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# Understanding ecotourists' responsible tourism intention in Sarawak through social cognitive theory

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## ABSTRACT

Sarawak's tourism industry relies heavily on ecotourism as most attractions are nature-based. Since 2021, the state government has actively promoted responsible tourism; however, research on ecotourists' intentions for responsible tourism in Sarawak remains limited. This study is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to investigate the role of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, awareness, and perceived value in shaping responsible tourism intentions. Data were collected via questionnaires at selected ecotourism sites, yielding 405 responses, of which 383 were retained for analysis after cleaning. Using PLS-SEM, the findings indicate that outcome expectations and awareness significantly influence responsible tourism intention. In contrast, self-efficacy and perceived value do not significantly influence responsible tourism intention. These results highlight that ecotourists in Sarawak are more driven by their awareness of and outcome expectations for responsible practices than by self-efficacy or perceived value. Theoretically, the study extends SCT by emphasising the importance of cognitive factors in responsible tourism. Practically, it suggests that policymakers and industry players should focus on raising awareness, communicating positive outcomes, and improving facilities to create a more enabling environment for responsible tourism.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Responsible tourism emphasises ethical and mindful practices in both the production and consumption of travel, involving not just tourists but also all related stakeholders. The global tourism crisis, intensified by a severe economic downturn, highlighted the sector's vulnerability, exposing its heavy dependence on tourism for individuals, families, and broader economic stability. This decline uncovered underlying structural weaknesses that had previously gone unnoticed, underscoring the urgent need for adaptive strategies to support recovery and strengthen resilience (Cheer et al., 2021). The goal of responsible tourism is to enhance both the tourist experience and the quality of life for locals. It places a focus on reducing adverse effects, encouraging cultural sensitivity, and making sure that tourism benefits the environment and the local population (Goodwin, 2014). Responsible tourism draws its foundation from sustainable tourism, which emphasises three key dimensions: economic, sociocultural, and environmental (Sosa et al., 2021). Responsible tourism is becoming increasingly vital for destination sustainability and aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to responsible consumption and production. Sustainable ecotourism, through the careful use of natural resources for recreation and experience, serves as a strategy to reduce negative impacts on destinations (Chan et al., 2021). Hence, responsible tourism is a crucial pathway to achieving sustainable tourism.

Sarawak is a state in Malaysia where the tourism sector is heavily dependent on ecotourism, as most of its attractions are nature-based. Besides, the Sarawak state has recognised the significance of responsible tourism, with the government actively promoting it both locally and globally since 2021, by recognising that it is an imperative step towards sustainable tourism (Cheah, 2021; Dayak Daily, 2024; The Borneo Post, 2023). Nonetheless, there is a lack of research evaluating the effectiveness of these efforts or examining ecotourists' responsible tourism behaviour in Sarawak. Without insight into the impact of current promotional initiatives, policymakers and industry stakeholders struggle to assess progress and further encourage responsible tourism practices among visitors. Furthermore, there is limited scholarly investigation into the cognitive mechanisms underlying responsible tourism behaviour among ecotourists in the state. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals' beliefs, outcome expectations, and awareness shape behavioural intentions, has not yet been applied to examine responsible tourism in Sarawak. This represents a significant theoretical gap, as SCT could offer a structured approach to explain why some ecotourists adopt responsible behaviours while others do not. Additionally, few studies have adopted SCT to explain responsible tourism behaviour from the perspective of ecotourists. Ergo, addressing this gap is vital not only to advance theoretical knowledge in responsible tourism research but also to provide policymakers and industry stakeholders with evidence-based insights on how to effectively encourage responsible practices among visitors, thereby supporting the sustainable development of Sarawak's ecotourism sector.

In addition, Sarawak, which is popular for its ecotourism sites, is vulnerable when it comes to the tourism crisis that happened a few years ago, affecting the local community, especially those who stay around ecotourism sites, who suffer from the loss of economic sources due to its heavy dependence on tourism income (Ibrahim et al., 2021). This signalled the problem of the ecotourism industry's unsustainability in Sarawak. Tourism stakeholders have recognised that the need for responsible tourism practices is critical and timely, as such actions offer effective solutions to current global challenges in the tourism industry and support the long-term goal of achieving sustainable tourism (Yusrini et al., 2022).

