

Article

Perceived Sustainability Communication and Tourist Behavioral Intention in Community-Based Tourism: The Sequential Mediating Roles of Destination Personality and Destination Image

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Abstract

Community-based tourism (CBT) destinations create sustainability value that tourists may not fully observe during short visits. This study examines how perceived sustainability communication is associated with tourist support. Its originality lies in showing that sustainability communication in CBT is not directly associated with destination image or behavioral intention but appears to operate through destination personality as a symbolic interpretation mechanism before destination evaluation. Drawing on signaling theory and the stimulus–organism–response framework, perceived sustainability communication is conceptualized as a sustainability signal, destination personality as symbolic interpretation, destination image as cognitive–affective evaluation, and behavioral intention as tourist support. Data from 390 domestic tourists visiting six CBT destinations in Surat Thani Province, Thailand, were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The results show that perceived sustainability communication was associated with destination personality, which was subsequently associated with destination image and behavioral intention. Destination image was also associated with behavioral intention, while the direct associations with destination image and behavioral intention were not significant. Destination personality and destination image sequentially mediated the relationship. IPMA identified destination personality as the primary managerial priority, followed by destination image. The findings suggest that sustainability messages become behaviorally meaningful through symbolic interpretation and destination evaluation.

Keywords: sustainability communication; community-based tourism; destination personality; destination image; behavioral intention; tourist support



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1. Introduction

Community-based tourism (CBT) destinations create value that extends beyond attractions, services, and visitor experiences. Ideally, CBT supports local livelihoods, preserves cultural identity, encourages community participation, protects environmental resources, and distributes tourism benefits more fairly within host communities (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Lee & Jan, 2019; Zielinski et al., 2020). Recent CBT scholarship has also emphasized sustainability, stakeholder participation, heritage conservation, resident well-being, and visitor experience (Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023). Yet many CBT sustainability values are

embedded in community participation, benefit-sharing arrangements, cultural preservation, and environmental management practices (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Lee & Jan, 2019; Zielinski et al., 2020). Because these values are process-based and not always directly observable during short tourist visits, sustainability communication is needed to make responsible practices, community values, and destination meanings more visible and interpretable to tourists (Font & McCabe, 2017; Tölkes, 2018). This creates an important communication challenge for CBT destinations: sustainability values must first be made visible, credible, and interpretable before they can shape tourists' symbolic evaluations and support for CBT destinations.

In this study, perceived sustainability communication refers to tourists' perceptions of how CBT destinations communicate social, environmental, and economic sustainability values. This conceptualization is consistent with sustainability communication research in tourism, which suggests that sustainability messages should be treated not merely as promotional content, but as a means of making responsible practices, community values, and destination meanings more visible and interpretable to tourists (Font & McCabe, 2017; Tölkes, 2018). This issue is also relevant to research on sustainable tourist behavior, which emphasizes the need to understand how tourists form intentions and behaviors in response to sustainability-related contexts and information (Li et al., 2024). Recent tourism studies further indicate that tourist behavioral intention is associated not only with destination attributes but also with psychological, informational, experiential, and evaluative factors, including destination image, perceived value, perceived safety, memorable experiences, emotional events, and brand value (Abror et al., 2025; Awais-E-Yazdan et al., 2025; Hurdawaty et al., 2025; Jimenez-García et al., 2025; Zhu et al., 2024).

Although prior research has established destination image as a strong predictor of behavioral intention (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020), less is known about how sustainability-related communication in CBT is transformed into tourist support for a destination. Existing studies have linked information quality, storytelling, digital communication, trust, perceived safety, and experience value to tourist responses (Kim et al., 2017; Ghaderi et al., 2024; Awais-E-Yazdan et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2025; Shneikat et al., 2025; M. Zhang et al., 2026). However, the central issue in CBT is not simply whether communication matters, but how sustainability communication becomes behaviorally meaningful when many sustainability practices are intangible and not directly observable to tourists (Font & McCabe, 2017; Tölkes, 2018).

To address this gap, this study integrates signaling theory with the stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) framework. Signaling theory explains how receivers use observable signals to infer less visible qualities under conditions of information asymmetry (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011). In CBT, tourists may not be able to verify whether community benefits are fairly distributed or whether environmental and cultural practices are genuinely embedded in destination management (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Lee & Jan, 2019; Dodds et al., 2018; Zielinski et al., 2020). They may therefore rely on perceived sustainability communication as a signal of sincerity, responsibility, authenticity, community orientation, and environmental concern (Connelly et al., 2011; Font & McCabe, 2017; Tölkes, 2018). The S–O–R framework further explains how external stimuli are linked to internal psychological mechanisms and subsequent responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In this study, perceived sustainability communication is conceptualized as a communication-based stimulus, destination personality and destination image as tourists' internal interpretive and evaluative mechanisms, and behavioral intention as the tourist response.

The prioritization of destination personality ahead of destination image is central to the proposed model. Destination personality captures the human-like characteristics tourists associate with a place, such as sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication,

and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). Destination image, by contrast, reflects tourists' broader cognitive and affective evaluation of the destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002). In CBT, tourists may first interpret sustainability communication as evidence that a destination is sincere, responsible, authentic, warm, or close to nature (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Tölkes, 2018). These symbolic interpretations may then be associated with destination image and behavioral intention. Because alternative direct pathways are also theoretically plausible, this study examines both the proposed sequential pathway and relevant direct paths between the constructs.

Empirically, this study examines six CBT destinations in Surat Thani Province, Thailand. These destinations combine natural resources, local livelihoods, cultural identity, environmental stewardship, and community participation. The regional context is appropriate for examining perceived sustainability communication because CBT experiences in this area depend strongly on communicating local social, environmental, and economic values to visitors. At the same time, the findings should be interpreted within the context of domestic tourists visiting CBT destinations in southern Thailand.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it advances sustainability communication research in tourism by conceptualizing perceived sustainability communication as a signaling and meaning-making mechanism rather than a merely informational or promotional activity. Second, it extends destination personality and destination branding research by positioning destination personality as the symbolic mechanism through which tourists interpret sustainability communication as destination character. Third, it contributes to destination image and tourist behavior research by explaining how sustainability communication is associated with tourist support through a symbolic–evaluative pathway involving destination personality and destination image. In practical terms, the study offers guidance for CBT managers seeking to communicate sustainability in ways that strengthen a credible, sincere, and authentic destination personality, enhance destination image, and encourage future behavioral intention.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Perceived Sustainability Communication in Community-Based Tourism

Community-based tourism (CBT) is grounded in the principle that tourism should generate value for host communities while preserving cultural identity, supporting local livelihoods, encouraging community participation, and protecting environmental resources (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Lee & Jan, 2019; Zielinski et al., 2020). In CBT destinations, many sustainability values are embedded in community participation, benefit-sharing arrangements, cultural preservation, environmental management, and local livelihood support (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Lee & Jan, 2019; Zielinski et al., 2020). Because these values are process-based and not always directly observable during short tourist visits, communication becomes central to how tourists recognize, interpret, and evaluate the sustainability value of CBT destinations (Font & McCabe, 2017; Tölkes, 2018). Tourists may experience local activities, landscapes, products, or cultural performances, but they may not directly know whether tourism benefits are fairly shared, whether environmental practices are consistently implemented, or whether cultural preservation is genuinely embedded in destination management.

