Understanding Anticonsumption in Tourism Services: A Qualitative Study of Young Slovenian Travelers

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This research aims to explore how anticonsumption manifests in tourism, specifically among young Slovenian consumers. It addresses a gap in the literature, which often focuses on promoting sustainable products while overlooking the reasons behind anticonsumption in the tourism and service sectors (Garima et al., 2024). The study highlights the disparity between sustainable attitudes and actual vacation behaviours (Nikolić et al., 2021). Using a qualitative approach, the methodology includes conducting a focus group with young adults to identify motivations for and against anticonsumption in tourism (Liu-Lastres et al., 2025). The research will also examine psychological mechanisms like moral disengagement (Pizzetti et al., 2024) and guilt (Mkono & Hughes, 2020), as well as cultural factors relevant to Slovenia (Krsnik & Erjavec, 2024). The collected data will undergo content analysis and coding to provide deeper insights. Expected findings include key motives influencing anticonsumption behaviour and why sustainable practices often fall short in vacation settings. This research aims to clarify how participants rationalize their decisions. The findings will help marketing professionals develop credible, sustainable strategies and adapt offerings that promote responsible vacation behaviours.

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1 Introduction

In modern society, consumption is a key driver of economic growth but also a significant source of environmental pressure. The widespread culture of consumerism promotes excessive consumption, depletes natural resources, deepens social inequalities, and poses risks to human well-being (Garima et al., 2025). Unsustainable consumption patterns are therefore recognized as one of the key drivers of environmental change, and the transition to more moderate forms of consumption is becoming central to sustainable development (Kropfeld et al., 2018).

This problem is particularly pronounced in tourism, which is one of the most consumption-intensive activities, intricately linked to materialism, income growth, and broader consumer culture (Hall, 2011). Although the discourse on sustainable tourism has intensified in recent decades, many sustainable practices often do not reduce overall consumption levels, but rather reproduce them in a green form. This approach can serve as a moral compromise, allowing individuals to maintain their travel habits without thoroughly reflecting on their necessity, frequency, or impact (Gričar et al., 2025). This raises the question of whether merely promoting sustainable alternatives is adequate to reduce the environmental impact of tourism.

In this context, anticonsumption is presented as an alternative research framework. It refers to the conscious, voluntary decision to exclude specific products or services from consumption, or to reduce or avoid consumption altogether (Garima et al., 2025; Garcia-de-Frutos et al., 2018). A key characteristic of anticonsumption is its voluntary nature and its connection to personal identity, which sets it apart from behaviours that reduce consumption due to external constraints (García-de-Frutos et al., 2018). The typology of Iyer and Muncy (2009) further distinguishes anticonsumption according to object (general reduction or reduction of a specific product, brand, or activity) and purpose (individual or social motives).

Despite growing interest in anticonsumption, significant knowledge gaps remain. Many studies primarily focus on products, while the service sector, especially tourism, remains under-researched (Lee, 2022; Makri et al., 2020; Garima et al., 2025). Additionally, much of the existing research has been conducted predominantly in Western countries, thereby largely overlooking the role of cultural differences (Garima et al., 2025). Furthermore, there is an apparent discrepancy

between attitudes and behaviour in tourism: individuals who adopt sustainable practices at home often fail to extend them to the vacation context (Barr et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Pizzeti et al., 2024), where norms are relativized or even suspended (Liu-Lastres et al., 2025).

Individuals with a strongly positive attitude toward the environment and a high level of environmental concern believe that sustainable practices help reduce their environmental footprint and are aware that such behaviour requires personal sacrifice. However, this logic is often not upheld in the context of tourism, suggesting that tourism operates as a distinct space where sustainability norms are relaxed (Barr & Prillwitz, 2012). These findings suggest that tourism creates a unique moral environment in which people may temporarily redefine or abandon their everyday norms. Understanding this phenomenon, therefore, requires an in-depth analysis of the psychological mechanisms that enable such relativization of sustainable values and explain why sustainable attitudes do not necessarily translate into actual behaviour.

