

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE TOURIST BEHAVIOUR IN THE GORIČKO NATURE PARK

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Abstract The aim of this paper is to empirically evaluate a conceptual model which uses socially responsible behaviour (SRB) as its central component. Past research has focused primarily on social responsibility consequences, but little is known about the impact of a destination's image on SRB. We conducted an opinion poll to test our structural model shaped to measure the SRB. Our sample were visitors to the Goričko Nature Park in Slovenia. After testing the content validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity and reliability of constructs, results show that a) the destination image is an important precursor to three perceived SRB dimensions (economic, social, environmental), and b) that SRB dimensions have a positive impact on visitor satisfaction, intention to revisit the destination, and to spread a positive word-of-mouth. Results provide a comprehensive view of SRB, which proves the important role of the tested constructs as well as the cause, and the consequence for/of SRB.

Keywords:

destination image,
socially responsible
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visitor satisfaction,
revisit intention,
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park

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1 Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a central concern in the business world. CSR-oriented organisations are aware of the interdependency between their employees, environment, community, business partners, and good management, and thus responsibly sum up their decisions and activities to sustainable development, including the health and well-being of the society, and transparent and ethical behaviour, all in accordance with applicable legislation and operating norms, and implement all requirements and norms in their relations (Mulej et al., 2017).

Perceived socially responsible behaviour (SRB) is result of three dimensions and a set of interrelated constructs. Our model is adapted and upgraded from perceived sustainability models for tourist behaviour designed by Kim, Thapa and Kim (2017). Although models were developed to measure individual constructs (e.g. tourist satisfaction, revisit intention) related to perceived sustainability (Kim et al., 2017), we have not found factors influencing the SRB. Among the antecedents of factors influencing SRB, our research includes the destination image; among the consequences, we included visitor satisfaction, revisit intention, and positive word of mouth (WOM).

Based on the above, the main aim of our research was to investigate whether the destination image affects the perceived SRB in the GNP, and which are the consequences of the perceived SRB in the destination.

2 Conceptualization of Socially Responsible Behaviour and Related Constructs

The concept supposed to influence the SRB is the *destination image*; it is considered to be *the* element that makes the differentiation between tourism destinations possible, and an important criterion in the decision-making process which destination to choose (Lee et al., 2014). The concept “destination image” consists of people's beliefs, ideas, and impressions about the destination (Chaulagain et al., 2019).

Destination image has not yet been extensively researched in relation to the SRB. Papadimitriou et al. (2015) argue that tourists form behavioural intentions towards a destination based on general perceptions. Some other authors expose the subjective perception of tourists (including choice of destination) (Chaulagain et al., 2019; Chen & Tsai, 2007). The destination image – as perceived by potential customers – is crucial for their post-trip evaluation and their future behaviour (Zhang et al., 2014). On this basis, we propose the first three hypotheses:

H1: The perceived image of the Goričko Nature Park (GNP) has a positive effect on *socially* responsible behaviour of visitors.

H2: The perceived image of the GNP has a positive effect on *environmental* SRB.

H3: The perceived image of the GNP has a positive effect on *economic* SRB of visitors.

Customer satisfaction is a frequently researched concept (Keshavarz & Jamshidi, 2018; Milfelner et al., 2010). It may derive from SRB. Some research (Chu, 2002) is based on Oliver's (1997) expectation dis/confirmation theory, defining satisfaction as the degree up to which a product (or service) satisfies the customer's pre-purchase expectations. Satisfaction thus reflects the difference between consumer's prepurchase expectations, and the after-purchase evaluation (Milfelner et al., 2010).

The concept of sustainability with the triple bottom line model (Elkington, 1994) strives to minimise negative social, environmental, and economic impacts of the organisation; it became an important component of the CSR, as it shows that such approach enables the organisations to also achieve economic goals (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019).

CSR and sustainable development are interdependent, and do not function without each other (Lawrence, 1993). Literature review shows that all three sustainable development dimensions (social, environmental, and economic) have a positive effect on tourist satisfaction (Basak et al., 2021). Therefore, we propose the next three hypotheses:

H4: Perceived *social* responsibility of the GNP (as a tourism destination) has a positive effect on visitors' satisfaction with the destination.

H5: Perceived *environmental* responsibility of the GNP (as a tourism destination) has a positive effect on visitors' satisfaction with the destination.

H6: Perceived *economic* responsibility of the GNP (as a tourism destination) has a positive effect on visitors' satisfaction with the destination.

