

# Responsible Tourism and Generational Convergence: A Comparative Study of University Students in Italy and Vietnam

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism has increasingly become one of the arenas through which broader environmental, social, and cultural tensions are negotiated. The acceleration of global mobility, the diffusion of low-cost travel, and the growing centrality of digital platforms in shaping tourist imaginaries have transformed tourism into an everyday practice for large segments of the population, especially younger generations. These processes, however, do not unfold in a territorial vacuum. They produce concrete effects on places, landscapes, and local communities: the intensification of tourist flows generates pressures on urban fabrics and natural environments, transforms the social geographies of destination areas, and reconfigures the relationship between inhabitants and their own territories (Vargas-Sánchez *et al.*, 2015; Marco-Gardoqui *et al.*, 2025).

Discussions on overtourism, resource consumption, cultural commodification, and the fragility of local ecosystems have progressively shifted attention towards the need for more responsible forms of travel capable of balancing mobility, leisure, and territorial accountability. Within this context, responsible tourism has emerged not simply as an alternative tourism niche, but as a broader framework through which tourism practices are evaluated in relation to their social, environmental, and economic implications for specific territories and communities. Responsible tourism also concerns how travellers interpret their role within the places they visit and how their practices contribute to the reproduction or transformation of territorial conditions.

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Although the literature on sustainable and responsible tourism has expanded considerably over the last two decades, empirical research continues to privilege macro-level perspectives centred on governance models, destination branding, and industry practices. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to tourists' behavioural orientations, particularly among younger populations whose travel practices are deeply shaped by digital communication, transnational cultural exposure, and rapidly evolving social norms. University students represent a particularly relevant group because their tourism practices are strongly shaped by digital communication, transnational cultural exposure, and rapidly evolving social norms. Their attitudes toward responsibility may therefore anticipate broader transformations in future tourism cultures. At the same time, responsible tourism attitudes cannot be understood independently of broader cultural, social, and geographical contexts.

Existing studies suggest that perceptions of sustainability, environmental concern, and ethical consumption are shaped by different value systems, educational experiences, and collective expectations, themselves embedded in specific spatial and territorial configurations. Comparative analyses across different national contexts are therefore essential for understanding whether responsible tourism intentions emerge through context-specific mechanisms, rooted in particular geographies of tourism development, or whether younger generations increasingly share similar behavioural patterns across national boundaries.

This paper explores these issues through a comparative analysis of university students in Italy and Vietnam. The comparison between these two contexts is particularly significant from a geographical perspective, as it brings together two countries positioned at different stages of tourism development and confronted with distinct forms of territorial pressure. Italy represents a consolidated and spatially dense tourism system, characterised by concentrated flows onto heritage cities, coastal areas, and mountain landscapes, where the tensions between tourism expansion and territorial sustainability have long been a subject of both academic debate and local governance concern. Vietnam, conversely, reflects a rapidly emerging tourism geography in which the spatial expansion of tourism infrastructure, the internationalisation of destination areas, and the growing penetration of international tourist flows are producing new and accelerating forms of territorial transformation.

Despite these differences, both countries are engaged in ongoing discussions concerning tourism sustainability, environmental protection, and the social and territorial consequences of tourism growth. The study adopts the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as its analytical framework in order to examine how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control contribute to the formation of responsible tourism intentions among university students. The TPB offers a useful framework for examining how individual evaluations, social expectations, and perceptions of feasibility contribute to responsible tourism intention. Applying this framework comparatively allows the study not

only to assess the relative importance of these variables, but also to investigate whether the mechanisms underlying responsible tourism intentions remain stable across different national and territorial contexts.

More specifically, the paper pursues three interconnected objectives. First, it examines the extent to which attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence students' intentions towards responsible tourism. Second, it investigates whether educational exposure reinforces these relationships. Third, it analyses whether the structural configuration of these behavioural determinants differs between Italian and Vietnamese students. By focusing on university students and by comparatively examining two distinct tourism geographies, this study contributes to ongoing debates on responsible tourism in three ways. Empirically, it expands research on younger generations' tourism attitudes beyond single-country analyses. Theoretically, it further tests the applicability of the TPB within cross-cultural tourism research. Finally, it contributes to discussions surrounding the relationship between tourism responsibility, generational change, and transnational behavioural convergence in increasingly interconnected informational and territorial environments.

