



The Effects of Information Disclosure on Purchase Intention in Responsible Tourism: The Mediating Role of Moral Disengagement

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Abstract

While tourism offers cultural and economic benefits, it can also impose negative environmental and social impacts, creating moral challenges for travelers when choosing destinations and activities. Therefore, understanding the psychological and ethical factors that shape responsible tourism behavior is essential for promoting sustainable travel. This study employs an experimental design with two distinct information disclosure scenarios to explore consumers' behavioral intentions toward responsible tourism. The study focuses on the roles of individualism, moral emotions, moral judgements, and moral disengagement. A total of 909 valid responses were collected through an online survey. The findings indicate that individualism and information disclosure influence consumers' moral emotions. Moral emotions negatively impact moral judgment and moral disengagement, while moral disengagement reduces consumers' moral judgment. Moreover, moral disengagement mediates the relationship between moral emotions and moral judgment. These findings contribute to the existing literature on responsible tourism intentions by clarifying the underlying psychological mechanisms and offering practical implications for designing effective information strategies to encourage ethical travel behaviors.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the travel industry has experienced not only a steady rebound after the pandemic but also a marked increase in travelers seeking meaningful, immersive, and ethically conscious travel experiences (Bastiaansen & Duerden, 2025; Wang et al., 2023). These changes reflect the growing societal demand for environmental conservation, the protection of wildlife, and the need for sustainable tourism. The increasing number of travelers inevitably places a

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greater burden on the environment (García et al., 2015; Ko & Stewart, 2002), with potentially serious long-term consequences that may not be immediately apparent. Consequently, travelers are becoming more conscientious, evaluating whether the resources they consume meet present needs without compromising those of future generations (Wu et al., 2025).

To mitigate the impacts, it is imperative that all stakeholders, including tourists, operators and residents, adopt responsible tourism practices aimed at minimizing environmental, social and cultural harm, whilst simultaneously maximizing economic benefits for local communities (Guo & Chai, 2025). This includes animal welfare, such as elephant conservation programs. To ensure interactions are safe, educational and non-exploitative, these programs require ethical management and visitor cooperation (Lee et al., 2024). This approach fosters business growth and a positive living environment for residents without compromising the integrity of local ecosystems (Kim et al., 2013), thereby positioning sustainable development as a critical priority for the future of tourism. The fundamental objective of responsible tourism is to enhance the quality of life for both residents and visitors. Contrary to popular belief, responsible tourism does not necessarily entail high costs or a reduction in the quality of life. Indeed, many establishments already integrate sustainable management by harmonizing local nature and culture with high service standards. Furthermore, the implementation of responsible tourism programs has been demonstrated to reinforce environmentalism and enhance the tourism experience by supporting local agriculture, rural life and animal welfare protection initiatives (Lee et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2024), thereby benefiting both visitors and host communities.

Research underscores the importance of attending to economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development across diverse stakeholders, including tourists (Caruana et al., 2014), local communities (Kim et al., 2013), indigenous peoples (Woo et al., 2015), the industry (Power et al., 2017), and governments (Zgolli & Zaiem, 2018; Musavengane, 2019). Addressing the complex interplay among local, natural, and socio-cultural environments requires rigorous management of tourism at local destinations to minimize adverse impacts and maximize positive outcomes. Despite a growing focus on responsible tourism, most studies investigating consumer involvement, intention, motivation, and values reveal a persistent gap between attitudes and behaviors (Ruhanen et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2017). Even individuals who engage in environmental protection at home may adopt environmentally harmful behaviors when traveling (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Bandura (1986) defined moral disengagement as a set of cognitive mechanisms that deactivate moral self-regulation, helping to explain why individuals often make unethical decisions without feeling guilt or self-censure. Integrating Hunt and Vitell's (1986) general theory of marketing ethics with the concept of moral disengagement provides deeper insight into why tourists who support elephant conservation in principle may nonetheless engage in harmful practices such as riding elephants or visiting exploitative attractions.

