

**FACTORS INFLUENCING CUSTOMERS' WILLINGNESS TO PAY A
PREMIUM PRICE FOR AN ECOTOURISM EXPERIENCE**

**FATORES QUE INFLUENCIAM A DISPOSIÇÃO DOS CLIENTES EM
PAGAR UM PREÇO PREMIUM POR UMA EXPERIÊNCIA DE
ECOTURISMO**

**FACTORES QUE INFLUYEN EN LA DISPOSICIÓN DE LOS
CLIENTES A PAGAR UN PRECIO PREMIUM POR UNA
EXPERIENCIA DE ECOTURISMO**

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ABSTRACT

The growing interest in sustainable tourism has prompted managers to rethink specific consumer motivation strategies. "Green" consumers show a willingness to pay more for ecological practices, where recent studies have explored individuals' Willingness to Pay (WTP) in relation to sustainability. Environmental concerns influence hotel choices and ecotourism experiences, where the Theory of Planned Behavior (TCP) can explain pro-environmental behaviors in this current market context. Thus, this study investigates behavioral factors that influence willingness to pay for ecotourism experiences, mediated by environmental concern, sustainable practices and social value. The research used questionnaires simulating experiences in an environmental protection area in the Amazon, analyzing relationships between variables with mediation and moderation. The aim of this study is to analyze how behavioral factors explain and value customers' willingness to pay a premium price after experiencing an ecotourism experience. Thus, analyzing the interactions between environmental concern, social value, sustainable practices and willingness to pay provides insight into the elements that influence tourism consumption in this sustainable environment. Sustainable practices positively moderate the relationship between environmental concern and social value, but negatively their relationship with willingness to pay. In this context, customers with higher social value (related to status) are less willing to pay.

Keywords: Willingness to Pay for Tourism Services; Pro-Environmental Behavior; Customer Social Value (Status); Planned Behavior and Social Identity.

RESUMO

O crescente interesse pelo turismo sustentável tem levado os gestores a repensar estratégias específicas de motivação do consumidor. Consumidores "verdes" demonstram disposição para pagar mais por práticas ecológicas, onde estudos recentes têm explorado a Disposição a Pagar (DAP) dos indivíduos em relação à sustentabilidade. As preocupações ambientais influenciam as escolhas de hotéis e experiências de ecoturismo, onde a Teoria do Comportamento Planejado (TCP) pode explicar comportamentos pró-ambientais no contexto atual do mercado. Assim, este estudo investiga fatores comportamentais que influenciam a disposição em pagar por experiências de ecoturismo, mediada pela preocupação ambiental, práticas sustentáveis e valor social. A pesquisa utilizou questionários simulando experiências em uma área de proteção ambiental na Amazônia, analisando as relações entre variáveis com mediação e moderação. O objetivo deste estudo é analisar como fatores comportamentais explicam e valorizam a disposição dos clientes em pagar um preço premium após vivenciar uma experiência de ecoturismo. Assim, analisar as interações entre preocupação ambiental, valor social, práticas sustentáveis e disposição a pagar fornece insights sobre os elementos que influenciam o consumo de turismo nesse ambiente sustentável. Práticas sustentáveis moderam positivamente a relação entre preocupação ambiental e valor social, mas negativamente a relação deles com a disposição a pagar. Nesse contexto, clientes com maior valor social (relacionado ao status) são menos dispostos a pagar.

Palavras-chave: Disposição a Pagar por Serviços de Turismo; Comportamento Pró-Ambiental; Valor Social do Cliente (Status); Comportamento Planejado e Identidade Social.

RESUMEN

El creciente interés por el turismo sostenible ha llevado a los gestores a repensar estrategias específicas de motivación del consumidor. Los consumidores "verdes" demuestran disposición a pagar más por prácticas ecológicas, donde estudios recientes han explorado la Disposición a Pagar (DAP) de los individuos en relación con la sostenibilidad. Las preocupaciones ambientales influyen en la elección de hoteles y experiencias de ecoturismo, donde la Teoría del Comportamiento Planeado (TCP) puede explicar comportamientos proambientales en el contexto actual del mercado. Así, este estudio investiga factores comportamentales que influyen en la disposición a pagar por experiencias de ecoturismo, mediada por la preocupación ambiental, prácticas sostenibles y valor social. La investigación utilizó cuestionarios simulando experiencias en un área de protección ambiental en la Amazonía, analizando las relaciones entre variables con mediación y moderación. El objetivo de este estudio es analizar cómo los factores comportamentales explican y valoran la disposición de los clientes a pagar un precio premium después de vivir una experiencia de ecoturismo. Así, analizar las interacciones entre preocupación ambiental, valor social, prácticas sostenibles y disposición a pagar proporciona información sobre los elementos que influyen en el consumo de turismo en este entorno sostenible. Las prácticas sostenibles moderan positivamente la relación entre preocupación ambiental y valor social, pero negativamente su relación con la disposición a pagar. En este contexto, los clientes con mayor valor social (relacionado con el estatus) están menos dispuestos a pagar.