Most visitors to Sarawak are ecotourists. This leads the Sarawak Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry, and Performing Arts (MTCP) to redirect its strategic focus towards advancing the ecotourism sector, with the ambition of positioning the destination as a leading global ecotourism destination (Thong et al., 2024). In brief, understanding ecotourists' cognitive factors and intentions in practising responsible tourism is crucial for promoting responsible tourism in Sarawak. Ecotourists are travellers who prefer recreational experiences compatible with environmental protection and often visit ecotourism sites (Sharpley, 2006). The reason intention is an important psychological determinant of responsible tourism behaviour is that human behaviour is shaped by the interaction between individuals and their environment.

It is further driven by one's cognition and intentions (Cai et al., 2022). A good understanding of ecotourists' cognitive factors and intentions enables policymakers and industry players to develop effective, efficient strategies to promote responsible tourism. Based on the SCT suggestion, the current study aims to examine self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and responsible tourism intention. Moreover, two extended variables (awareness and perceived value) were recommended for the conceptual framework to investigate their relationship with responsible tourism intention. These cognitive factors all focus on the individual perception without external influences. Ultimately, the study aims to understand ecotourists' personal perspectives on their intention to practice responsible tourism.

The current study is expected to contribute theoretically to SCT by extending two variables and applying the responsible tourism theory. Apart from this, the study is expected to contribute to policymakers in responsible tourism policymaking and practitioners in practicing and promoting responsible tourism in their organisations.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Social cognitive theory**

SCT emphasises an agentic perspective in understanding human development, adaptation, and change. It provides a framework to examine the determinants and mechanisms shaping psychosocial functioning, explained through triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 2001b). The theory further differentiates three forms of agency: personal agency, proxy agency (when individuals rely on others to act on their behalf), and collective agency (where groups collaborate to shape outcomes). Among these, belief in one's own efficacy is considered the most fundamental (Bandura, 2002). According to SCT, individuals are active agents who shape their own life paths rather than passive recipients of external forces (Bandura, 1999). In the context of responsible tourism, this means that tourists consciously draw on their self-efficacy and intentions when making travel decisions and actively participate in sustainable practices rather than responding to environmental or social pressures. In essence, SCT can better explain the current study as the objective is to examine the individual's perspective rather than to include the influences from external sources. As mentioned in the introduction, self-efficacy and outcome expectations are directly derived from SCT. According to Bandura (1986), people form beliefs about what they can accomplish, anticipate the possible results of their behaviour, and set objectives with strategies to reach them. Therefore, behavioural intention, specifically, responsible tourism intention in the current context, aligns with the idea of goal formulation and deliberate action.

On top of this, the current study extends the traditional application of SCT by incorporating awareness as an additional cognitive determinant of responsible tourism intention. While SCT emphasises self-efficacy and outcome expectations, responsible tourism requires individuals to be informed and conscious of the environmental and social consequences before acting. By including awareness and perceived value, the study adapts SCT to the specific context of responsible tourism in Sarawak, capturing how knowledge and understanding of responsible practices interact with personal beliefs and anticipated outcomes to shape tourists' intentions. This extension not only strengthens the theoretical applicability of SCT in tourism research but also provides a framework for examining context-specific cognitive mechanisms that influence sustainability-oriented behaviours.

### **2.2 Responsible tourism intention**

Behavioural intention reflects a person's commitment to act, with stronger intentions generally increasing the likelihood of successfully performing the behaviour. Intentions represent underlying beliefs and knowledge that guide actions, though they may change over time (Torabi et al., 2022). In the context of the current study, responsible tourism intention represents the behavioural intention to practise responsible tourism while travelling in the destination. In this way, tourists seek to participate in and help

preserve the destination's environment, culture, and economy. Responsible tourism intention is a popular topic in sustainable tourism. Many studies have investigated tourists' intentions towards responsible tourism and found positive associations between cognitive factors and responsible tourism intention (Fenitra et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2022). Thus, considering the context of the current study, the behavioural intention will be responsible tourism intention, which is also the dependent variable.

