



Fans' behaviour in selecting green accommodations

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Abstract

Sport tourism has become an increasingly popular global phenomenon, merging the allure of sporting events with the adventure of travel. Given the scale of such events and the transient spike in population they induce, it is crucial to consider sustainable practices, particularly in choosing accommodations. Green accommodations emerge as a key solution to mitigate the environmental footprint associated with sport tourism. This study investigates the behaviour of sports fans in selecting green accommodations, highlighting the increasing preference for environmentally responsible travel options in the context of sport tourism. Following the Theory of Planned Behaviour, this research assesses how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence fans' decisions towards eco-friendly lodging. Data were collected from an open questionnaire distributed across diverse digital platforms in Italy. The online survey included questions aimed at investigating fans' preferences and behaviours in selecting green accommodations. Key findings reveal that, while environmental sustainability is not always the primary factor in accommodation choice, there is a notable consciousness towards eco-friendly living among sports tourists. However, the booking of green accommodations often falls short of initial intentions due to factors like limited availability, higher costs, and insufficient information. This study proposes strategies for event organisers and policymakers to bridge this intention-behaviour gap, such as enhancing the visibility of green accommodations and offering incentives to promote sustainable choices. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of consumers' behaviour in sustainable tourism and underscores the need for integrated efforts to facilitate more environmentally conscious decisions in sport-related travel.

Keywords: Sustainability, Climate Change, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Sustainable Development, Management

1. Introduction

Sport tourism has become an increasingly popular global phenomenon, merging the allure of athletic events with the adventure of travel (Van Rheenen et al., 2017). This niche sector of the tourism industry attracts millions of fans who traverse continents to witness sports, ranging from the grandeur of the Olympic Games to the fervour of football championships. As these fans converge on host cities, the surge in demand for accommodations and other services inevitably exerts a significant environmental impact (Cooper and McCullough, 2021; Daddi et al., 2021). Given the scale of such events and the transient spike in population they induce, it is crucial to consider sustainable practices, particularly in choosing accommodations. Green accommodations emerge as a key solution in mitigating the environmental footprint associated with sport tourism (Merli et al., 2019).

The importance of selecting green accommodations for sports tourists cannot be overstated. These eco-friendly facilities are designed to operate under principles that reduce energy consumption, conserve water, and minimise waste, aligning with broader environmental sustainability goals (Preziosi et al., 2019). By opting for such lodging, fans directly contribute to the preservation of the host city's natural resources, enhancing its capacity to host more sustainable events in the future. Moreover, green accommodations often employ local materials and labour, support local economies, and foster community engagement, thereby creating a ripple effect of benefits beyond just environmental conservation (Kim et al., 2015).

Environmental sustainability in sport tourism not only addresses the immediate impacts of increased resource use but also sets a precedent for future events. As the world becomes more conscious of climate change and environmental degradation, the sports industry is under growing pressure to demonstrate leadership in sustainability (McCullough et al., 2020). Sports fans, as critical stakeholders in this industry, wield significant influence through their economic choices (Daddi et al., 2024). By choosing accommodations that prioritise ecological responsibility, they signal to event organisers and host cities the importance of sustainability, encouraging a shift towards greener practices across all facets of sport tourism (Martins et al., 2021).

Sport tourism represents a strong catalyst for economic and cultural exchange but also poses significant environmental challenges (Mascarenhas et al., 2021). The decision by fans to opt for green accommodations is a pivotal step in transforming the industry. It not only helps reduce the ecological footprint of major sporting events but also fosters a culture of sustainability that resonates with global environmental objectives (Wicker, 2019). As the intersection of sports and tourism continues to grow, so does the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure that this convergence contributes positively to the health of the planet, making green accommodations not just an option but a necessity for environmentally conscious sports fans (Kamboj et al., 2022).

For these reasons, we carried out a survey aimed at understanding fans' behaviours in the selection of green accommodations during sports events. Our article is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework and formulates the hypotheses. Section 3 describes the methodology. Section 4 presents the results, while Section 5 discusses these results and the underlying implications. Lastly, this article summarises the findings and the main limitations of this research and provides a future research agenda.

