, assisting in marketing, and other related activities (Bramwell, 2011). Whereas local governments

tend to prefer strategies that align with their own goals, which leads to a reluctance in implementing significant reforms for these attractions, when there are great shortcomings. Particularly, local governments monitor these companies to guarantee the conservation of natural or cultural resources, as companies manage the operations of attractions (Huang et al., 2008).

The primary responsibility for planning the essential requirements for visitor development lies with local authorities. They are authorised by legislation to create land-use regulations and regulate local development activities (Dredge and Jenkins, 2007; Dredge and Moore, 1992). Their extensive understanding of the local environment gives them an edge over central institutions, allowing them to adopt a sophisticated approach to visitor management that takes into consideration the unique requirements and features of the region (Timothy, 1998). Hence, the achievement of sustainable visitor development is inherently connected to the proactive engagement of local governments. Their ability to execute comprehensive planning and regulatory policies is essential for guiding tourism towards sustainability (Ruhanen, 2013). Besides, local governments can enforce a strict conservation management model for attractions, minimizing the exploitation of natural and/or cultural resources without hindering the financial and economic potential for business growth (Wang and Xu, 2014). This strategy enables the achievement of both conservation and sustainable development objectives. Without local government direct engagement and authoritative planning, efforts to achieve sustainable tourism objectives may be significantly hindered. Given these capabilities and insights, local government is often viewed as the most appropriate authority to spearhead sustainable tourism initiatives at the local level (Bramwell, 2011; Hall, 2007). In brief, governments, as the authoritative body with legislative power, have the legitimacy and ability to bring together various stakeholders to mitigate negative effects and create favourable conditions for development (Bramwell, 2011; Ruhanen, 2013).

However, local governments encounter many challenges in obtaining sustainable

tourism. Government involvement in tourism can vary greatly, ranging from intentional legislative control to benign neglect (Choy, 1993). Further, concerns have been raised about how effective governments have been in integrating sustainability principles and practices within tourism planning policies and processes (Connell, Page and Bentley, 2009). Specifically, excessive influence by local governments in tourism development can hinder sustainable tourism efforts (Ruhanen, 2013). Governments have also faced criticism for adopting short-term, uncoordinated tourism policies and for involving communities in tourism development only in a limited, passive manner (Nunkoo, 2015). From a business perspective, government authority inevitably results in governmental participation in business governance decisions (Ang and Ding, 2006; Cao, Yang, and Sun, 2007), influencing the performance of companies. Liu and Chen (2012) examined how government control rights affect the performance of tourism business. They determined that reducing the proportion of local government ownership and focusing on the balance of power will enhance the performance of listed tourism companies.

Local governments are responsible for representing the interests of the local community in a fair and unbiased manner (Ruhanen, 2013). However, it is possible that they do not consistently advocate for democracy, operate in the most advantageous manner for society, and advance the goals of sustainable tourism (Bramwell, 2011). Ruhanen (2013) discovered that an overbearing presence of local government in the development of tourism inhibits the achievement of sustainable tourism. Governments have faced criticism for their short-term implementation of tourism policies and their lack of overall direction and coordination (Madrigal, 1995). Additionally, they have been blamed of passively involving communities in tourism development (Godfrey, 1998). Governments have been discovered to participate in corrupt activities in the development and planning of tourism, as evidenced by de Araujo and Bramwell (1999) and Morah (1996). These provide a risk to the legitimacy of government institutions, leading to political and social instability. According to Bramwell (2011), researchers have noticed a decrease in public trust in government regarding the development of tourism. Above all, there are numerous plausible reasons why the state frequently has

a significant impact on governance.

In practice, tourism is always a mix of government and private operations. Although the general trend today is less government and more industry self-regulation, this paper notes that it is difficult, if not impossible at present, for the Chinese government to disengage from developing red tourism since it is not merely an economic, social, or cultural activity (Zhao and Timothy, 2015). Chinese government in red tourism serves as a coordinator, marketer, educator, investor, and regulator, according to Hu (2010).

While research continues to grow that is focused on the roles of, and collaboration between, various stakeholders in sustainable tourism development (Matarrita-Cascante, Brennan and Luloff, 2010; Wray, 2009), these studies have tended only inadvertently to address the role of local government. Because governments increasingly undertake the entrepreneurial role, including but not limited to formulating policy frameworks, initiating and developing plans, and operating and providing tourism and hospitality services (Zhao and Timothy, 2015). Even if the government may not promote democracy, effective policymaking, fair outcomes, or the sustainability goals, the governance role of government cannot be neglected.

While research continues to grow that is focused on the roles of, and collaboration between, various stakeholders in sustainable tourism development (Matarrita-Cascante, Brennan and Luloff, 2010; Wray, 2009). There has been limited research on the roles, synergy, and co-responsibilities of tourism stakeholders. Moreover, there has been no clear explanation on what can be achieved when specific stakeholders bind together and leverage their respective collaborative advantages (Roxas, Rivera and Gutierrez, 2020). This research will focus on comparing the role of visitors' trust in tour-operator and local government in sustainable tourism.

2.5 Pro-sustainable behaviour in tourism

Pro-environmental behaviour is defined as actions that consciously aim to lessen the harmful effects of individual activities on the environment, highlighting the importance of personal responsibility in mitigating environmental damage (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002; Tian and Liu, 2022). This concept has evolved to not only encompass actions that reduce harm but also those that may positively benefit the environment, focusing on enhancing environmental conditions by addressing issues like greenhouse gas emissions and resource depletion (Steg and Vlek, 2009; Tian and Liu, 2022). Besides, pro-environmental behaviour, as defined by Steg et al. (2014), encompasses actions aimed at enhancing the environment's quality and contributing to sustainable development in a destination. Moreover, from a sustainability viewpoint, such behaviours are seen as crucial for bolstering environmental sustainability (Mesmer-Magnus, Viswesvaran and Wiernik, 2012). Overall, the paper posits that pro-environmental behaviour involves deliberate efforts to safeguard and foster the environment's sustainability.

Pro-environmental behaviour is also referred to in the literature under a variety of alternative terms, including “ecological behaviour”, “environmental behaviour”, “environmental action”, “responsible environmental behaviour”, “ecological responsible behaviour”, “conservation behaviour”, “environmentally responsible behaviour”, “environmentally significant behaviour”, “pro-ecological behaviour”, “environmentally conscious behaviour”, “environmentally friendly behaviour”, “sustainable behaviour”, “eco-friendly behaviour”, and “green behaviour”. In line with the approach taken by Tian and Liu (2022), which does not explicitly differentiate between these terms and encompasses all relevant research within its purview, the present study employs all relevant literature relating to various pro-sustainable behaviour terms. Because numerous of these concepts are linked to comparable particular actions, such as the reduction of resource consumption, and are impacted by

comparable elements, such as personal values, they are frequently examined within the context of theoretical frameworks, such as the theory of planned behaviour (Dilchert and Ones, 2012).

2.5.1 The Concept of Pro-sustainable behaviours

The concept of pro-sustainable behaviour is multifaceted, but there is a lack of empirical research that examines it as a three-dimensional model, which includes willingness to make sacrifices, engagement in eco-friendly actions, and a focus on localism (Landon et al., 2018). Therefore, this study aims to thoroughly investigate pro-sustainable behaviour. An all-encompassing theoretical framework is crucial for expanding understanding of the factors that influence sustainable tourism behaviour and devising effective ways to encourage it. Pro-sustainable behaviour refers to behaviours that actively decrease the negative effects on the environment (eco-behaviour), a desire to support and use goods and services that are produced locally (localism), and a readiness to accept higher expenses (willingness to sacrifice) or longer travel durations for goods and services that demonstrate a dedication to sustainability (e.g., Han, 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2023). As a consequence, the investigation into visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour has become a significant focus within the field of environmental research, as highlighted by Su and Swanson (2017).

The study of pro-sustainable behaviour in nature-based tourism, specifically in wetland destinations, is an important field that connects environmental conservation with the expansion of the tourism industry. Nature-based tourism appeals to visitors who are interested in firsthand encounters with pristine natural environments, such as wetlands, which are renowned for their exceptional productivity and rich biodiversity. These regions provide distinct prospects for visitors to actively participate in environmental preservation while simultaneously appreciating the cultural and ecological assets that distinguish these destinations as exceptional tourism locations (Kim et al., 2018; Linnes et al., 2022).

Visitors' increasing awareness of environmental issues has resulted in an increasing focus on promoting sustainable behaviour in the context of nature-based tourism. Contemporary visitors are increasingly aware of their environmental influence and are embracing practices that reduce their environmental influences. This include the selection of environmentally sustainable accommodations, active involvement in conservation initiatives, and providing financial support for the protection of natural resources (Thapa, 2010). Nevertheless, existing literature reveals a lack of comprehension of the impact of visitor trust and views of a destination's social responsibility on their adoption of sustainable behaviours in nature-based tourism contexts.

2.5.2 The Dimensions of Pro-Sustainable Behaviour

The sustainable tourism literature has long been dedicated to comprehending and anticipating the environmentally impactful actions of visitors, as evidenced by various studies (Higham and Carr, 2002; Miller, Merrilees and Coghlan, 2015). There is a continuous effort in sustainable tourism research to understand visitors' environmental actions, including their attitudes and the factors motivating pro-environmental behaviours. Besides, the ability of visitors to demonstrate proactive conduct towards sustainable tourism by applying their knowledge and experience of the impact of tourism on the environment, play crucial role in sustainable tourism (Lopez-Sánchez and Pulido-Fernández, 2016). Pro-environmental behaviour involves actions that benefit the environment and support sustainable destination development (Lee et al., 2021). It is influenced by factors like self-identity, personal values, altruistic values, environmental knowledge, and different motivations, both egoistic and altruistic.

Primarily, a significant portion of the research has primarily concentrated on the environmental consequences, disregarding the crucial aspect of evaluating the economic and social effects on local communities and economies (Boley and Nickerson, 2013; Lee, Jan and Liu, 2021). In a significant development within this area, Davis,

Green and Reed (2009) introduced the concept of environmental commitment, leveraging Rusbult's (1980) framework on relational commitment. This construct has been shown to be a powerful predictor of pro-sustainable behaviours, linking the willingness of individuals to prioritise the environment over personal gain (Coy et al., 2013; Davis, Le, and Coy, 2011). This also suggests that the depth of an individual's commitment to environmental principles can significantly influence their sustainable actions, underscoring the importance of nurturing such commitment to foster pro-environmental behaviours (Shukla et al., 2016). In light of this, examining the role of trust in conjunction with relationship commitment offers a more nuanced understanding of visitor behaviour. It is not only the emotional and cognitive attitudes of visitors that drive sustainable practices but also their trust in the destination's ability to manage and mitigate negative impacts effectively. However, few studies have examined relationship commitment and visitors' trust in the tourism literature, particularly when a destination declines. Therefore, this research fills the gap by investigating engagement in ethical consumption requires the trust and commitment of stakeholders, mainly government and business, particularly when an ecosystem is in decline. Furthermore, separating government from business activities in these visitor destinations is one strategy that has been used recently to boost business profitability and better preserve the region's cultural and natural resources (Wang and Xu, 2014). Moreover, prior studies on pro-environmental actions within tourism have often lacked a systematic approach to pinpoint the factors affecting behaviours (Ateş, 2020; Stern and Dietz, 1994). This limitation hampers their ability to fully elucidate behaviours driven by altruistic values, beliefs, and personal norms.

Visitors who actively promote and engage in sustainable tourism practices are highly aware of the potential impacts their actions can have on a destination, motivating them to protect and preserve it (López-Sánchez and Pulido-Fernández, 2016). In other words, visitors are increasingly conscious of their environmental impacts and are adjusting their travel behaviour in response. Visitors' pro-sustainable behavioural intentions by

considering various dimensions. These dimensions encompassed willingness to make sacrifices for sustainable tourism, the intention to purchase and utilize locally sourced products, and eco-friendly behaviours while on a travel (Landon et al., 2018). In an effort to expand on the topic of pro-sustainable behaviour, this study investigates the multifaceted aspects of visitors' intentions and actions in favour of sustainability. Visitors are more willing to purchase eco-friendly products and have higher expectations for environmentally conscious workplaces (Lee, Lee and Yoo, 2020). They tend to advocate for green products among their peers and support the use of recycled materials (Smith et al., 2014)

Additionally, as highlighted by Darnall, Ponting, and Vazquez-Brust (2012), sustainable consumption is viewed as a viable business opportunity. Recent studies have underscored the substantial potential of "sustainable" visitors in various tourism-related sectors such as hotels, restaurants, and transportation companies. These studies have not only emphasized the profitability of visitors who exhibit sustainable behaviours but have also demonstrated the positive impact of sustainability on different types of companies within the tourism industry.

Drawing from a range of theoretical perspectives including the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Protection Motivation Theory, Norm Activation Theory, and Place Attachment Theory, extensive research has been conducted to identify the drivers behind environmentally responsible actions. These drivers encompass a broad spectrum of influences, such as environmental attitudes (Cottrell, 2003), emotional responses (Han and Hwang, 2017; Su and Swanson, 2017), knowledge about environmental issues (Cheng and Wu, 2015; Cottrell, 2003), perceived social norm (Han, Hsu, and Sheu, 2010), concern for ecological well-being (Kang et al., 2012), awareness of environmental impacts (Han and Yoon, 2015), and both ascribed and personal norms related to pro-sustainable behaviour (Han and Hwang, 2017; Landon, Woosnam and Boley, 2018).

Sustainable development of a tourism destination relies on business practicing ethical

behaviour and visitors behaving in environmentally responsible ways (Huang and Swanson, 2017). Trust and commitment are critical components in achieving DSR and sustainable development. Trust is vital for building positive relationships among stakeholders (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), while commitment ensures the long-term dedication to sustainable practices (Meyer et al., 2002). Furthermore, pro-sustainable behaviour among visitors is influenced by their awareness of environmental impacts (López-Sánchez and Pulido-Fernández, 2016). This study explores the interplay between DSR, sustainable development, trust, commitment, and pro-sustainable behaviour, underscoring the need for comprehensive strategies to promote responsible tourism and ensure the long-term well-being of destinations. This comprehensive approach aligns with the growing awareness among visitors of their impact on the environment and their desire to make responsible choices (Dolnicar, 2010). As a result, visitors are increasingly seeking destinations and service providers that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability (Landon et al., 2018).

Recent research over the last twenty years has demonstrated that visitors place significant importance on environmental matters as part of their social concerns. This trend has garnered considerable attention from both tourism organisations and academia (Kim and Thapa, 2018). Visitors that are environmentally concerned exhibit responsible conduct by deliberately selecting destinations that prioritise sustainability. Besides, exiting research in the field of tourism has established that the psychological factors of consumers, such as their values, beliefs, and attitudes, play a crucial role in predicting ecologically responsible behaviours. This has been demonstrated in studies conducted by Han (2015), Kiatkawsin and Han (2017), and Landon et al. (2018). An individual's inclination to participate in environmentally conscious actions is determined by personal values, which subsequently impact their perception of the consequences of their actions and result in pro-environmental behaviours.

Destination marketers are tasked with developing and maintaining a distinct and engaging market to adapt to the ever-changing broader macro environment. As such,

destinations and their marketing strategies have become a focal point in tourism studies, increasingly regarded as the essential subject of analysis. This is because the majority of tourism activities take place at destinations, underscoring their importance in the field (Wang et al., 2022).

2.6 Destination decline

The concept of destination decline is crucial in sustainable tourism literature as it encompasses the broader context in which sustainability initiatives operate (Benner, 2020; Blázquez-Salom, Cladera and Sard, 2023; Ruhanen et al., 2015). Sustainable tourism aims to balance environmental conservation, socio-cultural responsibility, and economic viability (Bakhsh Baloch et al., 2023). The perceived decline of a destination, encompassing environmental degradation, cultural erosion, or economic downturn, serves as a vital indicator of the overall success of sustainable tourism, specifically, as a crucial contextual factor influencing visitors' perceptions of the destination tour operators' and government's commitment to social responsibility (Benner, 2020). Besides, it reflects the tangible outcomes and effectiveness of sustainable practices, shaping visitors' perceptions and experiences (Wang, Wu, Wu and Peal, 2018). Visitors' perceptions of decline can influence their behaviour for sustainability and trust in stakeholders, including tour operators and destination government (Frey and George, 2010). This understanding emphasizes the need to address not only explicit sustainability initiatives but also the overall health and resilience of the destination. In other words, destination decline acts as a barometer for the sustainability of tourism practices, prompting a comprehensive evaluation of the industry's contributions to the well-being of destinations.

The phenomenon of destination decline often finds its roots in the broader issue of regional decline. Infrastructure and social overhead capital will be destroyed or insufficiently utilised, leading to a decrease in the locally tax base (Breinlich, Ottaviano and Temple, 2014). Consequently, regions experiencing decline are prone to transforming into areas characterised by poor trust and high crime rates. This change

impacts the socio-economic structure of these regions and presents substantial obstacles for local government and community harmony. The decrease in trust and increase in crime worsen the challenges experienced by these regions, hindering the ability to attract in new investments or projects that would help to counteract the negative trends. Overall, region declines, indicated by economic downturns, industrial transitions, and demographic issues, can lead to a significant decrease in the vitality and attractiveness of destinations in those locations.

A large number of scholars focus on regional decline, characterized by a gradual decrease in a region's economic activity, productivity, and living standards (e.g., Hatori, Shirayanagi, Matsumura, 2023). This phenomenon may be instigated by diverse factors, such as variations in crime rates, social norms, and political beliefs, as well as externalities that yield inefficient and undesirable consequences. Investigating regional decline is crucial to understand the underlying mechanisms which can drive regional growth and to formulate efficacious regional policies (Breinlich et al., 2014; Hatori et al., 2023). The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) constitutes a theoretical framework, initially posited by Richard Butler in 1980, delineating the temporal progression of a tourism destination. This model postulates a sequence of phases through which tourism destinations traverse, encompassing exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and decline (Butler, 1980). The TALC model is widely used in tourism research and management to help understand the dynamics of tourism destinations and develop strategies for sustainable tourism development (Diedrich and García-Buades, 2009; Kruczek et al., 2018).

Once a region begins to decline, it can enter a cycle in which drawbacks accumulate, posing challenges to its rehabilitation (Breinlich, Ottaviano and Temple, 2014). Anticipating a decline in a region could potentially lead to that decline taking place, emphasising the importance of addressing regional issues with a dynamic approach. Policy makers will need to consider a region's level of diversification to determine its resilience to unexpected events, as prevention is more effective than

dealing with consequences. In response to regional decline, it is necessary to implement holistic solutions that tackle economic, social, and infrastructural obstacles simultaneously, with the goal of restoring trust in the region's opportunities for citizens, visitors, and investors (Shayan et al., 2022). It requires the revitalization of physical infrastructure, as well as the promotion of social cohesiveness and economic renewal. Addressing this decline requires collaboration between local governments, business, and other possible parties, all striving towards a common goal of revitalization and expansion.

Tourism provides substantial economic and cultural benefits, but its long-term success depends on a well-planned and proficient growth strategy. Destinations can successfully manage the challenges of the tourism lifecycle by foreseeing potential decline and planning for sustainable growth, aiming for a future where tourism enhances a resilient and thriving community (Diedrich and García-Buades, 2008). Prior research demonstrated that visitors' effects to the level of development, indicating that favourable opinions are typically found in less developed destinations (Belisle and Hoy, 1980). Generally, during the latter stages of development, characterized by swift and sometimes uncontrolled changes, the negative impacts of tourism can outweigh the positive ones, leading to a decline in the destination's attractiveness within the tourism market (Diedrich and García-Buades, 2008). Therefore, when an economy relies heavily on tourism, a decline in this industry can have severe consequences. Coccossis (2002) defines sustainability as the maximum capacity of tourism destinations, which becomes unsustainable when surpassed.

Manente and Pechlaner (2006) suggests that a declining destination should be regarded as a destination with a long tradition in tourism but currently experiencing adverse trends. Koens et al. (2018) identifies several issues in popular visitor destinations, such as overcrowding in public locations, disruptive behaviour by visitors. Besides, Environmental issues are important, with pollution and growing pressure on waste

disposal and water resources creating challenges for impacted regions (Benner, 2019; González-Pérez, 2020; Panayiotopoulos and Pisano, 2019). Furthermore, online leasing of apartments has increased pressure on the housing market, making housing less affordable for residents (Diedrich and García-Buades, 2008). The economic impact also affects the reduced purchasing power of the local people. If local people view tourism negatively, it might impact their behaviour towards visitors and ultimately affect the visitors' experience negatively (Diedrich and García-Buades, 2008). If visitors feel unwelcome or threatened by the local population, they are unlikely to return and may dissuade others from visiting. This, along with the negative reputation that a destination would inevitably attract, would lead to a decrease in visitors.

In addition, overtourism scenario as the consequences of tourism development exceeding a destination's carrying capacity will lead to destination decline (Benner, 2020). The unresolved question of how the decline of tourism, either through actual decreases or perceptions of overtourism, influences pro-sustainable behaviours remains critical, given the extensive ecological, social, and cultural impacts. In the context of ecotourism, very limited studies have been developed on the impact of destination decline on visitors' trust. Furthermore, there's a lack of in-depth exploration on how this decline interplays with DSR and visitors' perceptions, particularly when considering both the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) and regional decline together.

Without external interventions, an over-tourism destination may disappear. For instance, a decline in demand or a rise in costs may prompt a contraction of a destination's tourism sector. Alternatively, a destination may opt to downgrade its tourism offerings by providing inferior-quality services or attractions (Benner, 2020). Dislocation can occur when visitors avoid certain areas of a destination because of overcrowding or other negative influences. Eventually, a destination may disappear when the detrimental effects of over-tourism escalate to such an extent that visitors no longer express interest in visiting (Cheung and Li, 2019). Overall, when visitors observe a deterioration in the destination's appeal, they may attribute this decline to a lack of

effective social responsibility measures.

Destinations deeply committed to socially responsible practices might still find their efforts overshadowed by the negative perceptions of decline, which can weaken the link between DSR and visitors' trust in tour operators, as highlighted by Su and Swan (2017). This scenario underlines a pivotal challenge: even with active engagement in social responsibility, the perceived deterioration of a destination could lead to diminished trust among visitors. Blazek, Kveton, Baumgartinger-Seiringer, and Trippl (2019) further elucidate that without external interventions, such as policy changes, destinations are likely on a path to decline, underscoring the importance of exogenous efforts in reversing or mitigating this trend. The observation of decline by visitors often translates into a critique of the adequacy of government and policy-driven sustainability measures, diluting the positive effects of DSR on building trust. This nexus between social responsibility, perceived decline, and trust dynamics presents a complex landscape for destination management. Empirical studies in this field could unveil valuable strategies for effectively managing these relationships, enhancing the framework for sustainable tourism development in a landscape that continuously evolves.

This study distinguishes itself by emphasising the pivotal significance of human emotions in CSR efforts, a perspective that has not been extensively explored in previous studies. Prior studies have examined how emotions impact behaviour using a behavioural approach (Patwardhan et al. 2020; Guo et al. 2020). For example, Agost and Vergara (2014) demonstrated that individual's personal values significantly influence their emotional responses when assessing a brand or product. Whereas most research on CSR has typically focused on rational models to understand customer behaviour (Skawińska 2019; Boccia et al. 2019). Nonetheless, CSR researchers have recently criticised logical models for their inability to completely comprehend the complexities of human behaviour. As a result, there is now a movement towards embracing emotional models as a more suitable approach (Kraus et al. 2022; Xie et al. 2019). The research gap motivates the research to focus on the relationship between

consumer emotions and behaviour aimed at benefiting the environment, particularly pro-sustainable behaviour among visitors. This is why the research investigates the impacts on pro-sustainable behaviour by combining both destination-and individual-level factors.

2.7 Norm activation theory

Initially conceptualized by Schwartz in the early 1970s to explain altruistic behaviour, Norm Activation Theory has since been expanded to address the environmental duties of individuals. Originally intended to explain altruistic or prosocial behaviour, Norm Activation Theory is today recognised as a suitable paradigm for comprehending visitors' ecologically responsible behaviour (Gao et al., 2016; Schwartz, 1973). Bronfman et al. (2015) indicates that pro-environmental behaviour can be encouraged by factors such as personal values, adherence to the new ecological paradigm, awareness of consequences, assignment of responsibility, and personal norms. Norm Activation Theory proposes that altruistic behaviour derives from a moral commitment to protect a valued item from damage (Landon, Woosnam, and Boley, 2018). The Personal Norm (PN) is the central component of norm activation theory and is activated by two factors: Awareness of Consequences (AC) and Ascription of Responsibility (AR). This extension is pivotal, given the current global emphasis on sustainable practices. Overall, awareness of negative environmental consequences influences the ascription of responsibility (i.e., a sense of being responsible for the negative impact of not performing pro-sustainable behaviour), which then activates personal norms defined as a sense of moral commitment and obligation to avoid harmful behaviours according to various studies (Han, 2015; Lind et al., 2015; Hiratsuka et al., 2018). Personal norms are the primary and direct predictor of intents or behaviours in this sequence (Klockner, 2013; Lind et al., 2015; Hiratsuka et al., 2018; Karimi, 2019).

2.7.1 Awareness of Negative Environmental Consequence

Most people still believe that the economy is primarily concerned with the production

and consumption of physical products, despite the fact that researchers have demonstrated that humans consume products and services faster than the natural ecosystem can regenerate, process, or recycle (e.g., Rees, 2020; Wackernagel et al., 2002). The NAM model emphasises the importance of awareness of the negative consequence for others or for items one values when not acting prosocially (De Groot and Steg, 2009). Awareness of Consequences (AC) refers to an individual's recognition of the adverse impacts their inaction may have on others or things they value (Groot and Steg, 2009). The factors influencing people's intentions to engage in environmentally friendly actions are rooted in their understanding of the negative impacts of environmental issues (André et al., 2008). Vainio and Paloniemi (2014) define environmental concern as stemming from one's value orientation towards nature environment, concern for the environment's future, and the perception of human progress as damaging to the environment. Franzen and Meyer (2010) characterize it as an individual's awareness of environmental concerns due to pollution or excessive resource consumption.

Awareness of consequences is even seen as a part of a broader concept, which is environmental concern (Gkargkavouzi, Halkos, Matsiori, 2018). Saari et al., (2021) investigate the factors influencing sustainable consumption behaviour from the micro-level perspective of individuals' environmental concern, which is affected by environmental knowledge and risk perception (Marquart-Pyatt, 2015; Vainio and Paloniemi, 2014). Environmental concern is commonly linked to behaviours such as sustainable consumption (Fraj-Andrés and Martínez-Salinas, 2007; Wakefield et al., 2006), a willingness to pay more for sustainable products (Meyer and Liebe, 2010), and consumption behaviours of energy use (Sapci and Considine, 2014). Lin and Huang (2012), Tseng and Hung (2013), and Sapci and Considine (2014) have shown that people with a high level of environmental concern are more inclined to engage in activities such as recycling, buying green products, and reducing energy use. This behaviour stems from a willingness among these environmentally conscious consumers to adopt more eco-friendly practices as a means to contribute to environmental

protection.

Besides, Environmental concern is influenced by awareness of environmental issues (Franzen and Meyer, 2010; Marquart-Pyatt, 2018). Access to detailed information about these issues tends to increase concern for the environment (Marquart-Pyatt, 2008). Kochan et al. (2016) defines awareness of consequences as a person's understanding of the environmental impacts resulting from their actions. Individuals with greater awareness are more inclined to behave in a socially beneficial manner (Sajid et al., 2022). Conversely, those with less awareness may not act as pro-socially, believing environmental issues will resolve on their own (Banerjee and McKeage, 1994). To encourage individuals to behave in a pro-environmental behaviour, an awareness of negative environmental consequences must induce an ascribed responsibility to perform the behaviours that in turn activates a personal norm to perform the behaviours. The significant impact of social and personal norms on pro-environmental actions (Kaiser, Hübner, and Bogner, 2005).

The NAT proposes that altruistic behaviour arises from an individual's awareness of the social harm resulting from not participating in a specific behaviour and their willingness to take responsibility for performing behaviour (Ryan and Spash, 2012). When individuals are aware of the consequences and accept responsibility, they are more inclined to sense a moral obligation to act. Stern et al. (1993) assume that the belief in negative consequences leads to action, which highlights that the perceived costs and benefits of an environmental action, as related to various valued entities and weighted by an individual's value orientations, shape their intention to behave in certain ways (Torrejos and Israel, 2022). Awareness of environmental issues is considered crucial for promoting pro-environmental behaviour, as emphasised by Eom et al. (2016), and Tam and Chan (2018). Awareness of environmental issues might motivate individuals to embrace environmentally friendly behaviours in order to mitigate these challenges (Liobikienė, and Juknys, 2016). However, there may be a gap between perceiving environmental concerns and actually doing something about them, as some

people believe that technology by itself will solve these issues (van der Werff et al., 2013; Gössling et al., 2009). This emphasises for awareness about how one's actions and the acceptance of personal responsibility affect environmental conservation.

