


Article

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Factors Influencing the Destination Choice of International Visitors to Vietnam

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Abstract: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an attractive tourist destination with diverse and unique experiences, in which Vietnam is considered one of the most famous destinations in this region. Quality evaluations and strategies for attracting international tourists are being thoroughly researched. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had the most significant impact on the tourism industry, which has suffered greatly. Therefore, the recovery and expansion of international tourism necessitate the employment of tourism-related businesses and service sector workers. Extensive research must be conducted to identify solutions and new directions to recover the international tourist market's growth as quickly as possible. This study identifies the factors that influence the destination of international visitors visiting Vietnam after the COVID-19 pandemic by modifying and evaluating the scales of the theoretical model. Using the convenience sampling technique, data were collected through interviews with 208 international visitors, with 29 observed variables. Using SPSS 22.0, five factors influencing international visitors' decisions to visit Vietnam were revealed: tourist motivation, tourist attitude, destination image, social media, and environmental quality. Finally, the authors provide policy recommendations to enhance the allure and viability of Vietnam's tourism following the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study's outcome is intended to establish the importance of the many variables influencing the choice of destination for international visitors.



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Keywords: tourist destinations; choice of destination; international visitors; Vietnam tourism industry; COVID-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in earnest at the beginning of 2020, is a cat-astrrophic health and economic crisis affecting developing nations, particularly those dependent on tourism. In the meantime, tourism in Vietnam is one of the country's main economic sectors, and its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) has continuously grown over the years, especially in 2019, when it directly contributed to 9.2% of the GDP [1]. The tourism industry in Vietnam, along with the tourism industry in other countries around the world, is among the most vulnerable economic sectors to the COVID-19 pandemic. To limit the spread of the disease, governments have implemented policies such as border closures, quarantines, and the enforcement of various restrictions on domestic and international movements. As a direct outcome of these established policies, the attitudes and consumption habits of customers have changed [2–5]. Concurrently with the shift in consumer behavior brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is also a shift in tourist decisions regarding where they plan to vacation, and social media has a significant impact on these decisions [4–6]

The COVID-19 pandemic almost completely halted the international tourism industry. The global lockdowns caused a 49% decline in activity and a loss of close to USD 4.5 trillion

(GBP 3.7 trillion) compared to 2019 [7]. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the number of international arrivals in the Asia and Pacific region decreased by 86% in 2022 compared to the same period the previous year, and this region experienced a significant decline in international arrivals [8]. A drop in international tourist arrivals in 2020 has returned tourist numbers to levels not seen in 30 years and caused a loss of more than USD 900 billion in income from international tourism, which accounted for a near total decline in services exports, at 93%, and a decrease in the value of total exports by more than 4% in 2020 [9]. This decline has had significant indirect effects on the industries and sectors associated with tourism activities. Particularly, inactive labor and idle capital have a negative impact on the economy as a whole and contribute to its stagnation.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in global health and economic crises as well as a ripple effect across global industries, including travel and tourism, which is a significant contributor to the global services sector. The travel and leisure industry has borne the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic travel impacts and is one of the worst-affected industries worldwide. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reported that beginning in June 2022, there will be no COVID-19-related restrictions in 45 locations, 31 of which are in Europe. The first quarter of 2022 saw over four times as many international arrivals as the first quarter of 2021 (+280%). This increase was primarily due to the increased demand within the region. In the preceding three months, arrivals to the Americas grew by 117% [7]. Therefore, this study outlines the steps required to comply with the proposed mechanism when forming recovery strategies for the tourism and leisure sectors.

As a result of the Vietnamese government's extensive efforts to increase investment and develop the tourism industry, the annual growth rate of tourism is accelerating. The number of international tourists increased to 3,583,486 in 2006, thereby contributing to the development of the global tourism market. From 1990 to 2019, the number of international tourists exceeded 18 million, a 72-fold increase [10]. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges for Vietnam's tourism industry. Since March 2020, Vietnam has ceased to accept international tourists, leaving only domestic tourism activities. Moreover, the domestic tourism market has also been impacted by social distancing measures taken during the outbreak. Many of Vietnam's 2020 tourism industry goals are nearly impossible to achieve due to the unfeasibility of their implementation. Specifically, according to data from the General Statistics Office, the number of international visitors in 2020 will only reach 3.8 million, a decrease of 78.7% compared to 2019, with more than 96% of arrivals being international visitors. In the first quarter of 2020, the number of domestic tourists fell by nearly 50 percent, resulting in a loss of up to VND 530 trillion in tourism revenue (equivalent to USD 23 billion) [11].

Early in 2022, Vietnam took specific measures to revitalize and expand its domestic tourism industry. However, the number of international visitors is still low compared to the same period before the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, China and Japan were Vietnam's two most important tourism markets. However, they are also still unable to exploit their tourism potential, especially China, since this nation still maintains a zero-COVID policy and has closed its borders. It is anticipated that tourism will generate VND 111.2 trillion in the first three months of 2022. In March 2022, the number of international visitors to our country reached 41.7 thousand, a 41.4% increase over the previous month and a 2.2-fold increase compared to the same month in the previous year. According to the General Statistics Office, the number of tourists visiting certain provinces/cities in the first quarter of this year was significantly higher than in the prior year [12].

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media, shopping behavior, and product consumption now influence the factors that determine point allocation, despite the fact that these factors have not previously been considered. This study also examined perspectives on tourism, or destinations [2–6]. There is no universally agreed-upon definition of a tourist destination [13] that is independent of the nature of the research being conducted.