## 2. *Theoretical Framework*

The present study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991), one of the most widely employed frameworks for explaining the relationship between attitudes, intentions, and behaviour within social psychology and behavioural research. According to the TPB, behavioural intention is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). The TPB has been extensively applied within tourism studies to investigate environmentally responsible behaviour, ethical consumption, sustainable mobility, and pro-environmental travel choices. Previous studies show that positive attitudes toward sustainability do not automatically translate into responsible tourism intentions, particularly when sustainable options are perceived as inaccessible or difficult to implement (Han *et al.*, 2010; Verma, Chandra, 2018).

The comparison between Italy and Vietnam as tourism geographies requires some contextualisation of the processes through which Vietnam has emerged as an internationally significant tourism destination. The country's opening to international tourism is inseparable from its broader political and economic history. The normalisation of diplomatic relations with China in 1991 and with the United States in 1995, following the Doi Moi reforms initiated in 1986, progressively integrated Vietnam into international trade and mobility networks. Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2007 accelerated this process, facilitating the expansion of international tourism infrastructure across coastal destinations such as Ha Long Bay, Da Nang, and Phu Quoc, as well as heritage cities in-

cluding Hoi An and Hue, and the urban tourism circuits of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. International tourist arrivals grew from fewer than two million in the late 1990s to over eighteen million by 2019, generating intense and spatially uneven forms of territorial transformation (UNWTO, 2023).

Within this context, the Vietnamese state has retained a significant role in orienting tourism development, defining sustainability frameworks, and mobilising civic participation in tourism-related activities. Vietnam's National Tourism Development Strategy designates responsible tourism as a component of the country's broader sustainable development agenda, embedding it within institutional frameworks that have no direct equivalent in the Italian system. For younger generations, including university students, this institutional presence shapes the social environment in which tourism attitudes are formed: responsible travel is not only a culturally available norm circulated through digital media but also, in certain contexts, a practice endorsed by youth organisations, educational institutions, and state-sponsored civic initiatives. How this dimension interacts with the individual and social determinants captured by the TPB framework remains an open question that the present study's data cannot resolve directly, but which constitutes a productive direction for future research.

Within the field of responsible tourism, the TPB has frequently been employed to explain how tourists negotiate environmental concern, ethical responsibility, and tourism-related decision-making. Research conducted in different Asian contexts has confirmed the relevance of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in shaping responsible tourism intentions among younger generations (Nguyen *et al.*, 2024; Qiu *et al.*, 2022). These studies further suggest that moral awareness and perceptions regarding tourism's negative impacts may reinforce the formation of responsible intentions, especially when responsibility becomes socially normalised within peer environments and communication systems. Importantly, the dimension of social responsibility – encompassing respect for local communities, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement – has emerged as an increasingly salient component of responsible tourism orientations, alongside more established environmental and economic dimensions (Grimwood *et al.*, 2018).

Existing research frequently highlights a value-action gap in sustainable tourism behaviour, particularly among younger generations who often express strong environmental concern without consistently translating these values into practice (Cavagnaro *et al.*, 2018; Juvan, Dolnicar, 2014). Financial constraints, convenience, social expectations, and accessibility of sustainable options frequently mediate this relationship.

The focus on university students is theoretically significant for several reasons. Members of Generation Z are embedded within highly interconnected digital environments where tourism imaginaries, sustainability discourses, and consumption practices circulate rapidly through social media and online communication channels. As a generation defined by digital nativity, constant con-

nectivity, and strong sensitivity to social recognition, Generation Z approaches tourism through a distinctive blend of ethical awareness, experiential search, and identity expression (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2009). Existing research suggests that younger generations develop tourism-related perceptions through a combination of formal education, digital communication, peer interaction, and destination branding (Schönherr, Pikkemaat, 2024). Consequently, responsible tourism intentions among students are shaped not only by individual ethical reasoning, but also by socially mediated forms of visibility, recognition, and behavioural normalisation. The strong mediating role of perceived behavioural control within this generational context further suggests that intention is frequently contingent on the structural accessibility of responsible options, rather than on values alone (Butnaru *et al.*, 2022).