Monterrubio (2016) and Liang and Hui (2016), have further developed the discussion on the negative consequences of tourism, such as congestion, pollution, and cultural dilution. The impact of tourism on the environment, as emphasised by Nunkoo and So (2016), provides further worries regarding an increase of pollution and the issues associated with waste disposal. The Norm Activation Theory (NAT) has been crucial in comprehending the relationship between the effects of visitors' awareness of negative environmental consequences and their pro-sustainable behaviour. Notably, Landon, Woosnam, and Boley (2018) built significant contributions to this field. Their research highlights the importance of awareness of the negative environmental consequences in either promoting or impeding sustainable tourism practices. In addition, Melissen et al. (2018) emphasized the importance for the tourism industry in developing countries to prioritize CSR efforts that are based on local values and norms, rather than simply adopting Western norms without consideration. Furthermore, Gao et al. (2016) performed a meta-analysis which demonstrated that customers' personal values, environmental attitudes, awareness, and perceptions of advantages and the firm have a substantial impact on their intentions to support environmentally friendly business. Overall, if the antecedents of pro-environmental behaviours are more acknowledged and understood, effective public campaigns can then be created to raise people's awareness of environmental issues and challenges and convert that awareness into pro-environmental behaviours (Nguyen et al., 2016).

According to De Groot and Steg (2009), awareness of the negative environmental consequence means understanding how one's actions can harm others or important things, which can lead to feeling morally obligated to behave in a pro-sustainable behaviour. Wan et al. (2017) analyse the awareness of negative environmental consequences from a utilitarian standpoint, evaluating the advantages and

disadvantages of the resulting behavioural results. The awareness of negative environmental consequences triggers the activation of personal norms, which in turn generates a sense of moral obligation. This aligns with Schwartz's (1977) hypothesis regarding the development of personal norms. The discourse surrounding sustainable tourism is around comprehending and alleviating its negative consequences for the environment via a concerted emphasis on awareness of negative environmental consequences and pro-sustainable behaviour.

2.7.2 Ascription of Responsibility (AR)

Sustainable tourism development is a process, while Goodwin and Francis (2003) and Stanford (2008) view responsible tourism as a key method for implementing this process. Mihalic (2016) further clarifies that responsible tourism essentially operationalises the concept of sustainable tourism by prioritizing sustainable actions. Goodwin (2011) suggests that all forms of tourism can be deemed responsible when stakeholders assume responsibility, aiming to reduce negative impacts and enhance positive outcomes, as supported by Raviv, Becken, and Hughey (2016). Existing research on the concept of ascription of responsibility (AR) is commonly interpreted in two main ways. First, Bamberg and Schmidt (2003), and Hopper and Nielsen (1991) define AR as accepting responsibility for the consequences of a specific matter. Second, Liere and Dunlap (1978), and Montada and Kals (2000) refer to an individual's confidence in their capacity to actively participate in resolving the issue. The second perspective is linked to the concept of perceived outcome efficacy, which refers to an individual's evaluation of how their actions could impact the problem (Gao, Huang and Zhang, 2017).

Ascription of Responsibility (AR) involves the sense of personal responsibility one feels for these negative outcomes resulting from a failure to act in a prosocial manner (Groot and Steg, 2009). In addition, Stern (2000) defines ascription of responsibility as an individual's belief, perception, or assumption on who should be held responsible for

something occurred. In psychology, Ascription of responsibility refers to an individual's willingness to actively take on authority and responsibility across various aspects of life (Ariestiningsih et al., 2020). The concept attempts to evaluate an individual's willingness to accept both specific and broad responsibilities. In other words, ascription of Responsibility is an inherent value that emerges when individuals encounter with situations that demand assumptions associated with responsibility.

In sustainable tourism, ascription of responsibility refers to determining who should be held accountable for destination environmental issues such as culture protection and heritage conservation. Furthermore, individuals who ascribe personal responsibility for environmental issues tend to show stronger support for and engagement in pro-environmental behaviours (Steg, Dreijerink and Abrahamse, 2005). Research has explored the impact of this sense of responsibility across various domains, including sustainable accommodation practices, the use of renewable energy, adoption of eco-innovations, and efforts towards waste minimization (Clark, Kotchen and Moore, 2003; Ebreo, Vining and Cristancho, 2003; Han, 2015; Jansson, Marell and Nordlund, 2010). A number of research have demonstrated the direct positive relationship between assuming personal responsibility and participating in pro-environmental actions (Fransson and GÄRLing, 1999; Van Liere and Dunlap, 1978). In the tourism context, Alessa et al. (2003) discovered that visitors who exhibit a strong sense of personal attribution engage in less disrespectful behaviour compared to those who do not. Visitors are more inclined to act responsibly if they perceive themselves as contributing to the problem (Gao, Huang and Zhang, 2017; Roggenbuck and Manfredi, Citation1990).

Some researchers propose a sequential relationship where Awareness of Consequences precedes the Ascription of Responsibility, which in turn, serves as a precursor to Personal Norms (Groot and Steg, 2009). This sequence suggests that an individual first becomes aware of the negative consequences of their actions on others or valued entities

(AC), which then leads to a sense of personal responsibility for these outcomes (AR). This feeling of responsibility activates Personal Norms (PN) - internal moral standards that guide behaviour. According to this perspective, Personal Norms directly influence one's propensity to engage in prosocial behaviours. While other researchers who support a mediator model argue that Awareness of Consequences (AC) and Ascription of Responsibility (AR) indirectly influence intentions and behaviours through the mediation of Personal Norms (Steg, Drijerink, and Abrahamse, 2005; Stern and Dietz, 1994). In other words, they suggest that AC and AR do not directly lead to behavioural changes. Instead, they affect behaviour by first activating Personal Norms, which then guide an individual's intentions and actions. Furthermore, personal norms and awareness of negative environment consequences can impact pro-environmental actions among public servants in central and local governments (Fang et al., 2019). Research suggests that personal norms have a greater influence on fostering an ascription of responsibility compared to awareness of negative environmental consequences.

An individual's understanding and concern for the negative consequences of their actions are deeply rooted in their personal values, which shape their perception of the impact on valued objects or the environment. This awareness drives a sense of responsibility to mitigate any harm, with a direct correlation between the level of awareness of environmental issues and the degree of concern for addressing them. The study conducted by Ettinger et al. (2020) discovered that CSR communications, which aim to raise awareness of social concerns within the tourism industry, have a positive impact on customer attitudes towards hotels. These communications encourage customers to believe that hotels are behaving ethically, thus reducing the occurrence of 'green hushing'. The closer individuals are to their belief systems, the more acute their understanding of their environmental footprint. Thus, personal values and beliefs are fundamental in fostering environmental responsibility and action (López-Mosquera and Sanchez, 2012; Van der Werff and Steg 2016).

NAT provides a valuable theoretical framework for understanding and promoting pro-environmental behaviour. By elucidating the processes through which personal norms are activated, NAT offers insights into the psychological underpinnings of sustainable practices. The application of NAT in various contexts, particularly in the realm of tourism, highlights its relevance and potential for addressing contemporary environmental challenges (Ardoin et al., 2015).

NAT has incorporated the role of emotions in the activation of personal norms (e.g., Esfandiar et al., 2019; Wu, Wu, Hsieh and Ramkissoon, 2022). Emotional responses to perceived environmental degradation, such as guilt for contributing to negative environmental outcomes or empathy towards affected natural entities, can potentiate the activation of personal norms, leading to pro-environmental behaviour (Li and Fang, 2022). For example, the distress caused by witnessing the degradation of a visitor site can trigger a stronger commitment to sustainable tourism practices among visitors. This emotional dimension adds depth to the understanding of how personal norms are activated and suggests that emotional engagement with environmental issues can be a powerful driver of sustainable behaviour (Azoki, 2011).

Personal standards convey expectations of environmentally responsible conduct (Harland et al., 2007). Awareness of Consequences relates to a person's sense of the bad consequences of selfish behaviour, whereas Ascription of Accountability refers to a person's feeling of responsibility for these unfavourable results. Those with a stronger sense of responsibility for results are more likely to engage in behaviour according with their own norms (Schwartz, 1973). AC and AR can activate norm activation theory because knowledge of consequences implies that a person's projected behaviour may negatively impact others (Han, 2014; Schwartz, 1977). When an individual recognises a negative consequence for others or the environment (awareness of consequence) and ascribes responsibility for that consequence to themselves (ascription of responsibility), the appropriate personal norm is triggered, leading to pro-social behaviour (pro-sustainable behaviour) (Gao, Huang, and Zhang, 2017).

The core concept of norm activation theory is that individual norm activation effects environmental behaviour directly (Steg et al., 2005). Several empirical studies have shown that norm activation theory successfully explains prosocial/environmental behaviour (De Ruyter and Wetzels, 2000). AC and AR correspond to general environmental conditions (Steg et al., 2005) in general pro-environmental behaviour study (Schultz et al., 2005), causing PN to focus on wide environmental behaviour rather than a specific sort of activity.

2.7.3 Personal Norm

Personal norms, which refer to the feelings of moral obligation towards certain actions (Schwartz and Howard, 1981), represent the individual's self-imposed expectations for their behaviour in specific situations, experienced as a moral obligation (Schwartz, 1977). Schwartz and Howard (1981) emphasize that personal norms are feelings of moral obligations to do “the right thing” (e.g., decrease meat consumption to preserve the earth). Therefore, personal norms act as an internal compass on how to act morally. Personal norms stem from individual conscious reasoning and contemplation, disregarding societal expectations (Thøgersen, 2009). Stronger moral beliefs should make individuals less influenced by social affirmation from their surroundings (Schultz et al., 2016). When individuals believe others are not following a desired behaviour, having higher personal norms can lead to an increase in such behaviour (Hornsey, Majkut, Terry, and McKimmie, 2003; Hornsey, Smith, and Begg, 2007). Personal norm is the primary factor that enhances and influences the impact of awareness of consequences and ascription of responsibility on altruistic behaviour (Bamberg and Möser, 2007; Shi et al., 2017).

Personal norm is becoming more significant in explaining environmentally friendly behaviours (Han, 2021; Haöckner, 2013). This idea refers to an individual's moral obligation of undertaking an action based on their understanding of their awareness of negative consequences and their sense of responsibility to act (Han, 2014; Rosenthal and Ho, 2020). Personal norm refers to an individual's sense of moral duty to either

participate in or abstain from a particular behaviour (Schwartz, 1977). Personal norms are sometimes referred to as moral norms, moral obligations, and sense of moral obligation (Denley et al., 2020; Han, 2014). This personal norm influences pro-environmental behaviour (Shi et al., 2017). Personal norms influence behaviour through the anticipation of negative self-related emotions. This suggests that personal norms impact expected emotions, which therefore affect behaviour (Onwezen, Gerrit Antonides, and Bartels, 2013).

Schultz et al. (2016) investigate the moderating role of personal norms in relation to the relationship between social norms or social normative interventions and pro-environmental behaviour suggests that stronger personal norms decrease the impact of social norms on pro-environmental behaviour. Personal norms are the individual's own rules or standards governing their behaviour (Thøgersen, 2009). Whereas social norms reflect the perceived attitudes and behaviours of significant individuals in one's social circle, offering a benchmark for what is considered "normal" behaviour (Cialdini and Trost, 1998). Individuals with weaker personal norms, or those lacking strong pre-existing attitudes towards a topic, are more susceptible to influence from readily available and superficial signals, including societal opinions and actions highlighted through normative messages (de Groot, Bondy and Schuitema, 2021). Conversely, those with stronger personal norms prioritize their own ethical standards over these external cues, relying on their moral beliefs to guide their decisions and actions. People with strong personal norms tend to display consistent pro-environmental intentions and behaviours, irrespective of their awareness of social norms that may or may not support such behaviours. This resilience is attributed to their internal moral guidance aligning with normative environmental behaviours. On the other hand, individuals with weaker personal norms for environmental actions lack this internal ethical direction (de Groot, Bondy and Schuitema, 2021). As a result, their actions are more influenced by the prevailing social norms highlighted in messages, indicating a higher susceptibility to external cues for guiding their environmental behaviour.

A stronger inclination towards biospheric values correlates with a heightened sense of environmental self-identity and a more pronounced personal norm, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of actual participation (van der Werff and Steg, 2016). There are numerous studies that underscore the role of personal norms in guiding environmentally responsible actions (Ateş, 2020; Joanes, 2019; Schultz et al., 2016). Within the environmental context, individuals with strong personal norms for pro-environmental behaviour feel a moral obligation to act in ways that support the sustainability of the environment, according to Van der Werff et al. (2013). In other words, personal norms are considered to be a significant incentive for encouraging behaviour and intention that are environmentally friendly (Schultz et al., 2016).

2.7.4 The impact of AC, AR and PN in sustainable tourism development

To promote pride and self-respect, norm activation theory emphasises that personal standards are a type of self-imposed restraint (Schwartz, 1973). Moreover, norm activation theory highlights two conditions for individual norm activation. Secondly, individuals must acknowledge that their refusal to engage in prosocial behaviour has negative consequences for others. Second, individuals should feel accountable for these unfavourable effects. Personal norms can be triggered if one of these circumstances is met, and active personal norms can impact human behaviour (Schultz et al., 2005). Prosocial behaviour is generally linked to morality (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert, 2005) and is defined as any action that benefits others (Baron, 1997; Batson, Thompson, and Chen, 2002).

Extensive research has investigated the links between PN, AC, and AR in different contexts. Based on their findings regarding the associations between the three variables, these studies can be grouped into three primary study streams. The first study stream proposes that AC and AR moderate the impact of PN on prosocial behaviour (Hopper and Nielsen, 1991; Schultz and Zelezny, 1998; Schwartz, 1977; Vining and Ebreo, 1992), (see **Figure 2**). Those with high AC and AR exhibit a higher relationship between PN and prosocial behaviour, according to this research. The second stream

believes that AC is an antecedent to AR, which in turn precedes PN, which eventually influences behaviour (Nordlund and Garvill, 2002; Steg et al., 2005; Stern, 2000), (see **Figure 3**). De Groot and Steg (2009), for instance, conducted five studies on distinct prosocial intentions and behaviours, demonstrating that prosocial behaviour can be fostered by first increasing awareness and then promoting responsibility for the concerns, thereby activating PN for performing prosocial activities. The third study stream contends that both AC and AR influence PN, which then influences behaviour (Bamberg and Schmidt, 2003; Harland, Staats and Wilke, 2007), (see **Figure 4**). In the present research, the third research stream is used. This third research stream is chosen for its ability to provide a more integrated and realistic understanding of the factors that influence pro-sustainable behaviour. By recognizing the simultaneous effects of AC and AR on PN, this model offers a robust and flexible framework that is well-suited to the complexities of individual behaviour and good alignment of real-world scenarios, making it the most appropriate choice for the present research.

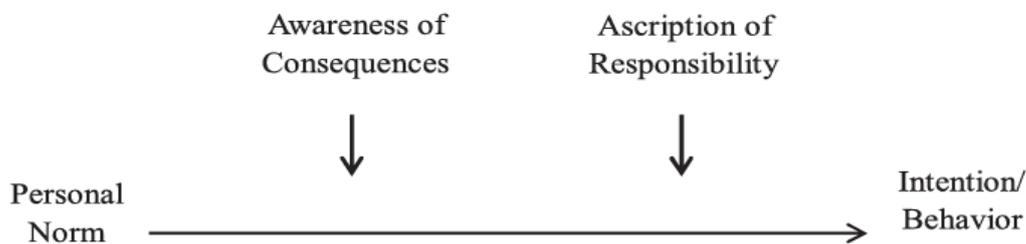


Figure 2 Moderator Model of Norm Activation Theory (a).

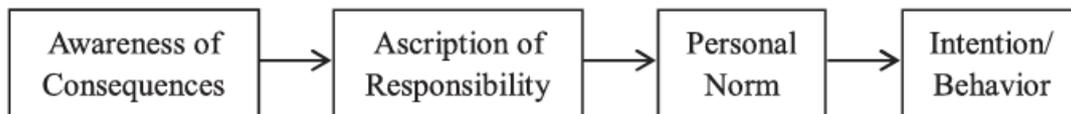


Figure 3 Serial Mediation Model of Norm Activation Theory (b).

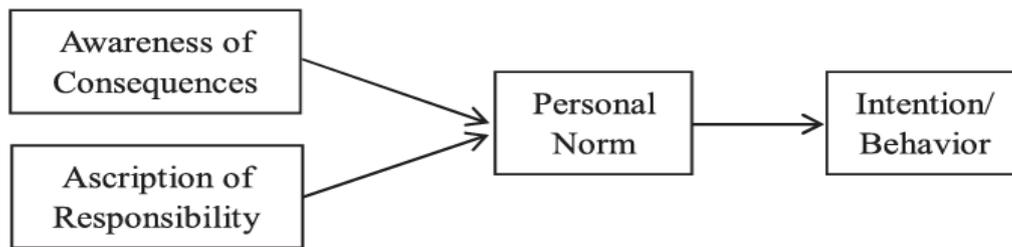


Figure 4 Simple Mediation Model of Norm Activation Theory (c).

Norm activation theory relevance to tourism is underscored by a growing body of empirical research. A seminal study by Confente and Scarpi (2020) established a conceptual model that connects visitors' awareness of environmental impacts to their responsibility and sensitivity, which in turn influences their environmental behaviour. This model is critical in highlighting the role of responsibility ascription in mediating the relationship between the awareness of negative consequences and the manifestation of environmental behaviour. In a similar vein, Setiawan, Afiff, and Heruwasto (2019) have emphasized the influence of personal norms on pro-environmental behaviour, particularly in scenarios where the consequences of actions and the ascription of responsibility are not readily apparent. Their work suggests that personal norms can be a driving force for environmental stewardship, even in the absence of strong external cues.

The application of norm activation theory has also been explored in specific tourism sectors such as adventure tourism, where Gupta and Sharma (2019) found that personal norms are a strong predictor of pro-environmental behaviour. This finding is crucial as it indicates that individual values can play an important role in conservation efforts within this niche tourism sector. Huijts, Molin and Steg (2010) propose that personal norms will depend on problem perception, and the perceived costs, risks and benefits of a particular energy technology. De Groot and Steg (2010) found that individuals were more inclined to demonstrate against nuclear power when they perceived a high moral need to do so, resulting in stronger personal norms to protest. Personal norms were more powerful when individuals believed that nuclear power presented numerous risks and expenses, with few benefits. Further research by Sharma and Gupta (2020)

reinforced the relevance of norm activation theory nature-based tourism, showing how biospheric values can influence the new environmental paradigm and lead to the development of strong pro-environmental personal norms.

From a practical standpoint, these academic insights have profound implications for tourism management and policy. They indicate the need for targeted educational campaigns and awareness-raising initiatives that not only highlight the negative consequences of irresponsible tourism but also emphasize the individual's role in counteracting these effects. By fostering a sense of personal norm and moral obligation towards the environment among visitors, it is possible to encourage more sustainable tourism practices (Landon, Woosnam and Boley, 2018).

Evidently, pro-sustainable behaviour benefits not only tourism destination but also other individuals, which classifies it as a subtype of prosocial conduct. Thus, norm activation theory can be used to explain the pro-sustainable behaviour of visitors in this study. Visitors often use the sharing of their experiences as a way to engage in symbolic consumption (Boley and Woosnam, 2020). Personal Norm is a variable that measures visitors' sense of responsibility. Consequence Ascription of Responsibility refers to the visitors' sense of responsibility for the detrimental impact of tourism on the target environment and their intention to participate positively to minimising this damage. Personal norms regarding the environment are believed to impact various environmentally significant behaviours, such as opting for ecotourism instead of a tourism spot with greater negative social and environmental consequences (Stern, 2000; Stern et al., 1999).

NAT has proven to be a robust and versatile framework for understanding and promoting sustainable behaviours, particularly within the context of tourism. Its focus on the activation of personal norms, influenced by awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibility, and emotional and social factors, provides a comprehensive model for addressing environmental challenges. As the theory continues to evolve and adapt to new contexts and challenges, it offers valuable insights for researchers,

policymakers, and practitioners working towards a more sustainable and environmentally responsible future.

The insights garnered from NAT research have important implications for the design of policies and interventions aimed at promoting environmental sustainability. Educational campaigns that enhance awareness of environmental consequences and foster a sense of personal and collective responsibility can effectively activate personal norms. Previous research investigates the antecedents and outcomes of personal norms in relation to pro-environmental behaviour (Karimi and Mohammadimehr, 2022; Tian and Xinyu Liu, 2022). Specifically, the research evaluated the assumption of responsibility, subjective norms, and the perceived ability to contribute to environmental initiatives (Han and Hyun, 2017). The results of the study show that the assuming responsibility, subjective norms, and abilities significantly impact the activation of personal norms. Moreover, policies that create supportive environments for sustainable behaviour—such as providing accessible recycling facilities or incentives for sustainable tourism practices, can reinforce the activation of personal norms by making pro-environmental actions more feasible and socially supported.

Therefore, norm activation theory presents certain challenges and opportunities as the global community advances towards sustainability goals and the continued application and expansion of NAT. To address the research gap, it is essential to investigate the interactions between personal, social, and cultural norms more comprehensively, particularly in the context of global environmental issues that demand collective action. For example, the rapid advancement of digital technologies offers new avenues for promoting environmental awareness and facilitating sustainable behaviours, yet also poses challenges in terms of ensuring equitable access and addressing the digital divide. By doing so, we can better understand how these norms influence behaviour and decision-making, ultimately leading to more effective strategies for promoting collective environmental responsibility. This approach will help bridge the gap in current research and provide a more holistic understanding of the factors driving

collective action on environmental issues.

2.8 Nature relatedness

Nature relatedness, a concept of growing importance in environmental psychology, relates to how deeply individuals connect with the natural world (Martin et al., 2020; Whitburn, Linklater and Abrahamse, 2019). Nature relatedness represents a profound understanding and appreciation of one's deep connection to the entirety of the living world. This concept, as outlined by Nisbet, Zelenski, and Murphy (2011), suggests that individuals have an innate capacity to recognise and value their interdependence with nature. This connection profoundly impacts human behaviour towards nature, especially within the realm of tourism. In exploring this topic, this research examines how nature relatedness influences visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour.

Scholars have found that individuals are more likely to act in environmentally responsible ways when they perceive a connection to the natural world (Gosling and Williams, 2010; Han and Hyun, 2017; Poon et al., 2015). This sense of relatedness to nature is defined as the degree to which a person feels a part of nature (Schultz, 2001). The relationship between nature relatedness and sustainable behaviour in tourism is deeply entrenched in the biophilia hypothesis proposed by Wilson (1984), which posits an innate human tendency to seek connections with nature. This hypothesis is bolstered by studies showing the beneficial effects of nature on human well-being (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1984). Nisbet, Zelenski, and Murphy (2009) advanced this understanding through the Nature Relatedness Scale, measuring individuals' affective, cognitive, and physical relationship with the natural world. This scale has proven crucial in assessing nature relatedness and its impact on human behaviour (Nisbet and Zelenski, 2013). Dutcher et al. (2007) and Mayer and Frantz (2004) suggested that individuals with a strong connection to the natural environment are more likely to engage in environmentally sustainable consumption behaviour.

The role of nature relatedness in tourism is critical. Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011) demonstrated how nature-based tourism enhances individuals' connection to

nature, leading to more sustainable behaviour. Immersive natural experiences can deepen visitors' understanding and appreciation of nature, influencing future environmental conservation and sustainable practices (Han, 2021; Katelieva and Muhar, 2022). This connection is further supported by Mayer and Frantz (2004), who found that individuals with greater nature relatedness are more likely to exhibit pro-environmental behaviours. This has significant implications for tourism, as visitors with a more substantial nature connection may choose more sustainable travel options, support conservation efforts, and practice responsible tourism.

A person's willingness to protect the natural environment grows as their sense of relatedness to nature increases (Mayer and Frantz, 2004; Poon et al., 2015; Schultz, 2001). Visitors' sense of relatedness to nature enhances their attachment to eco-friendly products/services and promotes environmentally responsible behaviour in consumption situations (Han and Hyun, 2017; Mayer and Frantz, 2004). Ecotourism's growing popularity underscores this link between nature relatedness and sustainable visitor behaviour (Weaver, 2008; Buckley, 2009). Weaver (2008) and Buckley (2009) explored how ecotourism, by providing immersive nature experiences, enhances visitors' appreciation for natural environments and their understanding of conservation's importance. These experiences can lead to more environmentally conscious decisions and behaviours during and after tourism experiences.

However, this relationship is not straightforward. Ramkissoon, Smith, and Weiler (2013) noted that while a strong connection with nature can lead to positive environmental behaviour, other factors like cultural background, environmental knowledge, and socio-economic status also significantly influence this (Lu, Weerapaiboon and Lin, 2023). The nature experience's type and quality also affect how nature relatedness impacts visitor behaviour. Authentic and engaging experiences are more likely to foster deeper connections with nature (Ballantyne and Packer, 2013).

The concept of nature relatedness has also been explored in urban tourism. Gössling and Hall (2006) argued that even in urban environments, nature elements shape visitors'

experiences and behaviours. Urban green spaces provide opportunities for visitors to connect with nature, impacting their satisfaction with the tourism experience and environmental attitudes (Passafaro, 2020). Besides, the role of technology in mediating nature relatedness in tourism is an emerging research area. Dickinson, Hibbert, and Filimonau (2017) highlighted how digital technologies can enhance or diminish the natural experience. Technologies like virtual reality can make nature experiences more accessible but may also lead to a less authentic connection with the natural world.

Research has consistently shown that those who live in a closer connection with nature tend to exhibit superior mental health, experience fewer physical ailments, and enjoy a higher quality of health overall compared to individuals who feel disconnected from the natural world (de Vries et al., 2003). Recent studies, such as those by Anders, Hooley, and Kivlighan (2023), have highlighted the diverse ways in which nature relatedness can manifest, pointing out that the benefits of such a connection extend beyond physical well-being to encompass happiness and personal fulfilment. These benefits are shaped by both the depth of the individual's bond with nature and the nature of their experiences within it. Deepening the visitor's connection with nature is not only essential for our happiness but also plays a critical role in leading a fulfilling life. This nature relatedness stimulates positive emotions, driving individuals to adopt more environmentally friendly behaviours. While nature relatedness is generally associated with positive emotions, it is essential to acknowledge that it can also give rise to temporary negative feelings, particularly in response to environmental degradation (Richardson et al., 2020).

Research on psychological connections with nature and personal norms further illuminates this relationship. Clayton and Opatow (2003), Kidner (2001), and Schultz (2001) argued for the necessity of a psychological connection with nature for sustainability. An individual's view of the natural world in relation to their personal norm strongly predicts behaviour (Davis et al., 2011). Personal norms, internalised social norms, and a sense of moral obligation are primary variables in norm activation

theory (Schwartz, 1973). A person's sense of responsibility engages them in pro-sustainable behaviour, aligning actions with their value system (Zhang, 2013). However, the research focuses on the impact of personal norms on donation intention, which still calls for more attention to explore other influential factors of visitors' donation intention, such as donation transparency and the form of donation.

2.9 Donation intentions

The natural-based destination's funding challenges highlight a crucial aspect of nature relatedness in tourism. Weaver and Lawton (2017) pointed out that natural destinations, increasingly popular among visitors, often lack adequate funding for conservation management, with governments not providing sufficient support. This funding gap necessitates diverse revenue sources, including tourism, to achieve conservation goals. Despite tourism's role in raising conservation funds, the relationship between tourism and donation behaviour still needs to be researched.

Tourism philanthropy, which includes individual donations, corporate fundraising, and volunteering (Goodwin et al., 2009), plays an important role in advancing conservation efforts. This form of philanthropy, involving contributions of money, labor, and resources toward community development and environmental projects (Maathai, 2011), can be either a central focus or a byproduct of the tourism experience. Donations from visitors, often inspired by their travel experiences, are crucial in boosting financial support for conservation initiatives (Sgalitzer et al., 2016). Conservationists like Williams (2013) argue that personal experiences foster a deeper care for biodiversity, making ecotourism's role in conservation a natural progression.

2.9.1 Altruism

The Norm Activation Theory has been extensively applied to explore various prosocial and pro-environmental behaviours, including bone marrow donation, volunteering, energy conservation, the willingness to support environmental protection, and recycling practices financially (Gao, Huang and Zhang, 2016; Guagnano, 2001; Guagnano, Dietz,

and Stern, 1994; Schwartz, 1973). Donation intention is viewed as a type of altruism. Altruism is a motive for helping, but it is also influenced by cognitive structures such as beliefs, values, and other attitudes (Ranganathan and Henley, 2008). Altruism is described as an attitude, motive, helping behaviour, and a desire to improve another's condition by various researchers (Frydman et al., 1995; Ranganathan and Henley, 2008; Sober, 1990; Schwartz, 1970). Individuals who prioritise altruism are inclined to allocate personal benefits to others, as they advocate for the equal distribution of benefits across society to enhance social welfare (Scheffczyk and Peacock, 2010).