This study addresses the gap between tourists' attitudes and actions, offering insights that can guide managers, firms, and organizations in promoting responsible tourist choices. It further aims to enhance the efficacy of tools designed to foster awareness and responsible behavior (Budeanu, 2007; Wu et al., 2025). Notably, research suggests that sustainability training and education, especially those incorporating wildlife ethics scenarios such as elephant tourism, are more likely to affect behavior change when they are grounded in moral decision-making frameworks and tailored to specific audience profiles (Garay et al., 2017). Accordingly, this

research explores the factors shaping travel itinerary decisions, with a particular focus on elephant conservation contexts, thereby advancing responsible tourism practices.

2.Literature Reviews

2.1 Responsible Tourism

Responsible tourism is an ethical travel concept that aims to minimize negative environmental, social, and cultural impacts while generating greater economic benefits for local communities (Responsible Tourism Conference, 2002; Pattiyagedara & Ranasinghe, 2024). Although often conflated with sustainable tourism, responsible tourism differs by specifically encouraging travelers to consume more responsibly and foster better destinations for locals and visitors (Weeden, 2005). Although often conflated with sustainable tourism, responsible tourism places a distinct emphasis on encouraging travelers to make responsible consumption choices and to contribute to creating better destinations for both residents and visitors (Weeden, 2005).

Tourism inevitably affects the environment through activities such as accommodation, transportation, and recreation (Su et al., 2020). Responsible tourism seeks to mitigate adverse social, economic, and environmental effects while improving the well-being of host communities. However, despite widespread acknowledgment of its importance, travelers may still consciously or unconsciously cause environmental harm. In other words, responsible tourism remains a significant concept, but it does not always serve as a sufficient motivator to alter tourism plans and behaviors (Dodds & Butler, 2019; Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014; Lee et al., 2017). However, community engagement is a critical aspect of responsible tourism, ensuring that local populations are involved in tourism decision-making and benefit economically while preserving their cultural heritage. Sustainable practices such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and eco-friendly infrastructure are essential for minimizing tourism's environmental footprint.

Furthermore, the complexities of ethical consumption in tourism reveal the pressures faced by travelers in making responsible choices. Understanding the motivations behind tourist behavior and the gaps in consumer knowledge can help stakeholders encourage more ethical decision-making (Budeanu, 2007; Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Responsible tourism is an evolving concept that necessitates collaboration among travelers, local communities, and tourism operators, not only to ensure positive contributions to both economic and ecological sustainability but also to develop and implement effective marketing strategies that encourage the adoption of responsible tourism options.

2.2 Individualism

Individualism is individuals are independent of one another, autonomous, and unique (Meng, 2010). The concept of individualism used in this study is taken from Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions. In an individualistic society, autonomy, emotional independence, personal initiative, privacy, pursuit of happiness, financial security, and the formation of specific friendships are highly valued. These traits are associated with the "I" consciousness, as described by Hofstede (1980). Consequently, individuals in such societies prioritize personal goal achievement over maintaining harmonious relationships (Oyserman et al., 2002).

The prevailing characteristic of individualism appears to be separateness (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1989), with independence, competitiveness and uniqueness forming the basis of individualism. Independence is defined as an individual's value of autonomy in judgment, decision making, and actions (Chen & Unal, 2023). Competitiveness is defined as an individual's aspiration to surpass others and to achieve success. The concept of uniqueness is predicated on the notion that it is of paramount importance to cultivate one's own distinctive characteristics, which should be expressed in a manner that sets them apart from those of others. Consequently, individuals who are characterized by a strong sense of individuality are likely to exhibit a pronounced tendency to focus on their own experiences and perspectives. When they perceive variations in emotional intensity, frequency, or the experience of specific emotions, their self-structure is activated, leading to mood changes (Markus & Kitayama, 2014; Aaker & Williams, 1998). These emotional shifts have been shown to influence behaviors and decision-making processes.

