

The Action-Attitude Gap to Pro-environmental Sustainability in Nature-Based Destinations: A Qualitative Study Using the Stakeholder Theory

Abstract

Tourist destinations relying on their natural environment are experiencing a growing demand for sustainability, which underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of tourists' perceptions of environmental practices. Although the environment is a key attraction, research on sustainable tourism development for nature-based tourism destinations is limited, highlighting theoretical and practical gaps in the existing literature. Phuket Island in Thailand was chosen as a study site, and more than fifteen hours of transcribed interview data were used to empirically investigate the action-attitude gap amongst international tourists as a barrier to sustainable tourism development. The findings reveal a substantial discrepancy between the tourists' self-reported high awareness of sustainable practices and their lack of evident behaviours supporting these principles. The paper discusses theoretical implications for tourism researchers and provides practical insights for policymakers and businesses.

Keywords: sustainability, nature tourism, sustainable tourism development, tourist behaviour, Thailand

1. Introduction

Tourism has the potential to make a significant contribution toward national, regional, and local economic development and well-being. However, when tourism development is focused entirely on exploiting economic gains, it may not be sustainable over the long term (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020; Mavrin, 2024). The study first aimed to investigate tourists' perceptions of environmental sustainability and second, to explore how they can enhance destination environmental sustainability. In a tourism destination setting, understanding perceptions is important if destinations remain competitive in the future (Cunha et al., 2020). In recent years, many tourists have become increasingly conscious of the need to support sustainable lifestyles, and many actively seek destinations that align with their values (Demeter et al., 2023).

There is a growing demand for sustainable practices in the tourism industry (Streimikiene et al., 2020), and understanding tourists' perceptions of environmental sustainability is crucial for meeting their expectations (Ramkissoon, 2023). Although the concept of sustainable tourism has been investigated from many perspectives, there remains a significant gap in the literature on visitors' perceptions (Guo et al., 2019). Understanding tourists' perceptions is crucial, particularly in positioning destinations such as Phuket, Thailand, as committed to sustainable development principles (Jarumaneerat, 2021). Taking responsibility for caring for the earth's ecosystem and its inhabitants was identified by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, n.d.) as a primary driver for the long-term restructuring of the global economy and the tourism sector specifically.

Božić et al. (2018) argue that while increasing tourism arrivals generates increased revenue, it can also create numerous environmental and social problems that may grow exponentially if not appropriately managed.

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Phuket's rapid development as a mass-tourism destination has created several challenges (Fuchs et al., 2024), including destroying the island's ecosystems, lack of worker housing, strains on social structures, and displacement of local culture. Therefore, the need for the global tourism industry to embrace sustainability as a core value is growing in urgency as the impact of global warming becomes increasingly apparent (Scott & Gössling, 2022). Tourism is a climate-sensitive industry that is beginning to suffer from many environmental and socioeconomic changes caused by climate change (Hall, 2019). Although the environment is a key attraction, research on sustainable tourism development in Phuket is minimal, highlighting theoretical and practical gaps in the existing literature (Fuchs, 2023).

Moreover, sustainability has been studied from various perspectives (Streimikiene et al., 2020). While there is a growing body of empirical research on tourist behaviour in pro-environmental sustainability contexts (Fuchs et al., 2024), the literature currently lacks evidence from the demand side in nature-based tourism destinations such as Phuket Island. Examining this gap in the literature is pivotal based on tourists' role in shaping sustainable tourism practices (evidently, without tourists, there would be no tourism industry to sustain). To address this gap, the study empirically analyzed how tourists perceive environmental sustainability and associated practices in Phuket and investigated how tourists can develop environmental sustainability in Phuket (Tuntipisitkul et al., 2021). The research outcome has the potential to generate practical implications and contribute to the discussion on sustainable tourism.

2. Literature review

Nature-based tourism, often referred to as nature tourism, encompasses travel activities that centre around natural environments, biodiversity, and conservation (Kuenzi & McNeely, 2008). This tourism segment involves exploring and experiencing natural landscapes, wildlife, and indigenous cultures while promoting conservation and sustainability (Wolf et al., 2019). Within the literature, nature-based tourism has been defined by various scholars and organizations, emphasizing its reliance on natural resources, education, and the enhancement of tourist experiences (Frost et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2021). Studies within this field have extensively focused on nature-based tourism's environmental and cultural impacts (Jones et al., 2021). Researchers have highlighted the potential positive impacts, such as raising awareness about environmental conservation and supporting local communities economically (Winter et al., 2019; Da Mota & Pickering, 2020). However, there is substantial concern regarding the negative impacts, including habitat degradation, disruption of ecosystems, cultural commodification, and loss of authenticity in indigenous cultures (Da Mota & Pickering, 2020). Scholars have emphasized the necessity of sustainable practices and policies to mitigate these adverse effects (Da Mota & Pickering, 2020; Jones et al., 2021).

