Why and how the millennials participate in sustainable tourism:
An analysis of Korean millennial sustainable tourists

By

KIM, Si Ra

THESIS

Submitted to

KDI School of Public Policy and Management

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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ABSTRACT

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By

SIRA KIM

Sustainable tourism has gained increasing attention amid the unprecedented growth in the tourism industry in recent years. Setting awareness and perception as the two important variables that shape sustainable tourism behavior, this paper aims to examine the overall awareness and perception of sustainable tourism, focusing on the Korean millennials. The millennial generation is one of the largest groups in the travel industry and known to possess pro-sustainable tourist behavior. Yet, the literature indicates that the travel motivations could vary among the millennials according to nationalities. Therefore, this research asks why and how the Korean millennials participate in sustainable tourism. Through qualitative analysis and hermeneutic phenomenology, the findings indicate that the competitive pressures faced by the Korean millennials function as a main motivational source of sustainable tourism. In addition, self-development and meaningful experience were found to be the most critical motivational factors for the Korean millennial sustainable tourists. Based on these motivational factors, this paper seeks to reappraise current sustainable tourism policies and further provide effective promotional strategies and policies to raise awareness and increase participation which can be adopted by both the government and businesses.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, Millennials, Tourism motivation, Korea, Phenomenology

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I do hope that this study will make a contribution to the field of sustainable tourism and help make it easier for everyone to travel as sustainably as possible.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has experienced an unprecedented growth in recent years (World Bank, 2018). As the tourism industry expands, the need for sustainable development has grabbed worldwide attention. In the field of tourism, sustainability is an important concept because once tourism loses sustainability, localities could suffer immensely, both socially and environmentally. For example, without sustainable tourism, low-wage and vulnerable laborers are likely to be exploited in a tourism-dependent economy (Higgins, 2017), and natural habitat and biodiversity could also be endangered (Williams & Ponsford, 2009).

While the need for sustainable tourism is clear, the question is, how can it be promoted and achieved so that tourism-dependent localities have a better chance of sustainable development? Previously, Pomering et al. (2011) put forward the importance of increasing its awareness through appropriate marketing and promotional strategies as a means to foster sustainable tourism. In fact, "perception" and "awareness" are found to be the most essential variables that shape sustainable tourism behavior (Dianan, 2000). As they continue to play an important role in formulating strategies for sustainable tourism, the first step to develop proper policy measures for its promotion would be to understand people's perception and awareness of sustainable tourism.

In this paper, I focus particularly on the millennial generation and their perception and awareness of sustainable tourism. The millennial generation is known to be the largest group of travelers in the world (Rita et al., 2018) and has the potential to become the main agent in spreading sustainable tourism. In fact, one of the characteristics of the millennials is noted to be their pro-sustainable attitudes. A number of existing studies have explained that the millennials are prone to sustainable tourism with a higher level of social and environmental

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awareness (Van Dyck, 2008; Kiatkaswin & Han, 2016; Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2010; Bernardi, 2018). However, there is another strand in the literature arguing that even the millennials with full awareness of social and environmental values do not necessarily take part in sustainable actions (Godelink, 2017). In other words, there exists a dilemma between moral values and actual practices, which has also been highlighted in various studies (Lee, 2019; Godelink, 2017; Hume, 2010; Heo & Muralidharan, 2017). Then, what would explain the behaviors of those who actually take actions? Considering that awareness does not automatically lead to sustainable tours, it is worthwhile to discover the precise reasons behind it.

Despite the importance of the millennial generation in the tourism industry, there have been only a few studies conducted (Cavagnaro et al., 2018). Some extant research has covered the millennials' travel motivations in China (Folmer et al., 2019), Europe (Ketter, 2020), the United States, and England (Rita et al., 2018). Adding to the literature, I specifically focus on the Korean millennials in this research. Will the Korean millennials, known to be under a fiercely competitive environment and pressures to succeed—a side effect of the country's rapid economic development in the late 20th century—take part in sustainable tourism? Although there is an existing study arguing for the Korean millennials' pro-sustainable tendency in general (Bernardi, 2018), whether it appears in the form of travel needs further examination.

In this research, a sample of Korean millennials who have previous experiences in sustainable tourism has been carefully selected for a deep and concrete understanding of their perception and awareness of sustainable tourism, as well as why and how they participate in it. Adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, this paper attempts to capture the actual lived experiences of the Korean millennial sustainable tourists. Focusing on their

personal narratives and perspectives on sustainable tourism, it identifies the values and meanings that the Korean millennial sustainable tourists have toward sustainable tourism.

Considering the low likelihood of the Korean millennials participating in sustainable tourism due to social structures and the difficulty of converting their pro-sustainable values into action, this research adds more value to exploring the motivational factors of the Korean millennials. Based on thorough understandings of the Korean millennial sustainable tourists' perceptions, motivations, and values, appropriate promotional strategies are presented. In particular, based on the data analysis, I will introduce policy plans that can be adopted by the Korean government to raise awareness of sustainable tourism specifically for the millennial generation.

The rest of the thesis is structured as follows. In section 2, literature on sustainable tourism as well as the millennial generation is examined to better understand the need for promotion targeting the Korean millennials. Section 3 covers the methodology of the thesis which are phenomenology and secondary data analysis. Key findings from the data analysis are discussed in section 4 followed by the discussion in section 5 which is expected to provide insightful information to businesses, policymakers, and researchers. This paper ends with the conclusion in section 6.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Sustainable Tourism

The concept of sustainable tourism can be found in the literature even before the term sustainable development was widely used. Rosenow and Pulsipher (1979) mentioned the term "New Tourism," which means preserving the environment and heritage. Butler (1980) introduced "Bulter's Destination Life Cycle Model," described as the first concept of sustainable tourism. However, the definition of sustainable tourism has been controversial

among researchers since 1980. The researchers such as Butler (1980), Hunter (1995), and Wall (1997) argue that instead of using the term "sustainable tourism," it is more appropriate to use the term "sustainable development" in the context of tourism.

On the other hand, some researchers defined sustainable tourism in a broader concept, including the principles of sustainable development in the context of tourism (Hunter, 1995; Müller, 1994). For example, Hardy (2002) argues that the concept of sustainable tourism is real and grounded in the general population. Similarly, The World Tourism Organization (2020, p.12) defines sustainable tourism as:

"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities."

Indeed, sustainable tourism has been recognized as a tool for economic development and influenced the nature of the tourism industry. In this sense, sustainable tourism should be developed and managed in a fair manner for host communities of both human beings and nature (Mullis & Figart, 2011). It is stated in the publication "Global Tourism Achieving Sustainable Goals" that sustainable tourism contributes not only to economic development but also environmental and cultural conservation by introducing the concept of a triple bottom line. Consequently, "sustainable tourism" has become the term alternatively used by "eco-tourism," "alternative tourism," "responsible tourism," "soft tourism," "fair tourism," and "low-impact tourism" (Liu, 2003) depending on the emphasis of the pillar.

In the case of Korea, it was not until recently that the Korean government began to focus on formulating strategies and policies based on sustainable tourism. Therefore, the word "sustainable tourism" was merely limited to "eco-tourism" in the past, and previous research on sustainability or sustainable tourism was mainly focused on environmental concerns (Joo et al., 2019). Now, this trend has been shifted from the previous environment-

centric approach to a broader regional approach, and the Korean government strives to develop policies not only to protect the environment from tourists but also to revitalize local communities.

A recent study has also suggested that more active focus has been formed on the two dimensions of the environment and society (Job et al., 2017). This is particularly aimed at addressing the current global crisis of over-tourism in tourist destinations such as Venice, Barcelona, and the Island of Boracay (Cotterell et al., 2019). However, sustainable tourism should be accepted as a goal to be achieved instead of the type of tourism (Lu & Nepal, 2009). In this paper, sustainable tourism refers to the broad term that encompasses all three pillars including the economy, environment, and socio-culture.

2.2 Importance of promotion for Sustainable Tourism

When it comes to sustainable tourism, marketing and promotion can often be overlooked because it tends to focus primarily on either measuring the impact of tourism or restricting tourism development (Buhalis, 2000). In a certain sense, promotions that attract countless visitors may even be considered as obstacles to sustainability. However, once adequate marketing strategies are adopted, balanced sustainable tourism can be actually achieved. Pomering et al. (2011, p.954) also explicitly said *"We argue that marketing is an appropriate vehicle to drive increased sustainability; within its domain are the managerial areas that determine tourism's market-facing characteristics."* Likewise, it is important that marketing in sustainable tourism serves to meet the needs, wants, and interests of tourists, but at the same time, it should be in line with environmental integrity, social equity, and economic prosperity. Reflecting on these multifaceted challenges, Pomering et al. (2011) introduced a marketing model for sustainable tourism by combining the existing tourism marketing mix with the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects of sustainable development. Consequently, it should not only be a tool for sales that attract more visitors but

also a means to acquire a sustainable balance between environmental costs and socio-economic benefits (Buhalis, 2000).

