

**THE IMPACT OF DESTINATION IMAGE AND
PERCEIVED RISK ON THE SELECTION OF TOUR
DESTINATION: A STUDY OF ECOTOURISM IN
BANGLADESH**

BY

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism has been recommended for multiple outcomes that foster environmental protection in developing nations. Through careful management of natural resources and low-cost funding approaches, ecotourism has the potential to be a viable choice. It has been depicted as an environmentally and socially responsible type of tourism that may limit damage to the atmosphere and local communities while benefiting wildlife and serving as a form of entertainment for tourists. Tourism studies revealed that ecotourism in Bangladesh had several setbacks, resulting in environmental difficulties, the unwillingness to visit destinations and security issues. Therefore, this study aims to explore the critical concepts about the image of the destinations and a feeling of reluctance in selecting ecotourism destinations in the narrow and specific sphere. This study also places high importance on tourists' motivation for travel and the impact of gender on travel decisions. More precisely, the relationship between the above constructs toward ecotourism expansion in developing countries like Bangladesh is rarely studied. The rising security fears and image issues for ecotourism destinations have become an escalating concern for ecotourism destination marketing in Bangladesh. It is generally agreed that the initial research offered specific unknown gaps concerned with numerous benefits, such as employment. This study also integrated a conceptual framework based on the theories of the "Stimulus-Response Model of Buyer Behaviour" and the "Push-Pull Model" to address this knowledge gap. The conceptual framework was then empirically verified to resolve the research problem. The mediating variable, "travel motivation", combined with other constructs in the conceptual framework, had never been tested empirically in the context of ecotourism. However, this study adopted quantitative approaches with a structured survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was pretested, refined, and then finalised for the survey. A total of 364 usable responses were collected from tourists who visited Bangladesh's ecotourism destinations. Eight hypotheses embodied the relationships between the constructs. The suggested hypotheses sought to uncover structural relationships among the five constructs in the model through a series of analyses using SPSS and AMOS (Version 25). The study's findings revealed that most of the research hypotheses were well supported and contributed to the body of knowledge within tourism literature. It was advocated that an appropriate image would encourage tourists to visit Bangladesh's ecotourism destinations. Acquiring an in-depth awareness of the multi-dimensional nature of risk is essential for tourists and ecotourism; otherwise, that may negatively influence tourists' minds. The outcome of this study will encourage sustainable development, influence tourists' decisions, and provide relevant knowledge about destinations for local and international tourists. Finally, it will also provide significant implications for the government of Bangladesh, ecotourism stakeholders and marketers to undertake specific efforts to promote Bangladesh ecotourism.