Policies and management strategies are crucial in regulating and promoting sustainable nature-based tourism (Winter et al., 2019). The literature review reveals various international, national, and local policies aimed at conserving natural resources, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting responsible tourism practices (Kularatne et al., 2021). Case studies, such as Kularatne et al. (2021), have been conducted to analyze the effectiveness of these policies in different destinations, highlighting successful instances of managing tourist flows, implementing carrying capacities, and fostering community involvement. Tourist behaviour and experiences form another significant area of exploration within nature-based tourism literature (Winter et al., 2019). The literature emphasizes the importance of education, interpretation, and immersive experiences in shaping travellers' attitudes toward environmental conservation and sustainable behaviours (Winter et al., 2019). Moreover, the economic aspects of nature-based tourism have also garnered attention in the literature (Thapa et al., 2022). For example, previous research has quantified the financial contributions of nature-based tourism to local economies, employment generation, and revenue generation (Thapa et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

Qualitative methods strive to understand and explain how a particular group of people or stakeholders perceive a specific phenomenon or relationship (Walters, 2016). This research approach has evidentially earned acceptability in tourism research through an increase in qualitative methodologies (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015). Qualitative studies allow researchers to explore a phenomenon or occurrence in more depth by evaluating multiple perspectives and gathering comprehensive and rich data to generate thick descriptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Moreover, Phuket Island was chosen as the study site based on its reputation as a nature-based destination concerned with sustainability-related issues. Phuket is Thailand's largest island, with a total land area of 543 km². Overall, Phuket is the second-smallest province in Thailand but a substantial contributor to the national gross domestic product (GDP).

Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling, described as “a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 172). Recruitment commenced with an informal discussion with potential participants, during which initial probing questions were used to determine the person's willingness to share information, level of articulation (and basic competency with the English language), and prior knowledge of sustainable tourism. The interviews were guided by questions not limited to but including “What is your understanding of environmental sustainability?”, “What are influences preventing you from contributing to environmental sustainability during your vacation?” or “What is your opinion about environmental sustainability in Phuket?”. The data collection occurred in the first half of 2023, and a total of 15 hours and 32 minutes of audio data was recorded.

Thematic saturation was used to determine when the size of sampled participants was sufficient (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation was achieved with the seventeenth interview. The sociodemographic characteristics of each participant were summarized in Table 1. Moreover, covert observations were used to assist the researchers in determining if the information gathered during the interviews coincided with or differed from their actual behaviour, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the empirical data (Reinharz, 2017). The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim under the principle of confidentiality. The transcribed interviews were analyzed thematically using open coding based on good practice (Clarke & Braun, 2017). First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data and generated keywords and codes. Manual coding was employed instead of software to enable the researchers to understand the data better. Transcripts were re-read and organized into potential subthemes until all researchers agreed on the results (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Table 1
Profile of the interviewees, including their gender, age, nationality, highest level of education, current employment status and the length of the interview

No.	Pseudonym	Description of the participant	Length of interview
1	Nick	Male – 34 years old – French – Bachelor's Degree – Self-employed (visited Phuket before)	50 minutes
2	Peter	Male – 26 years old – U.S. American – Bachelor's Degree – Employee (visited Phuket before)	53 minutes
3	Andrew	Male – 35 years old – British – Bachelor's Degree – Employee (visited Phuket before)	46 minutes
4	Anna	Female – 29 years old – Korean – Bachelor's Degree – Employee (visited Phuket before)	61 minutes
5	Matt	Male – 43 years old – Serbian – Master's Degree – Self-employed (visited Phuket before)	57 minutes
6	Mandy	Female – 25 years old – British – Bachelor's Degree – Employed (visited Phuket before)	48 minutes
7	Nigel	Male – 62 years old – Australian – Bachelor's Degree – Retired (visited Phuket before)	50 minutes
8	Liam	Male – 47 years old – U.S. American – Bachelor's Degree – Employee (visited Phuket before)	78 minutes
9	Olivia	Female – 52 years old – Turkish – Bachelor's Degree – Employee (never visited Phuket before)	56 minutes
10	Amanda	Female – 30 years old – New Zealander – Bachelor's Degree - Employee (visited Phuket before)	64 minutes
11	Ling	Male – 38 years old – Indian – Doctorate Degree – Employee (never visited Phuket before)	49 minutes

