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GREEN PARADOX IN CREATIVE RURAL TOURISM: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND PILOT SCALE ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

Creative rural tourism destinations increasingly promote green practices to attract eco-conscious travelers, yet tourists do not always respond positively. This study addresses this phenomenon, termed the "green paradox", by developing a conceptual framework integrating the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, the Theory of Consumption Values, and Attribution Theory. The proposed model positions perceived authenticity as the stimulus that generates green perceived value, which influences revisit intention through two competing pathways: a positive pathway mediated by green satisfaction (via intrinsic attribution) and a negative pathway mediated by green skepticism (via extrinsic attribution). Eight propositions specify the relationships among five constructs. The study extends S-O-R from single mediation to a competing mediation architecture accommodating opposing evaluative processes within the organism stage. A pilot study (n = 97) using PLS-SEM via SmartPLS 3 confirms satisfactory psychometric properties for all 21 measurement items contextualized for Vietnamese creative rural tourism, with outer loadings ranging from 0.834 to 0.909, reliability coefficients exceeding 0.70, AVE values above 0.738, and discriminant validity established through both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios. The validated scales provide a foundation for subsequent large-scale empirical testing of the proposed framework.

Keywords: *green paradox, green perceived value, green skepticism, perceived authenticity, creative rural tourism*

A. INTRODUCTION

Creative rural tourism has emerged as a promising pathway toward sustainable development in rural areas, particularly across developing economies in Asia (Richards, 2011; Richards et al., 2025; UNWTO, 2023). By inviting visitors to participate in traditional craft-making, local farming, and community-based cultural activities, creative rural destinations offer an alternative to mass tourism that is rooted in the identity of local communities (Richards & Wilson, 2007). Many of these destinations have actively embraced green practices, positioning themselves as providers of "green value" for eco-conscious travelers (Y. Chen & Chang, 2012; Cheng et al., 2022). However, tourists do not always respond to green initiatives in a uniformly positive manner. Visitors can simultaneously appreciate the environmental benefits of a destination and harbor doubts about whether its green claims are genuine (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2019). This coexistence of satisfaction and skepticism represents what this

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study terms the “green paradox”, a phenomenon recently observed in the hotel sector (Salem et al., 2026) but not yet examined in creative rural tourism contexts.

The existing literature has approached the relationship between green value and tourist behavior through two separate streams. The first demonstrates that green perceived value enhances green satisfaction, strengthening revisit intention and loyalty (Y.S. Chen, 2010; Hashish et al., 2022; Khairy et al., 2023). The second shows that greenwashing perceptions fuel green skepticism, leading to distrust and reduced behavioral intentions (Nguyen et al., 2019; Promalessy & Handriana, 2024; Rehman et al., 2025). Although both streams have produced robust findings, they have developed in isolation. No existing model integrates green satisfaction and green skepticism as competing mediators within a single framework. Theoretically, the S-O-R framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) has been widely used in green tourism research (Karimi & Asgharzadeh, 2025; Su et al., 2021) but predominantly with single mediation models. The possibility that the organism stage may involve competing processes has remained unexplored. Moreover, perceived authenticity (Yi et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2025) has not been examined as an antecedent of green perceived value, and Attribution Theory (Kelley, 1973), despite its potential to explain why the same green value produces divergent evaluations, has rarely been applied in tourism to explain this branching mechanism (N. T. Pham et al., 2024).

Despite considerable progress, three critical gaps persist in the literature. First, existing studies have examined green satisfaction and green skepticism as separate outcomes, but no study has integrated them as competing mediators within a single framework to capture the simultaneous positive and negative evaluative processes triggered by green perceived value. Second, perceived authenticity, a construct central to rural tourism experiences, has not been investigated as an antecedent of green perceived value, despite theoretical grounds suggesting that the genuineness of green practices shapes tourists’ value perceptions. Third, Attribution Theory, which offers a parsimonious explanation for why identical green stimuli produce divergent evaluative responses, has rarely been applied in tourism contexts to explain this branching mechanism.

