



## **Will Ecotourists Pay Premium Prices? An Explanatory Study on Motivations, Ecotourism Intention and Willingness to Pay Premium for Ecotourism**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** Recent literature emphasizes that there is an ambiguity on ecotourism consumption as actual environmentally friendly behaviors deviate from the intentions. Further, it is identified that ecotourism offerings are higher in price and discourage consumption. Hence, this study examined ecotourism consumer behaviors focusing on motivation, ecotourism intention, and willingness to pay premium for ecotourism. It also aims to investigate the mediating effect of ecotourism intention between motivations and willingness to pay premium.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study undertook a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. Self-administrated questionnaires (online) were distributed employing purposive sampling technique to young domestic travelers who had purchased green travel products in the last six months in Sri Lanka. A total of 212 responses were analyzed by PLS-SEM approach using SmartPLS 4.0 software.

**Findings:** The findings revealed that intrinsic motivation significantly influenced the willingness to pay premium whereas the impact of extrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium was insignificant. Additionally, this study proved that ecotourism intention partially mediated the relationship between intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium while ecotourism intention fully mediated the relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium.

**Originality:** This research contributes to extending knowledge of tourism consumer behaviour in the context of ecotourism. Moreover, this study examined how an individual is motivated towards ecotourism consumption and their willingness to pay premium for such consumptions. Thus, the present study integrates the actual behavior, willingness to pay premium to further explain the self-determination theory. Thus, it empirically contributes to broadening the understanding of comprehensive ecotourism consumer behaviour that has been paid little attention.

**Implications:** The findings offer important practical implications for ecotourism providers, marketers, policymakers, and other decision-makers for planning and developing ecotourism offerings, effective marketing and promotion to encourage and ensure sustainable tourism consumption.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Ecotourism Intention, Extrinsic Motivation, Intrinsic Motivation, Willingness to Pay Premium

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Sustainable consumption has become a rising trend in the tourism industry (Negacz, 2021) and sustainable consumption refers to “the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardies the needs of future generations” (United Nations Environment Program, 2015). In tourism, sustainable consumption takes place in many forms, and ecotourism has been identified to be one of them which refers to the responsible travel to natural areas that endeavors to preserve the environment and respect the local communities (Negacz, 2021).

Chi and Pham (2022), defined ecotourism as “Ecotourism refers to all forms of nature-based tourism with educational and interpretation features, making positive effects on the natural and sociocultural environment and supporting the maintenance of natural areas.”. Thus, ecotourism is a particular kind of alternative tourism closely associated with areas that are environmentally and culturally sensitive (Lu, Gursoy & Chiappa, 2014). The International Ecotourism Society (2015) posited three key pillars of ecotourism, i.e., (1) Minimize physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impacts. (2) Build environmental and cultural awareness, and respect. (3) Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts. (4) Produce direct financial benefits for conservation. (5) Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry. (6) Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental, and social climates. (7) Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities. (8) Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous People in your community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment.

According to Sharpely (2008), the importance of tourists’ awareness of the environment, engaging in environmentally appropriate forms of tourism, awareness of the impacts of tourism, and, hence, willingness to modify their behaviour are important aspects of the success of ecotourism development. Further, Sharpely (2008) emphasized that tourists must be positively motivated to consume responsibly for ecotourism to achieve its objectives and such tourist-consumer behaviour is fundamental to the development of ecotourism. However, relatively few tourists seem to make purchase decisions based on environmental concerns. Sharpely (2008) highlighted that the motivation to consume tourism has a direct bearing on the nature of tourist-consumer behaviour and, motivations push an individual from a condition of inertia into tourism-consumptive activity, that translates needs into goal-oriented consumer-behaviour. Further, Negacz (2021) emphasized that it is important to deepen the understanding of factors influencing sustainable consumer decisions, especially in the field of tourism

### **Performance Gap**

In sustainable goals, it is evidently identified that depletion of natural resources and adverse impacts of environmental degradation as major challenges that the present world faces. Hence, sustainable consumption is emphasized as one key

area to focus on (SDG12). Similarly, the global code of ethics for tourism emphasizes the importance of reducing the pressure of activities of visitors on the environment and enhancing its beneficial impact on the tourism industry and the local economy. According to Sharpely (2008), the concept of sustainable tourism development is challenged by the nature of tourism consumption and, Kazeminia, Hultman and Mostaghel, (2016), posited that environmental policies should focus on reducing materialistic values if the goal of environmental policy is to change environmentally harmful consumption behaviors. Even though institutions have identified policies and other eco-friendly measures to ensure the reduction of harmful environmental behaviours, there is still a doubt about whether people actually are willing to accept those measures. For instance, ecotourism is recognized as being particularly conducive to enriching and enhancing the standing of tourism, provided they respect the natural heritage and local populations and are in keeping with the carrying capacity of the sites (Global Code of Ethics for Tourism). Similarly, environmental protection is one of the major objectives of ecotourism development. Yet, people with high materialistic value would thus find ecotourism as an unattractive type of leisure activity (Dung et al., 2022) and ecotourism offerings have higher prices and often less comfort than mass tourism offerings (Hultman et al., 2016). Hence, tourists would not want to pay a premium for ecotourism products (Dung et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2014). Therefore, this study aims to critically focus on how an individual is motivated towards ecotourism consumption and their willingness to pay premium for such consumptions.

### **Behavior of the problem: Empirical and Theoretical Gap**

Previous scholars (Paul & Roy, 2023; Baloch et al., 2023; Luong, 2023; Weerasekera & Assella, 2023) have discussed ecotourism, as an important topic in current tourism research and emphasized that ecotourism's success relies on tourists' behaviors toward sustainable tourism practices. However, comprehension of the factors that drive ecotourism demand remains limited and, therefore, additional research is required to identify factors influencing travelers' intentions to visit ecotourism destinations (Luong, 2023; Weerasekera & Assella, 2023). Among the factors that drive demand towards ecotourism intention, willingness to pay premium for ecotourism (Duong et al., 2022) and motivation have been recommended for further studies (Chi & Pham, 2022).