In this study, perceived sustainability communication refers to tourists' perceptions of how CBT destinations communicate social, environmental, and economic sustainability values. These three dimensions are consistent with the multidimensional logic of sustainability and sustainable tourism, which emphasizes the interdependence of social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and economic contribution (Elkington, 1997; Font & McCabe, 2017; Lee & Jan, 2019; Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023). Recent green tourism

research similarly emphasizes that sustainability-oriented tourism should address environmental protection, socio-cultural integrity, and economic viability for host communities (V. A. T. Nguyen et al., 2026). In the present study, social communication concerns how destinations communicate community participation, cultural preservation, safety, and fair benefit sharing. Environmental communication concerns how destinations communicate natural resource conservation, waste reduction, environmental care, and conservation activities. Economic communication concerns how destinations communicate local product support, income generation, employment opportunities, transparent management, and sustainable community economic development.

Importantly, perceived sustainability communication is conceptualized as a communication construct rather than an objective measure of sustainability performance. It captures how tourists perceive the clarity, credibility, and meaning of sustainability-related messages. This distinction is important because tourists' responses depend not only on whether sustainability practices exist, but also on whether such practices are communicated in ways that tourists can understand and interpret. The measurement logic is consistent with the source–message–channel–receiver understanding of communication, in which the community or destination functions as the source; sustainability values form the message; local guides, signage, interpretation, printed materials, and digital media act as channels; and tourists serve as receivers (Berlo, 1960). Thus, perceived sustainability communication reflects tourists' reception and interpretation of communicated sustainability values. This issue is also relevant to sustainable tourist behavior research, which emphasizes the need to understand how tourists form intentions and actions in response to sustainability-related contexts and information (Li et al., 2024).

2.2. Theoretical Foundations: Signaling Theory and the Stimulus–Organism–Response Framework

Signaling theory explains how receivers rely on observable signals to infer less visible qualities under conditions of information asymmetry (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011). In CBT, tourists may not be able to directly verify whether community benefits are fairly distributed or whether cultural and environmental practices are genuinely embedded in destination management. These qualities are often linked to community participation, benefit-sharing arrangements, cultural preservation, environmental management, and operational conditions that are not fully visible during short visits (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Lee & Jan, 2019; Zielinski et al., 2020). Under such information asymmetry, tourists may rely on perceived sustainability communication as an observable signal of sincerity, responsibility, authenticity, competence, community orientation, and environmental concern (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011). In tourism contexts, sustainability communication can also help make responsible practices and destination meanings more visible and interpretable to tourists (Font & McCabe, 2017; Tölkes, 2018). From this perspective, sustainability communication is not merely promotional content; it is a signaling mechanism that helps tourists interpret what the destination represents.

The stimulus–organism–response framework provides a complementary explanation of how such signals become behaviorally meaningful. The framework was originally developed to explain how environmental stimuli influence internal psychological states and subsequent behavioral responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Although its origin lies in environmental psychology, tourism and consumer-behavior research has extended the framework to informational, digital, symbolic, and communication-based stimuli (Kim et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2025; M. Zhang et al., 2026). Recent green tourism research also applies the S–O–R logic by treating external cues, such as social media influence and green destination image, as stimuli that shape internal psychological states and behavioral intention (V. A. T. Nguyen et al., 2026). This supports the use of S–O–R in sustainable

tourism contexts where tourists respond not only to physical environments but also to communicated meanings, destination cues, and sustainability-related information.

In this study, perceived sustainability communication is conceptualized as the communication-based stimulus. Destination personality and destination image represent internal organismic mechanisms through which tourists symbolically interpret and evaluate the destination. Behavioral intention represents the response, reflected in tourists' intention to revisit, share positive information, and spend more time and money at the destination. This structure allows the study to explain how sustainability communication is associated with tourist support through symbolic interpretation and destination evaluation.

2.3. Direct Relationships Among Perceived Sustainability Communication, Destination Personality, Destination Image, and Behavioral Intention

Destination personality refers to the human-like characteristics associated with a destination, such as sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). It explains how tourists symbolically humanize places and associate them with traits such as warmth, trustworthiness, liveliness, competence, refinement, or closeness to nature (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). In CBT, these symbolic meanings may be particularly relevant because tourists may associate destinations with community warmth and the character conveyed through interactions with local residents (Lam & Ryan, 2020). They may also reflect cultural authenticity, environmental responsibility, and local embeddedness, which are central to CBT experiences (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Lee & Jan, 2019; Zielinski et al., 2020).

Perceived sustainability communication may be positively associated with destination personality because sustainability-related messages provide observable cues through which tourists infer what kind of destination they are encountering (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011; Tölkes, 2018). Communication about community participation and fair benefit-sharing may signal sincerity and responsibility; communication about local culture and traditions may signal authenticity and warmth; communication about environmental conservation may signal closeness to nature and ethical concern; and communication about local products, employment, income generation, and transparent management may signal competence and community embeddedness. This reasoning is consistent with destination personality research showing that tourists attribute human-like traits to destinations and that communicated destination content can project particular personality characteristics (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019; Lam & Ryan, 2020). Tourism storytelling research further indicates that communicated meanings are associated with destination personality, destination image, and tourists' behavioral intention (Ghaderi et al., 2024). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. *Perceived sustainability communication is positively associated with destination personality.*

Perceived sustainability communication may be positively associated with destination image. Destination image refers to tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations of a destination, including their beliefs about destination attributes and emotional impressions (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002). Prior research has shown that destination image can be shaped by information quality, digital tourism communication, social media content, perceived safety, value perceptions, memorable experiences, and green destination cues (Kim et al., 2017; Awais-E-Yazdan et al., 2025; Hurdawaty et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2025; V. A. T. Nguyen et al., 2026; Zhu et al., 2024; M. Zhang et al., 2026). Destination image may also be informed by social cues, including tourists' perceptions of friendly local residents and their interactions with knowledgeable community members (Setiawan et al., 2021; Styliadis et al., 2022). In CBT, communication about social, environmental, and economic sustainability

values may make responsible practices and destination meanings more visible, credible, and interpretable to tourists (Font & McCabe, 2017; Tölkes, 2018). These communicated meanings may, in turn, contribute to tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations of the destination (Ghaderi et al., 2024). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. *Perceived sustainability communication is positively associated with destination image.*

