

Factors Affecting the Choice of Eco-Tourism Destinations by Hanoi Residents: A Case Study of Dong Do Lake - Soc Son

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ABSTRACT

Dong Do Lake is an ecotourism destination exuding pristine beauty, enveloped by the lush greenery of nature. Beyond admiring the unspoiled landscapes, visitors to Dong Do Lake can engage in a multitude of captivating activities, including camping, boating, and indulging in BBQ feasts. In order to investigate the determinants of choosing Dong Do Lake ecotourism destination by Hanoi residents, the research team employed a quantitative research method based on data collected from a survey of 300 individuals, including 159 people who had previously visited Dong Do Lake for ecotourism purposes. The data was cleaned and processed using SMARTPLS software. The research results indicate that, with a 95% confidence level, the "Attitude towards the Dong Do Lake ecotourism destination" (ATT) has the strongest impact on the decision to choose Dong Do Lake ecotourism destination by Hanoi residents, with an impact level of 0.357. Next is the factor "Communication Strategy of the Dong Do Lake ecotourism destination" (CS) with an impact level of 0.249, followed by the factor "Travel Costs" (TC) with an impact level of 0.225, and the factor "Reference Group" (RG) with an impact level of 0.196. Based on the analysis results, the research team provides some discussion points to promote the decision to choose Dong Do Lake ecotourism destination for both people in general and Hanoi people in particular.

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Introduction

Dong Do Lake is located in Minh Tri commune, Soc Son district, Hanoi city, approximately 45km north of the city center. It is situated in a picturesque location surrounded by majestic mountains on both sides of the lake [1].

Dong Do Lake is an ideal destination for short-term tourism, conveniently located on the outskirts of Hanoi. It has become a sought-after spot for many travelers. A visit to Dong Do Lake, even for just one day, offers a complete experience with various exciting activities such as camping, BBQ parties, and boating, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the pristine and tranquil nature. The lake stretches deep into the valley, with towering and grandiose mountains on both sides. The surrounding area is mainly covered with green pine forests, creating a wild and serene beauty that captivates the souls of travelers who come here [2].

Hanoi in particular, and Vietnam in general, possess numerous potential factors that facilitate the development of eco-tourism. Dong Do Lake is an eco-tourism destination located on the outskirts of Hanoi, attracting tourists for short day trips. In order to promote sustainable tourism in Dong Do Lake's eco-tourism area, there is a need for empirical research into the psychology and behavior of tourists. Recognizing the significance of this issue,

the research team has decided to study "**Factors Affecting the Choice of Eco-Tourism Destinations by Hanoi Residents: A Case Study of Dong Do Lake – Soc Son**". To examine the factors affecting the choice of Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents and encourage tourists to select this eco-tourism destination, the research aims to answer the following questions

1. What are the factors that determine the choice of Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination?
2. To what extent do these factors influence the decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination?

Through this research, the research team aims to provide insights and discussions to attract tourists to choose the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination.

Theoretical Foundation, Research Overview

Theoretical Foundation

Tourist Destination

Many scholars argue that tourists perceive a tourist destination not merely as a geographical location but as an overall concept encompassing both providers and businesses offering services at the destination. According to Hu & Ritchie, a tourist destination is a bundle of tourism facilities and services, much like any other consumer product, consisting of several multidimensional attributes [3]. Despite its complexity, a tourist destination is still a product and should be viewed as a strategically managed brand [4].

Eco-Tourism Destination

As defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN-WTO), a tourism destination is a geographical area where tourists stay for at least one night. It encompasses tourism products, services, attractions, administrative boundaries for management, and a distinct image to determine its competitiveness in the market [5].

According to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, an ecotourism destination is a location endowed with exceptional natural tourism resources and rich biodiversity [6]. These destinations are often situated within natural conservation areas and possess the capacity to cater to tourists' needs for sightseeing, research, and fostering an enhanced understanding of the natural environment.

Choosing an Eco-tourism Destination

At a macro level, choosing a destination involves selecting one destination from various competing alternatives [7].

Um, & Crompton posit that choosing a tourism destination is the stage where one selects a destination from a pool of destinations that align with tourists' needs [8].

Selecting an ecotourism destination represents the final decision of travelers in choosing an ecotourism destination that aligns with their desires and needs [9].