In explaining why consumers are willing to pay premiums for ecotourism related products and services, consumer motivation has been identified as a prominent variable. Further, in the discussion of motivation in tourism, self-determination theory has been identified as a macro theory that focuses on human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Weiner, 1990) and how humans are motivated on knowledge of physical and social environments (Deci & Ryan, 1980). The theory discusses two motivations as intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation and explains how motivations drive towards an intention. In ecotourism research intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with the intention has been widely discussed (Chan & Boum, 2007).

Previous research revealed that ecotourism products are often priced more highly than others, owing to customers' general willingness to pay more for eco-friendly products (Agag et al., 2020). However, self-determination theory is only focusing on motivation, and it fails to discuss willingness to pay premium. In order to address this theoretical gap, the current study aims to further explain self-determination theory; intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on ecotourism intention and thereby willingness to pay premium.

Accordingly, the following are the research questions and the objectives of the study.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What are the possible motivational factors driving the willingness to pay premium for ecotourism?

RQ2: Does ecotourism intention affect the relationship between intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium for ecotourism?

RQ3: Does ecotourism intention affect the relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium for ecotourism?

### **Research Objectives**

RO1: To examine the possible motivational factors driving the willingness to pay premium for ecotourism.

RO2: To examine whether there is a mediating impact of ecotourism intention on the relationship between intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium for ecotourism.

RO3: To examine whether there is a mediating impact of ecotourism intention on the relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium for ecotourism.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Sustainable Tourism Consumption**

Sustainable consumption and production are identified as a holistic approach that focuses on minimizing the negative environmental impacts of consumption and production processes while ensuring the quality of life for everyone (Akenji, et al., 2015). On the consumption side, sustainable consumption and production discuss changes in the consumption patterns of households and governments through transformations in lifestyles and individual consumer behavior and choices (United Nations Environment Program, 2015).

In the tourism literature, it has been highlighted that sustainable tourism is challenged by the nature of tourism consumption (Sharpley, 2008). Nevertheless, the

development of tourism consumption is based on environmental awareness and its impact on tourism. In addition, new tourists are seeking flexible, quality environmentally friendly experiences while old mass tourists were satisfied with the homogeneous, predictable holiday experiences. Further, consumers pay closer attention to their human impact on the environment and seek more sustainable options in how they live and travel (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021).

Further, Dobson (2007) argued that behavioral changes of consumers towards sustainable development are based on environmental considerations than financial incentives. Also, it has been found that the purchases of sustainable products and services and ethical practices have increased over the years and will continue in the future (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021).

Moreover, Hanss et al., (2016) have highlighted that sustainable consumption could be strengthened to investigate willingness to pay for products and services. Therefore, it has been recommended that sustainable consumption should be further studied.

### **Ecotourism**

As per the previous findings, Tavakoli et al., 2022 it is noteworthy that ecotourism has been discussed in diverse ways. Previous scholars have discussed a common principle of a model of tourism that conserves the environment and provides economic benefits for local communities (Hall & Kinnaird, 1994; Holden & Kealy, 1996). Presently, tourism has focused on the sustainability approach, and ecotourism has been identified as a timely and relevant area to study (Sadiq & Adil, 2021).

Further, ecotourism includes the sustainable use of resources with a minimum impact on the environment, economic benefit, and maximum satisfaction to the tourists (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015) and it has been identified as a part of sustainable tourism (Lai & Shafer, 2005). Moreover, some argue that ecotourism is a declaration of sustainable tourism (Silanteva, 2022) and it focuses on environmental and cultural understandings (Crabtree et al., 2007). Meanwhile, it is identified as a responsible trip to natural areas that could conserve the environment and develop the welfare facilities of local communities and ecotourism has been studied under the nature tourism phenomenon (Wallace & Pierce, 1996). Thus, ecotourism has been familiarized within the context of tourism as more environmentally sensitive tourism (Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002).

### **Ecotourism Intention**

Intention refers to consumer preference towards a specific product or service (Younus et al., 2015). Further, as depicted in the theory of planned behavior attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control are acting as the main predicting variables of intention (Ajzen, 2011). In tourism research, ecotourism intention has been identified as individual's intention to travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas to experience the natural environment and, the cultural environment (Chi & Pham, 2022).

Further, Pham and Nguyen (2020) have discussed ecotourism intention as an individual's foreseen or planned future engagement with eco-destinations. Ecotourism intention has paid more attention to factors such as motivation, attitudes, and environmental concerns (Luo and Deng, 2008; Hultman et al., 2015). Previous research also has focused on examining the impact of individuals' travel motives on their ecotourism intentions (Lee et al., 2014; Postma and Schmuecker, 2017).

Ecotourism also has been conceptualized as responsible environmental behavior which is also a reflection of the environment, commitment, and environmental knowledge (Cottrell & Graefe, 1997). In fact, responsible tourism intention has been identified as consumers' belief about the future, and it is highlighted that consumers develop attitudes about favorable and unfavorable emotional intentions (Zeithaml, 2000). Further, people with an awareness of environmental protection and conservation will behave responsibly towards the environment (Pham & Khanh, 2021) promoting social and economic benefits (Weeden, 2002). Similarly, Raviv, Becken, and Hughey (2016), has posited that responsible tourism aims to decrease the negative effect of tourism while increasing the social benefits.