Perceived sustainability communication may be positively associated with behavioral intention. Behavioral intention reflects tourists' future-oriented support for a destination, including their intention to revisit, share positive information, and spend more time and money at the destination. Recent tourism studies show that behavioral intention is shaped by informational, emotional, experiential, safety-related, image-related, and value-related factors (Abror et al., 2025; Awais-E-Yazdan et al., 2025; Hurdawaty et al., 2025; Jimenez-García et al., 2025; V. A. T. Nguyen et al., 2026; Zhu et al., 2024). In CBT, clear and meaningful communication about sustainability values may help tourists understand responsible destination practices and the contribution of tourism to local communities. Such understanding may be associated with both pro-sustainable tourist behavior and future-oriented support for the destination. (Tölkes, 2018; Han et al., 2019; Gomes & Lopes, 2023; V. H. Nguyen et al., 2023). Therefore, H3 is proposed as follows:

H3. *Perceived sustainability communication is positively associated with behavioral intention.*

Destination personality may be positively associated with destination image because symbolic meanings can guide broader destination evaluation. A destination perceived as sincere may be evaluated as trustworthy and socially responsible. A destination perceived as competent may strengthen tourists' confidence in destination management and service quality. A destination perceived as exciting, sophisticated, or close to nature may enhance emotional appeal, distinctiveness, and memorability. Destination branding research supports the view that destination personality is closely related to destination image and can shape tourists' overall destination evaluations (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Papadimitriou et al., 2015; Ghaderi et al., 2024). Thus, H4 is established:

H4. *Destination personality is positively associated with destination image.*

Destination personality may also be positively associated with behavioral intention. Tourists may be more willing to revisit, recommend, or spend more time and money at a destination when they perceive it to be sincere, friendly, competent, distinctive, refined, or nature-oriented. Destination personality can create symbolic attachment and self-congruity, which may encourage favorable behavioral responses that extend beyond a general evaluation of the destination (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). More broadly, perceptions of friendly local people and a hospitable social atmosphere can contribute to destination personality (Lam & Ryan, 2020). In CBT, this relationship is theoretically meaningful because favorable evaluations of community-based tourism performance are associated with tourists' post-purchase intentions, including their willingness to revisit and recommend the destination (Han et al., 2019). Therefore, H5 is proposed as follows:

H5. *Destination personality is positively associated with behavioral intention.*

Destination image is one of the most established predictors of behavioral intention in tourism. A favorable destination image is associated with tourists' destination evaluations and future behavioral responses, including intentions to revisit and recommend a destina-

tion (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Recent studies in culinary and rural tourism further demonstrate the relevance of destination image to revisit intention and destination-related support (Tang et al., 2022; Hurdawaty et al., 2025; Jimenez-García et al., 2025). In CBT, direct evidence concerning the relationship between destination image and behavioral intention remains limited. Nevertheless, CBT research indicates that favorable perceptions of destination attributes, place attachment, and community benefits are associated with destination loyalty, revisit intention, and positive word of mouth (Han et al., 2019; Eom et al., 2020). A favorable destination image may therefore encourage tourists to revisit, share positive information, spend more time and money at the destination, and continue supporting community-based activities. Accordingly, H6 is established:

H6. *Destination image is positively associated with behavioral intention.*

2.4. Mediating Effects of Destination Personality and Destination Image

Beyond the direct relationships, this study proposes that destination personality and destination image act as mediating mechanisms linking perceived sustainability communication to tourist support. Signaling theory suggests that observable communication cues allow receivers to infer less visible qualities under conditions of information asymmetry (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011). In tourism, sustainability communication can help tourists recognize and interpret sustainability attributes that may otherwise remain abstract or difficult to verify (Tölkes, 2018).

First, destination personality may mediate the relationship between perceived sustainability communication and destination image. Communication about community participation, environmental responsibility, cultural preservation, local economic contribution, and transparent management provides tourists with cues about what the destination represents. These cues may be interpreted as evidence that the destination is sincere, responsible, authentic, competent, or connected to nature. Research indicates that communicated destination content can project particular personality traits and contribute to the relationship between destination personality and overall destination image (Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019; Ghaderi et al., 2024). Destination personality research further shows that human-like destination traits are associated with tourists' broader destination evaluations (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). Thus, sustainability communication may first be interpreted as destination character before being reflected in destination image. Therefore, H7 is proposed as follows:

H7. *Destination personality mediates the association between perceived sustainability communication and destination image.*

Second, destination image may mediate the relationship between destination personality and behavioral intention. Tourists' symbolic perceptions of a destination may contribute to their cognitive and affective evaluations. These evaluations may subsequently be associated with intentions to revisit, recommend, and support the destination. Prior research indicates that destination personality is associated with destination image and tourists' behavioral responses (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). Papadimitriou et al. (2015) further showed that overall destination image mediated the relationship between destination personality and revisit and recommendation intentions. Similarly, S. Zhang et al. (2022) found that destination image mediated the relationship between destination personality and behavioral intention in a tourism context. This mechanism is consistent with the S-O-R framework. Within this framework, destination personality represents symbolic interpretation, destination image represents cognitive-affective evaluation, and behavioral

intention represents the tourist response. Recent tourism research also supports the role of internal evaluative mechanisms in linking destination-related perceptions to behavioral intention (V. A. T. Nguyen et al., 2026). This reasoning is further supported by meta-analytic evidence identifying destination image as an important predictor of tourist behavioral intention (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8. *Destination image mediates the association between destination personality and behavioral intention.*

Finally, this study proposes a sequential mediation pathway linking perceived sustainability communication to behavioral intention through destination personality and destination image. Sustainability communication may not lead immediately to tourist support. Instead, it may provide observable cues that help tourists interpret less visible sustainability qualities of a destination (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011; Tölkes, 2018). Communicated destination content can project personality traits and contribute to the formation of destination image (Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019; Ghaderi et al., 2024). Destination personality may then inform tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations. These evaluations may subsequently be associated with intentions to revisit, recommend, and support the destination (Papadimitriou et al., 2015; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Prior research also indicates that sustainability communication can operate through intervening evaluative mechanisms rather than only through direct relationships (Čuić Tanković & Mušanović, 2022). This sequence is consistent with signaling theory and the S–O–R framework. Perceived sustainability communication functions as the stimulus and sustainability signal. Destination personality represents symbolic interpretation, while destination image represents cognitive–affective evaluation. Behavioral intention represents the tourist response. Although prior studies support the component relationships, the complete sequential pathway remains underexplored in CBT contexts. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H9. *Destination personality and destination image sequentially mediate the association between perceived sustainability communication and behavioral intention.*

Taken together, the proposed framework positions perceived sustainability communication as a sustainability signal and communication-based stimulus. Destination personality and destination image represent internal symbolic and evaluative mechanisms, while behavioral intention represents the tourist response. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework and the hypothesized direct and mediating relationships among the study constructs.