### **2.3 Self-efficacy**

As a most significant factor of behaviour change, self-efficacy refers to an individual's awareness of their ability to regulate actions and perform effectively (Zulkosky, 2009). People's willingness to adopt certain attitudes or behaviours is formed by their self-perception of their own ability and the environment, with self-efficacy playing a central role in influencing one's behaviour in both the actions taken and the effort made (Koc, 2021; Yang et al., 2022). Those with strong self-efficacy generally have greater intention to act, as they expect positive results and are confident in their capability to accomplish tasks effectively (Lestari & Setiawan, 2021). They are confident in their ability to perform the task, making correct decisions, hence it is a strong predictor of behavioural intention (Fawaid et al., 2022). Past studies evidence the positive relationship between self-efficacy and behavioural intention as well (Nursyirwan et al., 2022; Thanh & Doan, 2021). Hence, a hypothesis was formed as follows:

H1: Self-efficacy is positively associated with responsible tourism intention.

### **2.4 Outcome expectation**

Outcome expectations refer to the anticipated results or consequences that individuals believe will arise from the deliberate actions they decide to perform (Bandura, 2001a). Outcome expectations represent one's beliefs about the potential consequences of a particular action and serve as motivational factors that influence the decision to participate in specific tasks. According to SCT, individuals are more intent to act when they anticipate favourable outcomes, whereas unfavourable expectations reduce the intention to engage (Cai et al., 2022). Expectation to generate favourable outcomes plays a key role in shaping intention, as individuals are more inclined to act when they believe successful performance can produce a result that is beneficial to them (Alzahrani & Seth, 2021; Liguori et al., 2020). This shows the close relationship between outcome expectation and behavioural intention. Past studies also evidenced the positive relationship between these two constructs (Cai et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2011; Maddux et al., 1982). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H2: Outcome expectation is positively associated with responsible tourism intention.

### **2.5 Awareness**

Awareness can be defined as an individual's ability to sustain an understanding of situations and their actions to respond to the situation (Liechti & Sumi, 2002). In the current context, awareness refers to responsible tourism. Awareness is a psychological factor that determines individuals' daily actions, attitudes, and behaviours. Better awareness of an issue comes along with stronger intentions to preserve the environment and promote human well-being (Darvishmotevali & Altinay, 2022). Awareness enhances individuals' understanding and perceived relevance of an issue, enabling them to cognitively recognise and organise the information they receive within a meaningful framework. This cognitive processing subsequently encourages the formation of behavioural intentions and informs decision-making outcomes (Kerse, 2023). Previous research has shown the close relationships between awareness and behavioural intention, especially in the pro-environment topics and the responsible tourism topic too (Hayat et al., 2022; Janita Dewi, 2019; Munerah et al., 2021). Henceforth, the current study hypothesised that:

H3: Awareness is positively associated with responsible tourism intention.

## 2.6 Perceived value

Perceived value refers to a consumer's overall evaluation of a product or service, based on the balance between the benefits received and the costs or sacrifices made (Paulose & Shakeel, 2022; Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived value is considered a key criterion in consumer decision-making (Um & Yoon, 2021) and serves as an antecedent to various behavioural outcomes in services, including satisfaction, intention, and loyalty (Hosany et al., 2022). Perceived value represents how individuals judge the value of a product or service. It plays an important role in determining the behaviour since intention usually comes before action. When people see the value as meaningful or beneficial, they are more persuaded to follow through with their intention (Liao et al., 2020). Individuals tend to evaluate the benefits they receive relative to the resources they expend, and this assessment plays a crucial role in shaping their intentions and decisions to maintain ongoing engagement with a service provider (Polat et al., 2021). Past studies have evidenced this relationship between perceived value and behavioural intention (Bushara et al., 2023; Handriana & Ambara, 2016; Yap, 2022). Thus, a hypothesis is developed as follows:

H4: Perceived value is positively associated with responsible tourism intention.

## 2.7 Conceptual framework

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework based on the hypotheses developed.