Public donations play a vital role in supporting those in need, particularly in an era of limited government funding. Organisations need to grasp donors' intentions and behaviours to attract public funding (Eng Ling, 2012). In the realm of sustainable tourism, comprehending the motivations and intentions behind donations is crucial for crafting effective marketing strategies (Kashif, Sarifuddin and Hassan, 2015). These strategies aim to inspire individuals to contribute towards funding emergencies and disasters, thereby fostering a culture of philanthropy and support within the community. Such initiatives not only aid in addressing immediate needs but also contribute to visitor destinations' long-term sustainability and resilience (Cardoso, 2020).

In contrast to for-profit entities, non-profit organisations focus on persuading individuals to donate their resources—namely, time and/or money—both of which are critical resources that individuals continuously weigh throughout their lives (Aaker, Rudd, and Mogilner, 2011; Gino and Mogilner, 2014). A company's commitment to social concerns can be demonstrated through various means, including monetary donations, providing complimentary goods and services, and leveraging corporate resources for the benefit of the community (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2010). These assets encompass marketing expertise for increasing awareness, the allocation of employees' time and skills through volunteering initiatives, and the innovative capacity of research and development departments dedicated to addressing societal issues. These

commitments not only emphasise the company's role in promoting improvements in society but also significantly boost its reputation among consumers and stakeholders. We therefore assume, from an individual perspective, visitors focus on their commitment to a destination's environmental issue in various ways, particularly by donating funds.

Charitable organisations in the sustainable tourism sector often prioritise internal operations and are organisation-centric rather than customer-driven, a perspective deemed traditional (Andreasen and Kotler, 2003). However, this approach may impede their growth, especially considering the modern landscape characterised by fierce competition, discerning customers, and dwindling public trust (Padanyi and Gainer, 2004). Given these challenges, it becomes imperative for these organisations to understand the motivations behind monetary donations. Such insights are crucial for developing highly effective marketing strategies that can inspire charitable giving within the sustainable tourism sector (Piferi et al., 2006). In other words, the escalating need to raise funds poses a pressing challenge, potentially exacerbating difficulties for impoverished individuals (Sargeant et al., 2002).

2.9.2 Factors Affect Donation Intentions

White and Peloza (2009) found that individuals are more likely to be influenced by ads focusing on personal gains when making private donations, as such donations do not offer the immediate perk of boosting public image. Therefore, emphasising future personal benefits in donation outcomes can increase individuals' willingness to donate. Furthermore, Ye et al. (2015) suggest that donation outcomes in terms of benefits to oneself and others will impact an individual's willingness to donate to a charity. Besides, individuals are more inclined to donate when the donation outcome highlights the immediate benefits to others. Individuals typically take action to achieve their future objectives (Ye et al., 2015). Similarly, participants are more likely to intend to donate to charity after seeing an advertisement emphasising long-term benefits, like access to

the charity's resources in the future (Hibbert and Horne, 1996). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the factors influencing individuals' intentions to donate. Understanding these factors is essential for developing targeted strategies to mobilise resources effectively and ensure prompt and sustainable support for those in need.

On the other hand, social status also affects an individual's donation intention. Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroder, and Penner (2006) state that engaging in pro-social behaviour is costly, and individuals with lower social status have restricted resources and control over their lives. Some researchers indicate that individuals of lower social status are more sensitive to the needs of others because they frequently depend more on social support to accomplish their goals. To attract more donations from individuals with lower social status, charities should highlight either the immediate benefits to recipients or the future benefits to the donors themselves (Ye et al., 2015). This reliance increases the likelihood of them exhibiting behaviour focused on assisting others in comparison to individuals with higher social status (Piff et al., 2010). High social status persons may have reduced donation intention if the donation outcome framing emphasises benefits to others, as suggested by Kraus and Keltner (2009). These findings are further supported by research showing that people with high social status are more self-interested (Kraus, Piff, and Keltner, 2009) and inclined to help others primarily when it serves their own interests (Holmes et al., 2002).

While distinctions between monetary and time donations have been explored across various contexts such as risk aversion (Okada and Hoch, 2004), morality (Gino and Mogilner, 2014), social relationships (Mogilner, 2010), and happiness (Liu and Aaker, 2008), their significance in the context of sustainable tourism donations remains underexamined. In the sustainable tourism industry, monetary donations involve individuals contributing financial resources to support sustainable tourism initiatives. In contrast, time donations entail individuals volunteering their time and skills to participate in community projects, conservation efforts, or educational programs aimed

at promoting sustainable practices. Understanding the distinctions and motivations behind these different types of donations is essential for effectively devising targeted strategies to encourage and facilitate sustainable tourism contributions.

A common strategy employed in charitable appeals involves highlighting the potential outcomes of an individual's donation. Nonetheless, the manner in which these donation outcomes are presented significantly influences an individual's donation (Ye et al., 2015). Further exploration into the nuances of framing donation outcomes can provide valuable insights for enhancing the effectiveness of charitable appeals and maximising donation intentions. On the one hand, individuals are inherently motivated by self-interest, striving to maximise personal value and benefits (Holmes, 1990). This implies that all actions, including charitable donations, are subtly driven by selfish desires such as personal happiness or the expectation of a reward. Holmes et al. (2002) demonstrate that individuals tend to donate more to charities when donation appeals emphasise benefits to the self, as this creates a psychological contract between the donor and the charity. On the other hand, theories regarding charitable behaviour, such as altruism, posit a different perspective (Ashley et al., 2010; Schefczyk and Peacock, 2010). Individuals who prioritise altruism tend to allocate individual benefits to others, believing that societal benefits should be equally distributed to enhance social well-being (Schefczyk and Peacock, 2010). This dichotomy in theoretical perspectives underscores the complexity of donation intention and highlights the multifaceted nature of donation behaviour.

While previous research has underscored gender and age differences in charitable intentions, it has failed to pinpoint the underlying reasons behind monetary donations (Smith and McSweeney, 2007). Moreover, these studies often need more theoretical depth to fully elucidate the complexities of donation intentions and behaviour. Therefore, there remains a critical gap in understanding the motivations driving individuals' donation intentions (Kashif, Sarifuddin and Hassan, 2015). Hence, this

research aims to identify the factors that drive visitors' donation intention regarding the the norm activation model in sustainable tourism.

Increasingly, natural environments visited by visitors need more funds to support optimal conservation management activities, and most governments need to fully fund protected areas (Hehir et al., 2023; Weaver and Lawton, 2017). Thus, natural environments need to be supported from a variety of sources, including tourism, to meet conservation goals. Despite reliance on tourism-related activities to increase revenue to support conservation measures, little research to date has addressed the relationship between tourism and donation behaviour.

Travel philanthropy is the umbrella term for three distinct practices: individual giving, corporate fundraising, and volunteering (Goodwin et al., 2009), and refers to development assistance whereby funds, labour and other tourism-facilitated resources are donated towards community development and environmental initiatives (Maathai, 2011). Travel philanthropy can be a core part of the tourism experience (e.g. a volunteering/conservation holiday) or a secondary consequence of travelling (e.g. giving a financial donation or sponsoring a species) (Goodwin et al., 2009). In this study, donation intentions focus on the latter and is defined as, a new and/or increased financial contribution to a charity by a visitor, which is triggered by a recent travel experience. Such donations may occur during or after their trip (Hehir et al., 2023).

A study by Cacovean, Peluso and Plăiaş (2021) revealed that personal satisfaction plays a pivotal role in the visitors' supportive behaviours, such as donation intention. Visitors often donate when they feel a sense of fulfilment or happiness in contributing to the welfare of the destination they visit. This aligns with the broader theory of prosocial behaviour, suggesting that acts of giving are intrinsically rewarding (Aknin et al., 2015; Lazar and Eisenberger, 2022). Another crucial factor is the perceived social responsibility of visitors. As explored by Wu, Font and Liu (2021), visitors' moral obligation positively affects their pro-environment behaviour, such as donating to

destination sustainable projects. In the case of destinations, campaigns or educational initiatives that emphasise the destination social responsibility tend to enhance visitors' donation intention.

Emotional connections with the destination are pivotal in visitors' behaviour, such as the donation behaviour of a tourism experience. At the pre-travel stage, emotions play a fundamental role in activating visitor motivations and inputs in destination choice processes. During the trip, emotions can vary in intensity on a day-to-day basis. In addition, visitors' emotional reactions are fundamental in shaping post-travel evaluations such as satisfaction, destination attachment, perceived overall image and donation intentions (Hosany, Hunter-Jones and McCabe, 2020). Visitors who develop strong emotional ties with a place, often due to memorable experiences or cultural resonance, show higher donation intentions (Martins, Carvalho and Almeida, 2023; Silva and Correia, 2017). Memorable experiences, whether they elicit joy, serenity, or even sadness, can provoke a strong emotional response that translates into a desire to give back. The emotional resonance of witnessing the beauty of a natural wonder or the plight of a community can be a powerful catalyst for donations.

Destinations possessing unique natural and cultural attributes often experience higher levels of visitor donations (Hehir et al., 2023). Specifically, sites with well-preserved natural landscapes, rich biodiversity, or significant cultural heritage are seen as more valuable and, thus, more deserving of support. This perceived value plays a crucial role in motivating visitors to contribute financially to preservation efforts. Furthermore, the appeal of a destination can significantly influence donation behaviour (Denley et al., 2020). Visitors are more likely to donate to places that offer them a visually and emotionally engaging experience. For instance, the stunning visual appeal of a pristine beach or a well-maintained historical site can evoke feelings of awe and a desire to contribute to their preservation.

In this research, the focus is on sustainable tourism, a critical and increasingly influential paradigm within the travel industry. Sustainable tourism aims to minimise

the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities while maximising economic benefits. (Streimikiene et al., 2021) This concept has a profound influence on visitors' donation intentions as visitors become more conscious of their ecological footprint and the socioeconomic impact of their activities.

Firstly, environmental awareness plays a critical role in the visitors' pro-environmental behaviour (Amara, 2017; Handayani et al., 2021). Visitors who are informed and concerned about environmental issues are more likely to donate to conservation efforts. The Dinda (2006) study found that when visitors are educated about the fragility of ecosystems and the threats posed by over-tourism, they tend to respond with a greater willingness to contribute financially to sustainability initiatives. This suggests that raising awareness can be a powerful tool for increasing donations.

Moreover, the concept of 'leave no trace' resonates with the pro-environmental behaviours of visitors (Marion and Reid, 2007; Mateer et al., 2020). When visitors witness sustainable practices in action, such as waste reduction programs or renewable energy usage at their destinations, they are more inclined to support this pro-environmental philanthropy, such as donation behaviour (Powell and Ham, 2008). Such observable sustainable practices not only reinforce the message of conservation but also provide tangible proof of a destination's commitment to sustainability.

The integration of local communities into the tourism experience is another significant factor affecting donation intentions (Johannes, Yacob and Pasaribu, 2022). The involvement of local populations in tourism activities not only helps preserve cultural heritage but also ensures economic benefits are distributed within the community. This community-based approach to tourism has been linked to increased visitor donations, as visitors often feel more compelled to support initiatives that they can see directly benefit local people. According to a study by Carroll and Kachersky (2019) donors who engage with community members and witness the positive outcomes of their donations are more likely to continue supporting such initiatives.

Donation transparency is essential because donors want to know that their funds are going directly to environmentally friendly initiatives. Deng, Lu, and Huang's (2015) research shows a positive correlation between an organisation's donation income and transparency, particularly in terms of financial transparency. Visitors are more inclined to make donations to support sustainable development initiatives when the use of their funds is transparent, which This emphasizes the pivotal role of trust and accountability in fostering a long-lasting and supportive relationship between visitors and conservation efforts.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents a comprehensive conceptual model and hypotheses development for investigating the factors influencing visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions in the context of sustainable tourism. The model integrates both destination-level and individual-level factors, drawing upon the Commitment-Trust Theory and the Norm Activation Theory. At the destination level, the model posits DSR as a key driver of visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour, mediated by trust and relationship commitment, with destination decline as a moderating factor. At the individual level, the model draws upon the Norm Activation Theory to explain the psychological processes driving visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions, incorporating personal norms, awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, and nature relatedness.

The hypotheses development section provides a comprehensive and well-structured discussion of the relationships proposed in the conceptual model, grounded in relevant literature and theories. The destination-level hypotheses examine the impact of DSR on trust, the influence of trust on relationship commitment and pro-sustainable behaviour, and the moderating effect of destination decline. The individual-level hypotheses investigate the impact of awareness of negative environmental consequences and ascription of responsibility on personal norms, the effect of personal norms on pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions, and the moderating effect of nature relatedness.

3.2 Conceptual model

Based on the literature review discussed, the proposed conceptual model, **in Figure 5**, aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing visitors' pro-

sustainable behaviour and donation intentions in the context of sustainable tourism. The model integrates both destination-level and individual-level factors, drawing upon the Commitment-Trust Theory and the Norm Activation Theory.

At the destination level, the model posits that DSR is a key driver of visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour. DSR encompasses the economic, social, and environmental initiatives undertaken by tourism stakeholders to promote sustainable development within a destination. The relationship between DSR and pro-sustainable behaviour is mediated by two crucial factors: trust and relationship commitment. Trust, in this context, is examined from two perspectives: trust in tour operators and trust in the local government. Visitors' perception of tour operators' and local government's engagement in socially responsible practices can enhance their trust, which in turn positively influences their commitment to the destination and their likelihood of engaging in pro-sustainable behaviours.

Furthermore, the model introduces the concept of destination decline as a moderating factor in the relationship between DSR and trust. Destination decline refers to the perceived deterioration of a destination's environmental, cultural, or economic conditions. The model proposes that the presence of destination decline can attenuate the positive impact of DSR on visitors' trust, as the visible signs of decline may lead visitors to question the effectiveness of the destination's sustainability efforts.

At the individual level, the model draws upon the Norm Activation Theory to explain the psychological processes that drive visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions. The theory posits that personal norms, which are feelings of moral obligation to perform specific actions, are activated by two key factors: awareness of negative environmental consequences and ascription of responsibility. Visitors who are more aware of the negative environmental impacts of tourism and feel a personal sense of responsibility are more likely to develop strong personal norms related to sustainable

behaviour.

The model also incorporates the concept of nature relatedness as a factor influencing the relationship between personal norms and pro-sustainable behaviour. Nature relatedness refers to an individual's emotional, cognitive, and experiential connection to the natural world (Martin et al, 2020). Visitors with a higher level of nature relatedness are expected to have stronger personal norms and, consequently, be more inclined to engage in pro-sustainable behaviours and make donations to support conservation efforts.

The outcomes of the model are twofold: pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions. Pro-sustainable behaviour encompasses a range of actions that visitors can undertake to minimise their negative environmental impact and support sustainable tourism practices, such as choosing eco-friendly accommodations, using public transportation, and reducing waste. Donation intentions refer to visitors' willingness to make financial contributions to support conservation initiatives and sustainable development projects within the destination.

By integrating destination-level and individual-level factors, the proposed conceptual model offers a holistic approach to understanding the complex interplay of factors that shape visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions in the context of sustainable tourism. The model highlights the importance of fostering trust, commitment, and personal norms through effective destination management and communication strategies, while also considering the potential impact of destination decline and visitors' connection to nature.

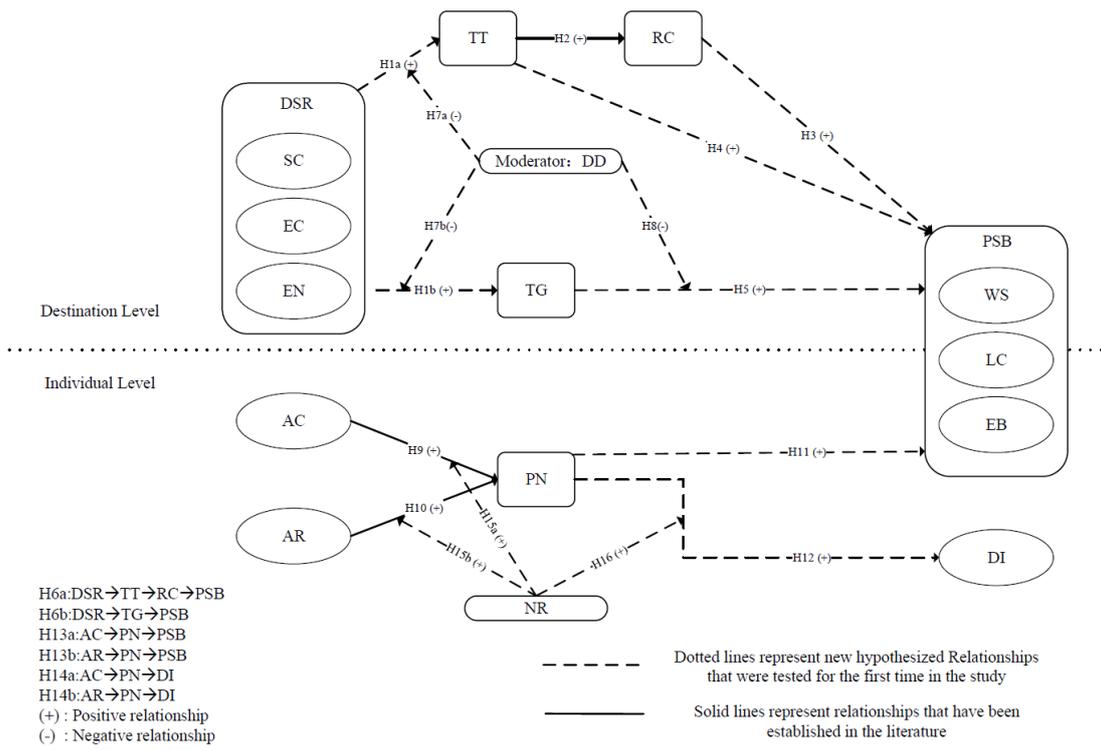


Figure 5 Conceptual Model

3.3 Hypotheses development

3.3.1 Destination level

The study examines the relationship between visitors' pro-sustainable behaviours (PSB) and factors including DSR and trust in local government and business (i.e., tour operators). It also unpacks the mechanisms for building trust and pathways promoting PSB amidst destination's decline.

3.3.1.1 Impact of DSR on trust

With a substantial growth of visitors, an increasing number of destinations are confronting various negative implications, such as environmental deterioration, waste production, and depletion of natural resources. These obstacles highlight the significance of collaborative responsibility among all stakeholders in a destination for achieving sustainable visitor growth (Sheldon and Park, 2011). Key stakeholders in advancing sustainability agenda face challenges in relation to social responsibility as major stakeholders that can influence the destination's economy, society and environment (Roodbari and Olya, 2024). The collective influence of stakeholders in the destination is substantial for different challenges, such as overcrowding, inflation, depletion of natural resources, and the erosion of cultural heritage (Su, Huang and Huang, 2018). Businesses are willingly incorporating sustainable development challenges into their operations and their interactions with stakeholders (Kahraman Akdoğu, 2017). Government is involved in the most of decision-making process that impact sustainable development and make a balance the values of powerful actors (Nunkoo, 2017). With this realisation, this research compares the role of local government relative to business.

DSR serves as an ethical framework with the purpose of fostering actions by destination organisations and individual visitors for the broader societal benefits (Su, Huang and

Huang, 2018). A visitor destination can be described as a geographic area that encompasses all the necessary services and infrastructure to accommodate visitors and provide them with a valuable experience (Buhalis, 2000). Rooted in the principles of corporate social responsibility, DSR addresses the responsibilities of various key stakeholders in responsible management of ecosystem hotspots, including business, government, visitors, and residents (Hassan and Soliman, 2021; Su et al., 2018). Particularly, China has increasingly focused on environmental issues within its evolving concept of 'civilisation', prioritizing ecological sustainability and introducing the notion of 'Ecological Civilisation' to address severe environmental challenges. This shift has influenced various sectors and emphasises the balance between economic growth and environmental conservation.

DSR involves obligations and activities that are applied to all destination stakeholders, including tour operator, local governments, visitors and other service providers, as defined by Su and Huang (2012). According to this notion, the destination has an obligation to protect and improve the social and organisational interests of the entire destination. Su, Huang and Huang (2018) define DSR as the collective ideology and efforts of destination stakeholders to conduct socially responsible activities for destination sustainability, and thus captures the collective outcome of the advancement of sustainability and echoes. DSR activities not only serve as a source of innovation and competitive advantage for tourism firms (Sheldon and Park, 2011), but also protect and enhance the society and environmental well-being of an entire destination (Su and Swanson, 2017). The Chinese government has implemented measures like environmental legislation, and eco-friendly policies, making significant strides in the global ecological crisis and the field of energy and environmental justice. Overall, DSR strives to reduce the negative effects of an increased influx of visitors flocking to these destinations while enhancing its beneficial effects on visitors, and other stakeholders by following to moral and ethical norms (Su, Lian, and Huang, 2020).

DSR influences visitors' impressions, trust, loyalty and visitation intentions (Su, Huang,

and Hsu, 2018). Because DSR has been believed as a pivotal factor in the realm of sustainable practice, reflecting visitors' contentment with their destination experiences and their likelihood to return to a destination. In brief, visitors' attitudes and behaviour are also influenced by the destination's reputation (Christou, 2007; Loureiro and Kastholz, 2011), and destination reputation could affect trust towards a visitor destination (Artigas et al., 2017; Johnson and Grayson, 2005). Lee and Heo (2009) argued that the degree of DSR fulfilment has an important influence on visitors' attitudes and behaviours, based on stakeholder theory. Hassan and Soliman (2021) investigate the impact of DSR on the reputation of the destination, the trust perceived by holidaymakers, and their intention to revisit. Additionally, they evaluated the direct relationships among destination reputation, visitors' perceived trust, and their revisit intention. Rodriguez and Cruz (2007) also revealed the effect of DSR on visitors' loyalty to a destination. This research investigates the visitors' PSB influenced by their views on how the destination is managed with a focus on social responsibility (referred to DSR) and their trust in tour operators and the local government. It aims to provide valuable information for destination managers and policymakers in their efforts to plan and execute strategies for sustainable development of the Yellow River Delta. Overall, DSR, enhances visitors' perceptions of the way the destination is responsibly managed. Therefore, this research develops the following hypotheses:

H1a. DSR has a positive relationship with visitors' perceived trust in tour operators.

H1b. DSR has a positive relationship with visitors' perceived trust in local government.

3.3.1.2 Impact of trust in tour operators on relationship commitment

The commitment–trust theory is to explain the development of long-term relationship between exchange parties, maintain a valued and crucial relationship (Bao and Wang, 2021; Moorman et al., 1992) and building confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity (Bao and Wang, 2021; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). This satisfaction transforms into a relational commitment between visitors and the

destination. Therefore, this research integrate Commitment-Trust Theory into this framework provides a lens through which we can delve into the psychological and emotional bonds that visitors form with sustainable destinations. This connection facilitates a deeper understanding of how positive experiences, driven by environmentally responsible practices and community engagement, contribute to the development of committed relationships between visitors and tour-operator.

Having customer trust and loyalty are key for success in a competitive and turbulent environment (Pahlevi and Suhartanto, 2020). Relationship marketing theory extensively considers the potential impact of relationship quality perceptions in customer relationships---i.e., trust and relationship commitment (Aurier and N'Goala, 2010). Trust is established based on the expected capability of a company to consistently meet consumer expectations, including aspects like reliability, credibility, and overall reputation (Aurier and N'Goala, 2010). Besides, trust can be strengthened by positive service evaluations and satisfying consumer experiences by making future interactions more predictable, instead of provider's opportunistic behaviours (Ferrell 2004). Existing research underlines the significance of trust in ethical consumption, emphasizing how it affects visitors' attitudes, behaviours, and overall happiness of travel experience, thereby shaping a more ethical consumer market (Liu et al., 2021; Ruo-Fei, Zeng, and Jin, 2022). Specifically, Ruo-Fei, Zeng, and Jin (2022) highlight that trust have a positive impact on eco-friendly and socio-economic-oriented ethical consumption behaviours, which subsequently lead to enhanced visitors' happiness. Overall, trust plays in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions.

Trust serves as a significant indicator to predict the behavioural patterns of the other party, as evidenced in exiting literature (Hessling, Asberg and Roxenhall, 2018). In the stage of developing relationships, trust is treated as a fundamental determinant of commitment, particularly when there is willingness and desire to maintain the relationship (Ponder, Bugg Holloway and Hansen, 2016; Rodríguez and Wilson, 2002). Johanson and Vahlne (2011) posit the criticality of trust in the early stage of a

relationship, emphasizing its capacity to share information and values, as well as the formulation of joint expectations. Specifically, a failure by either the business or the government to adhere to expected standards may cause diminished trust, underscoring the pivotal role trust plays in the complex dynamics of visitors' trust and their commitment to promoting sustainable practice. Therefore, this research aims to address the perceptions of visitors in who is in charge and who to blame when destination is declining.

According to Commitment-Trust Theory, trust is a key determinant of commitment and any compromise in trust, stemming from perceived negligence or inefficiencies on either party's part, has the potential to strain the commitment necessary for the sustenance of a positive and long-term relationship. This dependency on trust is underscored by MacMillan et al. (2005), who identify three critical variables influencing trust: shared values, communication, and opportunistic behaviour. Furthermore, affective commitment is more likely to be influenced by behavioural objectives aimed at investment in and the cultivation of enduring relationships (Aurier and N'Goala, 2010). A recent study by Su, Gong and Huang, (2020) argues that visitors' perception of DSR in terms of their own knowledge and available information influence their destination choice and relationship quality, subsequently affecting their intention to revisit. Trust holds significant importance in relational exchanges as relationships as it fosters valued relationships, motivating parties to willingly invest in and commit to these relationships (Hrebiniak, 1974). Given that commitment involves a level of vulnerability, parties naturally seek trustworthy partners (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). This concept is reinforced by the idea that trust is a fundamental factor influencing relationship commitment. (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Therefore, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H2: Visitors' perceived trust in tour operators significantly enhances their commitment to a long-term relationship with these operators, with higher levels of trust leading to stronger relationship commitment.

3.3.1.3 Impact of relationship commitment on pro-sustainable behaviour

Sustainable tourism provides equal opportunity to various stakeholders to contribute their part in the development of the tourism destination and society (Byrd, 2007). Promoting the sustainable development of the region involves fostering relationship between local authorities, residents, ecosystems, and visitors who take positive experiences with them (Farid et al., 2016). Local government is the primary participant in the political process of promoting sustainable practice (Bramwell, 2011; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2012). Because local governments have more local expertise, they are also in a better position to regulate sustainable practice (He, He and Xu, 2018; Nunkoo, 2015). Moreover, local governments have power to shape sustainable practice through rules and regulations and contribute to developing infrastructure and ensuring a safe environment for both visitors and locals (Maguire, 2019; Roxas, Rivera and Gutierrez, 2020). Besides, local government play a significant role in the advancement of sustainability by encouraging and facilitating private sector investment via development plans and strategies, the annual planning process, considering both the destination's potential and its limitations (Gorica et al., 2012; Maguire, 2019). Specifically, local government is well-equipped with quick access to community issues and detailed knowledge of natural and human resources. Additionally, local governments can provide updates on advancing sustainability agenda, such as destination services, and other technologies, encouraging community members to adopt and benefit from these advancements (Gorica et al., 2012). As a result, without strong local authority planning and local government involvement, sustainable practice is challenging to achieve (Ruhanen, 2013).

Tour operators is also recognized as a key stakeholder that can significantly contribute to the local economies of destinations by including local guides, accommodation, and business in their travel packages and services (MacNeill and Wozniak, 2018). They are instrumental in educating visitors about cultural sensitivity and environmental preservations instructions (Akbar, Zahari, and Dusi, 2016; Ndegwa, Maingi, and Ndubi,

2022). For instance, if a tour-operator fails to uphold their responsibilities or if a local government does not deliver on promised amenities and services, trust may erode, impacting the commitment levels of both parties. Despite the apparent correlation between sustainable practice and political trust, there exists a paucity of research addressing this relationship (Nunkoo, 2015). This paper bridges this knowledge gap by constructing a theoretical model that elucidates the relationship between DSR activities with the visitors' PSB and trust in business and government.