2.3 Information disclosure

Information disclosure refers to the act of sharing personal or sensitive information (Arslan et al., 2022), and it is influenced by various factors, including perceived benefits and risks associated with the exchange of information. For instance, individuals may disclose information based on perceived exchange benefits, such as monetary rewards, and these benefits can be affected by the fairness of the information exchange process (Li et al., 2010). The theory of information asymmetry, proposed by Akerlof (1978), serves as the foundation for the concept of information disclosure. Information asymmetry occurs when sellers possess more information than buyers, creating an imbalance in knowledge. To address this issue, enhancing the degree of information disclosure is essential. A higher level of information disclosure reduces uncertainty for both parties involved in a transaction, thereby mitigating information asymmetry (Kalakota & Whinston, 1996). Voluntary disclosure represents a specific form of information disclosure, wherein firms proactively share information to enable stakeholders to make informed decisions, thereby lowering associated costs (Healy & Palepu, 2001; Lambert et al., 2007).

In the tourism industry, providing specific and concise information regarding the performance and benefits of environmentally friendly alternatives assists tourists in making better travel decisions. Furthermore, such information serves to promote sustainable tourism by addressing internal behavioral barriers among visitors. Research indicates that persuasive strategies, such as awareness-raising campaigns, are particularly effective when tourists act out of ignorance or unintentionally. However, these measures are less impactful when attempting to influence behaviors tied to group identity or status claims (Budeanu, 2007). Consequently, disseminating information about conservation projects or environmental quality may enhance moral awareness by fostering greater awareness and positive attitudes toward sustainable tourism (Budeanu, 2007).

2.4 Moral emotions

Morality refers to the evaluation of good or bad, right or wrong, or acceptable or unacceptable based on standards in a culture (Turner & Stets, 2006; Dresler, 2023). Moral emotion is an emotional response that stimulates actions that support the interests or well-being of others or society (Haidt, 2003). For example, emotions such as guilt and shame help people

make the right decisions or behaviors, avoid mistakes, suppress unethical and anti-social behaviors, and promote individual compliance with social ethical standards, which have an important impact on ethical decision-making and ethical behavior (Cohen et al., 2011; Tangney et al., 2007).

Research suggests that the influence of emotion on moral judgment is shaped by underlying motivational dimensions. For example, emotions induced by anger tend to heighten moral judgment, whereas happiness can reduce moral sensitivity and make individuals less concerned about the consequences of their actions (Ugazio et al., 2012; Gawronski et al., 2018). Recent studies further indicate that moral emotions play a critical role in promoting pro-environmental behaviors in tourism (Lu et al., 2020), mediating the relationship between personal values and sustainable consumption (Sharma & Jha, 2017). Self-conscious emotions triggered by self-evaluation or reflection are also shaped by social feedback and post hoc reasoning processes (Tangney et al., 2007; Russell & Giner, 2011).

2.5 Moral disengagement

Moral disengagement is a psychological mechanism that occurs when individuals' cognitive behaviors deviate from social expectations or internal moral norms, allowing them to reduce or avoid moral pressure (Bandura, 1990; Wu et al., 2025). In other words, individuals attempt to rationalize, justify, or reflect on their behavior after engaging in ethically problematic actions. According to social cognitive theory, human behavior emerges as a response to environmental influences, behavioral outcomes, and personal beliefs. Since the self-recognition process does not inherently integrate ethical standards, moral disengagement serves as a mechanism to alleviate self-blame for unethical conduct (Fiske, 2004).

When individuals adopt this approach, they experience a diminished sense of moral restraint, leading to a reduction or elimination of guilt, embarrassment, and other emotional reactions. Consequently, moral disengagement weakens individuals' constraints on violating moral standards. This psychological process functions as a moral justification mechanism, facilitating disengagement from ethical responsibility (Bandura et al., 1996; Bandura et al., 2001).

2.6 Moral judgement

Moral judgment is rooted in fundamental behavioral aspects of human nature and involves the cognitive process through which individuals assess and evaluate the actions of others. These evaluations significantly influence future interactions within every society (Chan et al., 2024). Accordingly, moral judgments are defined as evaluations (e.g., good vs. bad) of a person's character or actions based on a set of virtues deemed obligatory by a given culture. This definition is intentionally broad to account for the gray area of morally ambiguous judgments (Haidt, 2001). Recent studies further emphasize that moral judgment is not only shaped by universal moral principles but also by situational and cultural factors that influence tourists' decision-making processes (Chan et al., 2024; Dresler & Fuchs, 2021).

