



Research Paper

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Responsible Behaviour and Psychological Well-being in Tourism: The Triple Helix Model



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ABSTRACT: While the conceptually related fields of sustainability and psychological well-being have been informed by extensive research in recent years, efforts to integrate these fields are yet to be systematically advanced. This lack of integration has left the nexus between sustainability and well-being largely underexplored and conceptually underdeveloped. Tourism offers a novel context within which to explore the intersection. Consequently, this paper critically assesses the relationship between sustainability-related decisions and tourist well-being. It is informed by the analysis of thirty semi-structured in-depth interviews that critically explored the holiday experiences of tourists while travelling internationally. Analysis revealed that both responsible and irresponsible tourist behaviours are interconnected with tourists' psychological well-being and are influenced by external barriers and internal conflicts. Responsible behaviours were found to contribute to eudaimonic well-being through a heightened sense of perceived integrity. Conversely, irresponsible behaviours trigger negative self-appraisals, enacting coping mechanisms and generating guilt. This manuscript presents the triple helix model detailing the complex and interconnected relationship between (ir)responsible behaviour and psychological well-being in tourism experiences. Future research should consider the intricate connections between tourists' sustainability-related decisions and psychological well-being as central to the developing sustainable tourism research agendas.

KEYWORDS: sustainability; well-being; eudaimonic; responsible; tourist; behaviour

Introduction

Well-being and sustainability are inherently interconnected concepts as prior empirical work denotes that environment and society are central to physical, psychological and social well-being (Ronen & Kerret, 2020). Human-induced climate change, for instance, presents an urgent threat to the well-being of both current and future generations, with empirical studies documenting youth are particularly susceptible, citing immediate and long-lasting effects on physical and psychological well-being (Sanson et al., 2019; Watts et al., 2018). Paradoxically, contemporary work illustrates the very pursuit of human well-being entails social and environmental exploitation through various consumption practices (O'Mahony, 2022),

including within the tourism sector. This study critically examines how responsible behaviour in tourism affects tourists' well-being.

Tourism has been viewed as an exemplar of both sustainable and unsustainable consumption, with emergent research recognising tourism's potential to enhance an individual's short-term and long-term psychological well-being (Pocinho et al., 2022; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). The focus on the role of sustainable behaviour in impacting well-being in travel processes has been chosen, as it has been relatively underexplored compared to other tourist experiences and behaviours, and understanding this relationship can provide valuable insights for promoting responsible tourism practices. Unsustainable consumption and production practices represent a significant barrier to sustainable development (UNWTO, 2019). With the growing recognition of tourism's impact on the environment and the potential for sustainable behaviour to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Moyle et al., 2022; Scheyvens & Cheer, 2022), it is essential to understand how responsible behaviour affects tourists' well-being. This study connects the promotion of well-being (SDG3) with sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG12). SDG12 is one of the three Goals which includes a specific target related to the tourism sector – a sector whose competitiveness depends on the quality of the environment in which it functions.

Embedded within, active communication persuades tourists that highly valued goals such as well-being and self-realisation are achieved through responsible behaviours rather than the sole pursuit of hedonic pleasure (Warren et al., 2017). The PERMA framework (Seligman, 2012) identifies five essential elements that contribute to human well-being: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement, providing a holistic understanding of the factors that lead to a fulfilling life. Captured narratives are utilised as a tool to inform behaviour change designed to encourage sustainable travel (Peeters et al., 2019; Reisch, 2001), with respect to increasing awareness of issues such as the environmental effects of flying, manifested in eco-anxiety and individuals' psychological defences (Mkono, 2020; Usher et al., 2019). Although policy reform and regulation are crucial, sustainable outcomes hinge on individuals' responsible behaviour (Weiler et al., 2017). Yet, existing studies have only tangentially explored its connection with psychological well-being, with limited empirical assessment designed to elucidate the intricacies of the relationship (e.g., Corral-Verdugo, 2012; Mock et al., 2019).

Consequently, this study explores the relationship between responsible behaviour and tourist well-being, providing rich and in-depth insights designed to generate theory for testing and validation in empirical research. This paper focuses on individual tourists as the catalysts of change, depicting the integral role of tourist decision making in sustainable tourism (Moyle et al., 2013). Recent discourse has demonstrated an 'awareness' of the negative impacts of tourism amongst tourists (e.g., Gao et al., 2017; Eichelberger et al., 2021). While the burden of guilt experienced by some tourists may jeopardise their psychological well-being, there is little evidence that this awareness has been translated into responsible travel behaviour (e.g., Chafe & Honey, 2005; Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Within this research, responsible behaviour is understood as a set of tourist actions aimed at conserving the integrity of the socio-physical resources of the destinations they visit (Corral-Verdugo et al., 2010). Conversely, irresponsible behaviour is defined as choices where tourists either inadvertently or intentionally disregard the potential negative impacts their actions might have on the destination's environment, cultural integrity, or economy. This paper illuminates the interplay between

sustainable behaviour and well-being in tourism, laying the foundation for future research and policy interventions for responsible tourism and enhanced tourist well-being.

Literature Review

Factors influencing tourist psychological well-being

Recently, the study of well-being has garnered significant scholarly attention in tourism (Filep & Laing, 2019). Human well-being can be broadly understood in terms of the two inter-related yet distinct approaches of hedonia and eudaimonia (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 2007). Hedonic well-being conceptualises pleasure-seeking as the essential constituent of human well-being, defining it subjectively. Eudaimonic well-being, on the other hand, defines well-being in more objective terms, referring to striving toward human excellence through realizing one's true potentials that guide one toward flourishing (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Unlike the ephemeral state of hedonia, eudaimonia can be construed as sustainable well-being.

