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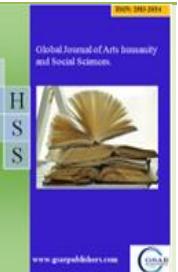
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## The current situation and managerial implications for responsible tourism development in Kien Giang Province based on tourist surveys

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### Abstract

Responsible tourism is a development trend in the tourism industry aimed at maximizing positive aspects and minimizing negative impacts from tourism. Besides achievements, tourism in Kien Giang Province also reveals many limitations that can be addressed through the approach of responsible tourism development. With the purpose of analyzing the current situation of responsible tourism development in Kien Giang Province based on content and territory according to tourists' perceptions, this study was conducted. Research data were collected via a survey with questionnaires administered to 400 tourists. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA analysis methods were used to analyze the data. The research results reflect the highlights and limitations in the development of responsible tourism in Kien Giang regarding aspects such as product development, communication, labor usage, tourism management, community actions, operation of food service establishments, and accommodation facilities. Additionally, the differences in the development level of these aspects by surveyed locations were also clarified.

**KEYWORDS:** Tourism, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, An Giang, Kien Giang

### INTRODUCTION

After the Cape Town Declaration (2002) and the Responsible Tourism Charter (2022), the importance of responsible tourism has increasingly been recognized globally. These documents emphasize the role of responsible tourism in contributing to the mitigation of global challenges such as greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity degradation, and local water scarcity. Responsible tourism also promotes inclusive economic growth by improving working conditions and employment opportunities for local residents. In addition, responsible tourism enhances tourists' experiences through cultural exchange activities and authentic interactions with nature (Goodwin, 2023). Owing to the growing environmental and social awareness of tourists and tourism stakeholders, together with supportive trends for the development of responsible tourism, such as the demand for authentic travel experiences and the increasing consumer concern for destination sustainability, responsible tourism has continued to expand (SNV, 2019).

Kien Giang Province, located in the Mekong Delta, possesses a rich combination of natural ecosystems (sea, islands, forests,

mountains, plains, and river systems) and cultural heritage (historical sites, festivals, traditional crafts, and cuisine), making it one of the country's most promising tourism destinations. In recent years, the tourism sector in Kien Giang has developed rapidly. In 2024, the province welcomed more than 9.8 million visitors and generated approximately VND 25,141 billion in revenue (Quoc Trinh, 2025). Although tourism has made a significant contribution to local economic growth, it has also raised concerns regarding environmental resource degradation, uneven community participation, pressure on infrastructure and ecosystems, and unstable service pricing (Kien Giang Provincial Party Committee, 2021). These concerns can be mitigated when the locality adopts a responsible tourism development approach, as its inherent objective is to minimize negative economic, environmental, and social impacts while maximizing positive outcomes across these dimensions. Furthermore, responsible tourism is evidence-based and action-oriented, requiring the joint efforts of tourism operators, authorities, local communities, tourists, and other stakeholders to implement activities in a transparent, ethical, and sustainable manner. Responsible tourism differs from sustainable tourism in that it places a clear emphasis on micro-level interactions among all tourism actors and highlights the responsibility of stakeholders



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to contribute positively to the destinations they affect (Burrai et al., 2019; Goodwin, 2023).

This article aims to analyze the current tourism context in Kien Giang from a responsible tourism perspective and to propose development solutions that are appropriate to local conditions. The study focuses on the aspects of responsible tourism in the interaction and balance among the economic, social, and environmental pillars. The research findings contribute to enriching the theoretical framework of responsible tourism and offer practical implications for adopting a responsible tourism development approach in Kien Giang.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Theoretical background and analytical content

After World War II, international tourism developed rapidly. The growth and expansion of tourism have been regarded as both a blessing and a curse (Kamau et al., 2022). The substantial contributions of tourism to job creation, income generation, foreign exchange earnings, diversification, and the promotion of economic growth are considered a blessing. Conversely, environmental degradation caused by tourism is viewed as a curse. Concerns regarding changes in the natural and social environment have stimulated research on the relationship between tourism and the environment over time, serving as a premise for the emergence of responsible tourism. Criticism of sustainable tourism has also been a necessary premise for the emergence of responsible tourism. The concept of sustainable tourism has been criticized for being vague and difficult to understand. This has created a gap between its theoretical meaning and practical application, making it difficult to implement in practice (Afamefuna et al., 2019). Similarly, McCombes et al. (2015) acknowledged that the ambiguity of the concept of sustainable tourism has reduced its value and affected its application. Therefore, despite more than 30 years of academic attention, sustainable tourism has seen little change in practice (Moscardo & Murphy, 2014).