خلاصة البحث

تمت التوصية بالسياحة البيئية لتحقيق نتائج متعددة تعزز حماية البيئة في الدول النامية. من خلال الإدارة الدقيقة للموارد الطبيعية ونهج التمويل منخفضة التكلفة، يمكن للسياحة البيئية أن تكون خيارًا قابلاً للتطبيق. وقد تم تصويره على أنه نوع من السياحة المسؤولة بيئيًا واجتماعيًا والتي قد تحمى من الأضرار التي تلحق بالجوار والمجتمعات المحلية مع الاستفادة من الحياة البرية والعمل كشكل من أشكال الترفيه للسياح. كشفت الدراسات السياحية أن السياحة البيئية في بنغلاديش تعرضت للعديد من النكسات، مما أدى إلى صعوبات بيئية، وعدم الرغبة في زيارة الوجهات، وقضايا أمنية. لذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف المفاهيم النقدية حول صورة الوجهات والشعور بالتردد في اختيار وجهات السياحة البيئية في المجال الضيق والمحدد. تولى هذه الدراسة أيضًا أهمية كبيرة لدوافع السياح للسفر وتأثير الجنس على قرارات السفر. بتعبير أدق، نادرًا ما تتم دراسة العلاقة بين التركيبيات المذكورة أعلاه تجاه توسع السياحة البيئية في البلدان النامية مثل بنغلاديش. أصبحت المخاوف الأمنية المتزايدة وقضايا الصورة لوجهات السياحة البيئية مصدر قلق متزايد لتسويق وجهة السياحة البيئية في بنغلاديش. من المتفق عليه عمومًا أن البحث الأولي قدم فجوات محددة غير معروفة تتعلق بفوائد عديدة، مثل التوظيف. دمجت هذه الدراسة أيضًا إطارًا مفاهيميًا يعتمد على نظريات "نموذج التحفيز والاستجابة لسلوك المشتري" و "نموذج الدفع والسحب" لمعالجة هذه الفجوة المعرفية. ثم تم التحقق من الإطار المفاهيمي تجريبيًا لحل مشكلة البحث. لم يتم اختبار المتغير الوسيط، "دافع السفر"، جنبًا إلى جنب مع التركيبيات الأخرى في الإطار المفاهيمي، بشكل تجريبي في سياق السياحة البيئية. ومع ذلك، اعتمدت هذه الدراسة مناهج كمية مع استبانة مسح منظم. تم اختبار الاستبانة مسبقًا وتنقيحه ثم الانتهاء منه للمسح. تم جمع ما مجموعه 364 إجابة قابلة للاستخدام من السياح الذين زاروا وجهات السياحة البيئية في بنغلاديش. ثماني فرضيات جسدت العلاقات بين التركيبيات. سعت الفرضيات المقترحة إلى الكشف عن العلاقات الهيكلية بين التركيبيات الخمسة في النموذج من خلال سلسلة من التحليلات باستخدام SPSS و AMOS الإصدار 25. كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن معظم فرضيات البحث كانت مدعومة جيدًا وساهمت في مجموعة المعرفة في الأدب السياحي. تمت الدعوة إلى أن الصورة المناسبة من شأنها أن تشجع السياح على زيارة وجهات السياحة البيئية في بنغلاديش. يعد اكتساب وعي متعمق بالطبيعة متعددة الأبعاد للمخاطر أمرًا ضروريًا للسياح والسياحة البيئية؛ خلاف ذلك، قد يؤثر ذلك سلبًا على عقول السائحين. ستشجع نتائج هذه الدراسة التنمية المستدامة، وتؤثر على قرارات السياح، وتوفر المعرفة ذات الصلة حول الوجهات للسياح المحليين والدوليين. أخيرًا، سيوفر أيضًا آثارًا كبيرة على حكومة بنغلاديش وأصحاب المصلحة في السياحة البيئية والمسوقين لبذل جهود محددة لتعزيز السياحة البيئية في بنغلاديش.

APPROVAL PAGE

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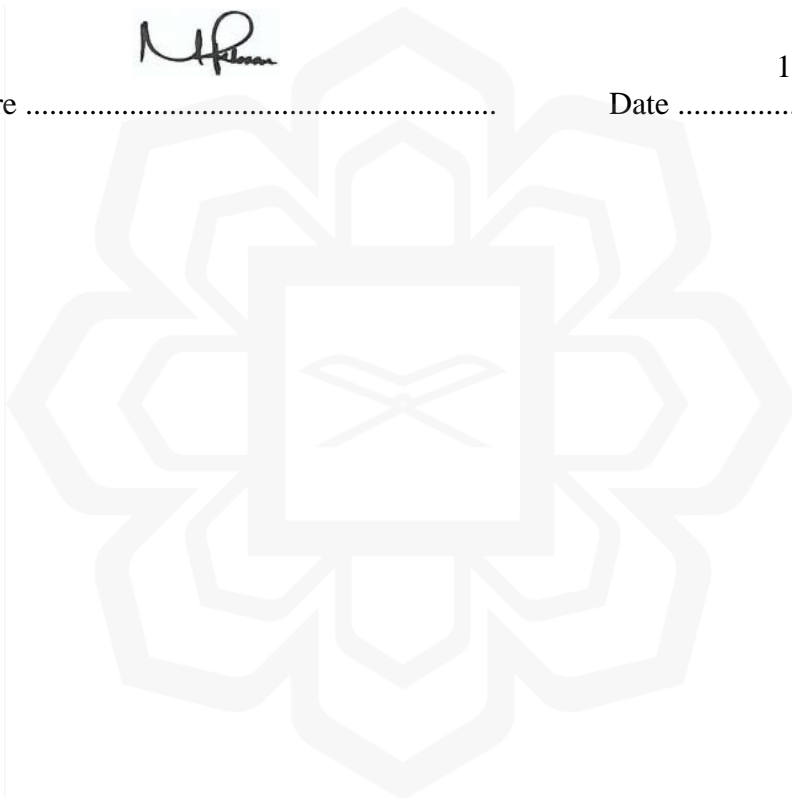
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Mohammad Moshiur Rahman