2. Literature review and research questions

Green hotel and tourist behaviours have been frequently investigated in the literature. Scholars have mainly centred their attention on two perspectives: the green practices adopted by hotels and accommodation facilities, and consumers' behaviours in the frame of the theory of planned behaviour.

While confirming the theory of planned behaviour, Han (2015) recognised the importance of the prominent role of awareness of consequences and normative processes in generating intention. This result was also confirmed by Han and Yoon (2015) who, in addition to consumers' environmental awareness, highlighted the importance of perceived effectiveness and reputation of hotels' eco-friendly behaviour. Wang et al. (2020) also identified a significant positive relationship between green purchase attitudes and green behavioural intention. Verma and Chandra (2018) confirmed that attitude ranks high in merit for predicting the consumer's green hotel visit intention. Gao et al. (2016) focused on the relevance of the relationship between personal values, attitudes, environmental knowledge/awareness, and perceived benefits and hotel/restaurant image, perceived quality, and satisfaction in influencing consumers' behavioural intentions (e.g., word-of-mouth intentions, retentions, willingness to pay, and willingness to pay a premium). The importance of environmentally friendly activities and overall image was also shown by Yarimoglu and Gunay (2020). Wang et al. (2018) demonstrated that perceived consumer effectiveness and environmental concern have positive effects on the attitude and the intention of consumers to visit green hotels, and that perceived consumer effectiveness has the largest effect.

Teng et al. (2015), however, claimed that, in addition to attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, consumers' altruism plays a crucial role in the selection of green accommodation. Nimri et al. (2020) also extended the analysis to other variables. These authors claimed that green hotel knowledge and attitudes, as well as subjective injunctive norms, positively influence intention towards green hotel patronage. Some limitations related to the theory of planned behaviour have also been highlighted by Olya et al. (2019). These authors, while recognising that perceived behavioural control boosts consumers' continued intention to visit, claimed that it is insufficient for predicting green hotel guests' intention to recommend.

With regard to green practices adopted by hotels to reduce their environmental footprint, the academic literature is divided into two main streams of research. On one hand, a group of scholars focused on the green human resource management (GHRM) of hotels' employees and, on the other hand, some scholars centred their attention on the technical activities that accommodations can adopt.

Pham et al. (2019) highlighted that the interaction of three GHRM practices (training, performance management and employee involvement) can enhance employees' voluntary green behaviour, depending on the level of green performance management and green employee involvement. In addition to GHRM, Nisar et al. (2021) introduced the concepts of green intellectual capital and pro-environmental behaviours in the domain of environmental management, proving their importance. Irani et al. (2022) suggested that green hotel management should promote GHRM practices throughout their organisations to enhance employee involvement in environmentally sustainable activities.

From the technical perspective, Trang et al. (2019) identified energy efficiency interventions as the most popular actions among green hotels. Other practices, as reported by Han et al. (2018), involved water conservation and waste reduction management. There is a strong relationship between the green practices adopted by hotels and the green image of

hotels. Consumer green satisfaction and green trust, in particular, have a significant influence over the word-of-mouth intention for hotels with environment-friendly operations (Hameed et al., 2022).

As proven by Chung (2020), social responsibility hotels can increase the consumer loyalty to the image of the hotel through green marketing. However, the trust building process depends on a traveller's environmental values, independently of the trip purpose (Gupta et al., 2019). Moreover, it is important that all the actions are robust and reliable because, as proved by Rahman et al. (2015), consumer scepticism about hotels' environmental claims influences the consumer intention to participate in green hotel programs and the intention to revisit the hotel. These findings are confirmed by Chen et al. (2019), who showed that perceived greenwashing had a significant negative influence on green trust.

Nevertheless, most of these studies have never specifically focused on sport tourism. Moreover, most of them were done in a specific geographical area (e.g., South-East Asia). Thus, to extend the geographical context and to shed some light on fans' behaviour in selecting green accommodation, we stated our research questions as follows:

RQ1: What are the drivers in the selection of green hotels?

RQ2: What is the best way to communicate to supporters about green hotels in a particular city?

RQ3: What are the most relevant hotels' green practices for fans?

RQ4: What are the most relevant behaviours when fans attend sporting events?

