EXAMINING THE PREDICTORS OF ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE TOURISM BEHAVIOR DURING COVID- 19

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the predictors of environmentally responsible tourism behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the tourism industry keeps expanding and the effects of tourism on the environment become increasingly obvious, the idea of responsible tourism has received a lot of attention recently. Also, the COVID-19 outbreak, lead to a decrease in travel and a shift in consumer behaviour.

This paper studies the impact of destination image, environmental concern and experience quality on environmentally responsible tourism behaviour. The study was performed using a cross-sectional survey with a 321 sample size and analysed using multiple regression. The study identified the advantageous and positive effect of destination image, environmental concern and experience quality on environmentally responsible tourism behaviour. This study can benefit destination managers and other tourism stakeholders to maintain the responsible behaviour of tourism among visitors.

Keywords*:* Responsible tourism, Destination Image, health consciousness, experience quality, COVID 19

1. Introduction

Tourism has developed as a significant source of development, employment, and money (Lasisi et al., 2020). 10.3% of global GDP was mainly composed of travel and tourism (WTTC, 2022). However, rapid tourism expansion has negative consequences such as environmental degradation, habitat loss, and discomfort to locals (Sari & Nazli, 2020). These difficulties have created both obstacles and opportunities for tourism-related businesses. Social-environmental concerns can hurt both humans and the environment if not addressed correctly. Additionally, during COVID-19, travellers considerably spread diseases, outbreaks, and pandemics across the destinations of local communities (Abbott, 2021; Zhong et al., 2021). Additionally, in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, face masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) have emerged as a brand-new category

of trash that has invaded several beaches and tourist destinations. (Thiel et al., 2021). This raises a concern for responsible tourism behaviour by tourists.

In recent years, responsible tourism has piqued the interest of many researchers (Burrai et al., 2021; Mondal & Samaddar, 2021; Musavengane, 2019;) due to its growing importance in reducing environmental problems and the sustainability of tourism (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020). Responsible tourism promotes tourism's economic, social, cultural, and ecological benefits (Mihalic et al., 2021).

According to Goodwin (2011), responsible tourism is all about accepting responsibility for one's activities and putting them into effect; thus, the behavioural aspect is viewed as the most critical in responsible tourism

(Mihalic et al., 2021). Responsible tourism focus on improving tourist travel experiences and economic possibilities to enjoy a higher quality of life with more significant socioeconomic benefits and improved management of natural resources (Spenceley et al., 2002). Responsible travel benefits our destinations and cultures and often enriches our memories, which always stick with us and become a focus of our remembrance. Mathew & Sreejesh (2017) observed that responsible tourism improves the community's standard of living, and hence responsible tourism is particularly helpful in community engagement. The attraction of tourist sites is increased by effective community development, encouraging tourists to conduct themselves responsibly while travelling.

Previous research has identified recreational experience, attachment to a place, and environmental beliefs as predictors of ecologically responsible tourism behaviour (Lin & Lee, 2019; Rajput, Jain, & Thakur, 2022). The variables such as perceived behavioural control, social norms, personal norms, and ethical obligations also predicted environmentally responsible behaviour. Past studies revealed minimal and scanty literature on ecological tourist behaviour. Therefore, it raises the scope for examining the factors affecting environmentally responsible tourism behaviour.

Destination image has been found to impact the behavioural intention of tourists. The evaluation of the destination image enables managers to identify the destination's strengths and weaknesses, forecast tourist behaviour and provide important information about the development and management of tourist spots (Bigné et al., 2001).

The past literature also suggests that tourist experiences play a crucial role in environmental behaviour (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2019). Most past researchers have used these antecedents to explain the general behavioural intention related to the purchase or loyalty of a customer. This raises a research gap and asks relevant questions: Do these variables (destination image, experience quality and environmental concern) significantly affect environmentally responsible tourism behaviour?

This study proposes a theoretical framework for responsible tourism to examine the antecedents influencing environmentally responsible tourism behaviour during COVID-19. This study investigates the impact of destination image, environmental concern, and experiential quality on environmentally responsible tourism behaviour. This article summarises the study's independent variables, then suggests the hypotheses and incorporates them into a theoretical model. The following section develops the study's methodology and analyses the proposed model. Finally, it discusses the theoretical and managerial consequences of encouraging environmentally responsible tourism behavior.

