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## The intention-behaviour gap in sustainable hospitality: a critical literature review

### Abstract

**Purpose.** The intention of consumers to behave sustainably is not a reliable predictor of sustainable hospitality choices. This intention-behaviour gap represents one of the biggest challenges for marketers and environment-friendly businesses. To address this issue, this study draws upon the intention-behaviour gap. We revise the sustainable hospitality literature i) to identify the limitations, ii) to evaluate the extent to which the intention-behaviour gap is embedded in the hospitality literature, and iii) to provide practical guidance on how to move research forward in the sustainable hospitality field.

**Methodology.** We adopted a five-step process to review and analyse 71 scientific articles published in 14 Hospitality Journals. We developed a descriptive overview of the literature showing the publications in this field over the years, the sustainability practices implemented by companies and consumers, and the setting of the studies. Finally, we conducted a critical analysis of research in sustainable hospitality adopting the intention-behaviour gap lens.

**Findings.** Leveraging our descriptive overview and critical analysis, we offer four directions for future research to address the existing literature limitations. We encourage scholars to expand the scope of the research setting, investigate diverse sustainability practices, integrate existing knowledge on the intention-behaviour gap into sustainable hospitality research, and combine traditional research methods with emerging technologies.

**Implications.** This study exposes the theoretical challenge of applying conventional behaviour theories to sustainable hospitality, prompting a call for framework re-evaluation. It offers practical insights, empowering researchers, marketers, and policymakers to navigate and mitigate the intention-behaviour gap in sustainable hospitality.

**Originality.** The originality of this paper is underscored by its distinctive focus on the unique intention-behaviour gap within sustainable hospitality, coupled with a compelling call to re-evaluate traditional behavioural frameworks. It provides a roadmap for future research in sustainable hospitality, benefiting researchers, policymakers, and marketers in promoting sustainable initiatives.

**Keywords:** Intention-behaviour gap, critical literature review, sustainable consumption, hospitality

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, elevated consumer awareness of environmental issues has driven the hospitality industry to embrace sustainable practices. Yadav *et al.* (2019) note an increase in sustainability efforts within hospitality in the last decade. Sharma *et al.* (2023) anticipate sustainability as a key trend to shape the hospitality industry's future. However, defining what sustainability means in hospitality is a challenge due to the diversity of the sector's activities (Oriade *et al.*, 2021). As Sloan *et al.* (2013, p.1) aptly state, "a clear understanding of the issues surrounding climate change, global warming, air and water pollution, ozone depletion, deforestation, the loss of biodiversity and global poverty is essential for every future manager in the hospitality industry." This statement provides the basis for the notion of sustainability in hospitality: considering the impact of hospitality activities on nature and society. From a consumer perspective, considering sustainability entails adopting innovative strategies that promote waste reduction, recycling, energy efficiency, ethical sourcing, community engagement, and the preservation of cultural heritage, and demonstrating an overall environmental responsibility (Oriade *et al.*, 2021). These definitions align with the concept of shared responsibility between hospitality businesses and consumers for the impact of their actions. In this study, we encompass sustainable hospitality by emphasising responsible practices adopted by hospitality businesses and consumers. The objective is to mitigate adverse environmental and societal effects, promote ethical practices, and contribute to long-term well-being of society.

Acknowledging the sustainability trend and the evolving hospitality sector, many research studies examine the effects of sustainable development from a consumer perspective. However, it must be recognized that the results of this body of research could be clearer. For example, Jones *et al.* (2016) argue that sustainability investments enhance competitiveness and efficiency for hospitality businesses. Yu *et al.* (2017) find that prioritising sustainability in hospitality brands boosts booking intentions. However, data shows that the actual use of sustainable services within the hospitality sector remains relatively low (Sadiq *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, a Booking.com (2022) survey with over 30,000 respondents reveals widespread support for sustainable travel (81%), and a preference for eco-friendly accommodations (78%). However, data show that green-certified hotels do not perform financially better than their uncertified competitors (Chi *et al.*, 2022). These inconsistencies can be explained by a well-known phenomenon in the sustainable domain: the gap between consumer intention and actual consumer behaviour (Viglia and Acuti, 2023).

This intention-behaviour gap poses significant challenges for marketers, environment-friendly businesses, and non-profit organisations, given that consumer intentions frequently fail to translate into actual behaviour. It is more true in the hospitality sector, where a change in consumers' usual context undermines behavioural continuity. For instance, individuals who practice recycling at home may forego recycling while on vacation (Oliver *et al.*, 2019). When moving from home to vacation, strong intentions expressed by tourists to buy local food may not translate into actual behaviour (Birch and Memery, 2020). Even consumers concerned about the environment often do not choose sustainable restaurants (Nimri *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, the ideal green consumer prototype is not as widespread as assumed in the literature. To understand sustainable hospitality, we need to take a different approach to typical consumer behaviour and distinguish between behaviour on vacation and behaviour at home.

Previous research in hospitality often used conventional human behaviour theories. It includes theory of planned behaviour (Chatterjee and Barbhuiya, 2021; Chin *et al.*, 2018; Dedeoğlu *et al.*, 2022; Patwary *et al.*, 2022; Teng *et al.*, 2015; Yadav *et al.*, 2019) and norm activation theory (Burhanudin *et al.*, 2022; Han *et al.*, 2016; Teng *et al.*, 2023). These theories emphasise the influence of attitudes, values, and beliefs on sustainable behaviour. With the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) being the most frequently utilized, it underscores that people's actions depend on their intentions. Similarly, the theory of reasoned action (TRA) emphasises attitudes and subjective norms in shaping intentions yet lacks the element of perceived behavioural control. However, these theories exhibit limitations in the hospitality context (MacInnes *et al.*, 2022). Trying to promote pro-environmental attitudes, does not always improve sustainable behaviours such as reusing towels at hotels (Dolnicar *et al.*, 2017). This observation challenges the predictability of these theories. While these theories have merits and have facilitated numerous studies, they fail to fully capture the complexities of multiple contextual variables affecting sustainable behaviour (Agag *et al.*, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). However, within sustainability, intentions may influence consumer behaviour only under favourable conditions. It highlights the need for context-specific adaptations given the altered consumer behaviour on vacation. In studying the sustainable intention-behaviour gap in shopping, Munro *et al.* (2023) also encourage scholars to transition from linear TPB to dynamic system-based models, integrating feedback loops and facilitating learning from diverse stakeholders.