Palabras clave: Disposición a Pagar por Servicios Turísticos; Comportamiento Proambiental; Valor Social del Cliente (Estatus); Comportamiento Planeado e Identidad Social.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, consumer interest in sustainable practices has increased, especially in tourism and accommodation. This reflects a change in consumer behavior, driven by environmental and social concerns (DURÁN-ROMÁN, CÁRDENAS-GARCÍA and PULIDO-FERNÁNDEZ, 2021) and the practices and protocols implemented in COVID (HOQUE et, al., 2020). The demand for sustainable tourism experiences has led managers to rethink their strategies (ZEYNALOVA and NAMAZOVA, 2022).

Sustainable tourism, like ecotourism, promotes environmental conservation and the socioeconomic development of the regions visited, involving responsible interaction with nature (UNWTO, 2019; DURÁN-ROMÁN et al., 2021). However, managers face challenges in pricing ecotourism due to the higher costs associated with sustainability than traditional tourism (ZEYNALOVA and NAMAZOVA, 2022).

Marketing scientists specializing in consumer behavior have identified that sustainable products/services attract "green" consumers who are willing to pay more for ecological practices (CHAN e HSU, 2016; KIM et al., 2021). Some of these studies analyze the preferences, motivations, psychological, behavioral and demographic aspects of ecotourism consumers, explaining their willingness to pay for this experience (HULTMAN, KAZEMINIA and GHASEMI, 2015; DURÁN-ROMÁN et al., 2021).

Willingness to Pay (WTP) reflects the value attributed to a product, taking into account behavioral factors such as attitudes, social norms and experiences. Marketing studies (HULTMAN et al., 2015; CHOO, AHN and PETRICK, 2016) explore WTP in relation to sustainability, as a function of food, environmental conservation, etc.

Customers concerned about environmental issues tend to prefer hotels with green initiatives and are more inclined to pay more for sustainable services. They are also likely to positively evaluate the hotel's environmental practices and its sustainability image (KANG et, al., 2012; LEANIZ, CRESPO and LÓPEZ, 2018). Previous research has examined tourists' willingness to pay a premium price for



a sustainable experience in tourism services such as hotels and air travel. Attitude towards sustainability influences tourist behavior as predicted by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (KREMER, FLACH and SALLABERRY, 2021), which explains human environmental behavior by considering attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control as antecedents of behavioral intention (FAUZI et, al., 2018).

For this study, it is understood that consumers' ecotourism experiences carry a social value that acts as a mediating dimension in the relationship between environmental concern and willingness to pay, and that environmental practices moderate the effects of environmental concern on social value and willingness to pay.

Considering the above, the central problem of this study lies in the need to understand which factors affect the consumer's willingness to pay a premium price for an ecotourism experience in environmental protection areas. Therefore, the methodological procedure used in the research was to draw up a questionnaire simulating a tourist experience on an Amazon Island which is an environmental protection area defined by the state government. The forms were distributed by e-mail and on social networks. The answers were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale. The method used to evaluate the relationship considered the mediation and moderation of the variables Customer Environmental Concern (CEC), Sustainable Environmental Practices (SEP), Social Value (SV) and Willingness to Pay (WTP).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 WILLINGNESS TO PAY A PREMIUM PRICE.

Increased environmental awareness has driven ecotourism and sustainable practices, reflecting a significant change in consumer behavior, which values experiences that promote environmental conservation (CHANDEL and MISHRA, 2016). Thus, it becomes crucial to understand the Willingness to Pay (WTP) a premium price for such experiences, especially for managers seeking to align their marketing strategies with consumer expectations (DIEGUEZ, 2020).

The WTP reflects the value that consumers attribute to products or services, considering not only economic aspects, but also personal values, such as



environmental and social concerns (LI and KALLAS, 2021). In the context of ecotourism, this implies an appreciation of the sustainable practices implemented, positively influencing consumers' perceptions and, consequently, their willingness to invest more in these experiences (CHEN et al., 2020).

The importance of pro-environmental behavior, perceived social value, and sustainable environmental practices as determinants of WTP in the ecotourism sector, were studied by Wu, Cheng and Ai (2018). Consumers concerned about the environment value companies' sustainable initiatives, showing a willingness to pay more for services in line with their environmental and social expectations (BRAMWELL and LANE, 2011).

Understanding consumers' willingness to pay for ecotourism is crucial for companies in the sustainable tourism market and makes it possible to align marketing strategies with consumer expectations, which can influence willingness to pay by promoting more sustainable tourism (DOLNICAR et al., 2017; CHI; DENTON and GURSOY, 2021).

2.2 CONSUMERS' ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN AND ITS IMPACT ON SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING BEHAVIOR

The call for pro-environmental initiatives has been effective in promoting sustainable behavior. In this sense, theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) have been fundamental to understanding how environmental concern influences consumer intentions and behaviors (DOLNICAR et al, 2017).

For Busch (1998), the TRA is a tripartite model made up of affective, cognitive and behavioral components, which influence intention and behavior, considering individual beliefs as shaping attitudes and subjective norms, which in turn directly influence intention and behavior (CHOO et al., 2016).