In sustainable tourism, there are three strategies that are considered predominant – social marketing, demarketing, and social media marketing. First, social marketing is deemed effective in raising awareness and participation in sustainable tourism. Social marketing refers to the technique that induces the voluntary behavior of individuals that can benefit society (Andreasen, 1995). In the tourism context, social marketing has much to offer as it centers on facilitating tourists to adopt pro-sustainable behaviors. Therefore, social marketing is instrumental in tourism, and in order to have effective social marketing in tourism, it is important to have a full understanding of the motivation and awareness of tourists (Hassan, 2000; Dinan, 2000).

This corresponds with Hassan (2000)'s view which underscored the importance of understanding the values and motivations of visitors. Dinan (2000) also insisted that the degree of sustainable behavior varies depending on the perception and the motivation. In particular, visitors' motivation for visiting certain places and their awareness of sustainable tourism issues have been demonstrated as the primary variable of sustainable tourist behavior in the research (Dinan, 2000). The significance of sustainable tourist behavior was further reaffirmed by Lu and Nepal (2009) who acknowledged it as one of the key themes in their 15-year analysis of sustainable tourism-related papers.

Second, following this idea, demarketing is generally used to control the total demand or discourage certain customers in particular matters (Kotler & Levy, 1971). Initially, demarketing was found to be effective in social campaigns such as anti-smoking or drunk driving as well as the health service sector (Beeton & Benfield, 2010). In regard to tourism, demarketing is often used to prevent over-tourism and manage scarce environmental resources efficiently (Beeton & Benfield, 2010).

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In addition, demarketing results in the possibility of taking all means and methods to attain sustainability and restrict consumption. It could limit the ordinary promotional expenditure or increase the expenditure to raise awareness of excessive demand that may discourage visitation (Beeton & Benfield, 2010). According to Beeton et al. (2010)'s case study, demarketing measures were taken in various forms from an individual business level to a regional or national level. For instance, to limit the number of visitors to Sissinghurst Castle in England, the National Trust reduced the advertising expenses and increased advertisements on the sensitivity of the natural resources and restrictions (Beeton & Benfield, 2010). They even charged additional fees for larger tour groups. The local government of Victoria in Australia that manages Wilsons Promontory National Park also adopted demarketing by educating its visitors on the ways to minimize their impacts and promote other destinations in neighboring areas as alternative tourist attractions (Beeton & Benfield, 2010). As such, demarketing can be utilized by governments and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) as effective policy tools for their visitor management. In this aspect, Beeton and Benfield (2010) argue that demarketing should be taken into account from the planning stage of the marketing mix in order to have a balanced demand.

Last, the use of the internet in marketing is notably influential in the decision-making of tourists due to the effectiveness of word of mouth (Sparks & Browning, 2011). As the internet creates a venue for people to share their travel experiences online, it functions as a stimulus that attracts potential tourists. Schmidt et al. (2008) suggest that tourism enterprises as well as DMOs take advantage of the internet as another approach to build an interactive relationship with the users. Accordingly, e-marketing should provide the right application to the right target audience (Andreopoulou et al., 2014).

With the evolution of the internet, social media surfaced as a sensational platform that reaches millions of users. Today, social media is often used by millennials, and in the field of

tourism, it can bring a significant influence on tourists' perceptions and attitudes towards sustainability (Kane et al., 2012; Han et al., 2017; Boley et al., 2013). Specifically, it can be utilized to raise awareness of the impact of tourists' behaviors and promote sustainable travel behaviors (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

For instance, it was found that *Facebook* could provide a linkage between environment-friendly attitudes and values (Kane et al., 2012). This means that although social media may not bring about a direct change in a certain user's behavior, it would gradually change his or her behavior in the longer term due to its influence on their values (Kane et al., 2012). Moreover, Han et al. (2017) found that user-generated content in social media actually played a strong role in promoting pro-sustainable behaviors as users were encouraged to share their experiences. The effect of social media on tourism behavior was also analyzed in the research of Boley et al. (2013), and it was revealed that those who post travel pictures on social media are likely to be interested in purchasing local specialties and regionally specific arts and crafts. These results imply that providing knowledge and creating a sense of responsibility through tourism-related social media can be effective in engaging users towards adopting sustainable travel behavior (Han et al., 2017).

Therefore, pertinent promotion needs to be initiated to achieve sustainable tourism. Intense promotion that is developed without consideration of the need for sustainable management might lead to the degradation of tourist destinations (Churugsa et al., 2007). In light of this, the current paper considers particular strategies of demarketing, social marketing, and social media marketing in the Korean context based on the interview data.

2.3 Who are the millennials?

The millennial generation refers to the people who were born from 1980 to 2000. According to Morgan Stanley Capital International (2020), there are more than 1.8 billion millennials that make up 23% of the global population.

In regard to tourism, the millennials have been a center of attention due to their significant impact on the industry, which consequently made them an essential agent (Benckendorff et al., 2010). As the ones who travel the most, the millennials give priority to travel compared to other generations (Mueller, 2019), and according to AARP's 2019 Travel Trend, millennials would spend $4,400 on travel per year, demonstrating a strong purchasing power in travel. This led various travel agencies and DMOs to develop plans and strategies targeting the millennials.

The millennials' travel motivation in general can vary based on their culture and nationalities (Rita et al., 2018). For example, Thrane (2008) identified "escape" meaning "to get away" as the major motivation for Norwegian millennials while Mohsin and Alsawafi (2011) discovered that Omani millennials' were to be "mentally fresh." Xu et al. (2009) analyzed motivation characteristics between students of the UK and China, and they found that the UK students valued "having fun" and "doing things with their family" whereas Chinese students valued "seeing famous sights' and 'learning other cultures and history." Relatively recently, it was found that the millennials of the United Kingdom and the United States share similar motivations which are "to relax," "to escape from the ordinary," and "to experience a different lifestyle" (Rita et al., 2018).

Similarly, existing studies explain that the millennials' motivations for sustainable tourism could also vary depending on nationalities. According to Folmer (2019), the two reasons why Chinese millennials chose to participate in sustainable tourism through mountain biking were "to escape daily life" and "to have special experiences." Chen (2013) also found five motivational factors of Chinese bikers, which are social interaction, self-actualization, destination experience, escape, and relaxation. Additionally, Ooing and Laing (2010) discovered that backpackers might participate in volunteer tourism mainly "to experience something different and new." On the other hand, Mcintosh and Zahra (2007) found out that

those who participated in volunteer tourism were interested in giving and experiencing service work instead of personal development.

The millennials are known to be a well-educated generation with a conscious level of social and environmental conditions. Previous studies have highlighted the millennials' pro-sustainable tourism behavior (Van Dyck, 2008; Kiatkaswin & Han, 2016; Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2010; Bernardi, 2018). However, there is a consensus among the extant research that the millennials generally have a hard time converting their pro-sustainable knowledge and values into actual behaviors (Gaudeli, 2009). In other words, although they may possess pro-environment values, they may not actually take environment-friendly actions. Heo and Muralidharan (2017) explain that such behavior is caused because a number of millennials do not perceive themselves as environmentalists. The matter of the millennials' self-perception was previously highlighted in the study of Pew Research Center (2014) which reported that only 32% of the millennials believed they were environmentalists.

Lee (2019) explains there is a paradox between the millennial generation's strong moral values and the actual practice in actions. Barbaro-Forleo's research (2001) suggests that environmental knowledge, also known as eco-literacy, is not a sufficient predictor of a customer's willingness to purchase green products. Godelink (2017) also admitted from his study that even the millennials with full awareness of social and environmental values were not able to easily adopt the expected actions. This disparity between altruistic compassionate values and practice was confirmed in the study of Hume (2010). Heo and Muralidharan (2017) also support the idea that despite the millennials' environmental knowledge and confidence, they are not likely to behave in an environmentally responsible manner.

While Gaudelli (2009) ascribed this contradiction to a lack of immediate satisfaction, Heo and Muralidharan (2017) explain that it is the millennials' degree of concern that may decide on their resulting action. In other words, the millennials would convert their actions if

they have a strong concern about the environment. Given how difficult it is for those with awareness to take pro-sustainable actions, it may be worthwhile to explore those who actually engage in such action to discover the reasoning behind it.