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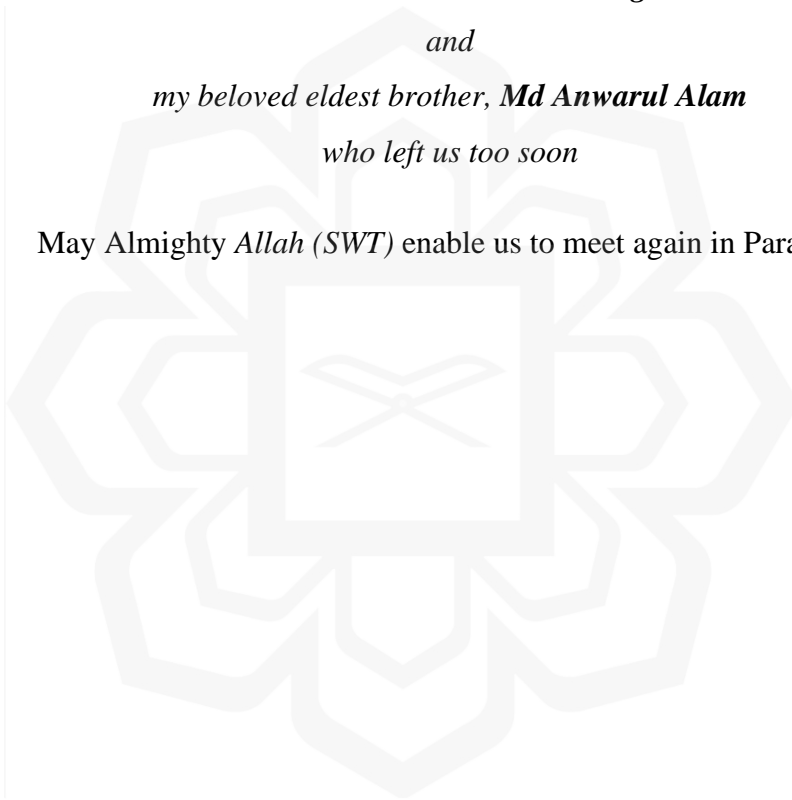
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To my dearly departed parents
Md Abdus Sattar and Saleha Begum

and
*my beloved eldest brother, **Md Anwarul Alam***
who left us too soon

May Almighty *Allah* (SWT) enable us to meet again in Paradise!



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BPC	Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CR	Critical Ratio
DMO	Destination Management Organisations
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
FA	Factor Analysis
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographic Information System
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TIES	The International Ecotourism Society
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

“Tourism” fosters a sense of healing and pleasure in the human mind, motivating individuals to visit a destination. From the beginning of the 21st century, it became one of the most significant activities and eminently expanded worldwide (De Vita & Kyaw, 2016). On an ostensible note, tourism has been described in various ways that reflect the perspectives and preferences of the visitors. It usually combines with financial, societal and cultural issues and validates safeguarding biodiversity and sustainable development (Fletcher et al., 2016). The progress of tourism has many advantages for society, such as expanding employment, improving the transportation system and local income, and upholding community culture (Shahzad et al., 2017). With many significant recreational assets and beneficial consequences, the tourism sector has been steadily growing and contributing to overcoming the alleviation of poverty in achieving national goals (Guizzardi & Stacchini, 2015; Sun et al., 2019). Similarly, the multitude of travel-related activities helps tourism achieve its sustainable aspiration; thus, policymakers, planners, and researchers are progressively examining many aspects of tourism and its development.