A principal destination will typically undergo two stages during the selection process. The fundamental objective is the engagement of producers, local communities engaged in tourism, and tourists in the creation and consumption of tourism products. This process is based on sentiments toward each choice, and it has a substantial effect on the final site chosen [13,14]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, travelers are seeking out remote settings, avoiding traveling in large groups, and choosing independent activities at their destination [5,6]. Some attributes of a destination, such as services, recreational activities, accessibility, tourism resources, reference groups, size and composition of a group's demographics, perceived value, destination experience, and marketing communications, belong to the perspectives and contexts of numerous studies [4–6,15–22]. Additionally, prior research has demonstrated that the determination of destination selection factors must take into account numerous destination attributes.

Tourist motivations appear very early in researchers' discussions of the contexts associated with destination choice, particularly in marketing decisions, such as segmentation, product development, advertising, and positioning tourism products. The reciprocal relationship between the need to experience new objects and visitor emotions is also reflected in tourist motivations [15,16]. Researchers conduct tourist attitude surveys at numerous stages of product selection decision making, which influences the quality of the product experience and the enhancement and restoration of the product's tourism value [18]. The destination image has a strong impact on a consumer's mind and frequently plays a significant role in the destination selection process of tourists [19,20]. Before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, social media continued to play a vital role in disseminating information regarding tourism products, destination situations, and contexts [4–6,21,22]. The influence of social media platforms on environmental quality and site safety is growing [5,6,17]. Increasingly, significant environmental quality standards in tourism activities inspire tourism and influence tourist choices [17].

In studies on tourist destination choice, there is a great deal of debate regarding the effects of stimulated arousal levels and the external environment. In numerous disciplines, including tourism, economics, and sociology, a great deal of research on destination selection decisions has been conducted. Um and Crompton's research focused on how psychological factors influence tourists' decisions regarding tourist destinations [14]. Horner and Swarbrooke's model demonstrated that both extrinsic and intrinsic factors influence the vacation decisions of tourists and that these motivations and determinants are closely related [23]. Hsu et al. identified the factors influencing tourists' choice of destination and evaluated tourists' preferences for the destination [24]. Research on the influence of media factors in destination selection decisions emphasizes the widespread development of information and communication technologies that alter how tourists synthesize and evaluate information when making travel decisions [4,25].

This study aims at developing the international tourist market in Vietnam and providing managers, academics, and travel agencies with valuable suggestions for reinvesting in the tourism industry to restore the market to its normal, expanding position. This study investigated the context and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and how innovation and change can contribute to the tourism industry's recovery based on the critical impacts presented. Determining the factors influencing the choice of destination of international tourists to Vietnam after the COVID-19 pandemic is, therefore, an essential requirement for detecting and providing decision makers with detailed information. Based on an analysis of the development status of the international tourist market in Vietnam after the COVID-19 pandemic and previous research, this study sought to answer the following three questions:

- (1) What factors influence international tourists' destination choices in Vietnam?
- (2) How much influence does each variable have on the selection of Vietnam as a destination by international tourists?
- (3) What are the implications for enhancing and developing tourism products and expanding the number of international visitors to Vietnam?

Accordingly, based on an evaluation of the development status of the international tourist market to Vietnam in the post-COVID-19 environment and previously established research questions, the following objectives were established for this study:

- (1) To determine the factors influencing the destination choice of international visitors to Vietnam.
- (2) To evaluate the impact of each factor on international tourists' selection of Vietnam as a travel destination
- (3) To propose policy implications to enhance and develop tourism products and to increase the number of international tourists visiting Vietnam.

In this study, the authors emphasize the impact of various factors on the decision-making process of tourists when selecting a destination. The authors propose a theory-based model related to behavioral intention, consumption behavior, and consumer choice decisions in the field of tourism, with a focus on international tourists, for the purpose of calibrating a scale and survey questionnaire. The structure of our research is as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of theories pertaining to tourist destinations and selection factors. Section 3, Section 4, and Section 5 cover, respectively, the materials and methods, the research results and discussion, and conclusions, as well as the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *The Tourist's Decision to Choose a Tourist Destination*

There are various definitions of tourist destinations in research, depending on the context of the study. There is neither a single agreed-upon definition nor a single acknowledged method for analyzing tourism locations. In research, tourist locations are defined differently depending on the setting of the study [13]. A review of the relevant literature reveals that scholars from various disciplines have studied tourist destinations, resulting in in-depth analyses based on their methodologies. This also complicates inter-student comprehension of the imitations of different fields.

To investigate the factors that make a destination appealing, it is necessary first to define a tourist destination that can be expanded in marketing, branding, and economic development through tourism development. Destinations for tourists can be characterized as dynamic spatial units in which tourism activities, production, consumption, and host communities interact. From an organizational standpoint, on the other hand, tourist destinations can be viewed as complex networks of multiple units that co-produce tourism products and services [26,27]. According to these definitions, a primary destination is the simultaneous interaction of multiple producers, local communities, and tourists around tourism-related activities, goods, and services. Therefore, it can be inferred that the quality and level of interaction will enable conditions to attract tourists to the destination.

In order to finish the procedure, the first step was to create an awareness set, and the second step was to pick a location from the awareness set that would serve as the final destination. The distinction between perceived inhibitors and perceived facilitators served as the basis for the attitude variable's operationalization. In addition, a person's attitude played a significant role in determining which probable destination was included in the evoked set as well as which location was chosen as the final destination. This decision was made based on which probable destination the person believed was most likely to be visited [14].

2.2. *Factors Influencing Tourists' Decision on a Tourist Destination*

Currently, there are numerous studies on the decision to select a tourist destination. These studies have determined that multiple factors influence tourists' destination selection decisions. These factors are summarized in the Table 1 below.

Table 1. Synthesis of studies on the factors influencing tourists' destination choice.