Young people are a particularly relevant group in this regard. Generation Y will make up the largest share of tourists in the future (Liu-Lastres et al., 2025). At the same time, it is deeply embedded in a culture of experiential and often conspicuous consumption. Short flights and city breaks can function as status symbols and a form of conspicuous consumption (Barr et al., 2010; Seegebarth et al., 2024; Cohen et al., 2011). At the same time, research indicates a growing trend of conspicuous anticonsumption, in which people intentionally avoid certain practices to express their identity (Sørensen & Hjalager, 2021; Karakus & Kalay, 2017).

To understand this phenomenon, it is essential to consider psychological factors such as moral disengagement, which allows individuals to justify unsustainable decisions and reduce internal conflict (Bandura, 1996; McCormack & Chowdhury, 2024), and holiday mindset, which frames vacations as a deserved exception to the usual moral expectations of everyday life (Barr et al., 2010; Pizzetti et al., 2024). At the same time, moral emotions such as guilt and regret also play a key role, as they can encourage consumption renunciation and the restriction of unsustainable practices (Lee, 2022; Culiberg et al., 2023; Ram et al., 2013).

An additional dimension is represented by cultural context. Cultural values, such as Hofstede's dimension of indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, 2011), influence how people view pleasure, leisure, and self-control and can moderate the relationship between psychological factors and individual behaviour (Garima et al., 2025). The conflict between the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure and restrictive sustainability norms is particularly pronounced in tourism (Ram et al., 2013; Seegebarth et al., 2024).

Slovenia represents a particularly relevant research context for examining anticonsumption in tourism. As a small European country with a growing emphasis on sustainable tourism development, it offers a setting in which environmental awareness coexists with increasing travel accessibility and consumption intensity. However, little is known about how anticonsumption is interpreted and enacted within this context, especially among younger generations. It remains unclear how anticonsumption is formed and expressed in tourism, how individuals justify selective restraint in a hedonically oriented domain, and how psychological mechanisms and cultural orientations shape the transfer (or suspension) of sustainable practices during holidays.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring how young Slovenian travellers understand and negotiate reductions in consumption in tourism services. By integrating psychological, symbolic, and contextual perspectives, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of why sustainable attitudes do not necessarily translate into reduced tourism consumption in experiential service settings.

Given the sparse prior research on anticonsumption in tourism services, this study takes an exploratory qualitative approach. It contributes to the literature in three significant ways. Firstly, it broadens the scope of anticonsumption research into the underexplored area of tourism services, demonstrating that anticonsumption manifests as selective, negotiated restraint rather than a total reduction in consumption. Secondly, it integrates psychological factors (such as moral disengagement and feelings of guilt), symbolic aspects (such as identity signalling), and contextual elements (including tourism as an exceptional domain) to explain the gap between attitudes and behaviours in tourism consumption. Lastly, the study

provides empirical insights from a European perspective, enhancing cultural understanding of anticonsumption in tourism, which has thus far been limited.
Based on the identified theoretical gaps, the following research questions guide the analysis:

RQ1: How do young Slovenian travellers understand anticonsumption in the context of tourism services?

RQ2: Which psychological mechanisms (e.g., moral disengagement, guilt) shape the relationship between sustainable attitudes and actual tourism behaviours?

RQ3: How do symbolic factors, particularly conspicuous consumption and identity signalling, influence the (non-)adoption of anticonsumption in tourism?

RQ4: Under what conditions are young travellers willing to reduce the intensity or frequency of tourism consumption?

2 Literature review

2.1 Anticonsumption

Anticonsumption refers to the intentional and voluntary act of reducing, restricting, or rejecting consumption. It signifies a conscious shift away from prevailing consumption-oriented lifestyles. Rather than just avoiding consumption, anticonsumption involves making active behavioural choices guided by environmental, ethical, or personal values (Peng et al., 2024). Similarly, Kropfeld et al. (2018) define anticonsumption as a lifestyle characterized by the voluntary reduction of the acquisition, use, and abandonment of goods and services.

