

THE INFLUENCE OF SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY ON CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING

Julija Mironova¹, Inguna Zusevica², Zaiga Oborenko³

Abstract. Sustainability has become an integral part of business strategies, influencing both operational decisions and customer choices. As people become more aware of environmental and social issues, many are looking for hospitality services that align with their values. But how much do sustainability efforts actually influence customers' choices of where to stay? This study explores this question by analysing whether sustainable practices in the hospitality industry influence consumer preferences. In order to comprehend the aforementioned correlation, the authors of this study conducted a survey with the objective of acquiring insights into customer attitudes towards sustainability in the hospitality industry. The survey encompassed pivotal domains such as eco-friendly initiatives, energy efficiency, waste reduction, ethical sourcing, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Utilising the statistical software SPSS, the authors employed descriptive statistics and Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric tests to examine whether hotel sustainability practices have a greater impact on the decision-making process of customers with higher education compared to those with lower education levels. The findings of the study demonstrate that sustainability is a significant consideration for customers. Individuals are more inclined to select hotels that demonstrate a commitment to meaningful sustainability initiatives. Moreover, the data indicates that consumers with a higher educational background place a greater value on sustainability when making their decisions. This research underscores the mounting significance of sustainability as a competitive advantage in the hospitality sector. Companies that integrate strong and transparent sustainability practices not only help the planet, but also attract a more loyal and conscious customer base. These findings provide valuable guidance for hospitality managers and policymakers, emphasising the need for sustainability initiatives that are both impactful and well communicated.

Keywords: sustainable hospitality, consumer behaviour, hospitality industry, environmental practices, SPSS analysis, green tourism, responsible consumption, corporate social responsibility.

JEL Classification: Q50, L83, D16, M14

1. Introduction

Sustainability has become one of the defining challenges and opportunities of the modern hospitality industry. As environmental concerns grow and social responsibility becomes a priority for businesses and consumers alike, hospitality enterprises are increasingly adopting sustainable practices. From energy efficiency and waste reduction to ethical sourcing and green initiatives, these efforts are shaping the way businesses operate. Simultaneously, customers

are becoming more conscious of their choices, paying attention not only to service quality and price, but also to the environmental and social impact of their decisions. It is imperative for businesses to understand whether and to what extent sustainability influences customer choices in order to remain competitive in an evolving market.

The hospitality sector is of particular pertinence in the context of sustainability, given its substantial environmental impact. Hotels, restaurants and

¹ ISMA University of Applied Sciences, Latvia (*corresponding author*)

E-mail: Julija.mironova@isma.lv

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3090-6220>

² Social Integration State Agency College, Latvia

E-mail: Inguna.zusevica@siva.gov.lv

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8064-2561>

³ ISMA University of Applied Sciences, Latvia

E-mail: Zaiga.oborenko@isma.lv

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7473-8169>



tourism services consume vast quantities of energy and water, generate significant amounts of waste, and contribute to carbon emissions. Many companies are addressing these challenges by implementing green initiatives, such as replacing single-use plastics with paper or wood products, using energy-efficient technologies and supporting local communities. When sustainability is an important factor for customers when choosing hospitality services, companies have both an ethical and strategic incentive to increase their commitment to environmental and social responsibility.

Despite the growing emphasis on sustainability in the hospitality industry, there is still a paucity of empirical evidence on how these initiatives influence consumer behaviour. While some studies suggest that eco-conscious travellers prefer green hotels and ethical dining options, others indicate that price and convenience remain dominant factors. The gap between sustainability awareness and actual consumer behaviour, sometimes referred to as the "green gap", raises important questions about how hospitality companies can effectively communicate their sustainability efforts to potential customers. Examining this relationship through data-driven research helps to provide clarity on the role sustainability plays in decision making and how companies can leverage it to increase customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

The purpose of this study is to analyse whether the sustainable practices of hospitality companies influence customer choice. A survey was conducted to assess consumer perceptions, preferences and behaviours regarding sustainability in the hospitality industry. The data collected was analysed using SPSS, applying descriptive statistics and Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric tests to identify patterns and relationships. By understanding the impact of sustainability on consumer behaviour, hospitality companies can refine their strategies to meet customer expectations while contributing to global sustainability efforts.