Both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are necessary for optimal human functioning and explain psychological well-being: while the former's (hedonic) role is to assist the individual through homeostasis in safe, familiar, and trouble-free situations, the latter (eudaimonic) functions in situations where one faces challenging tasks and change is necessary and assists the individual to attach meanings to the situation (Vittersø & Dahl, 2013). Dealing with a multifaceted and complex issue such as sustainability entails a profound mental effort since, for instance, it may require one to change their consumption behaviour to live more sustainably. In tourism, studies postulate tourist experiences have the potential to transcend usual pleasure-related tourism objectives such as relaxation and assist the individual in their self-development and personal growth by exposing individuals to new perspectives, challenging their assumptions, and providing opportunities for learning and self-discovery (Matteucci & Filep, 2017; Rahmani et al., 2018). Thus, an integrated view of psychological well-being, including hedonic and eudaimonic views of well-being, is critical for developing a nuanced understanding of the interconnection with sustainability.

Theoretical models such as the bottom-up spill over model and PERMA (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement) model stand out in contemporary work which seeks to apply theory to the study of tourists' psychological well-being (Neal et al., 1999; Seligman, 2012). These models integrate hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being. The PERMA conceptualisation arguably includes more relevant theoretical constructs, providing a comprehensive explanation of well-being in relation to tourist experiences than purely hedonistic theories and the bottom-up spillover model (Kler & Tribe, 2012). Although the empirical research integrating or applying PERMA is still developing in tourism (Zhang & Xiao, 2023), researchers suggest that using this framework offers a way forward to explicitly examine lasting aspects of well-being rather than mere hedonic pursuits (Pourfakhimi et al., 2021).

Sustainable behaviour and tourist psychological well-being

Recent scientific research underscores human actions as the primary cause of climate change (IPCC, 2022; Lynas et al., 2021), as well as other environmental and social issues such as deforestation, overpopulation, and ozone depletion. As a discipline that works toward human

well-being, psychology has the potential to lead individuals toward a fundamental shift in values and behaviours, moving away from the humans-first, Earth-second approach to complex environmental problems (Wielkiewicz, 2015; Wolske & Stern, 2018).

A sustainable behaviour pattern emphasizes protecting physical and social environments. This encompasses resource preservation, consumption reduction, community involvement, and addressing social inequalities (Bonnes & Bonaiuto, 2002; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Meaningful engagement in responsible tourist behaviour, which could transcend short-term pleasure seeking by an active concern for long-term social, cultural, and environmental benefits, has the potential to contribute to tourists' striving toward greater eudaimonic goals. In this context, sustainable behaviour can be seen as a way of achieving both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, by promoting long-term satisfaction and personal growth. Thus, theorizing sustainable behaviour as a noteworthy factor related to tourist psychological well-being is essential.

Previous studies on pro-sociality and well-being suggest that responsible behaviour is inherently a type of positive behaviour in its nature (Aknin et al., 2012; Ronen & Kerret, 2020). From a positive psychology perspective, responsible behaviour involves engaging in actions that promote positive outcomes for oneself, for others, and for the natural environment, while also fulfilling basic human needs and aspirations. This study is guided by an emphasis on human well-being and flourishing, as opposed to a conventional focus on mental illness (Seligman et al., 2005), as it pertains to the nature of responsible behaviour. According to this perspective, tourist well-being is a psychological state in which the tourist experiences positive emotions, is engaged in the tourist activities and/or derives a sense of meaning from the overall tourist experience (Filep, 2014; Filep & Deery, 2010, p. 407; Vada et al., 2020). Research in this area is vital for the success of destinations, with a focus on sustainability and the well-being of tourists, host communities, and the overall destination experience in the COVID-19 era and beyond (Hartwell et al., 2018; Zutshi et al., 2022).

A negative discourse is prevalent in the psychology of sustainability leading to recent calls to apply more positive psychology approaches (Hunecke, 2022). Individuals often associate negative emotions, such as fear of failure, guilt, and shame, with the practice of responsible behaviour due to the perceived ineffectiveness of their efforts (Kruse, 2011; Panu, 2020). However, it is suggested that these very negative emotions, if managed in the right way, can instigate responsible behaviours (Hurst & Sintov, 2022). Conversely, irresponsible behaviour presents a distinct aspect that shows different impacts on well-being. As such, exploring the underlying reasons behind tourists' irresponsible sustainability-related decisions and their influence on psychological well-being can help elucidate the complexities of these relationships.

Few studies currently link responsible behaviour to individual well-being. Other than studies that conceptualise a synergy between sustainability and well-being research (e.g., Barrington-Leigh, 2016; Cook, 2019; Kjell, 2011), the few empirical studies that indicate a relationship between sustainability and well-being have been conducted at a macro level (e.g., Veenhoven, 2004). Such studies connect these phenomena in areas other than tourism (Hall et al., 2015; Jacob et al., 2008; Venhoeven et al., 2020). In tourism research, it is further suggested that most of the studies that investigate either the quality of life or the impacts of tourism take the perspective of destination residents and not the individual tourist (Nopiyani & Wirawan, 2021; Hadinejad et al., 2019; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016).