In the field of hospitality, in particular, and given this issue, it is surprising that most of the existing studies rely on surveys and self-reported measures. The validity of these studies has been questioned, with concerns raised about the potential presence of social desirability bias, which may reinforce the gap between declared intention and real consumer behaviour (Karlsson and Dolnicar, 2016). Overestimation bias and lack of rigorous methods are also identified as issues (ElHaffar *et al.*, 2020). Bangsa and Schlegelmilch (2020) emphasise the direct impact of methodological bias when measuring self-reported behaviour as an indicator of actual behaviour. To bridge intention-behaviour gap in hospitality, it is crucial to discuss methodological issues and emphasise measuring actual behaviour in natural settings. Contrary to best practices recommendations, existing studies on consumer behaviour in sustainable hospitality primarily consider consumer intentions as a reliable indicator of subsequent behaviour (Lin *et al.*, 2022; Ulker-Demirel and Ciftci, 2020). To overcome this issue, it is crucial to delve into the shift from what consumers intend to what they actually do. Among other methodological shortcomings in relevant research, there is an emphasis on hotel establishments at the expense of other sectors (Hall *et al.*, 2016; Nisa *et al.*, 2017). What holds true for hotels may not necessarily apply to, for example, restaurants, and this limitation is overlooked.

Prior research papers focused on the intention-behaviour gap. However, they are either limited to a specific research setting, focus on a particular theoretical perspective like the TPB (Lin and Roberts, 2020; Ulker-Demirel and Ciftci, 2020), or do not take methodological issues into account (Hall *et al.*, 2016; Joshi and Rahman, 2015). More importantly, these previous studies aimed to synthesize research on the gap between intention and behaviour, which is different from our objective here. We recognize this gap, aiming to offer a critical perspective on sustainability research within hospitality. Considering these gaps, we want to paint a more

accurate picture of sustainability research in hospitality. We aim to address the following questions in this critical literature review:

*RQ1.* What critical gaps and limitations exist within the current literature on sustainable hospitality?

*RQ2.* To what extent do research outcomes regarding sustainable consumption intentions and behaviour align across various studies and research methods?

*RQ3.* How can researchers collect reliable data in sustainable hospitality?

The first research question serves to pinpoint gaps in current knowledge, enabling researchers to identify areas that require further investigation and enhancing understanding of sustainable hospitality. The second research question evaluates the consistency between consumer intentions and actual behaviours across numerous studies and research methods, guiding decision-making in sustainable hospitality. The final research question seeks to provide valuable insights into methodological practices, aiding researchers in designing rigorous studies, enhancing data accuracy, and elevating the overall research in sustainable hospitality. In doing so, we bring a critical perspective to what has been done previously. This literature review provides directions for future research and assists policymakers and marketers in developing effective sustainable hospitality marketing campaigns. It also contributes to the stream of research focused toward achieving the United Nations SDGs by identifying a pathway to mitigate the intention-behaviour gap within hospitality (Sharma *et al.*, 2023).

## **2. Methodology**

This research employs a critical literature review to uncover common characteristics and notable limitations in the existing literature on sustainable consumption in the hospitality industry. We adopted the five-step process to conduct the literature review systematically: formulating questions; identifying relevant studies; study selecting and evaluating studies; conducting analysis; and reporting results (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). We relied on the keywords relevant to sustainable consumption in hospitality journals for keyword identification. In this study, we deliberately chose not to include the terms “intention-behaviour gap” or “attitude-behaviour gap” in the search keywords. This decision was influenced by the recognition of a prevailing trend in the previous reviews. These review studies integrated keywords related to the intention-behaviour gap in their search strategy (ElHaffar *et al.*, 2020; Joshi and Rahman, 2015) to only review papers that examine this gap. Unlike previous reviews focusing solely on the intention-behaviour gap, our approach delves into how this gap is embedded in the current literature on sustainable hospitality. This allows a comprehensive literature evaluation, enhancing insight into challenges and opportunities in sustainable hospitality.

Once the authors agreed on the keywords to employ, we input two classes of keywords. These were identified by checking the keywords adopted in recent literature reviews on related topics (e.g., Acuti *et al.*, 2022) and relying on an initial sample of 15 papers on sustainable consumption in hospitality. The final 18 keywords related to *sustainability* were: “sustainab\* OR ethic\* OR responsib\* OR green OR environmental consciousness OR recyc\* OR reused

