

The impact of influencer marketing on the sustainable development of domestic green tourism intention in Vietnam

Le, Phuc Ngan ✉

*Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance, Vietnam (nganlp@uef.edu.vn)
Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Czech Republic*

Pilík, Michal

Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Czech Republic (pilik@utb.cz)

Phan, Bao Giang

Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance, Vietnam (giangpb@uef.edu.vn)



ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Received: 31 January 2026

Revised: 20 February 2026

Accepted: 5 March 2026

Available Online: 9 March 2026

DOI: 10.5861/ijrse.2026.26831

Abstract

Vietnam's domestic tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic is facing the need for green and sustainable development, in which influencer marketing is considered a strategic tool to promote tourists' awareness and behavior. This article does not conduct an empirical survey but focuses on synthesizing the theoretical basis and existing research evidence to propose a new research model. Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Parasitic Relationship Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, the model considers five independent factors: credibility, perceived authenticity, content quality, social interaction, and green value congruence. These factors affect attitudes towards green tourism, thereby forming the intention to participate in green tourism of local Vietnamese people. In addition, the level of personal environmental concern is included as a moderating variable, clarifying the difference in the level of influence. The article contributes by identifying the research gap when the aspect of green values and environmental concern is still underexploited and, at the same time, giving suggestions for further quantitative research. The significance is that the model will guide management agencies and businesses to apply influencer marketing to promote sustainable tourism development in Vietnam.

Keywords: influencer marketing, domestic green tourism intention, sustainable development, environmental concern, Vietnam

The impact of influencer marketing on the sustainable development of domestic green tourism intention in Vietnam

1. Introduction

The effectiveness of communication has been established since early times, when Hovland and Weiss (1951) demonstrated that information source credibility plays a central role in persuading the public. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior further extended the framework, showing that attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control are direct predictors of behavioral intentions. In tourism research, Chen and Phou (2013) demonstrated that destination image, value conformity, and emotional connection significantly influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic tourism in Vietnam has not only become a driving force for recovery but also an opportunity for green and sustainable restructuring (Duong, 2022). Promotional campaigns such as "Hello Vietnam" have demonstrated the central role of influencers in tourism promotion (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2024). Recently, Nguyen et al. (2023) pointed out that green messages in influencer content help raise green awareness and behavior among tourists.

From a global perspective, sustainable development is increasingly seen as a core principle of the tourism industry. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018) emphasizes that sustainable development not only protects natural resources but also ensures social equity and community benefits. Vietnam also identifies green tourism as one of the pillars in the Tourism Development Strategy to 2030. In today's 4.0 society, in the domestic tourism market of Vietnam in general and in those well-developed cities in the country, such as Ho Chi Minh City, the application of influencer marketing to promote green tourism behavior has strategic significance, contributing to the formation of a green lifestyle for the community and increasing the competitiveness of domestic tourism destinations in the country for local tourists.

2. Theoretical basis and research overview

Green consumer behavior and sustainable tourism - According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, attitudes and social norms are considered key factors predicting behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). In tourism research, destination image associated with value conformity and emotional connection has been shown to increase tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Chen & Phou, 2013). In Vietnam, recent studies have shown the growing impact of digital media on travel decisions. Nguyen et al. (2023) pointed out that digital media clearly shapes the behavior of young people. Tran (2020) asserted that social media has become the leading reference source in domestic travel decisions. Le (2021) emphasized that authentic travel vlogs, especially when associated with green experiences, have a direct impact on tour participation decisions. Huong (2025) demonstrated that Gen Z is particularly sensitive to content on TikTok when making travel choices. Vinh (2024) found that influencers have the ability to promote sustainable travel behavior. Most recently, Nguyen et al. (2024) showed that green messages from influencers not only raise awareness but also change travel behavior in a sustainable and long-term direction.

Influencer marketing in the context of tourism in Vietnam - Early studies confirmed the role of information source credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), which was later specified through a three-factor scale: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). In parallel, the Parasitic Relationship Theory explains how the public forms a one-way but intimate relationship with media personalities (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The Uses and Gratifications Theory adds that users seek content to satisfy their information and entertainment needs (Katz et al., 1973).

