



# Approaching the “True Ecotourists” Market

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**Abstract.** This study explores the influence of regulatory focus, consumptive lifestyle, and volunteering experience on ecotourism preferences among Indonesian tourists. By employing an experimental design with 237 participants, the research investigates how these factors shape individuals' choices of ecotourism tour packages. The results reveal that volunteering experience significantly impacts ecotourism preferences, particularly in favoring environmentally conscious and less hedonistic tour options. In contrast, consumptive lifestyle and regulatory focus manipulation showed limited direct influence, though an interaction effect was observed between these factors. Participants without volunteering experience were more likely to choose hedonistic ecotourism activities, while those with volunteering experience preferred tours emphasizing environmental conservation. These findings contribute to understanding the ecotourism market and provide insights for developing effective social marketing strategies that promote sustainable tourism behavior.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, regulatory focus, consumptive lifestyle, volunteering experience, ecotourism tour preferences

## 1 Introduction

Over the past decade, the tourism sector in Indonesia has played a crucial role in the country's economic growth, contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and foreign exchange earnings. The tourism sector has consistently contributed to Indonesia's GDP, with figures ranging between 4.6% and 4.9% from 2016 to 2019 [1]. However, the rapid growth of tourism has led to several impacts such as environmental degradation, social cohesion and traditional customs disruption, overexploitation of resources overcrowding, pollution, and noise, which have not only degraded the quality of life for residents but also posed long-term threats to the attractiveness of the destinations [2,3,4,5]. Additionally, the recent outbreak COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected Indonesia's tourism sector, recent study showed that from January 2020 to March 2021, the country lost nearly 16.65 million tourists,

leading to a potential revenue loss of approximately USD 19.07 billion [6]. Therefore, actions are needed to improve the tourism sector in Indonesia for the better.

Some scholars argue that when tourism destinations are not planned properly, can lead to environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity. Whereas the future success of tourism destinations depends on their ability to improve societal well-being, adopt sustainable living practices, embrace social responsibility, uphold ethical standards, and build strong partnerships among society, government, and businesses. Therefore, embracing eco-friendly tourism is regarded as a promising approach to achieving sustainable development [7,8].

Many developing countries, including Indonesia are beginning to incorporate it into their strategies for economic growth and environmental conservation. Indonesia has high potencies of ecotourism attractions, including its natural resources, natural biodiversity and traditional values spreading in various regions of the archipelagoes [9]. Hence, it is necessary for Indonesia to address the opportunity of ecotourism to develop the tourism industry and creating sustainability. However, many tourists remain largely unaware of ecotourism principles and practices, often displaying poor pro-environmental behavior in tourism destinations, both environmentally and socially. Examples include disturbing wildlife, littering in mountainous areas, and disregarding local customs and societal norms [10,11].

Efforts such as education, legal frameworks, and better enforcement including social marketing can help mitigate these issues. By aligning consumer actions with long-term well-being, social marketing can drive pro-environmental behaviors as well as promote sustainable consumption to enhance subjective well-being [12,13]. Previous scholars have discussed ecotourism particularly on finding ecotourism campaign to increase ecotourism awareness among society, thus exhibiting more pro-environmental attitudes [14,15]. However, the study which explores the marketing strategy to target ecotourism market, is in infant stage. To fill this gap, our study wants to focus on exploring marketing strategies to effectively target the ecotourism market.

Not all ecotourism visitors can be defined as true ecotourists which are motivated by a desire for nature immersion, environmental education, and contributing to conservation efforts. Previous study has revealed more various motivation in ecotourism market such as the occasional consumer of ecotourism who is simply looking for a novel experience, or as a means acquiring social prestige (ego-tourism) [16,17]. As mentioned in the earlier literature that visitors may have different interest to tourism places, proposed four basic types of ecotourist; 1) Type 1 - Hard-Core Nature Tourists: These individuals include scientific researchers or participants in tours specifically designed for education, litter removal, or similar environmental purposes; 2) Type 2 - Dedicated Nature Tourists: These tourists travel with the primary goal of visiting protected areas and gaining an understanding of local natural and cultural history; 3) Type 3 - Mainstream Nature Tourists: These travelers visit destinations such as the Amazon or Rwanda's gorilla park, primarily for the novelty of taking a unique trip; 4) Type 4 - Casual Nature Tourists: These individuals experience nature incidentally as part of a broader trip rather than as a primary focus. Understanding the variety of visitor types is crucial for ecotourism operators. For

example, Type 1 and Type 2 tourists are likely to be more tolerant of limited facilities at nature sites, while Type 4 tourists may primarily seek to avoid the crowds associated with mainstream tourism and may have different expectations for comfort and amenities. This distinction allows operators to tailor services and infrastructure to better meet the needs of different tourist segments [18].

