

From Environmental Beliefs to Ecotourism Intention: The Mediating Role of Ecodestination Image in Sustainable Tourism Behavior

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 2026-02-12

Revised 2026-03-19

Accepted 2026-03-20

Keywords:

Ecodestination image

Ecotourism intention

Environmental beliefs

Perceived value

Sustainable tourism

ABSTRACT

Ecotourism has become a key approach to promoting sustainable tourism and environmental conservation, yet the psychological mechanisms driving tourists' participation remain insufficiently understood. This study addresses this gap by examining how environmental beliefs influence ecotourism intention through the mediating roles of ecodestination image and perceived value among tourists in West Java. A quantitative research design was employed using survey data collected from 280 tourists who had previously visited natural destinations in the region. Data were gathered from an online questionnaire using a bipolar 1–10 scale and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach via SmartPLS 3.0. The findings reveal that environmental beliefs significantly influence ecotourism intention both directly and indirectly through ecodestination image. Ecodestination image emerges as a key mediating mechanism, linking internal environmental values to behavioral intention and significantly enhancing perceived value. In contrast, perceived value does not significantly predict ecotourism intention, indicating that environmentally driven psychological factors and destination-related perceptions are more influential than utilitarian evaluations in shaping sustainable travel behavior. These results highlight the critical role of destination-specific perceptions, integrating environmental belief perspectives with tourism marketing constructs. In practice, the study suggests that destination managers should prioritize strengthening the environmental image through sustainability communication and environmental education initiatives. Such strategies can enhance tourists' pro-environmental attitudes, encourage responsible travel behavior, and support the long-term development of sustainable tourism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism has emerged as an important approach for promoting sustainable tourism development and environmental conservation worldwide. Increasing environmental challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation, have heightened the need for environmentally responsible tourism practices. Ecotourism emphasizes nature-based experiences, conservation, and community participation, making it an effective strategy for balancing tourism development with ecological sustainability. As environmental awareness among tourists continues to grow, many travelers are increasingly interested in visiting destinations that promote sustainability and environmental protection, prompting researchers to investigate the psychological determinants of ecotourism intention [1], [2].

Previous studies highlight the significant role of environmental values and beliefs in shaping pro-environmental behaviors. Environmental beliefs refer to individuals' perceptions, convictions, and moral considerations regarding environmental protection and ecological responsibility. Within environmental psychology, these beliefs are commonly explained by the Value–Belief–Norm (VBN) theory, which proposes that environmental values shape beliefs that activate personal norms, which in turn lead to pro-environmental behavioral intentions. Empirical studies have confirmed that environmental beliefs are important predictors of sustainable behaviors, including participation in ecotourism activities and willingness to pay for environmentally responsible tourism experiences [1], [2].

Research based on the VBN framework further indicates that individuals with strong environmental beliefs are more likely to develop a moral obligation to protect nature, which motivates them to engage in ecotourism. Cross-cultural studies among ecotourists in Chile and Spain demonstrate that the causal relationships among environmental beliefs, personal norms, and ecotourism intention remain relatively stable across cultural contexts [1]. In addition, integrating the VBN framework with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has improved the understanding of ecotourism behavior by incorporating attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as key predictors of behavioral intention [2], [3]. These findings indicate that environmental beliefs represent an important psychological driver of sustainable tourism behavior.

Despite the growing body of literature on ecotourism behavior, several research gaps remain. Many previous studies primarily focus on normative and attitudinal mechanisms linking environmental beliefs to ecotourism intention [4], [5], while relatively limited attention has been given to tourism-specific cognitive factors such as ecodestination image and perceived value [6], [7]. In tourism research, destination image is widely recognized as a critical determinant of travel behavior because tourists' perceptions of environmental quality, sustainability practices, and natural attractiveness strongly influence their travel decisions [8], [9]. Empirical evidence suggests that environmental beliefs can shape tourists' perceptions of nature-based destinations and, in turn, influence their attitudes and behavioral intentions toward ecotourism [10], [11].