The Author	Factors Influencing Tourists' Decision of a Tourist Destination
[24,28–32]	Attributes of a destination: climate and weather conditions, prices, service and recreational activities, image of the destination, accessibility and tourism resources
[15,16,24,33]	Tourist motivations
[34]	Destination experience
[17]	Environmental quality
[31,35–38]	Reference groups
[39,40]	Perceived value
[41,42]	Size and composition of a group's demographics
[14,31]	Marketing communications
[25]	Social media
[14,18,43]	Tourist attitude

(a) Attributes of a destination

- Climate and weather conditions

Weather is the state of the atmosphere at a specific location and time, and it can be described by a particular weather station or for a specific area of the Earth's surface. Climate, in contrast, is the prevalent atmospheric condition inferred from long-term observations [44]. Both climate and weather substantially impact visitor activities and behavior, just as they affect people's daily lives.

Although climate and weather are essential characteristics of a destination, travel marketers and planners have no control over them. However, understanding how tourists perceive the destination's climate and weather will assist tourism planners and managers in better allocating their travel resources and activities.

- Price

A price is a group of alternative factors significantly influencing a tourist's destination selection decision. The total cost of a travel package is a crucial factor in selecting a destination.

Price becomes an essential factor for a traveler's consideration of a trip only when it is associated with a particular destination or tourism product and its services and quality. L. Dwyer and Kim [30] identified two types of prices: travel costs (associated with departure and return of travel) and ground costs (related to the price of goods) at the destination. Both of these costs can influence travelers' destination selection decisions.

(b) Service and recreational activities

Tourism activities and recreational services at the destination also play a significant role in selecting a destination. Therefore, tourism development in a location highly depends on the availability of numerous ancillary services [30]. Tourism is classified as a service industry. Some services for a visitor's stay include transportation, shopping, catering, lodging, and management. Providing dependable and responsive visitor service can significantly increase a location's competitive edge.

(c) Accessibility and tourism resources

Necessary tourist resources are crucial in determining a destination's appeal to tourists. Prior to trip cost considerations, tourism resource characteristics are the most crucial. Lohmann and Kaim [28] conducted a survey to determine the significance of particular destination characteristics.

Numerous characteristics are associated with a destination, but safety and security are the primary factors influencing tourists' decisions. According to [45,46], "safety, tranquility, and peace are necessary conditions for tourism to develop", otherwise most tourists will not spend their hard-earned money on a trip. It is widely acknowledged that a destination's safety and security play a significant role in its competitiveness. Political instability,

probability of terrorism, crime rate, traffic safety record, police corruption, administrative services, quality of sanitation, disease outbreak rates, and health care quality are safety and security factors [30]. Tourists' perceptions of a destination's safety and security will significantly influence their selection decision. A safe and secure location can attract numerous tourists.

(d) Reference Groups

Reference groups are social groups that influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors in relation to their purchase intentions [38]. Family, coworkers, and friends, who are representative of normative references, are among the numerous reference groups that significantly impact consumer decision making. In addition, identified were the primary sources of personal standards, attitudes, and values, gained through direct interactions, which are also reference groups [35,36].

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between reference groups and information-seeking behavior during trips or vacation planning. Henry [36] suggested that different information retrieval strategies can serve as a reasonable basis for classifying tourists, because they communicate how services and products offered to visitors are displayed. Snepenger et al. [37] investigated three information search strategies utilized by first-time visitors to Alaska. According to the study, travel agents are an essential source of information that respondents seek. Most users of travel agencies are women, and they use different sources of information regarding benefits, trip characteristics (such as spending and length of stay), and participation level than others.

(e) Size and composition of a group's demographic characteristics

Among the factors influencing the choice of destination include characteristics ranging from the individual's perspective to that of members of a group traveling together. Additional analyses include tourism behaviors, the activities that each member intends to pursue, and differences in socioeconomic status, demographics, and religion as distinct options [41]. Consequently, the size and composition of a particular tour group will significantly impact the ultimate decision.

Sara and Joan [46] emphasized the importance of considering group composition, noting that individual satisfaction may differ from that of the larger tour group, with collective satisfaction potentially being more critical than the ability to review decisions. According to Kozak [42], different household members are frequently involved in travel decisions, with specific motivations based on power relationships within the family. Understanding how tourism decisions are made within the household and by members of different decision-making group will enable the development of effective marketing strategies designed to attract tourists [47].

(f) Perceived Value

The study of tourists' perceptions on changing issues related to society, politics, the environment, technology, and tourism services will significantly impact a destination's ability to attract tourists. Consumers frequently have expectations based on prior familiarity, experience, values, and motivation. Perceptual differences often result in a shift in tourists' behavioral intentions or intentions, which is essential for influencing visitor selection, destination image, satisfaction, and service quality [40].

(g) Destination Experience

The analysis of visitor behavior also includes a discussion of the relationship between past travel experience and future travel behavior, through which past travel experiences have been found to exert an influence. Mazursky [34] argues that future tourism influences the extent and nature of previous travel experiences and suggests that personal experiences may significantly influence tourism decisions more than information obtained from external sources. Therefore, it can be inferred that a visitor's past personal experience with tourism in general or with a specific destination can influence their decision to include or exclude that destination in future tourism plans.

(h) Marketing communications

Advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations, and trade shows are the marketing communication channels used most frequently in the tourism industry [30,48]. Sales promotions are commonly employed to increase customer awareness, introduce new services or products [48,49], or gain a competitive edge by providing customers with special offers or discounted prices. Brochures, travel fairs, direct marketing, travel agency discounts, public relations, the use of a celebrity or journalist to disseminate information about a product, personal experiences and that of colleagues/friends/family, and public websites on the Internet are all effective marketing strategies.