Researchers emphasize that anticonsumption can occur at various stages of the consumption process. It can include refusing to buy, such as boycotting or avoiding certain goods, as well as using less and being responsible when giving up ownership, such as giving away, selling, lending, or returning items to circulation (Guillard, 2018). In this sense, anticonsumption reflects a broader transformation of consumer norms, in which individuals reevaluate their needs, minimize their reliance on physical possessions, and adopt more moderate, thoughtful consumption patterns

(Peng et al., 2024). These practices range from everyday behaviours, like cutting back on purchases and extending the lifespan of products through repair and reuse. They can also encompass more dedicated lifestyles, such as voluntary simplicity, minimalism, political activism, or engagement in alternative consumption models (Cherrier et al., 2010; Guillard, 2018). Anticonsumption can therefore be understood as a multidimensional and continuous phenomenon that varies among individuals in terms of intensity, motives, and the meaning they attribute to reducing consumption (Guillard, 2018; Ines & Moreira, 2025).

Iyer and Muncy (2009) offer an important conceptual contribution by distinguishing between anticonsumption based on object and on motive. From an object perspective, individuals may either reject consumption altogether or choose to give up certain products, brands, or activities. From a motivational standpoint, anticonsumption can result from personal goals, such as reducing stress and embracing a simpler lifestyle, as well as broader concerns about social and environmental issues. Research indicates that environmental motives do not solely drive anticonsumption; instead, they are influenced by a combination of personal benefits (e.g., saving money, a sense of autonomy, well-being, and identity expression) alongside broader ethical and social goals (Cherrier et al., 2010; Ziesemer et al., 2021). Anticonsumption is therefore a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained solely by environmental or economic factors.

Unlike sustainable consumption, which often involves replacing conventional products with more environmentally friendly alternatives, anticonsumption emphasizes reducing overall consumption. The higher costs associated with sustainable alternatives often create financial barriers that hinder their wider adoption, even when consumers have positive intentions (Ziesemer et al., 2021). Anticonsumption overcomes this limitation by focusing on reducing consumption rather than merely replacing products. This distinction is crucial, as reducing overall consumption can yield a greater reduction in environmental impact than simply switching to sustainable alternatives while maintaining the same level of consumption (Peng et al., 2024; Kunar et al., 2020).

Research further shows that sustainable consumption does not always lead to long-term behavioural change, as individuals often continue with unsustainable practices despite their positive environmental attitudes (Black & Cherrier, 2010). In contrast,

anticonsumption offers a more comprehensive approach to reducing environmental effects by actively curbing consumption rates (Kropfeld et al., 2018). Empirical findings indicate that anticonsumption is negatively associated with tendencies toward overconsumption, including impulse buying, prominent levels of material possessions, and financial debt (Seegebarth et al., 2016). Furthermore, an anticonsumerist lifestyle is more effective at reducing environmental impact than merely expressing environmental concern, underscoring that limiting consumption is a key mechanism for achieving sustainability goals (Kropfeld et al., 2018).

In the context of tourism, anticonsumption is particularly relevant, as tourism is a highly consumption-intensive activity. Despite efforts to promote sustainable tourism, research consistently finds a gap between pro-environmental attitudes and actual tourist behaviour (Holmes et al., 2021). Anticonsumption offers a unique perspective on this issue, highlighting that sustainable values can be expressed through reducing or abandoning consumption rather than solely opting for sustainable products (Black & Cherrier, 2010).

Similarly, concepts like slow tourism embody related ideas, emphasizing less frequent travel, longer stays, and less intensive consumption habits. Nevertheless, these concepts have not gained widespread popularity because they often conflict with prevailing social norms that associate tourism with intensive consumption and status signalling (Chauhan, 2024). However, there are crucial differences between them. While slow tourism can still be seen as a form of consumption involving travel activities, anticonsumption emphasizes the deliberate reduction or abandonment of consumption as such. Anticonsumption, therefore, does not simply mean choosing a different form of consumption, but can also involve consciously limiting the scope or frequency of travel. This further emphasizes its importance as a relevant theoretical framework for understanding consumption in a tourism context.