In the social media environment, authenticity becomes a core factor determining trust in influencers (Freberg et al., 2011). Lou and Yuan (2019) as well as Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019) point out that authenticity and natural style strengthen the persuasive effect. Mariani et al. (2021) add that informative and emotional content enhances travel intentions. Later, Tukachinsky and Stever (2019) and Iswanto et al. (2024) demonstrate that emotional engagement and social interaction help influencers inspire the public strongly.

In the context of Vietnam tourism, the “Hello Vietnam” campaign demonstrates the central role of influencers in promoting domestic tourism (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2024). Nguyen & Tran (2022) point out that when influencers are associated with cultural values, heritage travel intentions increase significantly. Huong (2025) shows that TikTok content has a strong influence on Gen Z’s travel decisions. Further studies continue to confirm that influencers have the ability to promote sustainable behavior when embedding environmental messages (Vinh, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Research Gap and Contribution - Most studies have focused on traditional factors such as credibility and attractiveness (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990; Freberg et al., 2011). These factors are considered fundamental in evaluating communication effectiveness, especially when explaining the extent to which the public trusts the information conveyed by influencers. However, in the context of sustainable tourism and green consumption trends that are becoming increasingly urgent, specific factors such as green value congruence or personal environmental concern are still underexplored in academic works. This absence suggests the need to add new variables that reflect social reality, where consumers are not only concerned with the quality of the destination or the entertainment value of the content but also consider the level of contribution to the environment and the community. This gap creates an opportunity to propose an integrated theoretical model, explaining the multidimensional impact mechanism of influencers on green travel attitudes and intentions, and expanding the application value of influencer marketing in the field of sustainable tourism (Nguyen & Tran, 2022; Vinh, 2024; Nguyen, Pham & Le, 2024).

The novelty of the study also lies in combining classic theoretical foundations (TPB, Parasitic Relationships, Uses and Satisfaction) with specific factors in the context of sustainable tourism in Vietnam (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973; Ajzen, 1991). Instead of focusing solely on general communication effectiveness, the study emphasizes “green value” as a key variable reflecting the trend of responsible consumption and sustainable lifestyle (Chen & Phou, 2013; Nguyen & Tran, 2022; Vinh, 2024). The inclusion of “personal environmental concern” in the model as a moderator is also a new contribution, as this variable has never been studied in depth in the relationship between influencers and green tourism behavior in Vietnam (Nguyen, Pham & Le, 2024). Thereby, the study not only expands the international theoretical basis but also has practical significance when directly linked to the goal of sustainable development of Vietnam’s tourism industry by 2030 (UNWTO, 2018; Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2024).

3. Research Model and Hypotheses

Proposed Research Model - The research model consists of five independent variables (Credibility, Perceived Authenticity, Content Quality, Social Engagement, Green Value Congruence), one mediating variable (Attitude towards Green Tourism), one dependent variable (Intention to Participate in Green Tourism), and one moderating variable (Personal Environmental Concern). Credibility is understood as the extent to which the public trusts the accuracy, transparency, and honesty of the message conveyed by the influencer. This is a fundamental element in communication, which has been identified very early in the study of source credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). Perceived authenticity reflects the extent to which followers perceive the influencer as genuine, close, and consistent with their personal values. Authenticity is increasingly seen as a core element in building trust, as audiences prioritize authenticity over showiness (Freberg et al., 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019).

Content quality refers to the extent to which influencer content is complete, useful, informative, and

emotional. According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, audiences seek content to satisfy their informational and entertainment needs (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973). Subsequent studies have also shown that content quality has a direct impact on destination choice behavior (Mariani, Borghi & Cappa, 2021).

