

To cite this article: Li, J., Nguyen, T.H.H., Morrison, A.M. and Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. (2022), “A measurement framework for socially sustainable tourist behaviour”, *Journal of Responsible Tourism Management*,

A measurement framework for socially sustainable tourist behaviour

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A measurement framework for socially sustainable tourist behaviour

Manuscript type: Conceptual research article

ABSTRACT

This conceptual research article considers the concept of socially sustainable tourist behaviour. It explains the critical role of this behaviour in two parts (themes and behaviours), highlighting the lack of adequate research to date on this concept and the role of the social dimensions in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The dimensions from previous works (academic and non-academic) attempting to articulate sustainable tourist behaviour from a social perspective are summarised and classified. A measurement framework of 19 dimensions of socially sustainable tourist behaviour is proposed. It is argued that the extant literature fails to comprehensively conceptualise and measure socially sustainable tourist behaviour, and that a new framework with an associated measurement scale is needed.

KEYWORDS

Dimensions; ethical tourism; measurement framework; responsible tourism; socially sustainable tourist behaviour; Sustainable Development Goals; sustainable tourism

INTRODUCTION

A variety of alternative labels have been used for “sustainable tourists” (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2016) and “sustainable tourist behaviour”. The interpretations of sustainable tourism and sustainable tourist behaviour are clouded by the different forms of tourism and the great diversity of destinations, resulting in multiple dimensions of emphasis and demand characterization for sustainable development (Stanford, 2008). Among the terms that have been used in studies, Dolnicar (2006) judged that “sustainable” was too broad, and “eco” too narrow. Meanwhile, other terms only reflect one element of sustainability such as a green or environmental emphasis. These alternative terms include but are not limited to eco-, green, new moral, ethical, and responsible tourists. Although a consensus on the definitions of terms has not yet been reached, they do, in the interim, describe tourists who demonstrate responsible behaviour (Stanford, 2008).

Although the research on sustainable tourist behaviour is expanding, previous reviews of this literature found gaps in what motivates sustainable tourist choices (Budeanu, 2007), a lack of understanding of the practices and behaviour of tourists (Hjalager, 2008), and measurements of behavioural change (Munro *et al.*, 2008). A systematic analysis of sustainable tourist behaviour is now required to document the trends, thematic clusters and findings in the current body of knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Socially Sustainable Tourist Behaviour?

Social sustainability is recognised as one of the three sustainability pillars (Purvis *et al.*, 2019), yet its importance is largely overlooked in research fields that include sustainable consumption and sustainable consumer behaviour (Hosta & Zabkar, 2020; Sesini *et al.*, 2020). A systematic literature review on sustainable consumption carried out as part of this research revealed that in scholarly work published after 2015, most studies (88%) dealt with sustainability from an environmental perspective, with social and economic sustainability accounting for 24% and 22% respectively. Some publications (27%) evaluated sustainability from more than one dimension (Sesini *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, authors tend to highlight the need for exploring frameworks and looking at the sustainable consumer as a whole from a comprehensive perspective (Sesini *et al.*, 2020). Despite the recent growing acceptance of

sustainable behaviour from a social perspective (Sesini *et al.*, 2020), socially responsible consumer behaviour remains a contested concept with an inadequate level of conceptualisation. Moreover, there appears to be little parity between sustainable tourism research focusing on environmental issues and social ones (Hosta & Zabkar, 2020). This imbalance also affects research related to socially sustainable tourist behavioural studies, where key concepts remain poorly defined.

The majority of scholarly research to date fails to analyse tourist behaviour from a comprehensive perspective. In fact, 80% of academic studies on sustainable behaviours favoured environmental perspectives over social ones (e.g., Chow *et al.*, 2019; Collins & Potoglou, 2019). Perhaps one reason for this imbalance can be linked to the higher levels of awareness of environmental sustainability issues such as climate change and global warming, which would go some way to explain the prevailing focus of sustainable tourism research with environmental perspectives (Butler, 1999). However, climate change is not the only salient threat and recent global sustainability risk assessments have argued that severe consequences could result from a combination of environmental degradation and its associated social schisms (World Economic Forum, 2021).