### **Willingness to Pay Premium**

Willingness to pay premium has been defined as the preparedness to pay more than the other alternative products and/or services in the market (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Further, Bishop and Barber (2014), have discussed that willingness to pay premium acts as a vital factor for designing optimal prices and estimating the demand for a product or service. Ligas and Chaudhuri (2012), further discuss that consumers' willingness to pay more for a specific brand in preference to other alternative brands can lead to profitability and competitive advantage. Also, consumers have the perception of higher price reflects higher value (Doung et al., 2022).

Further, it is stated that willingness to pay premium as the perceived influence of engaging in an activity (Hultman et al., 2015). According to Duong et al., (2022), willingness to pay premium has been identified as the actual behavior in ecotourism. Similarly, Perkins and Grace (2009) revealed that interest in ecotourism is a factor for tourists' greater intention to ecotourism consumption and their actual behavior.

In a study on consumer willingness to pay for green initiatives, it has been highlighted that consumers who are concerned about the environment are more likely to search for green initiatives and are willing to pay more (Kang et al., 2012). Similarly, Tajfel and Turner (1986) revealed a positive association of environmental concern and willingness to pay premium for green initiatives employing the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, in the same study, it is highlighted that many customers dither pay premiums for green initiatives (Choi & Parsa, 2006).

When focusing on the willingness to pay for ecotourism offerings, it is revealed that ecotourism and pricing of sustainable tourism offerings are not focusing competitive market (Duong et al., 2022). Hence it depicts that the pricing of green initiatives/ecotourism offerings has to be handled as consumer sensitivities (Makwela & Elizabeth, 2022).

There are various factors that have affected the willingness to pay premium such as motivation, materialism, and perceived value (Weaver & Lawton, 2007; Hultman et al., 2015). Further, it depicts that most of the existing literature has focused on individual relationships of the variables rather than integrated frameworks to discuss the relationship between willingness to pay premiums, motivation and ecotourism intention (Cetin et al., 2017).

### **Intrinsic Motivation**

Motivations are internal psychological factors that direct towards behavior (Iso-Ahola, 1980). Similarly, motivation means moving to act on something (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to previous literature, self-determination theory has been discussed as a theoretical underpinning to understand motivations in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic motivation has been defined as an individual's internal values and attitudes that affect personal enjoyment and satisfaction without any external outcome (Grønhøj & Thøgersen 2017). Further, intrinsic motivation has been characterized as a feeling of interest (Cini et al., 2013) and enjoyment or fun (Deci & Ryan, 1980). Also, intrinsic motivation has been identified as pleasure and satisfaction that occurs due to internal interests. (Chiu & Li, 2015; Van Yperen et al., 2016; Ifinedo, 2017).

Internal and external motivations have been studied in previous tourism research as “push” and “pull” motives (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981). Further, tourist motivations have been identified as factors that relate to the needs, goals, and preferences of the tourists, and understanding tourist motivations is important in understanding tourist behaviour in relation to destination choice (Chan & Baum, 2007).

Accordingly, internal motives have been referred to as “push motives”; traveler needs, wants, desires, and are intangible and intrinsic needs (Lundberg, 1990). Similarly, Crompton (1979) highlighted the desire to go on vacation as a push factor in tourism and travel intention as an emotional state of pleasure, arousal, and dominance that captures the consumer mindset (Lehto et al., 2008).

When focusing on ecotourism research, Chan and Baum (2007) highlighted that the intrinsic motivations of ecotourists aim to achieve a broad objective of an individual, such as a need to get away from work or to enjoy a different natural environment. Similarly, Holden and Sparrowhawk (2002) stated that the main intrinsic motivations for ecotourists are learning about nature, being physically active and meeting people with a similar interest. Therefore, it could be identified that the intrinsic motivations of ecotourists are diverse and required to further study.

### **Extrinsic Motivation**

Extrinsic motivation has been defined as being motivated by external factors (Chow et al., 2019). Further, explanations relating to extrinsic motivation highlighted that it is mandatory to have external rewards to motivate consumers externally towards something (Deci et al., 1991). As an example, reviews of other consumers

can act as an external motivation to consumers whilst credibility of the source acts as an intrinsic motivator. As per previous literature, further classifications of extrinsic motivation have been identified such as integrated, identified, introjected and external regulations (Deci & Ryan 1980) and Huang et al. (2016) emphasized that extrinsic motivation tends to lessen people's intrinsic motivation to engage in eco-friendly practices.

According to tourism literature, extrinsic motivations have been referred to as “pull factors” (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981) and are used to explain tourists’ choices (Crompton, 1979). Further, these factors have been identified to be associated with tourism destination features, attractions or attributes (Klenosky, 2002), which are tangible features of the destination’s attributes (Chan & Baum, 2007).

The empirical evidence on ecotourism revealed that natural attractions, including wildlife, rainforest, nature and wildlife conservation and local lifestyle and eco-activities are important extrinsic motivating factors in attracting ecotourists to a destination (Chan & Baum, 2007). Similarly, Ajuhari et al., (2023) have identified the availability of preferred outdoor activities and the opportunity to spend time with their companions as important extrinsic factors in ecotourism.

## **CONCEPTUALIZATION**

### **Intrinsic Motivation and Willingness to Pay Premium**

Intrinsic motivation is defined as pleasure and satisfaction due to internal interests and has been widely discussed in the travel and tourism literature (Van Yperen et al., 2016; Ifinedo, 2017). It was discovered that willingness to pay a premium positively related with intrinsic motivation (Kim et al., 2022), where consumers are prepared to pay more than the other alternative products or services in the market (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Motivation, and environmentally concerned tourists always depict stronger motivation to attend environmental related content (Luo & Deng, 2008).