3. Methods

To analyse fans' behaviour in selecting green accommodation, we used data collected through an online questionnaire administered within the ERASMUS+ project ACCESS (Achieving Circularity in Cities through Environmental Sustainability of Sports). The survey was carried out between September and December 2023 in Italy. The data were collected through an online platform, Survey Monkey. Access to the online survey was open, so anyone had the possibility to access the website and submit their contribution. In this way, we were able to use the potential of social networks and media channels to boost the dissemination of the survey. In parallel, we used several channels to garner opinions from as many fans as possible, raising the expectation of wide-ranging fan feedback from diverse parties that might otherwise not have been possible. To minimise the common method bias that can affect a questionnaire survey, we used the most widespread procedural remedies, such as: guaranteed anonymity; avoiding the use of ambiguity, vague concepts, complicated syntax and unfamiliar questions; the use of simple, specific and concise questions; the use of different response formats and methodological item separation. Lastly, we deem it important to highlight that all the comparisons and statements made in the paper are valid exclusively for the sample considered in our study and that they cannot be generalised to the whole universe of Italy or other European States.

Table 1 shows the sample distribution per age, gender, level of education and annual household income.

Table 1: Sample demographics

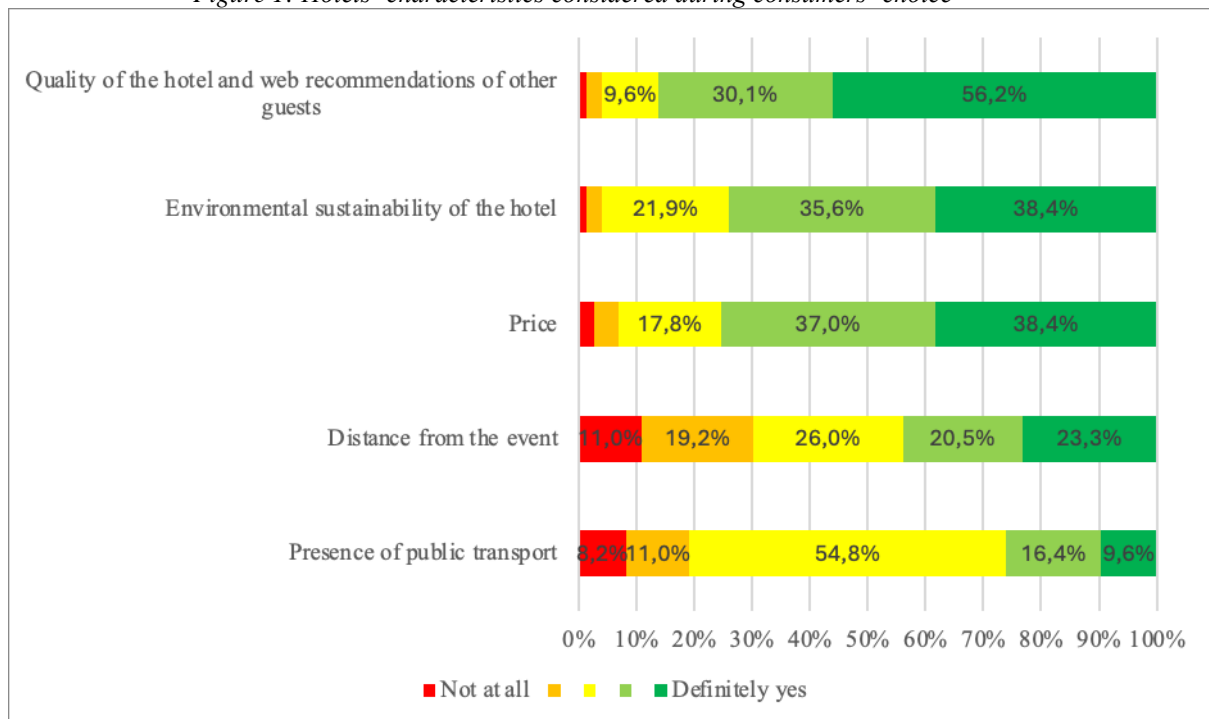
Variable	Characteristics	N	%
Age	15-24	18	6.16%
	25-34	118	40.41%
	35-44	72	24.66%
	45-54	60	20.55%
	>55	24	8.22%
Gender	Male	192	65.75%
	Female	100	34.25%
Level of education	Less than High School Diploma	13	4.45%
	High School	132	45.21%
	Bachelor's degree	56	19.18%
	Master's degree	73	25.00%
	Doctorate	18	6.16%
Annual household income	Less than €15,000	32	10.96%
	€15,000 - €25,000	56	19.18%
	€25,000 - €35,000	76	26.03%
	€35,000 - €45,000	60	20.55%
	Over €45,000	68	23.29%