Studies have applied the TPB to understand consumer behavior in relation to willingness to pay for environmentally friendly products, finding that factors such as environmental concern, social pressure and perceived ease influence this willingness (CHOO et al., 2016).

In addition, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explores beliefs as antecedents of behavior, influencing attitudes and social norms (HEMMERLING,



HAMM and SPILLER, 2015). For example, the belief in health and sustainability influences the purchase of organic products (RANA and PAUL, 2017).

Customers concerned about environmental issues tend to value companies with sustainable initiatives (KANG et al., 2012; LEANIZ et al., 2018). The literature differs on the definition of environmental concern, but recognizes its influence on the intention to purchase sustainable products (CRUZ, 2017).

The relationship between environmental concern and perceived social value affects willingness to pay more for sustainable products (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005). The interaction between perceived value, beliefs and environmental concerns shapes consumer behavior and their willingness to pay for sustainable products and services, reflecting the growing importance of corporate social and environmental responsibility (De JONG, HULUBA and BELDAD, 2020). In this sense, we propose the hypothesis that:

H1: Customers' environmental concern positively influences customers' social value.

Environmental valuation plays a crucial role in understanding the values associated with natural resources, especially since many of these values are not adequately reflected in market prices, where this process becomes even more relevant when considering the impact of ecosystems on human well-being, influencing aspects such as health, subsistence and survival (COSTANZA, 2014).

The environmental practices developed by companies in the search for production that makes efficient use of inputs, zero waste of resources and the preservation of the ecosystem are well accepted by a portion of consumers who value sustainable production activities, especially in the restaurant industry, and wish to consume products and services in which sustainable practices are present in all links of the production chain (ARUN, 2021).

The concern for sustainable practices in the business and tourism context thus reflects the importance attached to environmental preservation (NAYAK, AKBARI and FAR, 2019). Therefore, companies that adopt sustainable practices are perceived positively by consumers (ARUN, YUVARAJ and LAWRENCE, 2019).

Cheung and Jim (2014) evaluated tourists' willingness to pay for ecotourism activities in environmental conservation areas and the development of ecotourism in



Hong Kong in 2014, the results of which showed the willingness of conventional and nature tourists to pay more for ecotourism activities.

In this context, customers' environmental concerns are crucial in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards sustainable consumption. This affects both purchase intentions and willingness to pay more for socially responsible and environmentally friendly products and services. We therefore propose the hypothesis that:

H2: Customers' environmental concern positively influences their willingness to pay a premium price for this ecotourism experience.

2.3 SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES

Sustainable environmental practices are essential actions to protect the environment (CORRAL-VERDUGO, 2000). They reflect environmental awareness and concern and, in consumption, include a willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly products (LEE and LAWSON-BODY, 2011). Studies show that hotel customers are willing to pay more for sustainable practices. In this scenario, factors such as social influences affect pro-environmental behavior (CHWIALKOWSKA, BHATTI and GLOWIK, 2020).

Therefore, the discussion of sustainable environmental practices was built on the concepts of environmental practices in ecotourism enterprises and the Theory of Pro- Environmental Behavior, which are essential for the formation of the study's moderation variable.

2.3.1 Consumer Perception of Environmental Practices

The positive perception of environmental practices has a favorable impact on the company's image, strengthening customer identification, fostering loyalty and defending the company (RUST and OLIVER, 2000). A company's image is a crucial intangible asset in influencing customers' perceptions of the company's operations and communications (KANG and JAMES, 2004).

Tourism, as a booming industry, plays a vital role in the global economy, generating revenue, jobs and foreign exchange for many countries. However, there is a growing need for investment in actions aimed at environmental protection, given



its economic importance and impact on the environment.

Ecological campaigns promote the appreciation of nature, encouraging harmonious interaction between humans and the environment (GOBSTER et, al., 2007). Investing in infrastructure and equipment for sustainable tourism and promoting environmental awareness through education are crucial strategies for minimizing environmental impact.

For example, British Airways has implemented sustainable practices such as a research fund to reduce carbon emissions, providing passengers with a form of compensation for their carbon footprint (BOZTEPE, 2012).

Tourists' preference for destinations is based on factors such as climate, environmental and cultural quality. Travel agencies and reservation systems have begun to demand environmental management practices from hotels, recognizing that this has become a competitive differentiator in the sector (MIHALIČ, 2000).

These sustainable practices are the result of companies' strategic management, considering climate change and customer demand for environmentally responsible behavior (NAYAK et al., 2019). The restaurant industry, for example, employs practices such as waste reduction, efficient use of resources and the adoption of local and seasonal ingredients (KIM and HALL, 2020).

The adoption of sustainable environmental practices (SEP) not only positively impacts the relationship between customers' environmental concern and social value, but also promotes corporate responsibility and the preservation of ecosystems (MATHIYAZHAGAN et, al., 2021; IAMKOVAIA et, al., 2019). Thus, we propose the hypothesis that:

H3: Sustainable Environmental Practices positively moderate the relationship between customers' environmental concern and customers' social value.