Recent studies emphasize the importance of destination-related perceptions in strengthening the relationship between environmental beliefs and tourism behavior. The ecodestination image reflects tourists' perceptions of a destination's environmental sustainability and natural attractiveness, which can influence their attitudes and intentions to engage in environmentally responsible tourism activities. Similarly, perceived value plays an important role in tourism decision-making, as tourists evaluate whether the benefits of visiting a destination justify the costs. When tourists perceive that ecotourism experiences provide environmental, experiential, and social benefits, their intention to participate in ecotourism activities tends to increase. Furthermore, contextual factors such as environmental education can strengthen individuals' environmental commitment and support for sustainable tourism development by reinforcing environmental beliefs and pro-environmental intentions [10], [12].

The objective of this research is to investigate the direct and indirect effects of environmental beliefs on ecotourism intention, with ecodestination image and perceived value as mediating variables. This research further extends the integration of environmental psychology and tourism marketing perspectives in explaining sustainable tourism behavior among tourists visiting natural attractions in West Java, Indonesia. As a region rich in biodiversity and abundant natural tourism resources, West Java offers substantial potential for ecotourism development. The findings are expected to advance theoretical research on ecotourism behavior and to inform the development of integrated behavioral models. Additionally, the study provides actionable insights for destination managers to strengthen environmental image and promote sustainable tourism practices.

2. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the influence of environmental beliefs on ecotourism intention, mediated by ecodestination image and perceived value. The sample for this study comprises 280 individuals who have previously been tourists in West Java, Indonesia. This region is chosen for its significance as a prominent ecotourism destination in Indonesia, providing a rich context for examining the factors influencing ecotourism intentions.

The sample was selected using a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, which allows for the inclusion of respondents who are readily accessible and willing to participate. Data were collected via a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire employed a bipolar Likert scale ranging from 1 to 10, where 1 indicates "strongly agree" and 10 "strongly disagree".

Data analysis in this study was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, and the analysis was performed with SmartPLS 3.0. The evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) was performed by assessing convergent validity through outer loadings, with loadings exceeding 0.70. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha with a cut-off value greater than 0.70 and Composite Reliability with a threshold exceeding 0.80. The structural model (inner model) was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2) and path coefficient estimations. The acceptable threshold for endogenous latent variables was set at $R^2 > 0.20$,

indicating a sufficient level of explanatory power. Hypothesis testing for the structural relationships was conducted using path coefficient estimates, with statistical significance determined based on a p-value less than 0,05.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The sample consisted of 280 respondents, with the majority male (57.9%) and females accounting for 42.1%. In terms of age distribution, most respondents were relatively young, with 44.3% aged 20 years or younger and another 44.3% aged between 21 and 30 years, while smaller proportions were aged 31–40 years (5.4%), 41–50 years (4.6%), and 51 years or older (1.4%). Regarding occupation, entrepreneurs represented the largest group (53.2%), followed by private employees (38.9%), while smaller percentages were government employees (2.1%), students (1.8%), and other occupations (3.9%). In terms of educational background, the majority of respondents had a high school education (78.9%), followed by undergraduate degree holders (17.9%), while diploma holders (0.7%), postgraduate degree holders (1.4%), and other education levels (1.1%) represented smaller proportions. Finally, in terms of travel frequency, most respondents reported traveling 1–4 times per year (72.5%), followed by 5–8 times per year (19.3%), while fewer respondents traveled 9–12 times per year (3.9%) or more than 12 times annually (4.3%). These results indicate that the respondents were predominantly young travelers with relatively frequent nature-based travel experiences.

Table 1. Measurement Model

Indicator	Loading Factor
Environmental Belief [10] (CA:0,910 CR: 0,931 AVE: 0,692)	
EB1 I feel a moral obligation to support environmentally responsible behavior when visiting tourism destinations.	0,824
EB2 I believe that environmentally friendly tourism helps reduce environmental pollution, such as air and water pollution.	0,836
EB3 I believe that ecotourism contributes to protecting natural ecosystems and conserving natural resources.	0,868
EB4 I prefer environmentally friendly tourism destinations compared to conventional mass tourism destinations.	0,882
EB5 I have a strong intention to engage in pro-environmental behavior when traveling.	0,812
EB6 Over the past year, I have actively practiced environmentally friendly behavior during my travels.	0,754
Ecodeestination Image [13] (CA:0,920 CR: 0,938 AVE: 0,715)	
DI1 Natural tourism destinations in Indonesia have attractive and beautiful natural landscapes.	0,888
DI2 Natural tourism destinations in Indonesia maintain a good balance between environmental conservation and tourism infrastructure.	0,807
DI3 Natural tourism destinations in Indonesia provide pleasant and enjoyable natural environments for visitors.	0,912
DI4 Visiting natural tourism destinations in Indonesia makes me feel relaxed and emotionally refreshed.	0,917
DI5 Natural tourism destinations in Indonesia offer high-quality nature-based tourism	0,933