2.4 The Korean Millennials: What makes them so special?

As the most active generation in tourism (Kim, 2019), the Korean millennials present some distinguished characteristics. One of their distinct features is that they show the highest reservation rate for accommodation as well as tourism experience activities such as theme parks, art, and cultural performances among other generations (Lee & Park, 2020). Being digital natives, they collect most of the information via the internet, particularly through social media (Lee & Park, 2020), and they are also independent tourists who do not seek package tours and have a high preference for unique tourist destinations (Kim, 2009). Touching on the millennials' preferences and patterns for popular tourist destinations, Lee and Park (2020) further revealed that Korean millennials enjoy traveling in the peak season, especially in summer, and their satisfaction level increases when they can easily obtain travel information and access tourism information facilities.

Moreover, they are the generation who spends the most on shopping when traveling (Ahn et al., 2019). In detail, Ahn et al. (2019) found that a larger amount of their expenses was spent on accommodation than transportation, especially on the ones with innovative interiors, camping zones, free music, and local food events. This can be interpreted as the millennials' intention to pursue travel where they can experience various activities firsthand (Lee & Park, 2020).

The Korean millennials are also the primary group that enjoys overseas travel, but they become hesitant when there is a psychological risk perception (Park & Choi, 2013). It was found that they take approximately 8.5 domestic trips per year (Korea Culture and

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Tourism Institute, 2020), which makes them even more valuable for research when it comes to exploring the ways to promote sustainable tourism in Korea.

Regarding the millennials' travel motivation, Kim (2009) found that they were mainly motivated to "escape from daily lives," which was significantly different from the pre-millennial generation who focused more on their family. Kim (2009)'s finding was supported in Skyscanner's survey in 2018 where "to have a rest" was found to be the strongest motivation factor for the millennials. In terms of the difference in travel motivation between the pre-millennial generation and the current Korean millennial generation, Kim (2020), the author of "the future of tourism," attributes such difference to their values in tourism. The author believes that the current millennial generation tries to dive directly into the outside world to learn different ways of life from tourism whereas the pre-millennial generation only used tourism solely to discover the outside world. This coincides with the result of a most recent survey done by Hotels.com (2020) which showed that 9 out of 10 Korean millennials travel in order to self-develop.

Travel behavior is often shaped by one's motivation and values, but it also can be affected by their cultural and historical background. Korean millennials therefore might have their own intrinsic characteristics that are not shared globally due to the rapid urbanization they went through (Bernardi, 2018). However, they present evident characteristics similar to other millennials. First, they are the digital natives who are comfortable with technology (Prensky, 2010; Bernardi, 2018) and value speed, efficiency, and convenience in transactions; they trust their friends more than corporates' advertisements and like to be socialized and appreciate personal connections (Boston Consulting Group, 2012). Second, they are generally tolerant and all-embracing to new changes. They are confident, value work-life balance, and enjoy expressing themselves (KPMG, 2017).

Another globally-shared characteristic is that millennials possess pro-sustainable behavior. Saratovsky and Feldmann (2013) found that millennials tend to value meaningful work and are willing to be engaged in nonprofit activities. A recent survey by Deloitte (2020) indicates that 80% of millennials are prone to protecting the environment. Millennials' pro-sustainable attitudes can also be found in terms of traveling. They are highly aware of social and environmental impacts when traveling and look for ways to experience local communities (Van Dyck, 2008). The survey done by Marriott Rewards Credit Card (2015) revealed that 84% of millennials were in favor of participating in volunteer activities while traveling abroad. It was also found that 32% of millennials were actually interested in taking a charitable trip in the same study. Likewise, millennials' intention to behave pro-environmentally while traveling was proved in the study of Kiatkaswin and Han (2016), and Moscardo and Benckendorff (2010) also evinced millennials' aspects of value in terms of the environment as well as social issues including the degradation of local communities.

Similarly, Bernardi (2018) found that Korean millennials demonstrate a large interest in experiencing authentic local life by having direct contacts with locals. They not only support local traditions and are willing to rebuild local communities but they are also interested in taking good care of the planet (Bernardi, 2018). Ahn et al. (2019) even stated that local souvenirs and specialized local products should be developed targeting the millennials as they may appeal to them.

However, whether the Korean millennials are keen to take time to participate in sustainable tourism is questionable, considering the competitive pressure they face in the society—a side effect of the unprecedented rapid economic development in Korea, so-called the "Han river miracle" (Bernardi, 2018). According to the Korea Times (2016), it was found that nine out of ten Koreans were under stress, and four out of ten were under high stress, together with pessimism about the future. Furthermore, youth unemployment in Korea has

also increased since the Asian Financial Crisis mainly because of social and structural problems (Kim, 2014). Not to mention the social pressure and academic expectation (Juon et al., 1994), Korea has the highest suicide rate among OECD countries (OECD, 2011).

Moreover, it is doubtful that they are socially interconnected enough like other millennials. According to a survey developed by Saramin (2020), 44% of 1,314 respondents said that they intentionally minimize any kind of social interaction at work. This is not surprising given the growing percentage of non-marriages and single households (KB Financial Group [KBFG], 2020). In this context, new buzzwords such as "3 po generation" were coined to describe people who gave up dating, marriage, and having children due to social and financial problems and struggles with student loans and high rents. It then evolved into the "5 po generation" who gave up housing and career; and further into the "7 po generation" who even gave up hope, hobbies, and relationships. This eventually led to the term "N po generation" who literally gave up everything (Jo, 2017). Given these circumstances, the Korea Herald (2020) mentioned that some even characterize Korean millennials by a sense of resignation and helplessness. In a study on the self-perception of Korean millennials, Jo (2017) found out that they expressed themselves negatively with words like "sad," "gloomy," and "harsh." Although there could be different channels through which the negative self-perception is built, what is certain is that millennials in Korea cannot easily afford to take care of other surroundings but themselves. This is expected to reflect on tourism especially as people seek their own happiness and look after themselves through travel.

All things considered, this paper examines the experience of Korean millennials who have participated in sustainable tourism to facilitate the overall understanding of the Korean millennial sustainable tourists. Accordingly, I established one main research question: *why and how do the Korean millennials participate in sustainable tourism?* In addition to the overarching research question, several subset questions are raised as the following to

investigate the Korean millennial sustainable tourists' values and behaviors and to suggest relevant promotional strategies that could target them:

1.   How do the Korean millennial sustainable tourists perceive sustainable tourism?

2.   What actually motivates the Korean millennial sustainable tourists to travel sustainably?

3.   How should Korea promote sustainable tourism to the millennial generation?

This paper takes an in-depth analysis on how Korean millennials who once used to only have awareness but eventually took action, first started taking action by participating in sustainable tourism. In addition, I analyze the interviewees' sustainable tourism experience to identify the motivation and value for it. Based on the findings, this research seeks to provide possible strategies to encourage potential millennial tourists to engage in sustainable tourism.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research primarily adopted a qualitative methodology including phenomenology to make the full use of the main interview data analysis. A phenomenological study was used as a major methodology which is explained in 3.1. Based on the interview data from the phenomenological study, secondary data was used to analyze the current policies as well as current travel trends of the millennials. The secondary data is expected to play a role in investigating additional research questions to the existing self-collected data and validate the findings of the research (Heaton, 2008). The secondary data included Korean publications, government policies, and news articles. As a whole, they are reflected in 4.3 and 4.4 where promotional strategies and policy implications for raising Korean millennials' awareness for sustainable tourism are suggested.

3.1 Phenomenological Study: Adopting Hermeneutic Approach

Phenomenology, a compound word of the two Greek words *"phainomen"* meaning "appearance" and *"logos"* meaning "reason," can be interpreted as the reasoned appearance (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). It is often described as the study of "essence," "consciousness," and "exploration of human phenomena." This approach facilitates comprehending represented realities that individuals experience in their lives as its central aspect is to understand the essence of an experience that individuals share within a common ground (Diaz, 2015). Phenomenology can adequately be applied to tourism studies as it may foster understanding the experiential and lived experience of tourists or any stakeholder who participates in the tourism phenomenon (Penertecky & Jamal, 2018). Ingram (2002) described phenomenological studies in tourism as "an action research into human dynamics of tourism." Ablett and Dyer (2009) even went further, maintaining that phenomenology offers a coherent framework for advancing the interpretation of experience as a broadly inclusive, critical, and dialogical endeavor that helps bridge the gap between science and humanities.