Theory of Reasoned Action - TRA

Fishbein & Ajzen introduced the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to elucidate and forecast behavioral intentions, particularly in the context of product acceptance [10]. According to this theory, "intention" serves as the most accurate predictor of eventual behavior and is simultaneously determined by attitudes and subjective norms.

- **Attitude:** This represents an emotional state manifested in an individual's behavior through gestures, words, facial expressions, image perception, and various elements associated with the product.
- **Subjective Norms:** Behavioral intentions are influenced by the attitudes of individuals relevant to product usage, while the user's motivation is affected by the behavior and desires of those who have a stake in the situation.

Theory of Planned Behaviour – TPB

Ajzen's Theory TPB posits that individuals engage in a specific behavior if they believe that the behavior will yield valuable outcomes [10]. TPB consists of a set of relationships between attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention. This theory adds a third factor, perceived behavioral control, compared to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) model.

- **Perceived Behavioral Control:** It is an individual's perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform a behavior (related to the availability of necessary resources, knowledge, and opportunities to apply)

Consumer Travel Behavior Model

Engel, Kollat và Blackwell's Consumer Travel Behavior Model consists of 8 stages

- (1) Needs to be satisfied,
- (2) Prioritizing travel needs,

- (3) The involvement of time, money, and effort in the decision-making process,
- (4) Information search,
- (5) Evaluation and selection,
- (6) Choice decision,
- (7) Purchase and consumption behavior, and
- (8) Post-consumption attitudes [11].

Mathieson & Wall proposed a consumer travel behavior model consisting of 5 stages

- (1) Needs/desires to undertake a trip,
- (2) Gathering and evaluating information,
- (3) Decision to travel,
- (4) Trip preparation, and
- (5) Evaluation of satisfaction and contentment after the trip [12].

Research Overview

Choosing a travel destination is one of consumer travel behavior's core and most critical aspects. Binh NT researched the factors affecting destination choice decisions, providing a clearer insight into what tourists are looking for in destinations [13]. Binh NT constructed a model to assess the factors affecting the choice of Phu Quoc by domestic tourists using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) methodology. The research results revealed that four factors (pull motivation, push motivation, tour price, and promotional information) influence the choice of Phu Quoc as a destination for domestic tourists in different orders of importance. Based on these results, prioritized recommendations.

Dinh Kiem researched to analyze and assess the factors affecting the destination choices of domestic tourists [14]. The practical study was conducted in Mui Ne - Binh Thuan, with a survey of 304 participants, using qualitative and quantitative methods approach. The results revealed that there are seven factors affecting the choices of domestic tourists in order of importance: travel conditions and relaxation, travel motivation, cuisine and shopping, infrastructure, environmental landscape, destination information, and, finally, the economic environment.

Tri PQ & Thu TT researched the factors affecting the choice of rural tourism destinations based on community in the North Central region using survey data from 281 tourists in the provinces of Quang Binh and Nghe An in August 2019 [15]. The estimated results showed that tourists' destination choices depend on six groups of factors, including

- (1) the motivation for social interaction and relaxation,
- (2) the motivation for exploration,
- (3) the cost of rural tourism,
- (4) the information sources for rural tourism,
- (5) the unique products of rural tourism, and
- (6) the environmental management of rural tourism.

The research conducted by Nhung NTT et al. analyzed the factors affecting the quality of service (QoS) in ecotourism (ET) destinations [16]. The affecting criteria were measured and validated using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient and exploratory factor analysis. Data was collected in 2014 from 252 tourists who had experiences in Ba Vi National Park (BVNP). The results of ordinal regression analysis revealed that, except for the transportation factor, there are six groups of factors affecting QoS, which include: ecological landscapes, empathy, responsiveness, communication assurance, management capacity, and safety. Among these factors, "ecological landscapes" had the strongest impact, encompassing aspects such as differentiation from other

tourist areas in the region, diverse landscapes, and the preservation of natural beauty. Furthermore, the research indicated that there was no significant difference in the satisfaction perception of QoS at BVNP between male and female tourists.