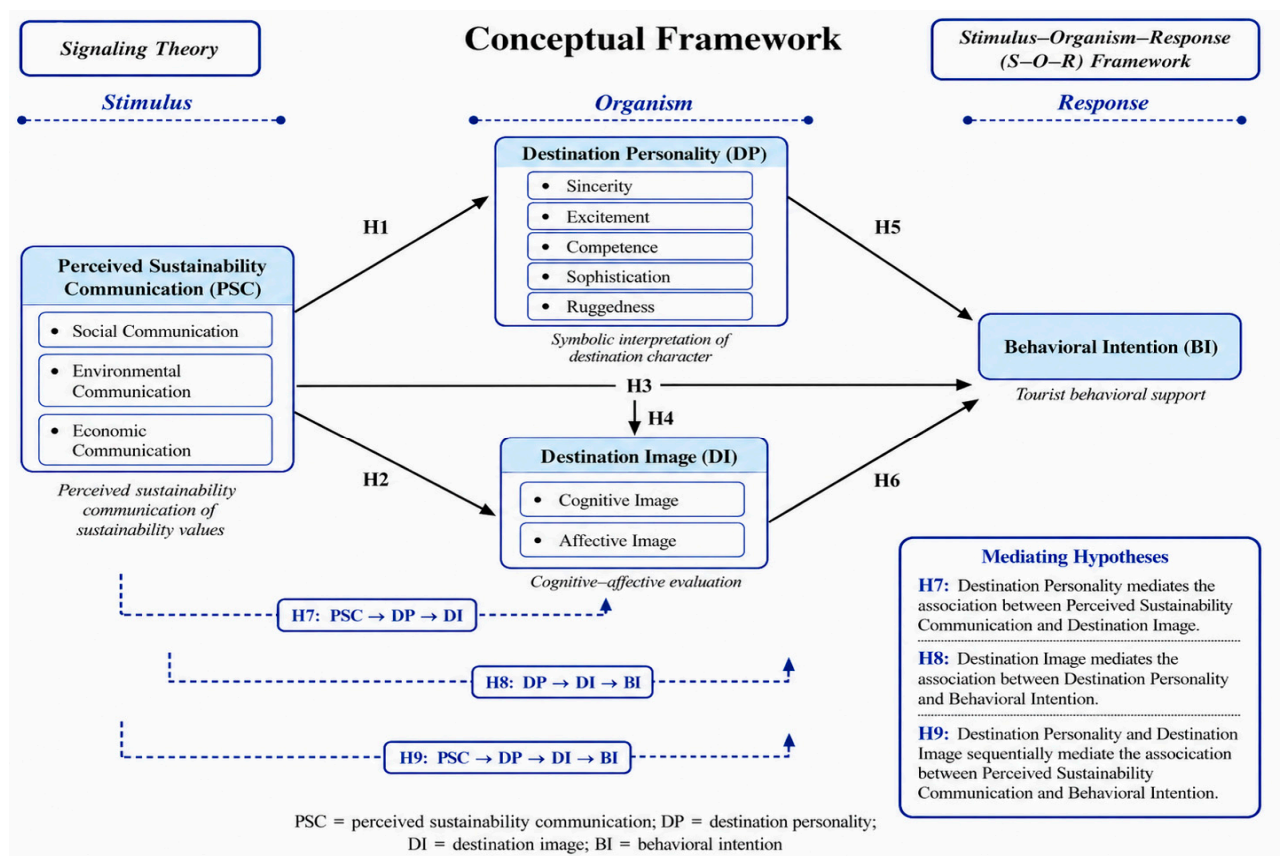


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework. Solid arrows represent the direct hypotheses (H1–H6), whereas dashed arrows represent the mediation hypotheses (H7–H9). Source: Authors’ own conceptualization.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Study Area

The study area was the Bandon Bay coastal area of Surat Thani Province, southern Thailand. This area was selected because it includes coastal community-based tourism (CBT) destinations where tourism activities are closely connected to local livelihoods, cultural identity, mangrove and marine resource conservation, local products, and community participation.

Six CBT communities were purposively selected as study sites, as shown in Table 1. These communities represent different but comparable forms of CBT within the same coastal regional context. They include livelihood-based activities, cultural resources, environmental conservation, local products, and community participation. This setting was therefore appropriate for examining perceived sustainability communication because many CBT sustainability values are not fully observable during short tourist visits and need to be communicated to tourists.

Table 1. Study sites in the Bandon Bay area of Surat Thani Province.

Community	Main CBT Emphasis
Bang Bai Mai	Riverside/coastal livelihoods, mixed agriculture, local way of life, and mangrove-related activities
Khlong Noi	Local cultural tourism, traditional livelihoods, local food, agricultural practices, and community-based learning activities

Table 1. *Cont.*

Community	Main CBT Emphasis
Leeled	Mangrove conservation, traditional fisheries, coastal ecology, and community-based environmental activities
Phum Riang	Cultural identity, local traditions, religious/cultural activities, and livelihood-based tourism
Tha Chang	Coastal livelihoods, fisheries, seafood processing, local products, and community-based economic activities
Lamet	Mangrove and marine resource conservation, nature-based learning activities, and community conservation initiatives

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

3.2. Research Design and Data Collection

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The target respondents were domestic Thai tourists who had visited or participated in tourism activities at one of the six selected CBT communities. Respondents were screened before completing the questionnaire to ensure that they had actually visited or experienced the community being evaluated. Data were collected by the researchers from March to August 2025 through on-site intercept surveys, QR code distribution at the selected destinations, and online Google Forms distributed to tourists who had visited one of the destinations.

The minimum sample size was initially estimated using Cochran's sample size formula for large or unknown populations, resulting in a minimum requirement of approximately 385 respondents (Cochran, 1977). To ensure a balanced representation of the six study sites, the sample was increased to 390 respondents and distributed equally across the communities. Specifically, 65 valid responses were obtained from each community, resulting in 390 usable responses. This site-balanced quota sampling approach reduced the risk of over-representation by any single community. It also enabled the study to capture tourists' perceptions across comparable CBT settings within the same coastal regional context. The sample size was considered adequate for PLS-SEM because it exceeded the minimum requirements based on model complexity. The most complex endogenous construct was behavioral intention, which had three direct predictors: perceived sustainability communication, destination personality, and destination image (Marcoulides & Chin, 2013; Hair et al., 2019). Because the study was conducted in one province and one coastal tourism context, the findings should be interpreted as evidence from CBT destinations in the Bandon Bay area of Surat Thani Province. They should not be automatically generalized to all CBT destinations.

