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Analysis of Tourist Preferences for Ecotourism Attractions in North Sumatera

Onan Marakali Siregar[1*], Selwendri Selwendri[1]

[1] Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
[2] Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

[*] *Corresponding author: Onan Marakali Siregar (onan@usu.ac.id)*

Abstract

In Indonesia, ecotourism is an important part of the tourism industry where Indonesia is included in the list of the best ecotourism destinations in the world. The most important thing about ecotourism is efforts towards maintaining the preservation of the natural and cultural environment. This requires good and professional management of ecotourism attractions by the character of each tourist destination area. This research aims to group tourists based on psychographic segments towards ecotourism destinations in North Sumatra, determine the combination of product attributes at ecotourism destinations in North Sumatra that fulfill the desires of tourists per segment, and determine the preferences of tourists in each segment regarding their level. This research uses cluster and conjoint analysis methods which aim to group tourists into two groups based on tourism motivation, namely soft ecotourists and hard ecotourists along with the types of characteristics in each group. The analytical method used is a descriptive survey. Primary data was obtained from a questionnaire with a total of 120 respondents in 4 regions, namely Medan City, Langkat Regency, Karo Regency, and Toba Samosir Regency. The results of the research show that the average assessment of soft ecotourists shows that the comfort (accommodation) measure reaches the highest value, namely F-count accommodation = 81,656 and (p-value = 0.000), while hard ecotourists show the highest measure of commitment to environmental issues. On the other hand, the instruments that do not have differences between the two clusters are the commitment, duration, and interaction instruments.

Keywords

Tourism, Ecotourism Facilities, Tourist Preferences, Ecotourism Development Concepts, Ecotourism Management, Marketing.

1. Introduction

The growth of ecotourism requires a deep understanding and serious attention to the factors that can stimulate tourist interest. By thoroughly understanding what inspires and captivates them, they can create memorable and sustainable travel experiences (Abdurahman et al., 2016). Ecotourism service providers and travel agents need to understand these important aspects well to explain them to potential tourists, in the hope of attracting their interest with ecotourism products that suit their needs. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) predicts that the tourism sector will continue to develop, with growth in the number of international tourists estimated at 3% to 4% in 2020 (Dogru & Bulut, 2018; Kronenberg & Fuchs, 2021; Adedoyin et al., 2022). Developments occurring in the tourism industry affect one part of tourism, namely ecotourism which focuses on natural tourism. Ecotourism is the practice of traveling to relatively underexploited natural destinations to appreciate natural settings, gain knowledge about wildlife, and enjoy local culture in authentic settings while preserving the destination environment (Lee & Jan, 2019; Khanra et al., 2021; Wardle et al., 2021).

The main principles of ecotourism are focusing on active contribution to conserving natural resources, integrating indigenous knowledge into ecotourism planning and improving community welfare, and organizing tourists in small groups (Zhang & Lei, 2012; Zong et al., 2017). The most important thing about ecotourism is its efforts towards preserving the natural and cultural environment. Don't let your love of the natural and cultural environment result the threat to the preservation of the environment and culture itself. To avoid damage to nature and culture by tourism activities, it is necessary to have good and professional management of ecotourism attractions by the character of each tourist destination area, as well as limiting the scale of development in this tourism sector. In designing a tourism product, apart from considering the conditions and potential of the tourist destination, it is also important to pay attention to the interests of tourists. This is because the composition of tourism products influences tourist satisfaction. Tourism products, in the form of services, are a combination of various attributes such as attractions, activities, packages, prices, prestige, and services that are expected to fulfill the desires and needs of tourists in creating new experiences (Setiyorini, 2017; Sukirno & Irfan, 2019).