The responsible tourism development approach emerged in the 1980s (Leslie, 2012); however, the concept of responsible tourism was officially recognized in the Cape Town Declaration in 2002 (International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, 2002). Since then, there has been a shift from vague sustainability aspirations toward concrete, actionable responsibilities of tourism stakeholders (Goodwin, 2023), and responsible tourism has increasingly been integrated into global tourism policies in alignment with the United Nations Millennium Sustainable Development Goals.

To date, there are multiple interpretations of responsible tourism. Responsible tourism is defined as any form of tourism development or activity that respects and conserves natural, cultural, and social resources over the long term, contributes positively and equitably to the development and well-being of those who live, work, and spend their holidays at the destination (Manente et al., 2014). Sangkhaduang et al. (2021) argue that

responsible tourism minimizes negative impacts on the economy, society, and environment while maximizing positive impacts on tourism development. In this study, responsible tourism is understood as a set of tourism activities aimed at minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of destinations, while maximizing benefits for local communities and promoting responsible actions toward tourists.

In recent years, several studies have examined factors influencing the development of responsible tourism, including "Factors affecting the development of responsible tourism in Kien Hai District, Kien Giang Province" (Nguyen et al., 2020), "Factors affecting the development of responsible tourism in Phu Quoc City, Kien Giang Province" (Tran, 2023), and "Factors affecting the development of responsible tourism: A case study of Ho Chi Minh City" (Vu et al., 2023). The findings indicate that the development of responsible tourism in Kien Hai District (Kien Giang Province) is influenced by factors such as responsible tourism communication, responsible operation of food service establishments, responsible operation of accommodation facilities, responsible community actions, and the development of responsible tourism products (Nguyen et al., 2020). Similarly, the development of responsible tourism in Phu Quoc is influenced by factors including responsible tourism communication, organizational management in responsible food service provision, responsible operation of accommodation facilities, responsible community actions in tourism, responsible tourism management, and the development of responsible tourism products (Tran, 2023). The study by Vu et al. (2023) shows that the development of responsible tourism in Ho Chi Minh City is influenced by factors such as the development of responsible tourism products, responsible tourism communication, responsible actions of residents, responsible operation of accommodation facilities, responsible operation of food service establishments, responsible labor practices, responsible tourism management, tourists' awareness of responsible tourism, and tourists' responsible tourism behavior. Accordingly, the analytical framework of this study is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Analytical framework of the study

### Data collection and analysis methods

The primary objective of this study is to analyze tourists' perceptions of aspects reflecting the development of responsible tourism. Therefore, a questionnaire survey method was employed. One of the main components of the questionnaire focused on tourists' perceptions of the current state of responsible tourism development in Kien Giang Province. These attributes were



measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very poor, very low) to 5 (very good, very high). Given that the nature of this study is descriptive and involves inferential testing (one-way analysis of ANOVA), a sample size of 400 tourists was considered sufficiently large. Respondents were invited to participate in the survey using a convenience sampling technique. Several members of the research team directly visited tourism destinations in U Minh Thuong, Rach Gia, Kien Luong, Ha Tien, Phu Quoc, and Kien Hai (Lai Son, Nam Du) to distribute the questionnaires. Tourists who agreed to participate completed the self-administered questionnaires during January, February, and March 2025. The sample consisted of 50.8% male and 49.2% female respondents, with age groups of 26-36 (33.8%), 15-25 (32.2%), 37-47 (20%), and 48 and above (14%). By location, the distribution included 40 tourists in U Minh Thuong (10%), 50 tourists in Rach Gia (12.5%), 50 tourists in Kien Luong (12.5%), 60 tourists in Ha Tien (15%), 50 tourists in Phu Quoc (12.5%), 10 tourists in Lai Son (25%), and 50 tourists in Nam Du (12.5%). In this study, for descriptive mean statistics, level 1 (very poor, very low) corresponds to values from 1.0 to 1.5, level 2 (poor, low) from 1.51 to 2.5, level 3 (average) from 2.51 to 3.5, level 4 (good, high) from 3.51 to 4.5, and level 5 (very good, very high) from 4.51 to 5.0.