In this study, we use the framework of regulatory focus, volunteering experience, and consumptive lifestyle to examine how these factors influence ecotourism tour preferences among individuals in Indonesian society. By analyzing the effects of these variables, we aim to understand how different regulatory focus orientations, levels of volunteering experience, and consumptive lifestyle shape ecotourism choices.

Regulatory Focus refers to a psychological perspective on the human motivational system. According to regulatory focus theory, individuals have two distinct motivational systems based on fundamental needs: promotion-focused and prevention-focused orientations. The promotion-focused system is driven by the need for growth and development, leading individuals with this orientation to focus on achieving positive outcomes. In contrast, the prevention-focused system is based on the need for security and safety, prompting individuals with this orientation to focus on avoiding negative outcomes. Regulatory focus plays a crucial role in goal pursuit, influencing judgment and decision-making processes [19,20,21]. Previous research has shown that situational factors can trigger a regulatory focus, referred to as situational or momentary regulatory focus. This type of regulatory focus can be influenced or controlled, with studies demonstrating that manipulating regulatory focus enhances the effectiveness of message framing in environmentally targeted advertising campaigns [22,23].

Our study also aims to investigate the key personal factors that shape individuals' attitudes toward ecotourism, focusing specifically on volunteering experience and consumptive lifestyle. Previous research has shown that consumerism plays a significant role in influencing tourism consumption patterns and the frequency of travel. Additionally, social class and income have been found to greatly impact tourism consumption [24,25]. Furthermore, early research has indicated that volunteers are driven by a combination of altruistic and egoistic values. Altruistic values emphasize the well-being of society and the environment, prioritizing collective harmony over individual benefits. Notably, earlier study discovered that altruism can encourage tourists to engage in environmentally responsible behaviors while visiting their destinations [26].

Building upon this idea, we develop our hypothesis are the followings:

H1: Regulatory focus manipulation (promotion-focused and prevention-focused) influences participants' intentions regarding their choice of ecotourism tours.

H2: Consumptive lifestyle influences participants' intentions regarding their choice of ecotourism tours.

H3: Volunteering experience background influences participants' intentions regarding their choice of ecotourism tours.

H4: Participants without volunteering experience who exhibited higher (or lower) levels of consumerism behavior were more likely to choose ecotourism tours that align with hedonistic tourism activities, while showing less support for environmental conservation and protection.

H5: Participants with volunteering experience who exhibited higher (or lower) levels of consumerism behavior were more likely to choose ecotourism tours that align with hedonistic tourism activities, while showing less support for environmental conservation and protection.

## **2 Method**

Previous research has investigated the effects of regulatory focus manipulation through experimental methods and found that it can strengthen persuasion. This influence extends to fostering creativity and problem-solving abilities, shaping consumer purchasing choices, and enhancing the effectiveness of messages [19,22,23]. Therefore, this study is quantitative research by using experimental research design.

### **2.1 Participants**

We employed a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling. This method enables the rapid and efficient collection of data, aligning with recognized principles of research methodology [27]. There were 237 people participating in this study. The participants were classified into different groups according to their consumerism and volunteering experience. Based on the initial test, participants with higher consumptive lifestyle totaled 118, while those with lower consumptive lifestyle numbered 124. Additionally, 171 participants had voluntary experience, while 67 had no voluntary experience. Since, our study focus on Indonesia tourist behavior, all participants are coming from across urban areas in Indonesia.