2.2 Conspicuous Consumption

Conspicuous consumption is the tendency for individuals to demonstrate their social status, identity, or personal values through the purchase and use of goods or services that are easily visible to others (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018). Such consumption goes beyond mere product functionality, as it primarily serves symbolic purposes, such as showcasing prestige, accomplishments, affiliation, or individual identity. People

often engage in consumption as a means of social signalling, differentiation, and self-presentation, driven by a desire for recognition, admiration, and social acceptance. Thus, conspicuous consumption is closely tied to the pleasure-seeking and symbolic dimensions of consumer behaviour (Effler et al., 2022).

Recent consumer trends indicate a shift from material to experiential consumption, with more people choosing to invest in experiences, such as travel, that allow them to convey their identity and lifestyle publicly. Although consumption has traditionally been associated with material goods, today it increasingly manifests itself through experiences, which, due to their social visibility, are becoming an important means of symbolic differentiation. This process is further reinforced by social networks, which make it easy to share otherwise fleeting experiences and increase their symbolic value. An individual's identity is thus no longer expressed solely through ownership, but also through the choice of activities, destinations, and modes of travel (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019).

Tourism, therefore, represents a particularly prominent area of conspicuous consumption. Tourist destinations frequently serve as indicators of status, as traveling to specific locations allows individuals to express their prestige, uniqueness, or social standing (Šagovnović & Kovačić, 2024). Holidays are not just a way to relax, but also a means of shaping and expressing one's identity. By choosing a destination, accommodation, activities, and transportation method, individuals actively shape and project their social status (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019). Given that status relies on uniqueness and novelty, tourism fosters an ongoing quest for new and unique experiences that facilitate further symbolic differentiation (Šagovnović & Kovačić, 2024).

Social networks are crucial in this context, increasing the visibility of travel experiences and strengthening social pressure to participate in such behaviours. Young travellers are susceptible to social comparison and the influence of reference groups, often viewing travel as a key avenue for social recognition and identity affirmation (Liu & Huang, 2019). Visually appealing social media content further enhances the symbolic value of travel and promotes conspicuous consumption within the tourism sphere (Wang et al., 2025). Influencers often emphasize the aesthetic and symbolic aspects of travel, while sustainability aspects remain less prominent (Asri et al., 2024). These dynamics contribute to increased social

pressures, the fear of missing out (FOMO), and the normalization of frequent travel as a desirable social activity (Seyfi et al., 2025).

However, conspicuous consumption can also be expressed through sustainable practices. The concept of going green to be seen suggests that individuals sometimes make sustainable choices to signal socially desirable values and enhance their reputation (Stoll-Kleemann & O'Riordan, 2020). Similarly, tourists value more sustainable elements of tourist destinations that are visible, aesthetically appealing, and symbolically recognizable, indicating that they have an important symbolic function in addition to their environmental function (Aydin & Alvarez, 2020). Sustainable practices are therefore not always motivated exclusively by environmental reasons but can also serve as a means of social signalling.

It is therefore important to note that conspicuous consumption and anticonsumption are not necessarily complete opposites. Both can serve to express identity and symbolically differentiate. Individuals can demonstrate their moral principles or social status by rejecting consumption, as others do through conspicuous consumption (Effler et al., 2022). Non-conspicuous consumption, therefore, does not necessarily imply reduced consumption but may reflect a transition towards more subtle ways of symbolically distinguishing oneself (Wu et al., 2017).

In the realm of tourism, conspicuous consumption further reinforces consumer behaviour, as travel is frequently seen as a reward, an escape from everyday life, and a symbol of personal success (Barr & Prillwitz, 2012). This mindset makes it difficult to accept practices aimed at reducing consumption, highlighting the tension between tourism's symbolic values and the pursuit of sustainable behaviour. Understanding conspicuous consumption is therefore key to explaining why individuals often continue to engage in consumption-intensive tourism practices despite their sustainable values.

