Youth Cycling Tourism on the Sunshine Coast: Exploring Impacts and Sustainability for Future Generations

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Introduction - Gaps in Current Knowledge

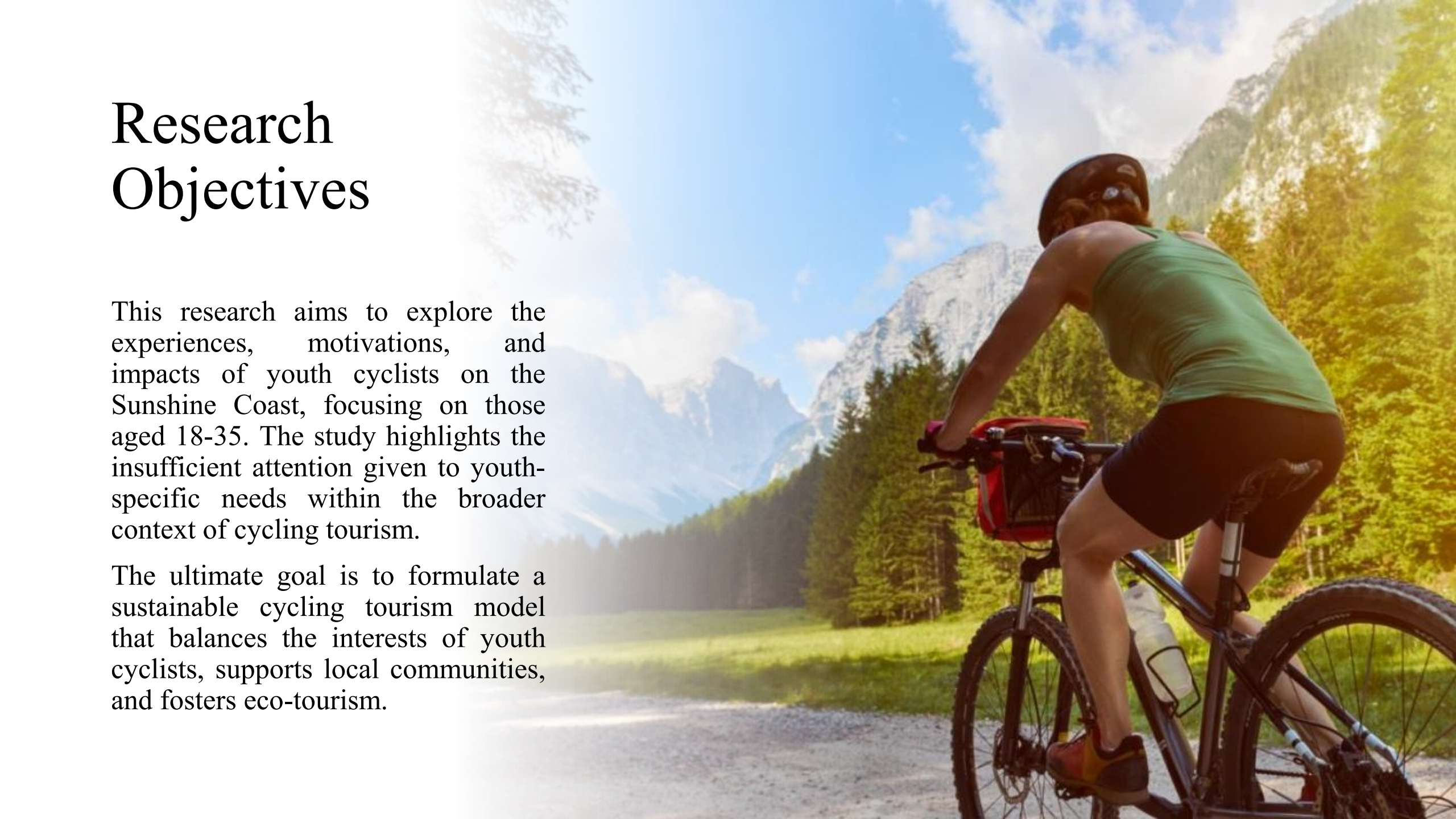
Cycling tourism is an emerging and highly impactful segment within the global tourism industry, known for its positive contributions to environmental sustainability, public health, and local businesses. However, much of the existing research focuses on well-established European destinations, often overlooking emerging locations like the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia.