Ecotourism in Indonesia is an important part of the rapidly growing tourism industry where Indonesia has a variety of ecotourism destinations that offer pristine natural beauty and attractive biodiversity. Ecotourism in Indonesia also combines aspects of local culture, introducing tourists to local wisdom and local community traditions. Furthermore, the Deputy Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy/Deputy Head of the Tourism and Creative Economy Agency Indonesia with its large wealth of natural and cultural resources has potential. ecotourism which can be developed as a selling point for tourism and the creative economy, so that it can increase the positive impact on environmental and community sustainability. Ecotourism is an important thing to pay attention to as an integral part of efforts toward sustainable tourism (Cobbinah, 2015; Tseng et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2023). Because ecotourism focuses on preserving the natural environment and biodiversity, while still paying attention to economic empowerment and social sustainability of local communities. These aspects are included in tourism management, we can ensure that tourism activities not only provide sustainable economic benefits but also protect and maintain natural resources which are important for environmental balance and the sustainability of human life. This makes ecotourism a crucial strategy in maintaining and promoting sustainable tourism. This research attempts to group tourists based on psychographic segments towards ecotourism destinations in Sumatra North,

determine the combination of product attributes at ecotourism destinations in North Sumatra that fulfill the desires of tourists per segment, and know the preferences of tourists in each segment regarding the level of importance of attributes in ecotourism destinations in Sumatra North.

2. Literature Review

Tourism is a travel activity carried out temporarily from the original place of residence to the destination area with the reason not to settle or earn a living but only for fun, fulfill curiosity, spend free time or holiday time and other purposes (Ketut & Widyatmaja, 2017). Travel from one place to another is temporary, carried out individually or in groups, as an effort to find balance in life in the social, cultural, natural, and artistic dimensions. Tourism is everything related to tourist objects and attractions. The tourism industry involves various parties, including providers of transportation, accommodation, food and beverage services, as well as various tourist attractions. In tourism activities, accessibility and amenities are very important things to pay attention to. Accessibility includes transportation into the country, inter, intra regions and within the region, and ease of obtaining information about destinations (Handayani et al., 2019). This access not only concerns aspects of quantity but also includes quality, timeliness, comfort, and safety. In addition, amenities are infrastructure that is not directly related to tourism but is often part of tourists' needs, including money exchange, telecommunications, rental businesses, publishers and sellers of tourist guidebooks.

Chiu et al. (2016), ecotourism is a concept defined as a new form of nature travel that emphasizes nature experiences, learning, and emerging environments. Stamatiou et al. (2020), ecotourism is an environmentally responsible trip and visit to a relatively undisturbed natural area, to enjoy and appreciate nature (and all the accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promote conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides active social and beneficial economic involvement of local communities. The development of ecotourism requires community participation who are willing to help participate in the development and management of ecotourism destinations. Kunjuraman (2022), community-based ecotourism is a type of tourism that emphasizes community participation and control in promoting the development and management of ecotourism in the area. This ecotourism development not only generates financial benefits but also conserves local environmental resources by encouraging low-impact and non-consumptive use patterns (Choi et al., 2020).

Tseng et al. (2019) ecotourism must have activities implementing the principles of reducing physical, social, behavioral psychological impacts and developing awareness, respect and culture for the environment to encourage positive experiences for visitors and hosts. To generate direct financial benefits for conservation that generate financial benefits for society and the private sector, offering visitors a memorable interpretive experience that helps increase sensitivity to the political, environmental and social climate. Designing, building, and operating low-impact facilities accepts the rights and spiritual beliefs of local communities and works with them to foster empowerment. Zabihi et al. (2019), sustainable development includes ecotourism management that leads to sustainable tourism. There are several aspects that need to be considered in its development, ecotourism, namely to mark attractions as the main attraction of a tourist destination. The attraction value of attachment to a destination that motivates visitors with special and unique resources that can fascinate tourists. Attractive destination resources, such as beautiful and impressive scenery, are an important prerequisite for tourism services. Management facilities in ecotourism are all the facilities and infrastructure used for tourist purposes which are used for activities during the trip. Concern for the environment for environmental sustainability is a key factor in the

competitiveness of tourist destinations. Investments in environmental improvements can increase the growth of the tourism industry. Natural tourism activities are directly related to natural resources and tourism activities are used to preserve nature and culture, advance conservation, expand environmental awareness, and provide benefits to the communities involved. Community participation is very important for the environment and will emerge if nature/culture provides direct/indirect benefits for the community. To provide benefits, nature/culture must be managed and protected. Namely the reciprocal relationship between tourist attractions - management of the benefits obtained from ecotourism and participation.