3.3. Measurement Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from the established literature on sustainable tourism communication, community-based tourism, destination personality, destination image, and tourist behavioral intention. The questionnaire consisted of screening questions, measurement items for the main constructs, and demographic questions. All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. As the respondents were domestic Thai tourists, the questionnaire was prepared in Thai. Items adapted from English-language sources were translated and reviewed for semantic clarity, conceptual equivalence, and contextual appropriateness for CBT settings. Full item statements and standardized loadings are reported in Supplementary Table S1.

Perceived sustainability communication was conceptualized as a higher-order construct reflected by three lower-order dimensions: social communication, environmental

communication, and economic communication, as summarized in Table 2. These dimensions capture tourists' perceptions of how CBT destinations communicate social, environmental, and economic sustainability values. The measurement was informed by the sustainable tourism communication and CBT literature, which emphasizes the visibility of community participation, cultural preservation, environmental responsibility, and local economic contribution (Font & McCabe, 2017; Lee & Jan, 2019; Krittayarungroj et al., 2023).

Table 2. Summary of perceived sustainability communication measurement.

Dimension	No. of Items	Item Codes	Measurement Focus	Main Sources
Social communication	5	SC1–SC5	Communication of community participation, local culture and traditions, community way of life, tourist confidence and safety, and fair benefit sharing	Font and McCabe (2017); Lee and Jan (2019); Krittayarungroj et al. (2023)
Environmental communication	5	EC1–EC5	Communication of natural resource conservation, environmentally responsible practices, waste reduction, environmental impact reduction, and conservation activities	
Economic communication	5	Eco1–Eco5	Communication of community economic benefits, local products and services, income generation, employment, transparent benefit management, and sustainable community economic development	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the reviewed literature.

Destination personality was conceptualized as a higher-order construct reflected in five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, as summarized in Table 3. The measurement was grounded in the brand personality framework and its application in tourism and destination personality research, which suggests that tourists can associate destinations with human-like traits that shape destination evaluation and behavioral response (Aaker, 1997; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Papadimitriou et al., 2015).

Table 3. Summary of destination personality measurement.

Dimension	No. of Items	Item Codes	Measurement Focus	Main Sources
Sincerity	4	SIN1–SIN4	Perceptions of transparency, friendliness, warmth, honesty, trustworthiness, and genuine reflections of local culture and traditions	Aaker (1997); Ekinici and Hosany (2006); Papadimitriou et al. (2015)
Excitement	4	EXC1–EXC4	Perceptions of novelty, fun, excitement, lively atmosphere, distinctive identity, and memorable impressions	
Competence	4	COM1–COM4	Perceptions of professional management, accurate information, safety, tourist friendliness, and service capability	
Sophistication	4	SOP1–SOP4	Perceptions of refinement, quality, beautiful design, meaningful experience, and the beauty of culture and nature	
Ruggedness	4	RUG1–RUG4	Perceptions of abundant nature, nature-based activities, strong connections with nature, care for nature, and harmony with nature	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the reviewed literature.

Destination image was conceptualized as a higher-order construct reflected by cognitive image and affective image, as summarized in Table 4. Cognitive image refers to tourists' beliefs and evaluations of destination attributes, whereas affective image refers to tourists' emotional impressions of the destination. This measurement follows the destination image literature that distinguishes cognitive and affective components and links destination image to behavioral intention (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020).

Table 4. Summary of destination image measurement.

Dimension	No. of Items	Item Codes	Measurement Focus	Main Sources
Cognitive Image	7	COG1–COG7	Beliefs about environmental quality, destination identity, information clarity, natural resource management, cultural fit, community friendliness, and tourism infrastructure	Baloglu and McCleary (1999); Gallarza et al. (2002); Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020)
Affective Image	5	AFF1–AFF5	Emotional impressions, including happiness, excitement, positive impression, relaxation, and memorable experience	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the reviewed literature.

Behavioral intention was measured as the outcome construct and reflected tourists' behavioral support for CBT destinations, as summarized in Table 5. The items captured tourists' intention to revisit, share positive information, and spend more time and money at the destination. These indicators are consistent with the behavioral intention literature in tourism studies, including assessments of revisit intention, positive word of mouth, and willingness to pay or spend more (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Styliadis et al., 2017; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Baker & Crompton, 2000).

Table 5. Summary of behavioral intention measurement.

Dimension	No. of Items	Item Codes	Measurement Focus	Main Sources
Behavioral Intention	3	BI1–BI3	Intention to revisit, share positive information, and spend more time and money at the destination	Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020); Styliadis et al. (2017); Zeithaml et al. (1996); Baker and Crompton (2000)

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the reviewed literature.

Before the main survey, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in tourism, sustainability, communication, and quantitative research to assess content validity, conceptual clarity, and contextual appropriateness. A pilot test with 30 respondents was then conducted to evaluate item clarity, wording suitability, and preliminary reliability. The pilot results indicated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.822 to 0.915. Minor wording refinements were made before the questionnaire was used for the main data collection process.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4.1.1.6 (Ringle et al., 2024). The analysis followed a two-step evaluation sequence comprising assessment of the measurement model and assessment of the structural model (Hair et al., 2019). Perceived sustainability communication, destination

personality, and destination image were specified as reflective–reflective higher-order constructs. Accordingly, the disjoint two-stage approach was applied to estimate these constructs (Sarstedt et al., 2019). In the first stage, the lower-order constructs were estimated and their construct scores were obtained. In the second stage, these scores were used as indicators of the corresponding higher-order constructs.

The reflective measurement models were assessed using indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). These criteria were used to evaluate indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2019). Because the model included reflective–reflective higher-order constructs, measurement quality was evaluated at both the lower-order and higher-order construct levels.

The structural model was evaluated using inner variance inflation factor (VIF), path coefficients, t-values, p-values, bootstrapped confidence intervals, R^2 , adjusted R^2 , and f^2 . Inner VIF values were used to assess collinearity among predictor constructs. R^2 and adjusted R^2 were used to assess explanatory power, whereas f^2 was used to evaluate effect sizes. The statistical significance of the direct path coefficients and specific indirect effects was assessed using bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples (Hair et al., 2019).

PLSpredict was conducted as a supplementary assessment of out-of-sample predictive performance. Predictive performance was examined using Q^2 predict and prediction-error statistics, including the root mean squared error (RMSE) and mean absolute error (MAE) (Shmueli et al., 2019). Given the explanatory and mediation-oriented purpose of this study, the PLSpredict results were used to complement the structural model assessment rather than serve as the primary basis for model evaluation.

Importance–performance map analysis (IPMA) was conducted separately, with behavioral intention as the target construct. Construct importance was represented by total effects, whereas performance was represented by average construct scores rescaled from 0 to 100. The analysis was used to identify antecedent constructs that may warrant managerial priority by jointly considering their importance and performance (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016).