The literature, therefore, suggests that although social scientists have thoroughly examined both sustainability and well-being issues, there is little identification of a clear link between responsible behaviour and a tourists' psychological well-being. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on this specific, underexplored intersection. This study maintains that the relationship between responsible behaviour and psychological well-being merits further exploration as it may promote sustainability through the argument that such behaviour may be inherently fulfilling for the individual. Consequently, this study set out to empirically explore the relationship between engaging in (ir)responsible tourist behaviours and tourists' sense of psychological well-being. To this end, this empirical study was guided by three specific research objectives:

RO1: To explore the relationship between tourists' responsible sustainability-related decisions and their psychological well-being;

RO2: To investigate the underlying reasons behind tourists' irresponsible sustainability-related decisions and its influence on psychological well-being; and

RO3: To elucidate the ways in which tourists employ coping mechanisms to maintain psychological well-being whilst engaging in irresponsible tourism behaviours.

Methodology and Methods

The research is grounded in the constructivist paradigm which seeks to understand a socially constructed phenomenon determined by internal states and external forces (Greene, 2006). In line with this paradigm, a qualitative approach was selected to explore this emergent phenomenon for its ability to provide depth and richness of data through the interpretation of the socially constructed perceptions of tourists. Data were solicited utilising in-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews to elicit participants' experiences and understand perceptions of sustainable tourism behaviour and subsequent implications for well-being, particularly in the context of international tourism experiences. Face-to-face interviews were chosen over group interviewing methods such as focus groups to minimize the influence of group norms on individual perspectives (Seidman, 2006). As it was essential for the interviewees to feel comfortable to have a meaningful exchange, participants were asked to choose a place convenient for them, which was often a café or their workplace. The date and time of the interviews were also chosen by participants.

The research sample included tourists aged 18+ with a recent international tourism holiday experience to New Zealand due to relatively high awareness of sustainability among the constituent public (BetterFutures, 2019). One specific focus of the study was on air travel emissions, for which New Zealand is ideal since, most tourists rely on air travel for their international travels from New Zealand (New Zealand Government, 2016). Participants were recruited using a snowballing sampling technique whereby respondents following the interview were then asked to nominate other potential participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. The sampling process aimed to access a relatively equal gender and cultural distribution across a broad age and education range. Interviews were audio-recorded to enable the interviewer to explore and clarify inconsistencies within respondents' accounts (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 331). An international tourism experience was considered preferable to explore the subject due to challenges in terms of being responsible while travelling in an unfamiliar setting hence providing more avenues for relevant discussions. Figure 1 illustrates the travel itineraries of the research participants. In the pilot interviews, the role-playing

interviewees found the term “sustainable behaviour” to be vague. Therefore, the term “responsible behaviour” was used in subsequent interviews to describe a set of actions aimed at preserving the integrity of socio-physical resources in tourism experiences.

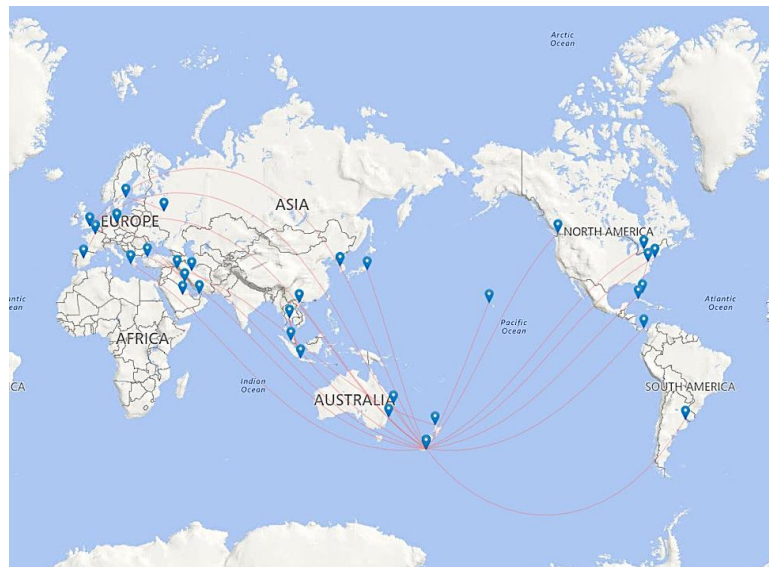


Figure 1: The travel itineraries of the research participants

Research objectives informed the interview questions, starting with rapport-building background and demographic queries (Gibson & Brown, 2009). To address the three focal areas of the research, the interviews proceeded by asking probing questions to understand how participants’ travel decisions, particularly decisions regarding such issues as protecting the environment and respecting the traditions at the destination, relate to their well-being. Other than these, probing questions sought clarification of the answers were asked, eliciting deeper information into the role of responsible and irresponsible behaviour, perceptions of implications for sustainability and subsequent impacts on well-being. The interview guide focused on attitude and behaviour to seek unique individual insights (Forlizzi & Ford, 2000). Each interview took, on average, one hour to complete.

After 26 interviews which critically assessed the effects of responsible and irresponsible behaviour on well-being, the point of saturation or literal replication emerged, with interviews ceasing at 30. During the interview process, a reflective journal consisting of key points of each interview was created, which led to the formation of initial ‘open codes’ (Williams & Moser, 2019). Following this, regular discussions on the emergent themes derived from the open codes, tracking evidence for saturation, eliciting axial codes. To further confirm emergent themes, another four interviews were conducted in which the similar themes were raised. Once evidence for saturation was collectively confirmed, the interview programme ceased accordingly. At this point, the process of generating selective codes was started to capture the essence of interviews according to the objectives of the study.