2.3.2 Theory of Pro-Environmental Behavior

Pro-environmental behavior refers to practices of care and attention to the environment, involving effective actions to protect it (CORRAL-VERDUGO, 2000). Environmental awareness and concern are considered fundamental, while an individual's willingness to deal with environmental issues reflects their environmental awareness (KAISER, WÖLFING and FUHRER, 1999). Environmental behavior

includes consumers' willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly products and services, while willingness to pay a premium price refers to the extra amount a consumer would be willing to pay for these additional features (LEE and LAWSON-BODY, 2011).

Research shows that hotel customers are willing to pay more for sustainable practices, indicating a favorable attitude towards sustainability. Several factors influence pro- environmental behavior, such as social influences, motivation to recycle and environmental beliefs (KANG et al., 2012). Concern for the environment is leading companies to adopt sustainable strategies, which is reflected in the prices, quality and value of products and services.

However, society is increasingly demanding of organizations in relation to socio- environmental issues (STEG et, al., 2014), where national and international studies have investigated the subjective and objective effect of situational elements, such as an environmental concern having a more generic context for the individual, and the perceptions of applied practices, more objective that end up not making it clear about the benefit of paying more due to the individual's environmental concern. We therefore propose the hypothesis that:

H4: Sustainable Environmental Practices negatively moderate the relationship between customers' environmental concern and willingness to pay.

2.4 SOCIAL VALUE IMPACTING ON WILLINGNESS TO PAY

The intersection between social identity and social value is crucial to understanding consumer behavior in relation to sustainable products. Tajfel and Turner (1986) highlight how identification with sustainable brands promotes loyalty, while Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989) emphasize that social value influences choices, reflecting the importance of emotional connection and perceived status in the adoption of sustainable products.

Empirical research supports this theory, showing that consumers value companies' environmental efforts and assume that they have desirable characteristics, which promotes consumers' identification with these companies and their favorable behavioral intentions (NIKBIN et, al., 2010).

The application of social identity theory to the tourism industry predicts



behaviors such as the willingness to pay a premium price for environmentally friendly services (NAMKUNG and JANG, 2017), given the social difference that this consumption provides. In this sense, social value deals with the perception of status and acceptance within social groups, which influence consumption choices. The search for a high status motivates choices that reflect personal aspirations and the desire to be recognized / valued (DHALIWAL, SINGH and PAUL, 2020).

Pro-environmental behaviors can increase perceived social value (Tezer & Bodur, 2020), however, the selfish/individualistic value of the individual's social context can decrease pro-environmental behavior (TAMAR et, al., 2021).

Personal values, such as self-respect and self-fulfillment, positively influence environmentally favorable behavior. Thus, the perceived social status of consumers is linked to word-of-mouth marketing on social networks (PARK, HYUN and THAVISAY, 2021) and the communications and interactions of the individual's social groups, where purchase intentions of luxury brands, for example, are influenced by the value of the brand and the awareness of status in the eyes of the consumer's peers (HUSAIN, AHMAD and KHAN, 2022). Social value can vary with individual and cultural factors, where the perception of social status is related to differences in behavior depending on the possession and access of consumption (CHEN and WYER JR, 2020).

In general, social value is relevant to marketing strategies and purchasing behavior (SWEENEY and SOUTAR, 2001), where the willingness to pay for ecotourism experiences can be influenced by this social value of customers (ARRUDA FILHO and OLIVEIRA, 2022).

However, it is important to recognize that social value is not homogeneous and can vary according to individual and cultural factors (LO, 2008). In addition, social value is also related to differences in behavior, with significant implications for marketing strategies and purchasing behavior (SWEENEY and SOUTAR, 2001).

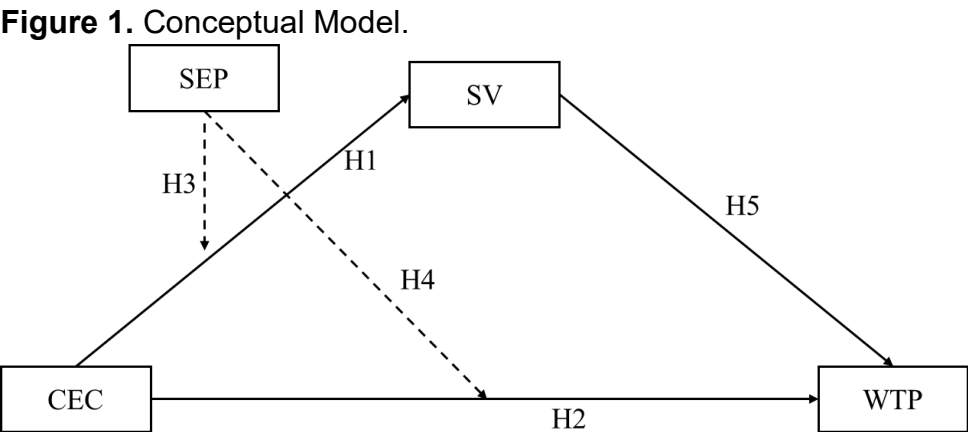
In this sense, while consumers value their social status and differentiation among their social group, they perceive an environmental concern that influences them to see value in the sustainable environment, but they are not willing to spend more for the perceived benefit of this differentiation. We therefore propose the hypothesis that:

H5: Customers' social value (status) negatively influences their willingness to



pay a premium price in ecotourism resorts.