This study differs from prior work in three important ways. Unlike Salem et al. (2026), who examined the green paradox within a single-mediation model in the hotel sector, this study proposes a competing mediation architecture where green satisfaction and green skepticism operate simultaneously as opposing pathways. Furthermore, while previous S-O-R applications in green tourism have treated the organism stage as a unidirectional evaluative process, this study reconceptualizes it as a dual-pathway mechanism capable of producing contradictory behavioral outcomes. Finally, by contextualizing the framework in creative rural tourism, a setting where green practices are embedded in community identity rather than corporate strategy, this study tests whether the green paradox operates differently in authenticity-rich environments.

To address these gaps, this study develops a conceptual framework integrating the S-O-R framework, the Theory of Consumption Values (Sheth et al., 1991), and Attribution Theory, proposing a competing mediation model in which green perceived value influences revisit intention through both green satisfaction and green skepticism, with perceived authenticity as the stimulus. Eight propositions are advanced. Additionally, a pilot study (n = 97) using SmartPLS 3 provides a preliminary assessment of 21 measurement items across five constructs. This study contributes theoretically by extending S-O-R from single to competing mediation, methodologically by offering a validated scale set for Vietnamese creative rural tourism, and practically by highlighting the need for authenticity and transparency in green destination branding. From a practical standpoint, understanding the green paradox is critical for destination managers who invest in green positioning: if green value simultaneously generates satisfaction and skepticism, strategies that focus solely on enhancing green value without managing authenticity perceptions may be counterproductive.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Underpinning theories

S-O-R Framework. The S-O-R framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) posits that environmental stimuli (S) influence individuals' internal cognitive and affective states (O), which shape behavioral responses (R). In green tourism, it has been applied to show how green practices influence tourist evaluations and behaviors (Bai & Lai, 2025; Hashish et al., 2022; Karimi & Asgharzadeh, 2025; Su et al., 2021). This study extends the framework by proposing that the organism stage may involve competing cognitive processes, where the same stimulus simultaneously triggers both positive and negative evaluative responses, rather than a single mediation pathway.

Theory of Consumption Values (TCV). TCV (Sheth et al., 1991) identifies five value dimensions driving consumer choice: functional, emotional, social, epistemic, and conditional. It has been applied in green marketing (Baah & Kim, 2025; Nekmahmud et al., 2022) and Vietnamese hospitality (T.N. Pham, 2026). In this study, TCV explains how perceived authenticity generates green perceived value: authentic rural experiences activate functional value (environmental benefits), emotional value (community connection), and epistemic value (discovering indigenous sustainability practices).

Attribution Theory. Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973) explains how individuals assign causal explanations, intrinsic (genuine motivation) or extrinsic (strategic self-interest), to observed behaviors. Applied in green marketing (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2019; Rehman et al., 2025), it provides the mechanism for the "green paradox": when tourists attribute green practices to genuine commitment, satisfaction follows; when they attribute them to commercial opportunism, skepticism emerges.

Theoretical integration

The three theories serve complementary functions. S-O-R provides the structural architecture (PA as stimulus; GPV, GS, GSk as organism; RI as response). TCV explains why perceived authenticity generates green perceived value (the PA → GPV link). Attribution Theory explains why the same GPV diverges into competing pathways, satisfaction versus skepticism. Together, they transform the conventional single mediation S-O-R model (S → O → R) into a competing mediation architecture ($S \rightarrow O_1 \rightarrow O_{2a}/O_{2b} \rightarrow R$).

Table 1. Summary of underpinning theories

Theory	Role	Mechanism	Gap
S-O-R (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974)	Structural architecture	PA (S) → GPV/GS/GSk (O) → RI (R)	Single mediation only; competing pathways unexplored
TCV (Sheth et al., 1991)	Explains PA → GPV	Authentic experiences activate functional, emotional, epistemic value	Not applied to rural tourism contexts
Attribution Theory (Kelley, 1973)	Explains GPV → GS vs. GSk	Intrinsic attribution → GS; extrinsic → GSk	Not integrated with S-O-R in tourism

Key constructs

Perceived Authenticity

Perceived authenticity refers to tourists' subjective judgment of whether a destination, its cultural expressions, and its practices are genuine, original, and true to local identity (Yi et al., 2018). In tourism research, authenticity has been conceptualized from multiple perspectives, including objective authenticity (adherence to original forms), constructive authenticity (socially negotiated meanings), and existential authenticity (personal feelings of connection) (Zhou et al.,