3.5. Common Method Bias

Because the data were collected from the same respondents using a self-administered questionnaire, procedural and statistical remedies were applied to reduce the risk of common method bias. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, informed that there were no right or wrong answers, and encouraged to answer honestly. Clear and neutral wording was also used throughout the questionnaire. As an additional statistical check, full-collinearity VIF values were assessed for the four substantive constructs using an auxiliary model. The VIF values ranged from 1.248 to 1.692, all below the recommended threshold of 3.3, suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to seriously affect the results (Kock, 2015). The complete results are reported in Supplementary Table S4. Nevertheless, common method bias cannot be completely ruled out in cross-sectional self-reported survey research.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were analyzed and reported only in aggregate. The study was granted an exemption from ethical review by the Research Ethics Committee of King

Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (study code EC-KMITL_68_046; date of exemption: 19 February 2025).

Generative artificial intelligence tools were used only to assist with language refinement, clarity, and the organization of selected parts of the manuscript. These tools were not used to generate data, collect data, analyze data, or interpret the research findings. The authors reviewed, edited, and take full responsibility for all content in this manuscript.

4. Results

4.1. Respondent Profile

A total of 390 valid responses were obtained from domestic Thai tourists who had visited community-based tourism destinations in the Bandon Bay coastal area of Surat Thani Province. Table 6 summarizes the respondents’ demographic and travel-related data. The sample consisted of 170 male (43.6%) and 220 female respondents (56.4%). Most respondents were aged 30–39 years (34.6%), with those aged 20–29 years (29.2%) being the next largest category, followed by the categories 40–49 years old (23.3%), and aged 50 years or above (12.8%). Regarding education, most respondents held a bachelor’s degree or equivalent (61.5%). In terms of community-based tourism experience, 45.1% of the respondents had visited community-based tourism destinations two to five times, 34.9% had visited once, and 20.0% had visited more than five times. Overall, the profile of the respondents indicates that the participants had experienced the kind of tourism that is relevant to evaluating sustainability communication, destination personality, destination image, and behavioral intention in CBT settings.

Table 6. Respondent data (n = 390).

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	170	43.6
	Female	220	56.4
Age	20–29 years	114	29.2
	30–39 years	135	34.6
	40–49 years	91	23.3
	50 years and above	50	12.8
Education	Below bachelor’s degree	95	24.4
	Bachelor’s degree or equivalent	240	61.5
	Postgraduate degree	55	14.1
CBT visitation experience	Once	136	34.9
	2–5 times	176	45.1
	More than 5 times	78	20.0

Source: Authors’ calculations based on survey data.

4.2. Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was examined before testing the structural relationships to ensure that the constructs were measured with adequate reliability and validity. The assessment included standardized loadings, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, which are key criteria in the evaluation of PLS-SEM measurement models (Hair et al., 2019).

Because the model included higher-order constructs, the relationships between the higher-order constructs and their lower-order dimensions were interpreted as part of the

measurement model rather than as structural paths (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Accordingly, social communication, environmental communication, and economic communication served as lower-order dimensions of perceived sustainability communication; sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness served as lower-order dimensions of destination personality; and cognitive image and affective image served as lower-order dimensions of destination image.

4.2.1. Indicator Reliability and Dimension Loadings

Standardized loadings were examined using the PLS-SEM output generated in SmartPLS 4. To improve readability and reduce excessive technical detail in the main manuscript, the full item-level and dimension-level loading results are reported in Supplementary Table S1. All item-level loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.918 to 0.950. The dimension-level loadings for the higher-order constructs ranged from 0.822 to 0.922. These results indicate that both the observed indicators and the lower-order dimensions adequately represented their respective constructs.

4.2.2. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Internal consistency reliability and convergent validity were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). Reliability values above 0.70 and AVE values above 0.50 indicate acceptable measurement quality (Hair et al., 2019). As shown in Table 7, all Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability values exceeded 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability. The AVE values ranged from 0.711 to 0.889, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50 and supporting convergent validity. Overall, the results indicate that all constructs and dimensions demonstrated adequate reliability and convergent validity.

Table 7. Reliability and convergent validity.

Construct/Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Perceived Sustainability Communication	0.844	0.845	0.906	0.763
Social Communication	0.965	0.965	0.973	0.877
Environmental Communication	0.969	0.969	0.976	0.889
Economic Communication	0.968	0.969	0.975	0.888
Destination Personality	0.898	0.899	0.925	0.711
Sincerity	0.954	0.954	0.967	0.878
Excitement	0.955	0.956	0.968	0.882
Competence	0.957	0.957	0.969	0.886
Sophistication	0.944	0.944	0.960	0.856
Ruggedness	0.957	0.957	0.969	0.885
Destination Image	0.822	0.822	0.918	0.849
Cognitive Image	0.974	0.974	0.978	0.865
Affective Image	0.967	0.967	0.974	0.883
Behavioral Intention	0.935	0.935	0.959	0.885

Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS 4.

4.2.3. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT), which is recommended for evaluating whether latent constructs are empirically distinct

from one another (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2019). Because the model included higher-order constructs, the assessment focused on the four main constructs used in the structural model: perceived sustainability communication, destination personality, destination image, and behavioral intention. A conservative threshold of 0.85 was applied.

As shown in Table 8, all HTMT values among the main constructs ranged from 0.231 to 0.627, placing them below the recommended threshold. These results indicate that perceived sustainability communication, destination personality, destination image, and behavioral intention were empirically distinguishable. Complete HTMT results for the lower-order constructs are reported in Supplementary Table S2. Bootstrapped HTMT confidence intervals for the main structural-model constructs are provided in Supplementary Table S3.

Table 8. HTMT results for main constructs.

Construct	PSC	DP	DI	BI
Perceived Sustainability Communication (PSC)	—			
Destination Personality (DP)	0.512	—		
Destination Image (DI)	0.268	0.590	—	
Behavioral Intention (BI)	0.231	0.505	0.627	—

Source: Authors’ calculations using SmartPLS 4.

Figure 2 provides an overall visual summary of the PLS-SEM results, including standardized loadings, path coefficients, and R² values for the endogenous constructs. The detailed assessment of the structural model is reported in the following section.