Some scholars have proposed that external stimuli can influence tourists' subjective judgements of their overall tourism experience, which can then elicit emotional responses (Su & Hsu, 2013). Other research has also explored how varying levels of personal involvement and

engagement (PIE) with specific issues or actions can result in differences in ethical judgement and behavioral intention (Barnett & Valentine, 2004). Furthermore, research suggests that visitors' emotional experiences while travelling influence their decisions about whether to continue using or avoid products and services, thereby shaping consumer behavior in the tourism industry (Jang & Namkung, 2009).

2.7 Purchase intention

Purchase intention defined as the likelihood or tendency of a consumer to buy a specific product, brand, or service, reflecting a consumer's subjective inclination toward a purchasing action (Belch, 2004; Dodds et al., 1991; Hossain et al., 2024; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). It represents consumers' subjective inclination toward a product and serves as a crucial indicator for predicting consumer behavior. Additionally, purchase intention encompasses three key aspects. First, it reflects consumers' willingness to make a purchase in the future, indicating their consideration of buying a particular product. Second, it represents the specific products consumers intend to purchase in the future. Third, it establishes a cognitive link between the self and the intended purchasing action.

Previous research has shown that purchase intention is influenced by a variety of factors. For example, consumers are more willing to purchase when they perceive information as trustworthy (Kim et al., 2008). Similarly, the intention to purchase sustainable products is significantly impacted by personal values and attitudes (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Together, these findings suggest that purchase intention is a reliable predictor of consumer behavior, market trends and new product sales (Morrison, 1979). Therefore, purchase intention is essential for understanding how travelers convert ethical attitudes into concrete booking and consumption behaviors in responsible tourism.

2.8 Hypotheses

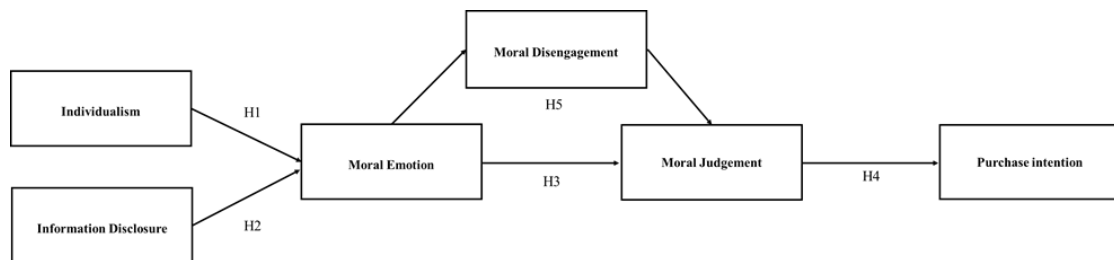


Figure 1 *Research Framework*

Base on Hunt and Vitell's (1986) general theory of marketing ethics, posits that the disclosure of information has the capacity to augment tourists' cognizance of environmental protection issues, thereby exerting an influence upon their travel decisions and intentions to engage in responsible tourism. When tourists are provided with specific information about environmental protection initiatives, sustainable resource use, and their associated impacts, they are prompted to cognitively reassess the ethical and environmental implications of their travel behaviors. Concurrently, such information has the capacity to evoke moral emotions, which in turn serve to enhance their propensity to engage in responsible tourism.

Individualism influences how individuals interpret situations and respond emotionally to situational stimuli (Davis et al., 2008). Previous research has shown that individualism positively impacts environmentally friendly and socioeconomically oriented consumption, suggesting that individualistic values may cultivate a sense of responsibility toward ethical consumption practices (Cui et al., 2022). In the context of responsible tourism, consumers with high individualistic tendencies are more likely to experience moral emotions, because they tend to act in accordance with their own values and internal moral standards and prioritize consistency between their actions and self-identity. When their travel choices align with responsible and sustainable values, they perceive such behavior as a reflection of their self-beliefs, which in turn stimulates positive moral emotions. Moreover, individualists tend to be more self-focused. When confronted with morally challenging situations such as witnessing animal abuse, their self-structure becomes more susceptible to emotional shifts, leading to strong emotional responses (Markus & Kitayama, 2014; Aaker & Williams, 1998). This suggests that individualism may play a critical role in amplifying moral emotions associated with responsible tourism behaviors. Therefore, we propose:

H1: Individualism affects the moral emotions of consumers.