## RESULTS

### Current status of responsible tourism development in Kien Giang Province

#### *Development of responsible tourism products*

The analysis results indicate that tourists highly value the authenticity of experiential activities (3.87) and opportunities for interaction with nature and culture (3.84), suggesting that tourism products in Kien Giang emphasize local characteristics and real-life experiences. Service quality (3.83) and the level of local community participation (3.76) are also positively evaluated, reflecting the important contribution of the community to responsible tourism development. In contrast, the level of negative environmental impacts caused by tourism activities is assessed at an average level (3.38), indicating that tourism in Kien Giang still generates certain environmental externalities. These results demonstrate the initial effectiveness of developing responsible tourism products in Kien Giang, as experiential elements, service quality, and community participation are positively perceived. However, tourism activities continue to exert negative impacts on the environment, highlighting the need to strengthen the management and protection of natural resources and the environment.

#### *Responsible tourism communication*

Tourists evaluate responsible tourism communication in Kien Giang at a good level, with an average score of 3.62, although there remains room for improvement. Activities such as providing information on appropriate tourist behavior (3.65), promoting environmental and resource protection (3.58), enhancing tourists' understanding (3.62), and ensuring tourist safety (3.63) are highly rated, reflecting comprehensive efforts in communication and

awareness-raising. However, the absence of outstanding scores indicates that these activities have not fully met expectations. These findings suggest that while responsible tourism communication in Kien Giang has achieved notable progress, it has not yet reached an optimal level. Communication activities are essential channels for guiding tourist behavior, raising environmental awareness, and ensuring visitor safety. Therefore, greater investment in responsible tourism communication is needed to foster a more environmentally friendly and safer tourism development

#### *Responsible use of labor in tourism*

The analysis results show that tourists positively assess the responsible use of labor in tourism in Kien Giang, with an overall average score of 3.87 out of 5. Among the evaluated criteria, employees' attitudes receive the highest score (3.99), reflecting friendliness and enthusiasm in service delivery. Working style and professional skills are also highly rated, with scores of 3.88 and 3.81, respectively, indicating professionalism within the tourism sector. Labor safety is likewise positively evaluated, though slightly lower than other aspects (3.80), suggesting that worker protection in the tourism working environment is generally ensured. These aspects should continue to be maintained and strengthened.

#### *Responsible tourism management*

Tourists rate responsible tourism management in Kien Giang with an average score of 3.62, reflecting a good but still incomplete level. Among the criteria, security and public order receive the highest average score (3.90), indicating a safe and stable tourism environment. Conversely, the adequacy and appropriate placement of waste bins received the lowest score (3.37), at an average level. The public listing of prices for goods and services and the cleanliness of restrooms are positively evaluated, with scores of 3.65 and 3.55, respectively. These results indicate that responsible tourism management in Kien Giang has established a reliable security environment; however, shortcomings remain in environmental sanitation infrastructure management and price transparency. Consequently, local authorities and stakeholders should prioritize improvements in these areas to enhance visitor experiences and promote more effective responsible tourism development.

#### *Responsible community actions in tourism*

Tourists give the highest evaluation to the friendliness and kindness of the local community, with an average score of 4.14, reflecting positive impressions and the warm hospitality of Kien Giang residents toward tourists. The absence of solicitation and harassment is also positively assessed (3.78), indicating civilized behavior within the community. Moreover, community awareness of landscape and environmental protection and public hygiene is rated positively (3.65). However, despite these positive aspects, tourists perceive that overcharging practices still exist (3.54), indicating issues that require improvement to enhance community responsibility and service attitudes. The local community plays a crucial role in responsible tourism development, particularly through attitudes and behaviors toward tourists. High levels of



friendliness form the foundation for building a positive destination image. Nevertheless, challenges such as environmental awareness and overcharging practices persist, necessitating stronger community awareness-raising and stricter management. Therefore, training and monitoring activities are required to enhance community responsibility and behavioral standards in tourism.