Indicator	Loading Factor
experiences.	
DI6 The natural tourism experiences offered in Indonesia are unique and different from other destinations.	0,903
DI7 Natural tourism destinations in Indonesia offer memorable and unforgettable tourism experiences.	0,909
Perceived Value [14] (CA:0,962 CR: 0,967 AVE: 0,766)	
PV1 Visiting natural tourism destinations provides valuable educational experiences.	0,858
PV2 Traveling to natural tourism destinations increases my knowledge about nature and the environment.	0,878
PV3 Nature-based tourism experiences stimulate my curiosity to learn new things about nature.	0,885
PV4 The natural environment encountered during the trip is enjoyable and pleasant.	0,861
PV5 The authenticity of the destination and local experiences creates meaningful impressions.	0,888
PV6 Activities available in nature-based tourism destinations are enjoyable and entertaining.	0,876
PV7 Visiting natural tourism destinations provides experiences that meet my travel expectations.	0,882
PV8 Traveling in natural environments gives me a sense of harmony, peace, and emotional well-being.	0,878
PV9 The natural scenery experienced during the trip is spectacular and visually impressive.	0,867
Ecotourism Intention [13] (CA:0,959 CR: 0,966 AVE: 0,803)	
EI1 I intend to visit natural or ecotourism destinations in the near future.	0,861
EI2 When planning my travel budget, I consider allocating funds for nature-based tourism trips.	0,856
EI3 I follow information and developments related to ecotourism products and services.	0,846
EI4	0,889
EI5 I will continue choosing natural or ecotourism destinations for my future travels.	0,868
EI5 Natural tourism destinations in Indonesia are among my preferred travel choices when opportunities arise.	0,745
EI5 I am still willing to visit natural tourism destinations in Indonesia even if travel costs increase.	

Based on Table 1, the factor loading from each instrument is greater than 0,7. Convergent validity is evaluated through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The AVE for all variables was greater than 0,5. It indicated that the indicators are valid to measure the variables. The Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values were greater than 0,7 for each construct, indicating that all variables are reliable for analyzing the measurement model.

Table 2. Hypotheses Testing

Path	Estimate	P-value	Result
H1 Environmental Beliefs → Ecotourism Intention	0,214	0,038	Significant
H2 Environmental Beliefs → Ecodestination Image	0,760	0,000	Significant
H3 Environmental Beliefs → Perceived Value	0,559	0,000	Significant
H4 Ecodestination Image → Perceived Value	0,367	0,000	Significant
H5 Ecodestination Image → Ecotourism Intention	0,507	0,000	Significant
H6 Perceived Value → Ecotourism Intention	0,186	0,136	Not Significant

Based on Table 2, environmental beliefs have a significant positive influence on ecotourism intention, ecotourism destination image, and perceived value. Thus, H1, H2, H3 are supported. The ecodestination image has a significant positive influence on perceived value and ecotourism intention; therefore, H4 and H5 are supported. The relationship between perceived value and ecotourism intention is not statistically significant, leading to the rejection of H6. Environmental beliefs play a critical role in shaping both ecodestination image and perceived value, while ecodestination image emerges as a strong predictor of ecotourism intention.