To provide further context on the participants, demographic details were collected. Thirty interview participants (Table 1) of the study included eighteen females (60%) and twelve

males (40%) across a broad education and age range from different cultural groups, with sixteen (53%) belonging to Western and fourteen (47%) to non-Western societies. Empirical research in sustainability and well-being has been typically based on analyses of individuals in Western societies (Henrich et al., 2010). Table 1 presents a brief overview of respondents, with pseudonyms utilised to protect the anonymity of participants.

Table 1: Profile of participants

ID	Pseudonym	Sex	Age group	Nationality	Highest qualification
01	Akash	M	35-44	Bangladeshi	Masters
02	Abid	M	25-34	Pakistani	Masters
03	Elmira	F	25-34	Iranian	High school
04	Farnaz	F	35-44	Iranian	Masters
05	Huang	M	25-34	Chinese	High school
06	Ibrahim	M	35-44	Maldivian	Masters
07	Indah	F	35-44	Indonesian	Masters
08	Margarita	F	18-24	Russian	High school
09	Nikita	F	35-44	Russian	Masters
10	Aryan	M	25-34	Iranian	Masters
11	Salma	F	18-24	Palestinian	Bachelors
12	Taehyun	M	18-24	South Korean	High school
13	Thien	M	18-24	Vietnamese	High school
14	Yukina	F	18-24	Japanese	High school
15	Beatrice	F	18-24	New Zealander	Bachelors
16	Benjamin	M	18-24	New Zealander	Undergraduate
17	Catherina	F	25-34	American	PhD
18	Klara	F	45-54	German	Masters
19	Charlotte	F	35-44	Australian	Bachelors
20	Daniel	M	65+	New Zealander	PhD
21	Ethan	M	65+	Australian	Bachelors
22	Elliot	M	35-44	British	Bachelors
23	George	M	45-54	New Zealander	Masters
24	Hildegard	F	25-34	German	Bachelors
25	Jessica	F	18-24	American	Bachelors
26	Judy	F	55-64	New Zealander	Bachelors
27	Lucy	F	25-34	New Zealander	Masters
28	Matilda	F	45-54	British	PhD
29	Sophie	F	45-54	New Zealander	Bachelors

ID	Pseudonym	Sex	Age group	Nationality	Highest qualification
30	Sandra	F	35-44	German	Masters

To enhance the credibility of the findings, an audit trail was adopted (Schwandt, 2007). An audit trail is a systematically maintained record of the research process and the theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices made by the researcher, encompassing all aspects of the project, including data collection and interview analysis. The audit trail was developed by the researchers and was regularly cross-checked for accuracy by different coders to further bolster the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach complements the researchers' prolonged engagement with the research programme, the established trusting relationship with research participants and the conscious effort not to reflect their own prejudices during the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006)'s six-phase thematic analysis guided this data-driven exploratory study, including data familiarisation, code generation, theme identification, review, definition, naming, and reporting.

Results

Narratives collected on the influence of tourists' responsible behaviour on well-being led to the emergence of five overarching themes, namely positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and achievement. The themes converged with the PERMA model, revealing insights into how responsible behaviours influence various dimensions of psychological well-being. Each theme represents an aspect of the model, further underscoring its relevance in the tourism context based on participants' experiences and narratives.

The narratives on tourists' irresponsible behaviour generated three overarching themes, lack of social recognition, temporary shift of environmental values and the lack of knowledge and attachment to the destination.

Additionally, the narratives illuminated the various coping mechanisms employed by tourists to reconcile their psychological well-being with irresponsible tourism behaviours.

Tourists' responsible behaviour

Positive emotions

The narratives suggested that positive emotions perceived from responsible tourism experiences ranged from an ephemeral sense of feeling good in the moment to a longer-term sense of fulfilment. For example, the simple act of 'when I pick up rubbish, I feel really good' (Sandra, No.30) in comparison to, 'if I pick up rubbish, it does not make me happy directly, but unconsciously I feel I am contributing towards to the society and when it happens more, it makes me feel good' (Thien, No.13). There was also a feeling of happiness about behaving positively towards to the environment, feeling 'happy that I was able to contribute to something.... I respected the environment and have never behaved in such a way that is damaging to the environment' (Akash, No.1) and 'it was a good feeling due to our car using low carbon emissions and very low noise (Abid, No.2). For Aryan (No.10), who explained his "caring for resources" such as energy and water in his travel to Europe, responsible behaviour was translated into a long-term positive feeling because he repeated this behaviour over time. Similarly, when remembering buying handmade bags from a Thai minority ethnic group and in

this way supporting the local economy but also enabling the opportunity to pass the craft down to next-generation, Huang (No.5) explained that when you feel you are repeating your responsible behaviour, it is 'no longer only a short-term positive feeling but a sense of fulfilment'.

Indirectly, it was also found that responsible tourism behaviour acted as a buffer against negative emotions since tourists noted that such behaviours may lead to avoiding negative self-appraisals. For Taehyun (No.12), avoiding resentment of himself due to irresponsible tourism behaviour is a motivation to act responsibly in his travels. Offering the personal example of carving your name into a monument, he noted that "disrespectful behaviour could remain in the back of his mind for a long time".