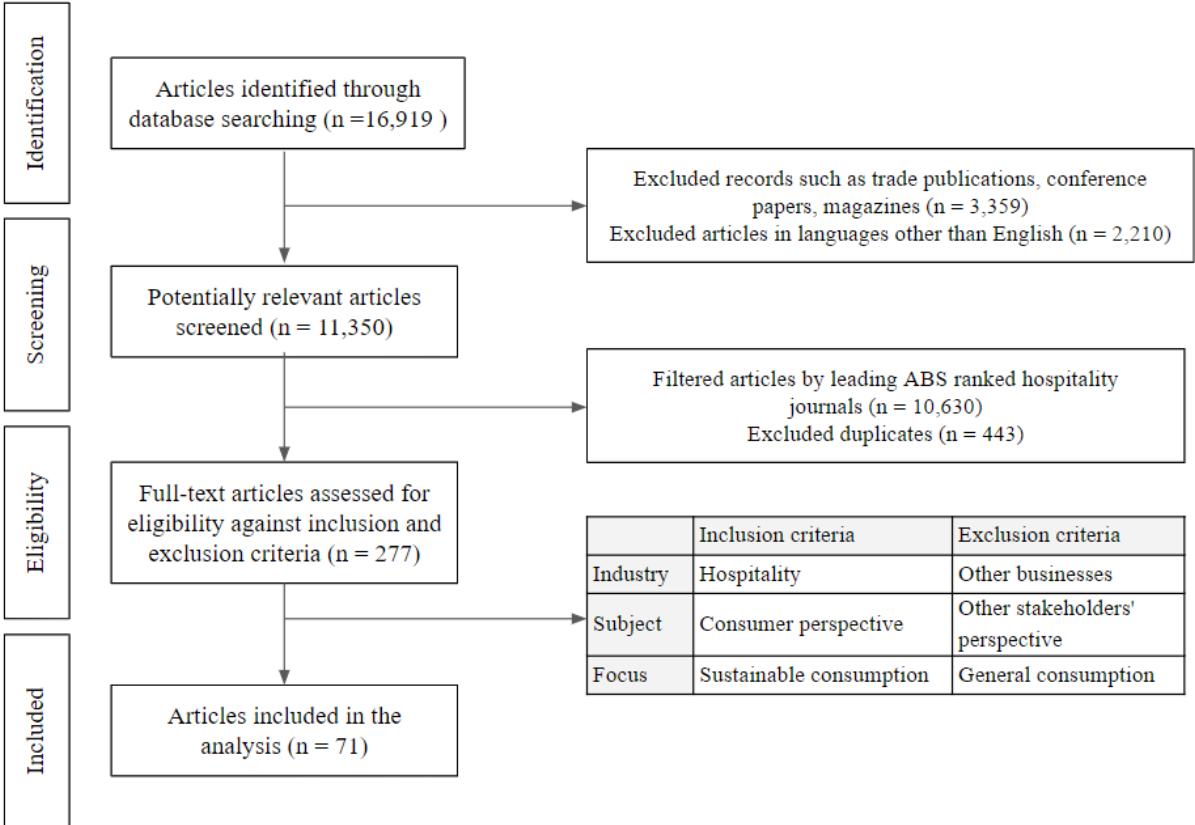
OR environmental claims OR eco-friendly OR human rights OR fair trade OR triple-bottom line OR diversity OR inclusion OR child labor OR sweatshop OR climate friendly behavior OR pro-environmental behavior.” The final 6 keywords related to the *consumer perspective* were: “consumer\* OR customer\*” OR “traveller\*” OR “traveler\*” OR “tourist\*” OR “vacationer\*”. With these keywords, we searched within abstracts. Additionally, we identified 18 hospitality journals from AJG Guide (Chartered Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Guide 2021). We exclusively focused on hospitality journals to maintain a targeted scope in exploring sustainable practices within hospitality businesses. However, our acknowledgement of the interconnected nature of hospitality and tourism is reflected in our analysis of hospitality journal articles that encompass tourism-related aspects. Consistently with other review papers (Blevins *et al.*, 2022), we selected articles from these journals published in the last 10 years (i.e., January 2013 to October 2023) to ensure that research is current and relevant. Table I in the Appendix outlines the 18 hospitality journals and their respective number of reviewed articles.

After including articles written only in English and removing duplicate results, the final number of articles was 277. For the screening of these articles, we developed the following three key inclusion criteria: a) *industry*: hospitality b) *focus*: sustainable consumption c) *subject*: consumer perspective. Simultaneously, the exclusion criteria were a) *industry*: generic businesses b) *focus*: general consumption c) *subject*: other stakeholders’ perspective. Aligned with the *industry* related criterion and in accordance with the scope of this review, we included only papers focusing on hospitality whilst we excluded papers related to other industries (e.g., retailing). With respect to the *focus*, we selected studies investigating sustainable consumption, excluding those exploring consumption behaviours more in general (e.g., consumer behaviour in the digital environment). Finally, we only considered papers that took the consumer point of view and excluded research addressing sustainability related to other stakeholders as core *subjects* (e.g., employees). In the initial screening phase, we reviewed the titles and abstracts to gauge articles’ relevance to the inclusion criteria. Subsequently, we conducted a more detailed examination of the selected papers to determine their alignment with the inclusion/exclusion criteria. This resulted in the final set of 71 articles published in 14 hospitality journals. Our sample consists of 65 empirical articles, 3 conceptual papers, and 3 review papers. Figure 1 illustrates a structured visual summary of the article identification and screening process. The final papers that we reviewed have been flagged with an asterisk (\*) at the end of each of their respective citations in the references list (Pinto, 2019).

Following Donthu *et al.*’s (2021) recommendation to review the literature when the topic is specific and the number of articles is in the low hundreds, the lead author systematically read, analysed, and coded the articles. We opted for manual coding as the nature of articles necessitated careful reading and identification of pertinent categories (Wang and Chugh, 2014). The analysis involved recognizing articles’ key research attributes and categorising them into both predefined codes and deductive themes derived from the research data. Continuous discussion among the authors facilitated this process.

First, we extracted the descriptive categories of the papers (i.e., title, authors, journal, year of publication, abstract). Second, the coding categorisation that led our descriptive analysis focused on the sustainability practice investigated in the paper and the research setting (including sector and geographical area). The thematic areas were then further organised into