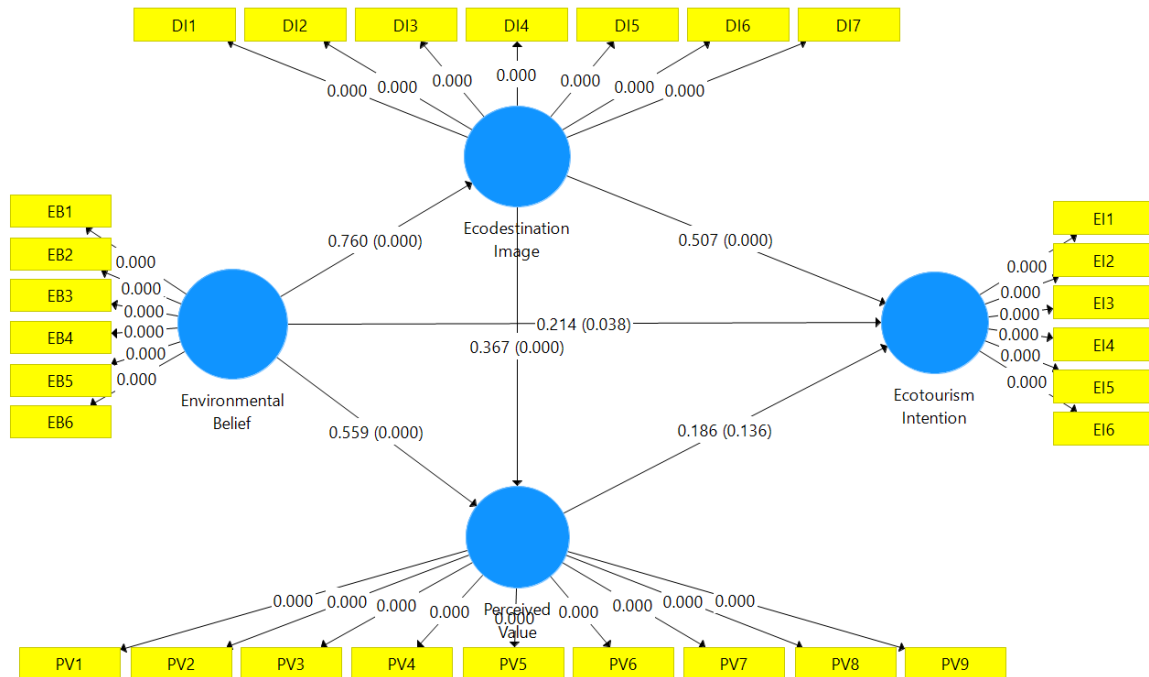


Figure 1. Research Result

Table 3. Specific Indirect Effects

Path	Estimate	P-value	Result
EB → DI → PV	0,279	0,000	Significant
EB → DI → EI	0,385	0,000	Significant
EB → PV → EI	0,068	0,141	Not Significant
EB → DI → PV → EI	0,052	0,142	Not Significant
DI → PV → EI	0,104	0,160	Not Significant

The findings show that ecodestination image mediates the relationship between environmental beliefs and perceived value. Ecodestination image serves as an important mediating variable linking environmental beliefs to ecotourism intention. However, the indirect effect of environmental beliefs on ecotourism intention through perceived value is not significant. The mediation path from environmental beliefs to ecotourism intention through ecodestination image and perceived value is not significant. The indirect effect of ecodestination image on ecotourism intention through perceived value is not significant. Ecodestination image plays a significant mediating role, while perceived value does not significantly mediate the relationships among the variables in this model.

3.2. Discussion

This study investigates the influence of environmental beliefs on ecotourism intention, with ecodestination image and perceived value as mediating factors, among tourists visiting natural attractions in West Java, Indonesia. The results demonstrate that environmental beliefs significantly influence ecotourism intention both directly and indirectly through ecodestination image, while perceived value does not significantly predict ecotourism intention in this model. These findings contribute to the growing literature on sustainable tourism behavior by integrating environmental psychology perspectives with tourism marketing constructs.

Environmental beliefs have a significant positive effect on ecotourism intention, thus H1 is supported. According to the Value–Belief–Norm (VBN) theory, individuals who hold strong environmental beliefs tend to develop personal norms and moral obligations to protect the environment, which subsequently motivate them to engage in environmentally responsible behaviors such as ecotourism participation [1]. Environmental beliefs are a key predictor of sustainable tourism behavior. Environmental beliefs significantly influence ecotourism intention through personal norms across different cultural contexts [1], [15]. Environmental beliefs remain a strong determinant of ecotourism intention and willingness to pay for environmentally responsible tourism experiences when integrated with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) [2], [3], [16]. These findings suggest that environmental beliefs represent a fundamental psychological driver of ecotourism behavior. In West Java, Indonesia, tourists with stronger environmental beliefs are more likely to have higher intentions to visit nature-based tourism destinations. This may reflect the growing environmental awareness among travelers and their increasing preference for tourism experiences that support environmental sustainability. The result also indicates that environmental beliefs serve as an internal motivational factor, encouraging tourists to align their travel behavior with their environmental values.