As a result of evolving media technologies that have introduced new information and communication platforms to the media landscape, marketing strategies are also evolving. Digital touchpoints have transformed some of the dynamics of marketing communications, including enhancing interactive communication between organizations and customers and empowering customers to have more control over their communication choices, providing them with greater control over the marketing communications they wish to receive or interact with.

Changes in communication technology (and arguably a changing market characterized by an increase in customers requesting customized or personalized products or services) are driving the shift from marketing that does not differentiate to marketing that focuses on establishing relationships with prospective customers. The most effective marketing communication strategies disseminate information about the destination to a wide variety of visitors and increase the destination's competitiveness with many potential audiences.

2.3. The Relationship between Consumer Behavior and COVID-19-Related Factors Affecting the Destination Choice of International Tourists

The COVID-19 pandemic affects customers' perceptions and consumption patterns, both individually and collectively. Under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, studies have been conducted to identify, collect data, analyze, and evaluate the change in consumer behavior in the decision-making process of tourists. Birtus and Lăzăroiu's [2] research focused on the evaluation and analysis of consumers' perceptions, emotions, choices, and decision making during the COVID-19 period. The COVID-19 crisis is affecting where and how individuals obtain and consume supplies, as shopping behaviors are impacted by the chaos of external emotional states, a lack of goods and services, and a lack of means to obtain goods and services. The risk of COVID-19 infection is also concealed when customers have direct access to the source of goods or services and their access frequency and communication behavior do not comply with preventative measures. COVID-19 infection makes these individuals significantly more susceptible. As a result, the practice of purchasing goods online or utilizing expedited delivery services is widespread [3].

As shopping and consumption behaviors become more prevalent as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, so too does the influence of social media grow. Social media regulates consumer behavior in the travel industry; it is a significant topic in tourism marketing, and it is responsible for establishing and maintaining successful long-term relationships between tourism-related organizations and tourists. There is an effect of social media trust on the travel decision-making process, and the prepurchase journey resources take over all direct and indirect relationships [4].

The purpose of all such studies is to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on traveler behavior and to estimate the likelihood that travelers will change their behavior as a result of this pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected tourists' perceptions of tourism risk and management as well as its influence on risk management, service delivery, transportation models, distribution channels, and the avoidance of overcrowded, hygienic, and safe destinations [6]. Considering the effects of COVID-19 on tourists' behavior, intentions, personal safety, economic spending, beliefs, and attitudes, which comprise tourists' susceptibility to a crisis, it can be concluded that COVID-19 will influence tourists' travel behavior. People will avoid traveling in groups and being surrounded by others, as

well as traveling without travel insurance. Destinations must consider attractively priced offers that can entice and attract tourists as long as they are tailored to the tourists' financial situation, and tourists will choose destinations that encourage more participation in nature and more responsible tourism practices [5].

2.4. Research Model and Hypotheses

(a) Tourist Motivations

Tourism scholars have paid considerable attention to motivation due to the fact of its significance in marketing decisions, such as segmentation, product development, advertising, and positioning [15,16].

According to Yoon and Uysal [16], the best definition of motivation is “psychological/biological needs and needs consisting of inseparable resources that directly and indirectly elicit and integrate a person's behavior and activity”. Due to the fact of its simplicity and intuitiveness, the push-and-pull approach is still the most popular method for describing the engine. The involvement of related elements, images, and emotions moderates this process. The connection between travel motivation and destination selection is demonstrated by the biological and emotional need to travel and the resulting characteristics of the destination.

H1: Tourist motivations significantly affect the destination choices of international visitors.

(b) Tourist Attitude

The concept of attitude is presented as a function of behavioral beliefs, and attitude toward behavior is defined as an individual's overall or negative judgment of a particular behavior following a perceived assessment of the consequences of an action. Attitude is viewed as a function of behavioral beliefs [50,51]. The most essential factor in determining future action is a person's attitude, while the importance of a person's subjective standards decreases as the situation becomes more specific. Subjective criteria ought to be the deciding factor that regulates intention behavior for those acts that demonstrate a strong commitment to rule compliance [52]. Attitudes, whether positive or negative, have a direct bearing on the intensity of behavioral intention; the greater the intensity of the intention to do perform action, the greater the likelihood that the behavior will be completed [53]. The theory of planned behavior is responsible for making this hypothesis regarding the connection that exists between behavioral intentions and actual future behavior [50].

The study of tourist behavior is predicated on levels of attitude formation or attitude measurement concerning an object's essential characteristics. A survey of visitor attitudes is required to comprehend the effect of emotions and moods on attitudes, such as visitor satisfaction, destination loyalty, and visitor involvement. This includes taking into account the emotions of visitors and the impact of measuring their attitudes toward services, destinations, and vendors [18].

However, much contemporary psychological research on attitudes has questioned the stability of attitudes, as they are susceptible to change when the context (e.g., how an issue is framed or the visitor's status) alters [18].

Attitude is central to the theory of tourist decision making, as the traditional view of attitude theory demonstrates that attitudes predict visitor behavior in destination choice. Visitors' attitudes are integral to the marketing environment, which can enhance or limit marketing activities. Attitude is commonly defined as a person's degree of favor or disfavor towards a psychological object [18]. Consequently, evaluation is a crucial component of attitudinal responses, as individuals rate, based on the visitor's beliefs, concepts, objects, and/or likely behavior as good or bad.

H2: Tourist attitude significantly affects the destination choices of international visitors.