Sadq et al. (2019), tourism marketing activities focus mainly on tourism products or services and their development as well as reasonable pricing policies for tourists to control the amount of tourism between peak season and recession, distribution channels to target markets, and development of tourism service packages by integrating total tourism services. Meanwhile, according to Yanti & Febrisa (2015) Li et al. (2018), tourism marketing is marketing as a management process used by national tourism bodies or tourism companies to identify potential tourists they choose, both real and potential, and communicate with them to determine and influence their desires, needs, motivations, pleasures, and displeasures at local, regional, national, international levels, and adapt their tourism products according to the situation so that tourists are satisfied by fulfilling their desires they. According to Phoek et al. (2021) and Jaya et al. (2024), ecotourism management is in line with the ecotourism paradigm, where there are three important elements related to its management, namely local communities, biodiversity, and tourism industry/activities. Local communities will gain economic benefits from tourism activities, cultural interactions, and increased appreciation and sustainability of the tourism environment. Biodiversity will benefit from conservation funding and tourism activities will be able to increase learning about the environment/biodiversity, as well as interactions with culture. In managing ecotourism, there should be regulations governing zoning, access, maximum number of visitors/groups, visitor habits, changes in land function, market share research, ecotourism marketing, evaluation, and further development with existing resource options. Ecotourism can also be developed into a business in the tourism industry, in general there are several categories of business actors in the ecotourism sector, namely medium small businesses, multitask operators and special equipment operators.

3. Method

This research uses quantitative research methods using cluster and conjoint analysis methods to group ecotourists into two groups based on their tourism motivation, namely soft ecotourists and hard ecotourists along with the types of characteristics in each group. The population in this study were tourists visiting ecotourism destinations in North Sumatra Province taken from 4 regions, namely Medan City, Langkat Regency, Karo Regency, and Toba Samosir Regency. At each destination a minimum of 30 samples will be taken so that the total number of samples taken is 120 samples. The data used is primary data obtained through a questionnaire which is divided into two stages. In the first stage, questionnaires were distributed randomly to tourists, to group them into two groups based on their motivation to visit. Next, in the second stage, questionnaires were distributed to the same two groups of tourists to provide assessment ratings regarding the attributes of tourism products at ecotourism destinations and secondary data obtained through literature studies, including journals and academic articles. The data analysis method used in this research is a descriptive survey using the cluster analysis method to

carry out the process of segmenting tourists based on their psychography or motivation.

4. Result and Discussion

Convergence is achieved due to the absence or slight change in the cluster centers. The maximum absolute coordinate change for each center is 0.000. The current iteration is 5. The minimum distance between initial centers is 17.263. It turns out that the clustering process is carried out through 5 stages of iteration to get the right cluster. From the table above, it is stated that the minimum distance between cluster centers that occurs from the iteration results is 17.263. The final output from the Cluster Center is still related to the previous data standardization process which refers to the z-score with the provision that a negative value means the data is below the total average and a positive value means the data is above the total average.

Table 1. Iteration History

Iteration	Change in Cluster Centers 1	Change in Cluster Centers 2
1	7.768	7.650
2	0.348	0.812
3	0.143	0.346
4	0.110	0.253
5	0.000	0.000

The percentage calculation results for each instrument are presented in Table 2, the average instrument assessment from respondents in cluster-1, namely the level of comfort (accommodation), has the highest value of 7.27, so it can be seen that the accommodation in cluster 1 is: (average of the accommodation indicator + (7.27x the standard deviation of the average mean of the accommodation indicator) = 6.32+ (7.27 x 2.28) = 22.90. Therefore, the average assessment of respondents in cluster-1 for the accommodation indicator is 22.90%. The average assessment of respondents in cluster-2, namely commitment, has the highest value of 6.22, so it can be seen that the majority of commitment levels are in cluster 2, namely: (average level of commitment) + 0.46696 x standard deviation of average commitment status)= 6, 71 + (6.22 x 2.03) = 19.34. Thus, the average level of commitment of respondents in cluster 2 is 19.34 %.