2025). The construct has been extensively examined as a predictor of perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions across heritage tourism (Yi et al., 2018), marine tourism (Su et al., 2021), cultural tourism (Sharma & Aggarwal, 2025), and traditional village settings (Lin, 2024). However, its role as an antecedent of green perceived value remains unexplored. In creative rural tourism, where green practices such as organic farming and traditional craftsmanship are embedded within the daily life of local communities rather than externally imposed, perceived authenticity may function as the foundational stimulus that shapes how tourists evaluate the environmental value of their experience.

Green Perceived Value

Green perceived value is defined as a consumer's overall appraisal of the net benefit of a product or service based on environmental considerations (Y. Chen & Chang, 2012). The construct captures the extent to which tourists believe that a destination's green attributes deliver meaningful environmental benefits relative to what they sacrifice (e.g., cost, convenience). Green perceived value has been examined in sustainable hospitality (Khairy et al., 2023), eco-friendly hotels (Hashish et al., 2022), and green consumer behavior (Nekmahmud et al., 2022). In the Vietnamese context, T.N. Pham (2026) applied the Theory of Consumption Values to model green service intentions among tourists. Despite this growing body of evidence, green perceived value has not been examined in creative rural tourism, nor has it been positioned as a construct that can simultaneously trigger both positive and negative evaluative outcomes within a single framework.

Green Satisfaction

Green satisfaction refers to tourists' pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment derived specifically from the environmental and sustainability aspects of their experience (Y.S. Chen, 2010). It captures the extent to which a destination's green practices meet or exceed tourists' environmental expectations. The relationship between green perceived value and green satisfaction has been well established in green marketing (Y. Chen & Chang, 2012), hospitality (Cheng et al., 2022; Moise et al., 2018), and ecotourism (Karimi & Asgharzadeh, 2025). However, existing studies have typically modeled green satisfaction as the sole evaluative outcome of green value, without considering the possibility that tourists may simultaneously develop skeptical responses toward the same green attributes that generate their satisfaction.

Green Skepticism

Green skepticism is defined as consumers' tendency to doubt or disbelieve environmental claims made by organizations (Mohr et al., 1998). In the tourism and hospitality literature, green skepticism has been linked to greenwashing perceptions, reduced trust, and negative behavioral intentions (Nguyen et al., 2019; B. T. Pham & Huynh, 2026; Promalessy & Handriana, 2024). Salem et al. (2026) identified the coexistence of green trust erosion and green value perception as the "green paradox" in sustainable hotels. Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017) and Rehman et al. (2025) examined causes and consequences of green skepticism through the lens of Attribution Theory, demonstrating that extrinsic attributions of firms' green motives fuel skeptical responses. However, green skepticism has not been studied in creative rural tourism, where the authenticity of community-based practices may moderate or reshape the attribution processes that generate skepticism.

Revisit Intention

Revisit intention reflects a tourist's willingness to return to a destination in the future (Zeithaml et al., 1996). It serves as a widely used behavioral outcome in tourism research due to its practical implications for destination competitiveness and sustainability. Revisit intention has been linked to satisfaction, perceived value, trust, and attachment across various tourism contexts (Lin, 2024; Moise et al., 2018). In creative rural tourism, revisit intention is particularly relevant

because the long-term viability of rural destinations depends on repeat visitation. While the positive pathway from satisfaction to revisit intention is well established, the negative pathway through which green skepticism undermines revisit intention has received less attention, particularly in rural and community-based tourism settings where green claims are tied to local identity rather than corporate marketing.

Conceptual framework and propositions

Building on the integrated theoretical framework, this section develops eight propositions that specify the relationships among the five constructs. Each proposition is grounded in prior empirical evidence and theoretical reasoning. In creative rural tourism destinations, authentic green practices are embedded within the daily life of local communities rather than being externally imposed. Organic farming, traditional handicraft techniques, and community-based environmental stewardship represent genuine expressions of local identity. Drawing on TCV, this authenticity activates green perceived value through multiple channels: the functional value of tangible environmental benefits, the emotional value of participating in genuine community traditions, and the epistemic value of discovering indigenous sustainability practices. Empirically, perceived authenticity has been established as a significant predictor of perceived value in heritage tourism (Yi et al., 2018), marine tourism (Su et al., 2021), and cultural tourism (Sharma & Aggarwal, 2025; Zhou et al., 2025). Therefore:

P1. Perceived authenticity has a positive effect on green perceived value.