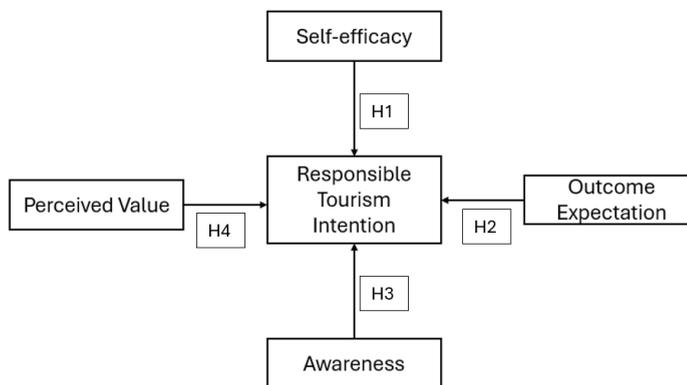


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

## 3. METHODOLOGY

Malaysia has been giving strong attention to ecotourism due to its rich natural beauty that attracts many visitors. Through the National Ecotourism Plan (NEP) 2016–2025, the government has promoted ecotourism actively and identified 60 ecotourism clusters across the country. Of this number, Sarawak has the most, at 15 percent, making it the state with the largest share. With its unique natural and cultural resources, Sarawak has prioritised its state as one of the top ecotourism destinations (Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, 2017; Thomas, 2020).

Based on this background and the problem faced by Sarawak mentioned in section 1, the present study focuses on ecotourism sites in Sarawak. After a thorough selection based on the popularity of ecotourism sites in each division of Sarawak, six main sites were confirmed as the study areas, namely Semenggoh Nature Reserve, Bako National Park, Fairy Cave Nature Reserve, Gunung Mulu National Park, Niah National Park, and Similajau National Park. These represent the divisions of Serian, Kuching, Miri, and Bintulu (Ministry of Tourism Creative Industry and Performing Arts Sarawak, 2024).

For the research method, a quantitative approach was applied. Data were collected mainly via a Google Form survey administered in person by the researcher, with all fields set to compulsory to prevent missing responses. The survey covered both local and international tourists aged 18 years and above. This method allowed the study to gather reliable information about tourists' intentions towards responsible tourism behaviour in Sarawak.

In this study, participation was fully voluntary, and the respondents were chosen using convenience sampling. Several strategies were implemented to minimise the risk of common method bias, following the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2003). During questionnaire design, items for the different constructs were drawn from distinct sources, and temporal separation was applied between predictors and criteria. Prior to answering the questionnaire, the respondents were approached, the purpose of the study was explained, and consent was acquired to conduct the survey. Moreover, respondents were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses and informed that all answers were valid, with no correct or incorrect options. To determine the required number of samples, a power analysis was conducted with the G\*Power 3.1.9.4 programme (Faul et al., 2007). A statistical test should have a power of at least 0.80 to detect meaningful effects (Cohen, 1988). Following this guideline, the analysis was set with four predictors, a 5% significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), a medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ), and a power of 0.95 (95%). Based on these parameters, the minimum recommended sample size was 129 respondents. This ensured the study had sufficient statistical power to identify real relationships among the constructs.

For data analysis, two main software tools were used: SPSS 30.0 and SmartPLS 4.0. SPSS was used first for preliminary checks, including tests for straight-lining and missing values. Since the questionnaire was distributed using Google Forms, all responses were complete, and no missing data issues were found. However, some responses showed straight-lining patterns, which required removal before further analysis.

After cleaning, the dataset moved into the main analysis stage with SmartPLS 4.0, which applied a two-step PLS-SEM approach. This method was chosen because it is suitable for path modelling and for confirming the validity and reliability of constructs (Abdi, 2003; Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2022).

In total, 405 responses were collected. After the preliminary analysis by using SPSS 30.0, 22 were removed due to a straight-lining issue (the standard deviation of this dataset = 0, which means these data have a suspicious response pattern - all the answers are scaled with the same value for that set of data), leaving 383 valid responses ( $n = 383$ ) for the final analysis. The questionnaire items of all the constructs were adapted from past studies, which had been validated previously (Kousar et al., 2022; Kusumawati et al., 2022; Lin & Hsu, 2015; Nga et al., 2024; Venkatesh et al., 2011). Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess potential common method bias (CMB) among the survey items. An unrotated principal component analysis revealed that the first factor accounted for 42.5% of the total variance, which was below the 50% threshold suggested by (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This indicates that common method bias is unlikely to be a significant concern in the present study.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Validation of the measurement model

