

## How environmental and experiential values drive tourists' environmentally responsible behaviours in urban parks

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### INTRODUCTION

As global tourism faces environmental challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss, the importance of sustainable tourism has grown significantly (Chandel, 2022). Urban parks, as vital green spaces, play a crucial role in advancing sustainable tourism by fostering environmentally responsible behavioral intentions (ERBI) among visitors (Schönherr & Pikkemaat, 2024). Through initiatives such as waste reduction and ecosystem conservation, urban parks not only mitigate environmental impacts, but also enhance the value of urban green spaces (Erfanian et al., 2024). Tourist ERBI encompasses the behaviors and intentions of tourists during their travel, actively supporting environmental conservation and reducing negative ecological impacts (Su et al., 2020; Tian et al., 2024). Its formation is not only influenced by external environmental factors but also closely linked to tourists' internal psychological mechanisms (Stedman, 2002), such as green self-identify (Ding & Jiang, 2025), cultural attachment (Cheng & Chen, 2022), and place attachment (Chow et al., 2019; Tian et al., 2024; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). The formation of place attachment is closely related to tourists' perceived value of the destination (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001), with experiential value and environmental value being two key driving factors. Environmental value (Wong & Lai, 2024), defined as “*those values that are specifically related to nature or that have been found to correlate with specific environmental attitudes or concerns*” (Schultz et al., 2004, p. 32), manifests in tourists' emotional connection to the natural environment and their sense of responsibility for environmental protection (Wu et al., 2022). And experiential value refers to the perceptions that tourists gain during travel, including interactions with local people and other tourists (Prebensen et al., 2014; Tian et al., 2024). When tourists gain high-quality experiences and recognize the values of urban parks during their travel, they are more likely to develop a strong place attachment to their destination (McCabe & Stokoe, 2004). Place attachment theory indicates that the emotional connection between tourists and specific destinations significantly influences their attitudes and behaviors (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). This emotional bond enhances tourists' sense of belonging to the destination (Korpela, 1989) and motivates them to adopt environmentally responsible behaviors, such as reducing resource waste and supporting environmental protection activities, through psychological mechanisms (Chow et al., 2019; Schönherr & Pikkemaat, 2024).

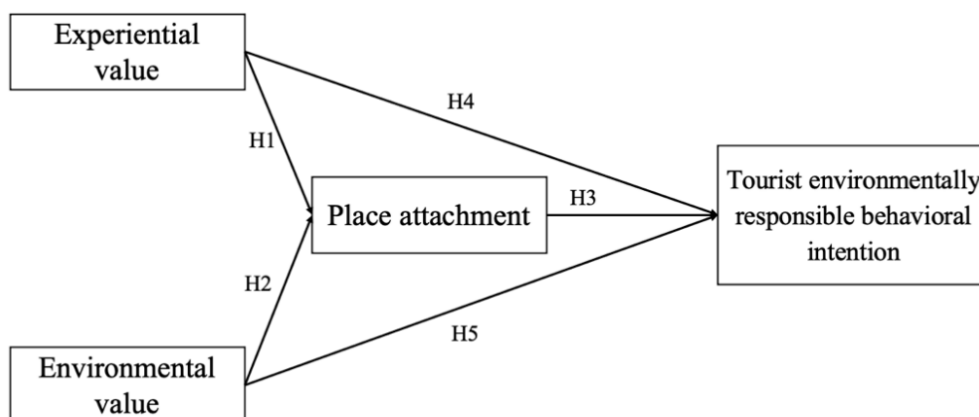


Figure 1. Research model

Current literature primarily focuses on external drivers of tourist behavior, such as policies (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003) and facilities (Westerholt et al., 2022), while paying less attention to tourists' internal psychological mechanisms (Stedman, 2002). By adopting the Value-Attitude-Behavior framework, this study constructs a theoretical framework to investigate how experiential value and environmental value influence tourists' environmentally responsible behavioral intentions through place attachment. Guided by this theoretical framework, this study formulates the research model illustrated in Figure 1.

## METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to investigate the relationships between environmental value, experiential value, place attachment, and tourist environmentally responsible behavioral intentions. A preliminary pre-test survey was conducted with 20 participants to ensure the content validity the measurement items. Formal data were collected from October to November 2024 at two prominent locations in Guangdong Province, China: Zhuhai Yuanming New Park and Hengqin National Wetland Park.

All major constructs were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). The measurement items were adapted and modified from existing studies, comprising five sections with a total of 21 items. Specifically, the measurement of experiential value consists of three items adapted from Zeng et al. (2022). Environmental value was measured through three items modified from Li & Wu (2020). The measurement of place attachment incorporated four items derived from Qiu et al. (2022). Tourist ERBI was assessed using four measurement items adapted from Qiu et al. (2022).

## FINDINGS

A total of 454 valid responses were collected using a systematic time-based sampling method. This study examined the relationships among environmental value, experiential value, place attachment, and Tourist ERBI using SmartPLS 4.1.0.9 for structural equation modeling (SEM).

The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 1. The result for H4 was rejected, whereas H1, H2, H3, and H5 were statistically significant and supported.

Table 1. Factory analysis

|    | <b>Paths</b>                            | <b>Co-efficient</b>     | <b>T statistics</b>          | <b>P values</b> | <b>Result</b> |
|----|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| H1 | Environmental value -> Place attachment | 0.348                   | 7.028                        | 0.000           | Supported     |
| H2 | Experiential value -> Place attachment  | 0.550                   | 11.304                       | 0.000           | Supported     |
| H3 | Place attachment -> Tourist ERBI        | 0.603                   | 11.464                       | 0.000           | Supported     |
| H4 | Experiential value -> Tourist ERBI      | 0.060                   | 1.016                        | 0.310           | Not supported |
| H5 | Environmental value -> Tourist ERBI     | 0.277                   | 3.965                        | 0.000           | Support       |
|    |                                         | <b>Cronbach's alpha</b> | <b>Composite Reliability</b> | <b>AVE</b>      |               |
|    | Environmental value                     | 0.804                   | 0.911                        | 0.836           |               |
|    | Experiential value                      | 0.889                   | 0.931                        | 0.819           |               |
|    | Place attachment                        | 0.907                   | 0.935                        | 0.782           |               |
|    | Tourist ERBI                            | 0.899                   | 0.929                        | 0.767           |               |

## IMPLICATIONS OR CONCLUSION

In the context of urban parks, both environmental value and experiential value significantly influence place attachment; place attachment and environmental value significantly influence tourists' ERBI. Also, the results indicate that experiential value has a stronger impact on enhancing place attachment compared to environmental value, thereby influencing ERBI more profoundly. However, the direct influence of environmental value on tourists' ERBI is significantly stronger than that of experiential value. As it primarily reflects the pleasure, satisfaction, and sense of meaning that tourists gain during their travels (Bai et al., 2023), representing a subjective perception and emotional experience rather than a direct driver of behavior. Therefore, experiential value must be transformed into behavioral intentions through emotional bonds, such as place attachment.

This study advances the Value-Attitude-Behavior framework by demonstrating its applicability in urban park contexts, where environmental and experiential values jointly shape place attachment and subsequently drive tourist ERBI. However, it is important to note that the generalizability of these findings may be influenced by the demographic characteristics and pre-existing connections of the surveyed population to the specific urban park. Future research could enhance external validity by employing stratified sampling across diverse user groups and comparative studies in varied cultural or geographical contexts. For urban park management and environmental policymakers, the findings highlight the need to integrate conservation-focused initiatives to leverage environmental value's direct impact on ERBI, while enhancing experiential offerings to strengthen place attachment and amplify tourists' indirect behavioral outcomes. Such dual strategies can optimize sustainable tourism outcomes by aligning park operations with broader environmental governance goals.

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