Within digital communication environments, responsible tourism increasingly functions as a socially visible and culturally mediated practice. Social media platforms contribute to the circulation of behavioural norms, sustainability narratives, and shared imaginaries of travel, while perceptions of feasibility remain strongly conditioned by the accessibility of responsible tourism options. The comparative dimension of the present study further extends the analytical relevance of the TPB framework. Although previous research confirms the applicability of the TPB across different cultural settings, studies also suggest that behavioural intentions may be shaped differently depending on broader socio-cultural configurations (Ozdemir, Yolal, 2017). Vietnamese tourism behaviour has often been associated with collectivist orientations, stronger sensitivity to social expectations, and destination-based responsibility frameworks (Luong, 2025; Le *et al.*, 2023; Ngo *et al.*, 2025). In collectivist cultures, subjective norms and social expectations tend to exercise a comparatively stronger influence on behavioural intention, as conformity to group standards and community obligations carries significant normative weight. Conversely, studies conducted in European contexts indicate that responsible tourism among younger generations is more frequently connected to individual value systems, self-expression, and ethical lifestyle positioning (Buffa, 2015; Cavagnaro *et al.*, 2018).

Nevertheless, recent literature also points toward forms of increasing generational convergence across national contexts. Digital communication systems, transnational media environments, and globally circulating sustainability narratives may contribute to partially shared behavioural structures among younger populations, particularly among university students who are highly exposed to similar informational ecosystems (Mavrin *et al.*, 2024). From a generational perspective, theories of generational cohorts suggest that individuals who come of age during similar historical and technological conditions may develop comparable value orientations and behavioural dispositions, irrespective of national origin (Lee *et al.*, 2013). Applied to tourism, this framework implies that the shared digital nativity, global media exposure, and transnational sustainability discourses that characterise Generation Z may partially override culturally specific behavioural

mechanisms, producing convergent patterns in responsible tourism intentions. From this perspective, comparing Italy and Vietnam becomes particularly useful for examining whether responsible tourism intentions remain strongly context-dependent or whether younger generations increasingly display convergent behavioural mechanisms despite different cultural backgrounds.

Building on these considerations, the present study applies the TPB framework to investigate the formation of responsible tourism intentions among university students in Italy and Vietnam. More specifically, the study examines the extent to which attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control positively influence behavioural intention, while also assessing the role of educational exposure and the potential moderating effect of cultural context.

### 3. Methodology

3.1. *Research Design* – This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the determinants of university students' intentions toward responsible tourism. The analysis is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which posits that behavioural intention is determined by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. A comparative approach was employed to investigate potential differences between students in Italy and Vietnam.

3.2. *Hypotheses Development* – Building on previous TPB applications in tourism research (Han *et al.*, 2010; Park *et al.*, 2007; Shephard, 2008), the study investigates the following relationships:

- H1. Attitudes towards responsible tourism positively influence students' responsible tourism intentions.
- H2. Subjective norms positively influence students' responsible tourism intentions.
- H3. Perceived behavioural control positively influences students' responsible tourism intentions.
- H4. Educational exposure strengthens the relationships between TPB constructs and responsible tourism intentions.
- H5. The relationships between TPB constructs and responsible tourism intentions differ between Italian and Vietnamese students.
- H6 (Exploratory). Environmental awareness exerts a stronger influence on students' responsible tourism intentions than social or economic awareness.

3.3. *Data Collection and Sample* – Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire administered to university students aged between 18 and 30 in Italy and Vietnam. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was selected, targeting respondents enrolled in higher education institutions. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The target sample size was approximately 200-250 respondents per country, resulting in a total sample of around 400-500 participants.

The final sample includes respondents from both countries, providing a suitable basis for cross-national comparison. The demographic profile confirms the targeted profile in terms of age and educational background. It should be noted that the two national higher education systems differ significantly in scale: Vietnam's university student population currently exceeds 2.5 million, while Italy's stands at approximately 1.8 million. The present samples were drawn through convenience procedures from specific institutional contexts, which limits demographic representativeness and requires caution in generalising findings to the broader student populations of either country.

*3.4. Measurement Instrument* – The questionnaire was developed using validated scales adapted from prior studies based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour. All constructs were measured using multiple items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”).