Hai PH researched the factors affecting the choice of ecotourism destinations in Ben Tre province [17]. The study aimed to examine the relationships between attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, intention, and the actual destination choice behavior of tourists. Using structural equation modeling (SEM) with a survey sample of 169 domestic tourists selecting ecotourism destinations in Ben Tre province, the research results indicated that all three factors: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control had positive effects on tourists' intention to choose the destination. Furthermore, the study also demonstrated that perceived behavioral control and intention had a positive impact on tourists' destination choice behavior. The research proposed recommendations for attracting tourists to ecotourism destinations in Ben Tre province, discussed limitations, and suggested directions for future research.

Thu HM et al., conducted a study on the factors affecting the destination choice decisions of European tourists: A case study in Can Tho City [18]. In this study, it was found that destination information affects travel motivation, and travel motivation strongly influences the destination image. Using quantitative analysis to identify the factors affecting the choice decisions of European tourists for Can Tho as their destination, Thu HM et al., identified five factors that influence the decision of European tourists to choose Can Tho as their destination: Travel motivation, tourist attitudes, destination image, marketing communication strategy, and the tourism environment.

Hien HN conducted a study on the factors affecting the choice of Ha Giang as a destination for domestic tourists [19]. The study highlighted that destination choice is one of the core and crucial issues in the consumer behavior of tourists. The research analyzed the factors affecting the decision to choose Ha Giang by domestic tourists using simple linear regression analysis. The research results showed that there are five factors (price, promotion, motivation, quality, and safety) that influence the decision to choose Ha Giang as the destination for domestic tourists, with varying degrees of importance. These findings provide an important foundation for developing solutions to attract tourists and enhance the competitiveness of Ha Giang tourism.

Proposed Model, Hypotheses and Research Scales

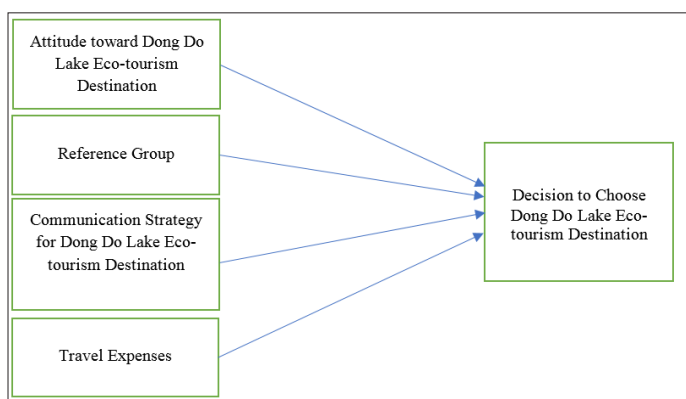


Figure 1: Expected Research Model

Research Hypotheses

H1. Attitude toward the Dong Do Lake Eco-tourism Destination has a positively correlated relationship with the Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake Eco-tourism Destination.

H2. The Reference Group has a positively correlated relationship with the Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake Eco-tourism Destination.

H3. Communication Strategy for Dong Do Lake Eco-tourism Destination has a positively correlated relationship with the Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake Eco-tourism Destination.

H4. Travel Costs have a positively correlated relationship with the Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake Eco-tourism Destination.

Table 1: Variables and Measurement Scales of Factors in the Model

STT	Code	Observed Variable	Source
I	ATT	Attitude toward Dong Do Lake Eco-tourism Destination	[9,16,18]
1	ATT1	Destination Dong Do Lake is interesting	
2	ATT2	Dong Do Lake Eco-tourism brings many benefits	
3	ATT3	Dong Do Lake Eco-tourism is comfortable and pleasant	
4	ATT4	I am attracted when Dong Do Lake eco-tourism is mentioned	
5	ATT5	I am enthusiastic when Dong Do Lake eco-tourism is mentioned	
II	RG	Reference Group	[9]
6	RG1	I often consult the comments of people around me about Dong Do Lake	
7	RG2	My decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism is influenced by the advice of those who have experienced it	
8	RG3	If there are negative comments about Dong Do Lake, I will not go	
9	RG4	Referring to opinions from other sources such as social media, magazines, and websites, etc. makes me more confident in choosing the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination	
III	CS	Destination Communication Strategy and Customer Engagement to Dong Do Lake	[18,9]
10	CS1	The eco-tourism destination Dong Do Lake is well-advertised and communicated	
11	CS2	Tourists have flexible choices in the service package at Dong Do Lake	
12	CS3	The staff at Dong Do Lake are enthusiastic and professional	
13	CS4	Tourists receive good advertising and care	
IV	TC	Travel Cost to Dong Do Lake	[15]
14	TC1	The cost of traveling to the eco-tourism destination Dong Do Lake is in line with the benefits it brings	