Drawing on Attribution Theory, when tourists perceive high green value and attribute the destination's green practices to genuine environmental commitment (intrinsic attribution), they experience fulfillment and satisfaction with the green aspects of their visit. The congruence between perceived green benefits and attributed sincerity produces a positive evaluative outcome. This relationship has been empirically supported in green marketing (Y. Chen & Chang, 2012), hospitality (Hashish et al., 2022), and green consumer behavior (Khairy et al., 2023). Therefore:

P2. Green perceived value has a positive effect on green satisfaction.

Importantly, green perceived value does not preclude skepticism. Through the lens of Attribution Theory, when tourists perceive high green value but detect inconsistencies between green claims and actual practices, for example, an "eco-village" with excessive commercialization, or green labels alongside visible environmental degradation, they engage in extrinsic attribution, inferring that the green positioning serves commercial purposes rather than reflecting genuine commitment. This attribution process generates skepticism. Nguyen et al. (2019) demonstrated this mechanism in green consumption; Promalessy and Handriana (2024) confirmed it in greenwashing contexts; and Salem et al. (2026) identified this very phenomenon as the "green paradox" in sustainable hotels. Therefore:

P3. Green perceived value has a positive effect on green skepticism.

When tourists are satisfied with the green aspects of their creative rural tourism experience, specifically when they perceive that the environmental benefits were genuine and met their expectations, they develop favorable evaluations that motivate return visits. This positive affective state reduces perceived risk associated with future visits and strengthens the emotional bond with the destination. The satisfaction-loyalty link is among the most established findings in tourism research (Y.S. Chen, 2010; Hashish et al., 2022; Moise et al., 2018). Therefore:

P4. Green satisfaction has a positive effect on revisit intention.

Conversely, when tourists become skeptical about a destination's green claims, they perceive a trust deficit that creates a psychological barrier against future engagement. The perceived dishonesty or inconsistency damages the destination's credibility, making tourists less willing to invest time and resources in a return visit (Nguyen et al., 2019; N. T. Pham et al., 2024; Rehman et al., 2025). Therefore:

P5. Green skepticism has a negative effect on revisit intention.

Beyond its indirect effects through green satisfaction and green skepticism, green perceived value may also directly influence revisit intention. Tourists who perceive high green value may develop an overall positive evaluation of the destination that directly motivates revisit intention, regardless of whether they feel fully satisfied or harbor some skepticism. This direct effect has been confirmed by Y. Chen and Chang (2012), Cheng et al. (2022), and Khairy et al. (2023). Therefore:

P6. Green perceived value has a positive effect on revisit intention.

The central theoretical contribution of this study lies in proposing that green perceived value influences revisit intention through two simultaneous but opposing indirect pathways. The positive pathway operates through green satisfaction (GPV → GS → RI), where high green perceived value, combined with intrinsic attribution, generates satisfaction that strengthens revisit intention. The negative pathway operates through green skepticism (GPV → GSk → RI), where the same green perceived value, combined with extrinsic attribution, triggers skepticism that weakens revisit intention. This competing mediation structure represents the "green paradox" in creative rural tourism. The net indirect effect on revisit intention depends on the relative strength of these two opposing pathways: when green satisfaction dominates, the overall effect is positive; when green skepticism dominates, the overall effect is attenuated or may become negative. This dual-pathway architecture moves beyond the assumption that green value uniformly benefits tourist behavior and recognizes that the effectiveness of green positioning is contingent upon the attributional processes tourists engage in. Therefore:

P7. Green satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between green perceived value and revisit intention.

P8. Green skepticism negatively mediates the relationship between green perceived value and revisit intention.