Social sustainability represents a major contributing factor to the triple bottom line framework for sustainable development (Elkington, 1994) (Figure 1) and remains a key pillar in this respect (Purvis *et al.*, 2019; Bastante-Ceca *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, several of the UNWTO's (2005) 12 goals for sustainable tourism combine environmental, economic and social dimensions, with visitor fulfilment, cultural richness, community well-being, employment quality and social equity as key social sustainability challenges and impacts (UNWTO, 2005). Similarly, the UN's (2015) *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* includes key social dimensions among its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as SDG1 (no poverty), SDG2 (zero hunger), SDG3 (good health and well-being), SDG4 (quality education), SDG5 (gender equality), SDG8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG10 (reduced inequalities), SDG12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG17 (partnerships for the SDGs) (UNWTO, 2020). In line with this, further research is required on sustainable consumer behaviour in the context of tourism.

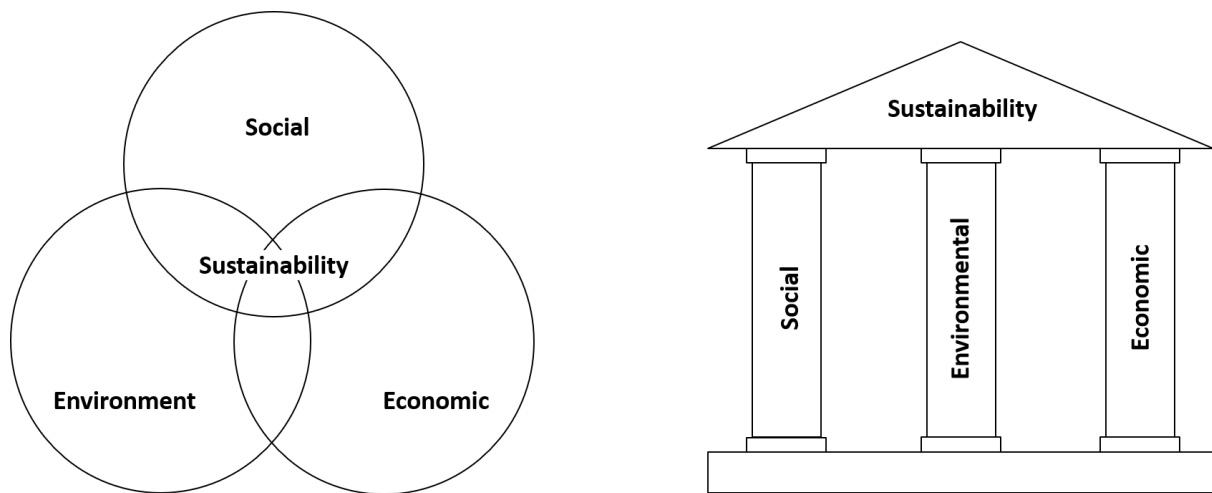


Figure 1. Sustainability models

In the extant research on socially sustainable tourist behaviour, the concept remains contested semantically. For instance, “sustainable tourist behaviour” is commonly used in studies investigating pro-environmental behaviour (e.g., Tölkes and Butzmann, 2018). However, scholars have argued that pro-environmental behaviours do not have universal drivers (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2017), and environmentally and socially responsible behaviours are often influenced by different factors including perceived behavioural control and social norms (Hosta & Zabkar, 2020). Socially sustainable behaviours should be addressed separately from pro-environmental behaviours (Hosta & Zabkar, 2020). In addition, concepts related to social sustainability such as sustainable tourist behaviour (Slocum & Curtis, 2016; Alazaizeh et al., 2019), responsible behaviour (Gong et al., 2019), pro-social behaviour (Gao et al., 2017), ethical behaviour (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft and Wooliscroft, 2017) and civilised behaviour (Liu *et al.*, 2020) are used indiscriminately whilst lacking clear definitions and conceptual frameworks. Moreover, irresponsible behaviour in tourism seems to be used interchangeably with other concepts, including deviant behaviour, unethical behaviour, annoying behaviour, questionable behaviour, misbehaviour (Volgger & Huang, 2019) and uncivilised behaviour (Zhang *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, there remains a major gap in the current understanding as regards a comprehensive conceptualisation of sustainable tourist behaviour from a social perspective.