3. Conceptual themes of the study
This section defines the study's conceptual themes, including destination image, environmental concern, experience quality, and environmentally responsible tourism behaviour.

3.1 Destination image
Over the last two decades of research, it has become clear that the image is an effective way to describe the process of visitors selecting a place. The destination's image is essential in decision-making and corresponding tourist travel behaviour. "Image" refers to beliefs and experiences formed through informal learning from various sources. This leads to a mental representation of a destination's qualities and intended benefits over time (e.g., Crompton, 1979). Every destination has an image based on various factors like the destination's geography, the local community's standard of living, Atmosphere, heritage, hygiene, price, safety, and protection of the destination (George, R.,2017). The destination's image is a core term for recognising tourist destination selection processes (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). The power of the destination might enhance its reputation among potential tourists. Many studies have described the picture of tourism as one person's overall view of the destination and have recognize it as an essential factor in travel decision-making (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Oliveira & Huertas, 2019). Destination image is synonymous with a simplistic perception of the emotions and opinions of visitors about a given destination.

Visitors' perceptions of a destination are largely influenced by its image. It is also predicted that a more attractive destination image would lead to a more significant cognitive commitment to a given destination. According to earlier studiesthe perception of a destination has a big influence on how and what tourists do (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Karl et al., 2020).

3.2 Environmental concerns

Environmental concern is the degree to which a person or group is concerned about environmental problems and the effects that human activity has on the environment. The importance of understanding and measuring environmental concerns have been widely studied.

One study by Smiley et al. (2022) found that individuals pro-environmental activities are more prone to be utilized by those who are more concerned about the environment like reusing and conserving energy. This suggests that understanding and addressing environmental concerns may be key to promoting sustainable behaviors and reducing negative environmental impacts.

Another study by Fairbrother et al. (2019) found that those who care more about the environment tend to have more positive views towards ecological policies and are more likely to support political action on environmental issues. This highlights the importance of considering environmental concerns in developing and implementing environmental policies.

Furthermore, research suggests that demographic variables including gender, age, and educational level may have an impact on environmental issues. According to a study by Poortinga et al. (2019), for instance, people with greater levels of education and gender likely to be more environmentally conscious.This suggests that targeted outreach and education efforts may be needed to engage different groups in ecological issues.
Overall, the literature suggests that environmental concern is essential in understanding individuals' attitudes and behaviours towards the environment and developing and implementing environmental policies.

It is also worth mentioning that environmental concern is essential not only on an individual but also on a societal level, as it is a crucial driver for the transition to a more sustainable society (Lou & Li, 2021).

In conclusion, the literature on environmental concern highlights the importance of understanding and addressing this variable in promoting pro-environmental behaviours, supporting environmental policies, and engaging different demographic groups in ecological issues.

3.2 Experience Quality

Experience quality is a vital notion in the tourism trade and industry, as it encompasses overall satisfaction and enjoyment a traveller derives from their trip. According to research, the quality of the experience is favourably correlated with a number of outcomes, including customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and overall satisfaction. (Sukhu & Bilgihan, 2021; Vesci et al., 2020).

Yu et al. (2021) found that experience quality remains positively associated with overall satisfaction, and this relationship is stronger for tourists who are more involved in the planning and execution of their trip. This suggests that allowing tourists to personalise their experiences can lead to higher levels of satisfaction.

Mai (2022) found that experience quality is positively related to repeat visitation and that this relationship is mediated by overall satisfaction and emotional attachment to the destination. This highlights the importance of creating positive emotions and memories for tourists to encourage repeat visitation.

Research also suggests that experience quality is positively related to favourable word-of-mouth, as visitors who had a fine experience are more likely to share their experiences with others (Vesci et al., 2020). This emphasizes the need of developing a positive tourist experience to generate positive word-of-mouth and attract new visitors.

In summary, research suggests that experience quality is critical in the tourism industry. It is positively related to overall satisfaction, repeat visitation, and positive word-of-mouth. Creating personalised and emotional

experiences for tourists can lead to higher levels of experience quality and ultimately benefit the destination.