In the tourism industry, providing specific and concise information about the performance and benefits of environmentally sustainable alternatives helps tourists make informed travel choices and promotes sustainable tourism by reducing internal behavioral barriers (Budeanu, 2007). Persuasive measures such as awareness campaigns are most effective when tourists act out of ignorance or unintentionally engage in unsustainable behaviors. However, these measures are less effective when individuals deliberately resist change to maintain their social group status or fulfill personal desires (Budeanu, 2007).

Enhancing tourism awareness and fostering positive attitudes toward sustainable tourism through information about conservation projects, sustainable practices, and environmental quality can influence consumer behavior by shaping both cognitive and emotional evaluations. Moral emotions are emotional responses that motivate actions benefiting others or society while discouraging inappropriate behaviors (Haidt, 2003). They have been shown to reduce unethical intentions and behaviors (Heywood & Murdock, 2002; Tangney et al., 1996). Information disclosure can therefore trigger moral emotions by making the ethical implications of tourism choices more salient, leading to a stronger propensity to engage in responsible tourism. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: Information disclosure affects the moral emotions of consumers.

Moral emotions are emotional responses triggered by an individual's moral evaluation of a specific situation. They can motivate behaviors that benefit others or society and inhibit unethical or socially inappropriate behavior (Haidt, 2003). Negative moral emotions, such as guilt and shame, often prompt self-reflection and lead to more rigorous evaluations of the ethical nature of one's actions. However, strong positive moral emotions, such as pride and satisfaction, can introduce bias, reducing an individual's critical evaluation of potentially unethical behavior, particularly when the behavior aligns with personal interests or values (Cohen et al., 2011; Tangney et al., 2007). While these emotions can encourage prosocial and sustainable behavior, they may also influence judgments about other ethical issues. For example, when a travel experience closely aligns with personal values, tourists may be less sensitive to negative

behaviors at the destination, such as overuse of natural resources or cultural commercialization, which can lead to more tolerant moral judgments. Moral emotion and judgment suggest that emotions influence cognitive processes (Lerner et al., 2015). Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed:

H3: Moral emotions negatively influence moral judgment.

Moral judgment is the evaluation of whether a specific behavior conforms to ethical and social norms (Rest, 1986). It plays a central role in the ethical decision-making process. Previous research has found that consumers' moral judgments directly influence their behavioral intentions and actual purchase behavior (Barnett & Valentine, 2004). Moral judgments influence tourists' overall attitudes and evaluations of destinations, products, and services (Su & Hsu, 2013). Tourists who make positive moral judgements about a travel choice are more likely to repeat that behavior on future trips and recommend related products or services to others. Conversely, negative moral judgements reduce their intention to repurchase or participate (Jang & Namkung, 2009).

Tourists' moral judgments may involve a variety of factors, including the impact of tourism on the environment, contributions to local communities, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Positive moral judgments not only increase the likelihood of tourists making repeat purchases but also promote word-of-mouth communication and long-term loyalty. Therefore, it is reasonable to speculate that moral judgments will have a significant and positive impact on purchase intentions in responsible tourism. Based on this, we hypothesize:

H4: Moral judgment positively influences purchase intention.

Moral disengagement is a cognitive mechanism that allows individuals to rationalize or justify behaviors that deviate from moral norms or social expectations, thereby reducing or eliminating the moral self-sanctions that would otherwise inhibit such behavior (Bandura, 1990). Through processes such as moral justification, euphemistic labeling, displacement of responsibility, and distortion of consequences, individuals can reframe unethical conduct as acceptable or less harmful. This mechanism plays a critical role in ethical decision-making and behavior regulation because it enables individuals to act in ways that are inconsistent with their moral standards without experiencing self-condemnation (Cohen et al., 2011; Tangney et al., 2007). Therefore, moral disengagement may occur when tourists experience strong moral emotions, which not align with their self-image as responsible travelers. These moral emotions could create a cognitive bias, leading individuals to overlook or downplay other unethical practices associated with their tourism activities, such as environmental degradation or cultural exploitation. Therefore, moral disengagement has the potential to influence the relationship between moral emotions and moral judgements by altering the way tourists process and evaluate ethical concerns, we hypothesize:

H5: The relationship between moral emotion and moral judgment is mediated by moral disengagement.