Dimensions of Socially Sustainable Tourist Behaviour

Previous works on sustainable tourist behaviour have investigated several factors related to social sustainability, including understandings; attitudes (Scarpato *et al.*, 2014; Adongo *et al.*, 2018); ethics (Lee *et al.*, 2017; Tolkach *et al.*, 2017); perceptions toward responsibility (Gao *et al.*, 2017); assessments of the roles of codes (Cole, 2007; Haller, 2017); social media (Hussain *et al.*, 2019); tour guides (Alazaizeh *et al.*, 2019) and persuasive communication (Hardeman *et al.*, Font & Nawijn, 2017); place emotions (Zhang & Wang, 2019); and social engagement (Diallo *et al.*, 2015) and its effects on sustainable behaviours; and comparison studies in terms of different scenarios (Slocum & Curtis, 2016; Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2017) and cultures (Litvin *et al.*, 2004). Some studies have proposed dimensions and indicators for investigating behaviour from a social sustainability perspective (Dalton *et al.*, 2008; Diallo *et al.*, 2015; Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2016, 2017; Lee *et al.*, 2017; Loda & Macri, 2017; Alazaizeh *et al.*, 2019). For instance, Gong *et al.* (2019) proposed a framework that categorised responsible tourism behaviour into three dimensions (environmental, socio-cultural and economic), whereby the social sustainability dimension is divided into four socio-cultural themes, namely, culture/customs, human rights, law and safety. In spite of this, existing studies have failed to deliver a framework of tourist behaviour that comprehensively covers tourism-related social sustainability issues.

Based on a combination of Gong *et al.*'s (2019) proposed framework of responsible tourism behaviour (culture/customs, human rights, law and safety) and Stanford's (2008) proposed dimensions for a responsible tourist (respect and awareness, being an exceptional visitor, interaction and engagement, spending local currency), the dimensions for measuring socially sustainable tourist behaviour can be summarised into a socially sustainable tourist behaviour (SSTB) framework containing two parts: themes of responsible tourist behaviour and aspects of responsible tourist behaviours (Figure 2). The proposed framework adapted awareness in the dimension for a responsible tourist as 'being aware' as a behavioural aspect.