There are two traditions in phenomenological approaches: transcendental and hermeneutic. Transcendental phenomenology was introduced by Edmund Husserl with a rigorous emphasis on objectivity which allowed researchers only to identify the "essence" in experience (Jackson et al., 2017). It is also known as descriptive empirical phenomenology focusing on essential structures. Much of the phenomenological research that centered on pure conscious experience was conducted in the field of tourism but failed to take account of the details of contexts and interpretation (Penertecky & Jamal, 2018).

Hermeneutic phenomenology, on the other hand, focuses on understanding the meaning of an experience within the sociocultural environment (Laverty, 2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology, also known as the "interpretive approach," was developed by Martin Heidegger, the disciple of Husserl, with the purpose of enhancing researchers to be actively

engaged with the construction of data, working together with interviewees to reach meaning. It facilitates elaborating the phenomena of the world - the purposes, activities, and significance of the objects that surround us (Penertecky & Jamal, 2018). Supporting this approach, Penertecky and Jamal (2018) have specifically underscored the effectiveness of the "hermeneutic phenomenological approach" in tourism-related studies.

Thus, adopting hermeneutic phenomenology, this paper delves into Korean millennial sustainable tourists' sustainable tourism experience from the perspective of meanings, understandings, and interpretation. In-depth communication, also known as interviews, and face-to-face techniques are frequently utilized by phenomenological researchers to explore and investigate interviewees' observations (Ingram, 2002; Jackson et al., 2017). With such techniques, each of the interviewees' backgrounds, cultures, and history were handed down and shaped the way they interpreted the experience (Laverty, 2003). With the researcher's guidance, the interviewees shared their perspectives through in-depth and semi-structured interviews. A dialogic process was applied where the researcher's knowledge and observation of the relevant literature were reflected in interpreting the interviewees' experience. All in all, the process of analyzing and gathering data was conducted through mutual interactions with the interviewees, as a team (Laverty, 2003).

3.2 Data Collection: Interviewee selection for phenomenology study

In phenomenological studies, data are usually gathered by conducting in-depth interviews with open-ended questions (Kitto et al., 2007). To induce a deep and concrete understanding of the Korean millennials' interpretations of sustainable tourism, the interviewees were recruited based on a purposive and homogeneous sampling method. Using the "sampling via websites" and "snowballing" framing, the interviewees were first recruited from online communities that are popular among the Korean millennials. Then, the final interviewees were selected based on the strict age criteria (born between 1980-2000) and are

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those who had at least two times of sustainable tourism experiences. However, it should be noted that as the interviewees may not have known the concept of sustainable tourism, the term "sustainable tourism" was not used when recruiting. Instead, it was explained as easily as possible to make them understand by elaborating it as "people who consider social, cultural, economic, and environmental impacts while traveling." This has allowed interviewees without full awareness to participate in interviews.

Table 1. Sample Matrix

No.	Name	Year Born	Gender	Occupation	# of Sustainable Tour
*Sociodemographic of the Interviewees*
1	Jung Min	1994	F	Freelancer	3
2	Ji Yoon	1996	F	Student	2
3	Chae Rin	2000	F	Student	Several times
4	Jae Ryang	1991	M	Worker	2
5	Ga Hyun	2000	F	Student	2
6	Gyu Ri	1999	F	Student	2
7	Han Sol	1998	F	Student	2
8	San Gun	2000	M	Student	Several times
9	Hae Rim	1998	F	Student	2
10	Tae Yeon	1993	F	Worker	2
11	Gang Won	1993	M	Worker	2
12	Hyun Hwi	1998	F	Worker	2
13	Sang Gyu	1994	M	Worker	Several times

A total of 13 interviews were conducted from December 2020 to February 2021 as seen in Table 1. The interviews were structured to capture the interviewees' experience and perception of sustainable tourism. The questions were formed and categorized into 4 different domains based on relevant literature and reflected the purpose of the current study. Although the questions were added, eliminated, and rephrased during the interviews, the key guiding questions included the following:

Table 2. Key guiding questions

Perception	- Have you heard of the term sustainable tourism?
	- How would you personally define sustainable tourism?
Tourism Behavior	- How/where do you get information when choosing the destination and planning to travel?
	- What do you consider the most when choosing the destination?
Motivation	- What makes you want to travel responsibly?
	- How do you feel during and after the trip?
Promotional Ideas	- What are your thoughts on the government's current policy and project on sustainable tourism?
	- What do you think should be done by your company or the government to promote sustainable tourism?

As all of the interviewees were Korean, the interviews were conducted in Korean. In addition, due to the current social distancing regulation, the interviews were done online. The extent of the interviews was from 50 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes, with a mean of 1 hour. Prior to the interviews, a one-pager document explaining the purpose of the interviews was given to the interviewees.

3.3 Data Analysis

The interview data were translated from Korean to English and transcribed in a Microsoft Word document. The subsequent coding process was conducted as follows. First, once the data were transcribed, through a familiarization process, a thematic framework of

descriptive codes following the research questions and objectives was constructed. Second, the descriptive codes were categorized into meaningful explanatory codes. Third, through selective coding, the explanatory codes were integrated into main themes which encompass the overarching theme.

Moreover, the secondary analysis engages the re-use of the existing studies including multiple sources of digital materials including documents, papers, and observations (Heaton, 2008). In this paper, apart from academic papers, news articles, blogs, and policy reports published by the government were used as the main resources of the secondary data. They were gathered to verify the interview data and to better understand Korea's current sustainable tourism situation. Making the most of the interview data, it was utilized to establish promotional strategies and suggest policy implications. Finally, both interviews and secondary data were again, triangulated with other sources of documents and articles as well.

4. FINDINGS

The 13 interviewees consisted of 9 females (I1, I2, I3, I5, I6, I7, I9, I10, I12) and 4 males (I4, I8, I11, I13) with an average age of 24.3. All of the interviewees were either students or workers who had just started working. In general, most of the interviewees showed a positive perception toward sustainable tourism and expressed their desire to participate in sustainable tourism again after the COVID-19 pandemic comes to an end.

As discussed earlier, international and Korean millennials share a common feature of being digital natives, utilizing social media as well as international travel platforms. They are also found to be sensitive in price and security when traveling (I3, I5, I6, I9, I13). In fact, the main reasons for their participation in domestic sustainable tours were because it is less costly and perceived to be safer than sustainable tours abroad (I5, I6, I9, I13). Moreover, an

intriguing pattern was that Korean millennial sustainable tourists who have engaged in sustainable tourism at least once, participated several more times (I3, I8, I13). To find out why, this study provides in-depth descriptions of the interviewees' sustainable tourism experience. Specifically, four main themes emerged from the coding analysis: the perceptions, motivations, promotional strategies, and policy implications.

Table 3. Results of the thematic analysis

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
The perceptions of sustainable tourism	Low awareness of sustainable tourism
	Definition of sustainable tourism
The motivations towards sustainable tourism	Self-development
	Meaningful & memorable experience
Promotional strategies	Education
	Social media marketing
	Corporate's effort
Policy Implications	Tour Dure
	Enactment of Tourism Promotion Act

4.1 Korean millennial sustainable tourists' perception of sustainable tourism

Although the existing studies account for the Korean millennials' tendency for pro-sustainability, it is a different story when it comes to the awareness of sustainable tourism. The Korean millennial sustainable tourists showed a very low awareness of the concept of sustainable tourism (I2-I13). Even the interviewees of this study who were well-aware of the concepts of Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and tended to pay keen attention to the emerging social and environmental issues did not have a clear understanding (I2, I6, I10, I11, I12, I13). Despite their previous experiences in sustainable tourism, they showed a merely vague perception without fully understanding the concept as illustrated by Kim (I6), one of the interviewees,

It is hard to elaborate on the exact definition, but I roughly know what it is. It is not that I went on a sustainable tour because I knew the exact definition of the term. (G.R. Kim, personal interview, December 30, 2020).

There were even interviewees who did not know that they were involved in "sustainable tourism" despite their previous experiences. Shin (I2) was surprised to find out the way she traveled had a special term, sustainable tourism.

I had to look it up on the internet to understand the definition prior to this interview, but it turned out to be a tour of the way I traveled! (J.Y. Shin, personal interview, December 27, 2020).

Likewise, except for the only one person who used to have a sustainable travel-related job, no one was clearly aware of the concept.