Table 1 (continued)

12	Naomi	Female – 60 years old – Italian – Bachelor's Degree – Retired (visited Phuket before)	58 minutes
13	Mina	Female – 32 years old – Canadian – Master's Degree – Employee (visited Phuket before)	47 minutes
14	James	Male – 35 years old – Japanese – Bachelor's Degree – Employee (visited Phuket before)	44 minutes
15	Ava	Female – 30 years old – German – Master's Degree – Employee (visited Phuket before)	59 minutes
16	Mia	Female – 37 years old – Russian – Bachelor's Degree – Employee (visited Phuket before)	38 minutes
17	Lucas	Male – 57 years old – German – Bachelor's Degree – Retired (visited Phuket before)	47 minutes

4. Results and analysis

The study's objective was to identify how tourists perceived environmental sustainability and associated practices in Phuket and, secondly, investigate how tourists can develop environmental sustainability in Phuket. The thematic analysis yielded an overarching theme, sustainable behaviour and responsibility, which can be broken down into three subthemes. Namely, the subthemes were (1) personal responsibility, (2) collective responsibility, and (3) awareness of environmental sustainability. Notably, the forthcoming comments and accounts are not representative of the sentiments of all participants. Therefore, evaluating them in the context of the stated quantifier (i.e., *all*, *many*, *half*, *few*, *none*, et cetera) is essential. A selection of the thematic coding can be seen in Table 2, showing the example quotes verbatim from the transcribed audio recordings, which served as a basis for the subthemes.

Table 2
Example of data analysis of the theme “sustainable behaviour and responsibility”

Subtheme	Codes / Keywords	Verbatim
Personal responsibility	To act (“taking action”)	<i>“The key is to do it. We can talk all day and listen to politicians, but at the end of the day, we have to act ourselves” (P. #13)</i>
	Common sense	<i>“I see this as part of my responsibility to share this good practice with others without being condescending” (P. #1)</i>
	The sum of personal responsibility	<i>“The sum of personal responsibility equals the outcome of collective responsibility” (P. #7)</i>
	Unethical behaviour	<i>“Our impact can be quite different from one another. But all of us do have an impact [on the destination] and an individual responsibility, definitely” (P. #5)</i>
Collective responsibility	Littering on vacation	<i>“Not holding myself to a higher standard is easier if others aren’t doing it” (P. #10)</i>
	CSR (Corporate social responsibility)	<i>“In Korea, my company holds events that support a good cause. Many people participate, but someone else takes the responsibility to make the first step” (P. #4)</i>
	Knowing and doing what's right	<i>“You have to hold all parties accountable” (P. #2)</i> <i>“Knowing the right thing does not necessarily equal doing the right thing” (P. #2)</i>
Awareness of environmental sustainability	Going green	<i>“Everyone keeps talking about ‘going green’ and using sustainable materials and avoiding fossil fuels” (P. #12)</i>
	Change needed	<i>“It is clear that something has to change, but no one has that magic formula to make everything better overnight” (P. #8)</i>
	Over-tourism	<i>“You can see what happened in Barcelona. The residents were not able to afford to live in the city centre because of the rising costs caused by tourism” (P. #15)</i>

4.1. Theme 1 – Personal responsibility

Most interviews organically progressed in a direction that centred around “taking responsibility” or “being responsible” as a recurring theme. Although the interviewed tourists had different perceptions and expectations of what “being responsible” entails. However, a standard agreement was shared among the participants that travellers are “personally responsible” to support the destination sustainably. In half of the discussions, it was mentioned to engage in practices to support the local community or local economy. For example, to purchase locally made souvenirs and gifts or to visit the local markets instead of overly crowded hotspots. Similar sentiments were shared among many of the participants, as further illustrated by the following quotes from the interview transcripts:

“I think that it starts with small things [...] help recycle garbage. This sounds obvious, but you would be surprised to learn how many tourists are not doing that. But I also ask [in the hotel] for a place to throw away my plastic bottles. It is not much of an extra effort for me to separate the trash instead of throwing everything in the same bin” (Participant #7).