Before testing the relationships among the constructs, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the selected constructs within the research model. Using the PLS-SEM algorithm, the measurement model was assessed by item reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The results, including the reliability and validity of each construct and its items, are presented in Table 1. All factor loadings were found to be above the threshold of 0.50 (Bagozzi et al., 1991). In addition, both composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha values for every construct ranged between 0.70 and 0.95, confirming that the measures were reliable (Chin, 1998; Cronbach, 1951; Hair et al., 2022). Convergent validity was assessed through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), where a

minimum score of 0.50 is required (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As presented in Table 1, all constructs exceeded this benchmark, further supporting strong convergent validity.

Table 1. Convergent validity of the construct measures

Construct	Items	Loading	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Self-efficacy	SE_1	0.729	0.861	0.785	0.609
	SE_2	0.812			
	SE_3	0.823			
	SE_4	0.753			
Outcome Expectation	OE_1	0.769	0.871	0.815	0.575
	OE_2	0.770			
	OE_3	0.755			
	OE_4	0.777			
	OE_5	0.719			
Awareness	Aware_1	0.629	0.866	0.811	0.567
	Aware_2	0.703			
	Aware_3	0.814			
	Aware_4	0.817			
	Aware_5	0.784			
Perceived Value	PV_1	0.692	0.897	0.862	0.593
	PV_2	0.766			
	PV_3	0.792			
	PV_4	0.817			
	PV_5	0.764			
	PV_6	0.783			
Responsible Tourism Intention	INT_1	0.796	0.894	0.852	0.628
	INT_2	0.832			
	INT_3	0.801			
	INT_4	0.731			
	INT_5	0.800			

Note: SE = Self-efficacy, OE = Outcome Expectation, Aware = Awareness, PV = Perceived Value, INT = Responsible Tourism Intention

Table 2 shows the discriminant validity of the measurement model using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). Normally, HTMT values below 0.85 are considered ideal, and those below 0.90 are still acceptable (Henseler et al., 2015). In this study, all HTMT values were below 0.90, meaning no issue with discriminant validity.

Table 2. Discriminant validity of the constructs (HTMT)

Construct	Self-efficacy	Outcome Expectation	Awareness	Perceived Value	Responsible Tourism Intention
Self-efficacy					
Outcome Expectation	0.899				
Awareness	0.723	0.719			
Perceived Value	0.842	0.824	0.848		
Responsible Tourism Intention	0.661	0.793	0.684	0.673	

## 4.2 Structural model analysis

To evaluate the structural model, this study referred to the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), path coefficient ( $\beta$ ), p-value, and effect size ( $f^2$ ). For this study, four factors (self-efficacy, outcome expectations, awareness, and perceived value) explained 49.9% of the variance in responsible tourism intention ( $R^2 = 0.499$ ).  $R^2$  values above 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 indicate substantial, moderate, and weak levels (Chin, 1998). Therefore, the  $R^2$  values in this study fall in the moderate category, indicating that the model is acceptable and reliable. PLSPredict was employed to assess the model's out-of-sample predictive performance, as responsible tourism intention was the only endogenous construct; the predictive assessment focused on its measurement items. The results (see Table 3) show that all intention indicators recorded positive  $Q^2$ predict values, and the PLS-SEM RMSE values were consistently lower than those of the linear benchmark model, indicating that the proposed model demonstrates good predictive relevance and satisfactory out-of-sample predictive power (Shmueli et al., 2019).

Table 3. PLSPredict result

Measurement item	$Q^2$ Predict	PLS-SEM RMSE	LM RMSE
INT_1	0.312	1.228	1.275
INT_2	0.365	1.278	1.330
INT_3	0.272	1.345	1.399
INT_4	0.222	1.371	1.395
INT_5	0.331	1.292	1.343

The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 4. Out of the four hypotheses, two were supported (H2 and H3). The main reference for accepting a hypothesis is the p-value, which should be below 0.05 or 0.01. Findings revealed that outcome expectation ( $\beta = 0.444$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and awareness ( $\beta = 0.249$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) significantly and favourably associated with responsible tourism intention. On the other hand, self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.039$ ,  $p = 0.253$ ) and perceived value ( $\beta = 0.061$ ,  $p = 0.190$ ) were not significant, thereby supporting H2 and H3 but not H1 or H4.