3. Methodology

3.1 Experiential design

This research is an experimental design. We construct two different scenarios about information disclosure. The image of the elephant used in this test scenario was obtained by searching for legally copyrighted images from the Internet, and using images with text. One picture, the “cute elephant” scenario, showed an elephant at a happy moment, while the other, the “battered elephant” scenario, depicts an elephant during inhumane training. These opposing images ensure the correct expression of the scenario in pictures, and prompt morally rational responses from participants.

3.2 Measures

The questionnaire survey is used to test the research structure in this study. Except for the manipulation checks and demographic variables, all survey constructs employed existing multi-item scales, and were measured using five-point Likert-type scales ranging from “1=strongly disagree” to “5=strongly agree.”

Customer individualism was measured using the horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism scale developed by Singelis et al. (1995). Information disclosure was used with manipulation checks which showed the two scenarios of an elephant being abused/not abused while being trained. Moral emotion variables were measured using items by Tangney et al. (1996), which comprises three dimensions, Shame, Guilt, and Embarrassment. Moral disengagement, rewritten from Boardly and Kavussanu (2007), comprised 16 items. The measurement of moral judgment items is developed by Reidenbach and Robin (1990; 1988). Finally, the questionnaire was revised and reviewed by professionals and consumers to ensure the authenticity of questionnaire.

3.3 Pretest

To ensure the effective manipulation of independent variables in each experimental scenario, this study conducted a pretest before the formal experiment. Paper-based questionnaires were administered to CCU students, with each participant randomly assigned to one scenario. They were instructed to read the given context carefully and then complete the questionnaire in sequence. A total of 106 valid responses were collected, with each scenario receiving approximately 46–60 responses. Independent-samples t-tests confirmed the effectiveness of the manipulations, thereby enhancing the rigor and accuracy of the experimental design. In the information disclosure component, participants were exposed to either a “cute elephant” scenario or a “battered elephant” scenario. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” 5 = “strongly agree”). One representative item asked respondents to rate the statement, “I can clearly understand that elephants must endure inhumane training in order for humans to ride them.” The mean score in the “cute elephant” scenario was 2.67, whereas the “battered elephant” scenario yielded a mean score of 4.37, revealing a significant difference ($p < .001$). These results indicate that participants could clearly distinguish between the two scenarios as intended by the experimental design.

3.4 Participants and procedure

In the main research, we used random assignment to collect the data. The questionnaires were placed on Internet social media platforms, including Facebook, Line, and the popular college student discussion board PTT. After removing invalid questionnaires, we collected 909 valid data. The respondents of this study included 379 males and 530 females, most of whom were young. A of 485 (53.4%) respondents were aged 20-29 ages showing that the issue of responsible tourism is more interesting to younger than older individuals, and they are more active in travel. The majority of the respondents (807, 88.7%), held at least a university degree. The most common employment status, at 280 (30.8%), was 'student'. In income, 314 respondents (34.5%) earned 30,000-49,999 a month. In location, 886 respondents (97.5%) were from western Taiwan. The majority, 693 respondents (76.3%), said they had traveled at least 1-5 times.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Reliability analysis

Reliability is a crucial indicator in quantitative research, reflecting the internal consistency of a scale. This study measures five aspects in the questionnaire: Moral Emotion, Moral Judgment, Individualism, Moral Disengagement, and Purchase Intention. The respective Cronbach's α values for these constructs are 0.919, 0.943, 0.764, 0.931, and 0.910. According to Nunnally (1978), a Cronbach's α coefficient greater than 0.7 indicates high reliability, while a value below 0.35 suggests that the scale should be rejected. In this study, all scales exhibit Cronbach's α values above 0.80, ranging from 0.764 to 0.943, thereby demonstrating strong internal consistency. The results indicate that most variables exceed the 0.7 benchmark, confirming the high reliability of the measurements used in this study.