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Results

Figure 1 illustrates the priority levels that the respondents assigned to various attributes when choosing accommodations for sporting events. A significant majority indicated that the quality of the hotel, along with web recommendations and price, is a critical factor in the choice of a hotel. Environmental sustainability, while not the top priority, still displays a noteworthy preference rate of more than 50%, suggesting a growing consciousness towards eco-friendly living standards.

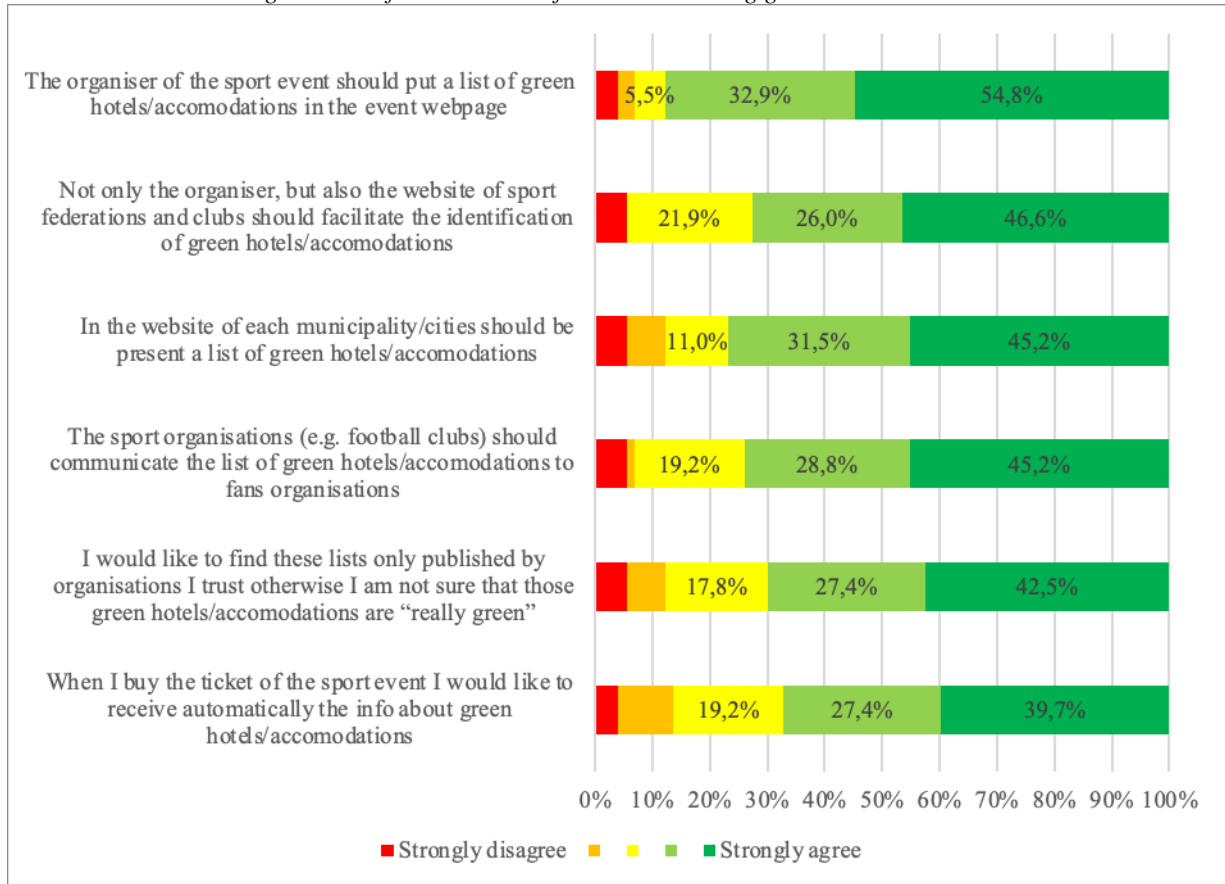
Figure 1: Hotels' characteristics considered during consumers' choice



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2 addresses the preferred communication channels through which participants would like to receive information about green hotels. A notable trend from the data is the desire for trustworthy sources and official communications. Most of the respondents expressed a preference for receiving information directly from sporting event organisers or through trusted organisations, underscoring the importance of credibility in environmental claims.