Supporting the mentioned relationship, perceived enjoyment, another conceptualization of intrinsic motivation has a positive affect the willingness to pay premium (Kim et al., 2022). Further, the same study stated that people accept and change their behaviors when they are internally motivated through enjoyment (Davis et al., 1992). Another study disclosed that there is a tendency to pay premium prices for eco-friendly activities due to internal motivation (Hultman et al., 2015). According to the above arguments below hypothesis has been derived.

H1: Intrinsic motivation will significantly impact the willingness to pay premium



### **Extrinsic Motivation and Willingness to Pay Premium**

Extrinsic motivation defines as being motivated by external factors (Chow et al., 2017). Further, explanations relating to extrinsic motivation highlighted that it is mandatory to have external rewards to motivate consumers externally towards something (Deci et al., 1991).

Willingness to pay a premium has been defined as the preparedness to pay more (Netemeyer et al., 2004). According to previous research, extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium has a close relationship (Gilal et al., 2018). However, numerous scholars have counter-argued on the uncertainty of willingness to pay premiums for environmentally sustainable products and services (Ku & Zaroff, 2014). However, some scholars have found that there is an impact of extrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium (Gilal et al., 2018). According to the above arguments below hypothesis has been derived.

H2: Extrinsic motivation will significantly impact the willingness to pay premium

### **Ecotourism Intention and Willingness to Pay Premium**

Ecotourism intention is defined as the tourist's intention to engage with ecotourism in the near future (Hultman et al., 2015). Also, ecotourism intention has been widely discussed in tourism related studies. However, it has been identified that further investigation of antecedents of willingness to pay premium is vital (Hultman et al., 2015). Hence, Hultman et al., (2015), have discussed the willingness to pay premium along with the theory of planned behavior. According to the results, ecotourism intention positively affects the willingness to pay premium (Hultman et al., (2015). Supporting the above proclamation, another study relating to the intention and willingness to pay premium has identified a positive impact (Kim et al., 2022). According to the above arguments below hypothesis has been derived.

H3: Ecotourism intention will significantly impact the willingness to pay premium

### **Intrinsic Motivation and Ecotourism Intention**

Deci and Ryan (2010) have discussed that intrinsic motivation has the highest level of determination when an individual is motivated by pleasure and feelings. Further, Cini et al., (2013), disclosed that intrinsic motivation is denoted by the feeling of something that is interesting. Previous research relating to extrinsic, intrinsic motivation stated that intrinsic behavior and extrinsic behavior affect the intention. However, it deployed that intrinsic motivation affects more than extrinsic motivation towards intention (Castaneda et al.,2007) as individuals decide it based on feelings (Kazemina et al., 2016). Moreover, in supporting the above relationship between intrinsic motivation and intention, a recent study conducted by Elgarhy et al., (2023) have argued that intrinsic motivation acts as a consequence of intention. Hence, respecting the above arguments, the hypothesis below has been derived.

H4: Intrinsic motivation will significantly impact the ecotourism intention

### **Extrinsic Motivation and Ecotourism Intention**

The main motivation of the users with goal-directed behavior is related to functional aspects or extrinsic motivation (Castaneda et al., 2007). Further, a study relating to extrinsic motivation and intention has found that there is a positive impact of extrinsic motivation on intention (Fagan et al., 2008). Moreover, extrinsic factors or the destination attributes, e.g.: natural attractions, wildlife, local lifestyle and eco-activities are the main motivational factors towards ecotourism consumption intention (Chan & Baum, 2007).

Further, perceived usefulness has been identified as a significant variable that has a direct relationship with behavioral intention under Technology Acceptance Model (Davis et al., 1989) and it has been highlighted that if perceived usefulness is high the probability of having intention would be high (Sadiq & Adil, 2021). In tourism research, ecotourism was found to have an impact of perceived usefulness which is a conceptualization of extrinsic motivation on intention (Sahli & Legohérel, 2016). According to the above arguments below hypothesis has been derived.

H5: Extrinsic motivation will significantly impact the ecotourism intention.

### **Intrinsic Motivation on Willingness to Pay Premium Mediates by Ecotourism Intention**

In the discussion of mediating impact of ecotourism intention in the relationship between intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium, Lu et al., (2014) have highlighted that the individuals who are interested or motivated towards ecotourism would only engage in ecotourism activities. Further, the same study highlighted that consumers who have the intention towards ecotourism activities tend to pay premium (Lu et al., 2014). Similarly, previous literature relating to destination marketing has stated that an individual's intention to select a destination is led by intrinsic motives (Battour et al., 2016). Moreover, another study on ecotourism intention and willingness to pay premium found that there is a mediating impact of ecotourism intention on the relationship between perceived value and willingness to pay premium (Duong et al., 2022). According to the above arguments below hypothesis has been derived.

H6: Ecotourism intention mediates the relationship between intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium

### **Extrinsic Motivation on Willingness to Pay Premium Mediates by Ecotourism Intention**

Extrinsic motivation has been conceptualized as perceived usefulness (Oh et al., 2013). As per literature, perceived usefulness is what consumer believes with the usage of products or services (Axel & Daniel, 2011). Averdung and Wagenfuehrer (2011), have identified that perceived usefulness has an impact on intention and thereby willingness to pay premium. Moreover, it explains that intention as a vital concept that leads to willingness to pay more for ecological initiatives (Agag et al., 2020). Further, it is highlighted that perceived usefulness has a significant impact on