The model includes four main constructs: Attitude (AT), Subjective Norms (SN), Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC), and Behavioural Intention (BI). In addition, educational exposure and responsibility dimensions (environmental, social, and economic) were included to test extended and exploratory relationships. Items were modified to fit the context of responsible tourism among university students. The theoretical source of each construct is traceable through the bibliographic references cited above, providing a sufficient basis for methodological replication.

*3.5. Data Analysis* – SPSS and AMOS were used for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were measured using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. For inferential analysis, a two-step approach was adopted. First, the measurement model was assessed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the structure, reliability, and validity of the constructs. While most items loaded on their intended constructs, several exhibited factor loadings below the recommended threshold of 0.50. These items were evaluated for retention on the basis of their contribution to overall construct reliability, following established recommendations in the SEM literature. Items whose removal improved overall reliability without compromising construct coverage were excluded; those whose retention maintained construct coherence despite borderline loadings were kept. The adequacy of these decisions was confirmed *a posteriori* by the CFA fit statistics reported below.

Model fit and construct reliability were assessed according to standard SEM criteria commonly adopted in tourism research. Finally, multi-group analysis (MGA) was conducted to compare structural relationships between Italian and Vietnamese students and to assess the moderating role of cultural context.

## 4. Results

4.1. *Socio-demographic profile of respondents* – The final sample consisted of 451 university students: 211 participants from Italy and 240 from Vietnam. The sample shows moderate demographic differences between the two national groups in terms of age distribution, educational level, and travel frequency, while awareness of responsible tourism remains comparatively similar across both countries.

Nevertheless, a slightly higher proportion of Italian students reported uncertainty compared to their Vietnamese counterparts.

4.2. *Descriptive statistics* – The descriptive statistics of the main constructs are presented in Tab. 1. Overall, high mean values across all variables were observed, indicating a positive orientation toward responsible tourism. ATR captured the highest mean ( $M=4.42 \pm 0.83$ ), suggesting strong evaluations of responsible tourism practices. BI ( $M=4.10 \pm 0.92$ ) and SN ( $M=4.10 \pm 0.89$ ) also depicted high average scores, reflecting both willingness to act and the influence of social expectations. PBC exhibited a slightly lower but still positive mean ( $M=4.05 \pm 0.85$ ), indicating confidence in the ability to engage in responsible tourism.

Regarding countries, Italian students showed slightly higher attitudes ( $M=4.50 \pm 0.59$ ), while Vietnamese students reported higher PBC ( $M=4.20 \pm 0.92$ ) and BI ( $M=4.25 \pm 0.95$ ) compared to their Italian counterparts ( $M=3.87 \pm 0.73$ ;  $M=3.93 \pm 0.86$ ). Standard deviations indicate sufficient variability across all constructs, supporting the suitability of the data for further analysis.

4.3. *Measurement model* – To assess the measurement model, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. The EFA results indicated a two-factor structure, explaining 59.06% of the total variance. Attitude items loaded distinctly on one factor, while subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and behavioural intention items clustered together, suggesting an action-oriented dimension. Subsequently, CFA using maximum likelihood estimation was performed. The measurement model showed satisfactory reliability and validity according to standard SEM criteria. Overall model fit was acceptable ( $\chi^2/df = 3.54$ ; CFI = .942; TLI = .931; RMSEA = .075), supporting the suitability of the model for subsequent structural analysis.

4.4. *Structural model* – Structural equation modelling was used to examine the relationships among the main dimensions influencing responsible tourism intention. The analysis was then extended to hypothesis testing using standardised path coefficients. The results indicate that attitude ( $\beta = .144$ ,  $p < .001$ ), subjective norms ( $\beta = .188$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and perceived behavioural control ( $\beta = .576$ ,  $p$

< .001) all exert a positive and statistically significant influence on behavioural intention. Therefore, H1, H2, and H3 are supported. Among the influences, perceived behavioural control emerged as the strongest determinant of behavioural intention.

The model accounted for a significant proportion of variance in behavioural intention ( $R^2 = .674$ )

To test H4, a multi-group structural equation modelling (MG-SEM) analysis was conducted by comparing respondents with and without formal educational exposure. The nested model comparison indicated that constraining the structural paths did not significantly worsen model fit ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 17.99$ ,  $\Delta df = 17$ ,  $p = .389$ ), suggesting that educational exposure does not significantly moderate the relationships between TPB constructs and behavioural intention. Therefore, H4 is not supported.