15	TC2	The price of experiential services at the eco-tourism destination Dong Do Lake is reasonable	
16	TC3	The accommodation cost at the eco-tourism destination Dong Do Lake is suitable	
17	TC4	The cost of traveling to Dong Do Lake is in line with the income level	
V	DTD	Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake Eco-tourism Destination	[20,9]
18	DTD1	The decision to choose the eco-tourism destination Dong Do Lake is correct	
19	DTD2	The decision to choose the eco-tourism destination Dong Do Lake is reasonable	
20	DTD3	I will decide to return to Dong Do Lake as a destination in the future	

Research Methodology

Data Collection Method

Based on theoretical foundations and a review of research on the factors affecting the decision to choose Dong Do Lake ecological tourism destination by Hanoi residents, the factors included in the research model consist of 4 independent variables:

- (i) Attitude toward Dong Do Lake ecological destination
- (ii) Reference group
- (iii) Communication strategy of Dong Do Lake ecological destination
- (iv) Travel Cost

The impact on the dependent variable “The decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents.”.

The survey questionnaire was constructed using a 5-point Likert scale, with

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

After constructing the survey questionnaire, the research team conducted in-depth interviews with 5 residents in Hanoi who had visited the Dong Do Lake ecological tourism destination. The survey questionnaire was then refined based on the feedback from the interviewees. Subsequently, the research team conducted a random survey of 10 residents living in Hanoi who had also visited the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination. The preliminary survey results showed agreement with the factors included in the model. Based on the preliminary survey, the research team finalized the survey questionnaire and conducted a wide-scale survey via the following link (<https://forms.gle/ZsMcJs9DozVG1W6i7>) with the target audience being residents living in Hanoi of various age groups.

The data collection method conducted by the research team is based on a convenient sampling method and the "snowball" method (a method of finding the next subject based on the suggestion or introduction of the surveyed subject) to ensure an adequate sample size as required. A total of 300 survey questionnaires were collected, of which 159 respondents had experienced the Dong Do Lake ecological tourism destination. Therefore, the number of valid questionnaires used in the analysis of influencing factors was 159.

Data Processing Method

Quantitative research methods were employed to process the data collected from the survey of residents in Hanoi. The SMARTPLS software was used to test hypotheses and evaluate the impact of various factors.

• Step 1: Measurement Model Assessment

The assessment of the measurement model is based on examining values related to the quality of Observed Variables (outer loadings), the reliability of the scale (Cronbach’s Alpha), Convergence, and Discriminant Validity.

• Step 2: Structural Model Assessment

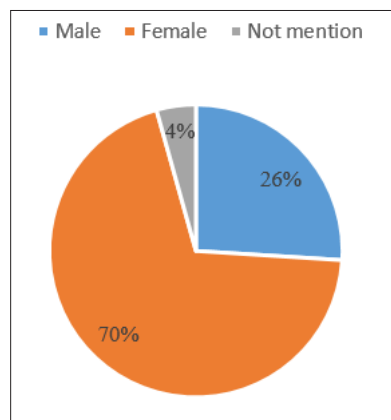
Once the measurement model assessment meets the requirements, the evaluation of the structural model is carried out through the analysis of causal relationships, path coefficients, the determination of the R-squared value, and squared path coefficients (f).

Research Results

Description of Survey Participants

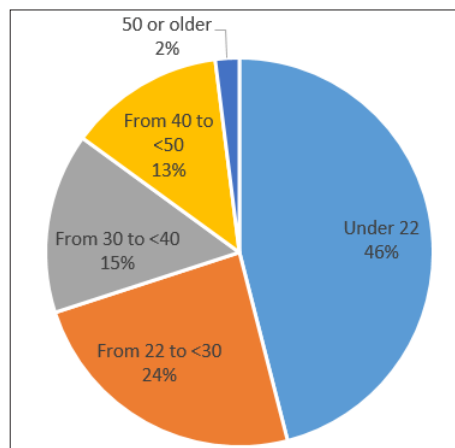
Among the 300 survey participants, there were 209 females (70%), 78 males (26%), and 13 individuals who preferred not to specify (4%).