The *intention to revisit* can also be a result of SRB; it is therefore crucial for tourism organisations as repeated visitors cost less than attracting first time visitors (Xu et al., 2021); further, Chen and Tsai (2007) argue that revisit intentions involve "visitor's judgement of the likelihood" to revisit the destination.

In their research model, Kim, Thapa and Kim (2017) confirm the significant impact of sustainable development on revisit intention. Similarly, Su and Huang (2018) note that a destination's CSR has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction, which, in turn, has a positive effect on the revisit intention. We therefore set the following three hypotheses:

H7: Perceived *social* responsibility of the GNP has a positive impact on the revisit intention.

H8: Perceived *environmental* responsibility of the GNP has a positive impact on the revisit intention.

H9: Perceived *economic* responsibility of the GNP has a positive impact on the revisit intention.

WOM plays an active role in destination promotion among relatives and friends (Quan et al., 2021): it is considered an important source of information (Chao et al., 2021). WOM can create a favourable image of a destination and increase its visibility (Chao et al., 2021).

Literature shows a significant relationship between different types of behavioural intentions and WOM in the tourism context. Even more, CSR has a direct impact on customer's willingness to buy and is related to customer loyalty (Lee et al., 2012). Such consequences are manifested through consumer behaviour (e.g. WOM). We tested the positive WOM consequences with these final three hypotheses:

H10: Perceived *social* responsibility of the GNP has a positive effect on positive destination WOM.

H11: Perceived *environmental* social responsibility of the GNP has a positive effect on positive destination WOM.

H12: Perceived *economic* social responsibility of the GNP has a positive effect on positive destination WOM.

3 Methodology

Measuring instrument

Based on the literature review, we first selected and adapted the questionnaire items. 6 items for the SRB were adopted from Sánchez-Fernandez et al., (2019) and 8 further items from Kim et.al (2017). The six items applied for the field of visitors satisfaction, and the four items applied for assessing the destination image were based on scales previously used by Milfelner et al. (2010). Items measuring the revisit intention were adopted from Tosun et al., (2015) and Wang and Hsu (2010). Finally, for WOM, three items were based on the measurement instrument constructed by Kim et al. (2017). Individual statements were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not agree at all; 5 = fully agree). Visitor satisfaction was assessed using a 5-point scale with values reaching from "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied". In the next step, the indicators and relevant definitions were reviewed by two tourism- and one marketing experts. In addition, five potential visitors to the GNP assessed the scales.

Sample selection and description

Data was collected by printed self-completion questionnaires in the GNP. A total of 422 questionnaires were completed. 49 were excluded due to missing data. 373 questionnaires were valid and completed by 41% male and 59% female respondents.

64.3% or 240 respondents visited the destination for the first time. The majority was aged 31 to 40 (30.0%), followed by those aged 41 to 50 (22.5%), and those aged 51 to 60 (20%). 13.4% of respondents were aged 61 or older. Respondents aged under 30 (10.7%) represented the smallest share.

Dimensionality, reliability, and validity of constructs

We used the software AMOS (version 27) to perform a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and assess the validity of our measures. CFA shows the multidimensionality of one scale (SRB). In total, four items were eliminated one after another according to the modification and fit indices. The final model contained 12 indicators for the SRB, 5 indicators for the perceived image, 4 indicators for visitor satisfaction, and 3 indicators for revisit intention and for WOM. The measurement model converged with an acceptable fit (χ^2 563.289; df = 301; RMSEA = 0.048; TLI = 0.978; NNFI = 0.988; CFI = 0.990 and GFI = 0.904.).

All indicator loadings exceeded the value of 0.7. Composite reliabilities reached a value of 0.9 and exceed the proposed 0.6 threshold, meaning that measuring instruments are well operationalized. Similarly, results of convergent validity for all constructs (AVE coefficients ranging from 0.841 to 0.989) show that coefficients are suitable and satisfy the criterion that the coefficient should exceed 0.5 (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000).