2. Understanding Sustainable Tourism

Definitions of sustainable tourism can be found in different sources, and they are quite similar, for example, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council defines sustainable tourism as follows: "*Sustainable Tourism refers to sustainable practices in and by the tourism industry. It is an aspiration to acknowledge all impacts of tourism, both positive and negative. It aims to minimize the negative impacts and maximize the positive ones.*" (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2024) United Nations World Tourism Organisation defines sustainable tourism as follows: "*Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.*" (UNWTO, 2005) The Encyclopaedia of Corporate

Social Responsibility states that sustainable tourism does not refer to a specific category of tourism, but rather to the overall sustainability of tourism activities. All destinations and tourism sectors should work towards greater sustainability in order to maintain their competitiveness. As sustainability and competitiveness are closely linked, they play a crucial role in shaping the future of tourism in any destination. Ensuring the long-term success of tourism requires effective management and sustainable development practices (Bayrak, 2013). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines sustainable tourism as having three core pillars: social equity, economic development and environmental integrity. It focuses on enhancing local prosperity by increasing the economic benefits of tourism, for example by retaining more visitor spending in the destination. Sustainable tourism aims to generate income and provide fair employment opportunities for workers, while preserving the environment and culture of the destination. It also ensures the long-term viability and competitiveness of destinations and businesses, allowing them to thrive and continue to deliver benefits over time. Sustainable tourism, as a goal for all tourism activities, should be distinguished from ecotourism, a niche within tourism that emphasises travel experiences that promote environmental conservation and social development (International Labour Organisation, 2017).

Sustainable tourism is a concept that is defined in different ways in numerous sources, but all definitions emphasise the importance of balancing the social, economic and environmental impacts of tourism. At its core, sustainable tourism seeks to promote practices that minimise negative impacts while maximising positive contributions to local communities, economies and the environment. It is widely recognised as a goal that tourism activities in all sectors should strive to achieve in order to ensure long-term viability and competitiveness. Sustainable tourism integrates principles of social equity, responsible economic development and environmental protection, and is critical to the future success of tourism destinations and businesses. Given its broad and evolving nature, future research on sustainable tourism will benefit from a bibliometric analysis of scholarship, which will help to map the trends, developments and findings in the field and provide a comprehensive understanding of how sustainable tourism is defined and applied in the academic literature.

3. Customer Behaviour in Sustainable Tourism

Customer behaviour in sustainable tourism reflects a growing preference for green travel options, with consumers seeking destinations and services that prioritise environmental protection. Many travellers are now more inclined to support businesses that

demonstrate responsible practices, such as reducing waste and promoting local, ethical sourcing. This shift in consumer behaviour is influencing the hospitality industry to adopt more sustainable practices in order to meet the growing demand for environmentally conscious travel experiences. Hotels that focus on sustainability not only meet evolving consumer demands, but also reap long-term benefits such as reduced costs, enhanced brand reputation and a greater ability to attract and retain customers who prioritise responsible and environmentally conscious options (Mazzuchelli, Chierici, 2024).

Several studies suggest that consumers are willing to make decisions based on a company's sustainability efforts. Han et al. (2011) show that consumers are more likely to choose green hotels, especially if they perceive the hotel's green initiatives as authentic. Torres and Kline (2013) argue that sustainability, including energy conservation, ethical practices and community involvement, plays an important role in destination choice. In addition, Chou et al. (2015) note that consumers are more likely to choose a hotel that markets itself as environmentally friendly, especially if sustainability is communicated transparently and authentically.

As posited by Gursoy et al. (2017), the mounting demand for sustainable practices is indicative of a shift in consumer preferences. Hospitality businesses that proactively promote sustainability through eco-friendly marketing and tangible environmental initiatives are more likely to attract a discerning clientele. Research conducted by Rahbar and Wahid (2011) also underscores the significance of transparent communication regarding sustainable practices, as it fosters consumer confidence and prompts them to select enterprises that are congruent with their principles.

Sustainability influences not only customer choice, but also long-term loyalty and satisfaction. Kang et al. (2012) highlight that customers who directly experience sustainable practices in a hotel are more likely to return, suggesting a strong link between customer satisfaction and perceived authenticity of sustainability efforts. Nguyen et al. (2020) also found that businesses with genuine sustainability efforts foster higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, particularly when these practices are consistent and visible.

Sustainability initiatives also generate positive word-of-mouth, which can attract new customers.