Chart 1: Gender of Survey Participants



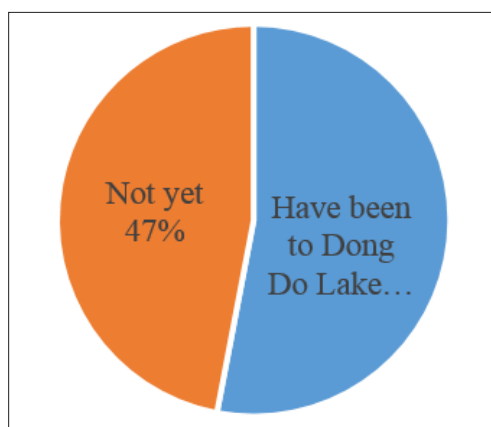
Participation in the survey included 300 individuals, among whom 138 were under 22 years old (46%), 72 were between 22-30 years old (24%), 45 were between 30-40 years old (15%), 39 were between 40-50 years old (13%), and 6 were over 50 years old (2%).

Chart 2: Age of Survey Participants



Among the 300 surveyed individuals, 159 had visited Dong Do Lake as their destination (53%), while 141 had not (47%).

Chart 3: Whether or not Participants have Visited Dong Do Lake as a Destination



Examination Results

Assessment of the Quality of Observed Variables in the Measurement Model

Examination of the Quality of Observed Variables
 The quality of Observed Variables is evaluated through outer loadings. The quality of Observed Variables influencing the decision to choose Dong Do Lake as an eco-tourism destination for Hanoi residents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Outer Loadings of Factors Influencing the Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake as an Eco-Tourism Destination for Hanoi Residents

	ATT	CS	DTD	RG	TC
	0.825				
	0.805				
	0.907				
	0.884				
		0.895			
		0.882			
		0.920			
		0.906			
			0.937		
			0.873		
			0.909		
				0.799	
				0.870	
				0.742	
				0.802	
					0.902
					0.879
					0.808
					0.880

The results from Table 2 show that the outer loadings of all the variables' total correlation coefficients influencing the decision to choose Dong Do Lake as an eco-tourism destination for Hanoi residents are > 0.7 [21]. This indicates that the Observed Variables are statistically significant.

Examination of Measurement Scale Reliability

The reliability of the measurement scale for factors influencing the decision to choose Dong Do Lake as an eco-tourism destination for Hanoi residents in PLS-SEM is assessed through two key indicators: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR).

Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability of Factors Affecting the Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake as an Eco-Tourism Destination for Hanoi Residents

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
ATT	0.916	0.921	0.937	0.750
CS	0.923	0.924	0.945	0.812
DTD	0.892	0.899	0.933	0.822
RG	0.817	0.823	0.880	0.647
TC	0.891	0.898	0.924	0.754

According to Table 3, the analysis of reliability using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient yields the following results: Attitude toward Dong Do Lake (ATT) reaches 0.916; Communication Strategy towards Dong Do Lake (CS) achieves 0.923; Reference Group (RG) attains 0.817; Travel Cost (TC) reaches 0.891; Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake as an Eco-Tourism Destination (DTD) reaches 0.892. Thus, all the measurement scales meet the condition of > 0.7 and do not violate any variable elimination rules. Therefore, no variables are removed, and they are all considered reliable [22].

The Composite Reliability (CR) for all the Observed Variables is also > 0.7 [23]. Hence, the measurement scales are reliable, statistically significant, and suitable for further factor analysis.

Convergence

Based on the data analysis results in Table 2, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for the factors are as follows: Attitude towards Dong Do Lake (ATT) achieved 0.750; Communication Strategy towards Dong Do Lake (CS) reached 0.812; Reference Group (RG) attained 0.647; Travel Cost (TC) reached 0.754; Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake as an Eco-Tourism Destination (DTD) obtained 0.822.

Therefore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables are > 0.5 (Hock & Ringle indicating that the model satisfies the convergence conditions [24].

