Guest editorial: Sustainability management from a behavioral perspective in hospitality and tourism

Introduction

Hospitality and tourism are currently navigating the "decade of action" for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), facing mounting pressure from regulators, customers, investors and local communities to align growth with inclusion and environmental protection (Buhalis *et al.*, 2023; Wynn and Jones, 2020). The sector causes greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption and waste generation (Buhalis *et al.*, 2023; Jones *et al.*, 2014), yet it also holds substantial potential for innovation and for driving transformative shifts toward responsible production and consumption (Buhalis *et al.*, 2023; Wynn and Jones, 2020). Recent scholarship highlights both tourism's contributions to the SDGs and the post-pandemic tensions that have reshaped priorities and strategies across destinations and firms (Buhalis *et al.*, 2023; Karatepe *et al.*, 2022b). Against this backdrop, advancing sustainability in hospitality management requires more than technical solutions; it demands ensuring that commitments translate into tangible behavioral change among employees, managers and customers.

The distinctive contribution of this special issue lies in its behavioral orientation: sustainability depends not only on regulatory frameworks or technological investment, but equally on micro-decisions and everyday practices (Han, 2015; Sapiains *et al.*, 2016). Recent studies demonstrate how psychological and organizational theories – such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Value–Belief–Norm Theory (Han, 2015), the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework (Farrukh *et al.*, 2024) and Social Identity Theory (Sapiains *et al.*, 2016) – provide robust explanations for the emergence, or absence, of pro-environmental conduct. On the consumer side, research has documented the role of values, social norms, perceived efficacy and emotions such as eco-guilt in shaping pro-environmental intentions and behaviors in hotels and restaurants (Han, 2015; Sapiains *et al.*, 2016). On the employee side, green human resource management (GHRM) practices create psychological resources and supportive organizational climates that empower human resource management and leadership to function as everyday levers of behavioral change (Farrukh *et al.*, 2024; Karatepe *et al.*, 2022a; Olorunsola *et al.*, 2024; Tabrizi *et al.*, 2023). The call for papers for this special issue invited contributions to advance this behavioral agenda by connecting sustainability management with employee, customer and organizational behaviors. The 19 accepted articles address this call with methodological diversity, geographical breadth and theoretical plurality, yielding a rich and multifaceted landscape of insights.

To facilitate an integrative reading, the articles are organized into three thematic streams reflecting key levels of analysis. The first, *workforce*, includes research on employee behaviors, green human resource management practices and sustainable leadership styles. The second, *consumers*, brings other studies on the attitudes, motivations, norms and behaviors of customers and tourists. The third, *organizations*, addresses systemic dimensions linked to stakeholders, supply chains, communities and technology. This structure enables readers to appreciate both the common mechanisms and the boundary conditions that explain sustainability from a behavioral perspective.

Articles in this special issue

Focus on workforce behaviors

Nguyen and Nguyen (2025) examined how green human resource management practices drove hotel sustainability through green innovation. Using interviews with managers and

survey data from 574 employees in Vietnamese luxury hotels, they showed that practices such as green discipline, safety and empowerment fostered both product and process innovation. Process innovation yielded strong economic, social and environmental gains, while product innovation mainly boosted environmental and social outcomes. The study underscores innovation as the link between human resource management and sustainability, advancing the ability–motivation–opportunity framework and resource-based view in hospitality.

Han et al. (2025a) explored green behaviors in hospitality through behavioral reasoning theory (BRT) using survey data from 263 US employees. Applying fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis and necessary condition analysis, they found that green conduct stemmed from combinations of values, reasons, motives and emotions rather than single factors. Positive emotions and social norms were key enablers, while cost and workload barriers suppressed behavior unless offset by organizational support. The study advances BRT by showing that workplace sustainability emerges from configurational pathways rather than linear effects.

Hossain et al. (2025) analyzed how smart technology, artificial intelligence, robotics and algorithms (STARA) influenced green performance in Malaysian hotels. Surveying 240 managers, they tested a moderated mediation model grounded in dynamic capability and social cognitive theories. The findings revealed that STARA improved sustainability only indirectly via green human resource management and employee green commitment with a green psychological climate reinforcing these effects. The study concludes that technology alone is insufficient; it delivers value when paired with human resource strategies and supportive cultures that drive employee engagement.

Haldorai et al. (2025) studied how top management commitment to sustainability (TMCS) drove performance in Thai green hotels. Using survey data from 376 managers and employees, they showed that TMCS boosted outcomes directly and through green supply chain management. Coercive and normative pressures strengthened this link, while mimetic pressure had little effect. The study highlights that leadership commitment, reinforced by external pressures, is essential to embed sustainability in supply chains.