According to Han, there are 10 variables that are the crucial aspects of the cognitive/perceptual process (green image, environmental knowledge, environmental corporate social responsibility, perceived effectiveness, green value), affective process (anticipated pride and guilt), conative process (attachment, connectedness to nature), normative

process (descriptive social norm) and habitual process (pro-environmental behaviour in everyday life) that are fundamental to environmentally sustainable behaviour. These concepts are therefore widely adopted and used in the broad literature on environmental consumption and are illustrated in Figure 1.

Sustainable tourism consumer behaviour reflects a growing preference for environmentally friendly travel options, with travellers increasingly choosing destinations and services that prioritise environmental protection. This shift is encouraging the hospitality industry to adopt sustainable practices, as companies that emphasise sustainability not only meet evolving consumer demands, but also reap long-term benefits such as cost savings, improved brand image and stronger customer loyalty. Research shows that consumers are more likely to support companies with authentic sustainability efforts, such as waste reduction, energy conservation and ethical sourcing, especially when these initiatives are clearly communicated. This focus on sustainability also contributes to greater customer satisfaction, repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth, further enhancing business success in the competitive hospitality market.

4. Mapping Scientific Knowledge on Sustainable Tourism

In order to gain a broader insight into sustainable tourism, the authors decided to carry out a bibliometric analysis of the literature from the Scopus database. Data were collected from the Scopus databases, which are recognised as the most comprehensive and representative sources for social science research (Vieira and Gomes, 2009). The relevant literature was selected according to specific criteria: only full-length research articles written in English were included, excluding materials such as book chapters and conference papers. The keywords "tourism" or "hospitality" and "sustainable" or "sustainability" were used to identify suitable studies and construct the sample. After searching by title, 7740 articles were retrieved from the Scopus databases. After selecting articles, the authors selected only articles, conference papers, book chapters, reviews and books from the list, and a total of 7515 articles were selected.

For data analysis, the VOSviewer software tool was used to generate visual representations of the research results. VOSviewer is a widely recognised and robust bibliometric tool that facilitates the creation of visualisations based on the co-occurrence of keywords, author collaborations, citation patterns and other relevant metrics within large datasets. It provides a comprehensive understanding of complex research landscapes by presenting the data as network maps that illustrate the relationships between different research elements. This method



Figure 1. Key drivers of environmentally sustainable consumer behaviour
 Source: (Han, 2021)

helps to uncover underlying trends, clusters and connections within the data, enabling the identification of key research areas, emerging themes and the evolution of academic networks over time. By using VOSviewer, the analysis provides both a quantitative evaluation of the literature and enhances the interpretability of the research findings through clear and informative visual representations.

The pioneering study in this area was published by Wall in the *Annals of Tourism Research* in 1990, and a further 7740 full-length articles were published on the subject between 1990 and 2025. The United Kingdom is the primary contributor to the subject area, with a total of 669 documents sourced from the Scopus database. It is followed by China, which has 661 articles, and the United States, with 588 articles. Spain and Indonesia have 587 and 509 articles, respectively. Figure 2 illustrates the number of articles published over the entire research period.

The data presented herein reflects a significant upward trend in the number of publications related to "tourism" or "hospitality" and "sustainable" or

"sustainability" within the Scopus database over the past few decades. The period from 1990 to 2000 saw 197 publications, indicating the early stages of research in this area. Subsequent years witnessed a steady rise in publications, with a pronounced surge in the mid-2000s.

The number of articles published began to rise more substantially around 2005, with 67 publications, and reached 100 in 2007. This indicates a growing interest in sustainability within the tourism and hospitality sectors. By 2010, the number of publications had risen to 129, and the years following continued to show consistent growth. It is noteworthy that from 2015 to 2025, there was a substantial increase in the number of published articles. In 2020, the total number of articles reached 583, and by 2023, it had increased to 957, indicating a significant surge in research activity concerning sustainable tourism and hospitality practices.