#### **Responsible operation of food service establishments**

The overall average score of 3.73 reflects tourists' positive evaluation of the responsibility of food service establishments. Specifically, staff friendliness and courtesy receive a high score of 4.00, indicating positive service attitudes. Security and safety are also highly rated (3.92), demonstrating that dining environments are perceived as safe. Food hygiene and safety score 3.77, while environmental cleanliness scores 3.53, indicating satisfactory performance in these areas. Price reasonableness receives the lowest score (3.45), suggesting that many tourists perceive prices as inappropriate and remain concerned. Overall, food service establishments in Kien Giang operate with a good level of responsibility; however, greater attention should be given to improving pricing practices and enhancing environmental sanitation to better support responsible tourism development.

#### **Responsible operation of accommodation establishments**

The data show that tourists highly evaluate the responsible operation of accommodation establishments in Kien Giang, with an overall average score of 3.73. Customer care (3.93) and safety (3.90) receive the highest scores, reflecting the emphasis placed by accommodation providers on guest services and maintaining a safe environment. Management practices aimed at reducing wasteful use of electricity and water are rated at 3.75, indicating efforts to conserve resources and protect the environment. Environmental cleanliness scores 3.61, showing that accommodations generally maintain clean surroundings. However, price reasonableness receives the lowest score (3.47), suggesting that many tourists remain uncertain about the value-for-money relationship. Overall, accommodation establishments in Kien Giang operate responsibly, but price adjustments are needed to increase customer satisfaction. Furthermore, enhanced management to reduce electricity and water waste remains necessary.

#### **Overall assessment of responsible tourism development**

Tourists' overall evaluations of responsible tourism development aspects in Kien Giang range from 3.62 to 3.87 on a five-point scale, indicating a generally positive situation across surveyed dimensions. Criteria such as responsible use of labor (3.87) and responsible community actions (3.78) receive the highest ratings, reflecting a strong emphasis on human factors in responsible tourism development in Kien Giang. The development of responsible tourism products scores 3.74, indicating good performance in terms of experiential authenticity, community participation, service quality, and opportunities for interaction with nature and culture; however, reductions in negative environmental impacts remain necessary. Responsible tourism communication (3.62) and responsible tourism management (3.62) receive lower scores, highlighting these as areas requiring improvement to enhance effectiveness and commitment in tourism development.

The operation of food service and accommodation establishments is rated at 3.73, meeting responsible tourism development requirements but still offering room for improvement.

#### **Differences in responsible tourism development in Kien Giang Province by survey location**

##### ***Differences in the development of responsible tourism products***

The level of responsible tourism product development across surveyed locations shows statistically significant differences ( $p = 0.004$ ). Specifically, Rach Gia records the highest average score (4.03), indicating the most advanced development of responsible tourism products among the surveyed destinations and reflecting substantial progress in product development. In contrast, Kien Luong and U Minh Thuong record the lowest average scores (3.58 and 3.65), indicating notable limitations in responsible tourism product development. Other destinations, including Lai Son (3.74), Nam Du (3.73), Phu Quoc (3.72), and Ha Tien (3.71), score around 3.7, reflecting positive and relatively balanced development. To promote responsible tourism development in Kien Giang, destinations such as Kien Luong, U Minh Thuong, Ha Tien, Phu Quoc, Nam Du, and Lai Son need to further invest in the development of responsible tourism products.

##### ***Differences in responsible tourism communication***

With  $p = 0.000$ , responsible tourism communication differs significantly across surveyed locations. Rach Gia leads with the highest average score (4.08), indicating effective responsible tourism communication that contributes to resource and environmental protection, ensures tourist safety, and promotes appropriate behavioral norms. In contrast, U Minh Thuong and Kien Luong have the lowest average scores (3.35 and 3.48), suggesting that communication activities in these areas remain limited and require substantial improvement to meet responsible tourism development requirements. Other locations such as Phu Quoc (3.68), Ha Tien (3.65), Nam Du (3.63), and Lai Son (3.52) score between 3.52 and 3.68, reflecting good communication performance that nonetheless requires further enhancement.