Proposed conceptual model

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual model illustrating the competing mediation architecture. Perceived authenticity (PA) functions as the stimulus, generating green perceived value (GPV) as the primary organism-level evaluation. GPV then branches into two competing pathways: a positive pathway through green satisfaction (GS) and a negative pathway through green skepticism (GSk), both converging on revisit intention (RI) as the behavioral response. A direct path from GPV to RI is also proposed. Solid lines represent direct effects; P7 (GPV → GS → RI) captures the positive indirect effect, while P8 (GPV → GSk → RI) captures the negative indirect effect.

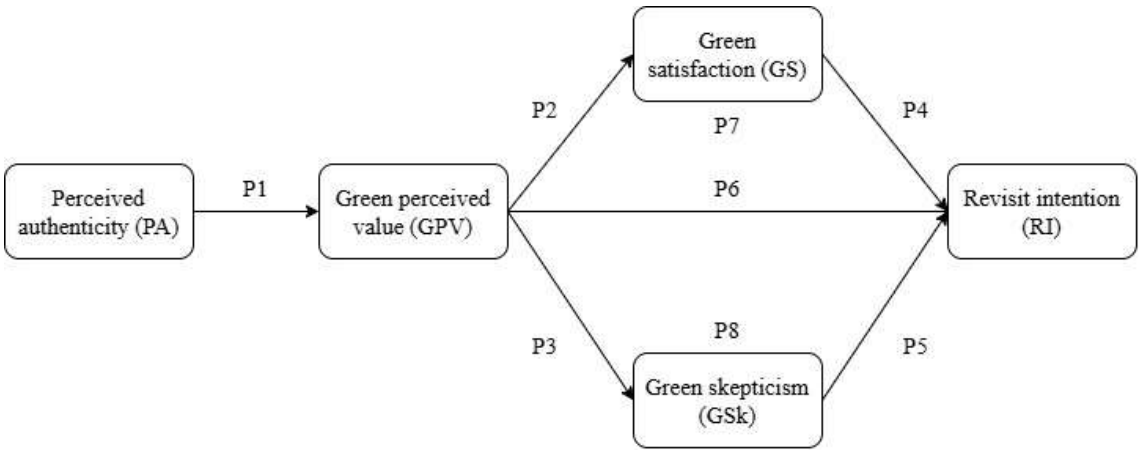


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model

Table 2. Summary of propositions

Proposition	Relationship	Direction	Theoretical Basis
P1	PA → GPV	+	S-O-R + TCV
P2	GPV → GS	+	Attribution Theory (intrinsic)
P3	GPV → GSk	+	Attribution Theory (extrinsic)
P4	GS → RI	+	Satisfaction-Loyalty framework
P5	GSk → RI	−	Green skepticism literature
P6	GPV → RI	+	Green perceived value literature
P7	GPV → GS → RI	+ (indirect)	Positive mediation pathway
P8	GPV → GSk → RI	− (indirect)	Negative mediation pathway

Pilot study

Before proceeding to a large-scale empirical test, a pilot study was conducted to serve two purposes: (1) to assess the psychometric properties (reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity) of the 21 measurement items adapted and contextualized for Vietnamese creative rural tourism, and (2) to identify any items requiring modification or removal before large-scale deployment. PLS-SEM was selected as the analytical technique because it is suitable for scale validation with small samples, does not require multivariate normality assumptions, and is widely recommended for exploratory research in tourism and hospitality studies (Hair et al., 2019).

Measurement scales

Twenty-one items across five constructs were adapted from validated instruments and contextualized for Vietnamese creative rural tourism. PA (5 items) adapted from Yi et al. (2018) and Zhang et al. (2021); GPV (5 items) from Y. Chen and Chang (2012) and Khairy et al. (2023); GS (4 items) from Y.S. Chen (2010) and Hashish et al. (2022); GSk (4 items) from Mohr et al. (1998) and Nguyen et al. (2019); RI (3 items) from Zeithaml et al. (1996) and Lin (2024). All items used a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was back-translated per Brislin (1970).

Sample and procedure

Survey design. The questionnaire comprised three sections: (1) screening questions to confirm eligibility (age ≥ 18, having visited at least one creative rural tourism destination in Vietnam within the past 12 months), (2) 21 measurement items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), and (3) demographic questions (gender, age, education, visit frequency). The questionnaire was originally developed in English, translated into Vietnamese by a bilingual researcher, and back-translated by an independent translator following Brislin's (1970) protocol. A pre-test with 10 graduate students in tourism management was conducted to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness of the Vietnamese version.