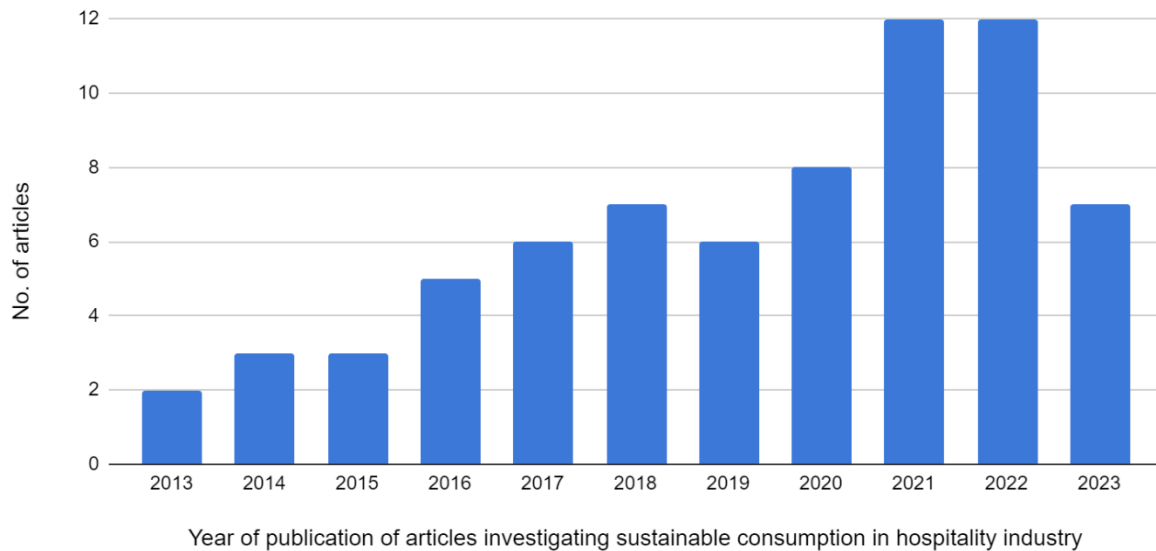
sub-categories following common patterns in the papers. The examination of sustainability practices reveals that the papers delve into recycling and reuse, water and energy efficiency, organic/local food consumption, promotion of green practices, and application of green marketing tools. The research settings under scrutiny range from accommodations, tourism, cruises, camping, tours, to events. The geographical focus varies, encompassing Asia, Australia, Europe, the USA, multiple locations, and other countries. Finally, the critical discussion of the intention-behaviour gap in the hospitality literature is built on two key dimensions: the consumer intentions and consumer behaviours investigated by the literature. The combination of descriptive and critical analyses led the formulation of a research agenda for future studies. The discussion of the analysis ensues.



**Figure 1.** Article identification and screening process. Source: Authors own creation.

**3. Overview of the literature on sustainable hospitality**

Over the last ten years, the number of research articles focusing on consumer intentions and consumer behaviour in sustainable hospitality has increased (see Figure 2). However, the growth is not drastic. The maximum number of articles published within one year is 12, indicating limited overall research in this area. Within this set of studies, we observe that the sustainability practices investigated, and the setting of the studies bring some limitations to the literature.



**Figure 2.** Frequency and year of publication of the reviewed articles. Source: Authors own creation.

### 3.1. Sustainability practices

Previous research investigating sustainability practices focuses on two aspects: consumers adopting sustainable practices and sustainable practices within hospitality businesses. Regarding consumer adoption, 3 articles emphasise individual determinants influencing sustainable behaviour, i.e., nature-relatedness (Burhanudin *et al.*, 2022), green mindfulness (Dharmesti *et al.*, 2020) and sustainability values (Sirakaya-Turk *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, 1 article focuses on the role of consumers' beliefs, attitudes, social norms, and perceived costs affecting intentions to use bottled water (Chatterjee and Barbhuiya, 2021). From a marketing perspective, 2 articles explore the impact of adopting sustainability marketing tools by examining consumers' willingness to pay more for eco-labelled tours (Lissner and Mayer 2020), and consumer perception of green marketing tools adopted by hotels (Chan, 2013).

From a hospitality business perspective, most studies examine the sustainable practices in hotels in general. In our sample, 4 articles examine the role of sustainable practices in accommodations without specifying them. Considering the most investigated sustainable practices, 4 articles focus on recycling policies, followed by 3 articles examining towel/linen reuse policies in accommodations, particularly hotels. Additionally, 4 articles highlight energy and water conservation practices in hotel settings. Likewise, 1 article explores different sustainable practices in camping, including locally-produced food consumption and energy/water-saving measures. Lastly, 1 article explores the use of green marketing tools in rural tourism (Chin *et al.*, 2018). There may be overlap as some studies examine multiple sustainable practices. Finally, we observe that most articles (36) focus on the environmental dimension of sustainability, while 24 articles explore more than one sustainability dimension. However, 11 articles make reference to 'sustainability' in hospitality without specifying whether they explore environmental or social practices. Notably, none of the studies exclusively focus on social or economic sustainability practices.



### 3.2. *Research setting in the reviewed studies*

The physical or social setting in which the research is conducted highly impacts the research findings and interpretation. We analysed the final set of 71 articles to identify common research settings in the existing literature: tourism (35), accommodation (27), tours (4), events (2), cruises (2), and camping (1). Most of the articles in sustainable hospitality concentrate on general tourism and accommodation. In tourism, 35 research studies cover various aspects, like local food consumption, rural, volunteer, destination, and heritage tourism. Concerning the accommodation setting, 20 out of 27 studies focus on hotels and 4 studies explore peer-to-peer accommodation choices. Among these 27 studies, 2 delve into both accommodation and food, while the remaining 1 study investigates consumers' choice of accommodation during COVID-19. Although accommodation and tourism are central to hospitality, consumer behaviours in other settings such as local food consumption (Dedeoğlu *et al.*, 2022) and cruise trips can also affect the environment significantly (Han *et al.*, 2016). Consistent with the viewpoint of Sadiq *et al.* (2022), the geographical setting of the reviewed studies is imbalanced. Our sample includes studies in Asia (22), Europe (15), the USA (8), Australia (5), multiple locations (7), and other countries (5). 3 studies do not specify their location. Also, the location does not apply to conceptual and review papers. Simultaneously, the research focus is mostly on the urban areas with little attention paid to rural areas.

## 4. **The intention behaviour gap in the sustainable hospitality literature**

Considering our literature review, we now critically examine the complexities and implications of sustainable behaviour in hospitality. Additionally, we analyse to what extent the intention-behaviour gap is embedded in sustainable hospitality literature. Precisely, we want to raise two main critical considerations.