3.4 Environmentally responsible tourism behaviour

Environmentally responsible behaviour may be characterised as: "the degree to which it alters the supply of resources or energy from the environment or alters the structure and dynamics of habitats or the biosphere". Researchers suggest that economic and environmental protection of natural tourism will be accomplished while people behave in an environmentally sustainable way. Environmentally responsible tourism behaviour requires the implementation to reduce environmental harm and enhance the protection of the environment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Wildlife parks, coral reefs, and sandy beaches are some tourist attractions that Stern P.C. (2000) describes. Global warming, erosion, forest loss, deserts, and rising tourist numbers point to low productivity endangering the environment. This has contributed to expanded demands for adopting environmentally friendly activities in nature-based tourism destinations (Stockdale & Barker, 2009). Tourism *scholars have adopted ecologically friendly actions differently based on the nature of the analysis.* Rasool et al. (2021) argue that international economic growth receives a significant contribution from tourism, especially in developing countries that depend on tourism as an essential source of income.

Tourists might not be conscious that their actions can affect commuting environments. To offset the negative impact on biodiversity and avoid environmental deterioration in nature-based tourist locations, visitors must also be encouraged to make sustainable efforts to have a better tourism experience. Researchers also described many forms of the adverse climate impacts of tourism, including preparedness and regulation (Addison et al., 2008) and effective enforcement of rules (Davenport et al ., 2006). Other literature discussed the need for tourists to be recognised as an essential contribution to constructive environmental action (Saleem et al., 2020).

This research involves essential factors such as Destination image, health consciousness, and experience quality to explain the determinants of the environmentally friendly actions of tourists in responsible tourism destinations.

4. Model and Hypotheses

A potential source of plastic litter during the Covid-19 epidemic is the surgical face mask. (Aragaw, 2020; Fadare & Okoffo, 2020). Rume & Islam (2020) mentioned the environmental concern as a result of improper disposal of masks, gloves and other solid waste during Covid-19. This ongoing problem raises the concern for studying the antecedents of environmentally responsible tourism behaviour among tourists. This study provides a multiple regression model to examine the effect of destination image, environmental concern, and experience quality on environmentally responsible tourism behaviour. Figure 1 presents the responsible tourism behaviour model
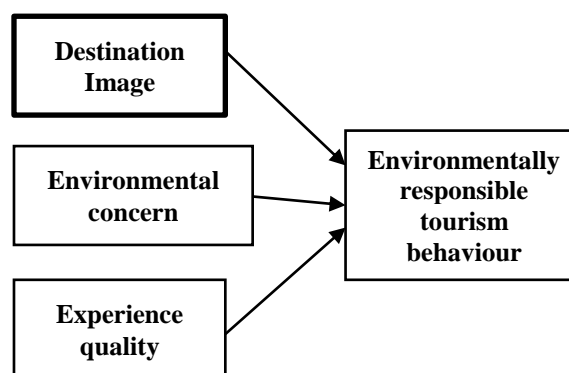

Figure 1. An environmentally responsible tourism behaviour model

4.1 Destination image and environmentally responsible tourism behaviour

Kaur & Kaur (2019) investigated the effect of destination image on tourists' behavioural intention to promote heritage site visits and discovered a significant link between the variables. A substantial influence of destination image on travellers' intentions to return was found by Soliman (2019). The majority of earlier studies looked at how tourists' behavioural intentions to travel were impacted by destination perception. When the consumer's environmental interest in the local destination grows, this will form a positive image of the region (Abdullah et al.,2019). The significance of destination image was uncovered by Abdullah et al. (2019) who investigated into how it affected visitors' intentions to act sustainably.

On the basis of the prior research, this study makes the following hypothesis:
H1: Destination image has a positive influence on environmentally responsible tourism behaviour

4.2 Environmental concern and environmentally responsible tourism behaviour

The effect of value-driven and attitude- driven on green consumer decision was examined by Rahman & Reynolds (2017) to analyse the impact of environmental concern on environmentally conscious tourism behaviour Ibnou-Laaroussi et al. (2020) identified how environmental concerns have a substantial impact on environmentally conscious tourism behaviour. Environmentally responsible travellers are concerned about environmental challenges, are intrigued by eco-labels, and think about ecological implications while travelling. These travellers are inclined to make compromises to lessen the negative consequences of their behaviour, preceding comfort, and making an effort to travel in an ecologically responsible manner (Puhakka R, 2011). Hence, the following hypothesis is being proposed:
H2: Environmental concern has a positive effect on environmentally responsible tourism behaviour

