

Study on Intention-Behaviour Gap in Eco-Tourism in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study investigates the intention-behaviour gap in ecotourism in Sri Lanka from the perspective of ecotourism operators-a stakeholder group often overlooked in existing literature. While many tourists express strong pro-environmental intentions, their actual travel behaviours frequently diverge due to a combination of psychological, social, and structural barriers. Adopting a qualitative, exploratory research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires administered among ecotourism business owners and service providers across Sri Lanka. Thematic analysis revealed that factors such as convenience, cost, limited eco-friendly infrastructure, greenwashing, and weak policy enforcement significantly contribute to the gap between tourists' intentions and behaviours. Conversely, visible sustainability practices, immersive environmental education, and strong social norms were found to reduce this gap. The findings highlight that operators not only face operational challenges in delivering sustainable experiences but also play a critical role in influencing tourist behaviour. This study provides actionable insights for policymakers, tourism businesses, and sustainability advocates to align tourists' environmental intentions with their actual practices, thereby enhancing the long-term viability of ecotourism in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: eco-tourism, intention-behaviour gap, operator perspectives, Sri Lanka, sustainable tourism