### **2.2 Design**

Participants were tested individually by filling in an online questionnaire. There are two types of experimental groups according to regulatory foci manipulation condition (situational promotion focus vs situational prevention focus) inside the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of five parts, namely, consumerism, perceiving volunteering experience questions, regulatory foci manipulation condition (promotion vs prevention) and ecotourism tour package options. The testing for each participant took about 15 – 20 minutes. Before conducting the test, the participants were

randomly allocated to one of the two experimental groups according to regulatory foci manipulation condition (situational promotion focus vs situational prevention focus). In the first part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to answer ten questions that would indicate their consumptive, modern and hedonic lifestyle, which was adopted by previous research [28]. Secondly, participants were asked whether they had prior volunteering experience or no volunteering experience. Third, participants were stimulated by manipulation condition. Fourth, after being stimulated by the manipulation condition, we asked participants to choose a different choice of ecotourism tour program.

**Table 1.** Reliability Analysis

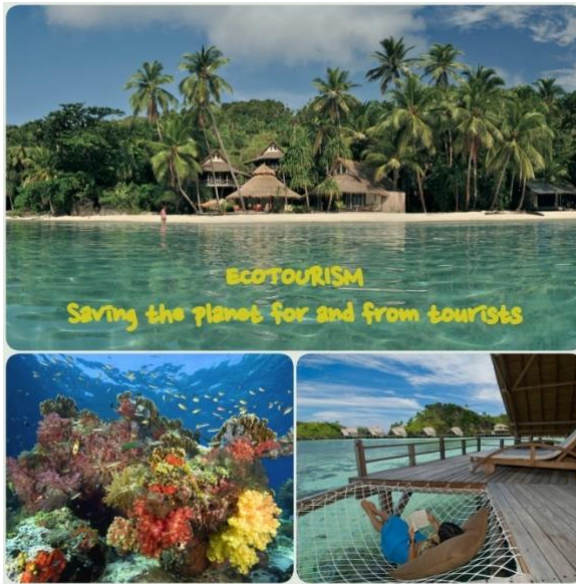
<b>Variables</b>	<b>No. of items</b>	<b>Cronbach’s, <math>\alpha</math></b>
Consumerism	10	.800
Perceiving Volunteering Experience	4	.893

The table presents the reliability scores of the instrument variables, demonstrating their consistency. All the items used to measure the three variables have reliability scores exceeding the minimum recommended threshold of 0.6, indicating that the instruments are sufficiently reliable for the analysis. This suggests that the variables are measured with a high degree of internal consistency, ensuring that the results derived from these measures are dependable and accurate for further statistical analysis.

### **2.3 Regulatory focus manipulation**

Our study uses pictures to manipulate the participants and put them in manipulation setting by seeing picture. Before implementing regulatory focus, the pretest has been conducted to attain manipulation picture. The test is conducted by asking poll to participants adapted from previous study [29]. Firstly, we gave participants information about promotion focus frame and prevention focus frame. We defined promotion focus as an eagerness-driven approach, presenting messages that emphasize positive outcomes. Since our study centers on ecotourism, we provided participants with statements that evoked feelings of happiness about the environment and society depicted in the images, encouraging them to eagerly visit the destination. In contrast, prevention focus was defined as a vigilance-driven approach, with messages highlighting negative outcomes. Participants were shown statements that elicited feelings of sadness about the environment or society in the images, prompting them to express concern for the tourism destination. Lastly, we give participants an option to state neutral picture, if they do not see the picture representing either promotion focus or prevention focus. As a result, at least 70% of pictures are characterized either promotion or prevention focus. Among ten pictures,

four pictures are indicated as promotion pictures and three pictures are indicated as prevention pictures. Eventually, we selected three images for each manipulation condition that best represented the desired focus. For the promotion-picture condition, participants viewed images of pristine beach scenery, healthy coral reefs, and a person relaxing by the shore, accompanied by a message highlighting the benefits of ecotourism. Conversely, in the prevention-picture condition, participants were shown images of polluted beaches, damaged coral reefs, and a child with a sad expression, along with a message emphasizing the urge to preserve nature.