Engagement through education

The narratives highlighted engagement, characterized by mindfulness and heightened competence, as one of the psychological outcomes when participants expressed passion for responsible tourism actions, such as learning and educating others to be responsible tourists. George (No.23), a participant who identifies himself as an outgoing person, explains that for him "it is a passion to learn and educate others, who may not be the most experienced tourists, about how to do camping responsibly". Like George, Ibrahim (No.6) and Daniel (No.20) also noted that they "feel good when learning and teaching their children to travel responsibly".

Positive relationships

The narratives also showed that responsible tourism could positively affect human interactions with people, including family, friends, and local people. Remembering a particular instance in which he "helped a disabled person during an entire tour while travelling in the US", Taehyun (No.12) thinks of the event as a turning point in improving his relationship with his father as his father still continually repeats his approval of his son's responsible behaviour, which in turn reinforces his sense of well-being. Conversely, talking about protecting the environment when travelling, Ibrahim (No.6) perceives his son replicating responsible behaviour and explaining it to others, "bringing a sense of pride for his son and a reflection of himself as a father".

Almost all participants identified themselves as responsible individuals in their daily lives. Of interest were some idiosyncratic accounts of those participants who reported being extra responsible in their tourism experiences since they perceived themselves as representatives of their home country and were inclined to contribute overcoming negative stereotypes about their countries (e.g., regarding American tourists). Abid (No.2), for instance, maintained that while at home his decisions are often automatic when he visits a foreign country, he has to be extra conscious as he perceives himself as a "spokesperson" for not only his country but also his "faith and ethnicity". Similarly, Jessica (No.25) assumes that "when travelling internationally, it is a duty to behave in such a way to change local's judgement about my people". In this sense, tourists aim to overcome being stereotyped by their host and they want to maintain positive relationships with their peers. They would modify their behaviour to present the best version of themselves due to a feeling that their behaviour is observed by their hosts as a basis to form a judgement of the tourist's group of people. This aspect of tourists' behaviour, aimed at overcoming stereotypes and maintaining positive relationships, directly contributes to their psychological well-being.

Meaning and achievement

When introspecting about responsible actions in their tourism experiences, respondents also pointed to a sense of meaningfulness and accomplishment, mainly because engaging in responsible behaviour when travelling was perceived as more challenging than their home environment. Abid (No.2), for instance, recalled his camping experience in Scotland and England, which, as he described it, was a “responsible tour” in which he and his friends covered more than 300km with a conscious awareness not to ruin the environment. “At the beginning of our trip, there were times that we were not so happy about it even though we were doing something good, but it was, you know, taking a lot of effort”. In his mind being responsible while travelling “is not something that happens automatically and you just can’t make it a part of your life and say not even bothered about it, you get bothered”. For Abid, however, the sense of meaningfulness he feels, as a result, makes the reward worth the effort. In addition, another indirect factor of achievement was related to a sense of integrity when participants perceived their behaviour as aligned to their sustainability-related values. Through the example of littering, a common tourism impact in some destinations, Salma (No.11) and Margarita (No.8) explained that “it was important to feel true to themselves by not littering and by picking up rubbish”. Thus, tourists’ responsible behaviour could lead to positive psychological outcomes in terms of hedonic and deeper eudaimonic well-being.

Tourists’ irresponsible behaviour

When explaining their irresponsible behaviours during tourism experiences, respondents identified a combination of external barriers and internal conflicts. While there were evident external challenges, such as unavailability of sustainable alternatives (e.g., recycling facilities), some narratives also shed light on internal conflicts. These conflicts were rooted in the juxtaposition of personal sustainability values against the allure of convenience, anonymity, and sometimes the sheer thrill of novelty while traveling.

Lack of social recognition

Interestingly, some respondents indicated that a lack of social incentives inhibits their willingness to behave responsibly during their travels. Speaking about this issue, Matilda (No.28) suggested that in her travel experience in Panama, “there was no positive feedback for responsible behaviour”, whereas, in the country of her residence, there is so much support around her to do things sustainably. She illustrated that whilst at home, she has many friends interested in sustainability that if, for instance, she tells them about a new type of composting, “they will be excited and start conversations around it”, however, in many countries she visited, there seemed to be a lack of interest. Therefore, not receiving positive feedback made those who want to be sustainable may feel isolated in such destinations. This lack of social recognition acts as an underlying factor for tourists’ irresponsible sustainability-related decisions, potentially negatively affecting their psychological well-being.

Temporary shift of environmental values

A recurring narrative was that the way respondents behave when travelling is noticeably different from how they behave at home. Charlotte (No.19) recalled her tourism experience in Bali. Rather than being worried about the waste issue there, she decided “putting the blinkers on” is an easier mindset to adopt to enjoy her holiday. Another participant (Elliot, No.22),

who identified himself as an environmentally conscious person in his life, considered anonymity as a critical factor, which made his irresponsible behaviour justifiable: “it’s a different country, so it’s ok to do it, nobody knows me”. It seems that, as soon as the ‘individual’ transforms into the ‘tourist’ that could anonymously visit a destination, a sense of freedom is activated. For example, Harry (No.5) said “when I left the air-conditioning on, I chose my comfort over my responsibilities. I think it was like a necessary evil, so I wasn’t proud of it, but I still did it”.

Lack of resources and attachment to the destination

Some interviewees mentioned that insufficient information about the destination contributed to irresponsible behaviour whilst on holiday. For Sandra (No.30), “if I stay in a hotel or even somewhere that I can cook myself, it would be very difficult for me to recycle or figure out how to recycle, but when I am at home, I have more time and familiar with everything so I care more”. Some participants also mentioned a trophy tourism mindset that prioritises visiting more destinations or attractions over quality tourism experiences as a cause for engaging in irresponsible tourism behaviour since adopting such a mentality also places sustainability as a tangential concern. Collectively, due to these external and internal barriers, tourists could perceive themselves as being locked in with little agency to be responsible in their tourism experience.