Discriminant Validity

The results in Table 4 regarding the Fornell-Larcker criterion of the research model for factors influencing the decision to choose Dong Do Lake as an eco-tourism destination for Hanoi residents show that the factors: Attitude towards Dong Do Lake (ATT); Communication Strategy towards Dong Do Lake (CS); Reference Group (RG); Travel Cost (TC); Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake as an Eco-Tourism Destination (DTD) all ensure discriminant validity because all square root AVE values on the diagonal are higher than their corresponding off-diagonal values. Therefore, in terms of discriminant validity, both the cross-loadings and the Fornell and Larcker criterion conditions are met.

Table 4: Fornell-Larcker Criterion of the Research Model for Factors Influencing the Decision to Choose Dong Do Lake as an Eco-Tourism Destination for Hanoi Residents

	ATT	CS	DID	RG	TC
ATT	0.866				
CS	0.736	0.901			
DID	0.823	0.792	0.907		
RG	0.559	0.657	0.677	0.805	
TC	0.771	0.677	0.772	0.526	0.868

The f^2 values indicate the degree of influence of a structure (factor) when removed from the model. The f^2 values corresponding to 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, are associated with small, medium, and large effect sizes of the exogenous variable. If the effect size < 0.02 , it is considered as having no effect.

Table 5: Summary of f^2 Values

	ATT	CS	DTD	RG	TC
ATT			0.201		
CS			0.109		
DTD					
RG			0.105		
TC			0.094		

In this model, in Table 5, we can observe the relationships between CS (0.109), RG (0.105), and TC (0.094) "having" a small effect on the decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents because $0.15 > f^2 > 0.02$. The factor ATT (0.201) with $0.35 > f^2 > 0.15$ is considered to have a "medium" effect on the decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents.

Evaluation of the Impact Level Using Structural Model Evaluation of the Impact Relationships

Regarding the relationships and the degree of influence of the factors affecting the decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents in SMARTPLS, it is illustrated in Figure 2.

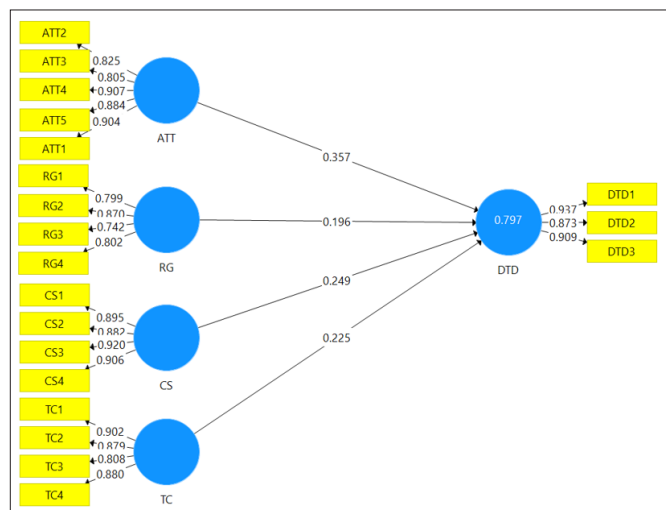


Figure 2: Factors Affecting the Decision to choose Dong Do Lake Eco-Tourism Destination by Hanoi Residents

The results of the Bootstrap analysis to assess the impact relationships are presented in Table 6. According to the table, the factors of "Attitude toward Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination" (ATT), "Communication strategy of Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination" (CS), "Reference Group" (RG), and "Travel cost" (TC) have P-values < 0.05 . This reflects that these factors have significant statistical significance in demonstrating a positive influence on the decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents (Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4 are accepted).

Table 6: Path Coefficients in the Structural Model

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
ATT -> DTD	0.357	0.365	0.068	5.288	0.000
CS -> DTD	0.249	0.236	0.088	2.812	0.005
RG -> DTD	0.196	0.186	0.066	2.976	0.003
TC -> DTD	0.225	0.237	0.100	2.256	0.024
TC			0.094		

The test results in Table 6 show that with a 95% confidence level, "Attitude toward Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination" (ATT) has the strongest impact on the decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents, with an impact level of 0.357. Next is the factor "Communication strategy of Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination" (CS) with an impact level of 0.249, followed by the factor "Travel Cost" (TC) with an impact level of 0.225, and the factor "Reference group" (RG) with an impact level of 0.196.