“It sounds condescending, but I am from a developed country, and we have more advanced practices. So, I see it as part of my responsibility to share this good practice with others without being condescending. Leading by example is my mantra. If others [locals and other tourists] see what I am doing, maybe they will follow” (Participant #1).

As one participant noted, “leading by example” appeared to motivate many tourists to hold themselves accountable for their actions that support sustainable practices that do not require extra effort. On a more general level, many of the participants noted that individual actions led to collective movements. Generally, it can be said (based on the interviews and non-participant observations) that most tourists avoid “obvious unethical practices” and take responsibility for actions that do not cause excessive inconvenience. To further explain this statement, prominent unethical practices refer to tourism activities with a terrible reputation (among educated tourists) but are still offered in different parts of Phuket. A few mentioned activities are elephant riding through the jungle, touching coral reefs during a snorkelling excursion, or petting tiger cubs.

The other statement that requires further explanation about taking personal responsibility concerns activities that do not cause excessive inconvenience. Thus, if the tourists choose between eating locally or eating at an international franchise, they would opt for the local option if it does not mean a significant inconvenience (for example, if both restaurants are an equal distance away). Contrary to that, several participants noted that if a particular action requires them to put significantly more effort or go out of their way, they will likely not do it (although knowing it is “wrong”). For example, if no garbage containers for plastic bottles are available near sight, they would opt to dispose of them in the general waste bin instead of carrying the plastic bottles around. Indeed, there was a scarcity of available options for waste disposal in highly populated tourist locations, as observed through the non-participant observations (Figure 1).

Figure 1

A recycling station at the beach (photo taken during non-participant observation in May 2023)



4.2. Theme 2 – Collective responsibility

Other than personal responsibility, collective responsibility (or shared responsibility) refers to collective actions and ethical standards shared by society. The findings indicate that collective actions are needed to achieve a common goal. This was evident through two particular occurrences discussed by the interviewees with many participants. First, it became apparent that most of the participants hold themselves to higher standards regarding good practices in the context of sustainable tourism. These good practices included waste management (recycling), reducing energy consumption (less electricity or water), supporting local craftsmanship, and avoiding single-use plastic. Although the list is not exhaustive – based on the interviews – these represent the most commonly mentioned examples.

Notably, there was a disagreement among the participants about what constitutes good practice and what should be considered a common standard. However, both interviewees agreed that a sustainable destination must have tourists follow these practices. Furthermore, the interviewed tourists held themselves to higher standards of following these practices diligently at home and while on vacation. However, the discussion later revealed that about one-third of the participants abandoned their willingness to follow these good practices during their vacation. This hypocritical behaviour was further evident in multiple non-participant observations, particularly along the beach areas. The unwillingness to follow the self-declared good practices manifested through purchasing single-use plastic bottles, Styrofoam packaging for takeaway food, and littering in public places. The following comments were made during the interviews.

“I wouldn’t throw it on the streets or litter at the beach (or park) at home, but the trash is already there. And it makes it a little easier, a little more convenient for me, I suppose [to litter]” (Participant #14).

“I mean, not playing by the same rules and not holding myself to a higher standard is easier if others aren’t doing it, although society tells us to lead by example. But the reality is different” (Participant #10).

Furthermore, an interviewee mentioned that a lack of collective accountability among tourists prevents more sustainable development in Phuket. The participant noted that visitors in Phuket are not demanding enough to impose sustainable practices, which, in turn, would require businesses and the local government to act accordingly and implement stricter rules. “If people want it, then the other side will react”, and concludes by saying it is “the main responsibility of the tourists”. Although other participants in subsequent interviews did not echo this perspective, the interviewees – when asked – did not object to this sentiment when presented with it.

4.3. Theme 3 – Awareness of environmental sustainability

Most (if not all) participants were fully aware that sustainable tourism development is indispensable for a nature-based tourism destination like Phuket. However, only a few participants actively sought opportunities to support the sustainable development of tourism during their vacations. Furthermore, the interviewed tourists already engaged in good practices that support sustainability at large in their home country (for example, recycling waste or seeking ways to reduce emissions of CO₂), but they are more likely to slip (take a timeout to practice these behaviours) during their vacation. Generally, it was well understood by most of the interviewed tourists that more actions to support the sustainable development of tourism are necessary for Phuket—however, a few raised concerns about how to achieve the desired outcome.