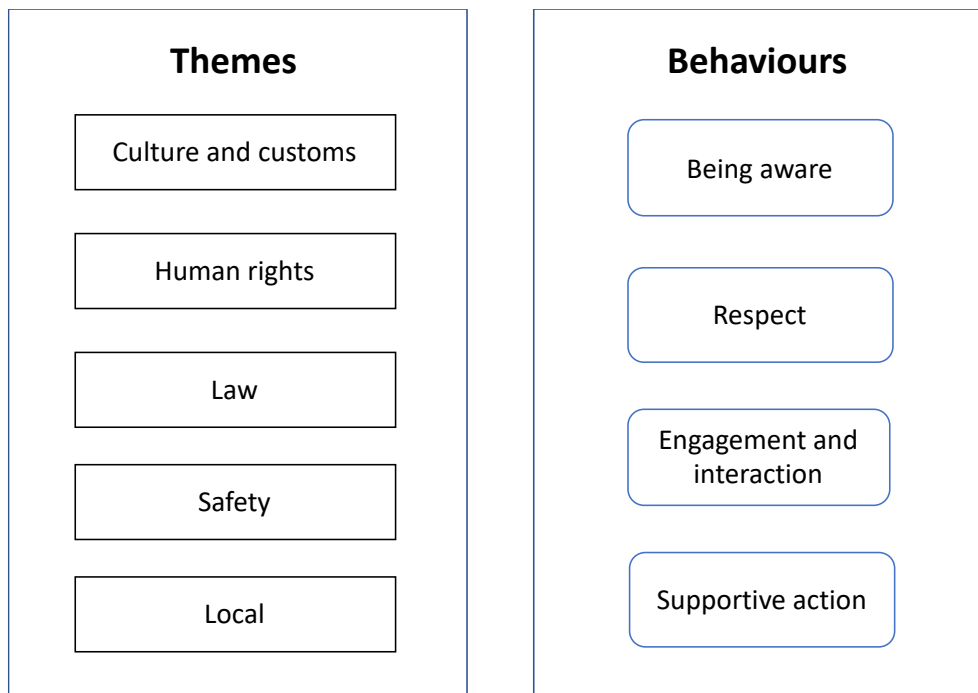


Figure 2. Proposed socially sustainable tourist behaviour (SSTB) framework (based on work by Gong *et al.* (2019) and Stanford (2008)).

Although social sustainability seems to be taking hold in recent sustainable consumption work (Sesini *et al.*, 2020), it is still underdeveloped in the context of tourism. For example, one study measuring responsible tourist behaviour has indicated the significance of financial, physical and social dimensions; however, the items adopted in the scale such as ‘*I am willing to invest in local projects for sustainable tourism*’, ‘*I am ready to devote my time and energy to the implementation of projects for sustainable tourism*’ uses the concept of ‘sustainable tourism’ which to the general public might be somewhat vague (Diallo *et al.*, 2015, p. 102).

Some other studies have adopted more specific items for measuring socially sustainable behaviour among tourists; however, the items do not fully cover socially sustainable behaviour. Lee *et al.* (2017), for example, used ‘*contributing to a respect for local cultures and the treatment of local people as equals*’ as an item. Ganglmair-Wooliscroft and Wooliscroft’s (2016) applied 33 items to measure ethical tourism behaviour, the majority of which were from the environmental point of view, and five were related to the social perspective (support locally made products and souvenirs, support businesses that employ

locals, be a considerate and respectful photographer, respect the local culture and traditions, be familiar with and observe local laws, be interested in and gain an understanding of the host community). In their later study, the same authors adopted 20 items for measuring ethical tourist behaviour, and another two items ‘avoid countries based on their political regimes’ and ‘volunteer during holiday’ were added to the social dimension items (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2017).

Alazaizeh et al. (2019) had five items related to social behaviour (accept the control policy, spend money in the local area, help other tourists to learn about the site, protect cultural environment, donate for the protection the site) that were adopted for measuring sustainable behaviour at cultural heritage sites. Loda and Macri (2017) included five dimensions related to social sustainability in their proposed responsible tourism index, each of which had one indicator. However, these previous works either failed to define socially sustainable tourist behaviour or to fully analyse these behaviours. A classification of the dimensions used in previous studies for measuring socially sustainable tourist behaviour is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of items measuring sustainable tourist behaviour from a socio-cultural perspective

Examples from existing literature	Related socio-cultural sustainability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect (for cultural heritage) (Loda & Macri, 2017) • Contributing to a respect for local cultures (Lee et al., 2017) • Respect the local culture & traditions (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2016) • Protect cultural environment (Alazaizeh et al., 2019) • Help other tourists to learn about the site (Alazaizeh et al., 2019) • Donate for protection the site (Alazaizeh et al., 2019) 	Culture and customs (supportive action)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on logistics and organization of the trip (Loda & Macri, 2017) • Knowledge of local traditions (Loda & Macri, 2017) 	Culture and customs (awareness)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness and curiosity towards the host context (Loda & Macri, 2017) 	Culture and customs (interaction and engagement)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be interested in and gain an understanding of the host community (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2016) • Interact with local people (Loda & Macri, 2017) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consume local products (Loda & Macri, 2017) • Support locally made products & souvenirs (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2016) • Spend money in local area (Alazaizeh et al., 2019) • Support businesses that employ locals (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2016) 	Local businesses (supportive action)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer during holiday (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2017) 	(Interaction and engagement & supportive action)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the treatment of local people as equals (Lee et al., 2017) 	Human rights (supportive action)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a considerate and respectful photographer (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2016) 	Customs and human rights (supportive action)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be familiar with and observed local laws (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2016) • Accept the control policy (Alazaizeh et al., 2019) 	Law (awareness & supportive action)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid countries based on their political regime (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2017) 	Safety (supportive action)

Despite the attempts to conceptualise sustainable tourist behaviour and the related social behavioural issues, certain social sustainability related areas are overlooked. When considering the existing dimensions for measuring socially sustainable tourist behaviour in the SSTB framework (Figure 3), it is evident that the current studies do not succeed in fully representing these behaviours.