Vu et al. (2025) evaluated how green human resource management shaped employee cognition, pro-environmental behavior and performance in Vietnamese hotels. Using survey data from 393 employees, they showed that green human resource management boosted knowledge, attitudes and pro-environmental behavior, which enhanced environmental outcomes. However, attitudes toward pro-environmental behavior did not directly predict behavior and work overload weakened positive effects. The study, framed by social identity theory, illustrates how human resource practices, cognition and workload pressures interact to influence sustainability.

Nadeem et al. (2025) identified and prioritized the key determinants of employees' green behavior in the Indian hotel industry. Combining a systematic literature review with analytic hierarchy process (AHP) and fuzzy AHP, the study evaluated intra-personal, inter-personal and external factors influencing staff pro-environmental actions. The findings denoted that individual green values, green human resource management practices and perceived organizational support were the most critical drivers. By applying multi-criteria decision-making techniques, the research recommends a structured framework for managers and policymakers to design human resource strategies and organizational interventions that effectively promote sustainability in the hospitality workforce.

Azila-Gbettor et al. (2025) investigated how green inclusive leadership fostered green creativity among hotel employees in Ghana, with green work engagement and psychological ownership (individual and collective) as mediators. Using survey data from 484 employees in 3- to 4-star hotels, the study showed that inclusive leaders enhanced creativity both directly and indirectly by strengthening employees' engagement and sense of ownership over environmental initiatives. The results highlight the importance of cultivating a supportive climate where employees feel empowered to contribute to innovative solutions for sustainability.

Ishaque and Ansari (2025) examined how green human resource management shaped pro-environmental behavior in the hospitality sector of Pakistan. Using survey data from 286 hotel employees, the study confirmed that green human resource management practices directly activated pro-environmental behavior and indirectly did so through green work engagement. Moreover, employees' individual green values strengthened this relationship, acting as a moderator. The findings highlight that human resource policies such as training, rewards and empowerment can only reach full potential when aligned with employees' personal values, underlining the combined role of organizational practices and individual beliefs in driving sustainability.

Nazeer et al. (2025) analyzed how environmentally specific authentic leadership (ESAL) promoted green voice behavior among hotel employees in Pakistan. Using multi-source, time-lagged survey data from 286 staff, the study showed that ESAL encouraged both promotive voice (suggesting eco-friendly initiatives) and prohibitive voice (challenging harmful practices). These effects occurred directly and indirectly through green moral identity and green work climate perceptions. The findings denoted that authentic leaders who embodied ecological values inspired employees to internalize green identities and perceive supportive climates, thereby strengthening their willingness to speak up for sustainability.

Focus on consumers behavior

Nguyen et al. (2025) examined the determinants of tourists' intention to adopt public bike rental services in Vietnam through an integrated Norm Activation Model and Technology Acceptance Model. Drawing on survey data from 777 tourists in Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City, the study revealed that ease of use, perceived usefulness, awareness of environmental consequences and personal norms jointly shaped positive attitudes and behavioral intention toward bike-sharing. The findings underscore the role of environmental awareness as the most powerful driver, highlighting the value of merging technological and pro-social perspectives to understand sustainable transport choices in tourism.

Kement et al. (2025) investigated how hotel guests' environmental attitudes shaped responsible behavior (ERB) in green and non-green hotels in Türkiye. Surveying 411 participants, they distinguished ecocentric, technocentric and dualcentric orientations. Ecocentric views drive activism, technocentric attitudes hinder behaviors like recycling, while dualcentric attitudes support all ERB dimensions, especially in green hotels. The study clarifies how attitudinal profiles translate into sustainable practices and offers guidance for managers to encourage eco-conscious behavior.

Jana et al. (2025) analyzed the sustainable consumption patterns among affluent travelers in India's luxury hospitality sector, applying the TPB. Surveying 418 consumers, they confirm strong links between attitudes and intentions but expose a persistent intention–behavior gap, largely due to the limited availability of green hotels. The study refines TPB by highlighting structural constraints and urges practitioners to expand eco-friendly options and communicate sustainability attributes to meet rising demand in luxury travel.

Han et al. (2025b) explored customer retention in green hotels using surveys from 661 Chinese consumers and a multi-method approach. They distinguished cognitive drivers (health benefits, performance, employee responsibility and environmental features) and affective drivers (well-being, pride, happiness attractiveness). The findings indicated that retention stemmed from combinations of factors, with health benefits, responsible staff and emotional well-being, which were most influential, while pride and happiness boosted repurchase. The study underscores that loyalty depends on both rational and emotional engagement.