2.3 Moral disengagement

Moral disengagement is a psychological defence mechanism that allows individuals to justify behaviour that deviates from their moral standards and to reduce feelings of guilt and internal conflict arising from the inconsistency between their values and

their actual behaviour (Bandura, 1996; Sharma & Paco, 2021). When individuals act contrary to their moral beliefs, they experience psychological discomfort associated with cognitive dissonance and a threatened moral self-image (Sharma & Lal, 2020). To preserve a favourable self-image, they employ mechanisms of moral disengagement that allow them to reinterpret or rationalize their actions (Leviston & Walker, 2021).

Bandura (1996) explains that moral disengagement is a process of temporarily deactivating internal moral brakes, in which individuals cognitively transform the situation so that their behaviour becomes morally acceptable. This process involves several mechanisms. First, moral justification, in which individuals present their actions as necessary, beneficial, or justified, often using euphemisms or comparisons with more harmful behaviours. Second, diffusion or transfer of responsibility, which involves attributing responsibility to external influences, other people, social norms, or institutional entities, resulting in a diminished sense of personal accountability (Leviston & Walker, 2021; Ines & Moreira, 2025). Third, individuals may downplay or deny the adverse outcomes of their actions, thereby minimizing the perceived harm or questioning its significance. Fourth, they might redirect blame to the victim or devalue those affected, thereby lessening empathy and facilitating the justification of harmful behaviour (Bandura, 1996). Another key mechanism is moral licensing, in which individuals justify unsustainable decisions by referencing prior pro-environmental actions (Nielsen et al., 2024). Furthermore, people often justify unsustainable behaviour by pointing to external factors such as time limits, costs, convenience, or the absence of alternatives, which diminishes their sense of personal responsibility (Seyfi et al., 2025).

Moral disengagement is a situational and motivated process that is more likely to be activated when an unsustainable choice is attractive to the individual or brings personal benefits. The greater the perceived benefit, the greater the likelihood of rationalization (Killian & Mann, 2020). As a result, moral disengagement increases the likelihood of choosing unsustainable alternatives and reduces the willingness to choose sustainable options, thereby widening the gap between attitudes and behaviour (Wu et al., 2021).

In the context of tourism, moral disengagement is particularly pronounced. Tourists often express concern for the environment, yet experience tension between their environmental values and behaviour on vacation (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Individuals often address this dilemma by rationalization, such as viewing vacations as a legitimate exception to daily standards or by justifying air travel based on time constraints and comfort (Mkono & Hughes, 2020; Barr & Prillwitz, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2024). The context of tourism further encourages moral disengagement, as anonymity and a break from daily routines can diminish self-regulation (Wu et al., 2025). Vacations are thus frequently perceived as opportunities to temporarily relax moral standards (Mkono & Hughes, 2020).

Empirical research confirms that moral disengagement acts as an important inhibitory mechanism for sustainable behaviour. While moral obligation encourages pro-environmental behaviour, moral distance allows for the rationalization of unsustainable decisions without guilt, with both mechanisms having a comparably strong influence on behavioural intentions (Wu et al., 2021). Moral distance thus represents a key psychological mechanism that enables the maintenance of unsustainable practices despite the presence of sustainable values in the tourism context.

In the context of tourist consumption, anticonsumption and moral disengagement are linked through tourists' management of moral conflict. Anticonsumption reflects ethically motivated efforts to reduce, avoid, or reject forms of tourism consumption perceived as socially or environmentally harmful. Moral disengagement, in contrast, enables tourists to justify continued participation in problematic tourism practices by minimizing perceived impacts, diffusing responsibility among tourists and providers, or normalizing such behaviours. When moral disengagement is limited or resisted, tourists may turn to anticonsumption as a means of restoring moral alignment between their values and travel-related behaviours. Thus, anticonsumption and moral disengagement represent contrasting strategies for resolving moral tension in tourist consumption and should therefore be negatively related.