Data collection procedure. Data were collected during September 2026 via an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The survey link was shared through social media groups related to Vietnamese domestic tourism, university networks, and tourism community forums. Convenience sampling was employed, which is appropriate for a pilot study aimed at scale validation rather than hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2019). Respondents were informed of the voluntary nature of participation and the confidentiality of their responses.

Sample characteristics. A total of 112 responses were received, of which 97 were valid after removing incomplete responses and/or respondents who failed the screening criteria. This sample size exceeds the recommended minimum of 30 observations for PLS-SEM pilot studies (Hair et al., 2022) and satisfies the 10-times rule (10 × the maximum number of arrows pointing at any construct = 10 × 3 = 30).

Table 3. Demographic profile (n = 97)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	38	39.2
	Female	51	52.6

	Other	8	8.2
Age	18–25	24	24.7
	26–35	35	36.1
	36–45	20	20.6
	Over 45	18	18.6
Education	High school or below	13	13.4
	College/University	62	63.9
	Postgraduate	22	22.7
Monthly income	Below 5 million VND	22	22.7
	5–10 million VND	39	40.2
	10–20 million VND	23	23.7
	Over 20 million VND	13	13.4
Visit frequency	1 time	26	26.8
	2–3 times	52	53.6
	More than 3 times	19	19.6

C. RESULTS

PLS-SEM via SmartPLS 3 was employed. All outer loadings exceeded 0.708 (range: 0.834-0.909). Reliability and convergent validity were satisfactory across all constructs.

Table 4. Measurement model assessment

Construct	Loading range	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
PA (5 items)	0.834-0.883	0.911	0.934	0.738
GPV (5 items)	0.854-0.876	0.918	0.939	0.754
GS (4 items)	0.859-0.886	0.894	0.926	0.759
GSk (4 items)	0.853-0.889	0.895	0.927	0.760
RI (3 items)	0.866-0.909	0.869	0.920	0.792

Note. Thresholds: Loading ≥ 0.708; α ≥ 0.70; CR ≥ 0.70; AVE ≥ 0.50 (Hair et al., 2022).

Discriminant validity was confirmed via the Fornell-Larcker criterion (all √AVE > inter-construct correlations) and HTMT ratios (all < 0.85; Henseler et al., 2015). GSk showed theoretically consistent negative correlations with GPV (r = -0.186), GS (r = -0.198), and RI (r = -0.214).

Table 5. Fornell-Larcker criterion

	PA	GPV	GS	GSk	RI
PA	**0.859**				
GPV	0.454	**0.868**			
GS	0.064	0.599	**0.871**		
GSk	0.023	-0.186	-0.198	**0.872**	
RI	-0.075	0.023	0.336	-0.214	**0.890**

Note. Diagonal = √AVE; off-diagonal = correlations.

The pilot results confirm that the measurement model meets all established thresholds for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Importantly, the theoretically expected negative correlations between GSk and the other constructs (GPV: r = -0.186; GS: r = -0.198; RI: r = -0.214) provide preliminary evidence of nomological validity, suggesting that the scales capture the intended opposing dynamics of the green paradox. However, it must be emphasized that these results pertain exclusively to the measurement model; no structural path coefficients, mediation effects, or proposition testing was conducted at this stage. The propositions remain theoretical until tested on a larger sample with full structural model estimation. No items required removal. The scales are validated for large-scale deployment.

D. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has developed a conceptual framework and conducted a pilot scale assessment to address a significant gap in the green tourism literature. By integrating the S-O-R framework, the Theory of Consumption Values, and Attribution Theory, the proposed model introduces a competing mediation architecture in which green perceived value simultaneously generates green satisfaction and green skepticism, with opposing consequences for revisit intention. The pilot study confirmed that all 21 measurement items demonstrate satisfactory psychometric properties, providing a validated instrument for subsequent empirical testing.