Table 4. Findings of the structural model

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Error	P-value	t-value	Decision	$f^2$	VIF
H1	Self-efficacy → Responsible Tourism Intention	0.039	0.059	0.253	0.665	Not Supported	0.001	2.444
H2	Outcome Expectation → Responsible Tourism Intention	0.444	0.064	<0.001	6.942	Supported	0.157	2.494
H3	Awareness → Responsible Tourism Intention	0.249	0.067	<0.001	3.704	Supported	0.053	2.359
H4	Perceived Value → Responsible Tourism Intention	0.061	0.069	0.190	0.879	Not Supported	0.002	3.058

Furthermore, effect size ( $f^2$ ) values of 0.35, 0.15, and 0.02 represent large, medium, and small effects (Cohen, 1988; Hair et al., 2022). As shown in Table 4, H1 and H4 have very small effects, whereas H2 has a medium effect, and H3 has a small effect size. Collinearity among the predictor constructs was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). As shown in Table 4, all inner model VIF values range from 2.359 to 3.058, which are below the threshold of 3.3 (Hair et al., 2022; Kock, 2015), indicating that multicollinearity is not an issue in the structural model. These results suggest that the estimated path coefficients are stable and not biased by collinearity issues.

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Discussion

This research has identified the relationship between several cognitive factors and the intention of engaging in responsible tourism among ecotourists in Sarawak. To solve the problem of unsustainable tourism around ecotourism sites in Sarawak and to provide policymakers and industry players with insights into ecotourists' responsible tourism behaviour, the findings of the current study suggest that outcome expectations and individuals' awareness of ecotourism are critical. The result recommended that outcome expectations and awareness are positively and significantly associated with responsible tourism intention, supporting H2 and H3. These findings are in line with the past studies that found a positive relationship between outcome expectation and intention (Cai et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2011; Maddux et al., 1982) and awareness – intention (Hayat et al., 2022; Janita Dewi, 2019; Munerah et al., 2021). Ergo, policymakers and tourism industry players should look into boosting the outcome expectations of responsible tourism towards ecotourists and other kinds of tourists, as this effort will lead to their intention to practise responsible tourism. Besides, policy-makers and tourism industry players should place a strong emphasis on promoting responsible tourism, aiming to educate more tourists about it, which is expected to drive their intention to adopt it.

Surprisingly, self-efficacy is found to have no significant positive relationship with responsible tourism intentions. The result is inconsistent with previous studies suggesting a significant relationship between these two constructs (Nursyirwan et al., 2022; Thanh & Doan, 2021). This means that among Sarawak ecotourists, responsible tourism intention is not based on their confidence and capability in practising responsible behaviour. A plausible reason for the findings might be that the facilities of responsible tourism in Sarawak are lagging. According to (Kiatkawsin et al., 2020), the accessibility of responsible tourism facilities is imperative for tourists to practise responsible tourism. Ecotourists might be confident in their ability to practise responsible tourism, but without the facilities ready at ecotourism sites, it is very inconvenient to do so. Therefore, rather than boosting self-efficacy, it is more practical to enhance on-site facilities.

Additionally, perceived value was unrelated to responsible tourism intention. The result contradicts the past studies that found a substantial relationship between perceived value and intention (Bushara et al., 2023; Handriana & Ambara, 2016; Yap, 2022). Perceived value might be important in driving behavioural intention; however, social norms might also affect individuals' decisions in practising responsible behaviour. When people travel in a group, they may feel awkward about practicing responsible tourism if others around them are not. Even if they believe it is the right behaviour, they might hold back. According to Mansoor et al. (2025), intention is strongly influenced by social pressure. This means that if the group shares a positive attitude and perceived value of responsible tourism, individuals will feel more confident and motivated to act responsibly.