**Fig. 1.** Promotion-focused Manipulation Picture

(Author's Own, 2022)



Fig. 2. Prevention-focused Manipulation Picture

#### 2.4 Ecotourism tour package

Several previous visitor surveys showed that many ecotourists concern with the importance of their visit to contribute to conservation and local society development, while this is not important for some other visitors [16,17,18]. Thus, this study provided three different characteristics of ecotourism tour packages which are designed for different visitor orientation, based on earlier typology. Tour A is designed for casual visitor activities, casual visitor means people who join the nature tourism incidentally, such as through part of general trip, and we represent Tour A with less conservation activities and more hedonic program. Tour B is designed for dedicated visitor activities for those people who have strongest consideration toward ecotourism, specifically to see protected areas and who want to understand local natural and cultural history, and we represent Tour B with more conservation activities and less hedonic program. lastly Tour C represents mainstream visitor activities, it designed for visitor who would attain novelty in nature or adventure tourism or other such destinations primarily to take an unusual trip, and we represent Tour C with moderate conservation activities and hedonic program.



Fig. 3. Ecotourism Tour Package Alternatives

### 2.5 Data analysis

To assess our dependent variable, which is the ecotourism package, we asked participants to indicate their preferred ecotourism tour package. Additionally, to analyze the interaction between factors which are regulatory focus manipulation, consumerism, and volunteering experience, we employed analysis of variance (ANOVA). Whereas, to obtain the mean score for each tour program, we used the General Linear Model (GLM) for analysis. The choice data for each ecotourism tour were coded as binary: Tour A (1 = chosen, 0 = not chosen); Tour B (1 = chosen, 0 = not chosen); and Tour C (1 = chosen, 0 = not chosen).

## 3 Result and Discussion

First, we examined the main effects of each factor: regulatory focus, consumptive lifestyle and volunteering experience. The results indicated that among the three factors, only volunteering experience had a significant impact on participants' choices, while lifestyle and regulatory focus did not significantly influence their decisions. Specifically, volunteering experience had a strong effect on the selection of Tour A and Tour B, whereas the results for Tour C showed no significant differences.

Table 2. Main Effect for Ecotourism Tour Preference

Factors	Dependent Variable	MS	F	P value
Volunteering Experience	Tour A****	1.50	8.47	.00
	Tour B	3.07	12.81	.00



		B****		
Regulatory Focus	Tour C	.27	1.28	.25
	Tour A	.01	.06	.80
	Tour B	.02	.11	.73
Consumptive Lifestyle	Tour C	.00	.01	.90
	Tour A	.00	.03	.86
	Tour B	.01	.07	.78
	Tour C	.04	.20	.65

sig: \*\* p < 0.05, sig: \*\*\* p < 0.01, sig: \*\*\*\* p < 0.001

Dependent variable: ecotourism tour preference

Furthermore, the results of the three-way interaction between regulatory focus, consumerism, and volunteering experience were significant ( $F = 2.900$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ). This indicates that there is an interaction between these three factors influencing participants' choices of ecotourism tours. Similar to the result of the main effect, the p-value also suggests that the interaction affects only certain tour packages, rather than all options.

**Table 3.** Three-way Interacting Result for Ecotourism Tour Preference

Factors	MS	F	P value
Consumptive Lifestyle*Regulatory Focus*Volunteering Experience	1.56	2.90	.09

sig: \*p < 0.1, sig: \*\* p < 0.05, sig: \*\*\* p < 0.01, sig: \*\*\*\* p < 0.001

Dependent variable: ecotourism tour preference

In line with the primary focus of our study, we compared the mean preferences for each ecotourism package to test our hypothesis. Specifically, we examined the differences between participants with volunteering experience and those without. By analyzing the mean scores, we aimed to determine how these groups varied in their ecotourism preferences. The detailed results of this comparison are outlined as follows:

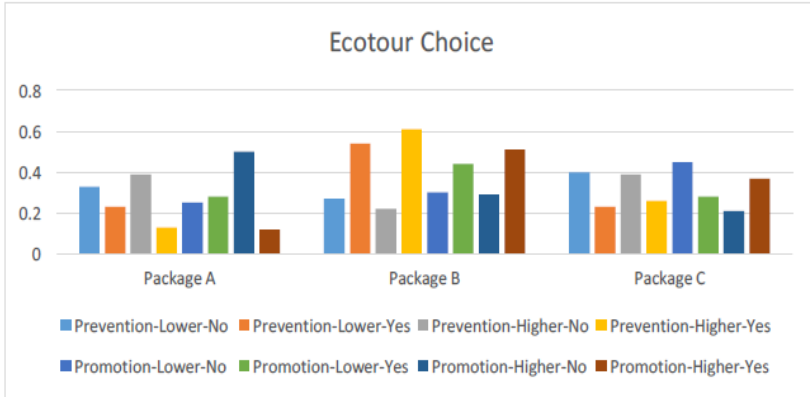


Fig. 4. Ecotourism Tour Package Preferences

Table 4. Ecotourism Tour Package Preferences

	With Volunteering Experience				Without Volunteering Experience			
	Higher Consumptive Lifestyle		Lower Consumptive Lifestyle		Higher Consumptive Lifestyle		Lower Consumptive Lifestyle	
	Prevention	Promotion	Prevention	Promotion	Prevention	Promotion	Prevention	Promotion
<b>Tour A</b>	.13**	.12**	.23	.28	.39*	.50***	.33	.25
<b>Tour B</b>	.61**	.51*	.54*	.44	.22**	.29	.27*	.30
<b>Tour C</b>	.26	.37	.23	.28	.39	.21	.40	.45

sig: \*\* p < 0.05, sig: \*\*\* p < 0.01, sig: \*\*\*\* p < 0.001

This comparison allows us to assess whether volunteering experience significantly influences ecotourism choices, providing insights into the role of personal experiences in shaping ecotourism preferences.

More specifically, the general findings for Tour A (which involves more hedonistic activities) revealed that participants without volunteering experience were more likely to select this tour option. Specifically, 50% of participants exposed to the promotion picture condition, with a higher consumptive lifestyle and no volunteering experience, chose Tour A. In contrast, only 12% of participants with the same promotion picture condition and lifestyle, but with prior volunteering experience, selected this option.

Similar results were observed in the prevention picture condition: 39% of participants with a higher consumptive lifestyle, but without volunteering experience, preferred Tour A, compared to only 13% of those with similar lifestyles but prior volunteering experience.

For Tour B (involving least hedonistic activities), participants with volunteering experience generally favored this option. Specifically, 61% of participants exposed to the prevention picture condition, with higher consumptive behavior and volunteering experience, strongly preferred Tour B, while only 22% of participants with the same lifestyle but without volunteering experience selected this option. Additionally, 54% of participants in the prevention picture condition, with lower consumptive behavior and volunteering experience, showed a greater preference for Tour B, compared to 27% of participants with similar lifestyles but no volunteering experience.

For Tour C (involving moderate hedonistic activities), the results did not show significant differences across participant groups. Participants without volunteering experience and with lower consumptive behavior showed a relatively similar preference for Tour C, with percentages of 45% and 40%. A notable finding emerged among participants with higher consumptive lifestyles: those without volunteering experience and exposed to the prevention picture condition were more likely to prefer Tour C compared to those exposed to the promotion picture condition, as those in the promotion picture condition were more likely to choose Tour A. Yet, this trend did not hold for participants with volunteering experience.

In summary, this study found that among the three factors, only volunteering experience significantly influenced ecotourism tour choices. As a result, we reject H1 and H2, which proposed that regulatory focus manipulation and consumerism significantly impact ecotourism tour choices. However, we accept H3, as volunteering experience had a significant effect on ecotourism tour preferences, particularly for Tour A (most hedonistic activities) and Tour B (least hedonistic activities). Furthermore, our findings support both H4 and H5. Individuals without volunteering experience tended to prefer options with less emphasis on environmental conservation and more hedonistic activities (H4), while those with volunteering experience were inclined toward alternatives that offer greater support for environmental conservation and fewer hedonistic activities (H5). This pattern held true regardless of whether participants were influenced by promotion-focus or prevention-focus stimuli.

Furthermore, we argue that volunteering experience is a key factor influencing participants' decision-making, extending the findings from our previous hypothesis. However, regulatory fit still plays a role in certain circumstances. Our interpretation is that when individuals with higher consumptive behaviors are influenced by regulatory fit, their decision-making can become more easily manipulated according to the regulatory fit they experience. This can lead to uncertainty in their choices, often resulting in a preference for options that fall between two extremes. Therefore, we concluded that the effects of regulatory focus in society manifest under certain conditions. In our study, regulatory focus was evident when participants were not engaged in high-involvement tasks. However, when participants were required to make decisions about ecotourism tours, the impact of regulatory focus was moderated by their volunteering experience and consumptive lifestyle.