4.3 Experience quality and environmentally responsible tourism behaviour

In a study by Ghorbanzade et al.(2019), the impact of experience quality on the behaviour of domestic visitors to water parks was found to be significant. Tourism industry stakeholders place a high value on places that are close to nature and work with local communities to offer top-notch environmental activities that teach tourists about the environment (Lee et al., 2015). Mansour and Ariffin (2016) looked at how tourists to historical sites behaved and found that experience quality had a significant statistical influence on tourists' intentions. While previous research has studied the impact of experience quality on visitors' behavioural intentions, there is a dearth of literature on the effect of experience quality on environmentally responsible tourism behaviour. Based on the past literature, this research proposes the hypothesis given below:
H3: Experience quality has a positive effect on environmentally responsible tourism behaviour.

5. Research Methodology

This study was based on a cross-section research design. The study's respondents are Indian tourists who travelled through India's Golden Triangle comprising Delhi, Agra and Jaipur routes of heritage tourism. Data were collected through online mediums. The survey questionnaire was sent to the targeted respondents through google groups on Gmail and social media travel pages, including Facebook. Before collecting the final responses from the target population, a pilot study was conducted on 48 identified respondents to check the measurement scale's reliability. Through Cronbach alpha, the questionnaire's reliability was evaluated (α), and the values were found between 0.75 to 0.89 (Singh & Kaurav, 2022). The final questionnaire was sent to 528 people, and 321 data were shortlisted for the final evaluation of responses after filtering out the missing and outliers in the data.

5.1 Demographic Profile

The questionnaire also included demographic questions based on age, gender, education and annual household income. Among respondents, 34.89 % were males, while 65.10 % were females. The age group of 21-30 constituted 26.47 % of respondents. 31.46% of respondents were found to be in the age group of 31- 40. 37.69% of respondents were in the age group of 41-50. 4.36% of respondents were in the age group above 51. 34.89% of respondents were graduates. The remaining were found to have a postgraduate degree. The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in detail in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	111	34.89%
	Female	210	65.10%
Age	21-30	85	26.47%
	31-40	101	31.46%
	41-50	121	37.69%
	51 above	14	4.36%
Education	Undergraduate	112	34.89%
	Postgraduate	209	65.10%
Annual Household Income	<INR 2.5 lacs	23	7.16%
	INR 2.5 lacs-INR 5 lacs	42	13.08%
	INR 5 lacs-INR 7.5 lacs	73	22.74%
	INR 7.5 lacs-INR 10 lacs	86	26.79%
	>INR 10 lacs	97	30.21%

5.2 Measurement scale

Responses were collected from domestic tourists in India through the help of a cross-sectional survey-based questionnaire. The measurement scale items were adopted from past studies. The destination image scale with six items was adapted from Hanikson (2005). The environmental concern scale with four items was adapted from (Maichum et al., 2016). Experience quality with three things was adapted from Dean and Suhartanto (2019). Environmentally responsible tourism behaviour with three items was adapted from Kerstetter et al. (2004) and Liu (2016).

5.3 Data Analysis

This research uses the multiple linear regression model to examines the observations.

The multiple regression model for this study is as follows:

$$ERB = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EQ + \beta_2 EC + \beta_3 DI + e$$

Table 2 depicts a multiple correlation coefficient with an R-value of -.711. It shows a strong correlation between the predictor and criterion variable, i.e. Environmentally responsible behaviour. The coefficient of determination for the proposed model is 0.506, which signifies that the three predictors explain 50.6% of the variance in Environmentally responsible behaviour: experience quality, environmental concern, and destination image.

Table 3: ANOVA

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	203.032	3	67.677	107.831	.000
	Residual	198.329	316	.628		
	Total	401.361	319			

Source: Author's work

Table 3 shows, $F(3, 316) = 107.831$, $p = .000$, $R^2 = 0.506$. The total regression model is significant, as indicated by the high F value and the low significance level of 5%.