Yun et al. (2025) studied non-vegan consumers' motives for dining at vegan restaurants, using social comparison theory and survey data from 208 South Koreans. Status and uniqueness needs drove conspicuous motives that created ambivalence, yet this ambivalence unexpectedly increased revisit intentions, especially when restaurants displayed strong authenticity. The study showed how non-altruistic motives like status signaling could still

foster loyalty, offering insights for strengthening authenticity and leveraging social identity in vegan dining.

Darwish *et al.* (2025) examined green purchase behavior in Lebanon's restaurant sector using surveys from 397 customers. The results demonstrated that environmental concern strongly predicted both intention and behavior, while social value and consumer effectiveness acted indirectly. Willingness to pay a premium also supported sustainable purchasing, though it did not moderate the intention–behavior gap. The study adapted theory of reasoned action and theory of planned behavior to a Middle Eastern context, stressing economic and cultural barriers and calling for targeted green marketing and pricing strategies.

Demirović Bajrami *et al.* (2025) presented a multidimensional model of pro-environmental behavior among tourists, integrating psychological, demographic, situational, behavioral and contextual predictors. Using survey data from 824 domestic and international tourists in Serbia, the study identified personal norms, travel companions and perceived effectiveness as the strongest drivers of sustainable actions, alongside influences from stay duration and destination characteristics. By combining regression and genetic algorithms, the paper highlights the interplay of internal values and external contexts, offering a holistic framework for understanding what makes tourists "go green."

Jacob *et al.* (2025) investigated the drivers of guest loyalty to green hotels in Gran Canaria, Spain, emphasizing the role of circular practices. Utilizing survey data from 211 tourists, the study applied partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and multigroup analysis to assess how circular behavior at home, hotel environmental policies and guest preferences for circular practices formed loyalty. The results denoted that hotel environmental policy and tourists' own circular habits strongly enhanced loyalty, while age, gender, booking system and board type moderated these relationships. The paper advances understanding of loyalty by introducing a construct rooted in the 3R principle (reduce, reuse, recycle) and highlighting the value of segment-specific strategies for sustainable demand.

Focus on organizational behavior

Elbelehy and Crispim (2025) conducted a systematic literature review to examine how social sustainability had been addressed within hospitality and tourism supply chains. Using the PRISMA framework, they analyzed 17 peer-reviewed studies published between 2008 and 2023, identifying trends, practices and research gaps. The review revealed that research on the social dimension lagged behind environmental and economic aspects, with most attention directed toward community development while areas such as labor rights and human rights remained underexplored. Methodologically, the field shifted from early qualitative case studies in developed countries to more recent quantitative approaches, though multi-criteria decision-making remained scarce. The authors argue for broader stakeholder inclusion, standardized indicators and stronger theoretical grounding, calling on future studies to integrate perspectives from institutional, stakeholder and social network theories. The paper contributes by consolidating fragmented knowledge and setting a research agenda for advancing social sustainability in hospitality and tourism supply chains.

Tran and Tran (2025) investigated the sustainability outcomes of volunteer tourism (VT) in rural Vietnam through 37 interviews and document analysis. They identified impacts across nine areas, from education and health to cultural exchange and infrastructure. Benefits depended largely on community empowerment and the involvement of volunteer tourism organizations in decision-making. The study proposes a model linking community capital to sustainability and stresses that lasting gains require collaboration, shared responsibility and inclusive governance.

Final observations

The contributions assembled in this special issue demonstrate that sustainability in hospitality and tourism cannot be achieved through technology or regulation alone. Instead,

it emerges from the daily choices of employees, managers and consumers, embedded within organizational systems. Taken together, the 19 articles highlight a unifying message: behavioral change is the missing link between sustainability commitments and sustainability outcomes. By integrating diverse theories, methods and contexts, these studies show how values, leadership, human resource management practices, consumer attitudes and systemic governance mechanisms jointly shape the future of sustainable hospitality. We hope this collection not only advances academic debate but also inspires industry leaders and policymakers to recognize that meaningful transformation depends on engaging people – their motives, identities and actions – at every level of the tourism ecosystem.

In closing, we thank all the authors for their valuable contributions and the reviewers for their constructive and timely feedback. We are especially grateful to Professor Fevzi Okumus for his support. Our sincere thanks also go to the journal's editorial and production team for their excellent coordination and assistance throughout the process. This issue is the result of a shared effort, and we deeply appreciate everyone who helped make it possible.

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