As a result of performing irresponsible tourism behaviour, tourists experienced a range of self-conscious short- and longer-term negative emotions, including guilt, shame, embarrassment, and resentment. A sense of guilt was the most salient label participants used when describing their self-conscious negative affect. Sophie (No.29) felt guilty over her use of plastic bags in her travel to Greece. While if it was inevitable, it could be easier to deal with, the guilt was intensified in her mind, as it was avoidable through a bit of planning. Another aspect suggested by the participants is that, in some cases, irresponsible behaviour in tourism “does not elicit an immediate sense of guilt – it only comes into effect in the post-trip reflection phase, and in such cases, the guilt may be long lasting”. The common feature among these emotions was a negative self-evaluation when participants reflected upon their behaviour in relation to a set of rules or social norms that determine if the actions of the self are right or wrong.

Coping mechanisms

Analysis revealed tourists engaged in coping mechanisms to justify behaviour that was perceived as not sustainable, which emerged in great depth with respect to air travel. Narratives demonstrated that carbon offsetting seemed to be a built-in compensatory strategy allowing individuals to appease the guilt of the environmental consequences and convince them that there is no need for them to change their air travel behaviour, as long as they pay for the impacts. One of the defence mechanisms most interviewees employed to avoid or minimise their negative emotions was to depreciate the consequences of their flight behaviour. Faced with the personal emissions of her flight from New Zealand to the United Kingdom, Judy (No.26) resorted to this mechanism by saying, “it’s shocking, but then there is this part of me that is saying I have done it only once, that’s not an excuse, is it?”

Most respondents often postponed the responsibility to sometime in the future, either further or closer, when they are back home where, in their mind, they can compensate for their emissions by behaving in an environmentally friendly manner. Beatrice (No.15) talked about a

“running tally” in her head about all the flights she has taken within the last years and her wish to reduce her footprint as she gets older and have more ability to make better choices: “it’s like a conundrum that I really have no good defence for, apart from I’ll do better one day”. Voluntary carbon offsetting schemes also paved the way for the emergence of another compensation fallacy. For instance, Charlotte (No.19) paid for carbon offsetting in her travel from New Zealand-USA trip and admitted that it is to make her feel better because “at the end of the day I want to see the world”. However, some believed that carbon offsetting is, at best, a short-term solution to a fundamental problem. Beatrice (No.15) pictured carbon offsetting programmes as “the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff” as it does not address the source of the problem and only provides a quick fix as a solution.

Distancing oneself from responsibility was also a strategy to dissolve their dissonance since some respondents believed that the onus of responsibility is on another party and not tourists themselves. Sophie (No.29) believed that the impact of people flying for their holiday could be lessened if “others” fly less when they do not need to”. Believing in technological know-how to solve the environmental problems related to air travel emissions was also brought up by the respondents aiding them to remain in a state of denial and enabling them to rationalise their behaviour in their minds. Salma (No.11) and Judy (No.26, New Zealander) were among such participants as they argued that “when we can get electric planes in the future, all these worries will be resolved”. Taehyun (No.12) and Lucy (No.27) too believed that “we have to wait for green technologies to catch up to reduce carbon emissions”.

Of interest were participants who made a conscious decision to stop flying to be true to their sustainability values and instead took freighter ships for their international tourism. For Matilda (No.28), “concern about climate change was a big motivation to take a freighter”. These participants, who had options (time and money) for congruent behaviour available to them, assessed their decision positively regarding their psychological well-being as it enabled them to reaffirm their identity as environmentally conscious individuals.

Discussion

This study explored the influence of tourists’ responsible and irresponsible sustainability-related behaviour on their psychological well-being. The core findings highlight that responsible tourism behaviours are closely linked with both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being dimensions, as conceptualised in the PERMA model. The results provide a fresh perspective on how engaging in responsible tourism aligns with elements such as positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Seligman, 2012). While earlier research, like those by Vada et al. (2022) and Zhou et al. (2021), advanced the understanding of the PERMA model, this study specifically bridges the gap by focusing on the interrelation of tourist behaviour with sustainability decisions.

Responsible tourism behaviour indirectly contributed to improved psychological well-being by preventing negative self-appraisals and leading to a heightened sense of integrity when tourists’ behaviours match their sustainability values. This buffering effect against negative emotions can be partially explained by the moral compensation process, where individuals engage in responsible behaviour to counteract or alleviate potential negative emotions associated with their previous irresponsible actions or to maintain a positive moral self-image (Jordan et al., 2011).

Moreover, in some instances responsible tourism behaviour was found to lead to a heightened sense of integrity. By acting in accordance with authentic sustainability values, tourists can experience a sense of integrity and enhanced psychological well-being, as actions are consistent with beliefs and conceptions of the authentic self (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). This alignment between values and actions has the potential to play a vital role in promoting tourists' psychological well-being in the context of responsible tourism.