In the realm of advancing sustainability, the relationship between DSR and the Commitment-Trust Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the attribution of blame in cases of reduced trust from the perspective of visitors. When visitors experience a decline in trust, stemming from perceived environmental negligence, unmet expectations, or a lack of commitment to sustainable practices, the responsibility for this erosion of trust can be distinctly assigned to either tour operators or local governments. Visitors may place blame on tour operators for insufficiently communicating or implementing sustainable practices, or to local governments for insufficient regulatory measures or inadequate enforcement of sustainable initiatives.

However, the impact of trust has not been sufficiently explored in understanding its relationship with DSR and relationship commitment, which is one of the research gaps of this research. In our study, trust is defined as the degree to which visitors believe in and feel confident about their local government's environmental policies and actions (Song, Daryanto and Soopramanien, 2019). This research sheds light on the potential for sustainable practices to foster long-term loyalty, benefiting the destinations, by exploring the linkages between DSR and commitment-trust relationship. This interdisciplinary approach provides practical insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders aiming to enhance sustainability in the ever-evolving global sustainable practice landscape.

When applied to the context of sustainable practice, understanding how commitment influences visitors' PSB becomes paramount. Affective commitment, grounded in

emotional attachment and shared values, is likely to be a driving force behind visitors engaging in pro-sustainable actions (Hessling, Asberg and Roxenhall, 2018). Visitors who are emotionally committed to a destination are more likely to demonstrate environmentally responsible behaviours (Gorica et al., 2012). By assessing the intricate connections between commitment and PSB, we can contribute valuable insights into fostering a symbiotic relationship between commitment-driven visitors' experiences and the promotion of sustainable practices, thereby contributing to the overall resilience and longevity of ecosystem. Therefore, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H3: Relationship commitment is positively related to visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour.

3.3.4 Impact of trust on pro-sustainable behaviour

In recent years, a growing trend indicates that consumers are increasingly motivated to purchase eco-friendly items (Heo and Muralidharan, 2019; Nguyen Tran Cam, 2023) and to demand their workplaces to demonstrate environmental responsibility (Lee, Lee and Yoo, 2020). The business sustainability literature confirms these findings, indicating that visitors are keen to engage with local cultures and keenly aware of the social and environmental impacts of their journeys in terms of collaborative marketing and stakeholder collaboration (Budeanu, 2007; Ngo, Gui and Hales, 2018; Salman et al., 2021). In other words, PSB plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable practice, as visitors' willingness to engage with local cultures and their heightened awareness of social and environmental impacts drive them to adopt more responsible and collaborative approach to tourism.

PSB encompasses multiple dimensions, including economic, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions (Landon et al., 2018; Lee, Lee and Yoo, 2020; Tyrrell, Paris and Biaett, 2013). Furthermore, Landon et al. (2018) develops a framework by proposing that PSB not only involves individual actions mitigating direct environmental impacts, such as recycling and water conservation, but also manifests in

an intention to embrace "Localism" by consuming locally produced goods and services, and a willingness to incur greater financial costs or experience longer travel times for products and services embodying a green ethos, termed as "Willingness to Sacrifice." This holistic conceptualisation underscores the importance of considering not only environmental but also local economies and communities in fostering sustainable practices.

Eco-behaviour, also a critical component of pro-environmental behaviour, is comprehensively defined as visitors' potential actions aimed at preserving the environment associated with their travel and consumption patterns (Steg and Vlek, 2009), spanning both public realms, such as participation in environmental movements, and private domains, including actions like recycling (Hadler and Haller, 2011). This nuanced understanding of eco-behaviour within the PSB framework not only enriches theoretical perspectives but also provides actionable insights for fostering sustainable practices.

Understanding and predicting the environmentally significant behaviours of visitors has been a longstanding focus in the sustainability literature (Nunkoo, 2017; Ryan, 2002; Song and Li, 2019). The concept of stakeholders is applicable to destinations because a destination is perceived as a network comprised of interdependent and diverse stakeholders (Waligo, Clarke, and Hawkins, 2013). According to the above arguments, cooperative behaviour is essential for sustainable development (Beritelli, 2011). Because sustainable destination development depends on collaboration and common comprehension among all stakeholders, Therefore, it's vital to ensure that stakeholders from both public and private sectors collaborate effectively to promote socially responsible practices (Lee and Heo, 2009; Garay and Font, 2012).

However, potential conflicts may emerge as stakeholders attempt to advance their own objectives (Bramwell and Lane, 2011). Collaboration requires adequate power to bring stakeholders together and managing power imbalances among them for policy and business decision-making (Nunkoo, 2017; Purdy, 2012). The role and manifestations

of power among destination stakeholders with respect to the commercial and political negotiations are crucial for achieving sustainability within the regulatory environment in which they operate (London, and Lohmann, 2014). Investigating the factors that drive visitors to engage in pro-sustainable actions, such as policy making, and destination management, responsible consumption, environmental conservation efforts, or support for local communities (Nunkoo, 2017), contributes significantly to the broader discourse on sustainable practice. Many scholars have explored visitors' environmental attitudes (e.g., Dolnicar, 2010), and endeavoured to determine the causes of visitors' adoption of pro-environmental behaviours (Juvan and Dolnicar, 2014). However, there is limited research exploring factors that motivate pro-sustainable actions, and the scope of behaviours conducted by visitors that enhance the sustainability of the industry, local communities and environments (Landon, Woosnam and Boley, 2018). In addition, there is little empirical research that highlights sustainability and power balance between business and government from visitors' perspective.

In this research, a conceptual model is crafted by synthesizing DSR concept with Commitment-Trust Theory to predict visitor's PSB. Extending this conceptualisation, understanding how DSR influences visitors' trust in both government and tour operators and the impact of trust on visitor's PSB provide a pragmatic insight that helps developing workable solutions to responsibly manage fragile ecosystem. Hence, this research develops the following hypotheses:

H4: Trust in tour-operator is positively related to visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour.

H5: Trust in local government is positively related to visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour.

3.3.1.5 Mediation impact of Trust to tour-operator, Relationship commitment and Trust to local government

Researchers perceive trust as a precursor to relationship commitment, as relationship

commitment inherently involves a degree of self-sacrifice that cannot transpire without trust (Sargeant and Lee, 2004). Visitors' trust in the tour operator and the strength of their relationship commitment may influence their behaviour. When visitors believe that their operator is genuinely promoting destinations responsibly, they may be more inclined to themselves engage in behaviours that support sustainable development (World Tourism Organisation and United Nations Development Programme, 2017). This is because they feel they are part of a collective effort to promote sustainable development, which is facilitated by the trust and relationship commitment they have with their tour operators. In addition, DSR could invoke positive emotions in visitors and foster visitors–destination identification, which in turn would promote visitors' environmentally responsible behaviour (Su and Swanson, 2017). Tourism consumption is a subjective and emotional experience, as stated by Su and Hsu (2013). Rittichainuwat, Qu, and Mongkhonvanit (2006) emphasise that tourism offers excitement, unfamiliar experiences, and a sense of discovery to visitors, unlike other products and services. Su and Swanson (2017) analyses how positive and negative emotions directly affect ecologically responsible behaviour in the tourism industry and explores their role as mediators between DSR and environmentally responsible behaviour. Visitors' trust in tour operators and relationship commitment they feel towards the destination act as influential factors that mediate and shape the relationship between DSR and PSB. In the context of DSR, individuals may engage more pro-sustainable behaviours to protect the environment at the destination in order to maximise benefits from DSR strategies (Agapito, Kronenburg and Pinto, 2022). This implies that a stronger sense of trust in tour operators and a deeper commitment to the destination may amplify the positive influence of DSR, ultimately contributing to a more significant PSB among visitors.

According to Jebbouri et al. (2022), visitors' trust in the local government has a significant impact on their overall satisfaction with the destination. This satisfaction was positively associated with their intentions to engage in sustainable practices, suggesting a possible relationship between DSR, trust in local government, and PSB.

CSR can be defined as responsible business strategies that align with the economic, social, and environmental principles of sustainable development (Torugsa, O'Donohue, and Hecker, 2012). Referring to CSR, business can adopt a reactive approach, addressing legal or economic demands as they emerge, or they can proactively embrace DSR (Puppim de Oliveira and Jabbour, 2017). In relation to Environmental Management (EM), proactive behaviour encompasses the systematic integration of environmental concerns into organisational objectives and strategies (Haden, Oyler, and Humphreys, 2009). In essence, the effectiveness of DSR initiatives in fostering PSB is contingent upon the intermediary mechanisms of trust within the local government and visitor relationship. This implies that a stronger sense of trust in local government to the destination may amplify the positive influence of DSR, ultimately contributing to a more significant PSB among visitors. Prior research has examined the economic effects of attitudinal response to CSR, such as consumer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth, as well as resistance to negative information (Pérez and Rodriguez del Bosque, 2015; Xie, Bagozzi, and Grønhaug, 2015). This study extends prior research by analysing visitors' emotional responses (i.e. trust) to perceived DSR instead of CSR and explores pro-sustainable behaviour as the ultimate outcome. Behavioural intention can differentiate individuals who are deeply dedicated to environmental conservation from those who are willing to make financial sacrifices for the environment (Nawrotzki, 2012). Tour operators can directly influence the visitor experience by providing services and making commitments, which in turn can shape visitors' trust and their overall satisfaction with the tour. As visitors in China have the freedom to choose which tour operators they engage with, we hypothesize a serial mediation effect for tour operators. Unlike tour operators, visitors cannot choose or directly interact with the government in the same way, nor can the government make commitments to visitors. The government's role is more indirect, setting regulations and creating the broader framework within which tourism operates. Therefore, the influence of government actions on visitors' behaviours is more straightforward and limited to setting the context, rather than directly mediating the relationship between service provision and visitor

commitment. Therefore, this study develops the following hypotheses:

H6a: The relationship between destination social responsibility and pro-sustainable behaviour is serially mediated by trust in tour-operator and relationship commitment.

H6b: The relationship between destination social responsibility and pro-sustainable behaviour is mediated by trust in local government.

3.3.1.6 Moderation impact of Destination Decline

The implementation of sustainable practices involves the rational use of resources and environmental protection, alongside the provision of products and services that ensure visitor comfort and safety (Zha et al., 2021). According to Song and Li (2019), this strategy effectively harmonises socio-economic benefits with ecological considerations. In other words, sustainable practice aims to balance environmental conservation, socio-cultural responsibility, and economic viability. However, over-pursuing economic benefits could hamper sustainability of the development. Environmental degradation, cultural erosion, or economic downturn represents as indicator of destination decline. The perceived decline of a destination reflects the tangible outcomes and effectiveness of sustainable practices, shaping visitors' perceptions and experiences. Visitors' perceptions of decline can influence their behaviour for sustainability and trust in stakeholders.

Pertinent research focuses on regional decline, characterised by a gradual decrease in a region's economic activity, productivity, and living standards (e.g., Hatori et al., 2023). This phenomenon may be instigated by diverse factors, such as variations in crime rates, social norms, and political beliefs, as well as externalities that yield inefficient and undesirable consequences. Investigating regional decline is crucial to understand the underlying mechanisms which can drive regional growth and to formulate efficacious regional policies (Hatori et al., 2023). The collective behaviour of the major stakeholders that determines the aggregate impact of sustainable development on a destination, and the aggregate effects perceived by visitors in turn shapes their attitude,

and consequently support sustainable development (Su, Huang and Huang, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to examine the social responsibility from a destination's perspective.

In addition, the scenario of bringing a large number of visitors may cause destinations to decline because a variety of detrimental effects including congestion, ecological degradation, socio-cultural tensions, and economic imbalances (Boukas, Ziakas and Boustras, 2012). To the best of our knowledge, no studies have been developed on the impact of destination decline on visitors' trust. Furthermore, no renowned studies have investigated the interactive role of destination decline in the relationship between DSR and visitors conceptualize destination decline by integrating the TALC with regional decline. Without external interventions, a destination with a large group of visitors causing severe negative impact may disappear. Dislocation can occur when visitors avoid certain areas of a destination because of overcrowding or other negative influences. Eventually, a destination may disappear when the detrimental effects of dramatically increased visitors escalate to such an extent that visitors no longer express interest in visiting. Particularly, many tourism destinations rely entirely on their flora, fauna, biodiversity, ecosystems, and geographical conditions for their livelihood (Jasrotia, Kamila and Pate, 2021). Therefore, they prioritise environmental conservation and development to ensure benefits for both current and future generations, benefiting both human and ecological aspects of the site (Ballantyne et al., 2018).

When visitors observe a deterioration in the destination's appeal, they may attribute this decline to a lack of effective social responsibility measures. Consequently, even if a destination actively engages in socially responsible practices, the negative impact of the perceived decline may diminish the positive association between destination social responsibility and visitors' trust in tour operators. In other words, when a destination is declining, visitors may become skeptical of whether the actions taken by tour operators are sufficient or sincere enough to address these negative trends. This skepticism can lead visitors to doubt their efficacy and thus weaken the trust that visitors have in tour

operators, even if those operators are actively engaged in DSR.

Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H7a: Perceived destination decline negatively moderate the effect of DSR on visitor trust in tour operators such that the effect is weaker when destination is in decline.

On the other hand, local governments play crucial role in managing and developing destinations' sustainable tourism (Goffi, Cucculelli and Masiero, 2019; Ruhanen, 2012). Their responsibilities include setting regulations, planning, preserving natural and cultural resources, and providing infrastructure. Governance refers to the systems used to guide, regulate, and coordinate social actions to maintain order within a destination (Bramwell and Lane, 2011). Besides, local governments also engage in marketing and promoting the destination, often working with various stakeholders, including the private sector and local communities, to foster sustainable tourism practices (Bramwell, 2011). In addition, local government provide essential infrastructure and services to enhance the destination's appeal and address issues like declining visitor numbers or deteriorating facilities (Timur and Getz, 2008).

Blazek et al. (2019) demonstrate that these destinations are indeed on a given trajectory of path decline in the absence of exogenous change such as policy interventions. Therefore, if visitors observe a decline, they may associate it with the inadequacy of government-led sustainability efforts, thereby attenuating the positive impact of DSR on trust. This research examines visitors' perceptions on who is in charge and whom to blame when a destination is declining, as well as how trust in government and business is established. Empirical validation of the research could contribute valuable insights for destination management seeking to navigate the intricate relationship between social responsibility, perceived decline, and trust dynamics in the evolving landscape of sustainable practice. Hence, we develop the following hypothesis:

H7b: Perceived destination decline negatively moderate the effect of DSR on visitor trust in local government such that the effect is weaker when destination is in decline.

Destination decline reflects the inefficiency of sustainable management of destination due to increased inequalities and environmental injustices, which may lead to a reduced visitors' sense of trust, responsibility, or commitment towards adopting pro-sustainable behaviour. As the actual or perceived adverse impact on destinations has significant ecological, social, and cultural consequences, a crucial question how precisely destination decline affects PSB remained unanswered. Extensive collaboration between the public and private sectors is essential to mitigate destination decline by manage a destination responsibly (Volgger and Pechlaner, 2014). This collaboration can manifest through various means, such as the involvement of destination management organisations, government policymaking and implementation, cluster initiatives, or broader cross-sectoral collaborative schemes (Dhiraj and Kumar, 2021). Particularly, local governments can influence sustainable practices by enacting rules and regulations, planning and developing infrastructures for visitors and locals (Gutierrez, 2020). Furthermore, their supportive actions are crucial in promoting business participation (Gorica et al., 2012; Su, Huang, and Pearce, 2018). When visitors perceive a destination in decline, they may lose confidence in the local government's ability to effectively manage and address these problems. The loss of trust can diminish their willingness to engage in pro-sustainable behaviours. In brief, trust can be significantly eroded in contexts where the government is perceived as failing to maintain the destination's quality and sustainability (Miller et al., 2010). Therefore, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H8: Perceived destination decline negatively moderate the effect of visitors' trust to local government on Pro-sustainable behaviour such that the effect is weaker when destination is in decline.

3.3.2 Individual Level

This study focuses on investigating the impact of visitors' situation activators (i.e., awareness of negative environmental consequence, ascription of responsibility), as well as personal norms, on the promotion of sustainable tourism in the Yellow River Delta.

The study also aims to explore how these factors influence visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions, considering their nature relatedness.

3.3.2.1 Impact of awareness of negative consequences and ascription of responsibility on personal norms

Awareness of consequences is a condition when individuals realise negative consequences for others or other things that a person values when one fails to act in an environmentally responsible manner (Bamberg, Hunecke, and Bloebaum, 2007; De Groot and Steg, 2009). Personal norm" refers to the self-expectations that individuals develop based on their internalised values, personalities, and habits, particularly regarding specific actions in specific situations (Setiawan, 2021). It encapsulates the sense of moral obligation individuals feel towards behaving in a certain manner. In the initial stages of activation, an individual's personal norms are prompted by an awareness of the potential negative outcomes of not engaging in pro-environmental behaviour (Setiawan, 2021). It is anticipated that problem awareness will activate the personal norm, which is thought to be developed from environmental and general norms. For instance, the use of cars contributes to localised air pollution and the degradation of both water and air quality. These issues could be mitigated through reducing car use, or by eco-driving (Ünal, Steg, and Gorsira, 2017).

In addition to being triggered by awareness of consequences, personal norms are also activated through the ascription of responsibility (Setiawan, 2021; Wu et al., 2022). When an individual becomes aware of the adverse outcomes resulting from their failure to engage in pro-environmental actions, they are inclined to attribute these negative consequences to themselves as visitors, assuming responsibility for their lack of environmental concern (Setiawan, 2021). In other words, there is a tendency for individuals to acknowledge their role in contributing to environmental issues when they realise the negative effects of their non-environmentally friendly behaviour. According to Gao et al. (2016), Visitors' perceptions of tourism's negative consequences have a positive impact on their ascription of responsibility, which in turn influences their

perception of responsibility. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that awareness of negative environmental consequences and ascription of responsibility would indeed influence Individuals' personal norms regarding sustainability. Therefore, this research develops the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 9: Awareness of negative environmental consequences positively affects personal norms.

Hypothesis 10: Ascription of responsibility positively affects personal norms.

3.3.2.2 Impact of personal norm on pro-sustainable behaviour

Personal norms are activated when individuals recognise their responsibility for their actions and are aware of the potential threats to things they value (Landon et al., 2018). Research has consistently demonstrated that personal norms serve as reliable predictors of an individual's pro-environmental behaviour (Collado et al., 2019; Doran and Larsen, 2016). Being aware of environmental problems and the belief that these problems may be reduced should be a key prerequisite for pro-environmental behaviour (Annika Nordlund and Garvill, 2003). Halpenny (2010) defines Pro-sustainable behaviour as actions taken by individuals to promote the sustainable use of natural resources and result in minimal harm to the environment or, in some cases, even contribute to environmental benefits (Halpenny, 2010; Steg and Vlek, 2009). Furthermore, personal norms are suggested to play a substantial role in an individual's perceptions and intentions to engage in sustainable travel behaviours, including their willingness to make sacrifices, support localism, and demonstrate eco-friendly actions (Kiatkawsin and Han, 2017; Landon et al., 2018). Visitors who possess a strong sustainable ethic (Lemelin et al., 2010; Lemelin and Whipp, 2019; Piggott-McKellar and McNamara, 2017) are more likely to be willing to pay a premium for ecotourism. This willingness to make financial sacrifices correlates with a higher likelihood of purchasing ecotourism services (Denley et al., 2020).

Individuals must be aware of the consequence of his or her activity before they are able

to engage in pro-sustainable behaviour. In turn, the ascription of responsibility increases the personal norms to engage in pro-sustainable behaviour (De Groot and Steg, 2009; Stern et al., 1999). Han (2015) and Kiatkawsin and Han (2017) found that individuals who hold a strong sense of responsibility tend to adopt more pro-environmental norms, ultimately enhancing their intentions to engage in pro-sustainable friendly behaviours. Besides, Han et al. (2016) found that the ascription of responsibility significantly influences individuals' sense of obligation to take part in pro-sustainable behaviour in the context of the ecological behaviour of cruise visitors. Therefore, this research makes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 11. Personal norms positively affect pro-sustainable behaviour.

3.3.2.3 Impact of personal norm on donation intentions

Donations motivate goals related to both emotional health and economic utility (Liu and Aaker, 2008). The public has embraced donation-based crowdfunding because of its benefits, which include increased transparency, a wide range of projects, and no restrictions on time or location (Chen et al., 2019). Donation intention has been demonstrated to be directly predicted by anticipated affective outcomes (Abraham and Sheeran, 2004). Every action an individual takes, including charitable donations, is believed to have an underlying subconscious motivation, which may stem from self-interest, such as seeking personal happiness or anticipating a reward (Ye et al., 2015).

In the context of individual behavioural intentions, numerous studies have highlighted the significance of subjective norms as a key determinant of intention, such as research on intentions to purchase organic food (Ha and Janda, 2010), revisit green hotels (Chen and Tung, 2014; Teng, Wu and liu, 2015), and donate blood (Webb, Green and Brashear, 2000). Across these studies, a consistent pattern emerges, demonstrating a positive association between subjective norms and behavioural intentions (i.e., donation intention). Moreover, visitors having positive subjective norms toward a given behaviours are more inclined to express a positive revisit intention (Han and Kim, 2010).

Besides, individuals have substantial resources, and a strong sense of control are more likely to have donation intentions for future better travel experience (Dovidio et al., 2006).

Researchers find that individuals' willingness to help others is affected by their personal norms, which are defined as situated, self-based standards for specific behaviours generated, derived from internalised values during the decision-making process (Piliavin and Charng, 1990; Schwartz and Howard 1984). Especially, Gugenishvili, Francu and Koporcic (2022) investigate how personal norms motivate individual donation intentions. When individuals perceive that those who matter to them have positive attitudes towards a behaviour, they are more inclined to engage in it. Conversely, if important individuals express negative views, they are less likely to perform that behaviour (Rhodes, Jones and Courneya, 2002). It is worth noting that the impact of personal norm varies across different cultures and can have distinct effects on intentions related to donations (Park and Lee, 2002). In essence, personal norms play a significant role in shaping how people perceive and approach helping others (Web, Green and Brashear, 2000). Therefore, this research makes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 12. Personal norms positively affect donation intentions.

3.3.2.4 Mediator role of personal norm

Studies examining pro-sustainable behaviours within the framework of the Norm Activation Model (NAM) have consistently highlighted the significance of two key factors: awareness of environmental consequences and the ascription of responsibility for mitigating those consequences (Liu et al., 2017). These elements have been identified as crucial precursors to engaging in pro-sustainable behaviour. An individual's problem awareness is the first step of responsible actions, and the extent to which they perceive themselves as capable of resolving the issue through their own actions subsequently activates their personal norm, ultimately influencing the level of activation (Jakovcevic and Steg, 2013; Liu et al., 2017).

Increased awareness about negative impacts of development and human lifestyle has led to growing focus on pro-sustainable behavioural change (Lucas, Brooke, Darnton and Jones, 2008). In the context of tourism, pro-sustainable behaviour is actions taken by visitors to mitigate their negative impact on the environment, actively contribute to the preservation and conservation of the environment and prevent any harm to the ecosystem and biosphere of the destination while travelling (Chiu et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2013). In addition, a sense of obligation to act is shaped by the perceived ability to mitigate the threat to this significant object. An individual's concern for the environment increases with their level of problem awareness. Furthermore, an individual's awareness of how their actions impact the environment grows the more in touch they are with their belief system (L´ opez-Mosquera and Sanchez, 2012; Van der Werff and Steg 2016).

Personal norms were strongly associated with awareness of need and situational responsibility and played a significant role in predicting various conservation behaviours (Black et al., 1985; Harland, Staats and Wilke, 2007). It is expected that the awareness of negative consequences of tourism and the ascription of responsibility for sustainable tourism will influence the personal norm of sustainability, which in turn has an impact on the intention and behaviour to reduce environmental damage. Thus, personal norm seemed to mediate the impact of situational activators, including awareness of negative consequence and the ascription of responsibility on pro-sustainable behaviour, supported by Norm Activation Theory (NAT) (Harland, Staats and Wilke, 2007). Therefore, this study make the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 13a. Personal norms positively mediate the relationship between Awareness of negative environmental consequence and pro-sustainable behaviour.

Hypothesis 13b. Personal norms positively mediate the relationship between Ascription of responsibility and pro-sustainable behaviour.

It is widely acknowledged that pro-environmental actions are essential for decreasing

these problems and to promote sustainable development (Groot and Steg, 2010). Initially, the Norm Activation Model was primarily applied to understand various pro-sustainable intentions and behaviours, such as blood or bone marrow donations (e.g., Schwartz, 1973; Zuckerman and Reis, 1978). The Norm Activation Model has proven to be effective in explaining a range of pro-environmental intentions and behaviours, including energy conservation, willingness to financially support environmental protection (Guagnano, 2001; Guagnano, Dietz and Stern, 1994, Steg and Groot, 2010). In summary, the NAM has been effectively employed to explain a wide array of pro-environmental and prosocial intentions and actions.

Huijts, Molin and Steg (2012) demonstrate that personal norms are shaped by factors like the perceived costs, risks, and benefits, as well as the effectiveness of expected outcomes, and an awareness of the negative consequences associated with rejecting the adoption of new technology. In other words, personal norms will depend on awareness of problems, and the perceived costs, risks and benefits of a particular energy technology. Researchers who propose a mediator model posit that awareness of consequences and attributed responsibility indirectly influence intentions and behaviours through personal norms (Groot and Steg, 2009; Steg, Drijerink and Abrahamse, 2005; Stern and Dietz, 1994). We, therefore, assume that personal norms are believed to act as intermediaries, mediating the relationship between attributed responsibility and visitors' donation intentions. This study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 14a. Personal norms positively mediate the relationship between Awareness of negative environmental consequence and donation intentions.

Hypothesis 14b. Personal norms positively mediate the relationship between Ascription of responsibility and donation intentions.

3.3.2.5 Moderation impact of nature relatedness

Nature relatedness encompasses an individual's capacity to appreciate and comprehend

their interconnectedness with all living entities (Nisbet, Zelenski and Murphy, 2011). The Nature Relatedness Scale evaluates the extent of an individual's internalised identification with nature while also delving into their nature-related perspectives, familiarity with, comfort in, and inclination to engage with the natural world (Nisbet et al., 2009; Nisbet, Zelenski and Murphy, 2011). Individuals living in more natural environments tend to enjoy improved mental health, report fewer physical symptoms, and have better overall health compared to those who experience a significant disconnection from nature (de Vries et al., 2003). Existing research shows the variety of ways that nature relatedness can take, since the benefits to a person's well-being and happiness are affected by both the personal and experiential aspects of their connection to nature (Anders, Hooley and Kivlighan, 2023). In tourism industry, visitors who had high nature relatedness and no safety concerns have high possibility to visit natural spaces (Claris Fisher et al., 2021).

Strengthening our connection with nature not only boosts our happiness but also contributes to a more satisfying existence. This enhanced connection promotes favourable emotions, thereby motivating individuals to engage in environmentally friendly behaviours. According to Schultz (2000), when people highly appreciate and hold their surroundings in high regard, they are more likely to protect and show reverence for the environment. Developing a more profound comprehension of our connection with the natural environment fosters empathy towards all living beings and the Earth itself (Nisbet, Zelenski and Murphy, 2009). Furthermore, as Thomashow (1998) shows, tackling environmental problems could have a dual effect of benefiting the world and enhancing human mental well-being. While nature relatedness (NR) has the potential to be related to positive emotions, it is worth noting that there can also be temporary negative emotions linked to the recognition and awareness of negative consequences, such as awareness of environmental issues (Nisbet, Zelenski and Murphy, 2011). Highly nature-oriented individuals may sometimes experience negative emotions due to their deep concern about what they perceive as the degradation of the environment, potentially impacting their overall well-being.

Schultz (2000) asserts that individuals' environmental concerns are closely tied to their sense of belonging to nature. If visitors do not value nature or express care for the environment, they are less likely to take action to preserve it (Howard, 1997). The level of connection visitors have with nature influences their awareness of their own actions and their empathy towards sustainable tourism (Nisbet and Zelenski, 2013; Schultz, 2000). Anders, Hooley and Kivlighan (2023) found that other factors may contribute to varying outcomes in wellbeing connected with nature relatedness, such as accessibility and safe natural settings are. In summary, a high level of nature relatedness fosters greater awareness of negative environmental consequences and ascription of responsibilities. Being aware of the problem is the initial step toward taking responsible actions (Torrejos and Israel, 2022).

Generally, when visitors are aware that their actions have negative consequences for others and the environment (referred to as awareness of environmental consequence), they tend to feel a sense of responsibility for these adverse effects (Liu et al., 2017). Consequently, they believe that engaging in environmentally responsible behaviour can contribute to mitigating environmental problems (referred to as ascription of responsibility). This, in turn, activate their personal norms (Groot and Steg, 2009; Steg and Groot, 2010). In essence, the extent to which individuals believe they can address the issue through their own actions influences the activation level of their personal norms, determining the degree of their commitment to responsible behaviour.