To examine H5, a cross-national MG-SEM analysis was carried out to assess whether the structural relationships differ between Italian and Vietnamese students. Measurement invariance was tested sequentially across three nested models. The configural model, which constrains only the factor structure to be equal across groups, served as the baseline. The metric model added equality constraints on factor loadings; the scalar model further constrained item intercepts to equality across groups. The fit comparison between constrained and unconstrained models ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 22.649$ ,  $\Delta df = 17$ ,  $p = .161$ ;  $\Delta CFI < .01$ ) confirmed full measurement invariance, equivalent factor structure, factor loadings, and item intercepts, across the Italian and Vietnamese samples. This provides a sound basis for cross-national structural comparison and indicates that the relationships among attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and behavioural intention operate equivalently in both national contexts. H5 is accordingly not supported.

Although the explanatory power of the model was higher in the Vietnamese sample ( $R^2 = .765$ ) than in the Italian sample ( $R^2 = .535$ ), the overall pattern was shared across the two countries.

## 5. Discussion

5.1. *Structural Convergence* – The findings of this study reveal a theoretically significant reconfiguration of the TPB structure within the present sample. While the Theory of Planned Behaviour posits attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control as analytically distinct antecedents of behavioural intention, the exploratory factor analysis identified a two-factor solution in which subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and behavioural intention converged into a single action-oriented dimension, while attitudes loaded separately. This configuration was incorporated into the measurement model and confirmed by the subsequent CFA fit statistics.

The theoretical implications of this structure deserve careful consideration. The separation between attitudes and the action-oriented cluster points to the presence of a value-action gap within this cohort: positive attitudinal dispositions toward responsible tourism do not generate behavioural intention unless they are simultaneously supported by perceived feasibility and social endorsement. Intention, in this reading, is not simply the downstream expression of attitudinal alignment but a practice-oriented construct that registers the intersection of capability, social context, and readiness to act. This finding extends and complicates existing TPB-based literature in responsible tourism, which typically confirms the predictive role of attitudes while preserving their analytical separation from the behavioural cluster (Le *et al.*, 2023).

From a geographical standpoint, the dominance of perceived behavioural control as the strongest predictor of intention ( $\beta = .576$ ,  $p < .001$ ) points directly to the material conditions in which tourism practices take shape. In Italy, a mature and spatially dense destination system with well-developed tourism infrastructure and a relatively consolidated sustainable supply, students may perceive responsible choices as accessible and practically achievable even in the absence of deep attitudinal commitment. In Vietnam, where the spatial expansion of tourism infrastructure is still uneven and responsible tourism functions more as an emerging than an established norm, perceived control may register a heightened sense of individual agency in a context where norms around responsible travel are still being negotiated. The higher explanatory power of the model in the Vietnamese sample ( $R^2 = .765$  vs.  $R^2 = .535$ ) is consistent with this reading, suggesting that the TPB structure captures a larger share of intention variance precisely where responsible tourism has not yet been institutionally routinised.

The absence of significant cross-national structural differences reinforces the convergence hypothesis. Within the perspective of the global generation paradigm, which emphasises shared value formation across digitally connected cohorts (Mavrin *et al.*, 2024), the structural similarity across two radically different tourism geographies suggests that the mechanisms underlying responsible tourism intention are increasingly shaped by transnational rather than context-specific forces. That students embedded in Italy's spatially saturated heritage tourism landscapes and students navigating Vietnam's rapidly expanding coastal and urban tourism geographies should display comparable behavioural structures points toward a progressive de-territorialisation of younger generations' tourism imaginaries, a process in which digital environments mediate the formation of responsibility orientations independently of the territorial conditions students inhabit.