On the other hand, tourists who engage in irresponsible tourist behaviour due to a set of external barriers (e.g., lack of sustainable alternatives) and internal conflicts (e.g., viewing sustainability as a secondary priority) may experience self-conscious negative self-appraisals. In such cases, a sense of guilt was the most salient label tourists used when describing their self-conscious negative affect. Previous studies have explored guilt in tourism such as anticipatory guilt about cannabis consumption on tourists' behavioural intentions (Wen & Qi, 2020) and factors that influence consumer financial guilt in hospitality (Hanks & Mattila, 2014). There are limited studies, however, which explore guilt in relation to sustainability-related decisions in tourism experiences.

The findings demonstrate tourists employ a range of coping mechanisms to maintain their sense of psychological well-being when engaging in conduct that contradicts their values. The strategies included depreciating and postponing the responsibility, denying personal responsibility, and believing in technological fixes. Avoidance strategies in response to an internal discrepancy, however, could only be temporarily positive in maintaining psychological well-being. In the long run, denial strategies are often detrimental as they leave the underlying causes unaddressed and attach little importance to the need for positive behavioural change (Baumeister et al., 1998). Previous studies have explored tourists' coping strategies in leisure travel, for example Zhu et al. (2020) found that coping strategies included problem-focused coping such as posting on social media, talking with others and taking a break or emotion-focused coping such as emotional regulation or thinking differently. Likewise, Schuster et al. (2006) found that emotion-focused coping was employed by tourists to maintain a state of cognitive consistency and rationalise situations that are stressful.

Figure 2 is termed the 'Triple Helix Model' and provides a visual representation between the intersection of tourism well-being and the responsible behaviour of tourists.

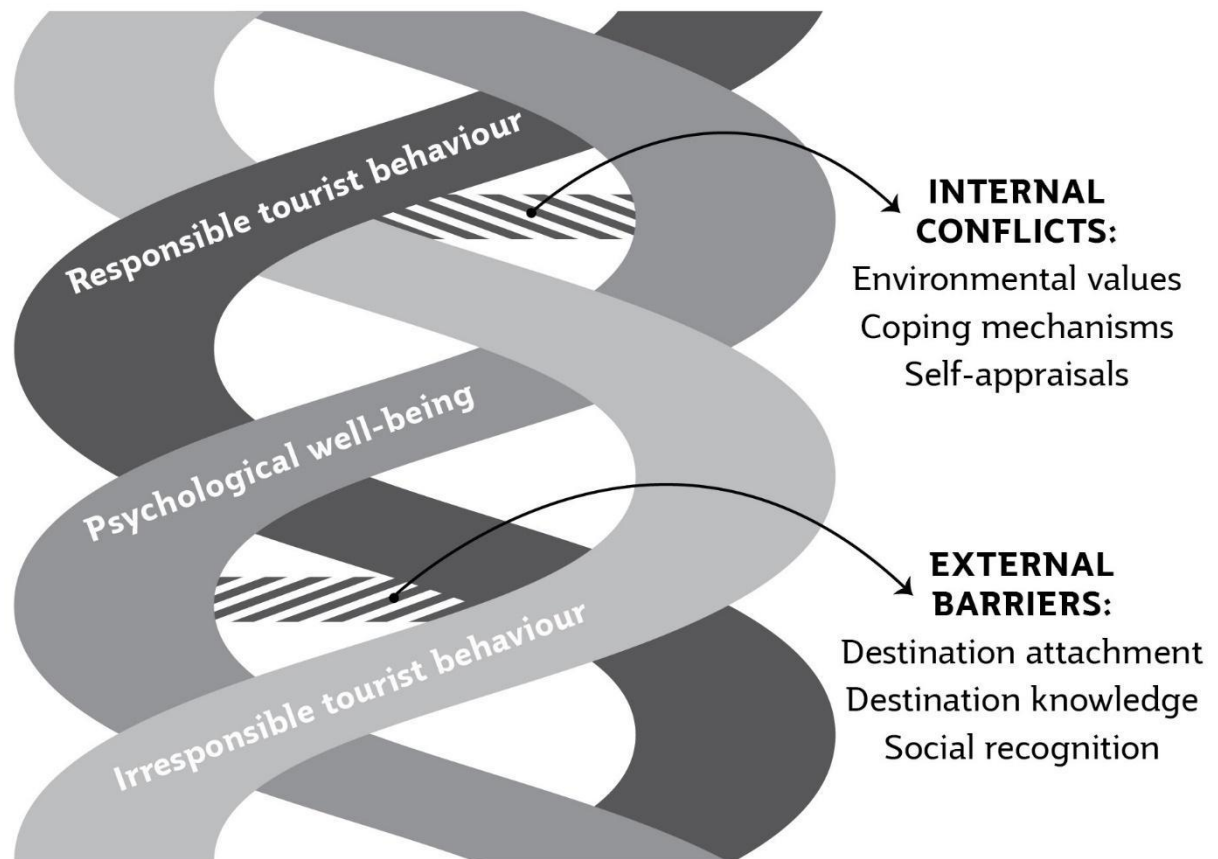


Figure 2: The Triple Helix Model of Responsible Tourist Behaviour and Tourist Well-being