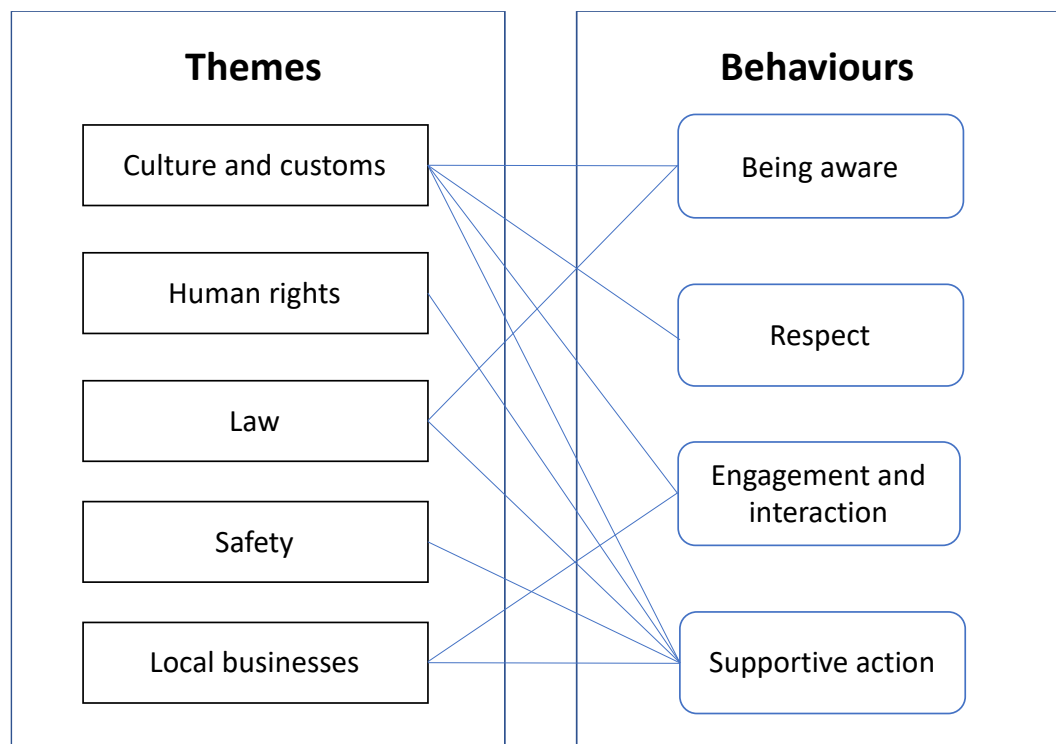


Figure 3. Coverage of the SSTB framework in existing studies.

Culture plays a crucial role in sustainability, with some scholars arguing that it could be the fourth sustainability pillar (Hawkes, 2001). Culture and customs are the most investigated dimensions in current studies about socially sustainable tourist behaviour. Previous studies such as those assessing the roles of tour guides in influencing tourist behaviour in terms of minimising the negative impacts on cultural heritage sites (Alazaizeh et al., 2019) and protecting archaeological sites (Mustafa, 2019) in Jordan have analysed culture and customs from different behavioural dimensions.

The themes of human rights, law, safety, and local businesses are all mentioned in previous studies; however, behaviours related to these themes are not fully articulated. These themes relate to some of the SDGs (United Nations, 2015), and they are crucial topics which have been examined in sustainable consumer behaviour areas such as food safety (Civero et al., 2017), AI-related ethics and safety (Du & Xie, 2021), and socially responsible purchasing (Zerbini *et al.*, 2019). To conceptualise socially sustainable tourist behaviour, it is essential to

build on the basis of an understanding of tourism-related social sustainability issues in different contexts.