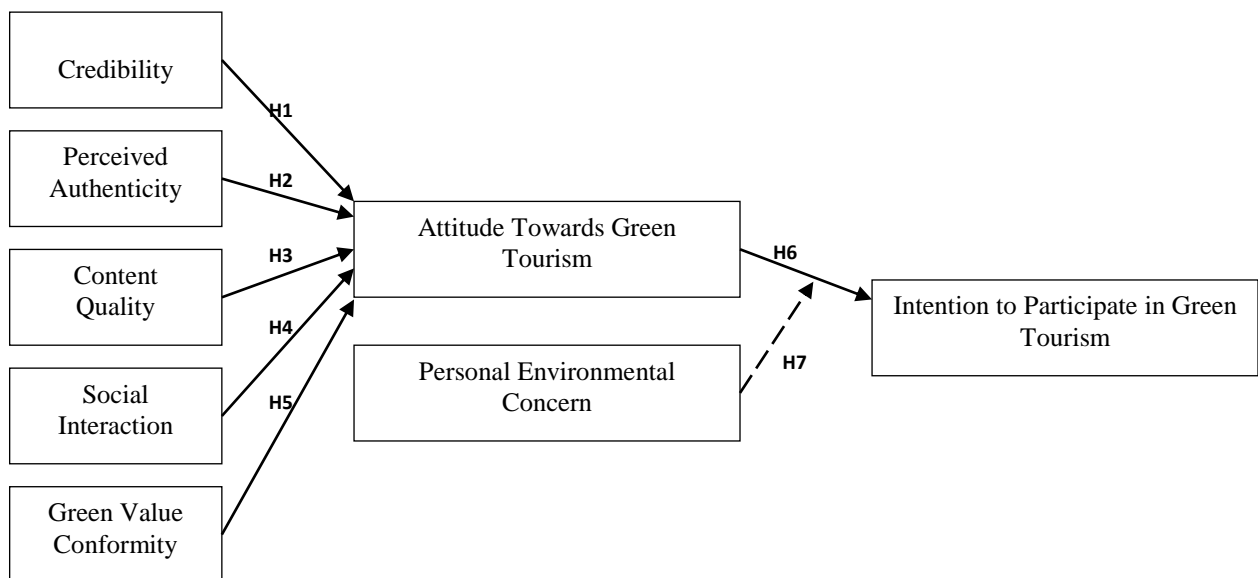
Social engagement is the level of communication, feedback, and engagement between influencers and audiences through the digital environment. This concept originated from the parasitic relationship theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956), and was later developed in the context of digital media to explain the emotional relationship between the public and media figures (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019).

Green value congruence describes the degree of congruence between the sustainability values expressed by the influencer and the public's green beliefs. According to Ajzen (1991), value congruence is the foundation for attitude formation. In tourism, Chen & Phou's (2013) study confirmed that value congruence increases customer loyalty. Recent studies in Vietnam also indicate that when influencers are associated with cultural and environmental messages, the persuasive effect increases significantly (Nguyen & Tran, 2022; Vinh, 2024).

Attitude towards green tourism is defined as the tendency of an individual to evaluate positively or negatively environmental tourism behaviors. According to Ajzen (1991), attitude is one of the most direct predictors of behavioral intention. In the tourism field, Lam & Hsu (2006) and Sokolova & Kefi (2020) both emphasized the close relationship between positive attitude and destination choice intention.

Intention to participate in green tourism reflects the individual's willingness to choose and participate in environmentally friendly tourism activities. This is the central dependent variable of the model, which is often predicted by positive attitude and social norms (Ajzen, 1991; Lam & Hsu, 2006).

Personal environmental concern is the level of awareness, concern, and willingness of each individual to act to protect the environment. This variable plays a moderating role in the relationship between attitude and intention, because green messages are only most effective when the public has a high level of environmental concern (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973; Chen & Phou, 2013; Nguyen, Pham & Le, 2024).



Source: Authors' elaboration

Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

Research Hypothesis

H1: Credibility of influencers has a positive impact on Attitude towards green tourism.

Credibility is considered a fundamental factor in communication (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). In tourism, trust in information directly affects destination evaluation (Chen & Phou, 2013). In Vietnam, the trust factor of online sources is identified as having a strong impact on tourism choice (Tran, 2020).

H2: Perceived Authenticity of influencer has a positive impact on Attitude towards green tourism.

Authenticity reflects the congruence between values and personal image (Freberg et al., 2011). Lou and Yuan (2019) emphasize that authenticity increases trust. Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019) add that natural style increases persuasion. In Vietnam, authentic vlogs clearly influence young people's travel behavior (Le, 2021).