The Triple Helix Model represents a model of sustainability and tourist well-being and presents a set of interactions between tourism experiences and sustainability-related decisions, tourists' responsible and irresponsible behaviours and psychological well-being. Essentially, tourists who make responsible sustainability-related decisions experience psychological well-being through hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions which are associated with positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement, and integrity. On the other hand, tourists who make irresponsible sustainability-related decisions as a result of external barriers and internal conflicts experience feelings of guilt and therefore employ a range of coping mechanisms to maintain their psychological well-being whilst engaging in behaviours that contradicts their personal values. Congruent with the findings of Gössling and Buckley (2016), this study complements the findings of existing discourse which advocates a transition to sustainable tourism requires fundamental changes to tourists' behaviour, and facilitating those changes is an essential task for researchers in both fields of psychology and tourism. As suggested by Weiler et al. (2018), psychology-informed research in tourism studies increasingly engages with eudaimonic concepts such as personal development. Findings of this study contribute to emergent discourse on the evolution of sustainability and well-being research by linking concepts from positive psychology to tourist behaviour studies. Subsequently, this study contributes to the reconceptualization of well-being in tourism away from the mere pursuit of happiness and pleasure and towards personal and collective well-being via in-depth articulation of eudaimonic dimensions in the Triple Helix Model. Building

on contributions of De Young (2000) and De Dominicis et al. (2017), the findings stipulate that a psychological well-being perspective of responsible tourism behaviour appeals to individuals' non-moral and self-interest considerations as well as their moral and altruistic concerns for the social and environmental problems we face.

Understanding the potential effect of sustainable behaviour on well-being is crucial to tourism literature as it reveals how responsible actions contribute to tourists' psychological well-being, which, in turn, could encourage further adoption of sustainable practices. Additionally, it highlights the importance of incorporating psychological aspects in sustainability research, offering insights for designing policies and positive messaging strategies that emphasize intrinsic motivators and self-enhancing reasons to foster responsible behaviour. This knowledge can help achieve a more sustainable and well-being-oriented tourism, directly linking to the Sustainable Development Goals.

This study explicitly responds to Sirgy and Uysal's (2016) call for developing a eudaimonic research agenda in tourism studies. Since tourism is an integral element in people's lives, it is expected that tourism research moves beyond economic focus to include the non-economic value of tourism, such as the well-being of participants at different levels of units of analysis. There are still many opportunities to investigate the connections between eudaimonia and tourism activities with different objectives and units of analysis. The present study found that responsible behaviour in tourism experiences can be a powerful vehicle for generating psychological outcomes such as a sense of engagement, meaning, and accomplishment, thereby contributing to eudaimonic well-being outcomes for tourists.

This study further echoes Pollock's (2015, p. 6) insight that "changing tourism must start on the inside of each of us as we upgrade our view of reality to be more in keeping with what both our hearts and the findings of modern science tell us". Coupled with supply-side measures, echoing the findings of Hardeman et al. (2017), tourists must be encouraged to behave in a more responsible way to reduce the negative impact of the global tourism sector. By incorporating psychological aspects in terms of well-being into sustainability research, the study informs policymaking to enhance individual and collective well-being, thereby functioning as a potential complement to other greening instruments such as green technologies. A more positive messaging strategy highlighting intrinsic motivators and self-enhancing reasons could increase tourists' motivation to engage in responsible behaviour in their tourism experiences and be less likely to elicit defensive responses (De Dominicis et al., 2017).

Tourism providers can leverage these findings to design experiences emphasizing responsible behaviour and its psychological well-being benefits. By showcasing the dual advantages of sustainable tourism—individual fulfillment and broader impacts—marketing campaigns can appeal to a diverse tourist base. This insight not only has practical implications for the tourism sector but also aligns with the Agenda for Sustainable Development, linking SDG3's focus on well-being and SDG12's emphasis on responsible consumption. The intertwining of well-being and sustainability should be a focal point as the sector evolves towards a more comprehensive positive agenda (Dwyer, 2022).

Conclusion

This study contributes to the conceptual development of the nexus between sustainability and well-being research through an in-depth empirical exploration of the impacts of tourists' sustainability-related decisions on their psychological well-being. Subsequently, a core theoretical contribution of this study is derived from the in-depth critical analysis of the interface between the two constructs from the perspectives of the individual tourist. Guided by the research objectives, responsible and irresponsible sustainability-related tourist behaviours, as perceived by tourists themselves, were explored in relation to their respective psychological well-being outcomes. A personal psychological well-being view of responsible tourism behaviour not only appeals to moral and altruistic concerns for social and environmental issues but also to the non-moral and self-interest concerns of individuals.

Future scholarship should test the robustness and extend the generalisability of the findings by quantitatively investigating the relationships between responsible tourist behaviours and psychological well-being by drawing from the PERMA Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016), or the DREAMA well-being model (Filep et al., 2022). Additionally, research could explore themes across different demographic groups, potentially uncovering nuanced differences in responsible and irresponsible sustainability-related behaviours based on factors such as age, gender, cultural background, and economic status. Further examining how values and social norms impact responsible tourist behaviour could complement this study.

To limit various issues associated with using self-reports (e.g., social desirability bias), a longitudinal study could be conducted that collects the data using in-situ observations of tourist behaviours during their lived tourism experiences, followed by interviews at fixed time intervals. This strategy would open further targeted investigation into whether the psychological well-being outcomes of responsible tourism behaviours change over time.

Findings of the study are relevant for the sector in generating well-being and sustainability in tourism with a more responsible approach and for tourists to recalibrate their priorities and social values in relation to their travel behaviours in the COVID-19 era and beyond. This is a transformative moment to re-define tourism and re-negotiate a balance between immediate recovery, long-term sustainability and psychological well-being (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Higham, 2020). A shift to regenerative systems that addresses not only the value tourism generates but also the values that underpin it, including nonhuman values, may prove to be a useful way forward in driving the vision for a responsible future for tourism (Becken & Kaur, 2021).

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