Table 2. Computational Results for Each Instrument

Instrument	Clusters 1	Clusters 2	Mean	Std.Dev	Cluster Percentage 1	Cluster Percentage 2
Commitment	6.92	6.22	6.71	2.03	20.76	19.34
Motivation	6.58	5.53	6.27	2.22	20.88	18.55
Orientation	7.07	5.47	6.59	2.05	21.08	17.80
Duration	5.30	5.36	5.32	2.27	17.35	17.49
Exploration	7.06	5.14	6.48	2.19	21.94	17.74
Involvement	6.30	5.31	6.00	2.33	20.68	18.37
Accommodation	7.27	4.11	6.32	2.28	22.90	15.69
Tourism Service	7.04	4.69	6.33	2.23	22.03	16.79
Interaction	6.71	5.94	6.48	2.18	21.11	19.43
Experience	7.08	4.28	6.24	2.27	22.31	15.96
Trip planner	6.12	3.75	5.41	2.43	20.28	14.52

The differences in variables and instruments in the clusters formed in this case can be seen from the F-count and p-value of each variable as shown in Table 3. The

cluster results obtained in this research are accommodation instruments that best show the differences in characteristics of the two clusters formed (soft ecotourist and hard ecotourist). In this case the F-calculation of accommodation = 81.656 and (p-value = 0.000). Second is experience where F-count = 56.585 and (p-value = 0.000). Third, tourism services as shown by the results of F-count = 36.019 and (p-value = 0.000). Fourth is the trip planner which is shown by the results of F-count = 29.825 and (p-value = 0.000). Fifth is exploration which is indicated by the results of F-count = 22.900 and (p-value = 0.000). Sixth, sustainability of orientation is shown by the results of F-count = 17.421 and (p-value = 0.000). Seventh is motivation which is shown by the results of F-count = 5.923 and (p-value = 0.016). Eighth is involvement which is shown by the results of F-count = 4.711 and (p-value = 0.032). Meanwhile, the instruments that do not have differences in the two clusters are commitment, duration and interaction.

Table 3. ANOVA

Variable	Cluster Mean Square	Cluster Df	Error Mean Square	Error Df	F	Sig.
Commitment	12.153	1	4.056	118	2.996	0.086
Motivation	28.078	1	4.741	118	5.923	0.016
Orientation	64.448	1	3.700	118	17.421	0.000
Duration	0.102	1	5.202	118	0.020	0.889
Exploration	92.959	1	4.059	118	22.900	0.000
Involvement	24.802	1	5.264	118	4.711	0.032
Accommodation	252.067	1	3.087	118	81.656	0.000
Tourism Service	138.135	1	3.835	118	36.019	0.000
Interaction	14.935	1	4.653	118	3.210	0.076
Experience	198.353	1	3.505	118	56.585	0.000
Trip planner	141.432	1	4.742	118	29.825	0.000
Instruments						
Commitment	15.159	3	0.634	116	23.917	0.000
Motivation	17.847	3	0.564	116	31.627	0.000
Orientation	7.001	3	0.845	116	8.287	0.000
Duration	8.453	3	0.807	116	10.471	0.000
Exploration	18.816	3	0.539	116	34.892	0.000
Involvement	3.488	3	0.936	116	3.728	0.013
Accommodation	14.775	3	0.644	116	22.953	0.000
Tourism Service	10.119	3	0.764	116	13.241	0.000
Interaction	5.565	3	0.882	116	6.310	0.001
Experience	13.940	3	0.665	116	20.951	0.000
Trip planner	9.533	3	0.779	116	12.232	0.000

The results of this cluster also show that the most visible instrument is the main difference between the four destinations (Medan, Langkat, Karo and Tobasa) starting from exploration (large or small group) as indicated by F-count = 34.892 (p-value = 0.000); motivation is shown by F-count = 31.627, (p-value = 0.000); commitment is shown by F-count = 23.917, (p-value = 0.000); accommodation is shown by F-count = 22.953, (p-value = 0.000); experience is shown by F-count = 20.951, (p-value = 0.000); tourism services are indicated by F-count = 13.241, (p-value = 0.000); trip planner is shown with F-count = 12.232, (p -value = 0.000); duration is shown by F-count = 10.471, (p-value = 0.000); orientation is indicated by F-count = 8.287, (p-value = 0.000); interaction is shown with F-count = 6.310, (p - value = 0.001); involvement shows F-count = 3.728, (p – value = 0.013).