The year 2024 saw a peak in publications with 1,304 articles, marking a sharp increase in research output in this field. However, the figure for 2025 (84)

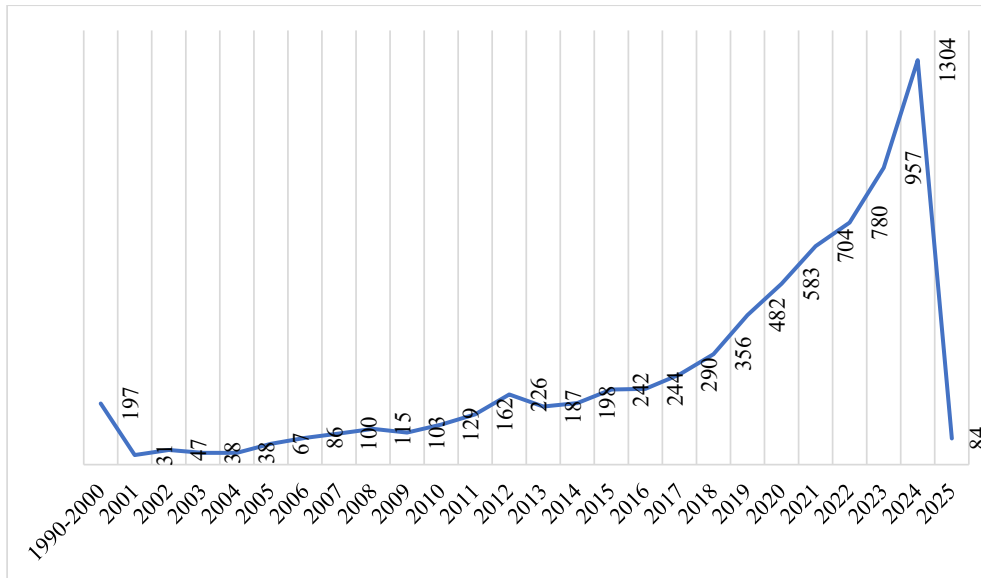


Figure 2. Amount of articles published in the Scopus database for the period from 1976 to 2024

appears to be an early estimate, indicating that the data are still being compiled or that fewer articles were published in the first few months of that year.

This steady increase in publications suggests a growing recognition of the importance of sustainability in the tourism and hospitality industry. As awareness of environmental, social and economic challenges increases, researchers are increasingly focusing on sustainable practices, their impact on tourism development and how the industry can address global sustainability issues. The strong growth in recent years reflects the increasing urgency and relevance of sustainability in tourism, likely driven

by both consumer demand and the global push for environmental responsibility.

Overall, the data clearly illustrate that sustainability in tourism and hospitality is an expanding area of research, with rapid growth over the past decade. This trend is likely to continue as sustainability remains a key priority for industry stakeholders and researchers alike.

The *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* appears to be the most influential publication, containing some of the most cited articles in the field. With papers on topics such as sustainable tourism development, the role of local food in tourism and critiques of sustainability

Table 1
The 10 most cited articles

Nr.	Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Total citations
1.	Sims R.	2009	Food, place and authenticity: Local food and the sustainable tourism experience	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	902
2.	Butler R.W.	1999	Sustainable tourism: A state-of-the-art review Le tourisme durable: Un état de la question	Tourism Geographies	882
3.	Buckle R.	2012	Sustainable tourism: Research and reality	Annals of Tourism Research	761
4.	Liu Z.	2003	Sustainable tourism development: A critique	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	761
5.	Choi H.C., Sirakaya E.	2006	Sustainability indicators for managing community tourism	Tourism Management	735
6.	Lee T.H.	2013	Influence analysis of community resident support for sustainable tourism development	Tourism Management	203
7.	Sharpley R.	2000	Tourism and sustainable development: Exploring the theoretical divide	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	670
8.	Saarinen J.	2006	Traditions of sustainability in tourism studies	Annals of tourism Research	656
9.	Hunte C.	1997	Sustainable tourism as an adaptive paradigm	Annals of Tourism Research	644
10.	Hassan S.S.	2000	Determinants of market competitiveness in an environmentally sustainable tourism industry	Journal of Travel Research	593

Source: compiled by the authors, 2025

practices, this journal has established itself as a central platform for research in the field. Articles published in this journal are highly cited, indicating its importance and influence in shaping the discourse on sustainable tourism.

Another significant journal that features extensively cited articles is *Tourism Management*, which has contributed research on topics such as community support for sustainable tourism and sustainability indicators. The journal's emphasis on practical applications of sustainability in tourism management, such as integrating sustainability into community tourism, has made it an important resource for both academics and industry professionals. Its high citation rate reflects its relevance in addressing pressing issues in sustainable tourism development.