4 Results

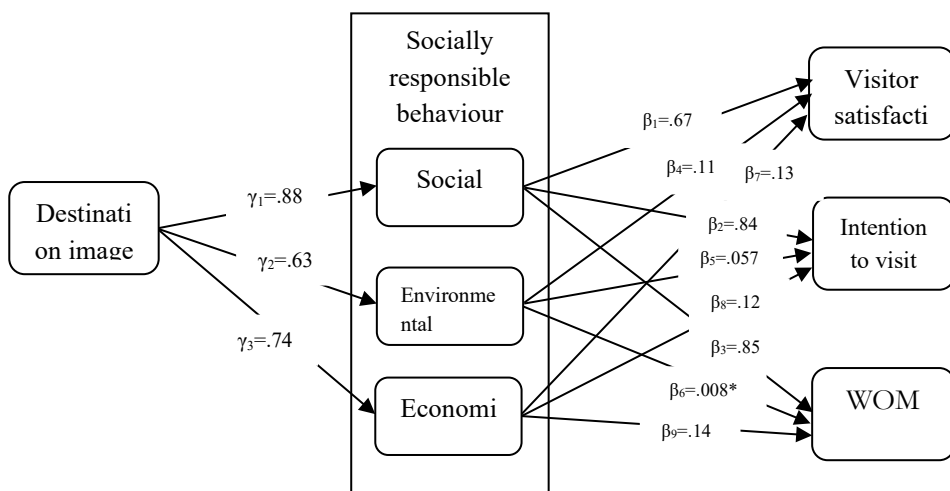
The parameters in the structural model were estimated using the ML estimation procedure. The model showed good fit to the data: $\chi^2(276)$ = 540.292; GFI= 0.900; RMSEA=0.051; CFI= 0.989; TLI=0.987; IFI=0.989. All indices, except χ^2 , which was characteristic, were distributed within appropriate intervals.

Results confirm that the destination image has a positive and strong influence on the *economic* dimension of SRB (γ_3 = 0.746; $p < .001$), on its *social* dimension (γ_1 = 0.889; $p < .001$), as well as on its *environmental* dimension (γ_2 = 0.633; $p < .001$). The hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 are confirmed.

The SRB's *social* dimension influence on visitor satisfaction ($\beta_1 = 0.671$; $p < .001$), on their revisit intention ($\beta_2 = 0.844$; $p < .001$), and positive WOM ($\beta_3 = 0.855$; $p < .001$) was positive, strong, and statistically significant, therefore hypotheses H4, H7 and H10 are confirmed.

The SRB's *environmental* dimension has a much weaker influence on visitor satisfaction ($\beta_4 = 0.111$; $p < .001$) and on revisit intention ($\beta_5 = 0.057$; $p < .01$), as the *social one* yet still a positive influence. As it is statistically significant, hypotheses H5 and H8 are confirmed as well. The SRB's environmental dimension path to positive WOM was not statistically significant ($\beta_6 = 0.008$; $p > .05$), we therefore reject the hypothesis H11.

The influence of SRB's *economic* dimension on visitor satisfaction ($\beta_7 = 0.136$; $p < .001$), on *revisit intention* ($\beta_8 = 0.126$; $p < .001$), and *positive WOM* ($\beta_9 = 0.147$; $p < .001$) have a weaker, yet still positive and statistically significant influence, thus hypotheses H6, H9 and H12 are confirmed, too. Results are presented in Figure 1.



- * - path significant at $p < .001$
- ** - path significant at $p < .01$
- *** - path not significant at $p > .05$

Figure 1: Structural model and standardized regression paths

Source: Authors' compilation.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The SRB model used in this research applied at the GNP, which was developed by the authors by upgrading the existing models, presents a new research perspective. The SRB concept assumes a variable with a positive and strong influence on the perceived SRB and that the discussed central concept affects some variables as well.

We conclude that the destination image influence on perceived SRB is positive and strong. This indicates that the destination image contributes to strengthening the visitor SRB in a destination. Destination managers must thus be aware that perceived SRB is a multidimensional construct, where economic, social, and environmental dimensions are crucial.

Research results also reveal that the social dimension of SRB has a positive and strong influence on (i) visitor satisfaction, (ii) positive WOM, and (iii) revisit intention. Research by other authors (Basak et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2017) shows similar findings.

Previous research (Jasrotia et al., 2021) reports that the *economic* dimension of sustainable development usually does not affect tourists' satisfaction, while our research, exploring the impact of the SRB's *economic* dimension on (i) visitor satisfaction, (ii) revisit intention, and (iii) positive WOM shows a weak, yet positive influence.

The interlinkage-analysis between the constructs also showed that the SRB's *environmental* dimension is affecting visitor satisfaction and their revisit intention, while it is not affecting the WOM. This can be explained by the fact that the majority (64.3%) were first time visitors to GNP, and thus could have no place attachment.

5.1 Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research

As the results relate only to the GNP visitors they cannot be generalised beyond the scope of our research. Nevertheless, the conceptual model developed in this study allows further verification by including additional factors, e.g. positive and negative emotions, perceived value, or memory of travel. Qualitative research methods (in-

depth interviews) should be considered in addition to quantitative research: this could reveal more causes and consequences of SRB.

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