(c) Destination Image

Chi and Qu [49] define destination image as an individual's mental expression of knowledge, emotions, and overall perception of a particular destination. According to Tasci et al. [19], "Destination image is an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions towards a destination." Thus, an overall impression is shaped through cognitive, affective, and conative factors. Perceived image was how Echtner [54] characterized the perception of a destination's characteristic or attribute. It is also a combination of cognitive and emotional images. It refers to mental images or pictures that determine whether the family will be safe and whether the experience will be enjoyable. Destination image is essential in tourist decision making and behavior [19], because it is frequently associated with the mental image formed by several factors that substantially impact visitor conduct [20].

H3: Destination image significantly affects the destination choices of international visitors.

(d) Social Media

In contemporary society, users of social networks vary significantly in their acceptance of social media, behavior, scope of use, credibility and influence, and ultimate travel decisions and actions. The correlation between trustworthiness, social media influence, and anticipated changes in travel decisions has been observed and documented extensively. It can be said that destination marketers and the tourism industry should conduct research and make appropriate adjustments to the needs of social network users and the potential tourist market by gaining a deeper understanding between platforms, applications, and implementation of social media marketing [21,22].

Azazi and Shaed [22] also stated that social networks significantly impact the tourism industry, particularly as a popular tool for obtaining information about travelers' preferences. Today, numerous social media sites (such as TripAdvisor, Trivago, Booking.com, and Agoda.com) can assist travelers in locating and selecting the best locations and travel activities around the globe. Therefore, further research can be conducted on the role of social media in decision making by focusing on enhancing the role of social media to promote tourism sectors and assist tourists in choosing a vacation destination.

According to the research conducted in [55], information technology offers opportunities for altering the decision-making behavior of individuals, groups, and organizations. Emerging changes that are interrelated include social media and Web 2.0 technology. These technologies can have positive and negative effects on the effectiveness and rationality of decision making. The availability and use of social media by managers in business and in our personal lives are growing. In addition, tools such as analytics software employed in management and customer service will assist in identifying business values based on customer perspectives and attitudes regarding social media associations, news, and business feedback.

Liu et al. [25] confirmed that social media is a significant source of information that influences the travel decisions of tourists. The authors argue that disseminating tourist information via social media is essential for a better understanding of the decision-making processes of tourists. Indirectly, social media can serve as a source of demand and guidance for tourists' destination decisions. Therefore, social media is a factor that influences tourists' destination decisions.

H4: Social media significantly affects the destination choices of international visitors.

(e) Environmental Quality

Environmental quality is frequently limited to natural environments, or spots in nature, and man-made structures. Some researchers only define tourism with natural resources, particularly in the original environmental quality debate. Later, cultural and social attractions were included in the environmental quality debate when the concept narrowed too much. In addition, the term "environmental quality" can be used even more

broadly, as environments other than natural and sociocultural may also be relevant. The economic, political, or technological environment, for instance, can influence the growth and competitiveness of tourist attractions [17].

The contribution of environmental quality factors to tourism activities is growing in significance, creating tourism motivation, influencing tourists' decisions to select and remain, and ensuring the sustainability of tourism destinations.

H5: Environmental quality significantly affects the destination choices of international visitors.

(f) Research Model

This study used the model of tourist destination selection in [28] and Hsu et al.'s [24] research model of destination selection to develop the research model proposal as shown in Figure 1, because according to the authors, these two models are quite comprehensive and specifically concern the factors influencing the decision to select a destination. Consequently, the choice of a destination is affected by internal and external factors, such as travel motivation, visitor attitude, destination image, and environmental quality. In addition, the social media factor from Liu et al.'s [25] model was added to the proposed model in this study. The aforementioned models, on the other hand, were researched prior to the formation and rapid development of the COVID-19 pandemic; consequently, the research context was not appropriate for the tourists who were interviewed after the outbreak pandemic. According to the findings of Pop et al. [4], this study took into account the role that social media plays in the decision-making process of international tourists regarding their destination of choice.

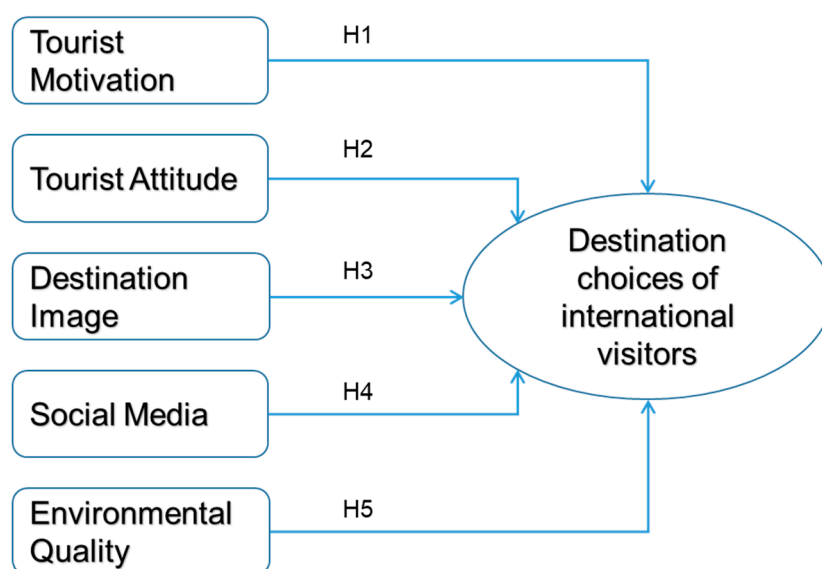


Figure 1. Research model.

3. Materials and Methods

This research was conducted in three phases:

In Phase 1, the author used the expert method, which is based on expert consultations and group discussions to complete the scale and create the survey questionnaire.