This does not render territorial context irrelevant. The spatial organisation of tourism supply, the visibility of sustainable options within the urban and landscape fabric, and the degree to which responsible travel is embedded in local mobility cultures all modulate the weight that perceived behavioural control

carries in shaping intention, without altering the underlying structural logic through which intention is formed. A further interpretive dimension is added by the specific institutional environment in which Vietnamese students form their tourism orientations. Unlike Italy, where responsible tourism norms circulate primarily through media, peer culture, and market-based sustainable tourism supply, Vietnam's tourism system retains a significant state dimension: responsible travel is embedded in national development strategies and endorsed through civic and youth organisations. In such a context, perceived behavioural control may register not only individual capability but also the institutional endorsement that makes responsible choices feel both feasible and socially required. This may help account for the higher PBC scores recorded among Vietnamese students ( $M = 4.20$  vs.  $M = 3.87$ ) without contradicting the convergence finding. Recent research on smart tourism destination development in Vietnam further underscores the uneven and still-emerging character of sustainable tourism infrastructure across the country's destination areas (Nguyen Doan Thanh *et al.*, 2024), suggesting that Vietnamese students' higher perceived control reflects an orientation toward individual and collective agency rather than simply the availability of well-established responsible options.

*5.2. The Role of Digital Exposure* – The structural convergence documented in Section 5.1 becomes more legible when considered alongside the informational exposure patterns that characterise the two student populations. Social media platforms represent the primary source of exposure to responsible tourism in both countries (Vietnam: 70.6%; Italy: 66.1%), followed by online articles and travel-related websites. Formal education plays a comparatively minor and uneven role in both national contexts.

These aggregate figures, however, obscure a meaningful difference in the digital ecosystems through which students in the two countries access and circulate tourism-related content. In Italy, responsible tourism representations are mediated primarily through Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (platforms shaped by a Western European media culture that frames sustainable travel as individual lifestyle choice and ethical consumption). In Vietnam, the informational landscape is more layered. Facebook retains a dominant presence among university students, alongside TikTok (Zhou *et al.*, 2023). Recent reports indicate that social media has reached more than 70% of the population, with young adults spending several hours per day on social networking platforms and consuming digital content (Kemp, 2025). These platforms expose young users to travel narratives, sustainability messages, environmental campaigns, and common travel practices, turning them into initial channels through which perceptions of responsible tourism are formed. Repeated exposure to peer-generated content, influencer recommendations, and sustainability-driven travel narratives may strengthen perceptions that responsible tourism is socially just and increasingly expected within one's social network (Lam *et al.*, 2020). How-

ever, the dominance of perceived behavioural control in the structural model suggests that, although social expectations matter, students' intentions are still more strongly mediated by their perceived ability to act sustainably in practice. Financial status, access to information, transportation options, and the availability of sustainable tourism products may therefore play a more decisive role than social pressure alone in determining whether intentions are translated into actual behaviour.

Through a geographical lens, this observation complicates the convergence narrative without overturning it. The similar structural outcomes across Italy and Vietnam likely reflect not the circulation of identical content through identical platforms, but a functional convergence in the role that digitally mediated imaginaries play in shaping tourism intention – regardless of the specific platforms or cultural registers involved. The mediation of tourism imaginaries through digital environments has become sufficiently powerful in both contexts to partially override differences in territorial conditions, institutional environments, and cultural orientations toward collective and individual responsibility.

This interpretation aligns with the new mobilities paradigm, which understands mobility not solely as the physical displacement of persons but as the circulation of images, norms, aspirations, and practices across space (Sheller, Urry, 2006). Digital platforms participate in the production of tourism imaginaries by selecting, aestheticising, and globally distributing particular representations of destinations, communities, and responsible travel practices (Salazar, 2012; Urry, Larsen, 2012). In this sense, students in both countries inhabit transnational informational environments whose effects on intention formation partially converge, even as the specific platforms and cultural registers through which those effects are mediated retain nationally distinct features.

The limited moderation effect of formal educational exposure reinforces this reading. Responsible tourism orientations among university students appear to be shaped primarily by informal and digitally mediated channels; curricular interventions are unlikely to substantially redirect behavioural intentions without engaging with the digital ecosystems that constitute students' primary informational horizon.

5.3. *Rethinking Responsibility: The Primacy of Social Awareness* – The exploratory analysis of responsibility dimensions reveals that social awareness emerged as the strongest influence on behavioural intention in both national samples, surpassing both environmental and economic concerns. From a geographical perspective, this result is theoretically significant. For younger generations, responsible tourism appears to be understood less as an ecological or economic obligation than as a relational and community-oriented practice, a form of engagement with the human geographies encountered through travel. This reading is consistent with a broader trajectory in responsible tourism research that has progressively decentred the environmental frame in favour of approaches fore-

grounding the social and cultural consequences of tourism for local communities, cultural landscapes, and inhabited territories (Grimwood *et al.*, 2018).

