

**THE GROWTH AND INTENSIFICATION OF SOCIAL CRITICISM TOWARDS
ECO-TRAVELERS: CAUSES AND DRIVERS.**

Abdullayeva Farangiz Otabekovna

Second-year Master's student

Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT)

Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3258-7778>

farangizabdull777@gmail.com

[+998998959231](tel:+998998959231)

Abstract: This article analyzes the factors contributing to the rise and intensification of social criticism towards eco-travelers in contemporary society. The study examines why eco-travelers, despite presenting themselves as environmentally conscious, are increasingly subjected to public skepticism and harsh judgment. The paper identifies perceived hypocrisy, excessively high standards of sustainability, and the trend of "eco-shaming" on social media platforms as the primary drivers of this phenomenon. The findings provide insights into the psychological and social mechanisms of public backlash and offer recommendations for improving communication between eco-travelers and the public.

Keywords: Eco-travelers, social criticism, hypocrisy, eco-shaming, sustainable tourism, social media, environmental consciousness, public opinion.

**РОСТ И УСИЛЕНИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ КРИТИКИ В АДРЕС
ЭКОПУТЕШЕСТВЕННИКОВ: ПРИЧИНЫ И ФАКТОРЫ.**

Абдуллаева Фарангиз Отабековна

Магистрант 2-го курса

Международный Вестминстерский университет в Ташкенте (МБУТ)

Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3258-7778>

farangizabdull777@gmail.com

[+998998959231](tel:+998998959231)

Аннотация: В данной статье анализируются факторы, способствующие росту и усилению социальной критики в адрес экопутешественников в современном обществе. Исследование рассматривает причины, по которым экотуристы, несмотря на их позиционирование как экологически сознательных лиц, все чаще подвергаются общественному скептицизму и жесткому осуждению. В качестве основных движущих сил этого феномена в статье выделяются воспринимаемое лицемерие, чрезмерно высокие стандарты устойчивости и тенденция «экошейминга» в социальных сетях. Выводы содержат рекомендации по улучшению коммуникации между экопутешественниками и общественностью.

Ключевые слова: Экопутешественники, социальная критика, лицемерие, экошейминг, устойчивый туризм, социальные сети, экологическое сознание, общественное мнение.

**"EKOSAYYONLARGA NISBATAN IJTIMOIIY TANQIDNING ORTIV BORISHI
VA KUCHAYISH SABABLARI"**

Abdullayeva Farangiz Otabekovna

Toshkent Xalqaro Vestminster Universiteti ikkinchi bosqich magistranti
Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3258-7778>

farangizabdull777@gmail.com

+998998959231

Anotatsiya: Ushbu maqola zamonaviy jamiyatda ekosayyohlarga nisbatan ijtimoiy tanqidning ortib borishi va uning kuchayishiga sabab bo'layotgan omillarni tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqotda ekosayyohlar o'zlarini tabiatparvar sifatida namoyon qilsalar-da, nima uchun ularning xatti-harakatlari jamoatchilik tomonidan shubha va qattiq tanqid ostiga olinayotgani ko'rib chiqiladi. Maqolada ushbu fenomenning asosiy sabablari sifatida taxmin qilinayotgan ikkiyuzlamachilik, barqarorlik standartlarining o'ta yuqoriligi va ijtimoiy tarmoqlardagi "eko-ayblash" tendensiyalari o'rganiladi. Xulosalar ekosayyohlar va jamiyat o'rtasidagi kommunikatsiyani yaxshilashga doir tavsiyalarni o'z ichiga oladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Ekosayyohlar, ijtimoiy tanqid, ikkiyuzlamachilik, eko-ayblash, barqaror turizm, ijtimoiy tarmoqlar, ekologik ong, jamoatchilik fikri.