In Phase 2, the following tasks were performed: Cronbach's alpha coefficient and exploratory factor analysis were used to assess the scale's reliability. According to [56,57], the minimum sample size must be $m \times 5$, where m is the number of observed variables. With 29 observed variables, the minimum sample size for this study was 145. To ensure a high reliability, however, the author surveyed 220 international visitors to Vietnam. After removing invalid questionnaires because many of the responses were left blank by the

tourists interviewed, 208 valid questionnaires remained. SPSS software was used to code and analyze all data gathered from the survey questionnaires. Observed variables with a total correlation coefficient greater than 0.30 and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient greater than 0.70 will ensure the scale's reliability, according to Nunnally and Bernstein [57].

After concluding during Phase 3, using multivariable regression analysis, that two variables had a linear relationship, this causal relationship could be modeled using linear regression. The assumption of multicollinearity was tested using the tolerance or variance magnification factor (VIF). If the VIF was less than 10, there were no indications of multicollinearity. In contrast, a rating of 10 was appropriate for technical or physical issues that did not utilize the Likert scale. Regarding economic and social difficulties, the analysts anticipated multicollinearity with a $VIF > 2$ [58]. When determining the degree of influence of the factors influencing the selection decision of international tourists to Vietnam, the greater the beta coefficient of any factor, the greater the influence that factor had on other factors in the research model.

4. Results

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. Descriptive Analysis of the Demographic Characteristics

Regarding gender, based on the structure of the survey sample, there was little difference between men and women, with 100 male tourists (representing 48.1% of the total) and 108 female tourists (representing 51.9% of the total).

Regarding age, the data revealed a significant disparity among guests over 56, who represented the smallest percentage (10.6%) of the total. The age group from 36 to 55 comprised the largest proportion of visitors, with 78 visitors (37.5%), while the other age groups also included a significant proportion. This demonstrates that most of the international tourists surveyed were of working age and able to pay for shopping and tourism activities. The highest proportion of international tourists were between the ages of 36 and 55, which is also consistent with the hypothesis that age plays a role in the destination selection process [59]. Therefore, when developing policies to promote and attract tourists, market researchers may give these topics special consideration.

Regarding the continent item, 47.1% of all of the international tourists came from Asia (98 people). Tourists from other continents made up the smallest share, 14.9%. Thus, Asian tourists continue to be a traditional and promising market in the structure of international tourists to Vietnam. This result also enables managers and market researchers to offer a variety of preferential policies to Asia's and Europe's significant tourism markets in order to maintain and expand them.

Regarding the length of stay, 52.4% of the international visitors to Vietnam stayed between four and seven nights, while 2.6% stayed longer than two weeks. Similarly, 22.6% of stays consisted of three nights or fewer or between one and two weeks. In tourism, the length of stay is a determinant of destination demand rather than a demand characteristic, as it is influenced by the sociodemographic profile and emotional characteristics of the tourist [60]. Therefore, businesses and destination managers may consider 4 to 7 night itineraries that are appropriate and appealing for international tourists to Vietnam. A detailed description of the analysis of demographic characteristics is shown in Table 2 below.

4.1.2. Reliability Analysis

The results of the reliability test indicate that the scale had a high degree of precision; the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was greater than 0.70, and the total correlation coefficients were almost all greater than 0.30; therefore, it was suitable for use in the EFA factor analysis, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of demographic characteristics.

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	100	48.1
	Female	108	51.9
	Total	208	100
Age	18–25	48	23.1
	26–35	60	28.8
	36–55	78	37.5
	>56	22	10.6
	Total	208	100
Continent	European	79	38
	Asian	98	47.1
	Others	31	14.9
	Total	208	100
Length of stay	≤3 nights	47	22.6
	4 to 7 nights	109	52.4
	1 to 2 weeks	47	22.6
	>2 weeks	5	2.4
	Total	208	100

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha of items (N = 208).

No.	Item	Notation	No. of Observed Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Smallest Item—Total Correlation
1	Tourist motivation	TM	5	0.84	0.534 (TM5)
2	Tourist attitude	TA	4	0.822	0.627 (TA3)
3	Destination image	DI	5	0.814	0.556 (DI1)
4	Social media	SM	5	0.839	0.543 (SM3)
5	Environment quality	EN	4	0.828	0.609 (EN1)
6	Destination choice	DC	4	0.748	0.495 (DC2)

4.1.3. The Result of the Exploratory Factor Analysis

Table 4 displays the results of the Barlett's test, which indicate a correlation between the variables in the population, with Sig. = 0.00 < 0.05. In addition, the coefficient KMO = 0.890 > 0.05 demonstrates that factor analysis is appropriate for grouping variables and that the data were suitable for factor analysis.

Table 4. KMO and Barlett's test.

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.890
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	2257.417
	df	253
	Sig.	0.000

Five factors were extracted from the observed variables using principal component analysis and varimax rotation, with the ability to explain 63.435% of the population-level change in the dependent variable. Table 5 shows that the five factors had eigenvalues greater than one. The variance of 63.435% exceeded 50%, which is acceptable.

Through Table 6, the rotation matrix demonstrates that the scale was accepted, that all variables had factor loadings greater than 0.5, and that they were categorized into five factors influencing the destination choice of international tourists to Vietnam.

Table 5. Total variance explained.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	Variance (%)	Cumulative %	Total	Variance (%)	Cumulative %	Total	Variance (%)	Cumulative %
1	8.053	35.012	35.012	8.053	35.012	35.012	3.132	13.618	13.618
2	2.447	10.638	45.650	2.447	10.638	45.650	3.078	13.384	27.002
3	1.720	7.478	53.127	1.720	7.478	53.127	3.000	13.045	40.047
4	1.253	5.449	58.577	1.253	5.449	58.577	2.767	12.029	52.076
5	1.117	4.858	63.435	1.117	4.858	63.435	2.513	11.359	63.435

Table 6. Rotated component matrix.