Environmental Beliefs have a significant positive effect on Ecodestination Image, thus H2 is supported. Tourists who possess strong environmental beliefs tend to evaluate nature-based tourism destinations more positively in terms of environmental quality, sustainability practices, and natural attractiveness. Environmental beliefs shaped tourists' perceptions of destination attributes. Environmental beliefs significantly influence nature-based destination image, which, in turn, affects tourists' attitudes toward ecotourism [10], [17]. Tourists who value environmental protection tend to perceive destinations with strong environmental characteristics more positively, thereby strengthening their behavioral intentions [10], [18]. Environmental beliefs influence how individuals interpret environmental information and evaluate the environmental attributes of tourism destinations. When tourists believe that environmental conservation is important, they are more likely to perceive destinations that emphasize ecological sustainability as attractive and desirable travel options. In West Java, this finding highlights the importance of developing and communicating a strong environmental image for ecotourism destinations. Tourism stakeholders should emphasize environmental conservation, biodiversity protection, and sustainable tourism practices in their marketing communication strategies.

Such efforts may strengthen tourists' perceptions of ecodestination image and encourage greater participation in ecotourism activities.

Environmental Beliefs significantly influence perceived value, while ecodestination image significantly enhances tourists' perceived value of ecotourism experiences; thus, H3 and H4 are supported. These findings suggest that tourists with stronger environmental beliefs perceive greater benefits from ecotourism activities, particularly in terms of educational experiences, environmental awareness, and emotional well-being. Ecodestination image plays a crucial role in shaping perceived value in nature-based tourism contexts. Destination image acts as an important cognitive evaluation mechanism that links environmental beliefs with tourists' perceived benefits from ecotourism experiences [18], [19]. When a destination is perceived as environmentally authentic and sustainable, tourists are more likely to evaluate the experience as valuable and meaningful. Ecodestination image enhances perceived value by reinforcing the environmental, experiential, and emotional benefits associated with ecotourism activities [18]. Tourists who perceive a destination as environmentally attractive and sustainable are more likely to feel that the experience offers high educational, recreational, and emotional value. Environmental beliefs shape tourists' cognitive evaluations of destination image, which, in turn, influence their perceptions of value. Thus, ecodestination image serves as a critical mechanism that translates environmental beliefs into positive evaluations of ecotourism experiences.

Ecodestination Image has a significant positive effect on Ecotourism Intention, thus H5 is supported. This finding highlights the critical role of destination-related perceptions in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions [9], [20]. In tourism research, destination image is widely recognized as a major determinant of travel behavior because tourists' perceptions of environmental quality, natural beauty, and sustainability practices strongly influence their travel decisions [21]. Nature-based destination image significantly predicts tourists' intention to visit ecotourism destinations [18], [22]. A strong environmental image enhances tourists' perceptions of ecological authenticity and sustainable tourism practices, ultimately increasing their intention to engage in ecotourism [23]. The significant mediating role of ecodestination image in this study further reinforces its importance as a bridge between environmental beliefs and ecotourism intention. Tourists' environmental beliefs alone may not be sufficient to influence behavioral intentions unless those beliefs are translated into positive perceptions of a destination's environmental characteristics. Ecodestination image functions as a cognitive mechanism that converts environmental beliefs into concrete travel intentions.

Perceived value does not significantly influence ecotourism intention in this study, therefore H6 is rejected. Although previous tourism research often identifies perceived value as an important predictor of tourist behavior, its influence on behavioral intention is not always consistent across different contexts. In ecotourism settings, tourists' decisions are frequently driven less by utilitarian value considerations and more by environmental values and moral motivations. Previous research indicates that perceived value in tourism may be more closely related to post-visit outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty rather than to the initial intention to visit a destination [24]–[26]. Perceived value may operate

indirectly through other psychological mechanisms such as attitudes, environmental commitment, or willingness to pay for sustainable tourism experiences [11], [22].