Table 4. Number of Cases in Each Cluster

Respondent	Clusters 1	84.000
	Clusters 2	36.000
Respondent (Destination)	Clusters 1	30.000
	Clusters 2	37.000
	Clusters 3	22.000
	Clusters 4	31.000
Valid	120.000	
Missing	0.000	

Table 4, shows that cluster-1 has 84 respondents and cluster-2 has 36 respondents. Meanwhile, from the respondent data (destination), cluster-1 (Medan City) totaled 30 respondents, cluster-2 (Langkat Regency) totaled 37 respondents, cluster-3 (Karo Regency) totaled 22 respondents, and cluster-4 (Tobasa Regency) totaled 31 people. In principle, conjoint analysis aims to estimate the pattern of respondents' opinions, also known as Part-Worth estimates, and then compare it with actual respondents. The high correlation between estimated results and actual results is called predictive accuracy. From the results of the conjoint analysis, utility values, and attribute importance levels were also obtained, both for each respondent and as a whole (aggregate). The utility value from the aggregate analysis shows overall consumer preferences for tourism destination attributes while the importance value measure or attribute importance level from the aggregate analysis shows the relative level of importance of each attribute for travelers. Aggregate conjoint analysis for the two clusters soft ecotourist and hard ecotourist is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Attributes and Levels of Tourism Destinations

Soft Ecotourism			
Attribute	**Attribute Levels**	**Importance Weight Relative (%)**	**Utility**
Preference	Mountains	8.333%	0.083
	Coastal		-0.083
Tourist attraction	Diversity of natural wealth	33.333%	0.222
	Culture		-0.444
	Man-made results		0.222
Destination facilities (Amenities)	Accommodation	41.667%	0.417
	Comfort		0.417
Accessibility	Private Transportation	16.667%	0.222
	Public transport		-0.111
	Rental Transportation		-0.111
Hard Ecotourism			
Preference	Mountains	26.316%	0.417
	Coastal		-0.417
Tourist attraction	Diversity of natural wealth	42.105%	0.444
	Culture		0.444
	Man-made results		-0.889
Destination facilities (Amenities)	Accommodation	10.526%	0.111
	Comfort		-0.111
Accessibility	Private Transportation	21,053%	-0.667
	Public transport		0.333
	Rental Transportation		0.333

The results of the aggregate analysis of the attributes of the four ecotourism destinations for general preferences, respondents in the first group or soft ecotourism prefer ecotourism in the mountains with a utility value of 0.083 when compared to choosing ecotourism on the coast. Meanwhile, tourist preferences generally show that respondents in the second group or hard ecotourism prefer ecotourism in the mountains with a utility value of 0.417 when compared to choosing ecotourism destinations on the coast. For tourist attraction attributes, in general the first group of respondents (soft ecotourists) prefer the diversity of natural wealth and artificial products with respective utility values of 0.222 and 0.222 when compared with cultural tourist attractions. Meanwhile, tourist attraction attributes generally show that respondents in the second group (hard ecotourists) prefer tourist attractions that offer a diversity of natural riches, and cultural attractions with utility values of 0.444 and 0.444 respectively when compared to artificial tourist attractions. For attributes of amenities or tourist facilities in general, group 1 respondents (soft ecotourists) prioritize accommodation and high comfort with a utility value of 0.417. Meanwhile, for the attributes of amenities or tourist facilities in general, the second group of respondents (hard ecotourists) prioritized accommodation from tourism destinations with a utility value of 0.111 compared to comfort.

For the accessibility attribute of tourist destinations, in general the first group of respondents (soft tourists) prefer private transportation with a positive utility value of 0.222, when compared with public transportation and rental transportation. Meanwhile, for the accessibility attribute of tourist destinations, in general the second group of respondents (hard ecotourists) prioritize the use of public and rental transportation with a positive utility value of 0.333, when compared to using private transportation. In aggregate, the first group of respondents (soft ecotourists) assessed that the most important attribute in choosing a tourist destination was amenities (accommodation and comfort) (41.667%). Then followed by tourist attraction attributes (33.333%) and transportation accessibility to the destination (16.667%). After that, the preference attribute of geographical tourist destinations (8.333%). Meanwhile, in aggregate, respondents in the second group (hard ecotourists) considered that the most important attribute in choosing a tourist destination was the tourist attraction attribute (42.105%), followed by the tourist destination preference attribute (26.316%) and destination accessibility (21.053%) . Then followed by destination facility attributes (10.526%).