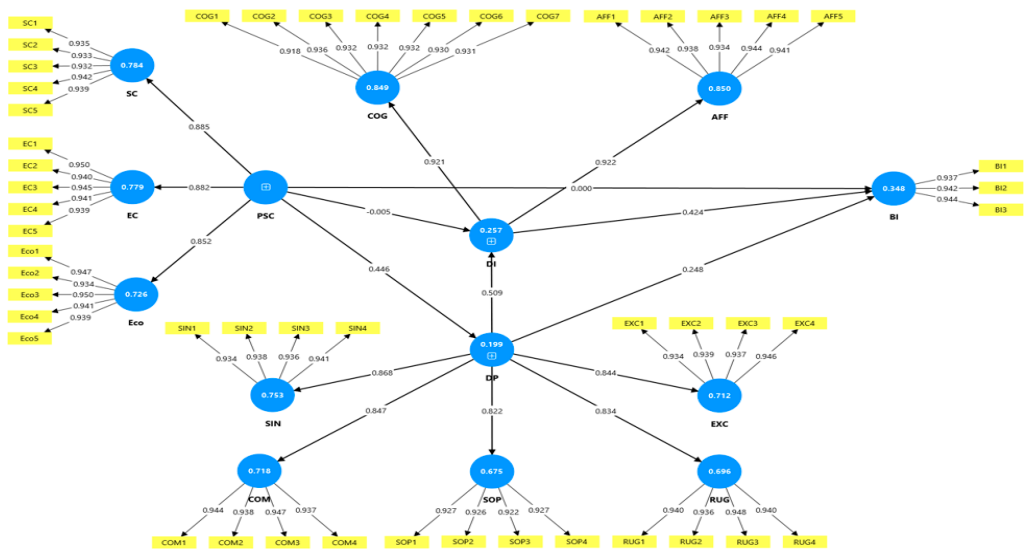


Figure 2. PLS-SEM structural model results. Blue circles represent latent constructs, including higher-order constructs and lower-order dimensions, whereas yellow rectangles represent observed indicators. PSC = perceived sustainability communication; SC = social communication; EC = environmental communication; Eco = economic communication; DP = destination personality; SIN = sincerity; EXC = excitement; COM = competence; SOP = sophistication; RUG = ruggedness; DI = destination image; COG = cognitive image; AFF = affective image; BI = behavioral intention. Source: Authors’ calculations using SmartPLS 4.

4.3. Structural Model Assessment

After confirming the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated using collinearity diagnostics, explanatory power, effect sizes, and path

coefficients. These criteria are commonly used to assess the quality of PLS-SEM structural models (Hair et al., 2019).

4.3.1. Collinearity Assessment

Collinearity among predictor constructs was assessed using inner variance inflation factor (VIF) values. The inner VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 1.597, well below the conservative threshold of 3.3, indicating no problematic collinearity in the structural model. The complete inner VIF results are reported in Supplementary Table S5.

4.3.2. Explanatory Power, Effect Sizes, and Direct Hypothesis Testing

The explanatory power of the model was assessed using R^2 and adjusted R^2 . Perceived sustainability communication explained 19.9% of the variance in destination personality. Perceived sustainability communication and destination personality explained 25.7% of the variance in destination image. Perceived sustainability communication, destination personality, and destination image explained 34.8% of the variance in behavioral intention. These results indicate modest to moderate explanatory power, which is reasonable for tourism behavior research, where behavioral intention is associated with multiple psychological, experiential, and contextual factors.

Effect sizes were assessed using f^2 . Perceived sustainability communication had a medium effect size for destination personality ($f^2 = 0.249$), while destination personality had a medium effect size for destination image ($f^2 = 0.279$). Destination image had a medium effect size for behavioral intention ($f^2 = 0.205$), whereas destination personality had a small effect size for behavioral intention ($f^2 = 0.059$). The f^2 values for the direct paths from perceived sustainability communication to destination image and behavioral intention were 0.000, indicating no meaningful direct effect size.

The direct hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples to assess the significance of path coefficients (Hair et al., 2019). Table 9 reports the standardized path coefficients, standard deviations, t-values, p-values, effect sizes, and hypothesis decisions.

Table 9. Structural model results: explanatory power, effect sizes, and direct hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Path	β	STDEV	t-Value	p-Value	f^2	Decision
H1	PSC → DP	0.446	0.041	11.008	<0.001	0.249	Supported
H2	PSC → DI	−0.005	0.046	0.101	0.919	0.000	Not supported
H3	PSC → BI	0.000	0.047	0.002	0.998	0.000	Not supported
H4	DP → DI	0.509	0.042	12.012	<0.001	0.279	Supported
H5	DP → BI	0.248	0.052	4.799	<0.001	0.059	Supported
H6	DI → BI	0.424	0.045	9.333	<0.001	0.205	Supported

Note. PSC = perceived sustainability communication; DP = destination personality; DI = destination image; BI = behavioral intention. R^2 values: DP = 0.199; DI = 0.257; BI = 0.348. Adjusted R^2 values: DP = 0.197; DI = 0.253; BI = 0.343. Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS 4.

The results show that perceived sustainability communication had a positive and significant path coefficient with destination personality, supporting H1. However, perceived sustainability communication was not directly associated with destination image or behavioral intention; therefore, H2 and H3 were not supported. Destination personality had significant positive path coefficients with both destination image and behavioral intention, supporting H4 and H5. Destination image also had a positive and significant path coefficient with behavioral intention, supporting H6. These findings indicate that perceived sustainability communication was not directly associated with destination image

or behavioral intention. Rather, its relationship with behavioral intention appeared to operate through tourists' symbolic interpretation of destination personality.

4.4. Mediation Analysis

The mediation hypotheses were examined using bootstrapped indirect effects. Table 10 presents the results. The indirect effect of perceived sustainability communication on destination image through destination personality was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.227$, $t = 7.480$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H7. The indirect effect of destination personality on behavioral intention through destination image was also positive and significant ($\beta = 0.216$, $t = 7.390$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H8. Most importantly, the sequential indirect effect of perceived sustainability communication on behavioral intention through destination personality and destination image was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.096$, $t = 5.830$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H9.

Table 10. Indirect effects and mediation testing.

Hypothesis	Indirect Effect	β	STDEV	t-Value	p-Value	95% CI	Decision
H7	PSC $\rightarrow$ DP $\rightarrow$ DI	0.227	0.030	7.480	<0.001	[0.171, 0.290]	Supported
H8	DP $\rightarrow$ DI $\rightarrow$ BI	0.216	0.029	7.390	<0.001	[0.160, 0.273]	Supported
H9	PSC $\rightarrow$ DP $\rightarrow$ DI $\rightarrow$ BI	0.096	0.017	5.830	<0.001	[0.067, 0.130]	Supported

Note. PSC = perceived sustainability communication; DP = destination personality; DI = destination image; BI = behavioral intention; STDEV = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval. Source: Authors' calculations using SmartPLS 4.

Taken together, these results indicate that destination personality and destination image sequentially mediate the relationship between perceived sustainability communication and behavioral intention. The findings suggest that perceived sustainability communication is not directly associated with behavioral intention but becomes behaviorally meaningful through tourists' symbolic interpretation of destination personality and subsequent destination image evaluation.

4.5. Predictive Assessment

PLSpredict was conducted as a supplementary assessment of out-of-sample predictive performance. The Q^2 predict values were positive for destination personality (0.195), destination image (0.046), and behavioral intention (0.038), indicating predictive relevance for all three endogenous constructs. Destination personality had the highest Q^2 predict value, whereas the values for destination image and behavioral intention were positive but comparatively small and should therefore be interpreted cautiously. Detailed Q^2 predict and prediction-error results, including RMSE and MAE, are reported in the Supplementary Materials Table S6.