##### ***Differences in responsible use of labor in tourism***

Statistically significant differences in responsible labor use are observed across surveyed locations at a 99% confidence level. Rach Gia leads with the highest average score (4.17), indicating strong responsible labor practices that enhance service quality and contribute substantially to the local economy. Phu Quoc also records a high average score (4.06), reflecting its emphasis on responsible labor use. In contrast, U Minh Thuong records the lowest average score (3.68), indicating the need for further improvements in labor management and utilization. Other destinations such as Nam Du (3.89), Lai Son (3.85), Kien Luong (3.75), and Ha Tien (3.73) achieve relatively high scores, demonstrating attention to responsible labor use. Achievements in Nam Du and Lai Son should be maintained, while Ha Tien and Kien Luong require further improvement.

##### ***Differences in responsible tourism management***

Regarding responsible tourism management across the seven surveyed locations, the results show statistically significant



differences at a 99% confidence level. Rach Gia and Phu Quoc achieve the highest average scores (4.05 and 3.97, respectively), indicating the most effective responsible tourism management. In contrast, U Minh Thuong and Kien Luong record the lowest scores (3.19 and 3.43), reflecting insufficient implementation of responsible tourism management measures. Other destinations such as Ha Tien (3.58), Lai Son (3.58), and Nam Du (3.51) score relatively high, indicating good management performance. Based on these findings, U Minh Thuong and Kien Luong require greater improvements in responsible tourism management, while Nam Du, Lai Son, and Ha Tien should continue to enhance management practices.

#### ***Differences in responsible community actions in tourism***

At a 95% confidence level, responsible community actions in tourism differ across surveyed locations. Rach Gia and Nam Du achieve the highest average scores (3.99 and 3.91, respectively), reflecting high levels of community responsibility in tourism activities. Although Kien Luong records the lowest average score (3.59), community responsibility in this location is still evaluated at a good level. Other destinations such as Phu Quoc (3.79), Ha Tien (3.79), Lai Son (3.72), and U Minh Thuong (3.71) also score at good levels, indicating responsible community actions in tourism. These results highlight the need to strengthen responsible community actions in locations with lower scores, such as Kien Luong, U Minh Thuong, and Lai Son.

#### ***Differences in the responsible operation of food service establishments***

Survey data reveal statistically significant differences ( $p = 0.000$ ) in the responsible operation of food service establishments across surveyed locations. Average responsibility scores range from 3.54 (U Minh Thuong) to 4.03 (Rach Gia). Rach Gia and Phu Quoc lead with average scores of 4.03 and 4.01, respectively, indicating the highest levels of responsible operation. In contrast, U Minh Thuong and Kien Luong record the lowest scores (3.54 and 3.58). The remaining destinations, such as Lai Son, Nam Du, and Ha Tien, achieve average scores of 3.75, 3.70, and 3.64, respectively, falling within the good category. These results suggest that food service establishments in the surveyed locations have implemented numerous responsible operational practices; however, to further promote responsible tourism development in Kien Giang, destinations such as U Minh Thuong, Kien Luong, Ha Tien, Nam Du, and Lai Son need additional improvements in responsible food service operations.

#### ***Differences in the responsible operation of accommodation establishments***

Data analysis indicates clear differences in the level of responsible operation of accommodation establishments across surveyed locations, with a probability value of 0.000. Accommodation establishments in Rach Gia demonstrate the highest level of responsible operation, with an average score of 4.06. Other destinations with good, responsible accommodation operations include Phu Quoc (3.94), Lai Son (3.81), Nam Du (3.76), Ha Tien (3.64), and Kien Luong (3.55). In contrast, responsible accommodation operation in U Minh Thuong is evaluated at an

average level (3.44). These results emphasize the need for greater investment in responsible accommodation operation in U Minh Thuong, while destinations such as Ha Tien and Kien Luong should continue to enhance this aspect.