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
SOCIALMEDIA2	0.787				
SOCIALMEDIA4	0.785				
SOCIALMEDIA1	0.751				
SOCIALMEDIA3	0.743				
SOCIALMEDIA5	0.669				
MOTIVATION4		0.818			
MOTIVATION3		0.760			
MOTIVATION2		0.698			
MOTIVATION5		0.627			
MOTIVATION1		0.605			
IMAGE3			0.773		
IMAGE2			0.755		
IMAGE5			0.690		
IMAGE4			0.672		
IMAGE1			0.609		
ATTITUDE3				0.768	
ATTITUDE4				0.764	
ATTITUDE1				0.733	
ATTITUDE5				0.586	
ENVIRONMENT4					0.763
ENVIRONMENT3					0.723
ENVIRONMENT2					0.704
ENVIRONMENT1					0.615

4.1.4. Hypotheses Finding

According to Table 7, the correlation between the observed and predicted values of the dependent variable $R = 0.770$ is greater than 0.5. This model is suitable for evaluating the relationship between dependent and independent variables.

Table 7. Overall model fit.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	0.770 ^a	0.593	0.583	0.35109	0.593	58.784	5	202	0.000	1.616

^a Predictors: (constant), EN, SM, TM, DI, and TA.

The regression model explained 58.3% of the variance in the destination choices of the international tourists to Vietnam. The remainder was attributable to errors and other variables, including the interviewed tourists' psychology, and personality. In addition, the

adjusted R-square coefficient was 0.583, which is less than the R^2 value of 0.593, indicating that the model fit the data at 0.583.

The F-test of the overall linear regression model's fit determines whether the dependent variable is linearly correlated with the independent variable.

The regression equation is:

$$DC_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot TM_i + \beta_2 \cdot TA_i + \beta_3 \cdot DI_i + \beta_4 \cdot SM_i + \beta_5 \cdot EN_i \quad (1)$$

The hypothesis proposes: H_0 is $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = \beta_5 = 0$.

The significance in the ANOVA table was relied on to reject or accept hypothesis H_0 (Table 8). According to the results, the significance value of the F test was $0.000 < 0.05$; therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis H_0 . This indicates that at least one independent variable in the model was linearly correlated with the dependent variable and that the combination of independent variables can explain the change in the dependent variable.

Table 8. ANOVA ^a.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.230	5	7.246	58.784	0.000 ^b
	Residual	24.900	202	0.123		
	Total	61.130	207			

^a Dependent variable: DC. ^b Predictors: (constant), EN, SM, TM, DI, and TA.

The table of regression coefficients (Table 9) results indicate that the significance values of the variables were less than 0.05, meaning that these independent variables were all significant for the dependent variable, and none of them were eliminated. There was no multicollinearity, because all of the VIF coefficients were less than two.

Table 9. Parameter estimates.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	0.592	0.195		3.030	0.003		
	TM	0.257	0.053	0.294	4.857	0.000	0.550	1.819
	TA	0.146	0.052	0.173	2.826	0.005	0.540	1.850
	DI	0.171	0.048	0.202	3.588	0.000	0.635	1.575
	SM	0.189	0.046	0.216	4.144	0.000	0.744	1.345
	EN	0.102	0.045	0.139	2.254	0.025	0.527	1.896

According to the beta coefficient (normalized regression weight), the strongest influence on the dependent variable, DC (Destination Choice), was exerted by the variable TM (tourist motivation), with a value of 0.294, followed by Social Media (SM = 0.216), Destination Image (DI = 0.202), and Tourist Attitude (TA = 0.173), and EN (Environmental Quality), with a standardized regression weight of 0.139, was the independent variable with the least impact on the dependent variable.

The equation for the linear regression was as follows: Destination Choice = $0.294 \times$ Tourist Motivation + $0.173 \times$ Tourist Attitude + $0.202 \times$ Destination Image + $0.216 \times$ Social Media + $0.139 \times$ Environmental Quality.

Thus, all five factors—Tourist Motivation, Tourist Attitude, Destination Image, Social Media, and Environmental Quality—had a proportional impact on the destination choice of international tourists to Vietnam.

4.2. Discussions

This study aimed to identify the factors that influence destination choice and to assess each factor's influence on the destination choice of international tourists to Vietnam. The authors ultimately achieved these objectives. Regarding the objective of identifying the factors influencing destination choice, to achieve this objective, hypotheses 1 through 5 were developed to suggest a relationship between Tourist Motivation, Tourist Attitude, Destination Image, Social Media, and Environmental Quality and the choice of tourist destination made by international tourists to Vietnam.

The results of using the SPSS 22.0 software (IBM Corp. Released 2013. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 22.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp) to test the hypotheses indicate that the five factors mentioned above influenced the choice of destination made by international tourists to Vietnam. Therefore, the formal theoretical model's hypotheses, H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5, were accepted.

Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 confirm that Tourist Motivation, Tourist Attitude, Destination Image, Social Media, and Environmental Quality positively affected international tourists' choice of Vietnam as a destination [4–6,15–22]. This result aligns with previous studies, such as that by Liu et al. [25].

Regarding the objective of measuring the impact of each factor on the selection of a destination, according to the results of the interaction between the concepts in the research model (Table 9), the variable TM (Tourist Motivation) exerted the greatest influence on the dependent variable DC (Destination Choice), with a value of 0.294. There was a slight discrepancy with the findings of Hsu et al. [24], where the Tourist Attitude variable positively affected tourists' destination choices.