Therefore, the consumer's Willingness to Pay (WTP) is affected by the variables Customer Environmental Concern (CEC) and Social Value (SV) moderated by Sustainable Environmental Practices (SEP). Based on this theoretical view, we propose the conceptual model (see Figure 1).



3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research target population is infinite and made up of a public chosen intentionally. The sample is non-probabilistic and the participants were chosen according to the convenience of the researcher and the characteristics of the target population. The advantages of this type of sampling include: greater control over the composition of the sample; efficiency due to the direct choice; and greater flexibility, in order to adapt the sample to the specifics of the research (RICHARDSON, PERES and WANDERLEY, 1985).

Before starting the extensive research, a pilot survey was carried out with 50 respondents, who were chosen based on their socioeconomic profile and contacts from the researcher's social networks. In this survey, the reliability analysis, via the Cronbach's alpha indicator, showed all the variables with results higher than 0.700.

3.2 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURE



The methodological procedure adopted for this research was based on the construction of a questionnaire with the representation of a scenario, in which the respondents were proposed a "simulated experience" on an island in the Amazon, which is an environmental protection area, accessed by boat, with a duration of 10 minutes from an Amazonian capital, in which they were experiencing a tourist experience on this island where there are tourist enterprises that drive the local economy, such as bars and restaurants, generating employment and income to support the community.

The questionnaire was distributed to individuals in various Brazilian states via links sent by email and social networks such as Messenger, Facebook and WhatsApp. Answers were given on a five-point scale ranging from (1 = not at all important to 5 = very important). The data was collected online using Google Forms and lasted 31 days, from 04/07/2023 to 05/08/2023, in which 342 responses were collected from participants.

The reliability analysis of the Sustainable Environmental Practices (SEP) variable was measured by 6 items from the adaptation of the scales by González-Rodríguez, Díaz-Fernández and Font (2019) and Kim and Hall (2020), with $\alpha = 0.839$; Customer Environmental Concerns (CEC) was measured by 8 items from the scale by Schultz (2001), with $\alpha = 0.939$; Social Value (SV) was measured by 4 items adapted from the scales by Arruda Filho and Oliveira (2022), Sweeney and Southeastern (2001) and Tajfel (1979). Soutar (2001) and Tajfel (1979), with $\alpha = 0.948$; and willingness to pay was measured using an item from González-Rodríguez, Díaz-Fernández and Font (2020), measuring the variable as continuous, identifying the determining factors of the WTP for a premium price of customers of environmentally friendly hotels, considering sustainable practices in the individual's numerical perception of value. The aim was to evaluate the valuation of ecosystem services estimated and considering a demand curve based on the willingness to pay statement.

In order to test the validation of the research hypotheses, in which several relationships between constructs were established, simple and multiple linear regression models were used, considering independent variables, called mediators and moderators, which act as conditioning factors for the dependent variable, using the SPSS macro *process* (HAYES, 2017).

The sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents show that 60.8%



were female and 39.2% male. With regard to marital status, the majority of respondents were married (50.3%), single (39.5%), divorced (9.1%) and widowed (1.2%). As for age, the sample was between 31 and 50 years old, with 47.1% of respondents, between 21 and 30 years old 24% and only 0.9% of respondents were over 70 years old.

4 RESULTS

At this stage, the hypotheses were evaluated using the structural model shown in table 1. The mediation and moderation technique were used using SPSS 23 software, with the *Process 4.0 package*. This tool makes it possible to assess the effects of direct and indirect distribution paths on the sample. The significance of the proposed relationships is analyzed using the coefficient values and p-values (HAIR et, al., 2017).

In order to understand the direct and indirect effects of the independent variable customer environmental concern and the dependent variable willingness to pay, social value was adopted as the mediating variable and sustainable environmental practices as the moderating variable.

Mediation analysis seeks to make a significant contribution to explaining the exogenous and predictive effects of a model (HAIR et, al., 2017). Figure 2 shows the result of the paths proposed in the theoretical model of this research.

Table 1: Evaluation of Hypotheses

	Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	T Statistic	P-Value	R²	Decision
Mediation	H1	CEC →SV	0,8211	64,3432	0,000	0,924	Supported
	H2	CEC →SV → WTP	-96,2137	-25,4779	0,000	0,703	Supported
	H3	CEC →WTP	67,9649	21,0703	0,000		Supported
Moderation	H4	CEC →SEP→SV	0,2840	2,444	0,015	0,217	Supported
	H5	CEC →SEP→WTP	-35,8965	-4,1728	0,000	0,058	Supported

*P values <0.05 (significant)
**Test – T > 1,96

The moderating variable has the potential to attenuate or intensify the influence of the predictor variable on the dependent variable, thus altering the nature of the relationship between the predictor (or independent variable) and the dependent