Theoretical contributions

The primary theoretical contribution lies in extending the S-O-R framework from a conventional single mediation model to a competing mediation architecture within the organism stage. Prior applications of S-O-R in green tourism have consistently adopted a unidirectional positive pathway, assuming that green stimuli produce favorable organism-level evaluations that lead to positive behavioral responses (Bai & Lai, 2025; Hashish et al., 2022; Karimi & Asgharzadeh, 2025; Su et al., 2021). This study challenges that assumption by proposing that the organism component is not a uniform evaluative process but rather a site of evaluative tension, where the same cognitive input (GPV) can simultaneously trigger both positive (green satisfaction) and negative (green skepticism) evaluative outcomes. The competing mediation structure ($S \rightarrow O_1 \rightarrow O_{2a}/O_{2b} \rightarrow R$) represents a more realistic depiction of tourist psychological processing, acknowledging that visitors to green destinations rarely form purely positive or purely negative judgments. This extension contributes to the broader theoretical discourse on tourist decision-making by demonstrating that existing frameworks may underestimate the complexity of cognitive processing in sustainability-laden consumption contexts.

The second contribution concerns the theoretical positioning of perceived authenticity as the stimulus that initiates the green value formation process. While perceived authenticity has been extensively studied in heritage and cultural tourism (Sharma & Aggarwal, 2025; Yi et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2025), it has not been linked to green perceived value through the lens of TCV. This study proposes that authentic experiences at creative rural destinations activate multiple value dimensions simultaneously: functional value from tangible environmental benefits, emotional value from meaningful participation in community traditions, and epistemic value from discovering indigenous sustainability practices. By grounding the PA → GPV relationship in TCV, this study moves beyond the general observation that "authenticity enhances value" and provides a theoretically specified mechanism explaining how and why this occurs in creative rural tourism settings. This integration responds to calls for more theoretically grounded explanations of value formation in sustainable tourism (Baah & Kim, 2025; T.N. Pham, 2026).

The third contribution is the application of Attribution Theory to explain the divergence from green perceived value into competing evaluative pathways. While Attribution Theory has been employed in green marketing research (Javed et al., 2023; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Rehman et al., 2025), it has rarely been integrated with the S-O-R framework in tourism to explain why the same level of green perceived value can produce both satisfaction and skepticism. This study introduces the intrinsic-extrinsic attribution mechanism as the theoretical engine driving the "green paradox", providing a more nuanced understanding of tourist evaluative processes than the prevailing approach, which treats green satisfaction and green skepticism as outcomes of entirely separate antecedents. Whereas Salem et al. (2026) identified the green paradox phenomenon in sustainable hotels using a single-mediation model, this study advances the theoretical explanation by specifying the attributional mechanism through which the paradox operates and embedding it within a competing mediation architecture.

Methodological contributions

The pilot study offers a validated set of 21 measurement items across five constructs specifically contextualized for creative rural tourism in Vietnam. A notable contribution is the

adaptation and preliminary validation of a green skepticism scale for the creative rural tourism context. While scales for green skepticism have been developed in consumer product and corporate contexts (Mohr et al., 1998; Nguyen et al., 2019), their application to rural tourism destinations represents a new contextual adaptation. The four GSk items demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.895$, CR = 0.927) and convergent validity (AVE = 0.760), and exhibited theoretically consistent negative correlations with green satisfaction ($r = -0.198$) and revisit intention ($r = -0.214$), providing preliminary evidence of nomological validity for the opposing role of skepticism within the proposed framework. However, it must be emphasized that these results pertain exclusively to the measurement model; no structural path coefficients, mediation effects, or proposition testing was conducted at this stage. The propositions remain theoretical until tested on a larger sample with full structural model estimation and bootstrapping. The validated scales provide a foundation for such large-scale deployment.

Practical implications

The conceptual framework offers several actionable insights for destination managers, local communities, and policymakers involved in creative rural tourism development.

First, the competing mediation architecture highlights that green destination branding is inherently a dual-edged strategy. Promoting green value does not automatically lead to positive outcomes; if visitors perceive the green positioning as superficial or commercially motivated, the same green perceived value that could generate satisfaction instead fuels skepticism, ultimately undermining revisit intention. This challenges the prevailing managerial assumption that more green communication is always beneficial and suggests that the quality and credibility of green claims matter more than their quantity.