2.4 Guilt

Eco-guilt refers to the negative moral feelings that individuals experience when they are aware of or concerned about their own environmentally harmful behaviour (Mkono & Hughes, 2020). It stems from a perceived moral obligation to oneself, society, or nature and reflects a personal commitment to sustainable values. Key to its emergence is perceived knowledge of sustainable options for action and the belief that individuals can contribute to reducing environmental problems through their behaviour. When individuals feel powerless or constrained by their circumstances, their sense of eco-guilt diminishes or disappears (Nielsen et al., 2024).

Although eco-guilt serves as a moral response, it does not automatically result in behavioural change. Instead, it often triggers rationalization processes that allow individuals to neutralize negative feelings without altering their behaviour. Eco-guilt is highly context-dependent and fleeting, typically arising during a specific decision-making moment and serving as an internal reminder or a source of cognitive conflict rather than a stable indicator of behavioural change. Those with a strong environmental awareness tend to experience eco-guilt more often. However, they also have better strategies to cope with it, for example, through suppression, reinterpretation, or engaging in compensatory behaviours (Nielsen et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, eco-guilt has significant potential to encourage sustainable behaviour, especially when individuals acknowledge their personal responsibility for their actions. In such cases, it acts as a moral regulator, encouraging behaviour consistent with one's values (Nielsen et al., 2024). Negative moral emotions, like guilt and shame, can drive individuals to make more environmentally responsible decisions. However, they can also trigger defence mechanisms, such as moral disengagement, which rationalize unsustainable behaviour (Stoll-Kleemann & O'Riordan, 2020). For instance, tourism research indicates that feelings of guilt can lead individuals to avoid certain consumption types, such as boycotting environmentally harmful tourism practices, demonstrating its potential as a self-regulation mechanism (Park & Jang, 2024).

The role of eco-guilt is particularly relevant among young consumers, who are both highly environmentally conscious and intensely involved in the symbolic and status dimensions of consumption, especially in the context of tourism. This duality can

increase internal conflict between values and behaviour, thereby activating eco-guilt. However, due to significant exposure to social norms and the pressure for visibility, young people may often resort to rationalization or moral disengagement strategies, thereby easing emotional discomfort without changing their behaviour. The dynamics between eco-guilt, social pressure, and identity formation are therefore key to understanding anticonsumerist decisions in this generational group.

In the context of tourism, eco-guilt and anticonsumption are intricately connected through emotional responses to perceived environmental harm. Eco-guilt arises when tourists recognize the negative environmental impacts of their travel-related consumption, such as carbon emissions, overuse of natural resources, or contribution to overtourism. This feeling of guilt can motivate anticonsumption by encouraging tourists to reduce, avoid, or selectively reject certain tourism activities to alleviate emotional discomfort and restore a sense of moral and environmental responsibility (Culiberg et al., 2023).

2.5 Cultural Factors

Cultural values represent an important framework that shapes individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural decisions, including consumer and tourist behaviour (Kuanr et al., 2021). Hofstede (2011) defines culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one society from another and changes relatively slowly. Cultural values thus function as a deeply rooted system that influences the interpretation of information, the formation of preferences, and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Even with globalization, cultural differences tend to remain relatively stable, underscoring the importance of considering them for a better understanding of consumer decisions and the limitations of applying findings directly across countries.

Hofstede's dimension of indulgence versus restraint is particularly relevant to this analysis, as it concerns the extent to which a society allows the gratification of desires related to pleasure, relaxation, and enjoyment. Cultures with a high level of indulgence allow relatively free satisfaction of these desires, reflected in greater appreciation of leisure time, a sense of personal control over life, personal freedom, and the belief that life is meant to be enjoyed. As a result, individuals in such cultural environments show a greater willingness to engage in spontaneous consumption and

to participate more frequently in hedonistic activities such as travel. In contrast, cultures that exhibit higher levels of restraint tend to have more rigid social norms, greater self-regulation, and control over personal desires. These cultures often prioritize values like duty, discipline, and adherence to social expectations. Individuals in these societies are more likely to experience a sense of limited personal control over their life circumstances, attach less importance to leisure time, and may feel more guilt about hedonistic activities such as tourism (Hofstede, 2011; Zhang et al., 2019).