### 4.1. *Research findings on sustainable consumption in hospitality are inconsistent.*

Existing literature in this domain reveals mixed findings on the determinants shaping consumer behaviour, with environmental concern emerging as a key factor. Patwary *et al.* (2022) indicate a positive correlation among environmental knowledge, concern, and the intention to stay at green hotels, mediated by eco-centric attitudes. Huang and Liu (2017) find that high environmental concern results in high revisit intention among foreign tourists in sustainable tourism. Kang and Nicholls (2021) confirm that environmentally concerned individuals express willingness to pay higher for eco-friendly hotels. Conversely, Njite and Schaffer's (2017) mixed-method study reveals that consumers with elevated environmental concerns may not prioritise green attributes when selecting hotels. This contradiction within the literature underscores the complex connection between environmental concern and sustainable behaviour. Indeed, the relationship between intention-behaviour is not always straightforward, and it may depend on some contextual factors.

External cues like environmental labels, eco-certifications, and green marketing also influence consumer behaviour. Lissner and Mayer (2020) find that 65% of surveyed tourists express willingness to pay higher for tours with eco-labels. Sirakaya-Turk *et al.* (2014) highlight consumers actively seeking green certifications before booking hotels. Berezan *et al.* (2014) report contradictory results, where consumers express that they are willing to pay higher for

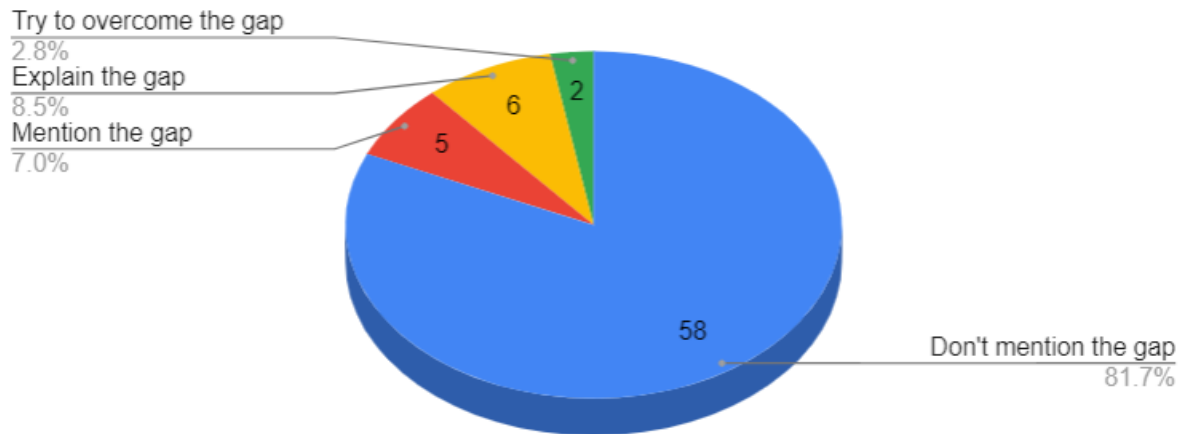
green hotels but also preferring discounts as incentives. This gap between sustainability and cost preference may be attributed to factors like awareness, economic constraints, trust issues, marketing strategies, and behavioural biases.

Research exploring the link between consumers' values, subjective norms, and sustainable behaviour presents some contradictions. Han *et al.* (2019) integrated norm activation model and model of goal-directed behaviour to emphasise that personal norms indirectly boost sustainable intentions in cruise tourism. Balaji *et al.* (2022) indicate a positive link between personal values and peer-to-peer accommodation selection. Teng *et al.* (2015) leveraged the TPB, revealing that subjective norm, attitudes, perceived behavioural control, and altruism collectively enhance intention to visit green hotels. Yadav *et al.* (2019) indicate no direct impact of subjective norms on green hotel choice, but their absence affects the decision. Conversely, Dedeoğlu *et al.* (2022) applied TPB to conclude that subjective norms are insignificant in local food consumption intentions. Personal values are multidimensional and may be influenced by individual differences and situational factors. However, these studies relied on surveys, and the inconsistencies in findings may stem from self-reported measures and methodological issues.

Lastly, consumer demographics' impact in sustainable hospitality studies yields mixed findings. Berezan *et al.* (2014) find similar satisfaction levels across different age and education groups. While Pekovic (2021) suggests a stronger link between satisfaction and green motives in older tourists. Lopez-Guzman and Santa-Cruz's (2016) examination of sustainable festival tourism depicts participants over 40 with university degrees as enthusiasts. Conversely, Mokhtari *et al.* (2019) report higher self-reported sustainable behaviour in 15 to 30-year-olds in geo-tourism. Despite valuable insights, the inconsistencies in findings prompt us to question the broader reliability and applicability of these results.

These mixed results stem from methodological weaknesses, which may be linked to measurement issues, but also to practical difficulties in measuring actual behaviour. The primary issue is the lack of critical discourse on the intention-behaviour gap in sustainable hospitality, coupled with an over-reliance on consumer intentions to predict behaviour. It holds significant implications, as exemplified by instances where individuals express intentions to partake in sustainable practices. However, consumer behaviour may not align with these intentions in the holiday or entertainment context, demanding a distinct approach. The methodological weaknesses and evolutions in the literature are developed hereafter.

Despite the contradictory findings, the literature scarcely acknowledges the intention-behaviour gap. 58 out of 71 reviewed articles do not mention the intention-behaviour gap (See Figure 3). Only a small number of studies address the issue, with 5 articles mentioning the gap, but 4 out of these 5 articles not defining it. They merely acknowledge the discrepancy between intentions and actions during travel. Additionally, 6 articles provide detailed explanations for this gap in the hospitality industry. Notably, only 2 out of the 71 articles try to overcome this gap. These 2 articles highlight the significance of environmental and health concerns among green hotel customers and emphasise tourists' individual transformation, respectively (Sadiq *et al.*, 2022; Seeler *et al.*, 2021).