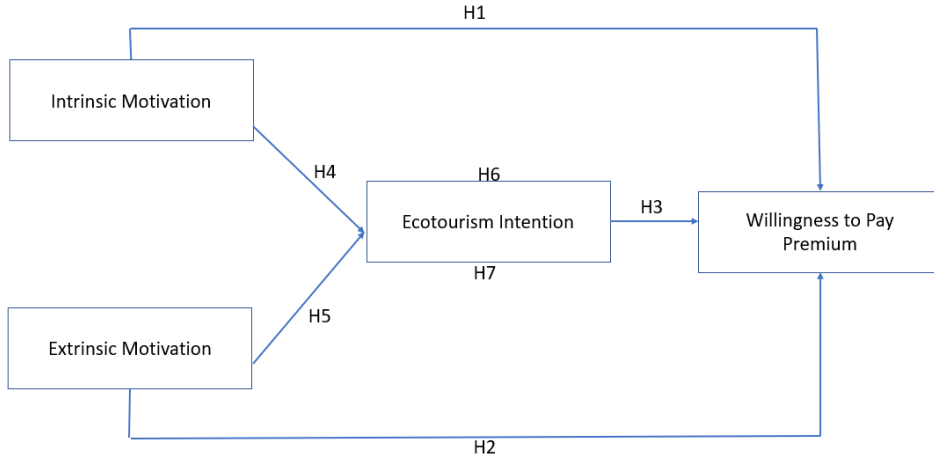
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willingness to pay (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005). According to the above arguments below hypothesis has been derived.

H7: Ecotourism intention mediates the relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 01: Conceptual Framework



Source: Authors, 2023

## METHODOLOGY

### Sampling and Data Collection

The study employed a deductive approach and cross-sectional quantitative research design. The data were collected from young domestic travelers between 18 – 35 years of age as they have been identified to have a greater interest to travel in foreseen future (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021) and who had purchased green travel products in the last six months (Agag et al., 2020). Purposive sampling strategy (Chan & Baum, 2007) was used and self-administered questionnaires were sent to the targeted population. Considering financial limitations and the difficulty of reaching participants in remote areas and, to obtain data from a relatively large sample, this study utilized an online survey approach as an appropriate data collection method (Lu et al., 2014). 212 responses were analyzed employing PLS-SEM approach and using SmartPLS 4.0 software.

## Measurement

Scales validated in the literature were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the study measurements. Measures of Willingness to Pay Premium were adapted from a previous study (Lu et al., 2014; Hultman et al., 2015). The scale in five items were adopted to measure ecotourism intention (Lu et al., 2014; Hultman et al., 2015). Intrinsic motivation was operationalized with ten items as proposed by Chow et al., (2017). Established and validated measures for extrinsic motivation were adopted from a previous study (Chow et al., 2017). Willingness to Pay Premium and Ecotourism Intention were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 7 ((strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) while intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation were measured using five-point Likert scale 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Information

According to the findings of the (See table 01) majority of the respondents were females (57.5%) while 42.5% were males. In total 21.7% of the respondents were aged between 18-23 years old, 38.2% were aged between 24-29 years old and 40.1% were aged between 30-35 years old. In the sample, approximately 67.3% of respondents have completed their tertiary education (graduate and postgraduate). In terms of occupation, most of the respondents were employed (74.1%) while 16.5% were self-employed.

**Table 01: Demographic Information**

Variable	Description	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	42.5
	Female	57.5
<b>Age</b>	18-23	21.7
	24-29	38.2
	30-35	40.1
<b>Education</b>	Primary	0
	Secondary	15.2
	Graduate	40.6
	Postgraduate	26.7
	Other	17.5
<b>Occupation</b>	Employed	74.1
	Self-employed	16.5
	Unemployed	9.4

*Source:* Survey Data, 2023

Descriptive analysis techniques were performed using SPSS software to examine the differences among items and variables. The average value of 3.00 was used on a medium scale (five-point Likert scale) and 4.00 (seven-point Likert scale) in this research. The mean values of all items, Willingness to Pay Premium (WPP), Extrinsic

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Motivation (EM), Intrinsic Motivation (IM) were leaning more towards agreement while Ecotourism Intention (EI) items obtained a mean score above the average value, except EI 4 which has a value of 3.99 as shown in Table 02.

**Table 02: Descriptive Analysis**

Variable	Code	Mean	SD
<b>Willingness to pay premium</b>	WL1	4.11	.869
	WL2	4.05	.970
	WL3	4.00	.966
	WL4	3.99	.903
<b>Eco-tourism Intention</b>	EI1	4.13	1.374
	EI2	4.35	1.303
	EI3	4.41	1.203
	EI4	4.35	1.225
	EI5	4.22	1.378
<b>Intrinsic Motivation</b>	IM1	4.25	.789
	IM2	4.25	.812
	IM3	4.16	.930
	IM4	4.14	.876
	IM5	4.03	.915
	IM6	4.27	.779
	IM7	4.07	.806
	IM8	4.02	.840
	IM9	4.12	.851
	IM10	4.07	.934
<b>Extrinsic Motivation</b>	EM1	4.06	1.222
	EM2	4.33	1.171
	EM3	4.33	1.068
	EM4	4.13	1.185
	EM5	4.17	1.183
	EM6	3.86	.981
	EM7	3.75	1.205

*Source:* Survey Data, 2023

## **Analysis and Results**

This study employed the PLS-SEM approach using Smart PLS 4 software package to analyze the data and to test the research hypotheses (Hair et al., 2017). This research adopted a two-step approach (Hair et al., 2017). First the reliability and validity of the measurement model was examined, and then the structural model was measured.

## Measurement Model

Hair et al. (2017), suggested a few parameters to assess validity and reliability which include factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) and Fornell- Larcker Criterion.

Convergent validity is a scale's capacity to load together as a single construct and is used to examine each loading for each indicators block. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is a standard measure to determine the convergent validity of the construction level (Hair et al., 2018). AVE value of 0.50 or higher is expected which indicates that the measurement correlates positively with the alternative measures of the same value of the construct (Hair et al., 2018). Accordingly, one item from intrinsic motivation and three items from extrinsic motivation were removed which did not meet the above criteria to further improve the model. Thereafter, AVE values calculated for this model were in the acceptable range above 0.5 (See table 03).