The geographical valence of this finding differs somewhat across the two national contexts. In Italy, where the pressure of mass tourism on heritage cities, coastal environments, and mountain landscapes has generated sustained public debate around overtourism, community displacement, and cultural commodification, the salience of social awareness among students may reflect a familiarity with tourism's territorial costs that is embedded in everyday urban experience. In Venice, Florence, and the Amalfi coast, tourism's social consequences are visible in the material fabric of the city and circulate through media and local governance debate, making community impact a culturally available frame for evaluating tourism responsibility. In Vietnam, where the rapid expansion of international tourism into coastal destinations, ethnic minority areas, and secondary cities is producing new and accelerating forms of territorial transformation, social awareness may carry a different inflection, oriented less toward the management of excess and more toward the terms on which local communities negotiate their relationship with incoming tourism flows, the preservation of cultural sovereignty, and the conditions under which tourism growth generates or undermines local benefit.

As discussed above, social media play a pivotal role in mediating awareness of destinations and tourism practices (Jiang *et al.*, 2017). Geographically speaking, this process can be understood as a form of digital placemaking: digital platforms do not merely represent destinations, but participate in the construction of place meanings by visualising local communities, cultural practices, everyday spaces, and territorial identities (Halegoua, Polson, 2021). This further helps explain why social awareness may emerge as a particularly strong influence of responsible tourism intention among young travellers, since digital media can transform the destination from an abstract site of consumption into a socially inhabited territory, thereby strengthening responsibility toward the communities and human geographies that tourism encounters and transforms. However, this relationship remains ambivalent, as this phenomenon might lead to superficial aesthetic consumption, viral overcrowding, and commodification of places when destinations are reduced to visually attractive content (Wengel *et al.*, 2022; Siegel *et al.*, 2023; Song, Wondirad, 2023).

## 6. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the growing convergence of responsible tourism orientations among younger generations across different tourism geographies. In particular, the centrality of perceived feasibility, social normalisation, and digitally mediated imaginaries suggests that responsible tourism intentions increasingly emerge through transnational informational environments rather than exclusively through context-specific cultural frameworks.

This study has examined the determinants of responsible tourism intentions among university students in Italy and Vietnam through the analytical lens of the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The findings confirm that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control all contribute positively to the formation of responsible tourism intentions. Among these dimensions, perceived behavioural control emerged as the strongest influence, indicating that students are more likely to express responsible tourism intentions when they perceive responsible practices as realistic, accessible, and practically achievable. From a geographical perspective, this finding points to the relevance of the territorial and infrastructural context in which tourism takes place: the availability of sustainable transport options, the spatial organisation of tourism supply, and the degree to which responsible practices are embedded in the local tourism system all contribute to shaping students' perceptions of behavioural feasibility.

Beyond confirming the explanatory value of the TPB framework, the results point toward broader transformations in how responsibility is articulated among younger generations. The absence of substantial structural differences between the Italian and Vietnamese samples does not imply that students in the two countries inhabit identical informational or institutional environments. The specific platforms through which tourism imaginaries circulate, from the individualised aesthetic logic of Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube in the Italian context to the more Facebook- and TikTok-centred digital ecosystem in Vietnam, carry distinct social architectures that may reinforce different components of the TPB structure. What converges is not the content or the platform, but rather the functional role that digitally mediated imagination plays in producing a sense of tourism responsibility. This functional convergence is powerful enough to generate structurally comparable patterns of intention formation across two radically different tourism geographies and institutional contexts, while leaving room for the platform-specific and culturally inflected differences that future research will need to unpack.

Educational exposure alone does not appear sufficient to substantially reshape responsible tourism orientations, which are strongly influenced by broader digital environments, peer cultures, and everyday social norms.

The exploratory findings concerning responsibility dimensions further contribute to current debates by showing that social awareness exerts a particularly strong influence on behavioural intention. Responsible tourism therefore appears to be interpreted not solely through the lens of environmental preservation, but also through relational and community-oriented dimensions linked to cultural respect, local engagement, and interpersonal responsibility toward the people and places encountered in travel. This highlights the importance of understanding responsibility as a socially and territorially embedded practice rather than exclusively as an ecological concern.