### 5.2 Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study offers valuable insights into the application of SCT with responsible tourism in Sarawak. The findings indicate that cognitive determinants do not contribute equally

to behavioural intention, with outcome expectations and awareness emerging as the most influential factors. At the same time, self-efficacy and perceived value appear less critical. This suggests that individuals are more likely to form responsible tourism intentions when they clearly understand the practices involved and anticipate positive outcomes, highlighting the role of situational, cultural, and environmental factors in shaping behaviour. Importantly, these results challenge the general SCT assumption that all cognitive determinants contribute equally, demonstrating that the theory's predictive power may be context-dependent and constrained by social norms, environmental conditions, and information availability. The Sarawak context is particularly meaningful due to its rich biodiversity, reliance on ecotourism, and culturally diverse population, which together create a unique environment where awareness and outcome expectations are more salient than personal confidence or perceived value. Moreover, the non-significant influence of self-efficacy and perceived value provides new conceptual understanding, suggesting that in ecotourism settings with strong environmental and cultural cues, responsible tourism behaviour may be more driven by knowledge and anticipated benefits than by individual confidence or value assessment. By incorporating these insights, the study not only extends the explanatory power of SCT but also offers a refined framework for understanding responsible tourism behaviour, providing empirical evidence and theoretical guidance for future research in similar contexts

Practically, the findings suggest that policymakers and industry players in Malaysia such as Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts (MTCIP) Sarawak, Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board (Tourism Malaysia), Sarawak Tourism Board (STB), Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC), other related agencies and organisations who put efforts to promote responsible tourism should prioritise awareness building and benefit oriented communication (to improve outcome expectation), rather than focusing on strengthening tourists' self-efficacy or perceived value. Educational initiatives, information sharing, and experiential learning activities can play a key role in shaping tourists' intentions by enhancing understanding and highlighting the positive outcomes of responsible behaviour. At the same time, the limited role of self-efficacy and perceived value underscores the need for external support mechanisms, such as adequate facilities, clear behavioural guidance, and supportive social norms. Creating an environment that makes responsible behaviour easier and socially encouraged is likely to be more effective in translating intention into actual practice, not only in Sarawak but also in other destinations with similar tourism and socio-cultural contexts.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

To sum up, the current study has investigated the relationship among self-efficacy, outcome expectations, awareness, perceived value, and responsible tourism intention in Sarawak. The result suggested that outcome expectations and awareness are positively and significantly related to responsible tourism intention. This study provided insights not only for policymakers and tourism practitioners to customise their policies and strategies in relation to responsible tourism but also provided information for scholars to recommend future studies. Besides, in terms of SCT, the current study adds empirical evidence to the literature, suggesting that SCT is a useful tool for explaining ecotourists' behaviour in responsible tourism. The insignificant findings suggesting self-efficacy and perceived value towards responsible tourism intention can also add value to the literature on responsible tourism.

### **5.4 Limitations and recommendations**

The current study has three limitations; therefore, three recommendations for future studies were based on these limitations. First of all, the study is limited in the diversity of the data collected. The study focused on Sarawak; data were collected from the ecotourists of Sarawak. This leads to a lack of diversity among the respondents from other parts of Malaysia. Future studies may extend to the other states in Malaysia or even beyond Malaysia to other countries. This can enhance the comprehensiveness of the data collected, producing different outcomes. Second, the study was limited by the sample. The selected sample for the current study was ecotourists. Nevertheless, other types of tourists may have different opinions

towards responsible tourism. It is suggested that future studies include other types of tourists to collect data from respondents with different travel preferences. Leisure tourists, cultural tourists, gastronomy tourists, and the like may have different opinions. These opinions may influence the research outcome. By collecting data from different types of tourists, the researchers can gather opinions from different viewpoints on travel goals. Lastly, the study is limited by the factors used to evaluate the responsible tourism intentions. Many more antecedents may affect responsible tourism intentions. Future studies are recommended to include cognitive factors such as environmental knowledge, perceived risk, personal norms, trust, and the like. Besides, moderators or mediators, such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual influencers, extended reality, and the like, can be included to extend the research framework.

## 6. CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS

Wei Chiang Chan: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing - Original Draft, Data Curation, Visualisation. Chee Hua Chin: Conceptualisation, Data Curation, Writing - Review & Editing, Validation, Supervision. Winnie Poh Ming Wong: Conceptualisation, Project administration, Resources.

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## 8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts, and declare the absence of conflicts of interest with the funders.

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