Table 4 shows the VIF value less than 10, and

Table 4: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.838	.364		2.301	.022		
	EQ_1	.210	.044	.215	4.808	.000	.781	1.281
	EC_1	.472	.038	.552	12.550	.000	.809	1.237
	DI_1	.160	.062	.108	2.587	.010	.891	1.122

Source: Author's work

Where,

β_0 = Intercept of Y, which is constant

β_1, β_2 and β_3 = Beta coefficients of EQ, EC and DI

EQ = Experience Quality

EC = Environmental Concern

DI = Destination Image

ERB = Environmentally responsible behaviour

hence the model doesn't have the issue of multicollinearity. The environmental concern had the highest beta value ($\beta = 0.552$), $t(316) = 12.550$, $p = .000$, followed by experience quality ($\beta = 0.215$), $t(316) = 4.808$, $p = .000$ and destination image ($\beta = 0.108$), $t(316) = 2.587$, $p = .010$. The result of all the variables was found to be significant with $p < .0001$

6. Results & Discussions

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.711a	.506	.501	.79223	1.509

Source: Author's work

Table 5: Hypothesis testing result

Hypothesis	Relationship	t-values	p-values	Decision
H₁	DI → ERB	2.587	.010	Supported
H₂	EC → ERB	12.550	.000	Supported
H₃	EQ → ERB	4.808	.000	Supported

The Covid-19 epidemic would make responsible tourism the most in-demand, as it becomes the tourists' social, ethical and moral responsibility to adhere to the guidelines and follow environmentally safe behaviour. Table 5 revealed that destination image, environmental concern, and experience quality positively influence environmentally responsible tourism behaviour; hence, all three hypotheses were supported. The study has contributed to the identification of relevant variables which act as predictors of responsible tourism behaviour and would help bring positive changes in the behavioural intention of tourists. This study is consistent with past research, where destination image has been originated to have a significant positive effect on environmentally responsible behaviour (Abdullah et al., 2019) along with environmental concern (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020; Singh & Kaurav, 2022). Tourism policymakers must work on enhancing the destination image and experiential quality of the place, which would help create environmentally social behaviour. Environmental concern is an intrinsic behaviour of tourists, which can be further induced by displaying socially responsible messages by tourist managers and policymakers.

7. Conclusion

This research focused on identifying the factors influencing environmentally responsible tourism behaviour. It examined three significant variables, destination image, environmental concern, and experience quality, positively impacting environmentally responsible tourism behaviour. The study was in line with past research where destination image significantly influenced environmentally responsible tourism behaviour (e.g. Chiu et al., 2014). Similarly, environmental concern (Willers & Staden van, 1998) and experience quality (Lee et al., 2015) were in line with the previous study. Theoretically, this study contributes by establishing a framework for explaining the antecedents of ecologically conscious behaviour. The researchers' findings will be useful to tourist policymakers to look after the variables influencing responsible tourism behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic and frame the policies accordingly. Tourism managers can explore ways of inducing socially responsible behaviour among the

tourists, such as developing messages on the billboards, spreading environmental awareness through tickets, and further enhancing the experience by looking into the various service elements that enhance the tourists' experiences visiting the heritage sites. Tourism managers can enhance the destination image and environmental concern and engage the tourist community through social media content (Kaur et al., 2015; Lam et al., 2020; Nabivi, 2020; Sultan et al., 2020). Further, destination managers can work out engaging the tourist community and enhancing their experience quality by focusing on user-generated content (Timoshenko & Hauser, 2019).

The given study also has a social implication. By involving local communities in the tourism industry and educating tourists about the importance of sustainability, can minimise tourism's impact on the environment. This can be over and done with the various forms of community engagement, such as community-based tourism initiatives, environmental education programs, and stakeholder engagement. These activities promote responsible tourism behaviour among tourists and empower local communities to participate in their communities' sustainable development actively. Additionally, it also creates an opportunity for local communities to benefit economically from responsible tourism.

The study has certain limitations, such as it has not included the influence of controlled variables such as age and gender effect on the model. Forthcoming studies can examine the impact of the controlled variable on the identified variables. The study proposes three predictors of environmentally responsible behaviour. Further research may include other independent variables, such as destination attachment, subjective norms, and tourist attitudes. The study focuses on heritage tourists as respondents. Further studies can be taken to explore environmentally responsible tourism behaviour in other tourism such as natural, adventure, cultural, spiritual, MICE and others.

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