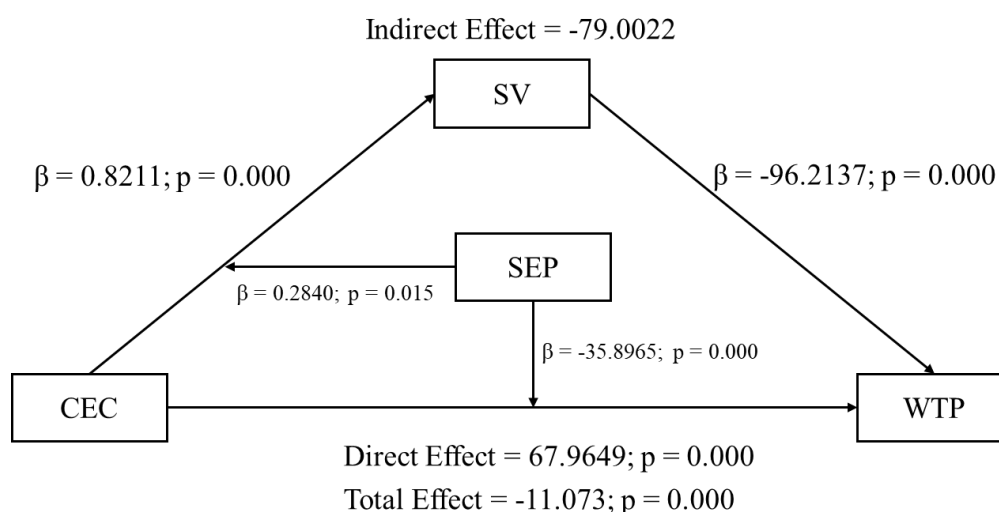


variable. In addition, it can play the role of a "mediator", influencing the direction of the relationship between the two variables and affecting the final outcome (BAUMAN et, al., 2002).

The results summarized in Figure 2 show that the customer environmental concern (CEC) variable has an effect of $\beta=0.8211$; $p<0.01$ on the social value (SV) variable, and $\beta=67.9649$; $p<0.01$ on willingness to pay (WTP).

The indirect effect of the model passing through social value (SV), which measures the relationship between the variables customer environmental concern (CEC) and willingness to pay (WTP), obtained $\beta= -79.0022$; $p<0.01$. The moderation results were satisfactory and significant, in which the sustainable environmental practice variable positively moderates the relationship between consumer environmental concern and social value, obtaining $\beta=0.2840$; $p<0.05$, and also moderates the other relationship in the model, but negatively, on the effect of environmental concern and willingness to pay $\beta=-35.8965$; $p<0.001$.

Figure 2. Mediation and Moderation of the theoretical model



In this model, the VS variable mediates the direct relationship between CEC and WTP, showing that there is partial mediation, i.e. the effect of CEC on WTP is reduced to the extent that the consumer of the tourist experience has greater social value.

In the first moderation, there is a positive effect in the moderation of the variable SEP between the variables CEC and VS, i.e. describing the increase in the direct relationship between CEC and VS previously presented, which is a positive value. In

the second moderation, there is a negative relationship between the moderating variable SEP and the relationship between CEC and WTP, i.e. describing a reduction in the direct effect between CEC and WTP, which is also positive, and which should reduce this effect given the moderation.

The results of the paths shown in Table 1 are represented by the effects of the latency coefficients between the constructs and the significance values, thus assuming Test - $T > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$ to confirm the main hypothesis. The model thus has its hypotheses supported.

The result obtained in Hypothesis 1 proved to be satisfactory, since it showed that customers' environmental concerns are positively associated with the social value they attribute to them. In other words, the adoption of environmental practices positively influences people's perception of social value and, consequently, the increase in environmental practices moderates the relationship between customers' environmental perception and social value, intensifying this impact.

This finding corroborates previous research (LEE and SHRUM, 2012), which indicates that individuals who perceive themselves as valued by society due to pro-environmental behaviors tend to increase the social value of others. The study by Tezer and Bodur (2020) reinforces this idea by confirming that the use of environmentally friendly products is associated with an increase in social value, since society values such practices. However, the increase in social value reduces willingness to pay, given the rational cost-benefit value of increasing a payment, which is different from social value focused on emotional issues of perceived status and consumer fad.

In summary, hypothesis 1 emphasizes the growing appreciation of pro-environmental behavior in society. The positive association suggests that consumers' environmentally responsible practices not only reflect an intrinsic concern for the environment but also serve as an indicator of social status. This phenomenon, supported by previous studies (LEE and SHRUM, 2012), emphasizes the importance of companies leveraging sustainability as an added value, transcending the direct benefit of products or services.

In Hypothesis 2, the result was satisfactory, as it revealed that customers with greater environmental concerns tend to be more inclined to pay for frequenting environments that are considered sustainable. In other words, as the customer's perception of environmental characteristics increases, their willingness to pay more



increases, as both are rational consumer reflections, so that the benefit achieved is justified by the cost, generating a positive CEC effect in WTP.