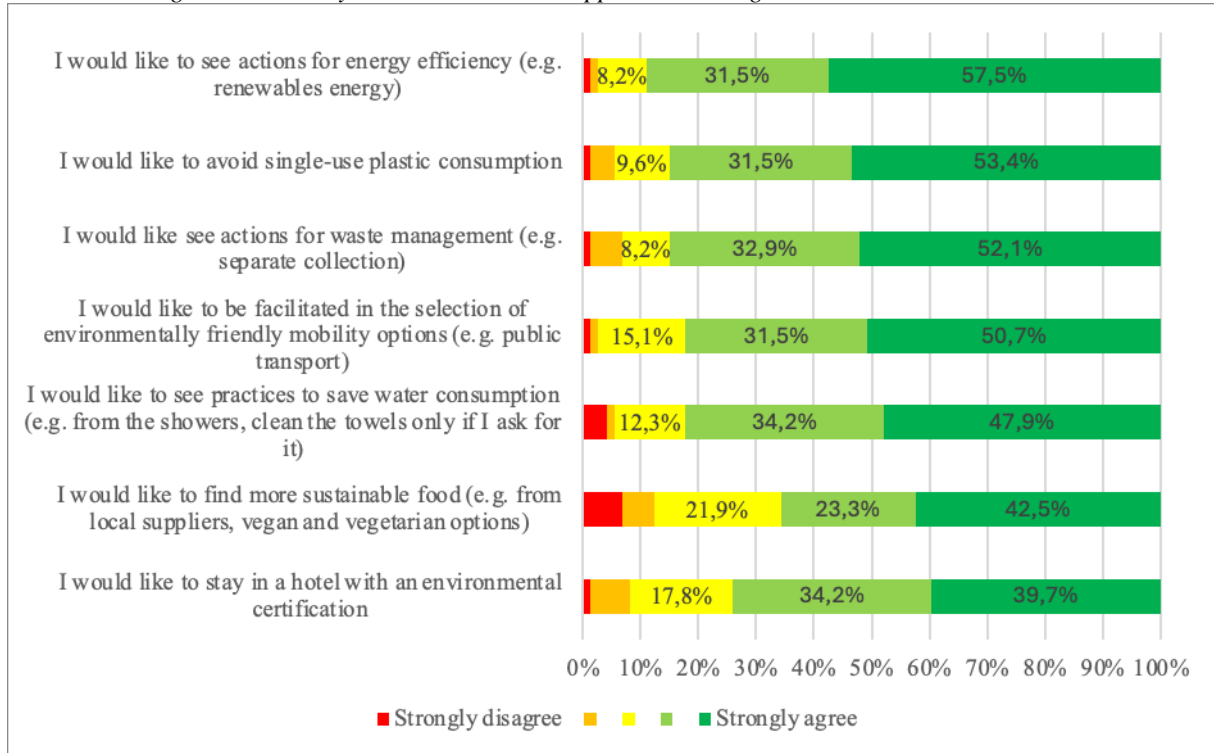
Figure 2: Preferred methods for communicating green accommodations



Source: Own elaboration.

Preferences for specific green features within hotels were also explored. Figure 3 shows strong support for environmental certifications and sustainable food options. Moreover, water-saving practices and waste management were highly favoured, indicating a significant inclination towards comprehensive sustainability in lodging facilities during sporting events.