**Table 03: Validity and Reliability Assessment**

Variables	Measurement Items	Factor loadings	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)
EI	EI1	0.781	0.759	0.92	0.927
	EI2	0.882			
	EI3	0.891			
	EI4	0.895			
	EI5	0.902			
EM	EM1	0.71	0.692	0.85	0.868
	EM2	0.879			
	EM3	0.875			
	EM4	0.854			
IM	IM1	0.678	0.604	0.917	0.92
	IM2	0.744			
	IM4	0.739			
	IM5	0.804			
	IM6	0.717			
	IM7	0.842			
	IM8	0.8			
	IM9	0.797			
	IM10	0.847			
	WL	WL1			
WL2		0.863			
WL3		0.761			
WL4		0.896			

Source: Survey Data, 2023

The value of Cronbach's alpha is used for measuring internal consistency and it is identified that Cronbach's alpha value should be above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017).

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According to the current study, Cronbach's alpha values of all variables were above 0.7 indicating that all were in the acceptable range (See table 03).

Composite Reliability (CR) is considered as another indicator to measure reliability and values greater than 0.7 can be considered as satisfactory (Hair et al., 2017). The values for CR of the present study were in an acceptable range as they were above 0.7 (See table 03).

Fornell-Larcker criterion is a measure of discriminant validity, which compares the square root of each construct's AVE with its correlations with all other constructs in the model (Hair et al., 2017). Accordingly, Fornell-Larcker criterion compares the square root of the AVE values with the latent variable correlations and the square root of each construct's AVE should be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct. The constructs of the study satisfied the above criteria (See table 04).

**Table 04: Discriminant Validity - Fornell-Larcker criterion**

	<b>EI</b>	<b>EM</b>	<b>IM</b>	<b>WL</b>
EI	<b>0.871</b>			
EM	0.772	<b>0.832</b>		
IM	0.502	0.451	<b>0.777</b>	
WL	0.602	0.493	0.786	<b>0.848</b>

*Source:* Survey Data, 2023

The predictability and strength of a model are reflected by the R-square and adjusted R-square values which are another vital determinant of the model (Hair et al., 2017). R-square values of 0.25, 0.5 and 0.75 for endogenous latent variables describe the strength of the model as weak, moderate and substantial respectively (Hair et al., 2017). In this model, the R-square of ecotourism intention was 0.625 and, willingness to pay premium was 0.674 indicating that the model has a moderate predictive accuracy (See table 05).

**Table 05: R-square and Adjusted R-square values**

	<b>R-square</b>	<b>R-square adjusted</b>
EI		0.625
WL		0.674

*Source:* Survey Data, 2023

### **Structural Model**

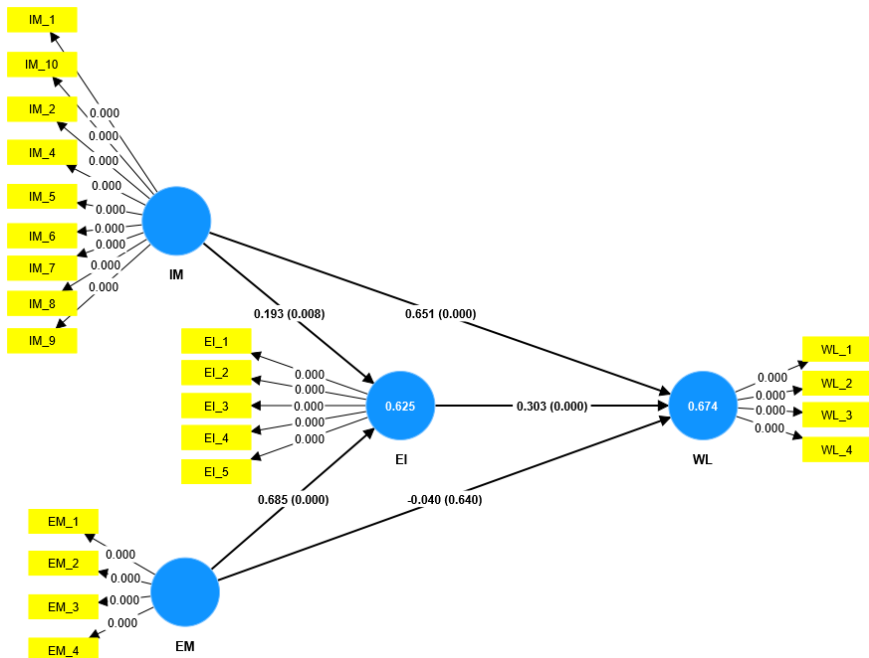
The structural model is used to check the hypothetical relationship among variables and reveals the interaction between dependent and independent variables (Hair et al., 2017). The hypotheses in the research were tested using a structural model after assessing and confirming reliability and validity of the constructs using the PLS algorithm and bootstrapping statistical techniques.