4.2 Correlations analysis

Based on the findings, the relationships among the various constructs neared significance. The relationships between purchase intention and moral judgement and moral disengagement are significantly positive, whereas the relationship between purchase intention and moral emotion is significantly negative. Moral judgement, moral disengagement, and Purchase intention are significantly and negatively related to moral emotion, see Table 1.

Table 1. *Correlation among Constructs*

	Individualism	Moral Emotion	Moral Judgement	Moral Disengagement	Purchase Intention
Individualism	1				
Moral emotion	.181**	1			
Moral judgement	.135**	-.483**	1		
Moral disengagement	.087**	-.409**	.806**	1	
Purchase intention	.012	-.505**	.698**	.632**	1

Note:**Significantly related at a significant level of 0.01(two-tailed)

4.3 Hypothesis testing

Using the Chi square test, we check whether the participants exhibit a significant difference in their moral view of the “battered elephant” scenario, finding that the difference is significant ($\chi^2(1, N=907) = 17.713, p = .000$). In the “cute elephant” scenario, the proportion of respondents exhibiting low moral emotion (23.4%) is lower than high moral emotion (76.6%). For the “battered elephant” scenario, the ratio of respondents exhibiting low moral emotion (12.4%) is lower than high moral emotion (87.6%). Moreover, respondents viewing the “battered elephant” scenario showed higher moral emotions (87.6%), than for the “cute elephant” scenario (76.6%). Thus, information disclosure on whether elephants were abused appears to influence moral emotions.

A one-way between subject, ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of information disclosure on moral emotions for the abuse and no abuse conditions. There was a significant effect of information disclosure on moral emotion at the $p < .05$ level for the two conditions [$F(1, 906) = 32.828, p = 0.000$]. The test indicated that the mean score for the “battered elephant” scenario ($M = 3.8, SD = 0.821$) was significantly different than that of the “cute elephant” scenario. ($M = 3.5, SD = 0.817$). These results suggest that information disclosure on abuse influences moral responses, supporting H2. Additionally, using individualism as a covariant, there was a significant effect of individualism on moral emotion at the $p < .05$ level [$F(1, 906) = 35.310, p = 0.000$]. This implies that individualism affects the moral emotion of tourists, supporting H1.

The hypotheses were further tested via regression analysis. The regression models presented here are all significant based on their F-values. Using moral emotion as a dependent variable, the scenario showed significant negative moral judgement ($\beta = -.431, p < .001$), H3 is supported. Moral disengagement significantly and positively affects moral judgement ($\beta = .801, p < .001$). There was a significant positive effect of moral judgement on purchase intention ($\beta = -.746, p < .001$), supporting H4. Furthermore, moral disengagement was significantly and negatively affected by moral emotion ($\beta = -.366, p < .001$).

Based on regression analysis, moral disengagement has a mediating effect on moral emotion and moral judgement. Moral emotion is significantly related to moral disengagement ($\beta = -.409, p < .001$). Moral emotion has significant explanatory power for moral judgment ($\beta = -.483, p < .001$). Moral disengagement is significantly related to moral judgement ($\beta = .806, p < .001$). At the same time, the explanatory power of the three variables is significant. Moral disengagement remains significant. ($\beta = .731, p < .001$). According to judgement (Baron & Kenny, 1986), the mediation effect is established, supporting H5.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1 Research findings

This research addresses the research gap on the relationship between tourist attitudes and tourist behavior, to help managers, companies, and organizations inspire responsible tourist choices by providing information and raising awareness, to promote the transition to responsible

tourist behavior and actions (Budeanu, 2007). There are six variables and five hypotheses in this study. All hypotheses are supported. Our findings show that individualism plays a significant role in shaping moral emotions, as these emotions often stem from personality traits. When individuals adopt a self-focused perspective, they are more likely to evaluate whether their actions, such as travel behavior, cause harm to animals. Additionally, information disclosure can greatly influence consumers' moral emotions. When confronted with the reality of a situation, people tend to experience emotions like empathy, prompting them to reflect on the ethical implications of their behavior. By contrast, moral disengagement, as an important part of this study, is a kind of psychological mechanism that occurs when individuals' cognitive behaviors do not conform to social expectations or inner moral norms to reduce or avoid moral pressure (Bandura, 1990). Thus, when humans experience moral disengagement, their moral emotions will be reduced when they travel and they do not attempt to think as much about whether traveling is good for locals. Moral disengagement positively influences moral judgement. Our findings show that moral disengagement plays a mediating role between moral emotion and moral judgment.