Figure 3 illustrates the keywords in the selected articles. After a first examination of the selected studies, the keywords "sustainable development" were mentioned 1741 times, while "ecotourism" and "tourism development" were mentioned 1400 and 1187 times respectively. The top 10 most frequently used keywords also include the following keywords:

"sustainability" – 1140, "tourism" – 771, "tourism management" – 517, "tourist destination" – 474, "sustainable tourism" – 380, "stakeholders" – 253 and "tourism market" with 228 mentions.

5. Methodology

In order to achieve the research objectives, the authors developed a questionnaire specifically for individuals who travel. The survey was distributed in Latvia at the first stage of the research.

In order to guarantee the reliability and validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to a series of revisions based on feedback from experts in the field of educational research and pilot testing with a small group of respondents. This iterative process enabled the refinement of the questions and the enhancement of clarity, thereby ensuring the improvement of the overall quality of the data collected.

Table 2 outlines the structure of the research questionnaire designed to collect comprehensive data from Latvian travellers. It is divided into two main sections: the profile of the respondent and questions

Table 2

Structure of the questionnaire

Part of the survey	Description		
	Types of the questions	Evaluation scale	Codes
A: Respondent profile	Open/Closed	Multiple-choice	A_1-A_3
B: Questions related to the importance of sustainable imperatives in the decision-making process	Closed	Multiple-choice	B_1-B_8

Source: compiled by the authors, 2025

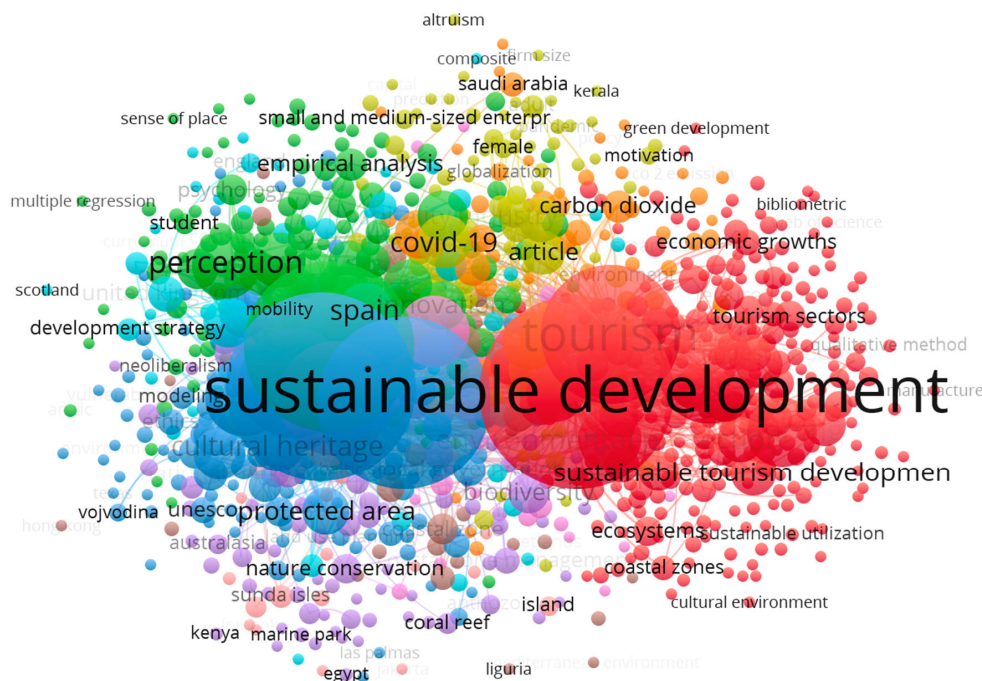


Figure 3. Keywords of the selected articles

related to researching whether sustainable practices influence the decision-making process when choosing a hospitality enterprise, such as a hotel restaurant.

The questionnaire was placed on the QuestionPro platform available at www.questionpro.com. Data was distributed through emails and during lectures with students during the period of one month from 01.09.2024 to 15.11.2024.

Table 2

Structure of the questionnaire

Label	Respondents' number	% from the total share
Gender		
Male	10	24%
Female	31	76%
Age		
<18	0	
18-24	5	11%
25-34	9	22%
35-44	10	24%
45-54	11	26%
55-64	7	17%
>65	0	
Education level		
Secondary education	16	39%
Short-cycle higher education	4	10%
Bachelor degree	8	20%
Masters degree	10	24%
PhD	3	7%

Source: compiled by the authors, 2025

The majority of respondents are female, constituting a substantial proportion of the total sample, while males represent a smaller percentage. The age distribution indicates that the most common age groups among respondents are 45-54 and 35-44, followed by those aged 25-34. Individuals under 24 and those over 65 are the least represented in the sample.