**Figure 3.** Breakdown of the intention-behaviour gap research in the sustainable hospitality literature. Source: Authors own creation.

#### 4.2. *Most studies examine consumer intentions and adopt self-reported measures.*

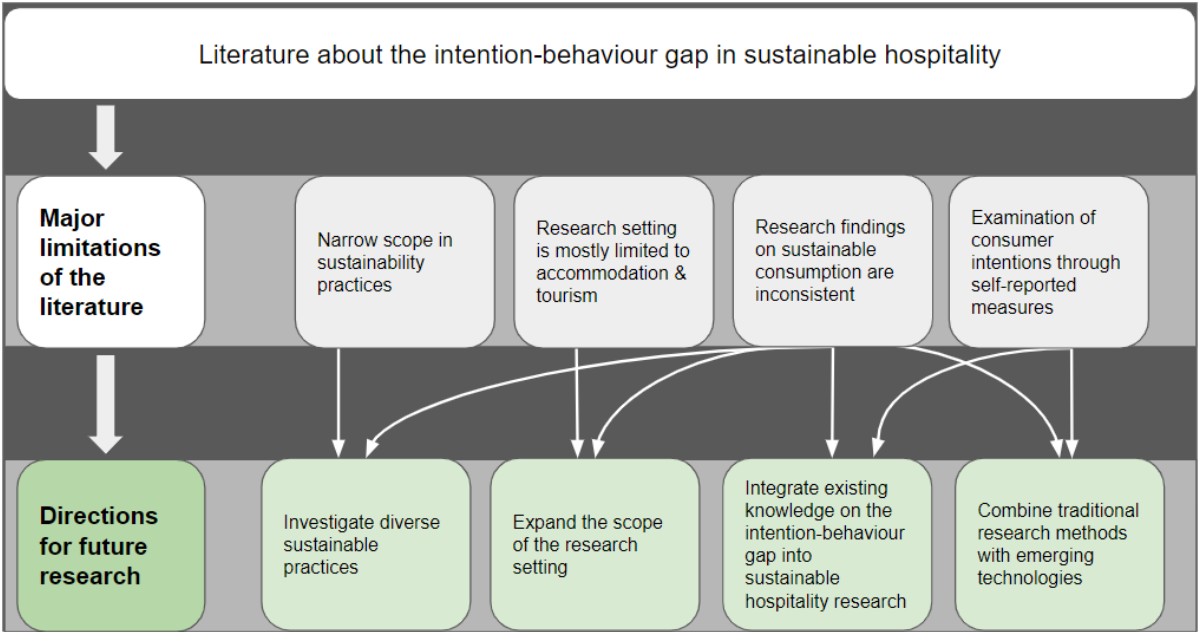
Out of 71 studies, 56 investigate consumer intentions or self-reported behaviour. 7 studies do not measure intentions or behaviours (comprising reviews, conceptual papers, and one study on ecotourism policy). Among 8 studies examining actual consumer behaviour, a notable trend emerges. 5 studies solely rely on big data analytics to evaluate online customer reviews. The remaining 3 out of these 8 studies adopt mixed methods to measure both actual consumer behaviour and intentions. We argue that exclusively focusing on measuring consumer intentions or self-reported behaviour may constitute a research limitation. This might explain the inconsistent findings and the intention-behaviour gap. While understanding consumer intentions is important to grasp their desire to perform a certain action, it is equally crucial to measure their translation into real behaviour.

Another limitation identified in our analysis is the use of self-reported measures. 42 out of 71 reviewed studies use surveys for data collection. In our sample, 12 studies use a mixed method approach, with 9 of them using self-reported measures. Most of these studies combine surveys with interviews, while the remaining also use workshops and collect descriptive consumer responses. However, both surveys and interviews are susceptible to response and social desirability bias (Karlsson and Dolnicar, 2016). In our sample, only 2 studies perform experiments and fieldwork, but these also investigate consumer intentions. Given the circumstances, the relationship between intentions (measured through self-reported behaviour) and actual sustainable behaviour in the hospitality industry is imperfect. Despite survey and interview results indicating pro-environmental intentions and values, these frequently do not translate into sustainable behaviour, especially during vacations (Sirakaya-Turk *et al.*, 2014). Many studies acknowledge this limitation of relying on stated consumer intentions or recalled past behaviour (Chatterjee and Barbhuiya, 2021; Kang and Nicholls 2021; Lissner and Mayer 2020). However, the literature rarely investigates actual consumer behaviour in sustainable hospitality, constituting a notable limitation (Sirakaya-Turk *et al.*, 2014).

Despite these methodological limitations, recent literature is approaching new methodologies for more reliable and generalisable findings. Notably, 7 out of 8 studies measuring actual behaviour utilize online review content. In our sample, user-generated content analysis is used for identifying sustainability dimensions in hospitality from a consumer perspective. For instance, Brochado and Brochado (2019) and Brochado *et al.* (2021) reveal key dimensions in glamping (glamorous camping) and sustainable tours. Mariani and Borghi (2021) examine the influence of environmentally focused online reviews on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Other studies also investigate glacier tourism (Abrahams *et al.*, 2022) and eco-tourism experiences (Ruhanen, 2019). From a methodological perspective, Brochado and Brochado (2019) argue that consumer-generated content analysis is emerging as a survey alternative. Given that online reviews impact decisions, their reliability is questionable due to social influence bias (Cicognani *et al.*, 2022) and potentially incentivized positive reviews. Despite these challenges, online content analysis offers insights into real-time consumer trends in sustainable hospitality (Mariani and Borghi, 2021).

**5. Four directions for future research**

Drawing from the descriptive overview of the literature and the critical discussion of the intention-behaviour gap in the sustainable hospitality, we provide four directions that seek to assist future studies in addressing the major limitations of the literature. Figure 4 presents the key limitations recognised in the current literature and establishes links between each limitation and the corresponding directions for future research.