Assessing the Coefficient of Determination R² (R square)

The results of the PLS Algorithm analysis provide the R2 value, which reflects the explanatory power of the independent variables for the dependent variable. The R2 value measures the coefficient of determination, indicating the goodness-of-fit of the model to the data (model's explanatory ability). According to Hair et al., R-square values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 are suggested [25].

Table 7: Coefficient of Determination R-square for Independent Variables on Dependent Variable (R Square)

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
DID	0.797	0.792

The results from Table 7 show that R² is equal to 0.797, and the adjusted R2 is 0.792, which is suitable for this research. Therefore, the independent variables in the model explain 79.7% of the "Decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents."

Assessing the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)

The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR): This index indicates the model's goodness of fit. According to Hu & Bentler, a well-fitting model typically has an SRMR value of less than 0.08.

Table 8: Reliability Index of Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.078	0.078

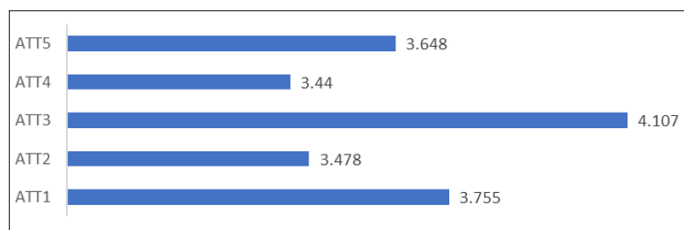
Through the research findings, the SRMR value in Table 8 of the research model is 0.078, which is less than 0.08. Therefore, this model is suitable for data analysis.

Discussion

Among the four factors considered, all four factors at a 5% significance level show an impact on the “Decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents”. Specifically, “Attitude toward Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination” (ATT) has the strongest impact on the decision, with an effect size of 0.357. This means that when the attitude toward the destination increases by 1 unit, the decision to choose the destination increases by 0.357 units; Next is the “Communication Strategy of Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination” (CS) factor with an effect size of 0.249, indicating that an increase of 1 unit in the communication strategy leads to a 0.249-unit increase in the decision to choose the destination. The “Travel Cost” (TC) has an effect size of 0.225, showing that an increase of 1 unit in travel cost, within a reasonable range, will stimulate the decision to choose the destination by 0.225 units; Lastly, the “Reference Group” (RG) has an effect size of 0.196, suggesting that increasing information-seeking behavior from reference groups by 1 unit will result in a 0.196-unit increase in the decision to choose the destination.

Based on the survey results and the assessment of the influence of the factors in the model on the decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents, the research team proposes the following suggestions:

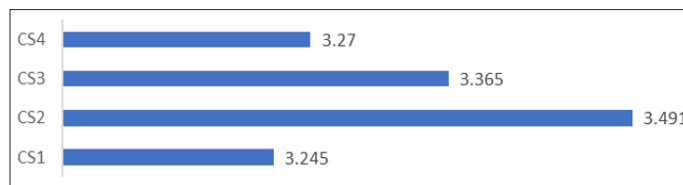
Attitude toward Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination (ATT) has the most significant impact on the decision to choose the destination.



The average scores of the ATT factor's measurement items range from 3.44 to 4.107, indicating that respondents generally agree with the statements in the survey. The highest average score is for item ATT3, suggesting that tourists who have visited Dong Do Lake feel comfortable and at ease. To leverage the attitude factor towards Dong Do Lake among tourists, businesses at the tourism destination should employ direct or indirect measures to ensure that tourists have good knowledge and a positive attitude towards Dong Do Lake eco-tourism. Diversifying the tourism products at the destination is essential to provide tourists with opportunities for exploration and close encounters with nature, allowing them to experience a change of atmosphere and escape from their busy daily lives.

The "Communication Strategy of Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination" (CS) is the second most influential factor in the decision to choose the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination.