In relation to educational attainment, a significant proportion of the respondents have successfully completed secondary education, with a considerable number holding either a master's or bachelor's degree. Conversely, a smaller percentage have pursued short-cycle higher education or a PhD. The data indicates that the respondents possess a relatively high level of education, exhibiting a wide range of academic achievements.

6. Results

To reach the goals of the research, the authors developed the following hypothesis:

H1: Respondents with higher levels of education are more likely to consider the sustainable practices of hotels when selecting a hotel compared to those without higher education.

The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to assess whether there were any statistically significant differences in the decision-making process of tourists, and whether their choice was affected by sustainable activities of the hotel. They were asked the following question: "How important is hotel sustainability in your decision-making when choosing accommodation?"

The mean ranks indicate that individuals with higher education levels (i.e., master's degree and PhD holders) tend to ascribe greater importance to sustainable hotel practices, with mean ranks of 27.20 and 31.50, respectively. In contrast, respondents with lower education levels (i.e., those in ranks 2 and 3) show lower mean ranks of 14.14 and 10.75, suggesting that sustainability plays a smaller role in their decision-making.

In light of the p-value being below 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in how respondents value hotel sustainability based on their education level. Higher-educated individuals tend to prioritise sustainable practices more when choosing a hotel, thus confirming that education level influences sustainable decision-making. The results thus far demonstrate that the hypothesis is approved.

7. Conclusions and Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the mounting significance of sustainability in the tourism sector, mirroring global industry trends and a discernible shift in consumer behaviour towards more responsible practices. The mounting interest in sustainable tourism is manifest not only in academic literature but also in the decision-making processes of tourists themselves, as evidenced by the outcomes of the Kruskal-Wallis test, which revealed a pronounced preference for sustainability among individuals with higher education levels.

A close analysis of the data collected reveals that education exerts a considerable influence on attitudes towards sustainability in the tourism sector. Respondents with a higher level of educational attainment, especially those in possession of a master's degree or PhD, attached greater importance to sustainable practices when selecting accommodation. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of previous studies which indicate that higher education can enhance environmental awareness and result in more eco-conscious behaviours (Han, 2021). This correlation suggests that educated consumers may be more knowledgeable about the environmental impacts of tourism and, consequently, are more likely to make decisions that align with sustainable principles.

In addition, this research reinforces the notion that customer behaviour in sustainable tourism is closely linked to the authenticity and transparency of sustainability practices. As consumers become

more discerning, businesses that promote sustainable practices in an authentic and transparent manner can benefit significantly, including increased customer satisfaction, loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Mazzuchelli & Chierici, 2024). The findings suggest that the hospitality industry must not only adopt sustainable practices but also communicate these efforts clearly in order to meet the increasing demand for eco-friendly and socially responsible travel experiences.

In addition to individual consumer preferences, the general trend towards sustainable tourism has wider implications for tourism businesses and destinations. The proliferation of publications on sustainable tourism, particularly since the mid-2000s, reflects the growing urgency to address the environmental, social and economic challenges facing the tourism industry. It is evident that sustainability is not a niche concern, but rather a critical component of the future of tourism. Destinations and businesses that fail to embrace sustainability may find themselves at a competitive disadvantage as travellers increasingly prioritise green and responsible options in their travel decisions.

This study's bibliometric analysis of the Scopus database further underlines the rapid growth of sustainable tourism research, which has seen a significant increase in the number of articles published in recent years. The increasing number of citations and the growing prominence of journals such as *Tourism Management* and the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* highlight the importance of sustainability in the academic discourse on tourism. As the field continues to evolve, further research will be crucial in understanding how sustainability can be effectively integrated into tourism practices and how businesses can meet the changing expectations of consumers.

Whilst the present research provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The sample was drawn from Latvia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different socio-cultural contexts. Further studies could explore consumer behaviour in other countries and regions to gain a broader understanding of global trends in sustainable tourism. In addition, future research could explore the role of other demographic factors such as income level, travel experience and cultural background in shaping sustainable tourism preferences.

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