**Figure 4.** Literature about the intention-behaviour gap in sustainable hospitality. Source: Authors own creation.

*5.1. Investigate diverse sustainable practices*

Two distinct objects of analysis emerge from the reviewed articles: the sustainable practices of guests/tourists once at the destination versus the practices of hotels/restaurants that may or may not be considered sustainable. For instance, Kapoor *et al.* (2021) and Assaker (2020) highlight

the potentially beneficial effects of sustainable positioning and the promotion of environmentally friendly behaviours on consumer choices, value perception, and satisfaction with these services. Others, on the other hand, are interested in consumers' behaviour: whether they adopt environmentally friendly behaviours or, conversely, whether they enact harmful behaviours toward the environment. Burhanudin *et al.* (2022) analyse the responsible behaviours reported by tourists according to their level of nature-relatedness. Chatterjee and Barbhuiya (2021) use the TPB to explore the determinants of tourists' use of bottled water. Nisa *et al.* (2017) highlight, in a meta-analysis, the effect of different types of interventions implemented by hotels to promote towel reuse (environmental appeals, messages encouraging conservation, messages using social norms or charitable donations). Nudges and social norms emerge as the most effective strategies to promote reuse of towel among hotel guests. Samaddar *et al.* (2022) highlight the importance of cultural engagement in reinforcing tourists' responsible intentions.

However, few studies address potential spillover effects, i.e., the effect of adopting one behaviour on the adoption of another. Indeed, a negative spillover effect could very well be envisaged, with consumers who have already made a choice in favour of the environment in opting for a green hotel for instance, feeling morally licensed to adopt less environmentally friendly behaviours. This negative spill-over has already been investigated in studies showing for instance that encouraging consumers to reduce water use can lead them to increase energy use (Truelove, 2014). It is possible that a consumer who has chosen a sustainable destination, or a destination promoted as sustainable behaves sustainably once there for the sake of coherence and consistency, which represents positive spill-over. This effect has been demonstrated to occur in other domains. For instance, consumers who are encouraged to buy green products, through monetary incentives, also engage in other pro-environmental behaviours such as taking public transport or using less water, without being encouraged to do so (Lanzini and Thøgersen, 2014). In any case, more research seems necessary on this aspect of sustainable consumption in hospitality, and convincing results can only be obtained using behavioural measures, as the spillover effect is difficult to demonstrate with self-reported intentions and measures. Finally, the literature investigates consumer responses to eco-friendly practices in hospitality (e.g., water-saving measures or use of eco-labels), with limited research on social sustainability. We encourage future studies to observe how companies and policymakers can promote their social initiatives (e.g., fair-trade food menus or employment of disadvantaged personnel in hotels) and enhance the social sustainability of hospitality. We believe this path for future studies is interesting because consumers might behave differently depending on the environmental vs. social practice they are presented with (Catlin *et al.*, 2017).

### 5.2. *Expand the scope of the research setting*

The current literature predominantly focuses on hotels and tourism, neglecting other sectors (i.e., restaurants, attractions, cruise, and tour operators). This narrow focus limits our grasp of sustainable consumption across the hospitality industry, making it potentially misleading to generalise hotel-centric research findings. In our sample, only one study (Hossain *et al.*, 2023) examines self-reported consumer behaviour in a combined restaurant and accommodation setting. It underscores the necessity for dedicated research on responsible behaviour in

restaurants. Hossain *et al.*, (2023) highlight the scarcity of research concerning consumer experiences in tourism and hospitality. Altogether, we advocate for further research in the neglected contexts. Geographically, the current research primarily focuses on developed countries and urban areas (Sadiq *et al.*, 2022). While these findings may in part provide a foundation for research in developing countries and in rural settings (Oriade *et al.*, 2021), rural and eastern geographical settings have their own peculiarities that should be considered in future investigations. Sustainable consumption patterns vary across developed and developing countries due to factors like cultural diversity and economic growth stage (Wang *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, Zulauf and Wagner (2021) highlight variations in the adoption of sustainable innovations and their dynamics in urban and rural contexts, offering insights into differing values, enablers, and motives for sustainability among different individuals. Hence, future researchers should aim to diversify locations and explore cross-cultural research which accounts for cultural and economic differences in consumer behaviour (Balaji *et al.*, 2022).

### 5.3. *Integrate existing knowledge on intention-behaviour gap into sustainable hospitality research*

Our thorough literature review emphasises the critical importance of addressing this issue. Despite a significant body of research on consumer intention in sustainable hospitality, there is a notable lack of integration of knowledge about the intention-behaviour gap. Astonishingly, more than half of the studies in our sample overlook this gap. This recurring oversight highlights the gravity of the issue and signals a critical need for renewed attention. Other research areas such as retailing have addressed this issue effectively, changing the current industry landscape. For instance, in retailing, supermarkets have investigated how sustainable packaging can work in practice (i.e., beyond intentions) (Vila-Lopez and Küster-Boluda, 2021). To address the challenges of understanding and bridging the intention-behaviour gap in sustainable hospitality, researchers can adopt an empirical approach similar to successful strategies in other sectors by adapting and contextualizing the findings to the unique challenges and dynamics of the hospitality industry. Additionally, researchers can navigate the challenges associated with field studies by integrating conventional behaviour theories with advanced methodologies, maintaining its relevance in understanding consumer behaviour in sustainable hospitality. This critical literature review aims, in part, to highlight this need to integrate existing knowledge on the intention-behaviour gap into sustainable hospitality research, facilitating more impactful studies in this domain. Given the substantial influence of the hospitality industry on the environment and society, addressing this issue is crucial for the development of a sustainable future.