4.6. Importance–Performance Map Analysis

Importance–performance map analysis was conducted with behavioral intention as the target construct. As shown in Figure 3, destination personality had the highest importance score (0.464; performance = 59.028), followed by destination image (importance = 0.424; performance = 59.719). Perceived sustainability communication had a lower importance score (0.205; performance = 59.303). Because the three constructs had similar performance scores, their relative managerial priorities were primarily differentiated by importance. Destination personality therefore emerged as the primary construct-level priority, followed by destination image. The lower importance of perceived sustainability communication should be interpreted alongside the mediation results, which indicate that

its association with behavioral intention operates mainly through destination personality and destination image.

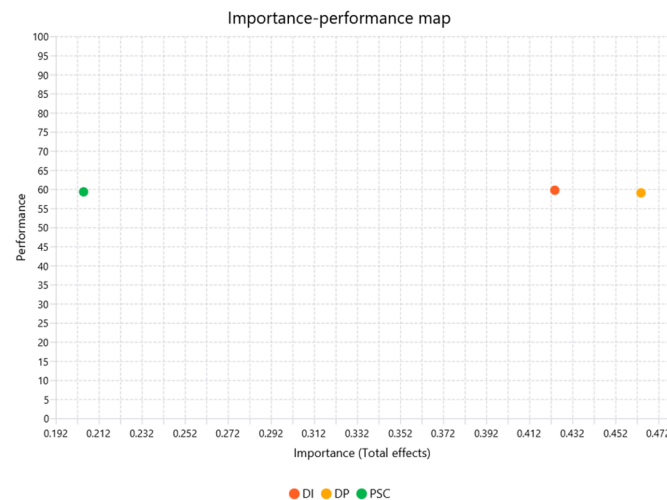


Figure 3. Importance–performance map for behavioral intention. Source: Authors’ calculations using SmartPLS 4.

5. Discussion

This study examined how perceived sustainability communication is associated with tourist behavioral intention in community-based tourism (CBT). The results show that perceived sustainability communication was not directly associated with destination image or behavioral intention. Instead, its relationship with behavioral intention appeared to operate through destination personality and destination image. This finding suggests that sustainability communication in CBT may not become behaviorally meaningful through information exposure alone. Tourists may first need to interpret sustainability messages as symbolic evidence of destination character before forming a favorable destination image and future support intention.

These findings are consistent with signaling theory and the stimulus–organism–response framework. Many CBT sustainability values, such as community participation, benefit-sharing, environmental responsibility, cultural continuity, and local livelihood support, are embedded in community processes and destination management practices (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Lee & Jan, 2019; Zielinski et al., 2020). Because these values are not fully observable during short tourist visits, tourists may rely on communication cues to infer less visible destination qualities (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011). Perceived sustainability communication can therefore be understood as the stimulus, while destination personality and destination image represent internal symbolic and evaluative mechanisms (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The non-significant direct paths are theoretically meaningful because they suggest that sustainability communication may require symbolic interpretation before it is associated with tourist support.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three contributions. First, it advances sustainability communication research in tourism by positioning perceived sustainability communication as a signaling and meaning-making mechanism, rather than only an informational or promotional activity (Font & McCabe, 2017). Second, it extends destination personality research by showing that destination personality can function as the symbolic mechanism through which tourists interpret sustainability communication in CBT, building on prior work on human-like destination traits and symbolic destination evaluation (Aaker, 1997; Ekinici & Hosany,

2006; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). Third, it contributes to destination image and tourist behavior research by identifying a symbolic–evaluative pathway in which sustainability communication is associated with behavioral intention through destination personality and destination image, consistent with prior research linking destination image to behavioral intention (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020).

5.2. Practical Implications

The findings suggest that CBT destinations should communicate sustainability values through concrete and credible evidence. This is consistent with sustainability communication research in tourism, which emphasizes the need to make responsible practices visible and meaningful to tourists (Font & McCabe, 2017). General claims such as “sustainable,” “responsible,” or “community-based” may be insufficient without visible evidence of local participation, fair benefit-sharing, cultural preservation, environmental responsibility, and local economic contribution. The IPMA results further indicate that destination personality should be treated as the primary managerial priority. Destination image should also be treated as an important evaluative priority associated with tourist support. CBT managers can use local guide narratives, community stories, signage, social media content, short videos, and interpretation materials to communicate sincerity, trustworthiness, competence, authenticity, distinctiveness, and connection to nature.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation. The findings should be interpreted as theoretically grounded associations rather than definitive causal effects. Second, the use of self-reported survey data means that common method bias cannot be fully ruled out. Future studies could combine surveys with interviews, behavioral data, online reviews, or social media analytics. Third, the study focused on domestic Thai tourists in one coastal CBT region. Future research should test the model in other regions, countries, and tourist groups. Additional mechanisms, such as trust, perceived authenticity, place attachment, engagement, perceived value, and memorable tourism experience, should also be examined.

6. Conclusions

This study investigated how perceived sustainability communication is associated with tourist behavioral intention in community-based tourism. The findings show that perceived sustainability communication was not directly associated with destination image or behavioral intention. Instead, its relationship with behavioral intention appeared to operate through destination personality and destination image. This result highlights a symbolic–evaluative pathway in which sustainability communication becomes meaningful when tourists interpret it as destination personality before forming destination image and future support intention.

The study concludes that the effectiveness of sustainability communication in CBT depends on its ability to make sustainability values visible, credible, and interpretable. Sustainability messages may become behaviorally meaningful when tourists interpret them as signs of sincerity, competence, authenticity, distinctiveness, and connection to the local community and nature. In this sense, sustainability communication is not merely information provision; it is a symbolic meaning-making process that helps tourists understand what the destination represents.

By integrating signaling theory and the S–O–R framework, this study provides a clearer explanation of how sustainability communication is associated with tourist support. The results suggest that CBT destinations should move beyond general sustainability claims

and develop communication that links community values to recognizable destination personality and favorable destination image. Such communication may strengthen tourists' intention to revisit, share positive information, and support CBT destinations through future engagement.

Given the cross-sectional and self-reported design, the findings should be interpreted as theoretically grounded associations rather than definitive causal effects. The study is also context-specific to domestic tourists visiting CBT destinations in one coastal region of southern Thailand. Future research should test the proposed model in other regions, countries, and tourist groups, and may consider additional mechanisms such as trust, perceived authenticity, place attachment, perceived value, and memorable tourism experience.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/tourhosp7070210/s1>, Table S1: Measurement items and standardized outer loadings, including higher-order construct dimension loadings; Table S2: HTMT matrix for lower-order constructs; Table S3: HTMT results for main constructs with bootstrapped confidence intervals; Table S4: Full-collinearity VIF assessment; Table S5: Structural collinearity assessment; Table S6: PLSpredict results.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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