Table 6. Aggregate Correlations

Soft Ecotourism		
	Value	**Sig.**
Pearson's R	0.778	0.007
Kendall's know	0.775	0.005
Hard Ecotourism		
Pearson's R	0.825	0.003
Kendall's know	0.753	0.004

The aggregate correlation results show the results of measuring prediction accuracy to test the following hypothesis.

H0. There is no significant relationship between estimated preferences and actual preferences
Ha. There is a significant relationship between estimated preferences and actual preferences

For soft ecotourist, the results of the Pearson's R calculation show a p-value (0.007<0.05), and Kendall's tau shows a p-value (0.005<0.05). These results prove that there is a significant relationship between estimated preferences and actual preferences for tourists who are classified as soft ecotourists in four tourism destinations. Meanwhile, for hard ecotourism, the results of the Pearson's R calculation show a p-value (0.003<0.05) and Kendall's tau shows a p-value (0.004<0.05). These results prove that there is a significant relationship between estimated preferences and actual preferences for tourists who are classified as hard ecotourists in these four tourist destinations.

In aggregate, both soft ecotourists and hard ecotourists in this study proved the results of strong correlation significance tests (Pearson's R and Kendall's tau) between conjoint measurements and the actual opinions of tourists as a whole. Statistical calculations for Pearson's R correlation (0.778) and Kendall's tau (0.775) in the first group (soft ecotourist and for hard ecotourist statistical calculations for Pearson's R correlation (0.825) and Kendall's tau (0.753). The results of the analysis also show that tourists' actual opinions, both soft ecotourists and hard ecotourists have high accuracy as proven by Kendall's tau correlation significance test. In addition, overall, tourists' actual opinions regarding the important attributes of priority destination choices have different combinations of attributes. Tourists belonging to the soft ecotourist group emphasize the importance of amenity attributes, in this context comfort and accommodation. Then, for tourist attraction attributes, prefer destinations that offer man-made products or destinations that have a diversity of natural resources. Soft ecotourism tourists prefer driving private vehicles to tourist destinations rather than using public transportation. Another final attribute, they prefer to visit destinations in mountainous areas with cool air rather than visiting the coast. On the other hand, even though there are similarities in preferences in visiting destinations in mountainous areas, in aggregate there are hard ecotourist considerations Their priority in this context is to highlight the tourist attractions offered by a destination. Tourists who are classified as hard ecotourists prefer to visit destinations that offer cultural attractions and natural diversity rather than man-made attractions. They prefer to use public transportation or rent a vehicle rather than using private vehicles. Likewise, with amenities attributes, hard ecotourists prioritize comfort over the accommodation offered destination.

5. Conclusion

The average rating of the instrument from tourists (soft ecotourists) shows that the measure of comfort (accommodation) reaches the highest value while for tourists (hard ecotourists) it shows the highest measure of commitment to environmental issues. The differences in characteristics in these two clusters are proven by the highest F-count and p-value for each instrument. In this case, the most prominent difference in instruments between the two clusters formed (soft ecotourist and hard ecotourist) is shown in the highest measure of F-count accommodation = 81,656 and (p-value = 0.000). On the other hand, the instruments that do not have differences between the two clusters are the commitment, duration, and interaction instruments. Likewise, the results of cluster computing between destinations (Medan, Langkat, Karo, and Tobasa) show that the most visible instruments are the main differences between the four destinations starting from exploration (large or small groups); motivation (various or specific); commitment (pro-environmental; low or high level); accommodation (comfortable or uncomfortable); experience self experiences or others); tourism service (with or without tour operator services trip planner (travel package or independent); duration (short-trips or long-trips); orientation (sustainability ecotourism awareness; low or high); interaction (physical interaction: low or high involvement (passive or active involvement).

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