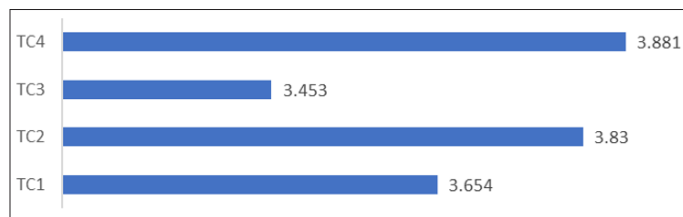
Chart 5: Mean values of the “Communication Strategy of Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination” (CS) factor



The mean scores of the measurement items for the CS factor range from 3.245 to 3.491. Only the item “Flexibility in selecting services at Dong Do Lake” (CS2) received agreement from survey participants. The remaining items are currently at the "No opinion" level. Therefore, to make the communication strategy of the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination more effective, there is a need to enhance advertising and communication activities for the destination. Training and workshops for staff at the destination are essential to ensure their enthusiasm and professionalism, as the tourism workforce serves as a crucial communication channel for tourism destinations in general and Dong Do Lake in particular. Additionally, upgrading infrastructure and service quality should be a focus for both the local authorities at Dong Do Lake and tourism operators. They should create websites and communication plans to promote ecological tourism knowledge about Dong Do Lake. Strengthening communication about the destination by publishing articles highlighting the importance of ecological tourism for the environment and sustainable tourism development, in general, is essential. Utilizing small tips and sharing knowledge about what tourists should know when visiting Dong Do Lake can help attract the attention of visitors.

Next is the "Travel cost" (TC) factor, which ranks third in influencing the decision to choose the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination.

Chart 6: Mean values of the "Travel cost" (TC) factor



The mean scores of the measurement items for the TC factor range from 3.453 to 3.881, indicating that the measurement items, including "The cost of visiting the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination is suitable for the benefits it offers" (TC1), "The price of experiential services at the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination is reasonable" (TC2), "The cost of accommodation services at the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination is appropriate" (TC3), and "The travel cost to Dong Do Lake is suitable for the income level" (TC4), all received agreement from survey participants. This can be considered an advantage of the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination, being located just outside of Hanoi with cost-effective options that cater to a wide range of visitors. However, tourism operators at the Dong Do Lake destination should focus on improving service quality and proactively study and analyze the preferences of tourists to strike a balance between quality and cost factors.

The factor that has the least impact on the decision to choose the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination in the model is the Reference Group factor (RG).

Chart 7: Mean values of the "Reference Group" (RG) factor



The mean scores of the measurement items for the RG factor range from 2.849 to 3.824. It indicates that three measurement items received agreement from survey participants. These items are "Consulting opinions from other sources such as social networks, magazines, websites... makes me more confident in my decision to choose the ecotourism destination Dong Do Lake (RG4)" with an average score of 3,824 points; "I often refer to comments from people around about Dong Do Lake (RG1)" with an average score of 3,818 points; "My decision to choose Dong Do Lake ecotourism destination was influenced by the advice of people who have experienced it (RG3)" achieved an average score of 3,541. If there are negative reviews about Dong Do Lake, I will not go again" received a score of 2.849, indicating that respondents did not agree with this statement. The "Reference Group" (RG) factor in this study plays a significant role in influencing the decision to choose the Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination. Therefore, tourism operators at Dong Do Lake should intensify their communication and marketing efforts to promote the destination. They should also focus on understanding the perceptions, beliefs, and preferences of tourists, gather customer feedback, and implement customer care strategies to ensure that every customer who visits Dong Do Lake becomes an advocate for the destination and is willing to return [26-32].

Conclusion

The preliminary results of this study have revealed the relationships between various factors influencing the decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents. However, it should be noted that the sample size for this study was relatively small, with only 300 survey questionnaires collected and 159 questionnaires used for the influence analysis. Additionally, the convenience and random nature of the survey may also be considered limitations in terms of sample size and questionnaire quality. Furthermore, the four factors included in the model explained only 79.7% of the "Decision to choose Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination by Hanoi residents," although all four factors were statistically significant. These results can be seen as a direction for future research on the decision-making process of choosing Dong Do Lake eco-tourism destination, not only for Hanoi residents but also for domestic and international tourists. In the future, the research team can consider expanding the survey, exploring additional factors and selection criteria, and targeting and filtering survey participants more purposefully to increase both the sample size and the model's explanatory power.

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