In addition, when the Korean millennial sustainable tourists were asked to define the term in their own words, "benefits of locals" and "minimizing environmental impacts" were mentioned the most. They perceived that the benefits of locals not only include the economic benefits but also the preservation of their cultures and traditions (I1, I2, I3, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I10, I11, I12, I13). They believed that sustainable tourism requires tourists to participate in local traditions so that the traditions are well-preserved and promoted (I3, I8, I13). The interviewees also expressed their confidence suggesting that sustainable tourism should focus on the balance between tourists and local residents. Kim (I10) mentioned:

Sustainable tourism should provide economic benefits to locals. It should not only have a positive effect on local communities, but it should go beyond the level where host communities are benefitted from the influx of tourists. (T.Y. Kim, personal interview, January 4, 2021).

Moreover, from the environmental perspective, they believed that tourists participating in sustainable tourism should focus on minimizing environmental impacts (I3, I4, I5, I13). They went on and elaborated that the efforts to minimize environmental impacts during travel can range from simply recycling or reducing plastic to taking a low-carbon plane and not using transportation (I1, I3, I7). In fact, out of the three pillars of sustainable

tourism: economy, socio-culture, and environment, the environment was the factor that was considered as the most important pillar by many of the interviewees (I3, I4, I6, I7, I8, I13).

4.2 Korean millennial sustainable tourists' motivation of sustainable tourism

Self-development

Interestingly, the main reason for the Korean millennial sustainable tourists' participation in sustainable tourism was not for the benefits of local communities, which was expected to be driven by an altruistic attitude, but for themselves. Interviewees attributed "self-development" as the major factor in choosing sustainable tourism (I5, I6, I8, I9, I10, I13). This is in correspondence with the importance of self-cultivation, a current trend among the millennial generation in Korea. In fact, Choi (2019) underscored the current phenomena of the millennials being obsessed with self-development. This trend can also be found by looking at the ranking of the best sellers of bookstores in Korea as well as the ranking of the Korean videos on YouTube as well. As another form of self-development, there has been an increase in the number of the millennials who study or exercise after waking up at dawn (Cho, 2021). Since there is a lot of social media contents about this, it became a trend with a new acronym of "morning routine." This is expected to have stemmed from Korea's cultural tradition of Confucianism which is deeply rooted in the Korean millennials (Kim & Lee, 2010). Kim and Park (2003) explained that the belief that they can succeed if they try as hard as they can, makes the Korean millennials constantly focus on self-development. However, Lee and Padila (2015) maintain that the social structure, in which a national examination to enter top universities is regarded as an indispensable tool for success for guaranteed economic stability, has caused Korean university students to be susceptible to depression. In fact, the interviewees shared similar thoughts on themselves: how they feel challenged and burdened about their future (I1-I13). All of the interviewees were certain that the Korean

millennials are becoming more focused on how to become successful. Seo (I11) revealed why the millennials had no choice but to be obsessed with success:

"Youth unemployment" was the first word that came to my mind when I came across the word "youth." It is not our fault to become unemployed, but it still makes me very pessimistic about my life. When I think I am not doing my best, I feel like I am falling behind. So, if I do not do something hard, it makes me really anxious. (G.W. Seo, personal interview, January 5, 2021).

This tendency towards self-development was in fact reflected in their motivation for sustainable tourism. Ko (I4) mentioned that sustainable tourism could also be one of their qualifications. He was confident that his sustainable tourism experience helped him get the job he wanted as he utilized it for the cover letter as well as the job interview.

In a similar context, the Korean millennial sustainable tourists were found to feel proud of themselves after their trip (I1, I5, I7, I9, I10, I13). Especially, they mentioned that they could feel a sense of accomplishment after the trip (I1, I8, I11, I12, I13). Usually, they experienced self-improvement through interactions with locals, acquiring a profound understanding of the cultures, and gaining knowledge about the traditions (I7, I8, I9, I10, I12). Local interactions appeared in various forms. These included experiences such as cooking and quilting experience and lodging, having to stay in houses or accommodation hosted by locals. Through a mutual exchange, the Korean millennial sustainable tourists believed that their attitudes of encountering a new culture and foreigners improved (I2, I5, I12). They believed that they became more open-minded and developed a positive attitude towards foreigners. Song (I5) mentioned:

I was able to learn the things I would not have learned if I had not stayed at the locals' homes. I think I became somewhat of a global citizen now that I can accept any kind

of dissimilarity that comes from cultural differences. (G.H. Song, personal interview,

December 29, 2020).

Together with the interactions with locals, the Korean millennial sustainable tourists explained they witnessed self-growth through the efforts to minimize the negative impact on the environment (I1, I3, I8). The interviewees took part by searching for a plane that had the least carbon emission, trying not to use any plastics, and carrying tumblers with them (I1, I3, I4, I8, I9, I13). They perceived these actions as moral and believed that their sustainable tourism behavior made them more environmentally conscious (I1, I3). Lim (I1) shared her feelings about her sustainable tourism behavior:

Although it may be seen as a trivial thing to just carry a tumbler around during my trip, the fact that I am environmentally aware while traveling gave me a sense of superiority at first, making me feel like I am different because I am an environmentally aware person. Then later, it just became a habit of mine and part of my travel and keeps making me think of ways to minimize the environment. (J.M. Lim, personal interview, December 17, 2020).

Likewise, the interviewees who physically engaged in sustainable tourism by walking or biking especially felt prouder of themselves after overcoming physical difficulties. Hong (I8) who went on a bike tour for 2 weeks mentioned how he felt like during and after the travel:

During the trip, it was so exhausting that it made me want to quit after riding a bike for two weeks. But, the whole process of searching for the routes and the directions for the bike lane made me become a better person with full environmental awareness. Of course, after the trip, I felt proud of myself for the fact that I succeeded in leaving no trace at all. (S.G. Hong, personal interview, December 30, 2020).

Clearly, being able to feel a sense of achievement and self-growth has directed the millennial sustainable tourists to constantly participate in sustainable tourism.

A meaningful and memorable experience

The self-development experience has led the overall travel experience to be considered as a meaningful and memorable experience as well. As mentioned earlier, some of the interviewees have engaged in sustainable tourism several more times after their initial sustainable travel (I3, I8, I13). The biggest reason for taking sustainable travel, again and again, was because they believed that the trip itself was meaningful (I1, I9, I11, I12, I13). They even differentiated it with regular travel characterizing sustainable tourism as memorable and meaningful (I12, I13).

There were two conditions under which sustainable tourism was regarded as memorable and meaningful for the interviewees. The first was a hardship, and the second was local interactions. This especially seemed true when the interviewees were faced with a certain difficulty during the trip, and the difficulty was resolved through the interaction with locals (I8, I10). Those interviewees who were involved in the volunteer tour particularly regarded their sustainable trip as meaningful and memorable (I10, I11, I13). Seo (I11) engaged in an animal-friendly tour where he took part in animals' welfare by cleaning and taking care of an elephant which was once used as a tourism product for tourists. He shared the reason for joining the sustainable tour although his friends did not understand him:

Honestly, when my friends heard that I bought this sustainable tourism product, they kept asking why I should pay my own money to clean up the elephant. They will never understand the formula. The more you struggle, the more memorable the trip is. The elephant-care tour in Bangkok is one of the unforgettable tours I have ever had. (G.W. Seo, personal interview, January 05, 2021).

Other interviewees narrated how they built a strong cordial relationship with locals from difficulties they faced during their sustainable tour (I8, I10). Kim (I10) is still in touch with a local fellow teacher who helped her when she was struggling with her volunteer

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tourism of teaching the Korean language. She said visiting her local friend whom she met on her sustainable trip is the first thing she would like to do once the pandemic is over. She highlighted that the true value of sustainable tourism, after all, is the people. Hong (I8) also recalled his trip stating how memorable it was despite physical struggles he faced during the trip:

It was the locals who saved me when I nearly passed out from a heat stroke and gave me necessities including water and even allowance. How can I ever forget them and the overall trip itself? (S.G. Hong, personal interview, December 30, 2020).

The main reason they were able to travel despite the difficulties they went through on their sustainable tours was because they understood that the essence of it is, indeed, the people. The interviewees were confident that those without the experience of sustainable tourism might not understand how meaningful and memorable the whole trip is (I7, I8, I9 I11, I12, I13). Park (I9) stated that their benefits outweigh the locals.

You will never know how awesome sustainable tours are unless you try. You think a sustainable tour is the tour for others? That is not true. I am the one who has benefited and actually enjoyed it the most. (H.R. Park, personal interview, December 30, 2020).

It was their own self-initiative that made Korea's millennial sustainable tourists engage in sustainable tourism, not their knowledge or awareness of the economic, environmental, and/or social issues. They participated several times because sustainable tourism was a tool for self-development and a source that made them feel self-achievement stemming from hardships and local interactions that they had never experienced anywhere else.