Thus, when there is congruence between customers and the company regarding environmental concerns, this tends to generate a positive evaluation of the company's green initiatives, leading to a willingness to pay premiums for these initiatives. This understanding is reinforced by studies by Kang et al. (2012) and Leaniz et al. (2018), in which customers with a high degree of environmental concern are more likely to choose hotels that promote environmentally friendly initiatives and to pay a premium price for environmentally friendly services.

The result of Hypothesis 3 was satisfactory, since Sustainable Environmental Practices (SEP) positively moderated the relationship between customers' environmental concern (CEC) and social value (SV). In other words, the more sustainable the environmental practices, the greater the effect of customers' environmental concern on the social value attributed.

This result contributes positively to previous studies, such as those by Rust and Oliver (2000), which indicate that a positive perception of environmental practices positively influences the image of the enterprise, strengthening customer identification with the company and contributing to customer loyalty and advocacy. This conclusion is corroborated by the research of Mathiyazhagan et al. (2021), who point out that the incorporation of sustainable practices results from the company's strategic management, considering climate change and the pro-environmental behavior intentions of customers and suppliers. These practices increase the justification for consuming environmentally friendly products, generating status and differentiation among peers, which facilitates the description of social consumption and its social value among peers.

In conclusion, hypothesis 3 shows the positive role of Sustainable Environmental Practices (SEP) in strengthening customer identification with the company, suggesting a synergy between adopting sustainable practices and building a positive corporate image. This result implies that companies which invest in sustainability can not only improve their reputation, but also increase customer engagement and loyalty by highlighting the perceived social value of these practices.

In Hypothesis 4, the results showed that Sustainable Environmental Practices negatively moderate the relationship between customers' environmental concern and willingness to pay. In other words, the high number of environmental practices tends



to be perceived as a negative factor, reducing the effect of environmental concern on willingness to pay.

This result contrasts with the study by Kang et al. (2012), which reveals that the majority of hotel customers are willing to pay a premium to support hotels' environmental efforts, demonstrating a favorable attitude towards sustainability. Thus, the study provides valuable results on hotel customers' willingness to pay a premium for sustainable practices and highlights the importance of considering customers' environmental concerns when implementing green initiatives in hotels.

Environmental concern leads individuals to increase their willingness to pay. However, environments that already have sustainable environmental practices in place reduce the effect of environmental concern on the individual's willingness to pay more for access to the service, considering that perceived environments with high environmental practice will not have greater additional value or benefit that reflects on willingness to pay. This shows that concern, which is a subjective factor, is taken into account more than the practices themselves, which exist in the environment.

In summary, hypothesis 4 reveals a negative moderating effect of SEP on the effect of environmental concern on willingness to pay, highlighting the complexity of consumer perceptions in relation to the cost of sustainable practices. This indicates that although consumers value sustainability, and that their environmental concerns increase their willingness to pay, when practices geared towards the environmental context are highly perceived, there is a reverse effect in the moderation of sustainable Environmental Practice.

The result of Hypothesis 5 was also satisfactory, as it showed that the higher the social value, the lower the willingness to pay. In other words, individuals with a high social standing tend not to want to pay more, as they consider the status of consumption to be important, but without deferring an increase in the cost of access to the benefit.

This relationship between social value and willingness to pay is associated with consumers' perception of the social and environmental impact of products or services, and how this perception influences their purchasing decisions and willingness to pay for them. This result diverges from much previous research, such as the study by Tezer and Bodur (2020), which suggests that green consumption can increase consumers' social value, making them more ethical, altruistic and collaborative.

In summary, hypothesis 5 describes a finding that higher perceived social value



can reduce willingness to pay, and is particularly intriguing, suggesting that consumers may expect companies to take environmental responsibility as an ethical imperative, rather than an "extra" for which they should pay more. This signals to companies that individuals with high social value have a lower willingness to pay than individuals with low social value, where the status and value represented to their social group does not bring rational cost-benefit recognition to the individual.

5 GENERAL DISCUSSION

The analysis presented on consumer behavior in relation to environmental concern and sustainable practices reveals complex aspects of the interaction between environmental, social and economic values in consumer decision-making. Applying mediation and moderation techniques to examine these relationships illuminates not only the underlying dynamics of consumer behavior, but also provides strategic directions for sustainable marketing.

The analysis of the results of this research into consumer behavior, centered on environmental concern and sustainable practices, provides significant insights into the relationship between these variables and the consumer's willingness to pay for environmentally responsible products or services.

The results present valuable findings for designing sustainable marketing strategies, emphasizing the importance of aligning sustainability initiatives with consumer expectations. Although the results point to a positive reception of sustainable practices, they also warn of the complexity of consumer perceptions of the value and cost of sustainability.

5.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

5.1.1 Mediation of the social value variable

The mediation analysis carried out in this study revealed a significant contribution to understanding the direct and indirect effects of the independent variable, the customer's environmental concern, on willingness to pay. This described



mediation inserts the concept of the social environment in relation to the consumer's peers, influencing the decision process with a sustainable context, identifying how much the effect of status or fad of the individual affects their willingness to spend more with a tourist context that has relations of environmental concern.