In particular, youth cycling tourism—targeting cyclists aged 18-35—remains underexplored. This study aims to fill that gap by understanding youth cyclists' experiences, motivations, and the socio-economic and environmental impacts they have on the region.

Research Objectives

This research aims to explore the experiences, motivations, and impacts of youth cyclists on the Sunshine Coast, focusing on those aged 18-35. The study highlights the insufficient attention given to youth-specific needs within the broader context of cycling tourism.

The ultimate goal is to formulate a sustainable cycling tourism model that balances the interests of youth cyclists, supports local communities, and fosters eco-tourism.

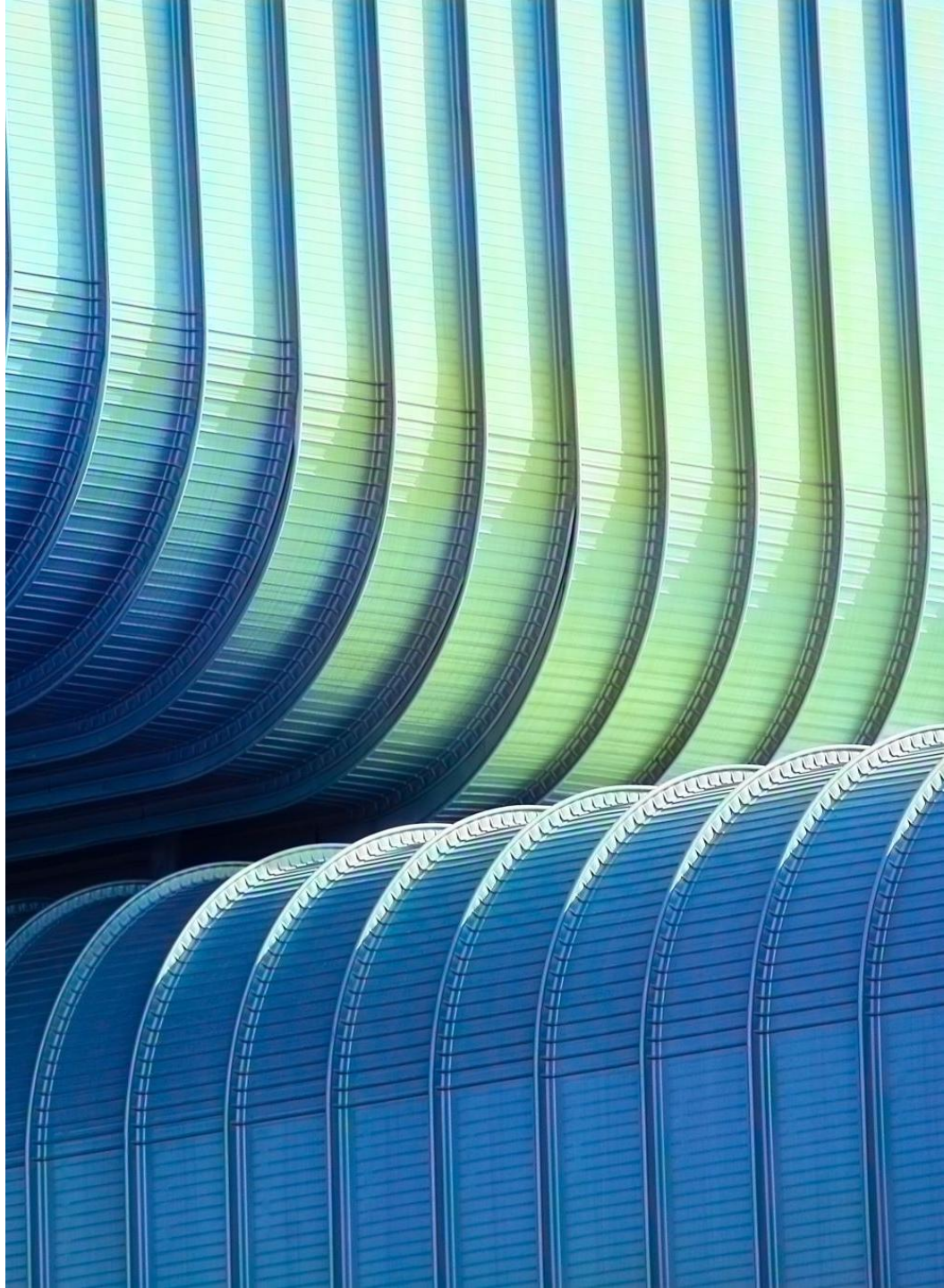


Theoretical Framework

The research utilizes a combination of four critical theories to understand the dynamics of youth cycling tourism.