H3: Content Quality of influencer has a positive impact on green tourism attitudes.

Content rich in informational value is often sought after by the public (Katz et al., 1973). Studies show that informational and emotional quality increases travel intentions (Mariani et al., 2021). Vietnamese youth often rely on detailed content when deciding to travel (Nguyen et al., 2023).

H4: Social Interaction of Influencer has a positive impact on green tourism attitudes.

Parasitic relationships describe a one-way but intimate attachment to a media personality (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In the digital environment, interaction strengthens this relationship (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019). In Gen Z, high interaction from influencers promotes travel intentions (Iswanto et al., 2024). In Vietnam, TikTok shows particular effectiveness thanks to its high level of interaction (Huong, 2025).

H5: Green Value Conformity between influencers and the public has a positive impact on Attitude Towards Green Tourism.

According to Ajzen (1991), value congruence is the foundation for attitude formation. In tourism, value congruence increases loyalty (Chen & Phou, 2013). In Vietnam, influencers emphasizing cultural and environmental factors have been shown to increase sustainable tourism intentions (Nguyen & Tran, 2022; Vinh, 2024).

H6: Attitude Towards Green Tourism has a positive impact on Intention To Participate In Green Tourism.

Attitude is the most direct predictor of intention (Ajzen, 1991). In tourism, positive attitude leads to destination choice intention (Lam & Hsu, 2006). Green attitude can also be translated into actual consumption behavior (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In Vietnam, post-COVID-19, positive attitudes towards sustainability have contributed to increased domestic travel intentions (Duong, 2022).

H7: Personal Environmental Concern moderates the relationship between Attitude Towards Green Tourism and Intention To Participate In Green Tourism.

Personal environmental concern determines the level of acceptance and action on green messages (Katz et al., 1973). In tourism, this factor is the foundation for choosing sustainable destinations (Chen & Phou, 2013). New research shows that green messages are most effective when the public has a high level of environmental awareness (Nguyen et al., 2024).

4. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to synthesize theories and build models. Documents are collected from the international and Vietnamese research system, including foundational works on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), Parasitic Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956), and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973), along with new studies on influencer marketing and sustainable tourism behavior in the context of Vietnam (Nguyen & Tran, 2022; Vinh, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024).

The result of this study is a theoretical model consisting of five independent variables (Credibility, Perceived Authenticity, Content Quality, Social Interaction, Green Value Conformity), one mediating variable (Attitude Towards Green Tourism), one dependent variable (Intention To Participate In Green Tourism), and one moderating variable (Personal Environmental Concern). The study also proposes specific hypotheses for each relationship, which serve as a foundation for future quantitative research steps.

5. Conclusion

Influencer marketing is both a modern communication tool and an important bridge between economic development goals and environmental protection responsibilities. In the context of the world facing major challenges of climate change and resource depletion, applying influencer marketing to promote green tourism behavior is of particular strategic importance. If properly oriented and managed, influencers can become "green ambassadors," contributing to spreading positive messages about sustainable development. Through communication campaigns, they have the ability to encourage the community to choose environmentally friendly services, such as hotels using renewable energy, restaurants limiting single-use plastic, or eco-tours associated with nature conservation. This is as well as a change in communication approach, a transformation in shaping sustainable lifestyles and behaviors for the community.

In addition to the economic and environmental impacts, the study also emphasizes the social value that influencer marketing brings when applied to tourism. The cooperation between businesses and influencers is in addition to increasing sales or promoting destinations, a way to contribute to creating benefits for local communities. By telling real stories, such as local people's improved livelihoods thanks to sustainable tourism, influencers can build strong trust with the public. It is this emotional connection that motivates tourists to actively participate while also forming the awareness that choosing sustainable tourism both brings personal benefits and contributes to community development. This is a clear demonstration of the convergence of the three pillars of "People-Planet-Profit" of sustainable development, which is considered a long-term strategic orientation for the tourism industry.