**Table 06: Path coefficients**

Hypotheses	Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STD EV )	P-values	Hypotheses acceptance/rejection
H1	IM -> WL	0.651	0.647	0.061	10.714	0.000	Accept
H2	EM -> WL	-0.04	-0.038	0.085	0.467	0.640	Reject
H3	IM -> EI	0.303	0.305	0.083	3.654	0.000	Accept
H4	IM -> EI	0.193	0.196	0.072	2.663	0.008	Accept
H5	EM -> EI	0.685	0.682	0.064	10.741	0.000	Accept

Source: Survey Data, 2023

**Figure 02: Hypothesized Model Structure and Result Using Bootstrapping Technique**



Source: Survey Data, 2023



The acceptance and rejection of the hypothesis and the interaction between dependent and independent variables were determined based on the level of significance (P-values) and t-values where the t-values were near or greater than 2 (Hair et al., 2017) and p-values were less than 0.05. Accordingly, except one hypothesis all the others were accepted (See table 06). The study revealed that H1, impact of intrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium ( $t=10.714$ ,  $\beta=0.651$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), H3, impact of ecotourism intention on willingness to pay premium ( $t=3.654$ ,  $\beta=0.303$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) H4, impact of intrinsic motivation on ecotourism intention ( $t=2.663$ ,  $\beta=0.193$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), H5, impact of extrinsic motivation on ecotourism intention ( $t=10.741$ ,  $\beta=0.685$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) are significant and positive. However, H2, impact of extrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium ( $t=0.467$ ,  $\beta=-0.04$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) was rejected as the p-value is greater than 0.05

### **Assessment of Mediation Effect**

As per Hair et al. (2017), mediation and non-mediation, depend on whether the model relationships are significant or not. Non-mediation is explained when the mediating relationship is insignificant. Further, a significant indirect relationship, but an insignificant direct relationship explains a full mediation.

Accordingly, mediation analysis was performed to assess H6, the mediation role of ecotourism intention in the relation between intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium and H7, the mediation role of ecotourism intention in the relation between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium. The results (See table 07) revealed a significant indirect effect of intrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium through ecotourism intention (H6:  $\beta = 0.059$ ,  $t=2.048$ ,  $p<0.005$ ). The total effect of intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium through ecotourism intention ( $\beta = 0.71$ ,  $t=12.733$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and direct effect of intrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium ( $\beta = 0.651$ ,  $t=10.714$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) were significant. Hence, this shows a complementary partial mediation role (Hair et al., 2017) of ecotourism intention in the relationship between intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium.

Further (See table 07), findings revealed that the indirect effect of extrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium through ecotourism intention was significant (H7:  $\beta =0.208$ ,  $t= 3.367$ ,  $p<0.005$ ), although initially the direct effect of extrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium (H2) was insignificant ( $\beta=-0.04$ ,  $t=0.467$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). In the mediation analysis it was identified that the total effect of extrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium ( $\beta = 0.168$ ,  $t=3.011$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), as well as the mediator effect of ecotourism intention between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium were significant. Hence, it depicts that there is a full mediation role (Hair et al., 2017) of ecotourism intention in the relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium.

**Table 07: Special Indirect Effects**

Hypotheses	Path	Original sample (Beta value)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values
H6	IM -> EI ->					
	WL	0.059	0.06	0.029	2.048	0.041
H7	EM -> EI ->					
	WL	0.208	0.208	0.062	3.367	0.001

Source: Survey Data, 2023

**Table 08: Total Effects**

Path	Original sample (Beta value)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
EI -> WL	0.303	0.305	0.083	3.654	0
EM -> EI	0.685	0.682	0.064	10.741	0
EM -> WL	0.168	0.17	0.056	3.011	0.003
IM -> EI	0.193	0.196	0.072	2.663	0.008
IM -> WL	0.71	0.707	0.056	12.733	0

Source: Survey Data, 2023

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The current study examined how an individual is motivated towards ecotourism consumption and their willingness to pay premium for such consumptions. Accordingly, this study was aligned to three main objectives. The first objective was to identify the possible motivational factors driving the willingness to pay premium. In accomplishing this objective, self-determination theory was adapted to explain how intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation affect on ecotourism intention and willingness to pay premium. The second objective was to examine whether there is a mediating impact of ecotourism intention on the relationship between intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium and final objective was to examine whether there is a mediating impact of ecotourism intention on the relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium.

### Identifying the Possible Motivational Factors Driving the Willingness to Pay Premium for Ecotourism

The present study found that there is a significant positive impact of intrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium (H1). In compliance with the present findings, intrinsic motivation has been found to have a positive relationship with willingness to pay premium (Kim et al., 2022). Similarly, it was identified that there is a tendency to pay premium prices for eco-friendly activities due to internal motivation (Hultman et al., 2015).

Findings also revealed that there is no impact of extrinsic motivation on willingness to pay premium (H2). Thus, it is contradictory to the previous findings that proved a relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium (Gilal et al., 2018). Similarly, a positive relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium has been identified in studies focusing on materialism that explain people are more likely to be motivated by external factors than internal factors (Doung et al., 2022). In materialism, people are identified to be easily motivated to overconsumption and obtain happiness and fulfillment through possessions (Lu et al., 2014). However, these characteristics are in contradiction with ecotourism, which is identified as a low-impact tourism that encourages minimum and responsible consumption and does not exploit resources (Bjork, 2000). Hence, it could be identified that ecotourists are not motivated to pay premium by external factors.

The third hypothesis disclosed that there is a significant positive impact of ecotourism intention on willingness to pay premium (H3). Supporting the above proclamation, a study relating to the intention and willingness to pay premium has identified a positive relationship (Kim et al., 2022). Similar findings could be identified in another study focused on ecotourism (Hultman et al., 2015), which revealed a positive relationship between ecotourism intention and willingness to pay premium. This has been explained by the growing popularity towards sustainable travel products that affect travelers' intention to buy and willingness to pay more for these products (Agag et al., 2020).

Findings of the current study also revealed that there is a significant positive impact of intrinsic motivation on ecotourism intention (H4) and extrinsic motivation on ecotourism intention (H5). The relationship between motivation and ecotourism intention has been discussed widely as a positive relationship (Hultman et al., 2015). Further, a study relating to extrinsic, intrinsic motivation has stated that the outcome of intrinsic behavior and extrinsic behavior affects the intention (Castaneda et al., 2007). Similarly, a study relating to extrinsic motivation and intention has found that there is a positive relationship between extrinsic motivation and intention (Fagan et al., 2008) whereas, according to Sharpely (2008) motivations push an individual from a condition of inertia into tourism-consumptive activity. The above argument could be explained with the fact that motivation is an inherent need of individuals to react to fulfill their desired satisfaction (Beerli & Martin, 2004).