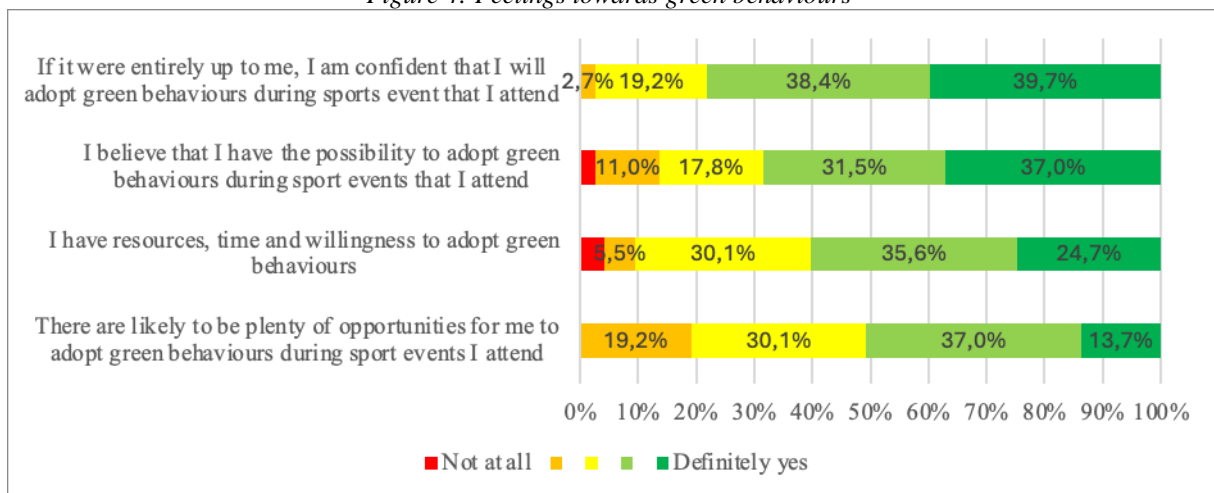
Figure 3: Best way to communicate to supporters about green hotels/accommodations



Source: Own elaboration.

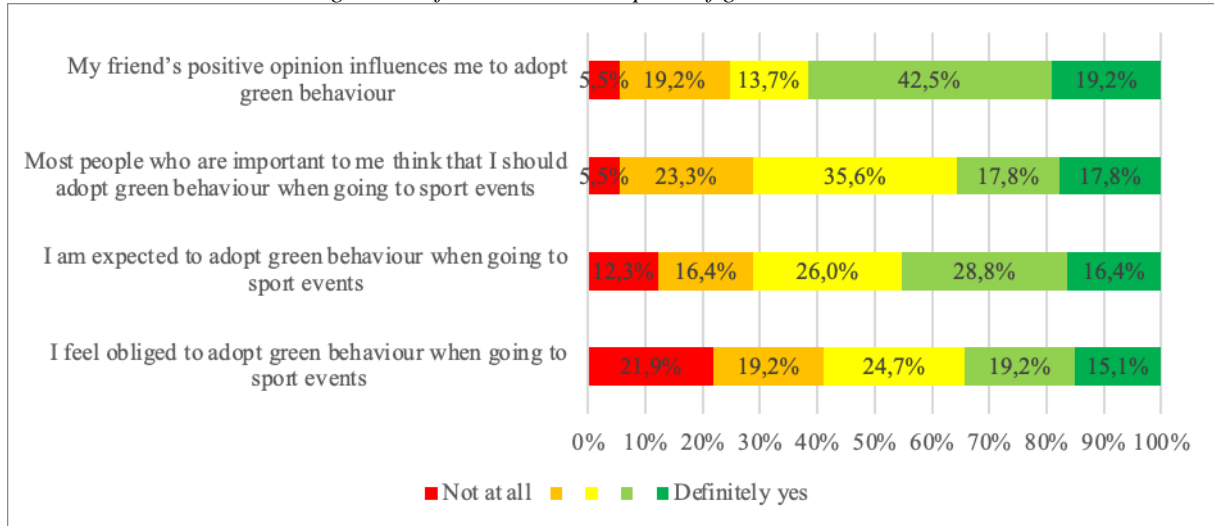
The survey further explored the willingness and perceived ability of attendees to engage in green behaviours during sporting events. Responses revealed a generally positive attitude towards adopting green behaviours, with a noticeable openness to participating in green events and staying at environmentally friendly hotels in the future. The data indicate a favourable shift towards environmental responsibility among sports event attendees.