While the interviewees had a heightened awareness (of the need to develop tourism sustainably in Phuket), only a few could provide practical examples of how to achieve this. Moreover, there was often a sense of helplessness about where to start, best summarized by a participant who noted, “Today should be better than yesterday, and tomorrow should be better than today.” Many participants commented that there are probably

not a few single actions that fix “all issues for Phuket” but a collection of many small actions that – as a sum – result in something more significant. However, while there is a high level of awareness, some of the tourists also expressed their concern about the involvement of tourists in this process. A few see themselves as advocates, i.e., “We can share good practices that our country has already adopted.” However, about a third of participants see themselves as passive actors in the tourism framework, as vocalized by the following comment.

“I am all about supporting green tourism, sustainable tourism, and the like. But I am not an activist that tries to change the world. In particular, when I am vacationing in a foreign country as a guest. I expect that the people in charge build the framework and the tourists simply follow the rules” (Participant #1).

5. Discussion

The study empirically analyzed how tourists perceive environmental sustainability and associated practices in Phuket and investigated the role tourists can play in developing environmental sustainability in Phuket. The short answer to this rather complex question is that understanding tourist perspectives is crucial for developing effective strategies that promote responsible tourism and environmental well-being, particularly for a nature-based tourism destination like Phuket. On the surface, it can be stated that all participating tourists value the concept of sustainability and perceive it as an essential element of the well-being of Phuket Island as a tourist destination. However, a deeper investigation of their perceptions revealed that their understanding and application of sustainable behaviour and responsibility vary. Consistent with the previous observation by Lenzen et al. (2023), it showed that travellers understand the importance of environmental sustainability for Phuket's tourism business, especially as a nature-based destination. This is consistent with previous research indicating an increasing global trend of tourists prioritizing sustainability when selecting places. Moreover, the empirical findings revealed that most participants were fully aware of the benefits of sustainable practices (Hall, 2019). Despite the apparent consensus among participating tourists regarding the need for sustainability, there is a disconnect between awareness and action. This global phenomenon highlights the necessity for further investigation into the factors influencing tourists' engagement in sustainable behaviours during their travels to Phuket. Streimikiene et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of global market patterns in tourism development, which influence consumer preferences and sustainable tourism projects' trajectory.

The first identified and observed phenomenon is that tourists emphasized the importance of sustainable tourism; however, only a few participants actively sought opportunities to support the sustainable development of tourism during their vacations. This discrepancy between awareness and action raises the need to explore the factors that hinder or motivate tourists to engage in sustainable behaviours during their visit to Phuket actively. Passafaro (2020) stated that the relationship between tourists' attitudes, behaviour intentions, and actions is a “challenging issue, and oftentimes a controversial relationship” (p. 9).

It is controversial because tourists would attest to the importance of an issue (in this case, sustainability). Still, their actions would not necessarily support that attitude (Passafaro, 2020). This is supported by the findings of Donaire et al. (2021), who investigated tourist behaviour in Spain. Learning from successful initiatives elsewhere can be beneficial. In Barcelona, Spain, deploying a ‘circular economy’ model in tourism has shown potential. This strategy focuses on waste reduction and resource efficiency, providing tourists with options such as refillable water bottles and responsible waste disposal systems (Axhami et al., 2023; Krishnan et al., 2023). Both studies emphasize the need for convenient and readily available options for tourists to participate in sustainable practices. Similarly, the findings of this study revealed that on an attitude level, the importance of sustainable tourism was highly valued. However, on an actionable level, it was valued only moderately at best. Fuchs et al. (2024) attempted to explain this observation through the possibility that the interplay between the affective and cognitive components may moderate the effect of attitudes on behaviour and intentions. Similarly, the findings

of this investigation revealed that tourists claimed a “lack of opportunities to contribute” as the primary reason for a lack of active participation. ‘Going out of their way’ was often not an option; therefore, more convenient alternatives allowing tourists to participate are required (Yousaf et al., 2018). Phuket can create a supportive ecosystem where sustainable choices become the easiest and most rewarding option for all stakeholders. This, in turn, can lead to a more positive and impactful tourist experience that benefits both tourists and the island's environment, mirroring successful models from destinations like Barcelona.

6. Theoretical and practical implications

This study adds to the expanding body of research on tourist attitudes towards environmental sustainability and their involvement in responsible tourism behaviours. Our findings point to a complex interplay between personal responsibility, collective action, and awareness in tourist behaviour. The findings support Han's (2021) argument that tourists' perceptions of conservation activities influence their behavioural intentions. Han (2021) argued that tourists are influenced by their beliefs about the effectiveness of their conservation efforts and activities. His argument potentially explains while tourists expressed a high value for sustainable tourism conceptually, their actions did not always reflect this. This suggests a potential disconnect between tourists' belief in the impact of individual actions and the actual effectiveness of specific practices. This study expands upon earlier research by emphasizing the significance of subjective standards and context-dependency. Several participants disagreed on what defines ‘good practice’ and an accepted norm for sustainable tourism (Dolnicar, 2023). This is consistent with research conducted by Buckley (2012), who discovered a lack of agreement on sustainable tourism criteria and best practices. While most tourists acknowledged the importance of sustainable tourism (Theme 3), their behaviours frequently did not reflect this awareness (Themes 1 & 2).

Furthermore, the interviewed tourists held higher standards of following these practices at home instead of following them on vacation. These findings also indicate that tourists might have differing opinions on what constitutes good practice and a common standard in sustainable tourism. Moreover, the study supports previous research that suggests that tourists would support a sustainability tax, which could help alleviate the economic burden on businesses (Shi & Jiang, 2022).

According to stakeholder theory, a firm or organization should consider the interests of all stakeholders who may be affected by its choices. Stakeholders in sustainable tourism include travellers, local people, tourism enterprises, and the environment. This study focuses on the intricate interplay between various stakeholders, notably tourists' perceived roles and responsibilities. The reiterated discussion of “personal responsibility” shows that tourists' views of their involvement in sustainable tourism may be shifting. The participants of this study stated readiness to engage in measures such as supporting local businesses, limiting waste, and avoiding unethical behaviour. This is consistent with the idea of visitors as active stakeholders who may help a destination's sustainability through their decisions (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Another significant element emerged: a “collective responsibility” concept. Tourists recognized the need to take collaborative action to ensure sustainable development. However, the study discovered a disconnect between visitors' expectations and their willingness to hold themselves and others accountable, especially when convenience is a consideration. This emphasizes the value of collaboration among all stakeholders.

The relatively high level of awareness (of practices supporting sustainable tourism) but inaction by many tourists also suggests a need to further educate them on the importance of sustainable tourism practices (Niezgoda & Markiewicz, 2021). Furthermore, it is necessary to provide tourists with more accessible opportunities to engage in sustainable behaviours during their vacations. For example, partnerships with local businesses and tour operators that promote and offer sustainable activities, such as eco-friendly tours or volunteering opportunities, can provide accessible avenues for tourists to participate in sustainable behaviours during their vacation actively (Font et al., 2021)—additionally, exploring ways to incentivize and encourage tourists to continue

their sustainable practices while on vacation might be beneficial. This could include implementing recognition systems for tourists who actively engage in sustainable behaviours, for example, offering discounts to those who choose eco-friendly options (Rawashdeh & Al-Ababneh, 2021) or demonstrating responsible tourism practices (Rafiq et al., 2022). The findings indicate the necessity for a multi-pronged strategy including all stakeholders. The travel and tourism industry can be essential in promoting sustainable behaviours by providing precise and accessible choices such as responsible tours and eco-friendly hotels. Local communities may get involved in creating and executing these programs, which fosters a feeling of ownership and cultural interaction. The findings emphasize the importance of tourists seeing themselves as engaged stakeholders. Tourism businesses may benefit by providing precise and accessible alternatives for sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly tours or responsible waste management systems. Furthermore, engaging with local communities to promote these programs may foster a sense of ownership and cultural interaction among visitors. The Phuket tourism sector can bridge the "knowing-doing gap" by building a supporting ecology where sustainable options are accessible and profitable, encouraging tourists to transfer their understanding into responsible action.

7. Conclusion and future research

Several key conclusions and implications derived from this research were discussed in earlier sections of this article. This research identified a crucial aspect: an action-attitude gap among tourists. There is a substantial discrepancy between the tourists' self-reported high awareness of sustainable practices and their lack of evident behaviours supporting these principles. The discrepancy suggests a need for targeted education and accessible opportunities to bridge the gap between awareness and engagement. Moreover, tourists have the potential to play a dual role as consumers and potential change agents in the tourism industry. Shifting from viewing them solely as consumers to partners can enhance governance and address challenges like over-tourism in nature-based destinations like Phuket, fostering a more effective and sustainable tourism model. Future research should explore factors influencing tourists' motivations and barriers to active participation in sustainable practices. Investigating the impact of sustainability education campaigns and recognition systems on tourists' behaviour is crucial for fostering a more sustainable tourism industry.

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