### **Examining the Mediating Impact of Ecotourism Intention on the Relationship between Intrinsic Motivation and Willingness to Pay Premium for Ecotourism**

This study further examined whether ecotourism intention is mediating the relationship between intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium (H6) and found that there is a partial mediation of ecotourism intention as the direct relationship between intrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium was significant. The current findings are in conformity with previous studies which revealed a mediation of ecotourism intention on the relationship between intrinsic

motivation and willingness to pay premium (Lu et al., 2014). Hence, it could be concluded that individuals who are motivated towards ecotourism would lead to intention towards ecotourism activities and thereby tend to pay premium (Lu et al., 2014).

### **Examining the Mediating Impact of Ecotourism Intention on the Relationship between Extrinsic Motivation and Willingness to Pay Premium for Ecotourism**

The third objective of the study was to examine whether there is a mediating impact of ecotourism intention on the relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium (H7). Findings of the current study revealed that ecotourism intention mediates the relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium. Further, it was depicted a full mediation as the direct relationship between extrinsic motivation and willingness to pay premium was insignificant. In accordance, previous studies related to ecotourism have revealed that external factors have not significantly motivated ecotourist to pay premiums, yet negation of the logical reasoning may affect intention to ecotourism which may then lead to a willingness to pay premiums (Rose, 2007). Similarly, it has been identified that extrinsic motivation has an impact on intention and thereby willingness to pay premium (Oh et al., 2013; Averdung and Wagenfuehrer, 2011).

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study attempts to enhance the existing knowledge of internal and external motivational factors affecting ecotourism intention and thereby willingness to pay premium for ecotourism. Thus, the current study has used self-determination theory as the main theory to discuss human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Weiner, 1990) and it has mainly focused on motivation and consumption behavior. The findings of the present study could be useful for decision makers in implementing new initiations.

However, self-determination theory does not discuss the actual behavior (willingness to pay premiums) (Dong et al., 2022) even though they are having a positive intention towards ecotourism. Hence, the current study incorporates willingness to pay premium as a vital concept to discuss how consumers are moving towards ecotourism related behaviors. The current study contributes to the existing literature on willingness to pay premium precisely by incorporating ecotourism intention as a mediating variable on the relationship between intrinsic, extrinsic motivations and willingness to pay premium.

### **Managerial Implications**

The findings of the present study revealed respondents' internal and external motivations and their effect on ecotourism intention and willingness to pay a premium

for ecotourism consumption, which provides practical implications for ecotourism operators and marketers.

According to Lu et al., (2014), the stakeholders involving in ecotourism operations should cooperatively develop and implement communication strategies and materials that emphasize the importance and benefits of ecotourism for the preservation of the environment and culture while generating positive benefits for local residents and tourists. Accordingly, understanding intrinsic and extrinsic motives for ecotourism would help in segmenting the ecotourism market (Duong et al., 2022) and will help in developing and implementing precise and effective messages for encouraging environmentally friendly behaviors and the conservation of local culture. Further, segmenting the ecotourism market is important in making decisions for new product development, creating effective advertising messages and strategic positioning (Kessler et al., 2020).

Moreover, many tourists seek memorable tourism experiences in a destination (Hosany et al., 2022) and tourists who develop memorable experiences are more likely to revisit the destination (Zhang et al., 2018), foster destination loyalty (Kahraman & Cifci, 2023) and, help to gain a sustainable competitive advantage over competitors in the tourism industry (Wei et al., 2019). However, the prices of ecotourism offerings are higher but often less comfortable than mass tourism offerings (Hultman et al., 2015) and tourists would not want to pay a premium for ecotourism products. Yet, ecotourism experience has been identified as a factor to pay a premium price for ecotourism (Huang & Liu, 2017). Therefore, ecotourism providers, marketers, and policymakers should increase the value of ecotourism towards creating a memorable and unique tourism experience and turning tourists' intentions into their actual decisions (Duong, 2022). Therefore, understanding participants' motivations in ecotourism activities is vital for creating memorable ecotourism experiences and making them pay a premium for ecotourism.

Accordingly, understanding the motivations and ecotourism intention helps policymakers and other decision-makers in strategic planning and developing ecotourism to encourage and ensure sustainable consumption and production.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

The research used purposive sampling which could under-represent some individuals from the target population. Similarly, scholars have proven that external motives as temporary, and thus result in temporary behaviors (Dodds et al., 2021; Antón et al., 2017). Therefore, cross-sectional design could have led to biases in the research.

The present study found intrinsic motivation as a significant influence on intention and willingness to pay premium. Therefore, future research is advised to incorporate psychological and other internal factors such as attitudes and beliefs. Further, the present study would suggest conducting future studies for other ecotourism market segments as this study only has focused on domestic young travelers in Sri Lanka.

## CONCLUSION

The current study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge of internal and external motivation towards intention. Further, it focuses on understanding whether consumers are willing to pay premiums for ecotourism. Accordingly, the direct relationships of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation towards willingness to pay premium along with a mediating impact of ecotourism intention was examined. Moreover, it could be highlighted that internal motivation is a vital variable where an individual could be directed to pay premium prices for ecotourism. In fact, tourists motivated by self-discovery are more likely seek to enhance their own intrinsic pleasure by engaging in ecotourism than extrinsically motivated inter-personal seekers (Snepenger et al., 2006). In conclusion, it is noteworthy that initiations to fulfil both external and internal motivation may result in increasing consumer intention towards ecotourism behaviors and willingness to pay premium prices.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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