Pro-environmental behaviors, such as ecotourism, are often better explained by value-based frameworks than by purely rational evaluations of benefits. The Values–Identity–Personal Norm (VIP) model, which evolved from the Value–Belief–Norm (VBN) theory, suggests that environmental values activate beliefs and personal norms that ultimately lead to pro-environmental behavior. Within this framework, individuals with strong environmental beliefs and environmental identity may develop intentions to engage in ecotourism regardless of the perceived economic or utilitarian value of the experience. Empirical evidence also supports this argument. Environmental beliefs, ecodestination image, and ecotourism attitudes significantly influence ecotourism intention, highlighting that value-driven motivations often outweigh perceived value evaluations in sustainable tourism decisions [11].

Ecotourism behavior is frequently associated with ideological and altruistic motivations, such as appreciation of nature and support for environmental conservation. As a result, tourists may prioritize environmental characteristics of a destination, such as ecological quality and sustainability practices, over personal value evaluations. This argument is supported by findings showing that ecodestination image plays a stronger role in shaping ecotourism intention than perceived value. In addition, contextual factors such as environmental education and environmental awareness may further moderate the relationship between perceived value and ecotourism intention [27]. Without these reinforcing factors, perceived value alone may not be sufficient to motivate tourists to engage in ecotourism. Therefore, in the context of sustainable tourism behavior, psychological and value-based determinants often outweigh perceived value in influencing ecotourism intention.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating environmental psychology and tourism marketing perspectives in understanding ecotourism behavior. Environmental beliefs play a foundational role in shaping tourists' perceptions and intentions, while ecodestination image serves as a key mechanism that translates these beliefs into behavioral intentions. For tourism policymakers and destination managers, the results emphasize the need to strengthen the environmental image of ecotourism destinations through effective communication strategies, environmental education programs, and sustainable tourism practices. By aligning destination image with tourists' environmental beliefs, stakeholders can enhance ecotourism intention and support the long-term development of sustainable tourism destinations.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of environmental beliefs on ecotourism intention by considering the mediating roles of ecodestination image and perceived value among tourists visiting natural attractions in West Java, Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that environmental beliefs directly influence ecotourism intention and strongly affect ecodestination image and perceived value. Environmental beliefs play a significant role in shaping ecotourism behavior. These results reinforce the importance of aligning individual

environmental values with destination-related perceptions to encourage participation in ecotourism effectively.

This research contributes to the advancement of the literature on ecotourism behavior by integrating environmental psychology and tourism marketing perspectives into a unified framework. The study extends the explanatory power of the Value–Belief–Norm (VBN) framework within a tourism context. The findings provide nuanced insights into the differential roles of cognitive constructs, demonstrating that not all evaluation mechanisms influence behavioral intention equally. This study enriches existing theoretical models by emphasizing the importance of destination-specific perceptions as a bridge between environmental beliefs and behavioral outcomes.

The findings offer important implications for tourism stakeholders and policymakers. Strengthening the environmental image of destinations should be a strategic priority in shaping tourists' intentions to engage in ecotourism. Destination managers are encouraged to enhance communication strategies that highlight sustainability practices, environmental conservation efforts, and the ecological authenticity of tourism experiences. Integrating environmental education into tourism promotion may further reinforce tourists' environmental beliefs and encourage responsible travel behavior. These efforts are expected to support the long-term development of sustainable tourism while fostering greater environmental awareness among the general public.

This study has several limitations. First, the use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not fully represent the broader population of tourists. Second, the regional focus on West Java, Indonesia, restricts the applicability of the results to other geographical and cultural contexts. Third, the cross-sectional design limits the study's ability to capture dynamic changes in tourists' perceptions and behaviors over time. These limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted with caution when applied to different settings or populations.

Future research is encouraged to employ probability sampling techniques and expand the study to multiple regions or countries to enhance generalizability. Longitudinal studies may also provide deeper insights into the evolution of environmental beliefs and their impact on tourism behavior over time. Future studies could incorporate additional variables, such as environmental awareness, environmental education, or emotional attachment to destinations, to better capture the complexity of ecotourism decision-making.

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