Figure 4: Feelings towards green behaviours



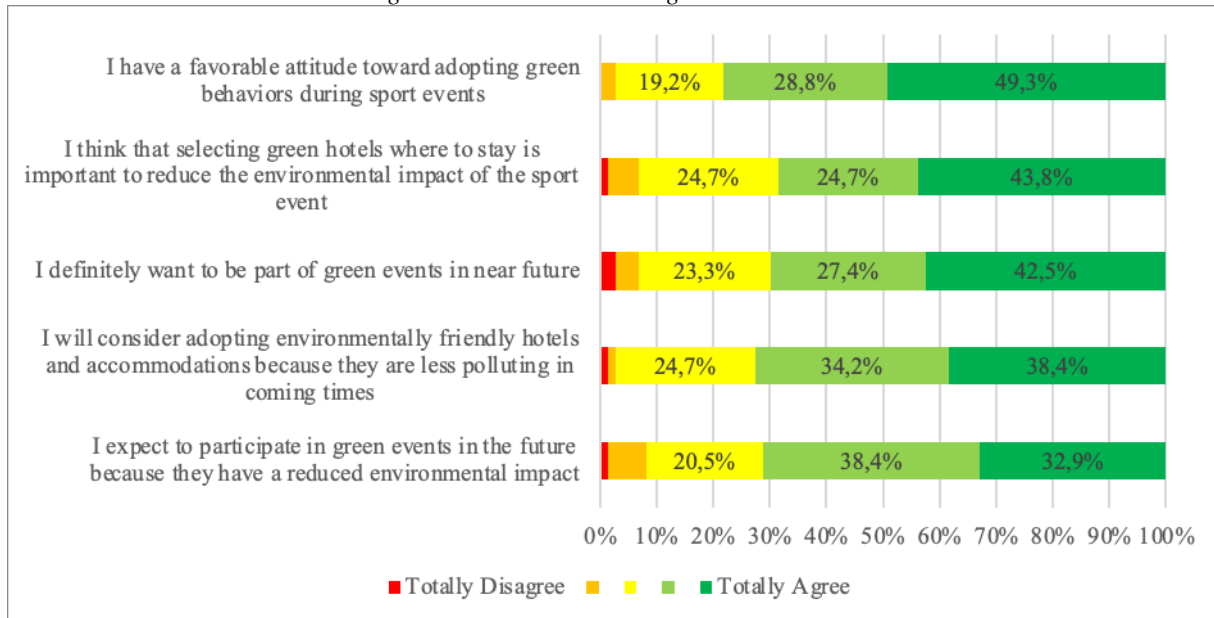
Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 5: Influence on the adoption of green behaviours



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 6: Attitudes towards green behaviours



Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion

When considering the behaviour of fans in selecting green accommodations, especially in the context of attending large-scale events such as sports competitions or music festivals, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) offers a robust framework for understanding the decision-making process (Ajzen, 1991). According to the TPB, the behaviour of individuals is driven by three fundamental determinants: their attitudes towards the behaviour, the subjective norms surrounding them, and their perceived behavioural control over performing the behaviour (Ajzen, 2002). This theoretical approach can be utilised to dissect how and why fans might choose environmentally friendly lodging options. This essay delves into this behaviour, examines the intention-behaviour gap, proposes strategies for event organisers and policymakers to enhance sustainability, and discusses the academic implications of studying such behaviours.

Fans' attitudes towards green accommodations often depend on their personal beliefs about the importance of environmental conservation and their perceptions of the benefits associated with staying in such lodgings, including reduced environmental impact and a healthier living space (Rahman and Reynolds, 2019). However, these positive attitudes might not always translate into booking green accommodations due to various barriers (Ray et al., 2023). Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform a certain behaviour. If fans believe that their peers, influential figures, or social groups value sustainability, they are more likely to emulate this behaviour. The role of celebrities or athletes advocating for environmental responsibility can significantly influence fans' choices (Gionfriddo et al., 2023). Perceived behavioural control involves the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour, influenced by past experiences and anticipated impediments. Factors like availability, affordability, convenience, and knowledge about green accommodations impact this component. Limited availability or higher costs of green accommodations can deter even the most environmentally conscious fans (Ahn and Kwon, 2020). Despite positive attitudes and norms, an intention-behaviour gap often exists. Fans might intend to book green accommodations but fail to do so due to various barriers. Fans might not have sufficient information about the availability or benefits of green accommodations. Often, green accommodations are perceived as more expensive than conventional ones. Fans may revert to booking familiar, non-green options out of convenience or habit (Chan et al., 2020).