These findings suggest the importance of developing tourism policies and educational strategies capable of making responsible tourism socially meaning-

ful, practically accessible, and territorially embedded within everyday mobility practices.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged explicitly. The use of a convenience sample of university students restricts the demographic representativeness of the findings and limits generalisability to the broader populations of the two countries. The two national higher education systems also differ significantly in scale, Vietnam's university student population exceeds 2.5 million, while Italy's stands at approximately 1.8 million, and the samples drawn from specific institutional contexts may not be representative of these broader populations. The study captures behavioural intentions rather than actual practices, a distinction that is particularly consequential where the gap between expressed orientations and material behaviour may be substantial and spatially variable. Furthermore, the aggregate treatment of digital exposure does not capture the platform-specific differences between Western European and South-east Asian digital ecosystems that may shape the formation of tourism imaginaries in ways a country-level comparison cannot fully resolve. Future research could productively address these limitations through longitudinal designs, qualitative approaches attentive to the spatial dimensions of tourism behaviour, and platform-disaggregated analyses of digital exposure.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to responsible tourism research by comparatively examining younger generations' behavioural orientations within two distinct national and geographical contexts. In doing so, it highlights how responsibility in tourism is increasingly shaped through the intersection of practical feasibility, social normalisation, and transnational cultural exposure, while remaining anchored, at least in part, in the specific territorial conditions that define the possibilities and constraints of responsible travel.

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### *Responsible Tourism and Generational Convergence: A Comparative Study of University Students in Italy and Vietnam*

This paper examines the determinants of responsible tourism intentions among university students in Italy and Vietnam through the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Situated within two geographically distinct tourism systems – a mature, spatially saturated destination and a rapidly expanding tourism geography – the study draws on a quantitative survey of 451 students. Structural equation modelling reveals that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control all positively influence behavioural intention, with perceived behavioural control as the dominant influence. Multi-group analysis shows no significant structural differences between the two national samples, suggesting a convergent behavioural pattern shaped by transnational digital environments. Social awareness, rather than environmental concern, proves the strongest driver of intention, pointing to the territorially and relationally embedded nature of responsible tourism practices among younger generations.

### *Turismo responsabile e convergenza generazionale: uno studio comparativo tra studenti universitari in Italia e Vietnam*

L'articolo indaga i determinanti delle intenzioni di turismo responsabile tra studenti universitari in Italia e in Vietnam attraverso la Teoria del Comportamento Pianificato. Collocato in due sistemi turistici geograficamente distinti, una destinazione matura e spazialmente satura e una geografia turistica in rapida espansione, lo studio si basa su un'indagine quantitativa condotta su 451 studenti. La modellazione con equazioni strutturali rivela che atteggiamento, norme soggettive e controllo comportamentale percepito influenzano positivamente l'intenzione comportamentale, con il controllo comportamentale percepito come predittore dominante. L'analisi multigruppo non evidenzia differenze strutturali significative tra i due campioni, suggerendo una convergenza comportamentale modellata da ambienti digitali transnazionali. La consapevolezza sociale, più che quella ambientale, risulta il fattore più rilevante, evidenziando la natura territorialmente e relazionalmente radicata del turismo responsabile tra le giovani generazioni.

### *Tourisme responsable et convergence générationnelle : une étude comparative entre étudiants universitaires en Italie et au Vietnam*

Cet article examine les déterminants des intentions de tourisme responsable chez des étudiants universitaires en Italie et au Vietnam à travers la Théorie du Comportement Planifié. Inscrite dans deux systèmes touristiques géographiquement distincts – une destination mature spatialement saturée et une géographie touristique en expansion rapide – l'étude repose sur une enquête quantitative auprès de 451 étudiants. La modélisation par équations structurelles montre que l'attitude, les normes subjectives et le contrôle comportemental perçu influencent positivement l'intention comportementale, ce dernier étant le prédicteur dominant. L'analyse multi-groupes ne révèle pas de différences structurelles si-

gnificatives entre les deux échantillons, suggérant une convergence comportementale façonnée par des environnements numériques transnationaux. La conscience sociale, plutôt que la préoccupation environnementale, s'avère le facteur le plus déterminant, soulignant la nature territorialement et relationnellement ancrée du tourisme responsable chez les jeunes générations.