5.2 Academic contribution

The academic contribution of this research lies in advancing the understanding of the gap between consumers' attitudes and their actual behaviors. The findings reveal that information disclosure can significantly enhance moral emotions and moral judgment, thereby increasing purchase intention. This emphasizes the importance of transparent and credible communication in shaping responsible tourism choices. This study also integrates the ethical decision-making model with the concept of moral disengagement and applies this framework to the context of responsible tourism, addressing a gap in prior research that has often overlooked the attitude-behavior discrepancy in tourism behavior. By introducing individualism and information disclosure as antecedents of moral emotions, this study empirically validates the influence of these factors in tourism contexts. Furthermore, it confirms through empirical analysis the mediating role of moral disengagement between moral emotions and moral judgment, thereby deepening the understanding of how consumers adjust their decision-making when confronted with moral pressure. The results also demonstrate that moral disengagement enables individuals to make choices inconsistent with moral standards, such as prioritizing personal experiences over environmental protection during travel abroad. These insights underscore the potential of targeted strategies to reduce moral disengagement and foster more ethical and sustainable tourist behavior.

5.3 Practical implications

The findings of this study have important practical implications for tourism operators and policymakers alike. For information disclosure strategies, tourism operators should provide clear, specific and credible information on sustainable tourism, particularly with regard to issues such as animal protection and environmental conservation. Such disclosure can engage tourists' moral emotions and encourage more responsible travel behaviors. In addition, moral emotional appeals can be used to encourage empathy and social responsibility among travelers who are highly individualistic, thereby reducing their tendency toward moral disengagement. To promote sustainable tourism, policymakers can design promotional programs tailored to information disclosure by integrating educational activities and scenario simulations to raise travelers'

awareness of the environmental and social impacts of tourism activities. Based on these findings, tourism operators and policymakers can promote sustainable and responsible tourism behaviors by reducing travelers' moral disengagement and enhancing their moral judgement.

5.4 Research limitations and future research directions

Although this study offers valuable theoretical and practical insights, several limitations warrant attention. First, using elephant riding as an example of animal abuse may have introduced bias, as respondents may seek a more detailed understanding of the issue, thereby affecting their choices. Additionally, the experiential design surrounding elephant abuse may have been insufficiently nuanced. It is unclear whether participants' moral disengagement arises purely from the symbolic significance of elephant riding in Thai culture or from broader ethical considerations. Moreover, the survey items themselves may have signaled that elephant riding is unequivocally harmful, potentially leading participants to underreport genuine attitudes. Second, cultural context poses a significant limitation. Elephants hold considerable economic and symbolic importance in Thailand, generating income for local communities while providing tourists with novel experiences. Participants unfamiliar with Thai cultural practices may rely on secondhand information, skewing their perceptions of moral responsibility. Thus, future research should include respondents from Thailand or those with firsthand knowledge of local conditions. Finally, subsequent studies could extend the scope by adopting a business ethics perspective to assess the influence of responsible tourism on consumers. Employing alternative data collection methods (e.g., interviews or qualitative field studies) would illuminate moral reasoning processes more deeply. Examining culturally specific factors and diverse samples will further elucidate how stakeholders negotiate the tension between economic benefit and ethical responsibility in tourism.

Statements and Declarations

- 1.Funding: this study was not supported by any funding.
- 2.Conflict of interest: the authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.
- 3.Ethical approval: for this type of study formal consent is not required.
- 4.Informed consent: for this type of study informed consent is not required.
- 5.Consent for publication: for this type of study consent for publication is not required.

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