Second, the central role of perceived authenticity underscores the importance of preserving genuine cultural and environmental practices at creative rural destinations. Destination managers should invest in maintaining the organic relationship between local communities, traditional craftsmanship, and environmental stewardship rather than creating artificial "green" experiences designed primarily for tourist consumption. Staging sustainability, such as labeling conventional practices as "eco-friendly" without substantive environmental commitment, is likely to trigger extrinsic attributions and heighten green skepticism (B. T. Pham & Huynh, 2026; Promalessy & Handriana, 2024).

Third, to mitigate green skepticism, destinations should adopt transparency as a core communication strategy. Providing concrete, verifiable evidence of environmental practices, third-party certifications, visible waste reduction systems, documented conservation outcomes, can shift tourists' causal attributions from extrinsic to intrinsic, thereby reducing skepticism and strengthening satisfaction. Community involvement in communicating green practices is particularly effective in rural settings, as tourists tend to view local residents as more credible sources of environmental information than commercial marketing materials (Salem et al., 2026).

Finally, an optimal green destination strategy requires simultaneous attention to both pathways: enhancing perceived authenticity and green perceived value while proactively addressing potential sources of skepticism represents a balanced approach that maximizes green satisfaction and minimizes the negative effects of green skepticism on revisit intention.

Limitations and future research

This study, as a conceptual paper with a pilot scale assessment, carries several limitations. First, the eight propositions have not been subjected to empirical testing. While grounded in established theories and supported by prior evidence from related contexts, the competing mediation mechanism (GPV → GS vs. GPV → GSk → RI) remains theoretical. The actual relative strength and significance of these opposing pathways can only be determined through structural model estimation with bootstrapping on a sufficiently large sample. Future research should prioritize a large-scale empirical study employing PLS-SEM with bootstrapping (5,000

resamples) on a sample of 350 to 400 respondents to estimate structural path coefficients and test the specific indirect effects for both the positive (GPV → GS → RI) and negative (GPV → GSk → RI) pathways.

Second, the pilot study was conducted with a relatively small sample (n = 97) using convenience sampling, which limits the generalizability of the psychometric results. The pilot was further restricted to the measurement model only; no structural path estimation or mediation analysis was performed. Additionally, the use of an online survey may introduce self-selection bias. Future research should employ stratified sampling across multiple creative rural tourism destinations with varying levels of commercialization (e.g., highly commercialized sites such as Bat Trang versus emerging sites such as Duong Lam) to enhance external validity and enable Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) examining whether the relative strength of the two pathways differs across destination types.

Third, the study context is confined to creative rural tourism destinations in Vietnam. The proposed relationships may not generalize to other types of green tourism destinations (e.g., ecotourism lodges, marine tourism, urban green hotels) or to other cultural and institutional settings where tourists' attributional processes may operate differently. Cross-cultural replications in other Southeast Asian and East Asian settings (e.g., community-based tourism in Thailand, rural tourism in Japan) would test the boundary conditions of the framework and enhance its theoretical generalizability.

Fourth, the proposed model does not include moderating variables. Future research should incorporate potential moderators such as (a) visit frequency (first-time versus repeat visitors), which may alter the strength of the satisfaction pathway, (b) tourists' prior environmental concern, which may influence susceptibility to green skepticism, and (c) perceived level of destination commercialization, which may shift the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic attribution. These moderators could be tested through Multi-Group Analysis or interaction terms within the structural model.

E. CONCLUSION

This study developed a conceptual framework addressing the green paradox in creative rural tourism by integrating the S-O-R framework, the Theory of Consumption Values, and Attribution Theory into a competing mediation architecture. The framework proposes that green perceived value, generated by perceived authenticity, simultaneously produces green satisfaction (via intrinsic attribution) and green skepticism (via extrinsic attribution), with opposing effects on revisit intention. A pilot study (n = 97) validated 21 measurement items across five constructs, confirming satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity for the Vietnamese creative rural tourism context. The study contributes to sustainable tourism theory by demonstrating that the organism stage of the S-O-R framework can accommodate competing evaluative processes, and provides destination managers with a diagnostic lens for understanding why green positioning does not always yield positive behavioral outcomes. The validated scales and conceptual model establish a foundation for large-scale empirical testing.

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