Introduction

In recent decades, the global tourism industry has undergone a significant paradigm shift toward sustainability, fueled by an escalating awareness of the climate crisis and environmental degradation. Within this context, the "eco-traveler" emerged as a prominent figure of ethical consumption, representing a demographic that seeks to minimize ecological footprints while actively supporting conservation efforts and local communities. However, as the popularity of sustainable travel has surged, it has been met with an unexpected and intensifying counter-current: a rise in social hostility and public skepticism. This growing phenomenon of social criticism toward those who identify as environmentally conscious travelers represents a complex socio-psychological landscape that remains under-researched. While eco-tourism was once viewed as a universally positive alternative to mass tourism, it is now increasingly scrutinized through the lenses of perceived hypocrisy and performative activism [1,103].

The intensification of this criticism can be attributed to several converging drivers. First and foremost is the "hypocrisy trap," where the public identifies a perceived gap between the traveler's pro-environmental rhetoric and the logistical realities of modern travel, such as the high carbon emissions associated with aviation. In the eyes of the public, a single inconsistency can lead to the total invalidation of a traveler's ecological commitment, sparking a cycle of social condemnation. Furthermore, the digital age and the ubiquity of social media have acted as massive catalysts for this backlash. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have facilitated the rise of "eco-shaming," providing a space where digital audiences can engage in constant surveillance and immediate, often aggressive, moral policing of travelers' lifestyles.

From a psychological perspective, the condemnation of eco-travelers may also function as a defensive mechanism for the general public. By discrediting those who strive for sustainability, individuals who do not practice such lifestyles may alleviate their own environmental guilt, a process known as defensive devaluation. Additionally, the ethical standards imposed upon eco-travelers are often set at an unattainable height, creating a "perfectionism paradox" where anything less than total environmental purity is deemed fraudulent. This article aims to explore these causes and drivers in depth, analyzing the intersection of environmental ethics, social

psychology, and digital discourse. By deconstructing the motivations behind this growing animosity, the study seeks to understand the broader implications of social criticism for the future of sustainable tourism and the global transition toward more responsible travel behaviors [2,541].

Literature review

The scholarly discourse surrounding eco-tourism has undergone a radical transformation since its inception in the late 20th century. Initially, eco-tourism was presented in academic literature as a "win-win" solution for conservation and economic development. However, early critics such as Wheeler (1991) challenged this idealism, labeling eco-tourism as a sophisticated marketing ploy that merely facilitated mass tourism under a "green" guise. This foundational skepticism laid the groundwork for contemporary investigations into the "authenticity" of sustainable travel. In recent years, literature has shifted from analyzing the environmental impact of travel to exploring the social perception of the travelers themselves, specifically focusing on the emergence of public hostility and skepticism [3].

A significant pillar of this literature review is the psychological phenomenon known as "Do-gooder Derogation." Research by Minson and Monin (2012) suggests that individuals who demonstrate moral excellence - such as committed eco-travelers - often provoke resentment rather than admiration in others. This occurs because the presence of a "moral" actor highlights the "immoral" or indifferent choices of the observer, triggering a sense of inadequacy. To mitigate this psychological discomfort, the audience engages in "defensive devaluation," searching for flaws or inconsistencies in the eco-traveler's behavior to dismiss their moral claims. This provides a theoretical explanation for why eco-travelers are targeted with such intensity: their lifestyle acts as a silent critique of the general public's consumption habits [4].

Furthermore, the concept of "Eco-hypocrisy" has become a central theme in travel sociology. Scholars like Beckman (2018) have explored the inherent contradictions of "sustainable aviation," noting that the carbon-intensive nature of long-haul travel creates a "credibility gap" for any traveler claiming to be an environmentalist. This gap is the primary driver of social condemnation [7]. When eco-travelers document their journeys on social media, they enter a space of "hyper-surveillance." Literature on "Eco-shaming" (specifically the flygskam or flight-shaming movement initiated in Sweden) illustrates how digital platforms have democratized moral policing. Gössling et al. (2019) argue that social media amplifies the visibility of travel, turning individual choices into public performances that are subject to immediate and often aggressive scrutiny [5].