## 4 Conclusion

This research contributes valuable insights to social marketing strategies, particularly for ecotourism, by reinforcing previous studies that suggest aligning consumer actions with long-term well-being. Social marketing can effectively promote pro-environmental behaviors and encourage sustainable consumption, thereby enhancing subjective well-being. Our study reveals that individuals with volunteering experience tend to prefer less hedonistic tour activities and are more supportive of environmental protection and conservation. In contrast, consumers without volunteering experience are more likely to favor hedonistic tour activities, with less concern for environmental conservation. As noted by previous studies, visitors interested in less hedonistic activities tend to be more down-to-earth and tolerant of limited facilities compared to those interested in more hedonistic activities [16]. Therefore, it is crucial for ecotourism providers to understand the needs and preferences of their target customers to design products and facilities that align with their characteristics.

Additionally, our study found that, regardless of promotional tools, participants with a higher consumptive lifestyle are generally more easily persuaded to choose ecotourism tour options compared to those with a lower consumptive lifestyle. Regulatory focus manipulation influenced decision-making only under specific conditions. For example, individuals with a highly consumptive lifestyle but no volunteering experience exhibited different preferences depending on the stimuli they received. Under promotion-focus conditions, they were more inclined to choose the most hedonistic option with minimal support for environmental conservation. On the other hand, under prevention-focus conditions, they tended to prefer a middle-ground option that balanced challenging and gentler activities, which acted as a compromise. These findings build on previous research, which demonstrated that regulatory focus can be manipulated to enhance message framing in environmentally focused advertising campaigns, thereby increasing their effectiveness. Additionally, regulatory focus manipulation only influenced decision-making under certain conditions. For instance, individuals with a highly consumptive lifestyle but no volunteering experience showed varying preferences depending on the stimuli presented. Under promotion-focus conditions, they were more likely to choose the most hedonistic option with the least support for environmental conservation. Conversely, under prevention-focus conditions, they preferred a middle-ground option that balanced more demanding and gentler activities, serving as a compromise. Thereby, our research also offers practical suggestions for enhancing message persuasiveness. We propose that marketing such as roadside billboards, online banners, or short videos could raise awareness about environmental preservation and foster positive attitudes toward ecotourism. Such forms of communication may reach a broader audience and prompt more environmentally responsible behaviors.

Additionally, we also suggest that Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) or tourism providers could enhance consumer attitudes toward ecotourism by organizing various volunteering activities. These could include charitable initiatives, environmental conservation projects, or community-focused efforts aimed at supporting local societies. Such activities not only contribute directly to

environmental protection and social well-being but also provide tourists with meaningful experiences that align with the principles of ecotourism. By engaging in these activities, participants can develop a deeper appreciation for the importance of preserving natural and cultural resources. This hands-on involvement allows consumers to personally connect with the values of ecotourism, making them more likely to adopt and promote sustainable travel behaviors.

Furthermore, these initiatives can strengthen the relationship between tourists and local communities, creating more authentic and enriching travel experiences. In turn, this can lead to a shift in consumer preferences toward tours and activities that emphasize environmental protection and cultural preservation, ultimately benefiting both ecotourism providers and the destinations they serve.

This research has several limitations. First, the manipulation groups in our study were restricted to the prevention and promotion conditions, with no control group to compare consumer attitudes between manipulated and non-manipulated conditions regarding ecotourism. This limitation leaves room for future research to improve upon by including a control group to better assess the influence of manipulation on ecotourism tour preferences. Second, this study focused solely on the behavior of urban Indonesian participants, we acknowledge that these findings do not fully represent the broader Indonesian population's awareness and attitudes toward ecotourism. Future research should expand its scope to include rural populations to better understand the awareness and willingness to engage in ecotourism across diverse segments of Indonesian society. Identifying these differences will provide a more comprehensive view of ecotourism attitudes nationwide.

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