Travelling across destinations to experience the beauty of natural resources has surged in demand globally (Mihalič & Fennell, 2015). Bangladesh has many widespread natural resources. Among them, the longest sea beach in Cox’s Bazar, hill tracks in Rangamati of Chittogram Division, tea gardens in Sylhet Division, and the world’s largest natural mangrove forest in the Khulna Division increase the richness of nature and consider excellent resources for tourism advancement in Bangladesh

(Khondkar & Anis, 2016). Regardless of its amusing natural resources, Bangladesh has made a concerted effort to expand its tourist business. As time advanced, the travel and tourism sector became an essential driver of economic growth. According to the World Travel and Tourism Corporation (WTTC, 2019), tourism contributed 11.6% of GDP to Bangladesh's economy directly in 2018 and will contribute an additional 6.1% by 2029. This figure is significantly lower compared to several other developing countries, which raises some concerns regarding the causes of sluggish growth. Thus, to maximise financial benefit and social advancement, it is necessary to scrutinise the present state of tourism to attract more tourists to visit the diverse tourism destinations in Bangladesh.

The idea of ecotourism first gained widespread recognition in the 1980s and has drawn much attention from world pioneers (Diamantis, 2018). With the continuing growth from a new niche market to a sustainable development paradigm, ecotourism has created substantial challenges for developing countries. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2015) defined ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education.” Thus, one of the most critical considerations is investigating an efficient approach for ecotourism planning that contributes to sustainable development. While ecotourism is a relatively new idea in Bangladesh's tourism industry, the planning phase has long been emphasised. Some specific problems, such as population pressure, insufficient physical infrastructure, and natural disaster, create obstacles to developing Bangladesh's ecotourism. In particular, it requires appropriate planning and implementation to gain a competitive advantage and sustain the global tourism race.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Tourism is now predominantly considered a preferred leisure activity both in the form of locally and globally. Leisure and travel activities are in great demand now and will remain high in the future. Also, it is distinguished as one of the most quickly developing industries globally and a significant revenue source for many nations that contribute directly to their GDP. Concerning this, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2019) disclosed that Travel and Tourism contributed US\$ 8.8 trillion to the global economy in 2018, equivalent to 10.4% of global GDP. A previous study also revealed that the tourism sector would develop by 54% by 2023 (Ghosh, 2011). United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNTWO, 2020) mentioned that 1.5 billion tourists visited different destinations worldwide in 2019. There was a 4% increase in the previous year, which is forecasted as one of the leading economic sectors.

As we continue to witness the recent global pandemic effects of mass tourism, ecotourism has also been disrupted. Regardless, it is becoming increasingly crucial to safeguard a destination's natural and cultural heritage and benefit local people. Ecotourism has been perceived as an essential tool for carrying financial advantages to local people. It has evolved into an indispensable source of employment, a global leader in the service sector, and a significant source of foreign currency. Additionally, this industry is labour intensive; most businesses involved with tourism are mainly small and micro-operators and directly related to local spending (Wu et al., 2016).