### 5.4. *Combine traditional research methods with emerging technologies*

Combining traditional methods with emerging technologies is a way to address the intention-behaviour gap. This includes integrating AI-powered tools like chatbots, which enable dynamic and real-time interactions with consumers (Kelly *et al.*, 2022), facilitating data collection on consumer behaviour. For instance, ChatGPT can contribute to promoting sustainable practices and assisting guests in making sustainable choices during their stay. Instead of relying on self-reported measures, leverage Internet of Things (IoT) devices (Elkhwesky and Elkhwesky, 2023) to examine the intention-behaviour gap in sustainable hospitality. For instance, smart

room systems can provide real-time objective data about energy use or waste management. It can reduce susceptibility to social desirability bias and offer a naturalistic environment for data collection. Text analysis, powered by natural language processing, can unveil valuable insights into consumer sentiments, intentions, and behaviour from social media, online reviews, and guest feedback. Moreover, embracing AI and machine learning can facilitate predictive modelling of sustainable behaviours, enhancing the ability to design targeted interventions. However, traditional methods like field experiments remain indispensable for observing actual consumer behaviour in natural setting and establishing causal relationships (Viglia and Dolnicar, 2020). As most of the mixed-method studies in our sample used surveys and interviews, we recommend a mixed-methods approach that combines surveys and interviews with behavioural observations. Additionally, the absence of longitudinal studies in the current literature is a glaring gap (Assaker, 2020; Huang and Liu, 2017; Yadav *et al.*, 2019). It can help track changes in consumer behaviour over time and offer a deeper understanding of evolving trends. Given the literature limitations and inconsistent findings, embracing innovative methodologies alongside traditional ones holds promise for closing the intention-behaviour gap in sustainable hospitality.

## **6. Discussion and conclusions**

### *6.1. Conclusions*

Sustainability research in the hospitality sector has significantly grown in the last decade. However, the literature on this topic has emerged fragmentedly and provides contradictory findings. This review, analysing 71 articles from hospitality journals, underscores existing methodological issues and proposes potential pathways for advancing research in sustainable hospitality. The critical assessment of the current state of literature provides both theoretical and practical contributions, laying the groundwork for future investigations in this dynamic field.

### *6.2. Theoretical implications*

This study carries crucial theoretical implications by highlighting the unique intention-behaviour gap in sustainable hospitality. It establishes sustainable hospitality as a distinct area within consumer behaviour and sustainability research. By critically analysing existing literature, this study illuminates the intricate challenges faced by the conventional theories of human behaviour when applied in the dynamic hospitality context. Our findings underscore the transformative impact of shifting from familiar home settings to exceptional environments, revealing a notable decline in sustainable behaviour. This prompts a critical reassessment of established frameworks like the theory of planned behaviour and norm activation theory. This review urges researchers to re-evaluate and adapt these frameworks for sustainability contexts when studying sustainable behaviour within the hospitality sector. This critical evaluation opens avenues for new theoretical perspectives accommodating dynamic forces influencing consumer intentions and behaviours during sustainable hospitality experiences. This fosters a deeper understanding of sustainable hospitality.

Additionally, this review provides a comprehensive examination of sustainable hospitality literature over the last decade and to what extent the intention-behaviour gap is embedded in

the current literature. The findings reveal a predominant focus on investigating consumer intentions through self-reported measures, neglecting consumer behaviour. Recognizing the need for more robust and generalisable findings, recent studies are exploring new methodologies. By comparing studies assessing consumer intentions and behaviour, we reveal how research findings on sustainable consumption in hospitality sometimes need to be more consistent. Acknowledging the intention-behaviour gap pitfalls for research and practice, many reviewed articles do not mention the gap and only a small number of the reviewed studies discuss it. This underscores the necessity for enhanced awareness and consideration of the intention behaviour gap within the scholarly discourse on sustainable hospitality.

### 6.3. *Practical implications*

This paper offers practical guidance to researchers, policymakers, managers, and marketers in the sustainable hospitality domain. To advance knowledge on sustainable consumption in hospitality, this study identifies four key research directions. These include investigating diverse sustainable practices, broadening the scope of research settings, integrating existing knowledge on the intention-behaviour gap into sustainable hospitality research, and combining traditional research methods with emerging technologies. These recommendations provide a roadmap for more robust studies bridging the intention-behaviour gap. Marketers can leverage these insights to design effective marketing campaigns, considering nuanced shifts in consumer behaviour during vacations. To address the intention-behaviour gap, stakeholders in hospitality should collaborate on holistic sustainability solutions, accounting for broader socio-economic and cultural contexts. Additionally, encouraging adaptability in the hospitality sector through regular assessments of sustainability initiatives ensures businesses remain responsive to evolving consumer preferences and trends. Policymakers and industry leaders can leverage these findings to inform policies aligned with the United Nations SDGs, facilitating the navigation and mitigation of the intention-behaviour gap within sustainable hospitality.

### 6.4. *Limitations and future research*

While this review makes meaningful contributions, it has limitations. First, the articles collected in this study are limited to the hospitality journals identified through the AJG guide. If this criterion enabled us to conduct a review with a tight focus, it also excluded potentially interesting papers published in more generalist journals. Second, our paper specifically focuses on the gap between talks and walks of consumers. We acknowledge that interesting and thoughtful research has investigated this inconsistency referring to other stakeholders - e.g., employees (Wang, 2016) or managers (Koch *et al.*, 2020). These limitations affect this review's generalisability, emphasising the need for more research to address research voids in this emerging area.



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Appendix.

<b>Table I.</b> Hospitality Journals included in the critical review. Source: Authors own creation.		
Title of the hospitality journals	No. of articles	%
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	11	15.5
Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism	11	15.5
Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	11	15.5
International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research	5	7.0
International Journal of Hospitality Management	5	7.0
Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	5	7.0
Anatolia: An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research	4	5.6
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	4	5.6
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	4	5.6
International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration	3	4.2
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	3	4.2
Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes	3	4.2
International Hospitality Review	1	1.4
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	1	1.4
Advances in Hospitality and Leisure	0	0.0
Hospitality and Society	0	0.0
Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, and Tourism Education	0	0.0
Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>