4.3 Promotional strategies targeting the Korean millennials

How did the Korean millennial sustainable tourists first participate in sustainable tourism?

How the interviewees first experienced sustainable tourism will provide additional insights in planning relevant strategies for raising awareness and participation. Overall, four different paths were identified.

First was through "education." The interviewees were previously educated about sustainability in their adolescent years or universities (I5, I6, I7, I9, I10, I11, I12). Those who had education on sustainability in their secondary school demonstrated a strong tendency towards sustainability (I6, I7). They would naturally carry water bottles and refrain from using plastics while traveling. In a way, they already had a sustainable lifestyle that was embedded in their lives. On the other hand, there were interviewees who first learned about sustainable tourism from the university (I9, I10, I11, I12). Song (I5) became conscious about their impacts while traveling after learning about it at university:

The course I took in my freshman year "Humanities in Tourism" enabled me to become aware of my tourism behavior. I was not specifically introduced to the concept of sustainable tourism but it made me rethink how to be involved in sustainable behavior while traveling. Since I took this course, I have become cautious about everything I do while traveling. (G.H. Song, personal interview, December 29, 2020).

It was found that even though the exact term of sustainable tourism was not delivered during class, it could still affect the way the millennials think and behave during travel. In other words, the courses did not have to be exactly related to sustainable tourism as long as the concept was addressed during class. While the outcome may vary depending on the quality and frequency of the course, education may have a significant influence on triggering them to become more sustainable while traveling. Evidently, the interviewees, who became aware of this concept from class, were willing to find out more about the form of tourism which ultimately led them to participate in sustainable tourism (I9, I10, I11, I12).

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Second was through a "shocking incident." Kim (I3) shared her pivotal moment when she decided to start sustainable tourism:

I was really shocked by the piles of plastics we used just for 2 days on our family trip when I was 12 years old. Ever since then, I have been trying my best to minimize every impact I make, while traveling, no matter whom I travel with. (C.R. Kim, personal interview, December 27, 2020).

This shows that even a single experience one goes through at a young age can have an enormous impact that may shape the behavior in the future.

Third was through "government programs." There were interviewees who joined the community-based tour program run by the ASEAN-Korea center which is only available to the millennials to participate (I9, I12). This was a gateway, which enabled them to experience sustainable tourism, and made them plan for their own sustainable tourism afterward. Kim (I12) shared her thoughts on the government program as below:

I first learned how tourism can be a tool for economic development in certain countries through the education from the program. If I had not participated in this program, the way I travel would have definitely been different. I would have been looking for somewhere that has the best hotel. But this on-site experience taught me how much benefit the locals could make and made me rethink which aspect I could contribute. Ever since I participated in the program, I try as hard as I can to travel responsibly. (H.H. Kim, personal interview, January 05, 2021).

As the program was financially subsidized by the government, it made it easy for the millennials to participate in the government program.

Last but not least, is "being influenced." Another route through which they could come across sustainable tourism was either from their close friends or the internet. There were interviewees who initially started traveling sustainably because of their friends who

actively seek sustainable tourism (I1, I2, I4, I13). They came to realize how enjoyable and meaningful sustainable tourism was after traveling with his or her friends (I1, I2, I4, I13). Among those interviewees, some also mentioned that they were exposed to the internet, especially social media which made them become more interested in sustainable tourism. Cho (I3) admitted that he first started participating in sustainable tourism after he read a post by a blogger.

I came across this concept from a travel blog that I have subscribed to. After reading the blogger's post, it seemed meaningful that I felt like I wanted to try it out as well. (S.G. Cho, personal interview, January 06, 2020).

Similarly, interviewees were not only exposed to social media content but also to international travel platforms. Seo (I11) first participated in sustainable tourism by simply buying a sustainable tourism product on an international travel platform.

There was a tourism product with the label: "sustainable tour," and I just bought it out of curiosity to find out what it was like. But that experience was so good that it made me want to try again and again. (G.W. Seo, personal interview, January 05, 2021).

There was not just a single channel that had led them to participate in sustainable tourism. Some of the interviewees were exposed to sustainable tourism in multiple ways (I5, I6, I7, I9, I11, I12). This corroborates the importance of different types of channels that can be utilized to raise awareness.

Social marketing and demarketing

Social marketing and demarketing, which are the common strategies for sustainable tourism (Pomering et al., 2011) can also be effective to the millennials. However, promoting sustainable tourism to the general Korean millennials will not be easy as the interviewees themselves also do not enjoy encouraging others to travel sustainably. The interviewees were hesitant in recommending it to others in words as sustainable tourism is not yet so prevalent

in Korea (I3, I4, I8, I10, I12, I13). Instead, they prefer doing it indirectly by showcasing their travel photos on their social media (I1, I7, I9, I12). Hence, an adequate mixture of social marketing and demarketing including education, social media, and policy implications can help raise the participation of sustainable tourism. Furthermore, promotional strategies should be planned and developed based on the characteristics and needs of the Korean millennials. The strategies that take into account the motivation of the Korean millennial sustainable tourists are developed as follows.

Social Media.

Social media is considered one of the most important promotional tools for millennials. DMOs have developed various marketing strategies utilizing social media (Hays et al., 2013). It has been proven to be an influential tool when it comes to travelers' planning process (Leung et al., 2013). The interviewees themselves also believed in the power of social media (I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I7, I9, I11, I12, I13). Lim (I1) was certain that the government's role is crucial in promotion using social media. Local governments, as well as DMOs, should not only promote their region as a whole but also small businesses which the millennials may not know of. Lim (I1) said:

How can an elderly who runs a small guest house in a local province promote his accommodation to the millennials? We would not even be able to know the existence of it unless it is exposed to us via the right channel. (J.M. Lim, personal interview, December 27, 2020).

Lim (I1) perceived that it is the government's role to actively promote local businesses to the millennials. If the government has no capacity to promote all of the local businesses, they could even hold a workshop or training session specifically on online promotion including the management of social media for locals who may not know about social media at all.

One of the interesting things the interviewees mentioned was the need for the effective management of social media. Shin (I2) criticized the current social media account of a certain local municipality, saying how the contents were not appealing and interesting at all. The interviewees expressed their thoughts on how informational content with a lot of words, such as a card-news template, is not appealing to the millennials (I2, I5, I9). Rather, it would have been much more effective to use keywords such as "hidden places," "must-visit places recommended by locals," and "traveling like locals" to introduce sustainable tourism (I2, I4, I7). Most of all, the quality of the contents, both photos, and videos, should be deliberately created to attract the eyes of the millennials (I3, I4). This is consistent with the recent findings on the current trend, which emphasizes having high-quality content in an online review format (Nusair, 2020).

In addition, as it was proven that "self-development" and "memorable experience" were the two major motivations for the millennial sustainable tourists, it would be effective to create memorable experiences by utilizing customers' information from social media (Nusair, 2020). In the form of customer relationship management, DMOs should analyze users' interests using data-driven technology and build long-term relationships to let the users have a memorable travel. Moreover, DMOs can create social media contents that are related to "self-development" to attract millennials. For example, a DMO may hold a social media campaign, "You can learn more about the Korean history if you come to Gunsan" and show various ways the millennials can learn new things by traveling to the region. Or, a local government may hold a social media contest that requires users to share their meaningful and memorable sustainable memories on their social media account.

Furthermore, influencer marketing, based on the importance of word-of-mouth, has already been found effective in tourism marketing (Gretzel, 2018). When influencers on various social media platforms share their photos or videos of sustainable tourism, their

followers, part of which are expected to be the Korean millennials, would also be exposed to it. They will not just stop at becoming aware of it, but they will have desires to follow them (I11, I12, I13). Such influencers may even lead social media challenge events to raise awareness and encourage others to take part in sustainable tourism. For instance, Jun-Ryeol Ryu, a famous actor in Korea, inspired a lot of his followers to become environmentally conscious by sharing his tips on reducing carbon emission on his Instagram. As a reaction, there were countless comments about how the followers actually took action and became more environmentally aware.