This sense of relatedness includes emotional connections, cognitive aspects such as beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge, as well as the experiences people have in nature (Nisbet and Zelenski, 2024). Individuals with a high level of nature-relatedness are also more aware of environmental deterioration and more driven to adopt sustainable activities, as their connection to nature amplifies the impact of environmental awareness on their personal norms (Nisbet, Zelenski and Murphy, 2009). Meanwhile, Individuals with a high-level of nature relatedness tend to feel more responsible for environmental protection and have a stronger internalization of environmental ethics,

which strengthens their personal norms. Therefore, this study makes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 15a. Nature relatedness positively moderate the effect of Awareness of negative environmental consequence on personal norms such that the effect is stronger when nature relatedness is high.

Hypothesis 15b. Nature relatedness positively moderate the effect of Ascription of responsibility and personal norms such that the effect is stronger when nature relatedness is high.

The concept of nature relatedness has the potential to contribute to the achievement of environmental sustainability (Zelenski and Nisbet, 2014). Nature relatedness can be achieved through exposure to natural environments and has, in turn, been found to promote pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour (Mayer and Frantz, 2004; Collado, Corraliza, Staats and Ruíz, 2015). In sustainable tourism, visitors' nature relatedness may inspire them to engage in pro-environmental activities (Mayer and Frantz, 2004; Wang and Huo, 2022). Nature relatedness can enhance people's awareness and appreciation of tourism environment, fostering a desire to conserve and thus improve their donation intentions (Klein and Benjamin, 2018). Therefore, donation intentions among visitors tend to rise when they contribute funds to an environmental organisation, seeking to generate public benefits through their pro-environmental choices directed towards nature and environmental causes.

On the other hand, absence of nature relatedness has been attributed to people's apathy about the deterioration and preservation of the environment (Soga and Gaston, 2016). Klein and Benjamin (2018) found that visitors may lack sufficient awareness and exhibit indifference towards nature, resulting in disaffection, alienation, and apathy towards the nature (Pyle, 2003), ultimately leading to a reduced likelihood of engaging in pro-environmental behaviour, such as donation intentions (i.e. donating money to an

environmental charity). Studies also demonstrate that visitors with strong altruistic values tend to have positive attitudes toward the natural environment (Kim and Stepchenkova, 2020).

Meanwhile, visitors' personal norms effectively plan and carry out the required pro-sustainable actions to achieve a specific goal, which is associated with their intention to make charitable donations (Basil, Ridgway and Basil, 2008; Palomo-Vélez, Buczny and Vugt, 2020). The nature relatedness deepens visitors' commitment to sustainable tourism, leading them to more actively translate their personal norms into tangible actions, such as donating to environmental causes. Consequently, when nature relatedness is strong, the influence of personal norms on donation intentions is much greater, as these individuals are more driven to support the preservation and protection of the environment (Nisbet, Zelenski, and Murphy, 2009). Therefore, this study makes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 16. Nature relatedness positively moderate the effect of personal norm and donation intention such that the effect is stronger when nature relatedness is high.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Overview

This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the methodology implemented to study sustainable tourism development in the Yellow River Delta, China. Drawing upon a positivist epistemology and objectivist ontology, it underscores empirical observation, measurement, and deductive reasoning as foundational to the research approach. The methodology employs quantitative research to optimize the investigation of hypotheses and the interaction of variables, focusing on empirical data for analysis.

The data collection method is elaborated upon, noting the deployment of questionnaires across various stakeholder demographics, ensuring data reliability and depth of insight into sustainable behaviours and intentions. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the application of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) for data interrogation, aligning with rigorous academic standards for quantitative analysis. Ethical considerations are subject to rigorous scrutiny, and the research conducted in accordance with the ethical standards established by Sheffield University Management School ensures the protection of participant rights and the integrity of the study.

4.2 Philosophical assumptions

Research philosophy, the framework through which a researcher perceives, understands, and obtains essential knowledge for completing a study (Hussey and Collis, 2014), plays a crucial role in determining the selection of research methods (Creswell, 2014) and is based on assumptions concerning the essence of reality and its potential for perception (Collis and Hussey, 2014) across two primary dimensions: ontology and epistemology. Understanding philosophical concepts in research design is vital, as it clarifies the research design, helps researchers identify designs that may simplify or complicate their investigations, and highlights potential research limitations while

reducing the probability of unproductive research directions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2001).

4.2.1 Ontological assumptions

This study adopts an objectivist ontological stance, which assumes that the existence of any given phenomenon, including destination social responsibility, pro-sustainable behaviour, personal norms, destination decline, and nature relatedness, is independent of individuals' awareness of it. Ontological assumptions pertain to the essence of reality (Collis and Hussey, 2014), and the objectivist perspective posits that social reality is mirrored in an external and objective reality (Creswell, 2014). Throughout this research, the belief in a singular objective reality is acknowledged and maintained. This ontological stance is consistent with the positivist perspective, which believes that real information can only be obtained via scientific method-based, objective empirical observation (Moon and Blackman, 2014).

In contrast, interpretivists argue that consciousness is contingent upon an individual's personal conception of the world, and that social reality is constructed through processes of interpretation, making it a subjective phenomenon (Collis and Hussey, 2014). While acknowledging the existence of this alternative ontological perspective, this study adopts an objectivist stance, as it better aligns with the research objectives and the nature of the phenomena under investigation.

4.2.2 Epistemological assumptions

The inquiry into the nature of the researcher-subject relationship is a fundamental concern of epistemology (Creswell, 2014). The primary focus of epistemological assumptions is how individuals perceive and validate the validity of knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2014). As a result, these assumptions establish the means by which knowledge can be generated and supported, encompassing the standards that enable knowledge, the nature of knowledge that is accessible, and the boundaries of such

knowledge (Creswell, 2014).

Epistemological positivism and epistemological interpretivism are two distinct epistemological perspectives that derive their names from the contrasting assumptions that ontological subjectivism and ontological objectivism make (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Collis and Hussey, 2014). Besides, epistemological positivism aligns with the objectivist ontological stance and assumes that reality exists independently of the researcher. Positivists believe that knowledge can only be acquired through objective observation and measurement, and that the researcher should remain detached from the subject of study to maintain objectivity (Junjie and Yingxin, 2022). This approach emphasizes the importance of empirical evidence, causality, and generalization of findings.

In addition, epistemological interpretivism is associated with the subjectivist ontological stance and assumes that reality is socially constructed and subjective. Interpretivists argue that knowledge is created through the interaction between the researcher and the subject of study, and that understanding social phenomena requires an in-depth exploration of individuals' perceptions, experiences, and meanings (Pulla and Carter, 2018). This approach emphasizes the importance of context, interpretation, and the co-creation of knowledge.

The choice between epistemological positivism and interpretivism has significant implications for the research design, data collection, and analysis methods. Positivist research typically employs quantitative methods, such as surveys and experiments, to collect and analyse data, seeking to establish causal relationships and generate generalizable findings. Interpretivist research, in contrast, often relies on qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, to gather rich, context-specific data and develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In the subsequent subsections, these two paradigms will be further elaborated upon,

discussing their key assumptions, methodological implications, and relevance to the current study.

4.2.2.1 Positivist paradigm

As was previously mentioned, the positivist paradigm posits that all research situations originate from a single objective reality (Moon and Blackman, 2014), irrespective of the beliefs or perspectives of the researchers. From a positivist standpoint, it is imperative that researchers employ a systematic approach to conducting their studies. This entails identifying research topics, formulating hypotheses, and employing methodology that is suitable for the proposed research (Moon and Blackman, 2014). In contrast to inductive methodologies employing qualitative designs, positivism predominantly depends on deductive approaches utilising quantitative designs (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

4.2.2.2 Interpretivism paradigm

In cases involving subjective ontological assumptions, interpretivist epistemology is favoured by researchers. Interpretivism, characterised by its propensity for induction, elucidates human behaviour by scrutinising specific instances (Moon and Blackman, 2014). Thus, the cultural and historical context of the participants and the field of study influence the ultimate results of interpretivism, which are derived from the interactions between participants and researchers (Collis and Hussey, 2014). According to Collis and Hussey (2014), interpretive paradigms are characterised by the use of inductive reasoning and the absence of theoretical frameworks during the initial examination of a phenomenon. Conversely, Creswell (2014) observed that these frameworks are proposed during the concluding phases of research in order to support and underpin the subject under investigation.

4.2.2.3 Classification of the current research

The current research adopts a positivist epistemology, which aligns with the objectivist

ontological stance. Positivism assumes that reality exists independently of the researcher and that knowledge can only be acquired through objective observation and measurement (Junjie and Yingxin, 2022). This epistemological approach is particularly suitable for the current study, as it aims to investigate the relationships between destination social responsibility, trust, relationship commitment, destination decline, awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, personal norms, nature relatedness, pro-sustainable behaviour, and donation intentions.

The decision to adopt a positivist epistemology is grounded in several considerations. Firstly, the research aims to test hypotheses and establish causal relationships among the variables of interest. Positivism, with its emphasis on empirical observation, measurement, and deductive reasoning, provides a robust framework for this type of inquiry (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Secondly, the study draws upon existing theories, such as the norm activation theory and commitment-trust theory, which have been developed and validated within the positivist tradition. Adopting a positivist stance ensures coherence between the theoretical foundations and the methodological approach of the research.

In summary, the current research adopts a positivist epistemology, which is compatible with the objectivist ontological stance and the nature of the investigated relationships. The study employs quantitative methods, including carefully selected measurement scales that have been validated in previous research and are appropriate for the constructs being examined.

4.3 Research methodology

The research methodology is the overarching strategy employed in a study, and the choice of methodology is guided by the researcher's philosophical assumptions. In line with the positivist epistemological position adopted in this study, a quantitative research design was selected as the methodology.

4.3.1 Quantitative design

The present study employs a quantitative methodology. Quantitative research design is particularly suitable for examining hypotheses and determining the presence and strength of relationships between variables (Creswell, 2014). As the study aims to investigate the relationships between destination social responsibility, trust, relationship commitment, destination decline, awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, personal norms, nature relatedness, pro-sustainable behaviour, and donation intentions, a survey questionnaire served as the principal instrument for gathering data to examine the research hypotheses. The choice of a survey questionnaire was deemed appropriate due to the existence of previous studies that developed theory and mechanisms for specifying the impact of destination social responsibility, awareness of negative environmental consequences, and ascription of responsibility on visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions.

A survey instrument was created, which consisted of a consent form, a participant information sheet, measures for study variables, and inquiries regarding demographic information. This research adapted 12 items for three factors from Lee et al. (2021) and Su et al. (2018) to measure DSR, emphasizing the critical aspects of this concept in the context of sustainable practice. Furthermore, the construct of Trust in Tour-operator was quantified using four carefully selected items from the works of Liu et al. (2019) ensuring a comprehensive assessment of this trust. Then, Trust in Local Government was gauged through four items, drawing from the studies by Bhat et al. (2020) and Nunkoo (2015), which provided a robust framework for understanding this dimension in the advancement of sustainability. Relationship Commitment, a key factor in this research, was assessed using four items sourced from the research of Bao and Wang (2021) and Cheng, Gu, and Mou (2020), offering insights into the dynamics of relationship building within such ecosystem hotspots. To evaluate the concept of Destination Decline, this research turned to four items adapted from the studies by

Diedrich and García-Buades (2009) and Hatori et al. (2023), providing a nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

Besides, four items from C. K. Lee and Back (2006) and Confente and Scarpi (2020) to measure awareness of negative environmental consequences, emphasising the critical aspects of this concept in the context of sustainable tourism. Similarly, the construct of ascription of responsibility was quantified using four carefully selected items from the works of Gao, Huang, and Zhang (2016), Rosenthal and Ho (2020), and Confente and Scarpi (2020) ensuring a comprehensive assessment of this responsibility. Furthermore, personal norm was gauged through four items, drawing from the studies by Zhang et al. (2016), Zhao, Wang and Ji (2020) and Wu et al. (2022) which provided a robust framework for understanding this dimension in the advancement of sustainability. To evaluate the concept of nature relatedness, this research turned to six items adapted from the studies by Nisbet and Zelenski (2013) and Luong (2022) providing a nuanced understanding of this phenomenon. Pro-sustainable behaviour, a pivotal aspect of contemporary sustainable practice, was evaluated through 12 items for three factors of PSB from the work of Landon et al. (2018), underlining the growing importance of sustainability. Lastly, Donation Intention a key factor in my research, was assessed using four items sourced from the research of Yoo and Drumwright (2018), Wang et al. (2018), and Chen et al. (2019) offering insights into the donation behaviour of visitors within such ecosystem hotspots.

The questionnaire was examined by professionals in the field of academic sustainability. After addressing minor revisions proposed by these experts, the survey was subjected to a pilot test including visitors (sample size of 50) who had previously visited the Yellow River Delta destinations. Following a marginal enhancement derived from the findings of the pilot test, main data collection was conducted. The details of the measurements applied in this research can be found in **Table 1**. The study employed multiple-item measures and utilised a seven-point scale to assess all variables.

Table 1 Measurement Scales

Variables	Contents	Citations
Social-cultural responsibility	The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are concerned about improving the overall welfare of society.	<i>Fatma et al., 2016; Su et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2021</i>
	The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta provide visitors with experiences through meaningful connections with local people and knowledge of local culture.	
	The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are aware of the socio-cultural issues related to tourism and can help to solve them.	
	The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta treat other customers very well.	
Economic responsibility	The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are trying to ensure their long-term success.	<i>Fatma et al., 2016; Su et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2021</i>
	The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are working hard to improve their economic performance.	
	The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta seem to give back to the local community.	
	The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta keep strict control over their costs.	
Environmental responsibility	The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta include environmental concerns in their operations.	<i>Fatma et al., 2016; Su et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2021</i>
	The tourism stakeholders of	

	the Yellow River Delta strive to reduce their consumption of natural resources.	
	The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta communicate to their visitors about their own environmental practices.	
	The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta publicly emphasize their concern over respecting and protecting the natural environment of the YRD area.	
Trust in tour operators	I trust the tour operators to make the right decisions about the tour activities.	<i>Liu, Wang, Fang and Zhang, 2019</i>
	I trust the tour operators provided comprehensive and customized service for visitors.	
	I trust the tour operators to provide products that are good value for money.	
	I trust the tour operator provided quality service during the tour.	
Trust in local government	I trust the local government of the Yellow River Delta to make the right decisions in relation to tourism	<i>Nunkoo, 2015; Bhat et al., 2020; Pagliara et al., 2021</i>
	I trust the local government to handle tourism without strict supervision.	
	I trust the local government to do what is right for destination in relation to tourism in the Yellow River Delta.	
	I do not trust the local government to look after the interests of the Yellow River Delta destination in tourism	

	development.	
Willingness to sacrifice	I am willing to spend more on travel if it is beneficial for the environment.	<i>Landon, Woosnam and Boley, 2018</i>
	I am willing to buy eco-friendly tours, even though they may be more expensive.	
	I am willing to use environmentally friendly transportation, even though it may take more time.	
	I would be willing to pay more to stay in an environmentally friendly place	
Localism	I prefer to stay at local accommodation.	<i>Landon, Woosnam and Boley, 2018</i>
	I prefer to eat locally sourced food.	
	I prefer to purchase locally produced goods.	
	I prefer to hire local guide services.	
Eco-behaviour	I would like to separate recycling from waste	<i>Landon, Woosnam and Boley, 2018</i>
	I would like to use tissue made from recycled materials.	
	I would like to use eco-friendly green tourism business and services.	
	I would like to use reusable shopping bags.	
Relationship Commitment	I am very committed to this tour operator of the Yellow River Delta through this travel experience	<i>Han and Hyun, 2017; Cheng, Gu and Mou, 2019; Bao and Wang, 2021</i>
	I will maintain a relationship with the tour operators of the Yellow River Delta.	
	The tour operators of the Yellow River Delta deserve my maximum effort to maintain a relationship.	

	If the tour operators of the Yellow River Delta planned something, I would think of it as something “we” would do rather than something “they” would do.	
Destination decline	There are not many social issues (e.g., social misbehaviours) in Yellow River Delta	<i>Diedrich and García-Buades, 2009; Hatori et al., 2023</i>
	There are many job opportunities in Yellow River Delta	
	There are many benign activities on the environment of Yellow River Delta.	
	Overall, I think that the Yellow River Delta is in develop as a destination	
	The Yellow River Delta could become an attractive destination in the future	
Awareness of negative environmental consequences	Tourism helps the preservation of the beauty of this place.	
	Tourism is not bringing too much noise to this place.	
	This place is polluted because of tourism.	
	Tourism makes this a better place to stay for visitors.	
Ascription of Responsibility	It is my responsibility to minimise my impact on this destination.	<i>Gao, Huang and Zhang, 2016; Rosenthal and Ho, 2020; Confente and Scarpi, 2020</i>
	I feel I am jointly responsible for tourism’s impacts on the environment.	
	I can do something to mitigate or even eliminate the negative impacts of tourism	
	It is up to everyone to keep the environment clean in the Yellow River Delta.	
Personal Norm	I have the obligation to	<i>Zhang et al., 2016;</i>

	protect the environment of the Yellow River Delta.	<i>Zhao, Wang and Ji, 2020; Wu, Wu, Hsieh and Ramkissoon, 2022</i>
	I feel an obligation to reduce the negative impact on the local community during the trip.	
	I have the obligation to comply with local environmental regulations and laws.	
	Because of my own principles I feel that I should behave in an environmentally responsible way while travelling on this destination.	
Nature Relatedness	My ideal vacation spot would be a remote, wilderness area.	<i>Nisbet and Zelenski, 2013; Luong, 2022</i>
	I always think about how my actions affect the environment.	
	My connection to nature and the environment is a part of my spirituality.	
	I take notice of wildlife wherever I am.	
	My relationship to nature is an important part of who I am.	
	I feel very connected to all living things and the earth.	
Donation Intentions	I intend on making a donation to the sustainable tourism projects of the Yellow River Delta Destination soon.	<i>Yoo and Drumwright, 2018; Wang et al. 2018; Chen et al., 2019</i>
	I would like to donate to the sustainable tourism projects of the Yellow River Delta Destination.	
	If I wanted to, I could easily donate money and time to the sustainable tourism projects of the Yellow River Delta Destination.	
	I would like to encourage	

	people who travel with me to donate to the sustainable tourism projects in the Yellow River Delta destinations.	
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4.3.2 Sampling Strategy

The research employed a purposive sampling strategy, particularly suited for the study's context where the target population consisted of visitors to the Yellow River Delta (YRD). Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure that respondents had specific characteristics relevant to the research questions, such as their experience with sustainable tourism in the YRD. This method allowed the researcher to select participants based on predefined criteria, ensuring that those most capable of providing relevant insights were included in the sample (Zhou and Makwara, 2024). The selected participants were expected to represent the broader population of visitors who are familiar with the destination, thus supporting the generalisability of the findings to this group.

4.3.3 Sampling technique

To ensure research findings are generalisable, it is crucial to apply an appropriate sampling method (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). Failing to do so may lead to results that do not accurately represent the population, thus weakening the generalisability of the study. As a result, the choice of a suitable sampling technique plays a vital role in the research process, as it directly affects the relevance and precision of the findings. Any mistakes in sampling are likely to manifest in the final outcomes. Given the variety of available sampling methods, it is important to choose the most appropriate one based on the specific context of the research.

Sampling techniques are broadly classified into two categories: probability sampling

and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is generally preferred, particularly for parametric tests, due to its ability to enhance the generalisation of results to a larger population (Flick, 2014). This method provides greater confidence in the findings, as it eliminates the risk of respondent bias by ensuring that every member or element of the population has an equal chance of being selected. Conversely, non-probability sampling does not guarantee equal chances for all members of a population, which may introduce bias into the research.

Probability sampling is categorised into four main types: simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling. In simple random sampling, each individual or element within the population has an equal likelihood of being chosen. This is often accomplished using random number generation methods or similar approaches (Flick, 2014). Systematic sampling operates in a slightly different manner, as it involves selecting every *n*th individual from an ordered list of the population (Etikan et al., 2016). For example, if the population consists of 1,000 individuals and a sample size of 100 is required, the researcher will select every tenth individual. Stratified sampling is particularly useful when the population displays varied characteristics, and the researcher aims to ensure that each trait is adequately represented within the sample (Flick, 2014). This method involves dividing the population into distinct subgroups, or strata. Finally, cluster sampling is employed in situations involving large, geographically spread populations. It groups the population into clusters that share similar characteristics (Sharma, 2017). Despite its advantages, probability sampling does have some drawbacks, which occasionally prompts researchers to adopt non-probability sampling methods instead.

Non-probability sampling relies on non-random criteria for sample selection, meaning not all members of a population have an equal chance of being chosen. It includes four techniques: convenience sampling, voluntary response sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling, as the name suggests, is based on ease

of access for the researcher, making it both cost-effective and accessible (Sharma, 2017). However, it raises concerns about whether the sample is truly representative of the population, thus affecting the generalisability of the results. Voluntary response sampling, similar to convenience sampling, depends on the ease of access but differs in that respondents volunteer to participate rather than being selected by the researcher. Purposive sampling involves the researcher selecting the sample based on specific criteria, commonly used in qualitative research. Snowball sampling, the final technique, relies on current participants to recruit further respondents.

By thoroughly examining probability and non-probability sampling techniques, researchers can determine the most appropriate approach for their specific research needs. While probability sampling is often considered the most suitable method, non-probability sampling may be more appropriate in situations where a sampling frame is difficult to obtain. In such cases, non-parametric tests are recommended, as using non-probability sampling compromises the generalisability of the results (Denscombe, 2002). Given the challenges associated with probability sampling due to the lack of a sampling frame, this study employed judgmental sampling. This method involves selecting respondents based on the perception that they represent the entire population under study.

Purposive sampling is particularly effective when the target population possesses specific traits that are limited in number. It is relatively time-efficient compared to other sampling methods and is deemed appropriate when collecting information from a select group of individuals with specific characteristics (Etikan and Bala, 2017). This approach is viable when the researcher can identify a reliable professional who can serve as a representative sample. In this study, purposive sampling was used to select participants, as the research focused on individuals who had previously visited the destination.

4.3.4 Sample Size Determination

In the quantitative phase of the study, determining an appropriate sample size was crucial for ensuring the reliability and validity of the statistical analysis. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), the primary analytical technique used, requires a specific sample size to generate stable and reliable parameter estimates. According to Hair et al. (2019), a minimum sample size of 200 is typically recommended for SEM, particularly when the model involves multiple variables and complex relationships. This recommendation is aimed at achieving sufficient statistical power and producing robust results that can be generalised to a broader population.

Moreover, the complexity of the model, which included several latent constructs and their associated observed variables, further influenced the sample size determination. The literature suggests that as the number of constructs and indicators increases, a larger sample size is needed to maintain adequate statistical power (Kline, 2016). A review of similar studies employing SEM in the context of sustainable tourism and environmental behaviour indicated that sample sizes ranging from 300 to 500 respondents are commonly used to achieve reliable results (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012).

In light of these considerations, the initial target for data collection was set at 400 respondents to ensure an adequate sample size, even after accounting for potential issues such as non-response, incomplete data, or outlier removal. The decision to aim for a sample size exceeding the minimum recommendation was motivated by the desire to enhance the study's robustness and the generalisability of its findings.

Ultimately, data were successfully collected from 430 respondents, with 416 responses retained after data cleaning. The cleaning process involved removing multivariate outliers identified through Mahalanobis distance and excluding cases with significant missing data. The final sample size of 416 exceeded the minimum requirements for SEM and aligned with best practices in the field, providing a strong foundation for the

subsequent analysis.

4.3.5 Common method bias

A lack to carefully consider common method effects in empirical research may lead in a variety of negative consequences, including bias estimates of the validity and reliability of the measures used, as well as bias in estimates of the relationships between constructs of interest, which can affect hypothesis testing. Together, these factors make it extremely difficult to interpret the results when they are influenced by substantive common method effects. Several preventives, investigative, and corrective strategies have been proposed in the literature to address concerns regarding the possibility of common method effects behind observed outcomes (Aguirre-Urreta and Hu, 2019). The most popular is Harman's Single-Factor Test. Despite previous studies' doubts about its efficacy, this approach remains extremely popular in the area (Changetal.,2010).

Harman's Single-Factor Test In 1960, Harman with the exploratory study on factors showed loading of all factors of a construct on to one factor without rotation and made a step to show that there was no bias in the data set (Changetal.,2010; Harman, 1960; Podsakoff et al., 2003). The Harman single-factor technique became popular due to its straightforward implementation and reporting.

In the conducted investigation, a series of methodical steps were meticulously followed by the researcher. Initially, data was imported into SPSS to commence the analysis. This was followed by the identification of the specific section earmarked for factor analysis, thus laying the groundwork for subsequent analytical procedures. Subsequently, the preparation phase involved assigning all measurement items into the variable box for processing. In the fourth step, the extraction methodology utilized the maximum likelihood method, opting for an unrotated factor solution with the extraction parameters set to isolate one factor. The decision to abandon rotation was made intentionally to preserve the initial structure of data interpretation. Concluding the

process, the researcher diligently examined the column denoting the percentage of variance, which provided insights into the results obtained from the factor analysis.

In addition to the statistical remedies mentioned above, this research should also address procedural remedies for common method bias. In order to reduce respondents' tendency to satisfice and respond stylistically and to minimise acquiescence bias, reverse-coding items are implemented as "cognitive speed bumps" requiring additional processing time from respondents (Podsakoff et al., 2024). Chyung et al. (2018) observed that combining negative and positive questions of the same construct in a questionnaire can help direct respondents' focus and enhance the possibility of their engaging in a more thorough processing of the items. Furthermore, Mathews and Shepherd (2002) discovered that informing participants about the presence of negatively worded questions in a survey helped decrease careless responses and the incidence of negative factor loadings in their research findings.

4.4 Data collection methods

The subsequent subsections therefore elaborate on the utilisation and operationalization of the survey questionnaire method in this study.

4.4.1 The survey questionnaire method

The conceptual model was evaluated using data obtained from an online survey. This research utilized Wen Juan Xing, a popular online survey platform in China, to distribute the questionnaire to visitors at the Yellow River Delta destination. Participation was exclusive to visitors who had opted for local tour operators within the Yellow River Delta. Upon initiating the survey, participants were presented with instructions and an introductory overview upon clicking the survey link or scanning the provided QR code. This procedure facilitated the collection of data for the study.

4.4.2 Pilot Study

To ensure the suitability of the generated items, it is advisable to conduct a pilot study to assess the accuracy of the developed measurement scale. Following the guidelines proposed by Dillman (1991), the subsequent step involves verifying the reliability of the scale. It is crucial to test both the reliability and validity of the measurement scale before proceeding with the main research. To complete this phase, the researcher initially disseminated the questionnaires among several academics specializing in sustainable tourism to obtain their expert opinions, thereby ensuring face validity. Adjustments to the language were made as necessary based on their feedback. Once consensus among the experts was achieved regarding the instrument's appropriateness for measuring the constructs, the scale was deemed ready for the pilot study.

In alignment with the recommendations of Malhotra and Birks (2003), the pilot study should be conducted among relevant population elements possessing characteristics similar to those of the actual survey participants. As discussed earlier, data collection for the pilot study employed judgmental sampling, a non-probability sampling technique. The selection of population elements was purposive to ensure they accurately represented the broader population under investigation (Churchill, 1996). Following the aforementioned criteria, data for the pilot study were gathered from visitors with experience traveling to Yellow River Delta destinations. Existing guidelines suggest that typical pilot study sizes range from 5 to 20 participants, although this may yield limited precision. A common heuristic suggests utilizing a sample size equivalent to 10 to 20% of the full-scale survey sample size or at least 30 to 50 respondents (Hair et al., 2010). Accordingly, the sample size for the pilot study was chosen to slightly exceed the number of items in the scale to obtain reliable results.

The pilot test was conducted in October 2022, with the primary aim of evaluating the appropriateness and consistency of the questionnaire's sections and items. The visitors selected for the pilot test were chosen based on their extensive experience in the field

of sustainable tourism. These individuals not only possessed significant practical experience from their travels but also had substantial knowledge of sustainable tourism practices in the region, enabling them to provide targeted feedback. Consequently, they were able to comprehend the questions' nature and purpose without requiring additional detailed explanations. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Hair et al. (2010), who emphasize the importance of identifying individuals willing and capable of offering constructive feedback when developing and testing research scales.

Out of the thirty-five pilot questionnaires distributed, thirty were returned approximately two weeks after they were sent, resulting in a 85% response rate. Only five questionnaires were not received. The data obtained from the pilot study provided valuable insights into the overall robustness of the variables used in the research study. According to Bryman and Bell (2015), a response rate of 85% for a pilot test is significantly higher than the average response rate for postal questionnaires, which typically hovers around 20%. This high response rate is indicative of the likely interest and engagement in the research, offering confidence in the willingness of visitors to participate in the main study.