Non-Academic Literature

Another major shortcoming of the academic research literature on this concept is the failure to fully consider other sources offering commentaries and recommendations on socially sustainable tourist behaviour. This is unfortunate as these sources are rich in their reflection of actual tourist experiences and business philosophies and practices. To have a more comprehensive scope of socially sustainable behavior, a Google search was conducted to gather the related non-academic literature. Some 74 websites were identified including organisations such as UNWTO (2021), Global Sustainable Tourism Council - GSTC (2021) and Association of Independent Tour Operators - AITO (2021), and responsible tourism operators such as Responsible Travel (2021). The guidelines and tips related to socially sustainable tourist behaviour were reviewed and analysed. Although there was much similarity, several recommended socially sustainable tourist behaviours emerged that were different from those in academic studies. These behaviours were categorized into three trip stages of before, during and after travel. The items obtained from the non-academic literature expanded the coverage of the SSTB framework with examples shown in Table 2. New themes emerged such as local communities, residents, tourist experiences, charities, local organisations and sustainable projects. A new classification of socially sustainable tourist behaviours obtained from academic and non-academic perspectives is recommended that blends research findings with practical knowledge and experience.

Table 2. Examples of items from non-academic literature.

Themes	Awareness	Respect	Engagement	Support
Culture/customs	N/A	Respect cultural differences, learn to listen and leave my preconceptions at home (UNWTO, 2021; STN, 2021).	Interact with local people and experience local culture, such as eating local cuisine (CREST, 2021; GSTC, 2021; UNWTO, 2021; AITO, 2021).	N/A

Human rights	Be aware of cancellation policies and your passenger rights (UNWTO, 2021).	I post selfies and pictures of other people with permission (UNWTO, 2021). Respect staff, caretakers and service providers (GSTC, 2021; UNWTO, 2021).	N/A	Report serious issues regarding human rights abuses, injustice, exploitation, and discrimination to local authorities (GSTC, 2021; UNWTO, 2021).
Law	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Safety	Read the small print in visa requirements and your travel insurance (UNWTO).	N/A	I practice “social distancing” during epidemics (UNWTO, 2021).	N/A
Local businesses	Check travel providers’ responsible tourism policy (GSTC, 2021; CREST, 2021).	N/A	Shop in local markets, and attend local festivals (CREST, 2021; GSTC, 2021; UNWTO, 2021; AITO, 2021)	Pay fair price (GSTC, 2021; CREST, 2021; UNWTO, 2021). I support businesses embracing diversity and equality (UNWTO, 2021).

SSTB Dimension Framework Development

To generate an initial item pool for the measurement of SSTB, a broad review of the academic and non-academic literature was conducted. Some 86 initial items were obtained from the literature review. The items obtained from the non-academic literature were sentences written in informal language. To develop these into items that can be applied as instruments for research, three phases of content analysis were conducted to categorize them. In the first phase, the items were coded according to the verb and theme that formed the original sentence. The second phase refined and combined the codes based on the meanings. The last phase analysis further summarised and categorised the results of the second phase, based on the nature of contribution and purpose of the initial item.

After the three-phase content analysis, these items were categorized into three trip stages and further classified into 19 dimensions (Table 3). The content validation of the dimensions is

being tested through an expert panel with an item-ranking questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Table 3. Initial dimensions of SSTB.