To bridge the intention-behaviour gap and promote sustainable choices, event organisers and policymakers can implement several strategies (Umrani et al., 2020). Initiatives to educate fans about the environmental impacts of their accommodation choices and the benefits of green accommodations can positively shift fans' attitudes. Subsidies or discounts for green accommodations can make them more financially attractive. Policymakers could incentivize accommodation providers to adopt sustainable practices, making green options more widely available and affordable. Utilising influential figures to promote green accommodations and showcasing stories of fans who have made sustainable choices can strengthen subjective norms. Integrating green accommodations into mainstream booking platforms and ensuring they are as easy to book as conventional options can enhance perceived behavioural control (Yin et al., 2020). Environmental certifications can be powerful solutions to ensure reliability and robustness of the environmental practices adopted by hotels (Khan et al., 2021).

Studying fans' behaviour in selecting green accommodations also provides several opportunities for academic exploration and contribution. Researchers can test and refine the TPB by incorporating additional variables that might influence sustainable accommodation choices, such as environmental concern, knowledge, or identity. Scholars could develop new methodologies or mixed methods approaches to capture the complex interplay of attitudes, norms, and perceived control in real-world settings. Academics can examine the effectiveness of different policy interventions and incentives designed to promote sustainable tourism, providing valuable feedback for policymakers. Conducting studies across different cultural contexts can uncover universal and unique drivers of sustainable behaviour in selecting accommodations, enhancing the generalisability and applicability of findings.

Understanding and influencing fans' behaviour in the selection of green accommodations is a multi-faceted challenge that requires a coordinated effort among event organisers, policymakers, and the academic community. By applying theories such as the TPB and addressing the intention-behaviour gap through strategic interventions, stakeholders can foster more sustainable practices that not only benefit the environment but also enhance the overall experience of event attendees (Srivastava et al., 2023). Moreover, scholarly research

on these behaviours offers valuable insights that can drive policy changes and promote sustainability in the tourism and events industry (Daddi et al., 2022; Aldulaimi et al., 2023).

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the comprehensive examination of fans' behaviour regarding the selection of green accommodations within the realm of sport tourism reveals a robust intersection of environmental consciousness and consumer choice. This study, grounded in the principles of the TPB, underscores the multifaceted nature of decision-making processes that are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Our findings demonstrate a significant inclination among sports fans towards eco-friendly lodging options, reflecting a broader commitment to sustainability in the context of major sporting events.

Attitudes towards green accommodations are largely favourable, with many fans recognising their environmental benefits and contributing positively to the host community's sustainability. However, this positive attitude sometimes contrasts with actual booking behaviours, which can be hindered by factors such as availability, cost, and diffusion of information. It is here that the role of subjective norms becomes pivotal, as the influence of peers, media, and particularly influential figures in sports can drive or deter eco-conscious lodging choices.

Perceived behavioural control also plays a critical role. The ease of finding and booking green accommodations, influenced by factors such as the visibility of green options on popular booking platforms and the affordability compared to traditional lodging, can significantly impact consumers' behaviour. This study found that when green options are both visible and competitively priced, the likelihood of their selection increases.

To bridge the gap between positive attitudes towards green accommodations and actual behaviour, several strategies can be employed. Event organisers and policymakers are encouraged to promote greater awareness of the availability and benefits of green accommodations through targeted campaigns. Additionally, integrating green lodging options into the main booking systems can enhance their visibility and ease of access. Incentives such as discounts or loyalty benefits could also be offered to encourage bookings at environmentally friendly accommodations.

Moreover, the results of this study can serve as a catalyst for further research in different geographical contexts and within various segments of the tourism industry. Understanding the drivers behind the selection of green accommodations can help refine marketing strategies and policy approaches, fostering a more sustainable tourism sector globally.

In essence, fostering sustainable practices among sports fans is not merely a trend but a necessity in the face of global environmental challenges. By making sustainable choices more accessible and appealing, stakeholders in the sports tourism industry can lead by example, promoting environmental stewardship while enhancing the overall experience of attendees. This approach not only supports the global sustainability agenda but also ensures the longevity and viability of sport tourism as a dynamic contributor to the economic and cultural exchange worldwide.

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