4.4.3 Validity Analysis

To assess the construct validity of the questionnaire, the instrument will be reviewed by independent experts who possess extensive knowledge of the concepts related to sustainable tourism. These experts will evaluate each item on the questionnaire to ensure it accurately measures the intended constructs. Following their review, any necessary revisions will be implemented based on their feedback to enhance the precision of the research outcomes.

4.4.4 Reliability Analysis

As highlighted by Marshall and Rossman (2014), it is possible for a measurement to be valid without being reliable, or reliable without being valid. This research project therefore strives to achieve both accuracy and reliability in data collection, as well as in the analysis and interpretation of the data, to ensure overall validity. Considering that the pre-test sample size is deemed sufficient (Malhotra and Birks, 2003), it is essential to evaluate the reliability of the measurement scale (Churchill, 1979). While various types of reliability exist, this study will focus on assessing internal consistency reliability to determine the extent to which the responses to the questionnaire items yield consistent results.

The evaluation of reliability will proceed in three stages. The first stage involves assessing the internal consistency of the items within the scale, as suggested by de Vellis (1991) and Churchill (1979). The second stage is to evaluate test-retest reliability to confirm the stability of responses over time (Nunnally, 1978). The third stage examines alternative forms of reliability, which measure the consistency of the constructs when assessed with different statements at different times (Netemeyer et al., 2003). However, this study will primarily focus on internal consistency reliability, which indicates that items intended to measure the same construct are highly intercorrelated. This intercorrelation suggests that the items share a common underlying core, thus confirming that they effectively measure the same concept (de Vellis, 1991; Netemeyer et al., 2003).

In this research, the internal reliability of the questionnaire items will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha, calculated via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Based on the assumption of Taber (2018), a Cronbach's alpha value within the range of 0.75 to 0.95 is considered acceptable. The reliability analysis of the questionnaire is expected to yield values within this range, indicating that the data collected will exhibit internal consistency.

During the pilot study, all variables demonstrated Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70, with overall results ranging from 0.70 to 0.95. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher indicates that the reliability coefficients are both consistent and dependable.

4.4.5 Questionnaire data analysis: structural equation modelling

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a significant multivariate statistical analysis method frequently employed in the social sciences for the development and testing of complex theories (Hair et al., 2019). However, it is worth noting that the acronym SEM does not specifically refer to a statistical technique, but rather denotes the utilisation of a combination of analyses, including factor analysis and multiple regression (Hair et al., 2019). The primary function of SEM is the analysis of covariance structures; to estimate such parameters, a variety of estimation techniques are available. Illustrative instances of such estimation methods consist of weighted least squares, generalised least squares, and maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) (Hair et al., 2019). The efficacy and efficiency of these estimation methods differ according to the sample size and distribution of the data. Nevertheless, MLE continues to be the most prevalent due to its robustness in situations where the assumption of normality is not satisfied (Olsson et al., 2000; Savalei, 2008).

Structural equation modelling are also suitable for evaluating intricate models using multivariate data (Hair et al., 2019). This is especially true when the model comprises variables that function as dependent variables in certain relationships while remaining independent variables in others. Destination social responsibility, awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, trust in tour operator, relationship commitment, trust in local government, personal norms, destination decline, and nature relatedness are the nine independent factors that comprise this thesis.

Depending on the context, these variables may be both dependent and independent. Therefore, a three-in-one approach comprising path analysis, factor analysis, and multiple regression was utilised in conjunction with SEM (Hair et al., 2019).

The initial element in SEM is the measurement model, which evaluates the connections between manifest variables or indicators and latent constructs (Hair et al., 2019). This can be achieved through the utilisation of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), a method that examines the associations between research indicators and latent constructs and validates these associations against the relevant theory in accordance with research hypotheses or previous empirical investigations (Hair et al., 2019; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019). According to Hair et al. (2019), CFA is a methodology utilised to assess the correspondence between a predetermined measurement theory consisting of factors and variables that have been measured and the information captured by data. Furthermore, dimensionality, validity, and reliability of the research variables or constructs are assessed by CFA (Hair et al., 2019).

The measurement model is employed to assess the validity, reliability, and multicollinearity of the research's latent constructs, as well as the pattern of indicator relationships (Hair et al., 2019). Furthermore, the measurement model operates under the assumption that all latent constructs are interconnected, as illustrated by the double-headed curved arrows in the models (Hair et al., 2019). This implies that no distinction exists between exogenous and endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2019). Endogenous constructs, denoted by single-headed arrows indicating their position in the models (Hair et al., 2019), pertain to outcomes and are determined by other constructs. Exogenous constructs, on the other hand, are deemed to be influenced by factors external to the research model and may be utilised to forecast other constructs. As a consequence, exogenous constructs are not denoted by arrows in the models (Hair et al., 2019). The objective of a structural model is to differentiate between exogenous and endogenous constructs, as well as to evaluate the model's fit and the hypotheses

associated with it (Hair et al., 2019). Furthermore, the structural model is designed to examine the research hypotheses, encompassing both direct and indirect connections.

4.5 The background of Yellow River Delta destination

To protect the wetland resources in the Yellow River Delta and the biodiversity in the delta region, in December 1990, the People's Government of Dongying City approved the establishment of a municipal-level nature reserve in the Yellow River Delta (Lu and Jiang, 2022). In 1992, the State Council officially approved the establishment of a national-level nature reserve in the Yellow River Delta (Xia et al., 2020). This reserve primarily focuses on the protection of wetland ecosystems and rare and endangered bird species, making it a multi-functional wetland ecosystem-type nature reserve. The location of the reserve is unique, with flat terrain, excellent climate, abundant biological resources, good ecological environment quality, and a sound protection system. It is the youngest, largest, and most extensive wetland protection area in the warm temperate zone of China. The Yellow River Estuary Tourism Zone has been developed around the nature reserve and serves as an important base for researching sustainable tourism development in China. Hence, it is important to present a comprehensive review of the fundamental circumstances pertaining to the destination.

Nestled at the confluence of the Yellow River and the Bohai Sea, flanked by Laizhou Bay to the east, the Yellow River Delta boasts a unique position where one of China's most storied rivers meets the sea (Guo, Zhang and Cui, 2023), see the **Figure 6**. The delta's geography, situated between the vast Northeast Asia inland and the fertile Jianghuai Plain, along with its favourable climate, has nurtured a rich tapestry of wetland ecosystems that are both diverse and expansive (Li et al., 2022).

This region has experienced a remarkable transformation, fuelled by the natural sedimentary processes of the Yellow River. The river, often referred to as 'China's Sorrow' due to its historically catastrophic floods, carries a significant sediment load, which has contributed to the delta's growth (Ren and Walker, 1998). Recent research by Bi et al. (2014) and Kong et al. (2015) suggests that the wetland area has been expanding progressively, positioning the Yellow River Delta as one of the world's most rapidly evolving landforms in terms of natural growth.

Furthermore, the Yellow River Delta's wetlands have become a focal point for eco-tourism. The development of the Yellow River Estuary Tourism Zone around the Shandong Yellow River Delta Nature Reserve underscores the region's allure as an eco-tourism hotspot. The zone has been designated as a national 5A-Level eco-tourism area, a classification that marks it as a premier destination for nature enthusiasts (Guo, Zhang and Cui, 2023). This recognition has helped to promote sustainable tourism practices that are sensitive to the ecological integrity of the wetlands.

4.5.1 Development and challenges in the Yellow River Delta's sustainable tourism

The Yellow River Delta's transformation into a sustainable tourism destination exemplifies the region's efforts to align economic development with environmental stewardship. These two key concepts, introduced earlier in the context of China's overall sustainability goals, are particularly relevant to the delta's development. The region has witnessed significant progress in infrastructure, community engagement, and conservation measures aimed at promoting eco-friendly tourism (Yu and Song, 2022). These advancements demonstrate the potential for sustainable tourism to contribute to both economic growth and environmental protection.

However, the development of sustainable tourism in the Yellow River Delta has also faced challenges. Yu and Song (2022) emphasize the need for a balance between resource consumption and economic growth within the tourism economy. Their

research provides insights into how the green development model can be applied in the specific context of the Yellow River Delta, such as through the adoption of low-carbon practices and the promotion of local products and services.

The construction of the Xiaolangdi Reservoir on the Yellow River has also raised concerns about the ecological impacts of large-scale infrastructure projects. Kong et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive assessment of the reservoir's socio-environmental consequences, revealing significant effects on local biodiversity, riverbed erosion, and the morphological evolution of the delta. Their findings underscore the complex relationship between infrastructure development and sustainable tourism, highlighting the need for careful planning and mitigation strategies.

As the Yellow River Delta continues to attract more visitors, the pressure on the natural environment has increased, leading to issues such as habitat degradation and pollution. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced approach that recognizes the ecological sensitivities of the delta ecosystem. Effective solutions must involve a range of stakeholders, including policymakers, local communities, and the private sector, working together to develop a comprehensive and resilient strategy for sustainable tourism.

The Yellow River Delta's sustainable tourism development is at a critical juncture, requiring a delicate balance between economic incentives and ecological imperatives. Achieving this balance necessitates the adoption of a green development paradigm that prioritizes resource efficiency, ecological preservation, and cultural integrity (Yu and Song, 2022). Robust empirical research and adaptive management practices are essential to guide decision-making and ensure that sustainable tourism practices can evolve in response to changing environmental conditions.

The Yellow River Delta Destination's progress as a sustainable tourism hub reflects China's commitment to balancing economic development with environmental preservation. The success of this endeavour relies on the continued involvement of

diverse stakeholders and the implementation of research-driven, adaptive management strategies. Therefore, this study selects the Yellow River Delta as the focal destination for exploring the correlation between variables linked to sustainable tourism.

4.6 Ethical considerations

It is of the highest priority to address ethical concerns in any research. This involves resolving critical questions concerning the study's insights, advantages, and logistical factors for each project. Qu and Dumay (2011) emphasised the importance of researchers safeguarding themselves and participants, guaranteeing safety for everyone during the period of the research. Since the current study employs survey questionnaires to explore sustainable tourism related matters, it poses no threat of physical or psychological injury to the participants. Furthermore, the research did not entail any perilous endeavours. The study was conducted during normal operating hours, ensuring that there were no interactions with anyone who posed a possible threat, and it was not conducted in any hazardous environments. This portion provides a detailed analysis of the ethical concerns that the researcher took into account regarding the selection of participants, the preservation of confidentiality and anonymity, and the protection of data.

Sheffield University Management School obtained ethical approval for the data collection techniques and participant briefing materials. Following that, questionnaires, consent forms, and information sheets were disseminated to participants to guarantee their comprehensive understanding of the study's objectives, methodologies, and materials, encompassing data security and privacy entitlements. Participants were mandated to provide informed consent before to their participation, with the guarantee that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any point prior to the publishing of findings.

Participants were obligated to sign a consent form that ensured their anonymity and the confidential treatment of their comments. This was done in order to utilise their information for the PhD thesis and other academic outputs, while also providing guarantees against the exposure of their names. Both the researcher and the participants have affixed their signatures to this paper.

After being collected, the survey data was converted into encrypted Microsoft Excel files, which could only be accessed by the researcher. The original questionnaires recordings were preserved securely at the researcher's home. The University of Sheffield utilised the SPSS software to do quantitative data analysis. The data obtained from questionnaires will be used solely to support this PhD project and its associated academic publications. The data will be kept for two years after the PhD is awarded.

Chapter 5: Result

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents the quantitative results of the study at both the destination and individual levels, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing sustainable tourism development in the Yellow River Delta, China. The study employs structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the proposed hypotheses to explore the relationships between various stakeholders and visitors' attitudes and behaviours. At the destination level, the results reveal the mediating role of trust and commitment in the relationship between DSR and visitors' Pro-Sustainable Behaviour (PSB), as well as the moderating effect of destination decline on the relationship between DSR and visitors' trust in tour operators.

At the individual level, the quantitative results examine the mediating role of personal norms in the relationship between situation activators (awareness of negative environmental consequences and ascription of responsibility) and visitors' PSB and donation intentions, as well as the moderating effect of nature relatedness on these relationships. The study demonstrates the reliability and validity of the measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and tests the proposed hypotheses using SEM, highlighting the importance of DSR, trust, commitment, personal norms, and nature relatedness in shaping visitors' PSB and donation intentions.

5.2 Survey Questionnaire Data Collection Results

In total, this study received 430 complete responses. After removing multivariate outliers using a Mahalanobis distance assessment and excluding inapplicable cases—those responses that did not meet essential conditions for valid data analysis, such as incomplete responses, inconsistencies, or cases falling outside the target population (Drumond, Rolo, and Costa, 2019), this research retained 416 responses for further

analysis.

A survey of visitors to the Yellow River Delta destination reveals some key demographic and behavioural trends. The gender distribution is nearly balanced, with 48.08% male visitors and 51.92% female visitors. All respondents reported that they chose local tour operators for their travel services. Regarding visit frequency, 40.14% were first-time visitors, while 44.95% were on their second visit. A smaller proportion, 8.89%, had visited the destination three to five times, and 6.02% had visited more than five times. The age distribution among participants was primarily concentrated in the 25-34 years age group, which accounted for 31.49% of the visitors. The next largest age group was 45-54 years old, representing 28.85%, followed by the 35-44 years group at 26.68%. Young adults aged 18-24 years made up 6.01% of visitors, while 55-64 years represented 4.33%, and those 65 years and older constituted 2.64%. In terms of income, 21.98% of participants earned below \$735.15 per month, while 27.64% earned between \$735.15 and \$1,176. The largest group, comprising 35.54%, earned between \$1,176 and \$2,058 monthly. Visitors earning more than \$2,058.15 accounted for 14.84%. The survey also gathered information on visitors' primary activities. The most common activity was relaxing or resting, reported by 35.56% of respondents, followed by sightseeing (31.49%). Observation or research related to plants, birds, or animals was the primary activity for 27.88% of visitors, while a smaller group (5.07%) prioritized exercise or fitness during their visit. In terms of educational attainment, a significant majority (84.4%) of respondents held a tertiary or university degree, while 15.6% had other levels of educational qualifications. All the information shows in the **Table 2.**

Table 2 Profile of Participants

Category	Description	Percentage
Gender Distribution	Male	48.08%
	Female	51.92%
Visit Frequency	First-time Visit	40.14%
	Second Visit	44.95%
	Third to Five Visit	8.89%
	More than Five Visits	6.02%
Age Distribution	18-24 years	6.01%
	25-34 years	31.49%
	35-44 years	26.68%
	45-54years	28.85%
	55-64 years	4.33%
	65 years and older	2.64%
Income Levels (monthly)	Below \$735.15	21.98%
	\$735.15 to \$1,176	27.64%
	\$1,176 to \$2,058	35.54%
	\$2,058.15 or more	14.84%
Primary Activities	Sightseeing	31.49%
	Observation/Research of Environment (Plants, Birds, Animals)	27.88%
	Relax/Rest	35.56%
	Exercise/Fitness	5.07%
Educational Attainment	Tertiary/University Degree	84.4%
	Other	15.6%

5.3 Assessment of measurement model-Destination Level

In the destination level results, the measurement model was assessed using PLS-SEM. To ensure reliability and convergent validity, outer loadings should exceed 0.7, with Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) values greater than 0.7, and the average variance extracted (AVE) greater than 0.5. Outer loadings above 0.5 are considered acceptable if CR, α , and AVE meet these thresholds (Hair et al., 2017; see **Table 3**). Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, which requires a construct's AVE to be greater than the square of its highest correlation with any other construct; our constructs satisfied this condition (see **Table 4**). These results confirmed the reliability and validity of the constructs.

Table 3 Constructs/underlying items and reliability test-Destination Level

Description of Items	Loadings *	α	AVE	CR
<i>Destination Social Responsibility</i>		0.907	0.646	0.846
The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are concerned about improving the overall welfare of society.	0.764			
The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta provide visitors with experiences through meaningful connections with local people and knowledge of local culture.	0.818			
The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are aware of the socio-cultural issues related to tourism and can help to solve them.	0.829			
The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta treat other customers very well.	0.811			
The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are trying to ensure their long-term success.	0.775			
The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are working hard to improve their economic performance.	0.833			
The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta seem to give back to the local community.	0.827			
The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta keep strict control over their costs.	0.828			
The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta include environmental concerns in their operations.	0.757			
The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta strive to reduce their consumption of natural resources.	0.813			
The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta communicate to their visitors about their own environmental practices.	0.825			
The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta publicly emphasize their concern over respecting and protecting the	0.814			

natural environment of the YRD area.

Trust in tour operators

0.837 0.571 0.841

I trust the tour operators to make the right decisions about the tour activities. 0.881

I trust the tour operators provided comprehensive and customized service for visitors. 0.813

I trust the tour operators to provide products that are good value for money. 0.799

I trust the tour operator provided quality service during the tour. 0.786

Trust in local government

0.557 0.834

I trust the local government of the Yellow River Delta to make the right decisions in relation to tourism 0.865

I trust the local government to handle tourism without strict supervision. 0.790

I trust the local government to do what is right for destination in relation to tourism in the Yellow River Delta. 0.827

I do not trust the local government to look after the interests of the Yellow River Delta destination in tourism development. 0.775

Relationship Commitment

0.586 0.848

I am very committed to this tour operator of the Yellow River Delta through this travel experience 0.901

I will maintain a relationship with the tour operators of the Yellow River Delta. 0.807

The tour operators of the Yellow River Delta deserve my maximum effort to maintain a relationship. 0.794

If the tour operators of the Yellow River Delta planned something, I would think of it as something “we” would do rather than something “they” would do. 0.793

Destination decline

0.515 0.841

There are not many social issues (e.g., social misbehaviours) in Yellow River Delta 0.779

There are many job opportunities in Yellow River Delta 0.802

There are many benign activities on the environment of Yellow River Delta. 0.812

Overall, I think that the Yellow River Delta is in develop as a destination 0.723

The Yellow River Delta could become an attractive destination in the future 0.788

Pro-sustainable Behaviour

0.895 0.591 0.812

I am willing to spend more on travel if it is beneficial for the environment. 0.765

I am willing to buy eco-friendly tours, even though they may be more expensive. 0.788

I am willing to use environmentally friendly transportation, even 0.801

though it may take more time.	
I would be willing to pay more to stay in an environmentally friendly place	0.822
I prefer to stay at local accommodation.	0.795
I prefer to eat locally sourced food.	0.813
I prefer to purchase locally produced goods.	0.819
I prefer to hire local guide services.	0.824
I would like to separate recycling from waste	0.785
I would like to use tissue made from recycled materials.	0.840
I would like to use eco-friendly green tourism business and services.	0.835
I would like to use reusable shopping bags.	0.832

Note: Significant at $t > 3.29$ at $p < 0.001$; α : Cronbach's Alpha, CR: Composite Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted.

Table 4 Correlation Matrix-Destination Level

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.DSR	0.646					
2.Trust in Tour Operator	0.308	0.571				
3.Relationship Commitment	0.137	0.253	0.586			
4. Destination Decline	-0.258	-0.152	-0.113	0.515		
5.Trust in Local Government	0.343	0.356	0.254	-0.024	0.557	
6.PSB	0.264	0.493	0.380	-0.198	0.443	0.591

Note: Square root of AVE is on the diagonal.

5.4 Destination-Level results Analysis

The data analysed using SPSS and AMOS software. The measurement model was established, and the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the maximum likelihood estimation method showed that the model had an adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 859.059$, $df = 758$, $p=0.006$, $\chi^2/df = 1.133$, $RMSEA = 0.018$, $CFI = 0.988$, $IFI = 0.988$, $GFI=0.911$, $TLI = 0.987$). The χ^2/df -value of 1.133 in the measurement model is within the acceptable range of 2–5, as noted by Marsh and Hocevar (1988), and other practical fit indices were adequate. The reliability values notably exceeded the 0.600 level recommended by Hair et al. (2010). All standardized factor loadings were significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating the convergence of the indicators (observed variables) with their associated underlying factors (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). In conjunction with the suitable fit of the measurement model, this finding provides empirical evidence of unidimensionality, signifying the existence of a single trait underlying each set of measurement items, as described by Hattie (1985).

Findings of structural model testing with the maximum likelihood estimation method revealed that the proposed structural model included an acceptable level of fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 1032.271$, $df = 838$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.232$, $RMSEA = 0.024$, $CFI = 0.977$, $IFI = 0.977$, $GFI=0.900$, $TLI = 0.975$). Details results of this model predicting visitor's PSB are shown in **Figure 7** and **Tables 5 and 7**. This model has a satisfactory level of explanatory power for behaviour in that the variables within the framework explained about 50.9% of the variance in PSB. In addition, approximately 7.2% of the total variance in relationship commitment was accounted for by its predictors. Moreover, visitors' trust factors explained about 21.9% and 20.2% of the variance in tour-operator and local government, respectively.

The hypothesized relationships among the research variables were rigorously tested, presented in **Table 5**. Specifically, the associations between DSR and visitors' trust in tour-operators and local government were examined (H1a and H1b). The findings revealed that DSR positively influences visitors' trust in tour-operators ($\beta=0.412$,

$p < 0.001$), as well as trust in local government ($\beta = 0.471$, $p < 0.001$), thereby substantiating Hypotheses 1. Additionally, the proposed relationship between visitors' trust in tour-operators and their commitment to the relationship was evaluated (H2). The results demonstrated a significant impact of visitors' trust in tour-operators on relationship commitment ($\beta = 0.267$, $p < 0.001$), lending support to Hypothesis 2. Furthermore, relationship commitment was found to significantly influence visitors' PSB ($\beta = 0.261$, $p < 0.001$), confirming Hypothesis 3. Visitors' trust in tour-operators was also observed to positively affect their PSB ($\beta = 0.401$, $p < 0.01$), thus supporting Hypothesis 4. Lastly, the impact of visitors' trust in local government on their PSB was significant ($\beta = 0.350$, $p < 0.001$), validating Hypothesis 5.

Table 5 The structural model results

Hypothesis	Direct effect	β	t-values
H1a	DSR \rightarrow Trust in tour-operator	0.412***	6.327
H1b	DSR \rightarrow Trust in local government	0.471***	6.503
H2	Trust in tour-operator \rightarrow Relationship commitment	0.267***	4.831
H3	Relationship commitment \rightarrow PSB	0.261***	4.808
H4	Trust in tour-operator \rightarrow PSB	0.401***	6.645
H5	Trust in local government \rightarrow PSB	0.350***	5.979

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$. DSR, destination social responsibility; PSB, pro-sustainable behaviour.

The indirect impact of research variables on visitors' PSB was methodically investigated, this study employed mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4 and 6), shown in **Table 6**. The analysis revealed that DSR significantly influences PSB indirectly via visitors' trust in tour-operators and their relationship commitment ($\beta_{\text{DSR-TT-RC-PSB}} = 0.019$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, the findings indicate that visitors' trust in local government significantly mediates the relationship between DSR and visitors' PSB ($\beta_{\text{DSR-TG-PSB}} = 0.137$, $p < 0.001$), thereby corroborating Hypothesis 6.

Table 6 The structural model results: Mediating impact

Mediation effect (H6)	Standardized estimates	Lower CI	Upper CI
DSR→ Trust in Tour operator→ Relationship Commitment→PSB	0.029***	0.009	0.031
DSR→ Trust in Local government →PSB	0.165***	0.093	0.185

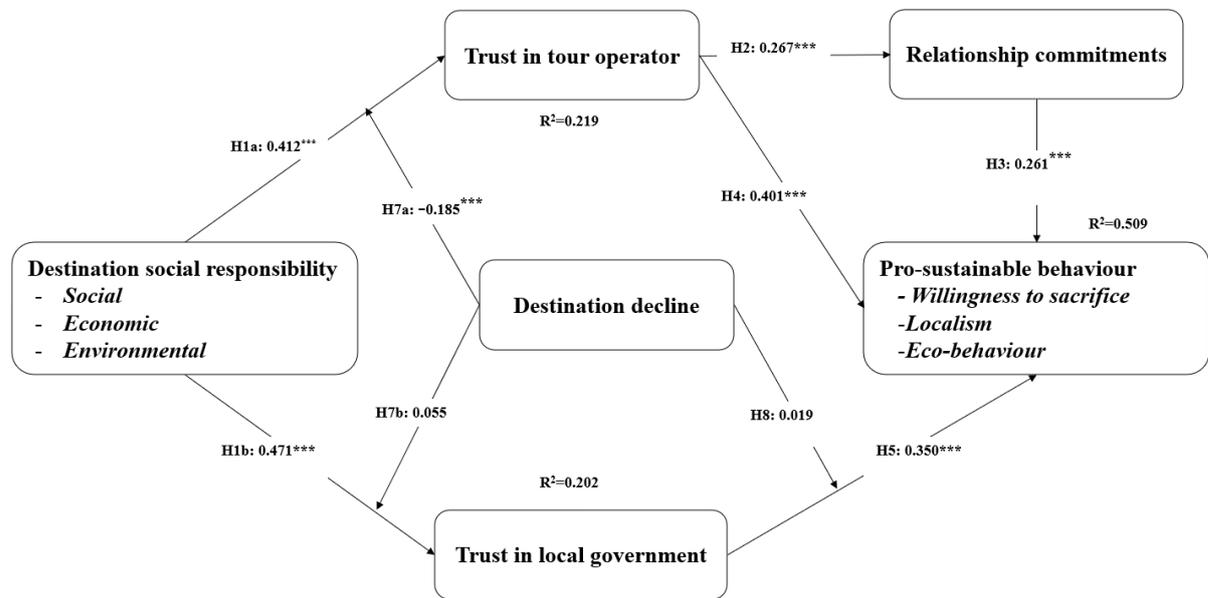
Note: ***: $p < 0.001$. DSR, destination social responsibility; PSB, pro-sustainable behaviour.

This study employed a moderated mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Models 86 and 58) with the bootstrap test, presented in **Table 7**. The analysis revealed a significant moderated mediation effect when trust in tour-operators was the dependent variable and DSR was the independent variable, with destination decline serving as the moderator ($b = -0.013$; $SE = 0.004$; 5000 bootstraps; $CI_{95\%}: [-0.025, -0.006]$). Consequently, Hypothesis 7a is supported. However, no significant moderation effects were observed when trust in local government ($b = 0.064$; $SE = 0.061$; 5000 bootstraps; $CI_{95\%}: [-0.056, 0.184]$) and PSB of visitors ($b = -0.046$; $SE = 0.044$; 5000 bootstraps; $CI_{95\%}: [-0.133, 0.040]$) were the dependent variables. Therefore, Hypotheses 7b and 8 are not supported.

Table 7 The structural model results

Hypotheses	Moderating effect	Standardized estimates	t-values
H7a	DSR * Destination Decline→Trust in tour-operator	-0.185***	-3.794
H7b	DSR* Destination Decline→Trust in local government	0.055	1.099
H8	Destination Decline*Trust in local government→PSB	0.019	0.417

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$. DSR, destination social responsibility; PSB, pro-sustainable behaviour.



H6a: Destination social responsibility → Trust in tour operator → Relationship commitment → Pro-sustainable behaviour $\beta = 0.029$ ***
H6b: Destination social responsibility → Trust in government → Pro-sustainable behaviour $\beta = 0.165$ ***

Note: Goodness-of-fit statistics: $\chi^2 = 1032.271$, $df = 838$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.232$, $RMSEA = 0.024$, $CFI = 0.977$, $IFI = 0.977$, $GFI = 0.900$, $TLI = 0.975$

Figure 7 The structural model assessment-Destination Level

5.5 Assessment of measurement model-Individual Level

In the individual level results, the measurement model was assessed using PLS-SEM. To establish reliability and convergent validity, outer loadings should exceed 0.7, with Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) values greater than 0.7, and average variance extracted (AVE) greater than 0.5. Outer loadings above 0.5 are acceptable if CR, α , and AVE meet the required thresholds (see **Table 8**). Discriminant validity was tested using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, which requires that a construct's AVE be greater than the square of its highest correlation with any other

construct. This research constructs satisfied this requirement (see **Table 9**).