The **Theory of Planned Behavior** helps explain how youth cyclists make decisions about where and when to cycle, based on their intentions and perceived control over their actions.

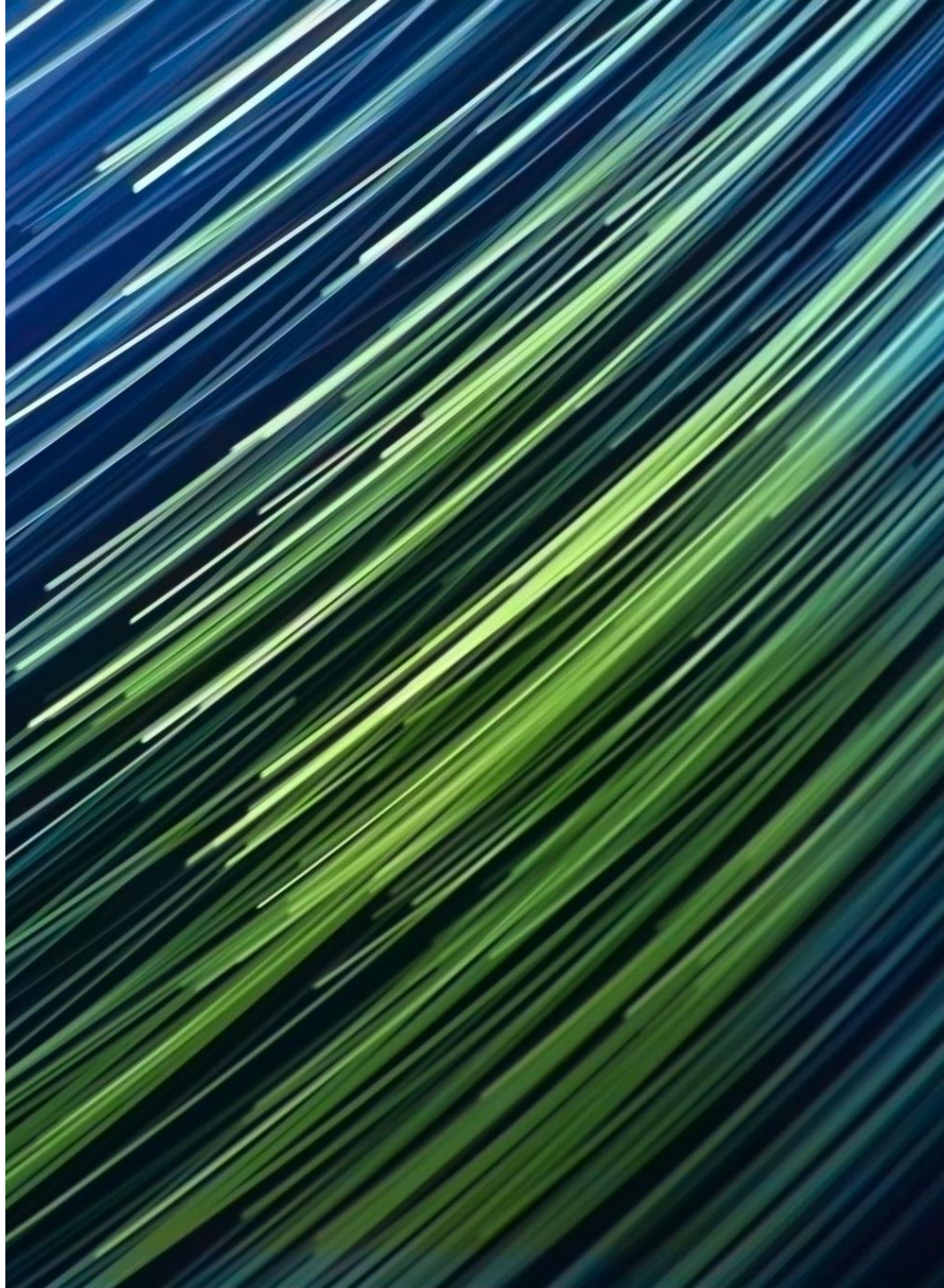
Social Identity Theory is applied to understand how youth cyclists' sense of identity as eco-conscious tourists influences their travel behavior.