Tourist motivation, according to research [15,16], should be highlighted in marketing decisions, such as segmentation, product creation, advertising, and positioning. The connection between tourism motivation and destination choice should be articulated in terms of travel demands and emotions related to location attributes [16]. The attitudes of visitors were assessed according to the basic features of the respondents in order to determine the impact of emotions and moods on attitudes, such as visitor satisfaction, loyalty to the location, and family participation. The questions also considered the emotions of tourists and the influence of assessing their sentiments towards services, locations, and suppliers [18].

Chi and Qu [49] define "destination image" as the mental representation of a person's knowledge, emotions, and overall perception of a specific destination. This study demonstrates the importance of the destination image element in the decision-making process and tourist behavior [19]. Moreover, destination image is frequently associated with tourist image and has a substantial influence on their behavior [20]. This study also found a correlation between reliability, social media influence, and predicted changes in tourists' travel decisions [21,22]. The majority of the interviewed tourists indicated that they seek information based on their interests and needs, conduct evaluations, and select destinations with significant influence from social media [21,22]. The quality of the destination's environment also influences tourist preference, particularly for destinations that guarantee the sustainability of tourism activities [17].

In the context of the research conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic, the results indicate that the pandemic has affected tourists' perceptions and consumption patterns [2–4]. Media influenced destination selection behaviors significantly prior to, during, and after the selection decision-making process [4]. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted tourists' risk perception, service delivery, transportation models, distribution channels, destination avoidance, sanitation and hygiene practices, and safety [6]. Destinations are also more appealing to tourists when they offer service packages at prices that are suitable for tourists' financial situations and prioritize the selection of attractive destinations that engage in more nature-based and sustainable tourism activities [5].

5. Implications and Conclusions

5.1. Implications

Vietnam is one of Southeast Asia's most popular tourist destinations, and it is easily accessible by various modes of transport, making it an ideal hub for connecting Asian tourist destinations. The majority of visitors to Vietnam are interested in culture, beautiful natural landscapes, and diverse culinary traditions. To preserve and develop these values and create motivation for future international tourists, there must be synchronized cooperation between the relevant authorities, tourist-operating businesses, and residents. To attract an increasing number of international tourists and stimulate their spending, it is necessary to invest in the development of public services and the construction of a transportation system that is fast, convenient, and easily accessible near tourist destinations.

Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic is not entirely under control; therefore, the Vietnamese government, tourism businesses, and Vietnam must implement safe tourism measures and create favorable conditions for tourism activities. In addition, it is necessary to construct a linkage system between the different tourist destinations in the numerous regions and different areas of Vietnam to create a package tour and, more broadly, connect with other tourist destinations. There is a need to increase organizations' and individuals' oversight of vehicles participating in tourist transport activities regarding tourist safety standards. State-level managers, private businesses, and individuals involved in tourism activities must rearrange and reorganize the planning and arrangement of trading and tourism activities to stabilize order.

Vietnam has always been a destination with stable politics and a lack of violence. Still, the local government has always prioritized ensuring tourists' safety and security in areas where tourism activities are conducted, in addition to environmental protection and natural and cultural landscape propaganda and awareness classes for the local populace. To accommodate the needs of tourists and locals, many public toilets and ecofriendly trash cans should be offered. Moreover, the government can employ propaganda techniques to educate the populace and the staff serving visitors directly regarding polite and civilized conduct. In addition, to maintain order and a uniform price, it is necessary to establish a tourism inspection team that operates regularly to prevent situations that may not attract tourists.

Tourism is prevalent in Vietnam. Strengthening the control of buying and selling activities, guiding visitors of organizations and individuals, and continuously evaluating standards to ensure tourists' safety while participating in tourism activities at locations should be conducted, as well as constantly monitoring food safety issues in the region's eating establishments, eateries, restaurants, and hotels. When traveling to Vietnam, tourists appreciate the regional cuisine. Local authorities must promote, advertise, and establish brands for Vietnamese specialties to preserve and promote the essence and distinctive flavors of the cuisine.

According to research findings, social media positively impacts the destination decisions of international tourists to Vietnam. However, Vietnam still needs to promote the awareness of tourists through social network communication activities. Vietnam must intensify tourism promotion propaganda in publications and distribute it to many international tourists, mainly via popular social networking sites. The Internet should be utilized for promotion via the websites of other travelers, well-known travel Facebookers, and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, and TikTok. They make it simple to connect with and provide tourist information to international travelers.

The government must create favorable conditions for local travel and tourism businesses to participate in domestic and international exhibitions. In addition, the government should direct companies to serve tourists with the highest quality and most affordable prices in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. This will aid in communicating and promoting Vietnam's tourism industry to friends and family through previous visitors. It can be said that this is a practical, low-cost solution, but it requires government support and cooperation from tourism-related businesses.

5.2. Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research

In addition to the practical contributions that can be made, this study shares the same limitations as other studies. Due to the limited research time, the sampling method, and the small sample size ($N = 208$), the research scope was limited to the local level. This does not encompass the nature of the problem regarding the factors influencing international visitors' selection of Vietnam as a destination.

The research results are limited to measuring and identifying certain factors influencing the destination choice of international tourists, even though there are numerous other factors, such as visitor psychology and other properties of the destination.

Future research must do the following to overcome the limitations mentioned above: increase the sample size and employ the probability sampling method, as well as expand the survey subjects to include tourists from Asia, the United States, and other nations so that the results can be generalized and a uniform effect list can be generated; include many other factors influencing tourists' choice of destination in future research, such as tourist psychology, tourist preferences, tourism products, and the quality of travel agencies.

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