1.2.1 Tourism Industry in Bangladesh

Tourism frequently works as a catalyst for other development by providing a diverse range of employment opportunities. In recent years, the tourism business has expanded tremendously throughout the world. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation

(UNWTO, 2019) has demonstrated that tourism is the most sustainable source of foreign exchange and provides employment opportunities for developing nations. Bangladesh's tourism sector is still emerging, equated to other Asian countries. It is a small part of the global tourism market compared to its neighbouring nations. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2019) reported that inbound tourists visited Bangladesh in 2019 for a total of 323,225, down from 139,106 in 2010, while local tourists numbered approximately 4.2 million. As illustrated in Table 1.1, the number of tourists has steadily increased yearly, but this figure is significantly lower than that of other developing countries. Among the challenges facing tourism marketers are guaranteeing the quality of tourism services and the competitiveness of tourism destinations, which will undoubtedly result in a rise in tourist numbers. Bangladesh's government must seek a tool and collaborate with the sectors involved to boost the tourism business in such circumstances.

Table 1.1 Number of Foreign Tourists Visited in Bangladesh

Year	Number of Tourists
2019	323295
2018	267209
2017	237452
2016	182469
2015	126264
2014	133902
2013	104009
2012	159524
2011	156454
2010	139106

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2019)

1.2.2 Overview of the Ecotourism Industry

Ecotourism concentrates on environmental and social concerns. It is an alternative to conventional tourism resulting from understanding the global tourism business. The importance and understanding of the principle of ecotourism are essential for tourists and stakeholders. Sustainable development and biodiversity preservation are also potential applications of ecotourism (Hassan & Burns, 2014). Ecotourism, however, functions as a service sector that deserves more attention to satisfy its customers. It reflects economic, socio-cultural, and infrastructure development (Khondkar & Anis, 2016). With this setting in mind, the following section begins with a few definitions of ecotourism before delving into other essential components of ecotourism in Bangladesh.

1.2.2.1 Ecotourism Definitions

Ecotourism is a type of tourism that encourages environmental and social sustainability. Table 1.2 contains a few more definitions compiled throughout the years by various researchers.

Table 1.2 Some Selected Definitions of Ecotourism

Definition(s)	Author(s)
Travelling to natural areas is immaculate and sterilised by the human factor for studying, appreciating, and enjoying wild creatures and plants for any social occasion.	Ceballos-Lascurain (1987)
Ecotourism includes sustainable development and environmental preservation combined to protect natural places while promoting them.	Ross and Wall (1999)
Ecotourism alludes to tourism which is mindful of the nature and prosperity of nearby individuals.	Hunt et al. (2015)
Ecotourism is observing the incomparable diversity of nature and human communities without causing harm to either.	De Grosbois and Fennell (2021)

However, the International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2015) specifies a distinct definition: “ecotourism is responsible travel to natural regions that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and incorporates interpretation and education”.

1.2.2.2 Ecotourism as Service Industry

Bangladesh is equipped with a variety of ecotourism attractions, including beaches, forests, waterfalls, wildlife creatures, rivers, and lakes. It draws the attention of both local and international tourists, and the country’s tourism earnings in foreign currency are rising. However, it is not practised widely as still considered a “new concept” in Bangladesh (Haque et al., 2016). On a separate note, Ahsan (2008) mentioned that Bangladesh is a “land of opportunity” for her unparalleled bio-diversified natural habitats and ancient. Therefore, tourists who visit ecotourism destinations may experience a sense of nature coexisting with heritage, encouraging them to return. Nevertheless, it is critical to have rigorous policymaking, appropriate planning, monitoring, and assessment of the implemented strategies.

The expansion of ecotourism helps develop local people’s socio-economic status. It advocates the biological system, provides local people’s financial opportunities, and protects natural assets. Besides, ecotourism offers travellers a broad scope to watch strange wildlife and indigenous occupants, leading to a significant foreign currency gain (Boley & Green, 2016). Supporting this notion, the researchers believed that ecotourism with tremendous natural resources is a tangible form of tourism to help make a country’s robust economic system (Jaafar & Maideen, 2012). Fennel (2013) argued that ecotourism involves deliberate travel to natural regions that understand the environment’s social and cultural history. Therefore, the government