Theoretical Framework

The **Sustainable Tourism Framework** focuses on promoting long-term sustainability in tourism practices, ensuring minimal negative impact on local communities and the environment.

Experience Economy Theory emphasizes the importance of memorable and engaging tourism experiences, where youth cyclists value adventure, challenge, and community in their travel activities. These theories together offer a comprehensive understanding of youth cyclists' behavior, motivations, and attitudes toward sustainability.



Research Approach and Data Collection

The study adopts a qualitative approach, collecting data through semi-structured interviews with youth tourists to understand their experiences and motivations. Focus groups were conducted with local stakeholders—including business owners, policymakers, and tourism authorities—to assess the socio-economic impact of youth cycling tourism. Additionally, direct observation at key cycling sites provides a more holistic view of the cycling experience. By combining these data sources, the research paints a comprehensive picture of youth cycling tourism's impacts on the Sunshine Coast, focusing on both the cyclists' perspectives and the local community.

Finding -Youth Cyclists' Unique Preferences

Preference	Description	Impact
Eco-Friendly Destinations	Youth cyclists prefer locations with clear sustainability practices.	Enhances the appeal of destinations to eco-conscious youth cyclists.
Community Engagement	They seek places that promote social interaction, group cycling tours, and community-based activities.	Promotes local culture while fostering a sense of belonging.
Adventure and Challenge	Youth cyclists enjoy cycling routes that challenge their abilities and offer new experiences.	Attracts cyclists seeking excitement and growth.

Finding - Economic Contributions of Youth Cyclists

Economic Contribution	Description	Impact
Spending on Tourism Services	Youth cyclists contribute to local businesses by spending on meals, rentals, and activities.	Supports local businesses in the hospitality and cycling sectors.
Niche Eco-Tourism Markets	Demand for eco-friendly cycling services, such as sustainable lodging and eco-tours, is on the rise.	Fosters the growth of sustainable tourism businesses.
Job Creation	Increased demand for cycling-related services creates new employment opportunities.	Boosts the local economy by creating jobs in tourism and services.

Thematic Analysis - Key Themes from Interviews and Observations

Theme	Description	Impact
Sustainability Focus	Youth cyclists prioritize sustainability in their travel choices, seeking eco-conscious destinations.	Drives demand for eco-friendly infrastructure and practices.
Infrastructure Gaps	There is a recognized need for improved cycling infrastructure, such as better trails, signage, and bike rental stations.	Local governments and businesses must invest in infrastructure to cater to this market.
Social Identity	Youth cyclists view themselves as part of an eco-conscious and adventure-seeking community, which influences their travel decisions.	Encourages destinations to tailor experiences that resonate with youth values of community and sustainability.

The Role of Social Identity in Cycling Tourism

Social Identity Theory plays a significant role in shaping the behaviors and motivations of youth cyclists. This research reveals how youth cyclists see themselves as part of a broader eco-tourism and cycling community. Their travel decisions are heavily influenced by the desire to connect with like-minded individuals who share similar values of sustainability, adventure, and social responsibility. This sense of social identity drives their preference for destinations that offer not only physical activity but also opportunities for social interaction and community building, shaping a new dimension of cycling tourism.