The results indicate that the customer's environmental concern positively influences social value, corroborating previous research (LEE and SHRUM, 2012), which highlights the association between pro-environmental behaviors and the perception of social value in an altruistic consumer context. This understanding is reinforced by the study by Tezer and Bodur (2020), which associates the use of environmentally friendly products with an increase in perceived social value.

5.1.2 Moderation of the Sustainable Environmental Practices Variable:

The introduction of the moderating variable, sustainable environmental practices, plays a crucial role in understanding the relationship between customer environmental concern and social value, as well as between environmental concern and willingness to pay. Moderation, as explained by Bauman et al. (2002), can attenuate or intensify the effects of the predictor variable on the dependent variable.

The results show that sustainable environmental practices positively moderate the relationship between customer environmental concern and social value, suggesting that customers perceive greater social value when exposed to sustainable practices. This conclusion is in line with previous studies (RUST and OLIVER, 2000), which highlight the positive influence of environmental practices on the image of the enterprise and the customer's identification with the company.

However, moderation also showed a negative effect on the relationship between environmental concern and willingness to pay, indicating that a high number of environmental practices can reduce the effect of environmental concern on willingness to pay, contrasting with studies such as Kang et al. (2012), which show a favorable willingness to pay a premium for sustainable practices. In this scenario, the objective appeal of the practices is not effective in reflecting concern affecting willingness to pay, where the subjective context of concern increasing willingness is the only one that guarantees an increase in paying for the differentiated sustainable service.



5.1.3 Relationship between Social Value and Willingness to Pay

Analysis of the results also reveals a significant relationship between the social value attributed by customers and their willingness to pay. This result is in line with consumers' perception of the social and environmental impact of products or services, and how this perception influences their purchasing decisions and willingness to pay for them. This relationship between social value and willingness to pay differs from some previous research (TEZER and BODUR, 2020), suggesting that consumers with high social value tend not to pay more, as they consider that the increased payment for the service does not justify the benefit of greater social value to the consumer.

These theoretical contributions provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interrelationships between customer environmental concern, social value, sustainable environmental practices and willingness to pay, highlighting the importance of considering these factors in the context of consumer behavior in relation to environmental products and services.

5.2 MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

5.2.1 Impact of Customer Environmental Concern on Social Value and Willingness to Pay

The results of this study show a significant relationship between customer environmental concern (CEC) and social value (SV), as well as with willingness to pay (WTP). It was shown that the adoption of environmental practices positively influences the relationship between environmental concern and the social value of this consumer. This result suggests that market communications value the environmental context as a social value to the individual, motivating consumers towards this perception. In addition, this study reinforces the idea that consumers with greater environmental concern are more inclined to pay for environments that are considered environmental, suggesting that the perception of sustainable practices leads to environmentally concerned behavior.

5.2.2 Moderation of Sustainable Environmental Practices



Sustainable Environmental Practices (SEP) have positive effects on social valuation, demonstrating greater importance to environments with greater practice, implying an increase in the differentiation that the individual has in an environment with a greater number of practices. However, these practices do not yet support an increase in willingness to pay, and there is a need for greater awareness of the cost involved and of environmental differentiation as a benefit for the sustainable context.

5.2.3 Relationship between Social Value and Willingness to Pay

The study showed that the higher the social value, the lower the willingness to pay. This suggests that individuals with a high social standing tend not to want to pay more, as they don't consider the benefit sufficient to increase their payment. This relationship between social value and willingness to pay is associated with consumers' perception of the social and environmental impact of products or services, diverging from some previous research. The managerial contributions provide valuable insights for companies and organizations interested in understanding and promoting pro-environmental consumer behavior, highlighting an environmental awareness in favor of social value for the protection of the environment.

5.3 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

5.3.1 Limitations

Despite the satisfactory results obtained in this study, it is important to note that the conclusions are based on a specific sample and a particular context. The generalizability of these results to other populations and environments is limited. Data collection through self-reported questionnaires may be subject to response bias, where participants may provide socially desirable answers rather than their true opinions or behaviors. Variables not considered in this study may influence the relationships between the constructs analyzed. For example, cultural factors were not controlled for, which may affect the results.

5.3.2 Future prospects



Future research could adopt longitudinal approaches to investigate the relationships between the constructs over time. This would allow for a deeper understanding of the behavioral dynamics of consumers in relation to environmental issues. To increase the external validity of the results, it is recommended that future studies include more diverse samples in terms of age, gender, culture and socioeconomic status. This would help to verify whether the relationships observed in this study are consistent in different contexts.

Future research could incorporate a more comprehensive analysis of the control variables, considering factors that may influence the relationships between the constructs studied. In addition to the variables examined in this study, future research could explore the influence of other relevant constructs, such as consumer trust in the company, environmental awareness and social norms, for a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in relation to sustainability.

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationships between consumers' environmental concern, sustainable practices and willingness to pay, there are several limitations to be considered. Addressing these limitations and exploring the future perspectives identified could further enrich the understanding of consumer behavior in relation to sustainability.

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