#### ***Differences in responsible tourism development***

The analysis reveals statistically significant differences ( $p = 0.001$ ) in responsible tourism development across surveyed locations. Rach Gia and Phu Quoc stand out, with the highest average scores of 4.06 and 3.87, respectively, while U Minh Thuong and Kien Luong record the lowest scores (3.51 and 3.57). Other destinations such as Lai Son (3.85), Nam Du (3.73), and Ha Tien (3.68) achieve relatively high average scores. This differentiation reflects variations in prioritization and capacity for implementing responsible tourism development activities across locations, as well as the influence of differing natural conditions, economic contexts, community awareness, and local governance capacities.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study shows that the current state of responsible tourism development in Kien Giang has achieved positive results across many aspects. Tourists highly evaluate the authenticity of tourism products, the participation of local communities, service quality, and the service attitudes of tourism labor, indicating that the development of tourism oriented toward local experiences and community participation has received considerable attention. Communication activities, tourism management, and the operation of food service and accommodation facilities are also assessed at a good level, reflecting coordination efforts among stakeholders. However, several notable limitations remain, such as negative environmental impacts, service costs that are not yet fully reasonable, and communication and tourism management that have not reached optimal effectiveness, particularly in the management of environmental sanitation infrastructure and price transparency of services. Although the level of responsible action by the community is generally positive, instances of price gouging still occur and need to be addressed. Management efforts to reduce wasteful use of electricity and water in accommodation facilities are rated highly but still have room for improvement. Differences in the level of responsible tourism development across localities indicate clear disparities, with Rach Gia and Phu Quoc standing out as leading destinations, while U Minh Thuong and Kien Luong still face many limitations that require greater improvement.

In summary, limitations in responsible tourism development in Kien Giang are concentrated in environmental aspects, communication, infrastructure, pricing, community behavior, and resource use. Accordingly, the managerial implications for responsible tourism development in Kien Giang are as follows: First, minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment through the use of renewable energy, waste recycling, minimizing single-use plastics, and increasing the use of low-carbon transportation; establish synchronized waste collection and treatment systems in tourism development areas; and build continuous environmental impact monitoring systems while



collecting feedback from tourists and communities to improve environmental management activities.

Second, improve environmental infrastructure by increasing the number and optimizing the placement of trash bins to reduce littering, and by ensuring clean, adequate, and conveniently located toilets to improve sanitation.

Third, educate tourists' behavior by developing campaigns and information programs to communicate regulations on tourist conduct and to encourage respectful behavior toward the environment and local communities.

Fourth, implement price transparency and fairness through public price listing for services and goods to prevent overcharging and to build tourists' trust in service providers.

Fifth, standardize environmental sanitation management systems at food service and accommodation facilities by applying the 5S model to maintain a clean, orderly, and efficient environment. The sorting is to eliminate unnecessary items that cause clutter and unhygienic conditions. The set in order is to arrange items rationally, conveniently, and in ways that are easy to clean and sanitize. Shine is to perform continuous cleaning and thoroughly handle waste and dust. Standardize is to establish standards and maintain consistent sanitation (set up sanitation checklists for each area, install signs reminding people to maintain cleanliness). Sustain is to create habits of maintaining cleanliness through ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement (organize weekly internal sanitation assessments, combine periodic training, emphasize 5S as part of service culture, and have leadership conduct surprise inspections to reinforce the 5S spirit).

Sixth, manage resources effectively by encouraging accommodation facilities to apply energy- and water-saving measures to reduce wasteful consumption and minimize environmental footprints.

Seventh, enhance community awareness and responsibility by engaging local residents in tourism activities and involving them in educational programs to foster a sense of responsibility in maintaining natural landscapes, protecting resources, preserving public sanitation, and avoiding price gouging of tourists.

Eighth, promote tourism safety by issuing warnings for dangerous areas and establishing hotlines to receive feedback and provide support to tourists.

Ninth, focus support on less-developed areas such as U Minh Thuong and Kien Luong to narrow development gaps, while leveraging the strengths of well-developed destinations such as Rach Gia and Phu Quoc.

These implications will contribute to refining the model of responsible tourism development in Kien Giang, ensuring long-term development that balances economic and social benefits with environmental protection, in line with sustainable development trends in the modern tourism industry.

Despite its contributions, this study has a limitation in the lack of qualitative data to further deepen the research content. Therefore, future studies should be designed using qualitative approaches to gain deeper insights and to extend the findings.

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