The research results confirm that influencer marketing plays an important role in shaping the attitudes and intentions to participate in green tourism of Ho Chi Minh City residents. Practice also shows that, to achieve the goal of sustainable tourism development, it is impossible to focus only on the supply side, such as infrastructure or tourism services. The demand factor-specifically the awareness, attitude, and behavior of tourists-needs to be strongly and systematically impacted. It is here that influencers play an effective intermediary role, helping to turn abstract policy messages into specific and familiar behaviors in the daily life of the community. This shows that influencer marketing as well as affects the promotion of destination images, has the ability to promote the transformation of social behavior in a sustainable direction.

In the next phase, the research will be expanded to quantitative methods to verify the proposed theoretical model. Specifically, the survey will be implemented with at least 300 residents in Ho Chi Minh City - a group of subjects that plays an important role in the development of the domestic tourism market. A 5-point Likert scale will be applied to collect detailed data on attitudes, intentions, and relationships between research variables. This data will be analyzed using the SEM-PLS method (SmartPLS 4.0) to assess the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the model (Lam & Hsu, 2006; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Conducting quantitative analysis as well as helps to verify the proposed hypotheses, provides valuable empirical evidence for management agencies, tourism businesses, and policy makers. This opens up a new direction in applying influencer marketing as a sustainable solution, serving both the goal of developing the tourism industry and protecting Vietnam's resources and environment.

6. References

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*,

- 50(2), 179–211.
- Chen, C. F., & Phou, S. (2013). A closer look at destination: Image, personality, relationship and loyalty. *Tourism Management, 36*(3), 269–278.
- Djafarova, E., & Trofimenko, O. (2019). ‘Instafamous’-Credibility and self-presentation of micro-celebrities on social media. *Information, Communication & Society, 22*(10), 1432–1446.
- Duong, L. H. (2022). The case of the Vietnamese domestic market: Factors influencing travel demand and tourists’ willingness to support destination recovery in post-pandemic conditions. *Sustainability, 14*(16), 9969.
- Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review, 37*(1), 90–92.
- Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry, 19*(3), 215–229.
- Hovland, C. I., & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 15*(4), 635–650.
- Huong, T. L. (2025). Gen Z’s travel decision-making under TikTok influence in Vietnam. *Vietnam Journal of Tourism Studies, 12*(2), 33–47.
- Iswanto, A., Sasmoko, Indrianti, Y., & Pramudiana, E. (2024). The role of social media influencers in inspiring travel intention among Gen Z. *Journal of Marketing Communications.*
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, J. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 37*(4), 509–523.
- Lam, T., & Hsu, C. H. C. (2006). Predicting behavioral intention of choosing a travel destination. *Tourism Management, 27*(4), 589–599.
- Le, Q. A. (2021). The impact of travel vlogs on youth tourism decisions in Vietnam. *Journal of Tourism Studies, 9*(1), 15–29.
- Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust. *Journal of Interactive Advertising, 19*(1), 58–73.
- Mariani, M., Borghi, M., & Cappa, F. (2021). Online reviews, influencer marketing and tourism decision-making: An empirical study. *Journal of Business Research, 129*, 906–915.
- Nguyen, H. T., Thong, P. T., & Duong, M. H. (2023). Digital media and youth tourism behavior in Vietnam. *Ho Chi Minh City Open University Journal of Science, 18*(2), 112–128.
- Nguyen, M. T., & Tran, L. H. (2022). Cultural identity in influencer marketing: Impacts on heritage tourism intention. *Journal of Cultural Studies, 5*(1), 41–55.
- Nguyen, T. A., Pham, K. H., & Le, M. T. (2024). Green messages in influencer content: Effects on sustainable travel behavior of Vietnamese tourists. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism Development, 18*(1), 21–36.
- Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it: Sponsorship disclosure and effectiveness. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 53*, 101742.
- Tukachinsky, R., & Stever, G. (2019). Theorizing development of parasocial engagement. *Communication Theory, 29*(3), 297–318.
- United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2018). *Tourism and the sustainable development goals – Journey to 2030*. UNWTO.
- Vietnam National Administration of Tourism. (2024). *Promoting green, sustainable tourism: Orientation and initiatives (#HelloVietnam campaign)*. VNAT.
- Vinh, N. T. (2024). Social media influencers and sustainable tourism behavior among Vietnamese consumers. *Journal of Asian Studies, 15*(3), 55–70.