The contrast between indulgence and restraint is crucial to understanding consumption patterns in tourism, which is a distinctly hedonistic activity associated with self-reward, leisure, and symbolic enjoyment. Cultural attitudes regarding the acceptability of enjoyment thus significantly influence how individuals perceive travel and their consumption habits in this context. Empirical research indicates that individuals from cultures characterized by high indulgence place greater emphasis on hedonistic, relaxing, and pleasure-driven tourism experiences, reflecting their stronger focus on satisfaction and personal enjoyment (Meng Ji et al., 2023). These individuals also tend to report higher satisfaction with the tourism experiences (Huang & Crotts, 2019), suggesting that cultural influences shape tourism behaviour (Koc et al., 2017).

Moreover, cultural values play a key role in anticonsumerist behaviour, as they shape how individuals interpret information and decide whether to reduce or eliminate consumption (Kuanr et al., 2021). Given that tourism is strongly associated with enjoyment, status, and hedonism, the indulgence-restraint spectrum can influence individuals' willingness to curtail their consumption. Cultures with a greater emphasis on enjoyment may decrease the motivation to limit tourism consumption, while those with a greater emphasis on self-regulation may encourage more moderate consumption practices.

While cultural dimensions are often used to describe differences between nations, research reveals considerable cultural diversity within countries, driven by factors such as migration, tourism, global media exposure, international commerce, and other aspects of globalization (Heydari et al., 2021). Individuals within the same country do not necessarily share the same values, which justifies researching cultural dimensions at the individual level and allows for a more accurate connection

between cultural values, personal norms, and behavioural decisions (Huang & Crotts, 2019; Heydari et al., 2021).

Despite the established influence of culture on consumer behaviour, the link between the indulgence dimension and sustainable and anticonsumerist behaviours in tourism remains under-researched. Further research is needed to examine how cultural values shape (un)sustainable consumption patterns and moderate the relationship between psychological factors and individual behaviour in a tourism context (He & Filimonau, 2020).

2.6 Gen Y

Generation Y is a crucial demographic for predicting future trends in tourism consumption, as they will constitute the largest share of tourists in the years to come (Liu-Lastres et al., 2025). Their significance is therefore essential for exploring the possibilities of adopting more sustainable travel behaviour.

For millennials (Generation Y), travel is a central part of their life priorities. They travel more frequently than previous generations, represent the largest segment of international tourists, and their influence on the tourism market is growing as their incomes rise. This generation is noted for prioritizing experiences over material possessions, reflected in their preference for authentic experiences, self-directed travel, and support for local businesses. Research also shows that they possess a higher level of environmental awareness and are willing to invest more in sustainable alternatives (Ketter, 2021).

An important aspect of their behaviour is also their attitude toward accommodation. Millennials are key users of the sharing economy and often prefer peer-to-peer accommodation over traditional hotels, mainly because of the perceived authenticity, contact with the local environment, and value for money. They often save on accommodation to spend more on unique experiences. Their travel decisions are closely intertwined with social networks, where they share their experiences intensively, thereby strengthening their own identity and, at the same time, influencing their peers' travel aspirations (Ketter, 2021).

At the same time, young people represent an ambivalent group. On the one hand, they are often seen as potential agents of sustainable change; on the other hand, they are heavily involved in the symbolic and status dimensions of consumption and are exposed to pressure from social networks and reference groups. Travel in the digital space often acts as a means of social signalling and identity formation, which can encourage consumption-intensive forms of tourism. Because of this duality, young people represent a promising but challenging group for promoting anticonsumerist behaviour (Ziesemer et al., 2021).

Empirical research confirms the complexity of their behaviour. The sustainability-oriented segment of tourists is generally younger, more educated, and higher-income, and more consistently transfers its values to the travel context. