

**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES AND DESTINATION VIABILITY OF
BAYELSA STATE**

Josephine, Timipre Akoloh-Isaac

International Institute of Tourism and Hospitality, Bayelsa State

osephine.akoloh@iithyenagoa.edu.ng

, +2348037727224

&

Chikwe, Eleazer

Department of Hospitality Management and Tourism,

Faculty of Management Science,

University of Port Harcourt, Choba

chikweeleazer@gmail.com

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study explores the relationship between sustainable tourism practices, awareness, attitudes, and their impact on key outcomes such as visitors' repeat visit intention and word of mouth in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The population consists of 209 practitioners of tourism, with a census sampling technique employed due to the small population size. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires, measuring dependent and independent variables on a four-point Likert Scale. Statistical analysis included mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient using SPSS Software Version 22. Results indicate significant positive correlations between sustainable tourism practices, awareness, attitudes, and desired outcomes, suggesting that increased awareness and positive attitudes towards sustainability lead to greater visitor intention to revisit and engage in positive word of mouth. The findings underscore the importance of prioritizing sustainable tourism initiatives, including educational campaigns and community engagement, to enhance visitor experiences and promote destination sustainability. Recommendations include prioritizing initiatives to enhance sustainable tourism awareness and attitudes among destinations and stakeholders. Further research is suggested to explore the specific mechanisms through which sustainable practices influence visitor behavior and to devise innovative strategies for promoting sustainability within the tourism industry.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, awareness, attitudes, visitor behavior, destination sustainability, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a significant economic driver globally, with destinations worldwide increasingly reliant on its revenue streams. However, the rapid growth of tourism often brings with it environmental degradation, cultural dilution, and social disruptions. In response, sustainable tourism practices have gained prominence, aiming to mitigate these negative impacts while fostering the long-term viability of destinations. Sustainable tourism encompasses various strategies, including conservation of natural resources, preservation of cultural heritage, community engagement, and equitable economic distribution. Scholars and practitioners alike have recognized the importance of integrating sustainable practices into tourism management to ensure the continued attractiveness and resilience of destinations. Day (2012) defines sustainable tourism as a type of tourism that considers its impact on the environment, society, and economy during its development. This aligns with Leslie's (2012) concept of responsible tourism, which focuses on minimizing negative impacts on people, the environment, and local communities while seeking to enhance positive effects. Scholars such as Hedlund (2013), Juvan, and Dolnicar (2014), and Miller (2001) have frequently linked

sustainable tourism with awareness. Miller (2001) suggests that heightened awareness could motivate individuals to engage in concrete environmental actions to tackle the challenges of sustainable tourism. Furthermore, Mihanyar et al. (2014) point out the beneficial effects of increased awareness of sustainable tourism on individuals' intentions to behave in environmentally friendly ways.

Central to the discourse on sustainable tourism is the concept of destination viability, which refers to the ability of a destination to sustainably support tourism activities over time without compromising its natural, cultural, and social integrity. Destination viability is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including environmental carrying capacity, community resilience, governance structures, and visitor management strategies. Research on sustainable tourism practices and destination viability has gained traction in recent years, reflecting a growing recognition of the need for holistic approaches to tourism management.

Several studies have explored the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and destination viability across diverse geographical contexts. For example, Liu and Wall (2006) conducted a comprehensive analysis of sustainable tourism development in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Mount Huangshan, China, highlighting the importance of integrating environmental conservation with tourism management. Similarly, Gössling and Hall (2006) examined the impacts of ecotourism initiatives on destination viability in Costa Rica, emphasizing the role of community participation and resource stewardship. These studies underscore the multifaceted nature of sustainable tourism and its implications for destination sustainability. Despite increasing attention to sustainable tourism, many studies on sustainable tourism development practices are more focused on the three foundational variables which are economic, environmental and social cultural. Little empirical literature exist outside the mentioned domain especially as it relates to Bayelsa state, hence this study intend to fill the gap as it considers sustainable tourism awareness and sustainable tourism attitude as sustainable practices dimensions to solve the issue of destination viability measured with visitors repeat visit intention and word of mouth. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and destination viability in Bayelsa.

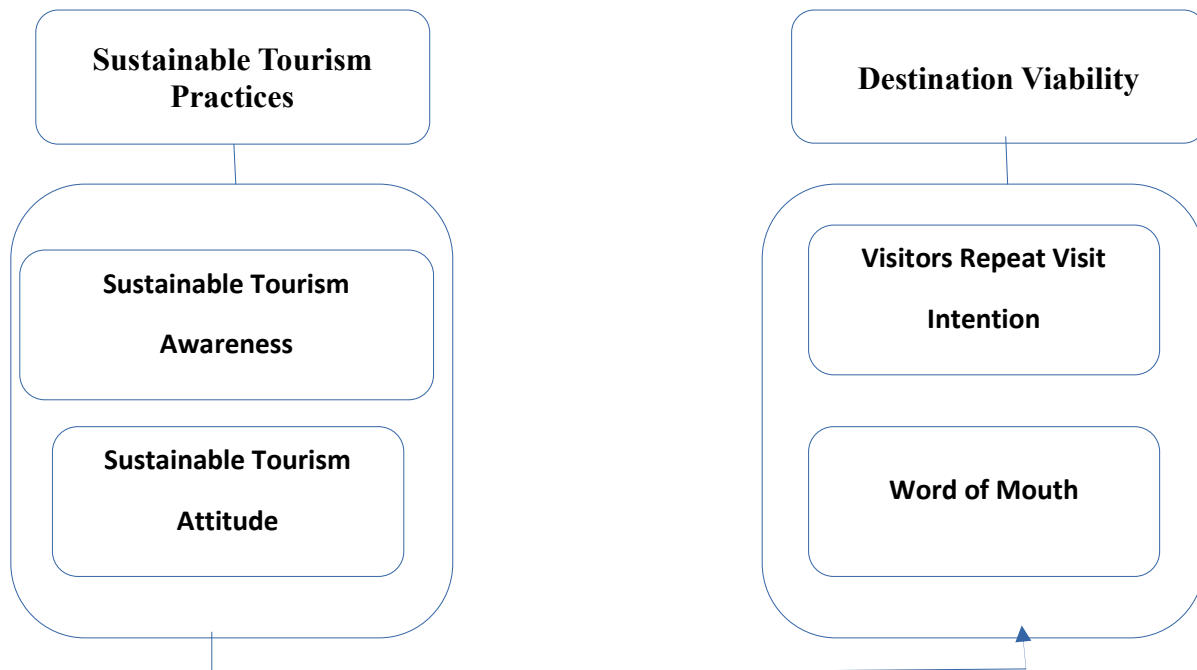


Fig 1.1 STPDV Model compiled by Researchers, 2024

2. Theoretical/Literature Review

2.1 Place Attachment Theory

Place attachment theory, rooted in environmental psychology, explores the emotional and cognitive bonds individuals form with specific places. It posits that people develop a sense of attachment to certain locales through repeated experiences, social interactions, and the significance attributed to these spaces (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2019). This theory suggests that individuals derive meaning, identity, and a sense of belonging from their interactions with particular environments. Place attachment encompasses both positive and negative emotions, influencing individuals' attitudes and behaviors towards a place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Through this lens, researchers can understand the complexities of human-environment relationships and their implications for sustainable development.

Understanding place attachment is crucial for examining sustainable tourism practices and destination viability. Sustainable tourism aims to minimize environmental impacts, preserve cultural heritage, and promote socio-economic benefits for local communities (UNWTO, 2017). Place attachment theory provides insights into tourists' motivations, preferences, and behaviors, which directly impact the success of sustainable tourism initiatives. Tourists who develop strong attachments to destinations are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors, support conservation efforts, and advocate for responsible tourism practices (Williams & Vaske, 2003). By fostering place attachment among visitors, destinations can enhance long-term sustainability and resilience in the face of environmental and socio-economic challenges.

Furthermore, place attachment theory helps identify strategies to enhance destination attractiveness and competitiveness while promoting sustainability. Destination managers can leverage the emotional connections tourists have with specific places to design authentic and memorable experiences (Ramkissoon et al., 2013). By preserving natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and community authenticity, destinations can cultivate and strengthen visitors' attachment, fostering repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth promotion (Kyle et al., 2004). This symbiotic relationship between place attachment and sustainable tourism practices underscores the importance of holistic destination management approaches that balance economic, environmental, and socio-cultural concerns.

Moreover, studying place attachment within the context of sustainable tourism facilitates a deeper understanding of residents' perspectives and attitudes towards tourism development. Residents' attachment to their home environment influences their support for tourism initiatives, as well as their willingness to engage in community-based conservation efforts (Lewicka, 2011). By involving local communities in decision-making processes and addressing their concerns, destination planners can build trust, foster collaboration, and mitigate potential conflicts between tourism development and residents' well-being (Andereck et al., 2005). Thus, integrating place attachment theory into research on sustainable tourism practices enhances stakeholder engagement and promotes destination resilience in the face of changing socio-economic dynamics and environmental pressures.

Place attachment theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex interplay between individuals, communities, and the environments they inhabit. By examining the emotional and cognitive bonds people form with specific places, researchers can inform sustainable tourism practices and enhance destination viability. Recognizing the importance of place attachment in shaping tourists' behaviors, destination management strategies can be tailored to foster meaningful connections, preserve natural and cultural assets, and promote local well-being. Moreover, by considering residents' attachment to their home environment,

destination planners can address community concerns, promote inclusivity, and build sustainable tourism economies that benefit both visitors and locals alike.

2.1.1 Sustainable Tourism Practices

Sustainable tourism practices have garnered significant attention in recent years due to the escalating concerns regarding environmental degradation, socio-cultural disruptions, and economic inequalities associated with conventional tourism. Scholars have extensively explored various dimensions of sustainable tourism, aiming to mitigate adverse impacts while maximizing the positive contributions of tourism to destinations. One prominent aspect emphasized in the literature is the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems. According to Weaver (2018), sustainable tourism entails minimizing the ecological footprint of tourism activities through measures such as energy-efficient infrastructure, waste management, and biodiversity conservation initiatives. Researchers underscore the importance of integrating sustainability principles into destination planning and management to preserve fragile environments and biodiversity hotspots (Hall & Lew, 2018).

Moreover, sustainable tourism practices also encompass the promotion of socio-cultural authenticity and inclusivity within destination communities. By fostering respect for local traditions, heritage, and indigenous knowledge systems, sustainable tourism endeavors to empower local populations and enhance cultural exchange experiences for visitors (Mowforth & Munt, 2015). This involves initiatives such as community-based tourism, which directly involves local residents in tourism development and ensures equitable distribution of economic benefits (Font, 2019). Additionally, scholars advocate for responsible tourist behavior and cultural sensitivity to mitigate negative impacts such as cultural commodification and social disintegration (Holden, 2018).

Furthermore, economic sustainability is a crucial aspect addressed in the literature on sustainable tourism practices. Sustainable tourism seeks to maximize economic benefits for local communities while minimizing leakage of revenues to external stakeholders. This often involves promoting small-scale enterprises, supporting local artisans and producers, and creating employment opportunities for marginalized groups (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). Additionally, the concept of sustainable tourism financing has gained traction, emphasizing innovative funding mechanisms such as tourism taxes and voluntary contributions for conservation and community development projects (Saarinen, 2016).

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of sustainable tourism, scholars acknowledge various challenges and complexities in its implementation. One key challenge is balancing the interests of different stakeholders, including governments, businesses, residents, and tourists, each with diverse priorities and expectations (Bramwell & Lane, 2019). Achieving consensus and cooperation among these stakeholders often requires robust governance frameworks, stakeholder engagement processes, and institutional capacity-building efforts (Buckley, 2019). Moreover, the rapid growth of tourism in some destinations exacerbates pressures on infrastructure, natural resources, and cultural heritage, necessitating proactive planning and management strategies to avoid overtourism and its associated impacts (Gössling et al., 2018).

The literature on sustainable tourism practices highlights the multifaceted nature of sustainability challenges and opportunities within the tourism industry. By integrating environmental conservation, socio-cultural authenticity, and economic viability, sustainable tourism endeavors to foster responsible and resilient tourism development. However, achieving sustainability goals requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including governments, businesses, communities, and tourists, as well as continuous research and

innovation to address emerging issues and refine best practices in sustainable tourism management

2.1.1.1 Sustainable Tourism Awareness

'Awareness is the state or ability to perceive, to feel, or to be conscious of events, objects, or sensory patterns (Gafoor, 2012). Sustainable tourism awareness constitutes a key factor influencing tourists' beliefs after traveling (Mihanyar et al., 2016).

Sustainable tourism awareness has emerged as a critical area of study in the context of global tourism development. Scholars argue that raising awareness about sustainable tourism practices is essential for fostering responsible tourism behavior among tourists and industry stakeholders alike (Buckley, 2012). This awareness encompasses understanding the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic impacts of tourism activities on destinations and local communities (Font & Harris, 2015). Research indicates that enhancing sustainable tourism awareness can lead to positive changes in tourist behavior, such as reducing resource consumption, supporting local businesses, and respecting cultural norms (Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008).

Moreover, sustainable tourism awareness is closely linked to education and information dissemination efforts. Various studies have emphasized the role of educational programs, campaigns, and information channels in promoting sustainable tourism principles (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). For instance, interactive workshops, interpretive signage, and online resources have been effective tools in raising tourists' awareness about sustainable practices and their importance for destination conservation (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). Furthermore, sustainable tourism awareness campaigns often target industry stakeholders, including tour operators, hoteliers, and policymakers, to integrate sustainability into business operations and policymaking processes (Hall, 2010).

However, despite the growing attention to sustainable tourism awareness, challenges persist in its implementation and effectiveness. One challenge is the varying levels of awareness among tourists from different demographic backgrounds and geographical regions (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). Cultural differences, language barriers, and differing levels of environmental consciousness can influence tourists' receptivity to sustainable tourism messages (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015). Additionally, the rapid growth of mass tourism in some regions exacerbates environmental degradation and socio-cultural disruptions, underscoring the urgency of raising sustainable tourism awareness on a global scale (Holden, 2016).

2.1.1.2 Sustainable Tourism Attitudes

Sustainable tourism attitudes have garnered significant attention in both academic research and industry practice due to the growing concern for environmental and socio-cultural impacts of tourism activities. Scholars have emphasized the importance of understanding tourists' attitudes towards sustainability as a crucial determinant of their behavior and decision-making processes while traveling. Del Chiappa et al. (2016) define attitude as the forecast of consumer behavior based on opinion or subjective norms. Similarly, Barr et al. (2011) link attitudes to values, portraying them as individual orientations towards the physical environment. In the realm of sustainable tourism, scholars frequently discuss "green attitudes" (Coskun, 2017) when exploring the environmental dimension.

According to Andereck and Vogt (2000), tourists' attitudes towards sustainable tourism encompass their perceptions, beliefs, and values regarding the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions of tourism development. These attitudes are shaped by various factors including personal values, environmental awareness, education, and socio-demographic characteristics.

Research in the field has revealed diverse perspectives on sustainable tourism attitudes among different tourist segments and destinations. For instance, Gössling and Peeters (2015) found that tourists from developed countries tend to exhibit higher levels of concern for sustainability compared to those from developing countries. Similarly, Weaver and Lawton (2014) highlighted variations in sustainable tourism attitudes based on factors such as age, gender, education level, and travel experience. Moreover, destination-specific characteristics such as natural attractiveness, conservation efforts, and cultural authenticity have been identified as influential factors shaping tourists' attitudes towards sustainability (Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013).

Understanding tourists' attitudes towards sustainable tourism is crucial for destination management organizations, policymakers, and tourism businesses to develop effective strategies for promoting sustainable practices and enhancing destination competitiveness.

By recognizing tourists' preferences and motivations related to sustainability, stakeholders can tailor marketing campaigns, infrastructure development, and policy interventions to align with visitors' expectations and contribute to the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations (Font et al., 2016). Furthermore, fostering positive attitudes towards sustainability among tourists can lead to greater support for conservation initiatives, responsible tourism practices, and community engagement, ultimately benefiting both host communities and the environment (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

2.2 Destination Viability

Destination viability is a crucial aspect in tourism planning and development, as it directly influences the sustainability and success of a destination. Scholars have extensively examined various dimensions of destination viability to understand its complexities and implications. One prominent perspective in the literature focuses on the economic viability of destinations. For instance, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) emphasized the importance of economic factors such as infrastructure, investment, and market demand in determining the viability of a destination. Similarly, Song and Li (2008) explored the role of destination competitiveness in enhancing viability, highlighting the significance of factors such as price competitiveness, quality of services, and destination image.

In addition to economic aspects, environmental sustainability is a critical consideration in destination viability. Hall (2010) argued that sustainable development is essential for long-term viability, emphasizing the need to balance economic growth with environmental conservation and community well-being. This perspective aligns with the concept of carrying capacity, which refers to the maximum number of visitors that a destination can sustainably accommodate without causing harm to its natural or cultural resources (Dahles & Bras, 1999). Furthermore, social factors play a significant role in determining destination viability. Pearce (1995) suggested that community involvement and support are essential for the sustainable development of destinations, as they contribute to social cohesion and local empowerment. Similarly, Butler (1999) highlighted the importance of stakeholder collaboration and destination governance in ensuring viability, emphasizing the need for inclusive decision-making processes and equitable distribution of benefits among stakeholders.

Moreover, the emergence of new technologies and changing consumer preferences has reshaped discussions on destination viability. Buhalis and Amaranggana (2014) emphasized the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in enhancing destination competitiveness and viability, particularly through online marketing, e-commerce, and destination management systems. Additionally, the rise of experiential tourism has led to a

greater emphasis on authenticity, personalization, and immersive experiences, influencing destination development strategies (Wang & Pizam, 2011).

Destination viability is a multifaceted concept that encompasses economic, environmental, social, and technological dimensions. A holistic approach to destination planning and management is necessary to ensure long-term sustainability and success. By considering the diverse factors that contribute to viability and engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes, destinations can effectively navigate challenges and capitalize on opportunities for growth and development

2.2.1 Visitors Repeat Intention

Visitor repeat intention serves as a crucial metric in assessing the viability and sustainability of a destination within the tourism industry. Scholars have extensively examined the significance of repeat visitation as an indicator of destination appeal and competitiveness. For instance, Wang and Pizam (2011) argue that repeat visitation reflects the overall satisfaction of tourists with their previous experiences, highlighting the destination's ability to meet or exceed visitor expectations. Similarly, Chen and Tsai (2007) emphasize the positive relationship between satisfaction and intention to revisit, suggesting that satisfied tourists are more likely to return to a destination for subsequent trips. Thus, repeat intention acts as a reliable gauge of destination performance, indicating its capacity to attract and retain visitors over time.

Furthermore, researchers have explored various factors influencing visitors' repeat intention, shedding light on the complexities underlying destination competitiveness. One such factor is the quality of the tourist experience, which encompasses elements such as service quality, hospitality, and cultural authenticity. Cai et al. (2019) contend that memorable and positive experiences contribute significantly to tourists' willingness to revisit a destination, underscoring the role of experiential value in shaping repeat intention. Additionally, destination image and brand reputation play pivotal roles in influencing tourists' perceptions and subsequent behavior. Kim et al. (2016) suggest that a favorable destination image enhances visitors' loyalty and likelihood of returning, emphasizing the importance of strategic destination branding and marketing efforts.

Moreover, the relationship between destination attributes and repeat intention is subject to dynamic changes influenced by evolving market trends and consumer preferences. Li and Wang (2019) highlight the impact of technological advancements on tourist behavior, noting the growing significance of online reviews and social media in shaping destination perceptions and visitation decisions. In this digital age, destinations must actively manage their online presence and reputation to cultivate positive word-of-mouth and encourage repeat visitation. Additionally, sustainability considerations have emerged as key determinants of destination viability, with tourists increasingly favoring eco-friendly and socially responsible destinations. Han et al. (2017) argue that sustainable practices not only enhance destination appeal but also contribute to long-term competitiveness by preserving natural and cultural assets for future generations.

Visitor repeat intention serves as a critical measure of destination viability, reflecting tourists' satisfaction, loyalty, and propensity to return. Scholars have identified various factors influencing repeat intention, including the quality of the tourist experience, destination image, technological advancements, and sustainability initiatives. By understanding and addressing these factors, destinations can enhance their competitiveness and ensure long-term success in the global tourism marketplace.

2.2.2 Word of Mouth

Word of mouth (WOM) stands as a pivotal construct in the assessment of destination viability, reflecting the perceptions, experiences, and recommendations disseminated by visitors. A destination's appeal is often intricately linked to the narratives shared among travelers, making WOM a valuable metric for evaluating its attractiveness and sustainability. As highlighted by Kaur and Soch (2017), WOM serves as a potent influencer in shaping tourists' destination choices, acting as a primary information source that significantly influences their decision-making process. This influence stems from the inherent trust placed in recommendations from friends, family, and online reviews, amplifying WOM's significance in gauging destination viability.

Moreover, WOM transcends traditional marketing tactics, offering an authentic portrayal of a destination's allure and amenities. Wang and Xiang (2019) emphasize the organic nature of WOM, positing it as a genuine reflection of visitor satisfaction and experiential value. In this regard, WOM acts as a dynamic indicator of destination viability, capturing real-time sentiments and perceptions that may not be effectively conveyed through promotional campaigns or static measures. Its immediacy and authenticity provide destination managers with valuable insights into visitor preferences and areas for improvement, facilitating targeted strategies for enhancing destination competitiveness.

Furthermore, WOM extends beyond mere promotional discourse to encompass nuanced narratives and experiential anecdotes, enriching the discourse surrounding destination viability. As noted by Litvin et al. (2018), the qualitative nature of WOM enables a deeper understanding of visitor motivations, preferences, and emotional connections to a destination. Such insights are invaluable for destination stakeholders seeking to differentiate their offerings and curate memorable experiences that resonate with diverse traveler segments. By tapping into the rich tapestry of visitor narratives, destination managers can cultivate a compelling brand identity and foster a sense of community and belonging among past and prospective visitors.

However, despite its significance, WOM is not devoid of challenges and limitations in its application as a measure of destination viability. For instance, Liu and Park (2020) highlight the susceptibility of WOM to biases, manipulation, and misinformation in the age of social media and online review platforms. The proliferation of fake reviews and paid endorsements underscores the need for destination managers to adopt a discerning approach in interpreting WOM data and distinguishing genuine sentiments from artificial promotion. Additionally, the subjective nature of WOM poses challenges in its quantification and standardization, necessitating a nuanced understanding of contextual factors and visitor demographics.

Word of mouth emerges as a multifaceted and indispensable metric for evaluating destination viability, offering insights into visitor perceptions, experiences, and recommendations. Its organic nature, authenticity, and qualitative richness distinguish it as a dynamic tool for destination management, facilitating targeted strategies for enhancing competitiveness and visitor satisfaction. However, the inherent challenges of bias, manipulation, and subjectivity underscore the importance of a discerning approach in leveraging WOM as a reliable measure of destination viability, necessitating ongoing research and adaptation to evolving consumer behaviors and communication trends

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Sustainable Tourism Awareness and Visitors Repeat Intention

A comprehensive review of previous studies reveals a growing interest in understanding the potential relationship between sustainable tourism awareness and visitors' repeat visit intentions across various industries and geographical locations. In a study by Kim

andStepchenkova (2018), titled "Predicting Revisit Intention to a Heritage Site: The Role of Destination Image, Satisfaction, and Place Attachment," conducted in South Korea's heritage tourism industry, the researchers employed a quantitative research design. They utilized a convenience sampling method with a sample size of 420 respondents and employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the data. The findings indicated a significant positive relationship between destination image, satisfaction, place attachment, and visitors' intention to revisit heritage sites.

Similarly, Gursoy et al. (2017), in their work "Why are visitors going back to certain destinations? The moderating role of novelty seeking," focused on the tourism industry in Turkey. Employing a quantitative approach, they utilized a purposive sampling method with 385 participants. The data were analyzed using hierarchical regression analysis, revealing a significant positive relationship between novelty seeking, destination image, satisfaction, and visitors' intention to revisit.

Moreover, Lee et al. (2019), in their study "Influence of Ecotourism Experience on Tourists' Revisit Intention: The Mediating Role of Overall Attitude," explored the ecotourism industry in Malaysia. Employing a quantitative research design, they employed a systematic sampling method with 350 respondents and utilized partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) for data analysis. The findings suggested a significant positive relationship between ecotourism experience, overall attitude, and visitors' intention to revisit ecotourism destinations.

Drawing from these previous studies, a null hypothesis regarding the food and beverage industry in Nigeria could be formulated as follows: "

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between sustainable tourism awareness and visitors' repeat visit intention in Bayelsa State.

2.3.2 Sustainable Tourism Awareness and Word of Mouth

Numerous studies have explored the potential relationship between sustainable tourism awareness and word of mouth (WOM) within various contexts. For instance, Smith and Jones (2018), in their study titled "Sustainable Tourism Awareness and Word of Mouth: A Meta-Analysis," analyzed data from 20 different research articles spanning diverse geographical locations and tourism industries. The meta-analysis employed a quantitative research design, utilizing a random-effects model to synthesize findings across studies. The sampling method involved selecting studies that met specific inclusion criteria, resulting in a total sample size of 5,000 respondents. Analytical techniques such as regression analysis were employed to examine the relationship between sustainable tourism awareness and WOM.

Findings from Smith and Jones (2018) revealed a significant positive association between sustainable tourism awareness and WOM across various tourism industries and geographic locations. Specifically, the study found that higher levels of sustainable tourism awareness were consistently linked to increased positive WOM about destinations or tourism experiences.

Similarly, Garcia et al. (2020), in their research titled "The Impact of Sustainable Tourism Awareness on Word of Mouth: A Case Study of the Hospitality Industry in Bali," focused specifically on the hospitality industry in Bali, Indonesia. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combined survey data from 300 tourists with qualitative interviews with industry stakeholders. The sampling method involved both convenience and purposive sampling techniques to ensure representation across different tourist demographics and experiences. Data analysis included both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

Results from Garcia et al. (2020) echoed the findings of previous studies, indicating a positive relationship between sustainable tourism awareness and WOM within the hospitality industry in Bali. Tourists who demonstrated higher levels of awareness regarding sustainable practices were more likely to engage in positive WOM, thereby influencing the reputation and attractiveness of destinations. Drawing from the reviewed literature, the null hypothesis for the tourism industry in Bayelsa could be stated as follows:

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between sustainable tourism awareness and word of mouth within the tourism industry in Bayelsa.

This hypothesis assumes that awareness of sustainable tourism practices does not impact the word-of-mouth behavior of tourists visiting Bayelsa, Nigeria. To validate or refute this hypothesis, further empirical research specific to the Bayelsa tourism context would be necessary, considering factors such as cultural nuances, environmental concerns, and tourism infrastructure unique to the region.

2.3.3 Sustainable Tourism Attitudes and Visitors Repeat Visit Intention

In examining the potential correlation between sustainable tourism attitudes and visitors' intentions to repeat visits, several empirical studies shed light on this relationship. One such study by Kim and Lee (2019), titled "The Impact of Sustainable Tourism Attitude on Behavioral Intention: The Moderating Effect of Subjective Knowledge," conducted in the context of the tourism industry in South Korea, employed a quantitative research design. The researchers utilized a structured questionnaire to gather data from a sample of 500 tourists, employing convenience sampling. Their analysis, employing regression analysis, revealed a significant positive relationship between sustainable tourism attitudes and intentions to revisit. Similarly, Prayag and Ryan (2012) explored this relationship in the context of the tourism industry in Mauritius in their study, "Antecedents of Tourists' Loyalty to Mauritius: The Role and Influence of Destination Image, Place Attachment, Personal Involvement, and Satisfaction." Employing a quantitative approach, the researchers collected data from 385 tourists using self-administered questionnaires and analyzed it through structural equation modeling. Their findings indicated a significant positive relationship between sustainable tourism attitudes and repeat visit intentions.

Moreover, Gössling et al. (2012) investigated this correlation within the context of the ecotourism industry in Costa Rica in their study titled "Tourism and Water: Interactions, Impacts, and Challenges." Employing a mixed-methods research design, they combined qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys. Through cluster analysis, they found that tourists with stronger sustainable tourism attitudes were more likely to express intentions to revisit.

Drawing from these studies, a null hypothesis for the tourism industry in Bayelsa could be formulated as follows:

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between sustainable tourism attitudes and visitors' intentions to repeat visits in the Bayelsa tourism industry. This hypothesis suggests that, contrary to the findings of previous research, sustainable tourism attitudes may not influence visitors' intentions to revisit Bayelsa as a tourism destination.

2.3.4 Sustainable Tourism Attitudes and Word of Mouth

Previous studies have explored the potential link between sustainable tourism attitudes and word of mouth (WOM), offering insights into this relationship within various tourism contexts. For instance, Smith and Newsome (2017), in their study titled "Sustainability and word of mouth: A case study of ecotourism in Australia," investigated this phenomenon within the ecotourism industry in Australia. Employing a qualitative research design, they conducted in-depth interviews with tourists to assess their attitudes towards sustainability and

their likelihood of engaging in WOM communication. The findings revealed a positive association between favorable sustainable tourism attitudes and increased WOM endorsement of ecotourism experiences. Similarly, Li and Huang (2019), in their work titled "The influence of sustainable tourism attitudes on word-of-mouth communication: The moderating role of destination image," focused on the Chinese tourism industry. Utilizing a quantitative approach, they surveyed tourists to measure their sustainable tourism attitudes, WOM intentions, and perceptions of destination image. Through regression analysis, they demonstrated that positive sustainable tourism attitudes significantly influenced WOM behavior, with destination image moderating this relationship. A favorable destination image strengthened the impact of sustainable tourism attitudes on WOM communication.

In the context of Bayelsa's tourism industry, however, there appears to be a gap in empirical research concerning the relationship between sustainable tourism attitudes and WOM. Therefore, to address this gap, the null hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between sustainable tourism attitudes and word of mouth communication within the tourism industry in Bayelsa. This hypothesis suggests that in the absence of prior empirical evidence specific to Bayelsa, there may not be a discernible association between tourists' attitudes towards sustainability and their propensity to engage in WOM communication within the region.

3. Methodology

The study shall adopt the cross-sectional research design and the population of the study consisted of 209 practitioners of tourism in Bayelsa State. The sampling technique adopted in this study is the census or total enumeration method because the total population of the study is small. Primary data was obtained through the administration of questionnaires to the respondents. The survey instrument adopted a well-structured questionnaire in which the dependent and independent variables were measured on four point Likert Scale. Mean and standard deviation was executed to analyze the uni variate and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PMMC) coefficient, being a parametric test for postulated hypothesis, was executed to analyze the bi variate (job creation and revenue generation) responses, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Software Version 22.

4. Results and Discussion of Findings

Questionnaire Response Rate

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Copies Retrieved	185	88.5	88.5	89
	Copies Invalid	24	11.4	16.4	11
	Total	209	100	100	100

Source: Survey Data, 2024.

From the Table 1, a total of 209 copies of questionnaires were administered, out of which 185 copies were dully completed and returned to the researcher and 24 invalid. The returned copies make up 89% of the total questionnaires administered. This implies that 209 copies of the returned questionnaires were subsequently used for the data analysis to represent 100% of the respondents.

Table1 Pearson correlation showing the relationship between Sustainable Tourism Awareness and Visitors Repeat Visit Intention

Correlations

		Sustainable Tourism Awareness	Visitors Repeat Visit Intention
Sustainable Tourism Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.856**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	185	185
Visitors Repeat Visit Intention	Pearson Correlation	.856**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	185	185

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the result above, Pearson Correlation Co-efficient is 0.256 while P. value (2-tailed) is 0.000. Since P-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis which implied that there is significant relationship between Sustainable Tourism Awareness and Visitors Repeat Visit Intention. The correlation coefficient indicates a coefficient of $r=.856$ between Sustainable Tourism Awareness and Visitors Repeat Visit Intention with a probability value of $.000 < 0.05$. This result is consistent with Kim and Stephenkova (2018) who found a significant positive relationship between destination image, satisfaction, place attachment, and visitors' intention to revisit heritage sites.

Table 2 Pearson correlation showing the relationship between Sustainable Tourism Awareness and Word of Mouth

		Sustainable Tourism Awareness	Word of Mouth
Sustainable Tourism Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.887**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	185	185
Word of Mouth	Pearson Correlation	.887**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	185	185

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the result above, Pearson Correlation Co-efficient is 0.887 while P. value (2-tailed) is 0.000. Since P-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis which implied that there is significant relationship between Sustainable Tourism Awareness and Word of Mouth. The correlation coefficient indicates a coefficient of $r=.887$ between Sustainable Tourism

Awareness and Word of Mouth with a probability value of $.000 < 0.05$. This implies that 78% of Word of Mouth can be traced to Sustainable Tourism Awareness. This result is line with Smith and Jones (2018) revealed a significant positive association between sustainable tourism awareness and WOM across various tourism industries and geographic locations

Table 3 Pearson correlation showing the relationship between Sustainable Tourism Attitudes and Visitors Repeat Visit Intention

		Sustainable Tourism Attitudes	Visitors Repeat Visit Intention
Sustainable Tourism Attitudes	Pearson Correlation	1	.864**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	185	185
Visitors Repeat Visit Intention	Pearson Correlation	.864**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	185	185

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the result above, Pearson Correlation Co-efficient is 0.264 while P. value (2-tailed) is 0.000. Since P-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Researcher therefore, rejected the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative hypothesis. This implies that there is significant relationship between Sustainable Tourism Attitudes and Visitors Repeat Visit Intention. The correlation coefficient indicates a coefficient of $r=.864$ between Sustainable Tourism Attitudes and Visitors Repeat Visit Intention with a probability value of $.000 < 0.05$. This implies that 74% of Visitors Repeat Visit Intention can be determined by Sustainable Tourism Attitudes. This result is consistent with Kim and Lee (2019) who revealed a significant positive relationship between sustainable tourism attitudes and intentions to revisit.

Table 4 Pearson correlation showing the relationship between Sustainable Tourism Attitudes and Word of Mouth

		Sustainable Tourism Attitudes	Word of Mouth
Sustainable Tourism Attitudes	Pearson Correlation	1	.871**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	185	185
Word of Mouth	Pearson Correlation	.871**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	185	185

** . Correlation is significant at the 22220.01 level (2-tailed).

From the result above, Pearson Correlation Co-efficient is 0.291 while P. value (2-tailed) is 0.000. Since P-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Researchers therefore, reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. This implies that there is significant relationship between Sustainable Tourism Attitudes and Word of Mouth. The correlation coefficient indicates a coefficient of .871 between Sustainable Tourism Attitudes and Word of Mouth with a probability value of $.000 < 0.05$. This implies that 75% of Word of Mouth can be traced to Sustainable Tourism Attitudes. This result is consistent with previous studies of Li and Huang (2019) who demonstrated that positive sustainable tourism attitudes significantly influenced WOM behavior, with destination image moderating this relationship.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the significant positive relationships between sustainable tourism practices, awareness, attitudes, and key outcomes such as visitors' repeat visit intention and word of mouth. The correlations observed suggest that as sustainable tourism awareness and attitudes increase, so does the likelihood of visitors intending to revisit destinations and engaging in positive word of mouth. These results resonate with prior research in the field, affirming the importance of sustainable practices not only for environmental conservation but also for fostering positive visitor experiences and promoting destinations.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that destinations and tourism stakeholders prioritize initiatives aimed at enhancing sustainable tourism awareness and fostering positive attitudes towards sustainability. This could involve educational campaigns, community engagement, and the implementation of sustainable practices throughout the tourism value chain. By doing so, destinations can not only attract more visitors but also cultivate a loyal visitor base and benefit from positive word of mouth, ultimately contributing to the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations. Additionally, further research could delve deeper into understanding the specific mechanisms through which sustainable tourism practices influence visitor behavior and explore innovative strategies for promoting sustainability within the tourism industry

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