Table 8 Constructs/underlying items and reliability test-Individual Level

Description of Items	Loadings ^a	α	AVE	CR
<i>Awareness of negative environmental consequences</i>		0.800	0.502	0.801
Tourism helps the preservation of the beauty of this place.	0.798			
Tourism is not bringing too much noise to this place.	0.761			
This place is polluted because of tourism.	0.812			
Tourism makes this a better place to stay for visitors.	0.792			
<i>Ascription of Responsibility</i>		0.809	0.516	0.810
It is my responsibility to minimise my impact on this destination.	0.776			
I feel I am jointly responsible for tourism's impacts on the environment.	0.802			
I can do something to mitigate or even eliminate the negative impacts of tourism	0.809			
It is up to everyone to keep the environment clean in the Yellow River Delta.	0.804			
<i>Personal Norm</i>		0.805	0.508	0.805
I have the obligation to protect the environment of the Yellow River Delta.	0.777			
I feel an obligation to reduce the negative impact on the local community during the trip.	0.793			
I have the obligation to comply with local environmental regulations and laws.	0.794			
Because of my own principles I feel that I should behave in an environmentally responsible way while travelling on this destination.	0.813			
<i>Nature Relatedness</i>		0.867	0.523	0.868
My ideal vacation spot would be a remote, wilderness area.	0.772			
I always think about how my actions affect the environment.	0.821			
My connection to nature and the environment is a part of my spirituality.	0.744			
I take notice of wildlife wherever I am.	0.754			
My relationship to nature is an important part of who I am.	0.773			
I feel very connected to all living things and the earth.	0.785			
<i>Donation Intentions</i>		0.815	0.525	0.815
I intend on making a donation to the sustainable tourism projects of the Yellow River Delta Destination soon.	0.807			
I would like to donate to the sustainable tourism projects of the Yellow River Delta Destination.	0.801			
If I wanted to, I could easily donate money and time to the sustainable tourism projects of the Yellow River Delta	0.815			

Destination.				
I would like to encourage people who travel with me to donate to the sustainable tourism projects in the Yellow River Delta destinations.	0.785			
<i>Pro-sustainable Behaviour</i>		0.895	0.596	0.814
I am willing to spend more on travel if it is beneficial for the environment.	0.765			
I am willing to buy eco-friendly tours, even though they may be more expensive.	0.788			
I am willing to use environmentally friendly transportation, even though it may take more time.	0.801			
I would be willing to pay more to stay in an environmentally friendly place	0.822			
I prefer to stay at local accommodation.	0.795			
I prefer to eat locally sourced food.	0.813			
I prefer to purchase locally produced goods.	0.819			
I prefer to hire local guide services.	0.824			
I would like to separate recycling from waste	0.785			
I would like to use tissue made from recycled materials.	0.840			
I would like to use eco-friendly green tourism business and services.	0.835			
I would like to use reusable shopping bags.	0.832			

Note: Significant at $t > 3.29$ at $p < 0.001$; α : Cronbach's Alpha, CR: Composite Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted.

Table 9 Correlation Matrix-Individual Level

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Awareness of negative environmental consequence	0.502					
2.Ascription of Responsibility	0.263	0.516				
3.Personal Norm	0.232	0.252	0.508			
4.Nature Relatedness	0.035	0.263	0.127	0.523		
5.Donation Intentions	0.288	0.281	0.241	0.144	0.525	
6.PSB	0.157	0.201	0.283	-0.016	0.198	0.596

Note: Square root of AVE is on the diagonal.

5.6 Individual-level results

The data analysed using SPSS and AMOS software. The measurement model was established, and the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the maximum likelihood estimation method showed that the model had an adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 524.894$, $df = 509$, $p=0.304$, $\chi^2/df = 1.031$, $RMSEA = 0.009$, $CFI = 0.997$, $IFI = 0.997$, $GFI=0.933$, $TLI = 0.997$). The χ^2/df -value of 1.031 in the measurement model is within the acceptable range of 2–5, as noted by Marsh and Hocevar (1988), and other practical fit indices were adequate. The reliability values notably exceeded the 0.600 level recommended by Hair et al. (2010). All standardized factor loadings were significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating the convergence of the indicators (observed variables) with their associated underlying factors (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). In conjunction with the suitable fit of the measurement model, this finding provides empirical evidence of unidimensionality, signifying the existence of a single trait underlying each set of measurement items, as described by Hattie (1985).

Findings of structural model testing with the maximum likelihood estimation method revealed that the proposed structural model included an acceptable level of fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 656.918$, $df = 605$, $p = 0.071$, $\chi^2/df = 1.086$, $RMSEA = 0.014$, $CFI = 0.991$, $IFI = 0.991$, $GFI=0.924$, $TLI = 0.990$). Details results of this model predicting visitor's PSB and donation intentions are shown in **Figure 8** and **Tables 10 and 12**. This model has a satisfactory level of explanatory visitors' personal feeling for behaviour in that the variables within the framework explained about 13.8% of the variance in PSB. In addition, approximately 13.2% of the total variance in donation intentions was accounted for by its predictors. Moreover, visitors' personal norm factors explained about 20.3% of the variance.

The hypothesized relationships among the research variables were rigorously tested, presented in **Table 10**. Specifically, the associations between awareness of negative environmental consequence and person norm were examined (H9). The findings revealed that awareness of negative environmental consequence positively influences

visitors' person norm ($\beta=0.216, p<0.001$), confirming Hypothesis 9. Furthermore, the relationship between ascription of responsibility and person norm were examined (H10). The results demonstrated a significant impact of awareness of negative environmental consequence on visitors' person norm ($\beta=0.257, p<0.001$) lending support to Hypothesis 10. Additionally, the proposed relationship between visitors' personal norm and their pro-sustainable behaviour was evaluated (H11). The results demonstrated a significant impact of visitors' personal norm on pro-sustainable behaviour ($\beta=0.372, p<0.001$), lending support to Hypothesis 11. Lastly, the relationship between visitors' personal norm and visitors' donation intentions were examined (H12). The findings revealed that visitors' personal norm positively influences visitors' donation intentions ($\beta=0.323, p<0.001$), validating Hypothesis 12.

Table 10 The structural model results

Hypothesis	Direct effect	β	t-values
H9	Awareness of negative environmental consequence \rightarrow Personal norm	0.216***	3.386
H10	Ascription of responsibility \rightarrow Personal norm	0.257***	3.775
H11	Personal norm \rightarrow PSB	0.372***	5.534
H12	Personal norm \rightarrow Donation intentions	0.323***	5.120

Note: ***: $p<0.001$. PSB, pro-sustainable behaviour.

The indirect impact of research variables on visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intentions was methodically investigated using a mediation analysis with Hayes' PROCESS macro (model 4), shown in **Table 11**. The analysis revealed that awareness of negative environmental consequence significantly influences PSB indirectly via visitors' personal norm ($\beta_{AC-PN-PSB}=0.080, p=0.001$), hypothesis 13a. Additionally, the findings indicate that visitors' personal norm significantly mediates the relationship between ascription of responsibility and visitors' PSB ($\beta_{AR-PN-PSB}=0.096,$

$p < 0.001$), hypothesis 13b, thereby corroborating Hypothesis 13. Furthermore, the result demonstrated that awareness of negative environmental consequence significantly influences visitors' donation intentions indirectly via visitors' personal norm ($\beta_{AC-PN-DI} = 0.070, p = 0.001$), hypothesis 14a. Besides, the findings indicate that visitors' personal norm significantly mediates the relationship between ascription of responsibility and visitors' donation intentions ($\beta_{AR-PN-DI} = 0.083, p < 0.001$), hypothesis 14b, thereby confirming Hypothesis 14.

Table 11 The structural model results: Mediating impact

Mediation effect	Standardized estimates	Lower CI	Upper CI
H13a Awareness of negative environmental consequence → Personal norm → PSB	0.080**	0.030	0.138
H13b Ascription of responsibility → Personal norm → PSB	0.096***	0.041	0.163
H14a Awareness of negative environmental consequence → Personal norm → Donation intentions	0.070**	0.024	0.129
H14b Ascription of responsibility → Personal norm → Donation intentions	0.083***	0.034	0.146

Note: ** $p < 0.005$. ***: $p < 0.001$. PSB, pro-sustainable behaviour.

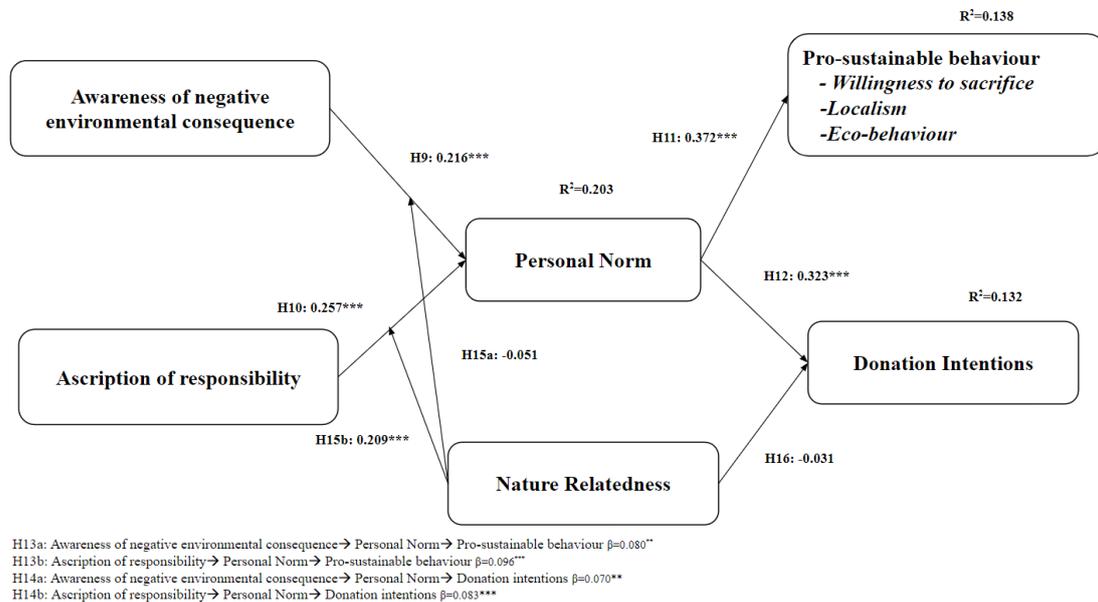
The moderator impact of research variables on visitors' nature relatedness were methodically investigated. This study employed a moderated mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro, presented in **Table 12**. The result indicated that no significant moderation effect was observed when awareness of negative environmental consequence was the dependent variable and personal norm was the independent variable, with nature relatedness serving as the moderator ($b = -0.051$; $SE = 0.047$; $p = 0.334$). Therefore, Hypothesis 15a is not supported. However, the analysis revealed a significant moderated effect when ascription of responsibility was the dependent variable and personal norm was the independent variable, with nature relatedness serving as the moderator ($b = 0.209$; $SE = 0.046$; $p < 0.001$). Consequently, Hypothesis

15b is supported. Finally, the result demonstrated that no significant moderation effect was observed when personal norm was the dependent variable and donation intentions was the independent variable, with nature relatedness serving as the moderator ($b = -0.031$; $SE = 0.041$; $p=0.551$). Therefore, Hypothesis 16 are not supported.

Table 12 The structural model results

Hypotheses	Moderating effect	Standardized estimates	t-values
H15a	Awareness of negative environmental consequence * Nature relatedness \rightarrow Personal Norm	-0.051	-0.966
H15b	Ascription of responsibility * Nature relatedness \rightarrow Personal Norm	0.209	3.872
H16	Personal Norm* Nature relatedness \rightarrow Donation Intentions	-0.031	-0.596

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$. PSB, pro-sustainable behaviour.



Note: Goodness-of-fit statistics: $\chi^2 = 656.918$, $df = 605$, $p = 0.071$, $\chi^2/df = 1.086$, $RMSEA = 0.014$, $CFI = 0.991$, $IFI = 0.991$, $GFI = 0.924$, $TLI = 0.990$

Figure 8 The structural model assessment-Individual Level

5.7 The Result of Common Method Bias

In this study, the total variance explained is 17.226%, well below the 50% threshold, indicating no significant presence of common method bias based on Harman's Single-Factor Test. To further mitigate potential common method bias, procedural remedies were implemented, including the use of reverse-coded questions designed as "cognitive speed bumps" to prompt more thoughtful responses and reduce acquiescence bias. Moreover, the questionnaire combined positive and negative items and informed participants of the presence of negatively worded questions, which helped minimise careless responses and enhance the overall quality of the data.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the findings of the study at both the destination and individual levels, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between various factors influencing sustainable tourism development in the Yellow River Delta, China.

At the destination level, the study reveals the mediating role of trust and commitment between DSR and visitors' PSB, as well as the moderating effects of destination decline on the relationship between DSR and visitors' trust in tour operators and government. At the individual level, the study examines the mediating role of personal norms between situation activators (awareness of negative environmental consequences and ascription of responsibility) and visitors' PSB and donation intentions, as well as the moderating effects of nature relatedness.

6.2 Discuss findings at destination-level

The present study developed and tested an integrated model to investigate how perceived DSR contributes to visitors' PSB via perceived trust in both tour operators and local government, as well as commitment relationship. This study revealed the mediating role of trust and commitment between DSR and visitors' PSB and demonstrated the moderating effects of destination decline in the relationship between DSR and visitors' trust in tour operators and government. The integrated model was empirically tested using data from a famous wetland destination in Shandong, China. Drawing on commitment-trust theory, the study confirmed that DSR, as perceived by tour operators and local government in the process of promoting sustainable practices, is important in shaping visitors' perceived trust, commitment, and PSB. This integration is pivotal, considering the Chinese government's innovative approach to harmonizing economic development with environmental sustainability and social equity through the

Chinese Ecological Civilisation framework (Wei et al., 2021; Nelson, 2020). This ancient philosophy, advocating for a symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature, mirrors the essence of DSR in promoting sustainable tourism practices that respect the natural and cultural heritage of destinations.

6.2.1 Impact of DSR on Trust (H1)

This study identified a significant positive correlation between DSR and trust in tour operators, echoing the findings of Su, Lian, and Huang (2020), who explored the impact of visitors' perceptions of DSR motives on their trust and intentions to visit a destination. These outcomes suggest that DSR initiatives are instrumental in fostering trust among visitors towards business. Further research by Su, Huang, and Hsu (2018) underscores the influence of DSR on visitors' perceptions, trust, loyalty, and intentions to visit, highlighting the role of DSR as a critical element in sustainable tourism practices. This is attributed to its reflection of visitors' satisfaction with their destination experiences and their propensity to return.

Moreover, the overall image of a destination, as perceived by potential visitors, has a significant impact on their intention to visit the destination, as supported by the study conducted by Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou, and Apostolopoulou (2015). This image is particularly attractive to visitors who have a high value on respecting nature and local culture, which are fundamental principles of the Chinese Ecological Civilisation. The Chinese Ecological Civilisation framework, known for its comprehensive approach that combines political, economic, cultural, social, and environmental aspects, provides a broad viewpoint for assessing and enhancing the impact of DSR on tourism. The literature also suggests that visitors' attitudes and behaviours are influenced by the reputation of the destination (Christou, 2007; Loureiro and Kastenholtz, 2011), with destination reputation playing a pivotal role in engendering trust towards a visitor destination (Artigas et al., 2017; Johnson and Grayson, 2005). Lee and Heo (2009),

drawing on stakeholder theory, posited that the extent of DSR fulfilment significantly affects visitors' attitudes and behaviours. Hassan and Soliman (2021) examined the effect of DSR on destination reputation, perceived trust by tour operators, and their revisit intentions, also assessing the direct relationships among destination reputation, visitors' perceived trust, and their intention to revisit. Rodriguez and Cruz (2007) further demonstrated the impact of DSR on visitors' loyalty to a destination.

At the dawn of the 21st century, the Chinese government introduced the innovative concept of "Ecological Civilisation," aimed at harmonizing economic advancement with environmental sustainability and social equity (Wei et al., 2021). This initiative is grounded in the age-old Chinese philosophy that advocates for a symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature, encapsulated in the axiom "nature and Man as one" (Nelson, 2020). Such a philosophy fosters a comprehensive worldview, recognizing humans as an inseparable element of the natural environment, and advocating for a balance between human aspirations and the well-being of other life forms and the ecological system at large (Berkes, Folke, and Gadgil, 1995). In accordance with the ethos of the Chinese ecological civilisation framework, this study substantiates a significant positive linkage between DSR and trust in local government. Trust within the context of tourism is identified as a complex construct that includes the perceptions of integrity, goodwill, and capability associated with local citizens, as well as governmental and private entities (Marinao, Torres, and Chasco, 2012). This observation aligns with prior research, notably by Nunkoo (2015), which highlights the instrumental role of local government in advancing sustainability. This is primarily through their stewardship over key planning activities, supported by their legal mandate to implement policies governing land-use planning and regulation of local development (Dredge and Jenkins, 2007; Dredge and Moore, 1992; O'Faircheallaigh, 2015).

6.2.2 Trust, Relationship Commitment and Pro-sustainable behaviour (H2, H3, H4, H5)

The present study found that visitors' perceived trust in tour operators positively affected their commitment relationship. This result is consistent with De Ruyter, Moorman and Lemmink (2001), Johanson and Vahlne (2009), and Rodríguez and Wilson (2002), who found that trust is considered a significant factor influencing commitment when there is a willingness and desire to sustain the relationship. Trust is paramount in the context of relational exchanges, a notion underscored by Spekman (1988), who considers it the cornerstone of strategic partnerships. This perspective is rooted in the understanding that relationships imbued with trust are greatly valued, leading parties to commit wholeheartedly to these alliances (Hrebiniak, 1974). The essence of commitment entails a certain vulnerability, thereby driving the propensity to establish connections exclusively with partners perceived as reliable.

Furthermore, visitors' relationship commitment positively affects their PSB. Based on trust-commitment theory, this study examined the effect of perceived trust in tour operators on visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour. This result is in accordance with previous research that identified biospheric values influence visitors' engagement in pro-environmental actions, even when such behaviours entail a certain level of cost (Steg et al., 2014; Loebnitz and Aschemann-Witzel, 2016). Relationship commitment, characterised by emotional attachment and mutual values, is posited to significantly influence visitors' engagement in pro-sustainable behaviours (Hessling, Asberg, and Roxenhall, 2018). Such relationship commitment to a destination on an emotional level enhances the propensity of visitors to exhibit environmentally responsible behaviours (Gorica et al., 2012).

This study found a positive relationship between visitors' perceived trust in tour operators and their PSB. Trust in tour operators reduces transaction costs, especially when people are unable to judge whether opportunism and uncertain situations will

emerge (Gefen et al., 2003). If visitors perceive trust from tour operators, they have a relationship with commitments that they will have confidence in the reliability (Bao and Wang, 2021), and thus their PSB could support sustainable practices.

Similarly, this study found a positive relationship between visitors' perceived trust in local government and their PSB. Trust in local government is a subjective phenomenon as visitors employ diverse criteria to assess their overall trust in local government (Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2003). Local government and their services are more visible and judged more important by visitors (Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2001). This finding contributes to the ongoing debate in the literature about the role of trust in local government in shaping pro-sustainable behaviours.

While some studies argue that trust in government is a key driver of sustainable behaviours (e.g., Nunkoo, 2015), others suggest that personal values and attitudes are more influential (e.g., Steg et al., 2014). The present research finding supports the former perspective, highlighting the importance of building trust in local government to promote PSB.

6.2.3 Mediation Impact of Trust, Relationship Commitment, and Trust (H6)

Trust and relationship commitment mediated the influence of DSR on visitors' PSB. This finding is in line with previous studies that stressed the important mediating impact of trust and relationship commitment (Palacios-Florencio et al., 2018; Sargeant and Lee, 2004; Loo-Zambrano, Santos-Roldán and Palacios-Florencio, 2022). Particularly, Sargeant and Lee (2004) highlight a positive causal relation between the degree of trust and behaviour mediated by commitment. Similarly, trust in local government positively mediated the impact of DSR on visitors' PSB. This result is consistent with Su and Swanson (2019) and Shiri and Jafari-Sadeghi (2023) who found organisational trust mediates the impact of CSR on the sustainable behaviours of employees. Above all,

this research results confirm that as trust in business or local government increases, visitors will be more motivated to engage in PSB.

6.2.4 Moderation Impact of Destination Decline (H7, H8)

When visitors perceive a destination is in decline, they may blame tour operators for the DSR failure, consequently diminishing their trust. This result is in accordance with Blázquez-Salom, Cladera and Sard (2023) who discussed when tourism exerts a certain level of pressure in terms of cultural, environmental and economic aspects, destination decline caused by overtourism begins to have negative effects on visitors.

Interestingly, destination decline does not moderate the link between DSR and trust in local government. Contrasted with direct interaction with tour operators, visitors indirectly interact with local government, which might buffer the impact of perceived destination decline on their trust in the local government. This insight is in line with Kutzner's (2019) emphasis on the different roles and perceptions of tour operators and local government regarding environmental change, resilience, and adaptation in nature-based tourism. Additionally, visitors use different criteria to determine their general trust in government, particularly factors beyond the control of the local government (Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2003), which may lead to a less direct impact on trust in the government.

This study also examined the moderating effect of destination decline on the relationship between visitors' trust in government and their PSB. Destination decline can be driven by the growth of a large group of visitors with lower value added and intense behaviour-related, cultural, or ecological disturbances (Dhiraj and Kumar, 2021). Therefore, it is imperative to actively manage excessive growth (Panayiotopoulos and Pisano, 2019). A possible explanation for this result is that destination declines come from a rapid influx of visitors into destinations causing major environmental problems, reflecting contradictions between visitors and local residents,

giving rise to questions concerning social and ecological sustainability (Cheung and Li, 2019).

In conclusion, the quantitative findings provide a clear understanding of the complex dynamics between DSR, trust, commitment, and PSB in the context of sustainable tourism development in the Yellow River Delta. The results highlight the roles and perceptions of tour operators, local government, and visitors in promoting sustainable practices and addressing destination decline. These insights offer valuable implications for destination managers and policymakers seeking to foster sustainable tourism development and encourage visitors' pro-sustainable behaviours in fragile ecosystems.

6.3 Discuss findings at individual-level

By means of perceived personal norms in visitors' experiences, the current study developed and evaluated an integrated model to examine how perceived awareness of negative environmental consequences and ascription of responsibility influence visitors' PSB and donation intentions. This study revealed the mediating role of personal norms between situation activators (awareness of negative environmental consequence and ascription of responsibility) and visitors' PSB and donation intentions. In addition, it demonstrated the moderating effects of nature relatedness in the relationship between two situation activators (awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility) and visitors' personal norms and the relationship between personal norms and donation intentions. The integrated model was empirically tested using data from a famous wetland destination in Shandong, China. Drawing on norm activation theory, the study confirmed that awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, as perceived by visitors themselves in the process of sustainable tourism, is important in affecting visitors' personal norms and shaping their PSB and donation intentions. The model introduces the ecological civilisation framework to explain mechanisms leading to visitors' engagement in sustainable practices.

6.3.1 Awareness of Negative Environmental Consequences, Ascription of Responsibility on Personal Norms (H9, H10)

The present study demonstrates that awareness of negative environmental consequences substantially enhances personal norms (H9). The motivation behind individuals' intentions to partake in environmentally sustainable practices is deeply embedded in their comprehension of the detrimental effects associated with environmental issues (André et al., 2008). Such awareness elicits an intrinsic moral reaction, as individuals acknowledge the ramifications of their actions on the environmental landscape (Setiawan, Afiff and Heruwasto, 2020). For example, when visitors are confronted with the tangible effects of environmental damage, such as plastic pollution at a destination, it can lead to an internal moral response. This internalisation process is pivotal in transforming cognitive awareness into actionable norms, thereby leading to sustainable practices such as recycling, conservation, and supporting green initiatives (Karimi and Mohammadimehr, 2022; Zarei et al., 2021).

A study by Denley et al. (2020) reveals that when visitors perceive the environment to be at risk, their personal norms can be activated, leading to intentions to engage in 'last chance tourism,' a phenomenon where visitors are motivated to visit destinations before they perceive them to be changed or gone. This sense of urgency reflects the deep connection between awareness of negative environmental consequence and the activation of personal norms, which can manifest in a desire to experience and potentially protect these vulnerable destinations.

The present study found that visitors' ascription of responsibility positively affected visitors' personal norms (H10). When individuals believe they have a role in causing or mitigating environmental problems, they are more likely to engage in behaviours that reflect their personal norms (Han et al., 2018). This sense of responsibility is not just about acknowledging one's part in the problem but also recognizing one's ability to contribute to the solution. This finding is in line with Schwartz's (1970) discussion that

personal norms become activated when an individual feels responsible for causing or solving a problem (ascription of responsibility).

Similarly, Arya and Kumar (2023) also found that university students indicated that the ascription of responsibility significantly predicts personal norms. In the sustainable tourism area, for instance, visitors may feel a personal responsibility to reduce their carbon footprint after recognizing the impact of environmental pollution or climate change (ascription of responsibility). This sense of responsibility may become a personal norm that guides their actions, such as choosing to cycle rather than drive.

6.3.2 Personal Norms on Pro-Sustainable Behaviour and Donation Intentions (H11, H12)

There is a positive relationship between personal norms and pro-sustainable behaviour (H11). The result is consistent with Kiatkawsin and Han (2017), who found that individuals with a strong sense of responsibility tend to embrace pro-environmental norms, ultimately boosting their intentions to engage in pro-sustainable behaviours. It is worth noting that Collado et al. (2019) also underscores a positive relationship between personal norms and pro-sustainable behaviour. Furthermore, personal norms are suggested to play a substantial role in an individual's perceptions and intentions to engage in sustainable travel behaviours, including their willingness to make sacrifices, support localism, and demonstrate eco-friendly actions (Kiatkawsin and Han, 2017; Landon et al., 2018).

Personal norms also have a positive impact on visitors' donation intentions (H12). The result suggests personal norms regarding environmental responsibility can enhance donation intentions, especially when individuals perceive that their contributions can lead to meaningful environmental improvements (Han et al., 2018). It is supported by Kim and Han (2020) and Piliavin and Charng (1990) highlighting those personal norms,

which are specific behaviour-related standards derived from internalised values during the decision-making process, influence donation intentions. Moreover, this relationship is reinforced by the emotional engagement that often accompanies the internalisation of personal norms. This emotional connection not only leads to behaviour changes but also to a willingness to invest in the well-being of the environment (Karimi and Mohammadimehr, 2022; Nisbet, Zelenski and Murphy, 2011).

6.3.3 Mediation Impact of Personal Norms (H13a, H13b, H14a, H14b)

Personal norms positively mediate the relationship between awareness of negative environmental consequences and pro-sustainable behaviour (H13a) and the relationship between ascription of responsibility and pro-sustainable behaviour (H13b). The results indicate that visitors with awareness of negative environmental consequences and ascription of responsibility to themselves are more likely to develop strong personal norms, which drives their pro-sustainable behaviour during their travels. The findings are consistent with previous research by Harland, Staats and Wilke (2007) that personal norms play a mediating role in the impact of situational activators, including awareness of negative consequences and the ascription of responsibility on pro-sustainable behaviour.

Similarly, personal norms positively mediate the relationship between awareness of negative environmental consequences and donation intentions (H14a) and the relationship between ascription of responsibility and donation intentions (H14b). The results indicate that visitors who possess awareness and a sense of responsibility for negative environmental consequences are influenced by their personal norms to financially contribute to environmental protection. This aligns with the prior research conducted by Groot and Steg (2009) and Steg, Drijerink and Abrahamse (2005), which proposes that awareness of consequences and attributed responsibility indirectly influence intentions and behaviours through personal norms.

6.3.4 Moderation Impact of Nature Relatedness (H15a, H15b, H16)

Nature relatedness does not moderate the relationship between awareness of negative environmental consequences and personal norms (H15a). The findings are consistent with the research conducted by Anders, Hooley, and Kivlighan (2023). They emphasise that an individual's well-being in relation to their nature relatedness depends on both personal and experiential aspects. Moreover, they suggest that factors like accessibility and safety in natural environments play crucial roles in shaping these different outcomes in terms of well-being associated with one's nature relatedness.

Conversely, nature relatedness positively moderates the relationship between ascription of responsibility and personal norms (H15b). The positive moderating role of nature relatedness between ascription of responsibility and personal norms indicates that individuals who feel a strong connection to nature are more likely to transform their sense of responsibility into personal norms by addressing the issue through their own actions. This finding is supported by Liu et al. (2017), who argue that participating in environmentally responsible behaviours plays a crucial role in mitigating environmental issues (i.e., ascription of responsibility), and in turn, activates their personal norms (Groot and Steg, 2009; Steg and Groot, 2010).

Interestingly, nature relatedness does not moderate the relationship between personal norms and donation intentions (H16). This finding suggests that while a connection to nature can influence one's personal norms, it may not necessarily influence their willingness to contribute to environmental causes. This could be attributed to various factors, such as financial constraints, doubts about the effectiveness of donations, or a preference for direct action like volunteering rather than monetary support (White and Peloza, 2009). This finding highlights the complexity of translating personal norms and values into different forms of pro-environmental engagement (Borusiak et al., 2020), as environmental outcomes include both environmental behavioural intentions like collecting and recycling used papers and environmental altruistic intentions like

donating money and volunteering (Palomo-Vélez, Buczny and Vugt, 2020).