Education

As mentioned earlier, education was one of the channels through which the Korean millennials first encountered sustainable tourism (I5, I6, I7, I9, I10, I11, I12). As a way of social marketing, the millennials can be educated on how to travel responsibly. In fact, it will be especially effective for the millennials who are interested in learning new things and constantly investing in self-development. There is no doubt that universities can provide quality programs; however, given that the millennials are keen on self-development, educational programs outside of university can also be effective. In the United States, where sustainable tourism is actively sought after, USAID offers free online courses regarding sustainable tourism not only to Americans but to all of the people around the world. Similarly, the Korean government can conduct online courses targeting the Korean millennials as Korea is already equipped with the right platform, Korean Massive Open Online Course, K-MOOC. K-MOOC is an online website that provides free courses run by the Ministry of Education, and its main users are either university students or those who have just started working. If there is a certificate given after finishing the course, many Korean millennials will try their best to achieve the certificate. Therefore, simply creating an online

course regarding sustainable tourism will be effective in raising awareness as there is no course related to tourism currently.

Not only the online courses but providing field experience for the Korean millennials can also be effective. As the ASEAN-Korea center's community-based tourism is only focused on community-based tourism abroad, it may be a great idea to develop a similar program that only allows domestic tour programs within Korea. It would not only help with the revitalization of local communities, but due to its cost-efficiency, a greater number of millennials will be able to join the program.

Kim (I12), a former interviewee of the community-based tourism organized by the ASEAN-Korea center gave ideas on the improvement saying:

I acknowledge how helpful the program was in general. However, I have to admit that it was somewhat showy. It was more focused on how it is shown in the media, on the surface level. I think the program itself needs to be improved in a detailed manner. (H.H. Kim, personal interview, January 05, 2021).

Instead of focusing solely on communities, it may be effective to add environmental activities such as trash picking or recycling involved as part of activities in the program. Overall, this on-site experience would enable more millennials to have a chance of getting a grasp of what sustainable tourism is all about.

Corporate's effort.

If there is little effort imposed by travel agencies or platforms which the Korean millennials like to use, sustainable tourism could become a concept that they can easily approach. Currently, there are limited tourism products that are associated with sustainable tourism in Korea. Although certain travel agencies specifically sell sustainable tourism products such as Fair Travel Korea and Travelers Map Co., usually, they are not particularly known to the millennials yet. The majority of the interviewees emphasized the fact that

domestic tourism agencies should keep trying to create sustainable tourism products (I5, I6, I7, I10, I11, I12, I13). Hana Tour, Korea's famous travel agency, once signed an MOU with UNESCO Korea in 2015 to create world-heritage-related travel products and donate to the World Heritage Protection Fund under the name of the tourists. Just as Hana Tour's travel products are related to cultural heritage, it is necessary for other domestic travel platforms as well as agencies to keep developing sustainable tour products that engage the environment or cultural exchange. If the tour products are involved in self-growth that may be remembered as a memorable experience, it will surely attract millennial tourists to purchase the products.

Furthermore, with very little effort on international travel platforms which are mainly used by the Korean millennials, their perception will be improved. Beyond simply selling sustainable tourism products, the platforms can actually educate the users. For instance, Airbnb, a home-sharing platform that is known to strive for sustainability can simply put a green logo on the listings that follow the sustainability policy of the company. In other words, Airbnb can distinguish the listings that are qualified for their sustainable tourism policy. The users would be likely to click on the green logo, and when they do, they can be informed about the general idea of sustainable tourism.

4.4 Policy Implication of Korea

The Korean government has recently been seeking to understand sustainable tourism. In 2020, the government initiated a research project on "policy measures for sustainable tourism and discovering new tasks" (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2020). This policy research was necessary to identify the domestic and international issues, to improve laws and systems, and to promote new projects in terms of sustainable tourism. Through these researches, the government has established a viewpoint on sustainable tourism as a broader term that encompasses not only the environment but also the society and economy.

Together with the research project, the Korean government-initiated projects for the revitalization of local communities. "Tour Dure" is a representative community-based tourism project that was developed to promote sustainable economic development in rural regions. Tourism-related organizations including the Ministry of Culture Sports and Tourism, Korea Culture and Tourism Institute, and Korean Tour Organization are involved in the planning, promoting, and implementing of the project. However, it is the local residents who actually ought to get engaged and involved in the local tourism ecosystem. The local residents are supported with relevant resources to create a local tourism product which would ultimately lead to economic development by attracting tourists from other regions (Tour Dure Performance Report, 2019). Since its initial stage, 184 community-based tourism businesses have been created in 47 regions. In addition, Joo (2019) explains the effectiveness of the project by stating the fact that local residents' life satisfaction has increased by offering them the opportunity to operate their own tourism-related businesses. There is no doubt that this project helps in giving opportunities to make local residents involved in tourism. However, the effectiveness of the project in terms of promotion is still doubtful. Almost all the interviewees were not aware of this project even though they were the ones who were most likely to get the information (I2-I13). Shin (I2) expressed his disappointment saying:

If I had known about this project, I could have searched about it before I went to Suncheon last summer! But definitely, I will have to look it up after this interview and find out more about this project for my future reference. (J.Y. Shin, personal interview, December 27, 2020).

Likewise, most of the interviewees were willing to visit the Tour-Dure businesses and purchase local specialties (I1, I2, I5, I6, I7, I9, I12, I13). The government should not only focus on developing the tour product itself but strategies for marketing and promotion. As mentioned above, contents should be attractive enough to catch the attention of the

millennials. However, existing contents that appear when searching for "#Tour Dure" on Instagram may not be appealing to the millennials but rather considered too informational and thus boring. Cho (I13) actually left a comment:

I just looked up on Instagram, and it's all about the information for business operators not for tourists. Shouldn't they be promoting their tourism products to potential tourists? (S.G. Cho, personal interview, January 06, 2021).

In order to make the millennials be informed about the business and visit a particular region, it would be important to have interesting contents with high-quality photos or videos. This is regarded to be critical as the contents of social media may enable users to have a virtual experience and a certain perception of the destination (Andreopoulou et al., 2014).

In addition, the enactment of Article 48-3 confirms that the government's perception of sustainable tourism has been recently broadened. Article 48-3 of the Tourism Promotion Act before the amendment used to only consider the environmental aspects (Park, 2020). This article was then revised in 2019 and went into effect on June 4th, 2020 (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2020). This recent article emphasizes social and cultural sustainability stating, "balanced with the lives of local residents" and economic sustainability stating "win-win development with the local economy."

Table 3. Article 48-3 of the Tourism Promotion Act

Before Enactment	After Enactment
1. The Minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism may request to provide information and financial support to encourage the development of sustainable tourism resources that minimize the use of energy and resources, respond to climate change, and reduce environmental damage. \<Established on March 25, 2009\>	1. The Minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism may request to provide information and financial support to encourage the development of sustainable tourism resources that minimize the use of energy and resources, respond to climate change, and reduce environmental damage as well as a **win-win development with the local economy while achieving balance with the lives of local residents.**

	2. The mayor or governor may **designate a special district** if there is any risk of damaging the natural environment or the habitat of residents by the tourists. 3. When the special district is to be designated, changed, or canceled, the mayor or governor should **gather the opinions of the residents in advance** and consult with the relevant administrative agency.
	4. When the special district is to be designated, changed or canceled, the mayor or governor should prescribe the location, area, date, and time by the Ordinance of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. 5. The mayor or governor may take necessary measures, such as restrictions on tourist visit times. <Newly established on December 3, 2019>

It is evident that the Korean government strives to share tourism earnings with localities. However, what has changed is not only the broader concept of sustainable tourism but also new policies related to the "establishment of the special district" which have been newly added to Act 48-3. This is a form of visitor management policy tool that requires effective use of demarketing (Beeton & Benfield, 2010). Once the area is designated as a special district, additional tax imposition by the form of the admission fee will be inevitable to procure the management and operation cost. In fact, the imposition of the fines has already been justified for the violations of restrictions according to Article 27(1) of the Local Autonomy Act (Joo, 2019).

Regarding the Korean government's enactment on the tourism policy, the interviewees understood the need to designate specialized districts especially in Gyungju or

Jeonju where Korean historical heritage is widespread and over-tourism issues arise (I4, I5, I7, I8, I9, I11). They especially acknowledged the importance of financial support in protecting resources such as cultural and environmental heritage (I4, I5, I8, I11). Hong (I8) even argued that the entrance fee of Korea's historical heritage such as Gyeongbok Palace or Cheomseongdae is too cheap compared to that of other countries. Hence, interviewees were willing to pay additional taxes when traveling to specialized districts (I1-I11, I13). Park (I9) actually shared her experience when she had to pay an additional fee for the conservation of cultural heritage:

When I visited the Buddhist's world heritage site located in Bagan, Myanmar, I was charged a certain fee for the conservation of the heritage as there was a huge earthquake in the past. I could understand that the circumstance of restoration was necessary. Also, when I went to Palau, I had to buy a card for ocean purification. Likewise, as for Korea, if we are to charge tourists for heritage conservation, it would be acceptable if the historical background is fully explained. (H.R. Park, personal interview, December 30, 2020).