Trip stages	Coding for phase 1	Coding for phase 2	Dimensions
Before travel	Get information (sustainable accommodation) Get information (destination) Get information (sustainable operator) Get information (tips for local area) Get information (political) Get information (customs) Get information (culture) Get information (volunteering)	Get informed (operators) Get informed (destination) Get informed (policies) Get informed (culture/customs) Get informed (laws) Get informed (volunteering)	1 - Seeking information before travel
	Prepare gifts Learn language	Gift Learn language	2 - Preparing to interact
	Pack smart Avoid overtourism	Pack smart Avoid overtourism	3 - Avoiding negative impacts
	Safe travel (knowledge) Avoid political regimes	Travel safely (policy) Travel safely	4 - Preparing to travel safely
During travel	Avoid picking (shells/plants) Reject begging Report issues (sexual exploitation, forced labour, child abuse) Reject illegal activities	Avoid unethical impacts Reject begging Report issues Avoid negative impacts	5 - Reducing negative impacts
	Avoid unethical products (endangered) Avoid ancient products Avoid unethical products (counterfeit) Ethical purchases	Conscious consumption	6 - Consuming consciously
	Donate right panel Donate money	Donate properly Donate	7 - Donating

	Eat in local restaurants Engage in local culture Experience & respect differences Engage in outdoor activities Interact with locals Avoid preconception Sustainable projects (devote) Volunteer Photograph (mementoes)	Experience local food Engage in local culture Experience & respect differences Engage in outdoor activities Interact with locals Avoid preconception Support sustainable (projects) Volunteer	8 - Engaging
	Accept control policies Obey local order Observe & obey (local laws/regulations)	Observe local order/laws Follow laws/regulations	9 - Following local laws and regulations
	Convince tourists Educate/influence tourists	Convince tourists Educate/influence tourists	10- Influencing peers
	Observe & protect (human rights) Protect sites	Protect human rights Protect sites	11 - Protecting
	Respect locals (communities) Respect local (customs) Respect local (cultures) Respect local (lifestyles) Respect local sites Respect local employees Polite to others Photographs (posting respectfully) Photographs (taking respectfully)	Respect locals (communities) Respect local customs Respect local cultures Respect local lifestyles Respect (people)	12 - Respecting
	Slow travel	Slow travel	13 - Travelling slowly
	Pay fair price Support responsible organisations Support sustainable operators (businesses) Support local charities Purchase local products Use local employees Purchase local food Spend locally Support local businesses Support projects Sustainable projects (invest)	Pay fair price Support responsible organisations Support sustainable operators (businesses) Support local charities Purchase local (services) Use local employees Purchase local food Purchase local products Spend locally Stay locally (accommodation) Support local businesses Support projects Sustainable projects (invest)	14 - Supporting
	Safe travel (knowledge) Safe travel (safety) Safe travel (health)	Travel safely	15 - Travelling safely

After travel	Give back/charity	Give back	16 - Continuing to make a (positive) contribution
	Honest comments Wisely use digital	Leave honest feedback Using social media wisely	17 - Using social media responsibly
	Get information (destination)	Keep exploring	18- Remaining involved after travel
	Share trips	Share trips	19 - Sharing experiences and recommendations

CONCLUSIONS

The academic literature to date has tended to focus on the environmental and physical aspects of sustainable tourism and tourist behaviour. In comparative terms, the social dimensions of tourist behaviour have been neglected. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive articulation of the dimensions of socially sustainable tourist behaviour (SSTB). The ideal approach will be to blend the academic and non-academic literature on such behaviour. This will ensure that qualitative and empirical research findings are extended by practical experiences and knowledge, providing more comprehensive coverage of SSTB.

The results from reviewing the non-academic literature added several behaviours of tourists that contribute to sustainability from a social perspective. This approach formed a broader set of dimensions and will support an instrument that can be flexibly applied in specific tourism segments and contexts. Past studies are more Western focused and oriented, and a few social sustainability issues have been overlooked. This research brought tourist behaviours related to these issues to the surface (i.e., being polite to employees, avoiding unethical consumption, etc.). This will assist future empirical studies on tourist behaviour to more comprehensively cover social sustainability concepts.

This conceptual research proposes 19 dimensions of SSTB in the before, during, and after travel stages. These dimensions are currently being further validated through a survey and interviews with sustainable tourism experts. Thereafter, a measurement scale for socially sustainable tourist behaviour composed of the dimensions and their measurement items will

be developed (the Socially Sustainable Tourist Behaviour Scale - SSTBS). SSTBS will be tested through two waves of a large-scale survey of domestic tourists in China.

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