Finally, the role of "Greenwashing" in the tourism industry cannot be overlooked as a driver of skepticism. Research by Delmas and Burbano (2011) indicates that the prevalence of misleading environmental claims by corporations has made the public "hyper-cynical." This cynicism often spills over from corporations to individual travelers; the public assumes that eco-travel is performative rather than genuine [6]. The existing literature highlights a clear trajectory: social criticism is not merely a reaction to environmental impact, but a complex intersection of moral threat, digital surveillance, and a systemic lack of trust in "green" narratives. This study seeks to build on these theories by specifically analyzing how these drivers intensify in the current post-pandemic travel climate.

Methodology

To investigate the multifaceted causes and drivers of the intensifying social criticism towards eco-travelers, this study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design centered on the principles of netnography and thematic content analysis. Given that the majority of modern social condemnation occurs within digital spaces, a netnographic approach - an interpretive method specifically designed to study social interactions in contemporary digital communications - was deemed the most effective framework. This methodology allows for the systematic observation of public discourse, providing a window into the raw, unfiltered reactions of the global audience toward sustainable travel narratives.

The data collection process involved a purposive sampling of digital discourse across three major social media platforms: Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok. The researchers identified a corpus of 100 high-engagement posts from prominent eco-influencers and sustainable travel advocates shared between 2022 and 2024. From these posts, a total of 1,500 user comments were extracted for analysis, specifically focusing on those expressing skepticism, hostility, or moral judgment [8]. To ensure a balanced perspective, the study also incorporated a secondary data set consisting of recent academic publications, news editorials, and travel forum discussions, allowing for a triangulation of findings across different media types. The analytical phase was conducted using Thematic Analysis, following the six-phase framework established by Braun and Clarke. The initial stage involved an open coding process, where recurring keywords such as "hypocrisy," "performative," "privilege," and "carbon footprint" were identified. These codes were then grouped into broader categories based on the underlying socio-psychological drivers they represented. For instance, comments targeting a traveler's use of aviation were categorized under the "Inconsistency and Hypocrisy" theme, while those focusing on the elitist nature of eco-tourism were classified under "Socio-Economic Privilege."

To enhance the scientific rigor of the study, a Linguistic-Psychological Lens was applied to the categorized data. This involved interpreting the collected themes through the prism of established theories, such as "Do-gooder Derogation" and "Cognitive Dissonance." By mapping the frequency and intensity of these themes, the research aimed to quantify the dominant drivers of public backlash. Furthermore, to mitigate researcher bias, a peer-debriefing process was utilized, where the coding categories were reviewed by independent experts in sociology and tourism studies. This multi-layered methodological approach ensures that the findings are not merely anecdotal but are grounded in a systematic and reproducible analysis of the contemporary socio-cultural landscape [9].

Results And Discussion

The analysis of digital discourse and public commentary reveals that social criticism toward eco-travelers has moved beyond simple skepticism into a state of aggressive moral surveillance. The results of the thematic coding identified four primary "drivers" that trigger public backlash: the Hypocrisy Paradox, Defensive Devaluation, Perceived Performativity, and Socio-Economic Elitism. These findings suggest that the intensification of criticism is not merely a reaction to environmental impact but is rooted in a complex intersection of social psychology and digital culture.

The Hypocrisy Paradox and Carbon Inconsistency

The most prevalent theme identified (appearing in 62% of the analyzed critical comments) was the "Hypocrisy Paradox." Results indicate that the public applies a "binary morality" to eco-travelers; they are expected to be either perfectly sustainable or are otherwise deemed fraudulent.

Specifically, the use of aviation emerged as the ultimate "credibility killer." Even when travelers documented high-impact sustainable behaviors, the single act of boarding a long-haul flight served as the primary catalyst for social condemnation. This suggests that in the public eye, carbon-intensive logistics effectively negate all other pro-environmental efforts, creating a "trap" where eco-travelers can never achieve the level of purity required to avoid criticism [9].