In conclusion, the quantitative results provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, personal norms, nature relatedness, pro-sustainable behaviour, and donation intentions in the context of sustainable tourism development in the Yellow River Delta. These findings offer valuable implications for destination managers and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable tourism and encourage visitors' pro-sustainable behaviours and contributions to conservation efforts in fragile ecosystems.

Chapter 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Overview

This chapter presents the conclusion of the research, which applied Commitment-Trust theory and Norm Activation theory (NAT) to develop a framework for assessing the impact of destination environmental factors (DSR, trust, commitment) and individual factors (personal norms, awareness, and ascription of responsibility) on pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intention at the Yellow River Delta ecotourism destination. The study fills research gaps by employing Commitment-Trust theory to support linkages of visitors' trust in tour operators and local government, and their commitment to pro-sustainable behaviour when the destination is declining. It also employs NAT to support linkages of visitors' psychological factors with their pro-sustainable behaviour, considering the mediating impact of personal norms and the moderating impact of nature relatedness.

The research contributes to the theoretical understanding of sustainable tourism by introducing the ecological civilisation framework and providing insights into the sustainable management of hotspot ecosystems that require multi-stakeholder involvement. It critically compares mechanisms of trust in tour operators and local government, relationship commitment, and destination decline to predict visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour. The study also assesses pathways for promoting pro-sustainable behaviour supported by Commitment-Trust Theory, highlighting the importance of an integrated approach involving various stakeholders. The research provides empirical evidence that considering visitors' perceptions of the role of government compared to tour operators in the sustainable management of a declining destination helps explain their decision-making process and relevant behaviour in the context of wetland-based ecosystem hotspots. Additionally, this chapter also provides the implications, the limitations and directions for future research.

7.2 Theoretical contributions

This research applied Commitment-Trust theory in conjunction with Norm Activation theory (NAT) to construct a research framework for evaluating the impact of destination environmental factors (i.e., DSR, trust, commitment) and individual factors (i.e., personal norms, awareness of negative environmental and ascription of responsibility), on pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intention at Yello River Delta as an ecotourism destination. Although DSR has been used to promote pro-environmental behaviours (Lee et al., 2021; Olya, Kim and Kim, 2023) and visit intention (Su, Gong and Huang, 2020; Su, Lian, and Huang, 2020), DSR involves stakeholder activities that aim to reduce negative impacts on the local environment while also generating economic, social, and environmental benefits. Besides, Commitment-Trust theory has been employed to support individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards their pro-environmental behaviours (Hossain, Nekmahmud and Fekete-Farkas, 2022; Hua, Dong and Goodman, 2021). However, this theory fails to comprehensively encompass the impacts of destination environmental factors, such as Destination Sustainability Rating (DSR), which are influenced by various other stakeholders, including tour operators and local government. Thus, this study filled the research gap by employing Commitment-Trust theory to support linkages of visitors' trust in tour-operator and local government and their commitment to pro-sustainable behaviour when the destination is declining.

Although exiting literature indicates personal norms positively affect pro-environmental behaviour (Gupta and Sharma, 2019) and demonstrate that visitors' perceptions of the negative impacts of tourism improve their ascription of responsibility, which positively influences visitors' perceptions of responsibility (Gao, Huan and Zhang, 2017), but they could not fully capture the intricate effects between visitors' psychological factors (i.e., Personal norms, AR and AC) and their pro-sustainable behaviours, and the connection visitors feel towards nature on their propensity to act in environmentally sustainable ways and their donation intention to support such

initiatives. Thus, this study filled the research gap by employing NAT to support linkages of visitors' psychological factors with visitor's pro-sustainable behaviour considering the mediating impact of personal norms and the moderating impact of nature relatedness.

In order to fill in aforementioned research gap, the objectives of this research are to 1) Investigate how DSR, trust, and commitment influence sustainable tourism in the declining Yellow River Delta Destination. 2) Assess the effect of awareness of environmental consequences, responsibility assignment, and personal norms on the region's sustainable tourism. 3) Examine visitor perceptions of the roles of local government and tour operators in promoting sustainable tourism, emphasizing the need for their collaboration.

This research introduces ecological civilisation framework and provides new insights of sustainable management of hotspot ecosystem that requires involvement of multi-stakeholders. Specifically, it critically compares mechanisms of putting trust in tour-operator and local government, relationship commitment and destination decline together to predict visitors' PSB. It also assesses pathways for promoting PSB supported by Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan and Hunt, 2022), highlighting the importance of an integrated approach involving various stakeholders. This study contends that engagement in PSB requires the trust and commitment of stakeholders through DSR. The encouragement of visitors' PSB is driven by their degree of trust in business and government.

Power pervades all aspects in various industries steering the interactions between business and local governments trying to affect policy formulation and implementations. Because business (i.e., tour-operator) deals with sustainable management, whereas local government is important for policy making and governance. On the one hand, DSR increases visitors' perceived trust in tour operators, enhances visitors' relationship commitment with tour operators, and contributes to visitors' PSB. On the other hand,

DSR enhances visitors' PSB through trust in local government. However, destination decline a result of irresponsible management, could lead to a circumstance where trust is absent or reduced. Therefore, this research assesses the moderating role of destination decline with DSR in instilling trust in government and tour operators. The results of these interactions effect indicates that visitors perceive who is in charge and whom to blame when a destination is declining.

Theoretical contributions of this paper are threefold. First, the study predicts visitors' PSB based on their perceptions of the way the destination is responsibly managed and trust in local government and tour operators. It extends the commitment-trust theory by providing a novel perspective on the necessity of trust and commitment from various stakeholders, including tour operators and mechanism promoting PSB during a destination's decline visitors, particularly in fostering ethical consumption. This research builds on and extends the conceptual model developed by Olya, Kim, and Kim (2023) to better predict visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour of visitors towards climate change actions. By drawing on Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), this research incorporates destination social responsibility (DSR) along with visitors' trust and commitment to both tour operators and local governments as key predictors of pro-sustainable behaviour.

Second, existing literature (e.g., Villacé-Molinero et., 2021; Naeem et al., 2023) highlights that economies heavily reliant on tourism can face severe consequences from a downturn in the tourism market. Specifically, DSR activities undertaken by tour operators and governments with poor reputations can erode visitors' trust in these entities (Su et al., 2020). To address this, my research integrates the concept of destination decline to examine its moderating impact at the destination level, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing pro-sustainable behaviour in tourism contexts. It also provides new theoretical insights in comparison of interaction of DSR and destination decline in building trust in tour operators with

government, by investigating the moderating role of destination decline with DSR in instilling trust in tour operators and local government. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first empirical study investigates visitors' perceptions of the role of government compared to tour operators in the sustainable management of a declining destination to explain who is in charge and whom to blame for the destination decline considering the ecological civilisation framework.

This study critically discusses that visitors outweigh the role of government in the sustainable management of a declining destination. This suggests that their trust in the government remains unaffected, as visitors blame other stakeholder (i.e., tour operators) for mismanagement. The present research provides empirical evidence that considering such views simultaneously better explains the visitors' decision-making process and relevant behaviour in the context of wet land-based ecosystem hotspots. This study contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable practice, offering practical implications for policy interventions and strategic planning to ensure the long-term viability and attractiveness of destinations.

Third, at the individual level, this research extends the conceptual model developed by Wu, Wu, Hsieh and Ramkissoon (2022) who investigate the role of face consciousness in the impact of personal norm on visitors' environmentally responsible behaviour, by expanding the norm activation theory. Therefore, this research proposes an integrative model that expands this theoretical framework by incorporating the concept of nature relatedness. This model examines how personal norms (PN) related to pro-sustainable behaviour and donation intention are moderated by nature relatedness (Anders, 2023). In addition, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of sustainable tourism development. Specifically, it explores the concept of donation intention, which is recognized in the literature as a key type of individual behaviour intention that supports sustainability efforts (Hehir et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2015). As many natural environments frequented by visitors suffer from insufficient funding for optimal

conservation management and given that government support for protected areas is often inadequate (Weaver and Lawton, 2017), this research highlights the critical need for diverse funding sources. By examining how visitors' donation intentions can contribute to conservation goals, the study highlights the crucial role of tourism in enhancing the financial sustainability of these natural environments.

7.3 Managerial implications

7.3.1 Improving tour operators' influence on PSB through effective DSR strategy

At the destination level, this study's findings suggest several implications for key stakeholders aiming to build strong, lasting relationships with visitors. First, the results show that tour operators play a crucial role in visitors' experiences, and they can influence visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour (PSB) through their DSR strategy. To improve their DSR, there are some suggestions for tour operators:

Firstly, they could implement eco-friendly practices in their operations, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and minimizing their carbon footprint. Secondly, they might support local communities by employing local staff, sourcing products and services from local business, and contributing to community development projects. Thirdly, they may educate visitors about responsible tourism practices and the importance of preserving the destination's natural and cultural heritage. Finally, they could collaborate with local authorities and other stakeholders to develop and implement sustainable tourism policies and initiatives.

More specifically, tour operators should publicly communicate the environmental and social impact of their operations to enhance visitors' trust through regular updates, sustainability reports, and certifications. Besides, tour operators could provide interactive and educational programs that involve visitors directly in DSR activities and sustainability efforts, such as tree planting for environmental preservation. In addition,

tour operators should highlight their DSR initiatives in marketing materials such as social media, websites, and travel brochures, emphasizing the positive impact visitors can have by choosing your services to attract visitors.

Effective DSR strategies play a vital role in conveying sincerity, enhancing perceived trust, fostering stakeholder commitment, and bolstering the perception of altruistic motives, which, in turn, influences visitors' intention to visit. To further improve trust and engagement in green initiatives, there are some suggestions for tour operators and local governments:

Firstly, they could regularly communicate the impacts of their activities through various channels, such as social media, websites, and newsletters. Secondly, they might provide transparent reporting on their environmental and social performance, using internationally recognised standards and frameworks. Thirdly, they may engage visitors and local communities in the planning and implementation of sustainable tourism projects, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are addressed.

7.3.2 Fostering ecological civilization through collective efforts

On the other hand, this research implies that ecological civilisation can thrive with the collective efforts of governments and business and enhanced public participation. To progress towards an ecological civilisation, there are some suggestions for governments:

Firstly, they could encourage public participation in environmental decision-making processes, such as public hearings, consultations, and citizen advisory committees. Secondly, they might provide incentives and support for business that adopt sustainable practices, such as tax breaks, grants, and recognition programs. Thirdly, they may strengthen ecological legislation and enforcement, ensuring that environmental laws and regulations are comprehensive, stringent, and effectively enforced. Finally, they

could invest in education and awareness campaigns to promote environmental stewardship and sustainable lifestyles among citizens.

Local government should work closely with tour operators to develop and enforce policy for sustainable tourism practice, by creating joint programs like waste management, wildlife protection, and energy efficiency in tourism facilities. Additionally, local governments can offer incentives, such as tax breaks or grants, to tour operators who invest in eco-friendly technologies. In return, tour operators should commit to constructing or upgrading facilities to meet high environmental standards.

7.3.3. Enhancing both Tour Operators' and Local Government's Role in Shaping visitors' PSB through NAT

At the individual level, this study highlights factors that impact visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour, which has considerable practical implications for tour operators, policymakers, and companies. To increase visitors' sense of awareness and responsibility towards the environment and boost their pro-sustainable behaviour, there are some suggestions for government and tour operators:

Firstly, they could develop targeted educational campaigns and materials, such as videos, brochures, and interactive exhibits, that inform visitors about the destination's environmental challenges and the actions they can take to minimise their impact. Secondly, they might integrate sustainability messaging into their marketing and communication strategies, highlighting the benefits of responsible tourism and encouraging visitors to adopt sustainable practices during their stay. Thirdly, they may provide incentives for visitors who engage in pro-sustainable behaviour, such as discounts on eco-friendly products and services, or recognition programs that reward sustainable actions.

Furthermore, there are some suggestions for tour operators and governments to develop strategies to utilise visitors' nature relatedness, which will help increase their concern for the environment, positive attitudes towards pro-sustainable behaviour, and donation intentions for sustainable practices:

Firstly, they could offer immersive nature-based experiences that foster a deeper connection between visitors and the natural environment, such as guided hikes, wildlife watching, and conservation volunteer programs. Secondly, they might partner with environmental organisations and charities to develop joint initiatives that engage visitors in conservation efforts and raise funds for sustainable projects. Thirdly, tour operators may provide opportunities for visitors to contribute to local environmental causes and Local governments can establish reflection points at key visitor sites, such as nature reserves, where visitors can engage in activities that reinforce their commitment to sustainability.

7.3.4 Strengthening Charitable Organisations' Strategies to Enhance Donation Impact and Engagement in PSB

Finally, the results of the research support charitable organisations in making well-informed managerial choices, developing their professional practices, and improving their capacity to increase donations from individuals. In these uncertain times, when each donation counts more than ever, it is crucial to help individuals understand their donation intentions, drivers, and the impact of their contributions. There are some suggestions for charitable organisations:

Firstly, they could conduct targeted fundraising campaigns that highlight the tangible outcomes of their projects and the difference that individual donations can make.

Secondly, they might provide transparent reporting on the use of donated funds, demonstrating how contributions are being used to support specific initiatives and

beneficiaries. Thirdly, they may engage donors through personalised communication, sharing stories of impact and expressing gratitude for their support. Finally, they could offer a range of donation options and platforms, making it easy and convenient for individuals to contribute according to their preferences and capabilities.

By considering these recommendations, tour operators, governments, and charitable organisations can work towards fostering a more sustainable and responsible tourism industry, encouraging pro-sustainable behaviour among visitors, and generating increased support for environmental conservation efforts.

7.4 Limitations and future directions

This study has some limitations, which provides possible directions for future research. First, the research framework, assuming that destination decline initially impacts visitors' time perspective in terms of relationship commitment and subsequently diminishes their desire for the destination, may oversimplify the relationship. The interrelated nature of visitors' time perspective and travel desire bonding needs further exploration. Future research should follow panels of survey respondents over longer periods of time to unravel the causal processes by which the threat of destination decline affects destination attachment through time perspective dimensions (Hatori et al., 2023). As the results show that destination decline negatively moderate the relationship between DSR and trust in tour operator but insignificant when it comes to trust in local government. Therefore, a key question for future research is why inactions of destination decline with DSR does influence trust in tour operators not government.

Second, the study used a convenience sample technique to collect views of domestic Chinese wet-land visitors and thereby potentially limiting the generalisability of the findings. Future research could improve generalisability by considering a diverse population that is more geographically and ethnically, and different political structures along with more generalisable random sampling techniques. It is worth exploring

variation of international visitors' views and domestic visitors on pathways involve trust building leading to their PSB. Third, this research focuses on visitors' views and including tour operators and local government's insights could provide a more comprehensive perspective into mechanisms for simulating PSB. According to findings visitors incline to loss their trust in tour operators, rather than government, if destination declines. Future studies can explore why visitors discharge government, despite their predominant role and reinforcing ecological civilisation framework, from potential implications of irresponsible management. Fourth, this study assessed common method bias using Harman's Single-Factor Test (SHFT), a method that has faced criticism. While SHFT was deemed adequate for this research, the study did not include a marker variable. Future research should adopt more rigorous approaches, such as the use of marker variables, to more effectively address common method bias.

Although this research offers several contributions to the study of pro-sustainable behaviours, it also has some limitations that provide potentially productive areas for further research. First, this study has identified the internal drivers of pro-sustainable behaviours based on one of the main decision-making process theories, norm activation theory. However, the analysis does not consider external drivers (such as subjective norms, sentiments, emotions, social media involvement, and membership of online community, psychological distance, and past behaviours) that are linked to theories like the value-belief-norm theory, which might be included in future studies. In addition to above predictors, future research could integrate in the conceptual framework other behavioural outcomes (e.g., activism in tourism) to better explore the possible antecedents and activities of visitors' pro-sustainable behaviour in the sustainable tourism context.

Furthermore, the study specifically targeted visitors to the Yellow River Delta destination in China. However, it is recommended that future research should encompass additional eco-system destinations and include a broader range of countries.

In conclusion, this study, originally focused on destination analysis, could be expanded to include hotels, and other locations. This extension aims to understand the pro-sustainable behaviours and specific products/services of visitors from different generations. Lastly, this study explores donation intentions broadly but does not differentiate between types of donations, like food, volunteer time, or non-monetary charitable contributions. Future research should delve into these distinctions to benefit non-profit organisations reliant on both monetary and non-monetary donations.

7.5 Conclusion

In the grand tapestry of sustainable tourism, the principles and aspirations of Chinese ecological civilisation offer a profound backdrop against which the findings of this study on the Yellow River Delta can be understood and appreciated. As this research navigates through the complexities of destination environmental factors, individual psychological components, and their interplay in fostering pro-sustainable behaviours and donation intentions, it echoes the wisdom of Chinese President Xi Jinping, who stated, 'Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets. This captures the essence of stakeholders' collective journey towards ecological preservation and sustainable development, highlighting the intrinsic value of nature as the foundation of prosperity. Through the lens of Commitment-Trust theory and Norm Activation theory, this study not only fills crucial research gaps but also emphasises the urgency of responsibility towards the fragility of ecosystems like the Yellow River Delta. By drawing on the strengths and insights of various stakeholders, from local governments to visitors, and embedding the ethos of ecological civilisation in the strategies, this study contributes to the harmonious coexistence of humans and the natural world. Standing at this pivotal crossroads, to embrace tourism as a positive force that nurtures rather than exploits, ensuring the longevity and vitality of the planet's precious ecosystems for generations to come.

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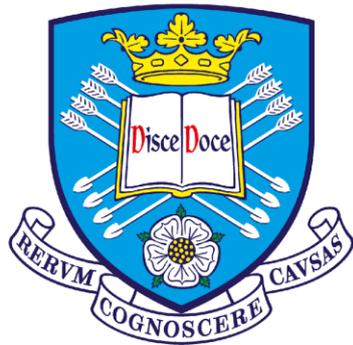
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Appendix

Appendix 1 Survey Questionnaire



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Questionnaire

The commitment of tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta area to eco-tourism practices: The impact of Chinese Ecological Civilisation values

Dear Visitor,

This survey requests your views on your visit to this Yellow River Delta scenic spot; there are no right or wrong answers. It should take you about 5 minutes to complete the survey. For each statement (row), please circle the number that best represents how you feel. Please return your completed survey to the University of Sheffield researcher. Thank you – your responses will be used to maintain and improve the visitor experience at this scenic spot.

1. Have you chosen a local tourism stakeholder in the Yellow River Delta as your service provider to visit to the scenic area?
 - 1) Yes

2) No

You do not need to complete the survey if you did NOT choose a tourism stakeholder

2. Think about your experience with the Yellow River Delta tourism stakeholders, indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements, from 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree.

1) The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are concerned about improving the overall welfare of society.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2) The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta provide visitors with experiences through meaningful connections with local people and knowledge of local culture.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3) The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are aware of the socio-cultural issues related to tourism and can help to solve them.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4) The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta treat other customers very well.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5) The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are trying to ensure their long-term success.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6) The tourism stakeholders in the Yellow River Delta are working hard to improve their economic performance.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7) The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta seem to give back to the local community.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8) The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta keep strict control over their costs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9) The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta include environmental concerns in their operations.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10) The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta strive to reduce their consumption of natural resources.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11) The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta communicate to their visitors about their own environmental practices.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12) The tourism stakeholders of the Yellow River Delta publicly emphasize their concern over respecting and protecting the natural environment of the YRD area.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Think about your travel experience in the Yellow River Delta, indicate the degree to which you agree with the following sentences, from 1 strongly disagree, to 7 strongly agree.

13) I am very committed to this tour operator of the Yellow River Delta through this travel experience	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14) I will maintain a relationship with the tour operators of the Yellow River Delta.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15) The tour operators of the Yellow River Delta deserve my maximum effort to maintain a relationship.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16) If the tour operators of the Yellow River Delta planned something, I would think of it as something “we” would do rather than something “they” would do.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17) I trust the tour operators to make the right decisions about the tour activities.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18) I trust the tour operators provided comprehensive and customized service for visitors.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
19) I trust the tour operators to provide products that are good value for money.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20) I trust the tour operator provided quality service during the tour.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21) I trust the local government of the Yellow River Delta to make the right decisions in relation to tourism	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22) I trust the local government to handle tourism without strict supervision.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23) I trust the local government to do what is right for destination in relation to tourism in the Yellow River Delta.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24) I do not trust the local government to look after the interests of the Yellow River Delta destination in tourism development.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Think about your travel experience in Yellow River Delta, indicate your level of responsibility with the following sentences, from 1 Completely irresponsible, to 7 Completely responsible.

25) It is my responsibility to minimize my impact on this destination.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26) I feel I am jointly responsible for tourism’s impacts on the environment.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27) I can do something to mitigate or even eliminate the negative impacts of tourism	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28) It is up to everyone to keep the environment clean in the Yellow River Delta.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29) I have the obligation to protect the environment of the Yellow River Delta.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30) I feel an obligation to reduce the negative impact on the local community during the trip.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
31) I have the obligation to comply with local environmental regulations and laws.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
32) Because of my own principles I feel that I should behave in an environmentally responsible way while travelling on this destination.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. Think about your travel experience in the Yellow River Delta, indicate the degree to which you agree with the following sentences, from 1 strongly disagree, to 7 strongly agree.

33) Tourism helps the preservation of the beauty of this place.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
34) Tourism is not bringing too much noise to this place.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
35) This place is polluted because of tourism.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
36) Tourism makes this a better place to stay for visitors.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
37) There are not many social issues (e.g., social misbehaviours) in Yellow River Delta	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
38) There are many job opportunities in Yellow River Delta	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
39) There are many benign activities on the environment of Yellow River Delta.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
40) Overall, I think that the Yellow River Delta is in develop as a destination	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
41) The Yellow River Delta could become an attractive destination in the future	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. Thinking about your travel experiences in the Yellow River Delta. Please indicate your awareness of the extent of the event in the following sentences, from 1 Completely unaware, to 7 Completely aware.

42) My ideal vacation spot would be a remote, wilderness area.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
43) I always think about how my actions affect the environment.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
44) My connection to nature and the environment is a part of my spirituality.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
45) I take notice of wildlife wherever I am.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
46) My relationship to nature is an important part of who I am.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
47) I feel very connected to all living things and the earth.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. How likely are you to perform the following behaviours, indicate your level of probability with the following sentences, from 1 Not probable, to 7 Very probable.

48) I am willing to spend more on travel if it is beneficial for the environment.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
49) I am willing to buy eco-friendly tours, even though they may be more expensive.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
50) I am willing to use environmentally friendly transportation, even though it may take more time.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
51) I would be willing to pay more to stay in an environmentally friendly place	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
52) I prefer to stay at local accommodation.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
53) I prefer to eat locally sourced food.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
54) I prefer to purchase locally produced goods.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
55) I prefer to hire local guide services.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
56) I would like to separate recycling from waste	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
57) I would like to use tissue made from recycled materials.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
58) I would like to use eco-friendly green tourism businesses and services.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
59) I would like to use reusable shopping bags.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
60) I intend on making a donation to the sustainable tourism projects of the Yellow River Delta Destination soon.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
61) I would like to donate to the sustainable tourism projects of the Yellow River Delta Destination.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
62) If I wanted to, I could easily donate money and time to the sustainable tourism projects of the Yellow River Delta Destination.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
63) I would like to encourage people who travel with me to donate to the sustainable tourism projects in the Yellow River Delta destinations.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1 Open questions:

- 1) In your opinion, what tourism stakeholders should have done to improve sustainable tourism at this region?
- 2) What activities visitors can undertake to improve Yellow River Delta sustainable tourism development?

Demographic Information

For each of the following questions, please indicate your answer by placing a "√" in the appropriate box. If you change your mind, please place an "O" around the original and then indicate a new "√".

1. Your Gender
Male Female Other
2. Which age group do you belong to
18-24

- 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - >65
3. Personal monthly income
 - <\$735.15
 - \$735.15 to \$1,176
 - \$1,176 to \$2,058
 - >\$2,058.15
 4. What is the highest level of education you completed?
 - Tertiary/university
 - Other
 5. How many times have you visited this Yellow River Delta Destination including this visit?
 - First visit
 - Second time
 - 3-5 times
 - More than Five Visits
 4. What is the MAIN purpose of your visit to this destination?
 - Sightseeing
 - Observation/Research of Environment (Plants, Birds, Animals)
 - Relax/Rest
 - Exercise/Fitness
 - Other (please specify) _____
 5. Based on your experience, what is your overall perception about sustainable tourism management of YRD? _____

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Appendix 2 Consent Form

Consent Form

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Ye s	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet, or the project has been fully explained to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project may include completing a questionnaire and/or being interviewed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any academic materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant name	Participant signature	Date signed

Project contact details for further information or to report an issue:

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Appendix 3 Other Path Result

Moderated mediation test	Standardize d estimates	Lower CI	Upper CI
DSR * Destination Decline→Trust in tour- operator→Relationship Commitment→ PSB	-0.013***	-0.022	-0.006

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$. DSR, destination social responsibility; PSB, pro-sustainable behaviour.

Appendix 4 Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research project carried out by the University of Sheffield into the **Assessing the Impact of Destination-Level and Individual-Level Factors on Visitors' Pro-Sustainable Behaviours and Donation Intentions**. The project has been approved by the Management School of the University of Sheffield. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this. You will be given a copy of this sheet and the signed consent form to keep.

What is the project's purpose?

The project is to examine the commitment of tour operators in the Yellow River Delta Area to eco-tourism practices and the impact of values associated with Chinese Ecological Civilisation for this commitment. It will form part of a dissertation study on the subject matter, in which specific organisations will not be identified. Your input will enable us to understand the specificity of tour operators' practices of commitment to their eco-tourism responsibilities, from your perspective as either a member of the respective companies or as a visitor or local authorities having made use of the company's services.

A short definition of the project's aims and objectives

This study aims to investigate the impact of Destination Social Responsibility (DSR) on visitors' trust in tour operators and local government, relationship commitment to tour operators, and propensity to engage in pro-sustainability behaviours in the context of the Yellow River Delta destination in China. The research also examines the influence of factors such as awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, personal norms, and nature relatedness on visitors' pro-sustainable behaviours and donation intentions. The study employs quantitative methodology to explore the relationships among these variables and validate the proposed research model.

To achieve this research aim, the following three research objectives have been developed:

RO1: Firstly, to examine the destination social responsibility (DSR) and trust and relationship commitment impact on sustainable tourism development in Yellow River Delta Destination, particularly when a destination is in decline.

RO2: Secondly, to evaluate the awareness of negative environmental consequences, ascription of responsibility, and personal norms impact on sustainable tourism development in Yellow River Delta Destination.

RO3: Thirdly, to suggest sustainable strategies and alternatives for minimizing negative environmental impact of tourism to achieve sustainable development.

RO4: Finally, to explore how visitors perceive the contributions of local government and tour operators towards sustainable tourism development in the Yellow River Delta Destination, highlighting the significance of collaboration between both entities.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been identified by the researcher as someone who may have experienced the impact of the YRD tour operators' commitment to eco-tourism practices as either a manager in charge or local authorities' staff or a visitor, and it is considered that your input would be really helpful to the project.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the researcher.

What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

Depending on whether you have been a visitor or a manager or at one of tour operators or a local authorities' representatives, you will be invited to complete a questionnaire (Online) or to be interviewed by one of the research team at a mutually convenient time. If you agree to be interviewed, the audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be anonymised and used for analysis. The dissertation may wish to incorporate a few anonymised quotes from the interviews and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project team will be allowed access to the original recordings.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no known disadvantages and/or risks associated with taking part in the research. The researcher will take care to avoid including any questions that may be too sensitive or compromise any of your personal or professional commitment as part of either the questionnaire or the interview.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will make improvements to YRD tour operators' effective eco-tourism commitment practices, which will then benefit both local authorities and the companies in question and visitors. Your involvement will have contributed to that work.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this.

Personal data?

No personal data, apart from your position at the company if you are one of the interviewees, will be collected. The comments and opinions you make will be stored using numeric identifiers, not your name, and which could only be linked to the participants personally by the members of the research team.

What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

Due to the nature of this research project, the data collected will be used solely for the project and the completion of the dissertation and will be destroyed on completion of the project.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The review is being funded and carried out by the Management School of the University of Sheffield.

Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Management School.

What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern, incident or withdraw from the study?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntarily. You can choose not to proceed with participating in this study at any point in the time. You can withdraw from the engagement with an immediate effect by speaking directly with the researcher at the point of the interview time or by contacting the researcher.

Likewise, if you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint/raise concerns please contact the researcher in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of Marketing and Cultural Creative Industries (Professor Hossein Olya).

Contacts for further information/complaints

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