The foremost important thing for the interviewees about imposing the additional tax was transparency. The interviewees emphasized transparency and said they would pay additional tax if the taxation were managed transparently (I2, I5, I6, I8, I9, I13). They would like to be informed about how the tax is used and whether it is used for locals or for preservation and protection. However, how the general millennials would react to this policy might be different. Kim (I12) actually doubted whether this could be accepted to the general millennials:

For me, it is understandable as I acknowledge the environmental impacts that are made from travel. However, for the general millennials, it may provoke hostility considering the lack of trust in government. People might exploit this policy and destroy the environment

with the thought that they already have paid a reasonable amount of taxes without any guilt.

(H.H. Kim, personal interview, January 05, 2021).

Therefore, it is essential to gather a lot of opinions of people of various ages before enactment and carefully reflect the ideas. However, among various tasks for the Korean government to focus on regarding sustainable tourism, Park (2020) claims the importance of the shared awareness and responsibility in traveling. Consequently, the Korean government would be responsible for the formation of a social consensus regarding sustainable tourism and spreading tourism manners suitable for the region. Therefore, DMOs and local governments should deliver a consistent message through demarketing and social marketing to the potential millennial sustainable tourists.

5. DISCUSSION

This research began with the main question: *why and how the Korean millennials participate in sustainable tourism.* Through the in-depth analysis of the interviews, the findings indicated that the primary reason they traveled sustainably is because it enabled them to develop themselves and accumulate memorable experiences. It was further revealed that the interviewees first encountered sustainable tourism through multiple channels that included education, social media, travel agency, and government-subsidized programs. This implies that there are various opportunities that can educate the millennials about sustainable tourism and eventually lead them to participate in it.

Existing studies have shown that the millennials who possess pro-sustainable behaviors, might actually have difficulties converting their beliefs and values into actions. Given the social obstacles that withhold them from participating in sustainable tourism, the general anticipation was that it may be even more difficult for the Korean millennials to first participate in sustainable tourism. Indeed, the harsh and competitive social structure of Korea

has been controversial and brought about the millennial generation's pessimism about the future. However, in this research, it was revealed that even in such a difficult situation, the Korean millennials found values by feeling a sense of achievement and accomplishment through sustainable tourism. This result corresponds with the current trend of the Korean millennials' fixation on self-development and self-growth due to the highly competitive environment accompanied by youth unemployment. This connotes that functioning as a source of sustainable tourism, the competitive environment in Korea consequently enables the Korean millennials to continue to seek self-development through meaningful experience. In turn, this holds a possibility of tourism becoming an advantage for the millennials just as one of the interviewees who traveled sustainably expressed the hope that the trip would become one of the qualifications for him.

Also, the motivation of Korean millennials for sustainable tourism was found to vary from that of other nationalities. While the millennials of the United Kingdom, the United States, and even China have similarities in that they all travel in order to relax, to escape from the ordinary, and to experience a different lifestyle (Rita et al., 2018), what made the Korean millennial sustainable tourists participate in sustainable tourism repeatedly was mainly to develop themselves or to feel a sense of achievement. This was also different from that of the participants' volunteer tourism which was to give and experience service work. Given the differences in travel motivation among nationalities, Korean millennial sustainable tourists presented their own uniqueness in that they perceive it as a means of preparation for the future rather than the enjoyment of the present. This was also reaffirmed in the most recent survey conducted by Hotels.com (2020) based in Korea where self-development was reported to be the major travel motivation for the Korean millennials.

This research also found that the Korean government's shift on sustainable tourism from a limited view on the environment to a broader view of society and the well-being of

local residents is consistent with the perception of sustainable tourism of the Korean millennial sustainable tourists. When asked to define sustainable tourism, Korean millennial sustainable tourists did not limit the definition to being environmentally friendly but recognized local interaction as one of the most crucial aspects of sustainable tourism. They especially valued intimate interaction with local people. While it poses a new approach to its extant tourism policy, this explains that the Korean government's previous sustainable tourism-related policies focusing solely on the environment may have overlooked the most important aspect: the benefits of locals.

Not only the motivational factors but understanding awareness is also essential in sustainable tourism as they make the first step in developing an adequate marketing and promotion strategy. In the case of Korea, it may even require more intense promotional strategies as Korean millennials are highly unlikely to be aware of the concept. In fact, even the interviewees, who participated at least twice in sustainable tourism, had a merely vague understanding of the concept. Again, this manifests the significance to identify the motivation and create intense promotion and marketing targeting the millennial generation.

Effective marketing strategies of social marketing and demarketing should be developed in accordance with the values, motivation, and perceptions of the target in general. When it comes to the Korean millennials, regional governments, as well as DMOs, can utilize marketing campaigns of the less-visited destinations using keywords: "tours where you can self-develop, meaningful and memorable travel." Additionally, social media influencers can be involved in promoting less-visited regions or sustainable tourism. Previously, a Korean influencer has set an example of inspiring his followers to become environmentally aware. Likewise, social media influencers can bring their creative contents in the marketing of sustainable tourism as an effective approach.

As the Korean millennial sustainable tourists understand the need of designating the special districts, it is crucial that the Korean government makes full use of demarketing and regulates over-tourism by initiating a special district designation from the proper Tourism Promotion Act. However, what is equally important is to build a social consensus and spread awareness of sustainable tourism. With the government's support in setting the right tone in the society, a social trend to go on sustainable tourism could emerge. This will not only ease the difficulty of recommending sustainable tourism to others but also naturally provide a venue for many others to participate voluntarily in sustainable tourism.

6. CONCLUSION

By dint of the travel ban imposed by governments in an attempt to restrict the Novel COVID-19, one thing that we could applaud, however in silence, would be the positive reaction from the environment that came with the lowest level of carbon emission in decades. About eight in ten flights were grounded in land, streets full of people were emptied, and the wildlife was able to roam back again. In this line, sustainable tourism is likely to have a new upsurge, as travelers become more environmentally aware. It has also been agreed that the way of traveling will be completely changed even after the COVID-19. One of the most mentioned in the post-COVID-19 travel trends is the preference for outdoor experiences in nature. Instead of visiting the most visited tourist attractions, people will look for isolated places in the countryside or mountains. The outdoor tourists are expected to be satisfied with the authenticity of the experience and appreciate nature. The millennials are expected to participate more fiercely than other generations when travel resumes. This will be a once-in-a-century travel rebound for the government and businesses to take an opportunity of having a strategic approach to engage millennials in sustainable travel.

The significance of this study relies on its contributions to the existing research in two ways. First, it adds to the literature by exploring the travel motivations and the perception of sustainable tourism of the Korean millennials that have been underexamined thus far. Secondly, it provides potential reasons behind the dilemma of the millennials' sustainable values and actions and suggests possible ways to raise the awareness and participation of sustainable tourism in Korea. Based on the data analysis, relevant policy measures that the Korean government should adopt in its endeavor to promote sustainable tourism are introduced.

Likewise, local governments pursuing sustainable tourism should first understand people's perceptions and awareness and identify the factors that could motivate them to engage in sustainable tourism. Just as the Korean millennials, who are likely to have low awareness of sustainable tourism, may take action if sustainable tourism is promoted as a "meaningful experience" or "a way to self-develop" in the right channel, promotional strategies should reflect the specific generation's traits. Also, the strategies for increasing participation in sustainable tourism may appear differently depending on generations and national characteristics; therefore, preliminary investigations are necessary when planning relevant policy measures.

This research was an exploratory study that aimed to gain a profound understanding of the Korean millennial sustainable tourists who have participated in sustainable tourism at least twice. As this research aimed to have an in-depth understanding of a small number of samples that were purposively selected, for further research, I would like to suggest a large-scale survey to find out about the general Korean millennials' perception and awareness of sustainable tourism. In such a survey, it would also be meaningful to find an answer to whether the Korean millennials with pro-sustainable attitudes have a hard time converting into action, as depicted in the literature. Having a large-scale survey will help comprehend

the overall tendency for sustainable travel patterns of the Korean millennials, which could lead to not only corroborating the needs but also further refining relevant marketing and policy strategies.

Finally, subsequent studies could also open further discussion on other generations' perceptions and awareness of sustainable tourism. It will be valuable to compare the traits of each generation and create potential marketing strategies that are suitable for each generation. These will eventually add value in providing insights to the government officials and tourism enterprises that aspire to plan more effective strategies to promote sustainable tourism.

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