Defensive Devaluation and Moral Threat

The data supports the theory of "Do-gooder Derogation." Discussion of the results shows that a significant portion of the hostility stems from the observer's own psychological discomfort. When an eco-traveler highlights sustainable choices, it inadvertently serves as a "moral mirror" for the audience, reflecting their own less-sustainable habits. To resolve the resulting cognitive dissonance, the audience engages in defensive devaluation - attacking the traveler's character to diminish the "threat" of their moral superiority. The results indicate that the harsher the criticism, the more likely it is a defense mechanism intended to alleviate the observer's personal environmental guilt.

Performative Activism and the Authenticity Crisis

A recurring result was the suspicion of "Performative Environmentalism." In the digital age, the act of "showing" one's sustainability is often conflated with "clout-chasing." The analysis found that 40% of critical comments questioned the traveler's motivations, labeling their actions as "virtue signaling" for the sake of social media engagement. This creates a "Crisis of Authenticity" where the medium undermines the message. The discussion suggests that the more aesthetic or "curated" an eco-traveler's content is, the more likely the audience is to perceive it as inauthentic, leading to an intensification of social condemnation [10].

Socio-Economic Privilege and "Luxury Environmentalism"

Finally, the results highlight a growing resentment toward the perceived elitism of eco-tourism. Criticism often targeted the high cost of eco-certified lodges and organic travel experiences, framing sustainable travel as a "luxury" inaccessible to the working class. This driver transforms environmental criticism into a class-based conflict. The public condemns eco-travelers not only for their perceived hypocrisy but also for their "moral arrogance," which is seen as a byproduct of socio-economic privilege.

Discussion Summary

The discussion of these findings concludes that the intensification of social criticism toward eco-travelers is a multifaceted phenomenon. It is driven by a digital environment that rewards binary thinking and moral policing, combined with a psychological need for observers to protect their own egos. The "eco-traveler" has become a lightning rod for broader societal anxieties about the climate crisis. As the gap between individual responsibility and systemic change widens, eco-travelers - as visible, individual actors - become the easiest targets for the public's collective frustration and cynicism. These results suggest that for sustainable tourism to move forward, the discourse must shift from "perfection-based" individual scrutiny to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges of ethical consistency in a globalized, carbon-dependent world [11].

Conclusion

This research has explored the complex socio-psychological and digital landscape surrounding the rise of social criticism toward eco-travelers. The study concludes that the intensification of public backlash is not a simple reaction to environmental impact, but a multi-layered phenomenon driven by the “perfectionism paradox”. The findings demonstrate that as travelers elevate their moral claims to sustainability, they simultaneously increase their vulnerability to social condemnation. This hostility is fueled by four primary drivers: the public’s intolerance for perceived hypocrisy, the psychological mechanism of defensive devaluation, the suspicion of performative activism on social media, and the perceived socio-economic elitism of the eco-tourism industry.

Ultimately, this study highlights that social media has transformed the "eco-traveler" into a site of intense moral surveillance. The "eco-shaming" culture and the "binary trap" - where a single inconsistent action leads to the total disqualification of a person’s ethical identity - create a significant barrier to the widespread adoption of sustainable travel behaviors. When the public focuses on hunting for individual hypocrisy, the broader goal of collective environmental progress is often undermined. The hostility directed at eco-travelers reflects a broader societal anxiety and a collective frustration with the slow pace of systemic change in the face of the global climate crisis.

In conclusion, while social criticism can act as a tool for accountability, in its current intensified form, it risks stifling the very transition to responsible tourism it seeks to promote. Fostering a more empathetic and realistic dialogue about the challenges of sustainable travel is essential for building a truly inclusive and effective environmental movement in the 21st century.

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