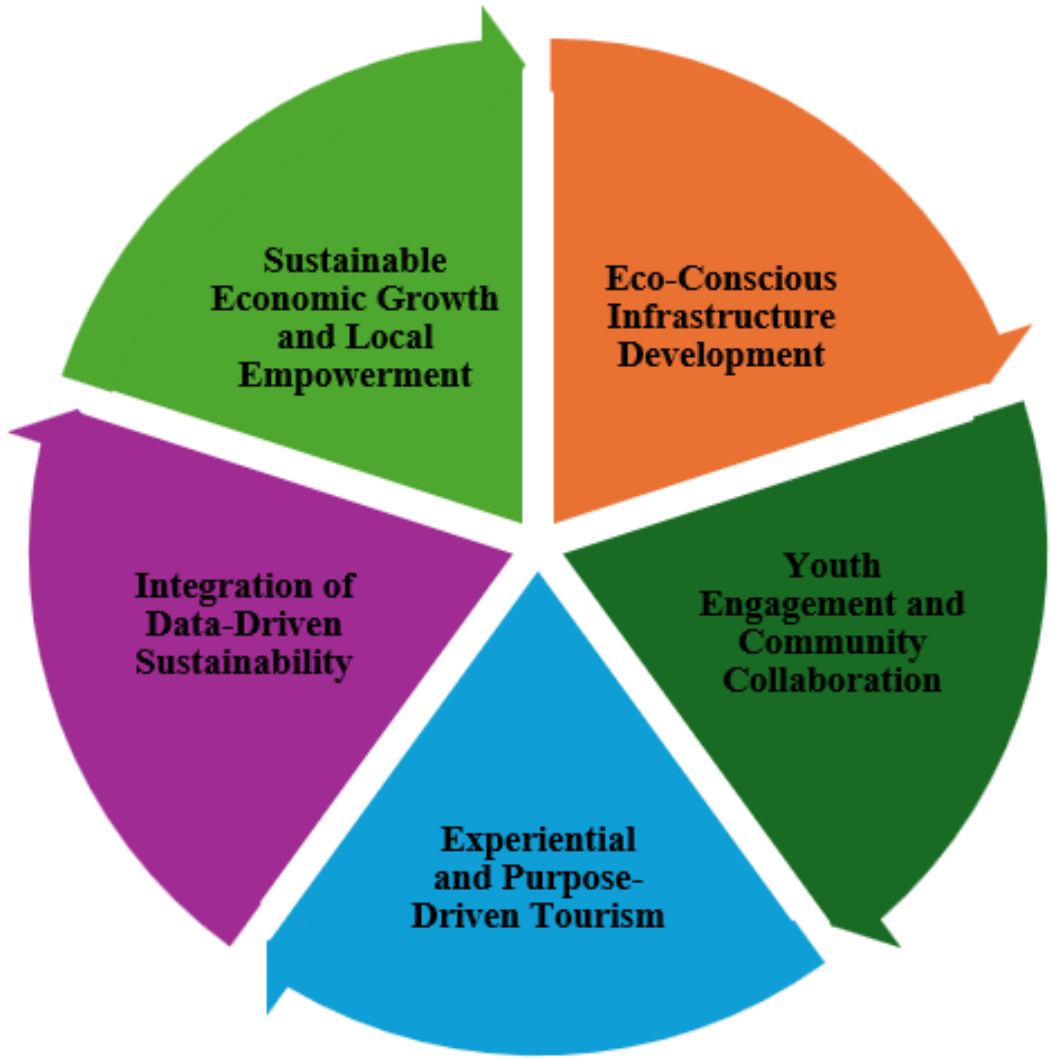
Sustainable Policies and Infrastructure Planning

The findings from this study will guide policies and infrastructure planning on the Sunshine Coast, with potential applications for other regions seeking to attract cycling tourists. Recommendations include the development of sustainable cycling infrastructure, such as well-maintained bike trails, eco-friendly accommodations, and community-based cycling events. These strategies should be tailored to meet the needs of youth cyclists while ensuring that the environmental impact remains minimal. The research calls for collaboration between local businesses, policymakers, and tourism authorities to create an integrated and sustainable model that appeals to youth cyclists while preserving the destination’s resources.

Introducing a New Sustainable Youth Cycling Tourism Model

One of the key findings of this research is the proposal of a new model for sustainable youth cycling tourism. This model integrates the needs of youth cyclists with the goals of local communities and environmental sustainability. It includes the development of eco-friendly infrastructure, such as dedicated bike lanes and renewable energy-powered accommodations. The model also promotes community engagement, ensuring that youth cyclists actively contribute to local conservation efforts. This approach offers a balanced solution, catering to youth cyclists' preferences for adventure and sustainability while ensuring that the local community benefits from the tourism without compromising its resources.

SUSTAINABLE CYCLING ECO SYSTEM



Conclusion and Innovation

This study introduces a fresh perspective on youth cycling tourism, highlighting the emerging trends, motivations, and impacts of this dynamic segment. By developing a sustainable tourism model that balances the needs of youth cyclists, local communities, and the environment, the research provides valuable insights for future tourism development. The model serves as a reference point for destinations like the Sunshine Coast and can be adapted to other regions looking to tap into the growing market of youth cycling tourists. The findings also pave the way for future research exploring long-term environmental impacts and community-driven tourism solutions.

Thank you

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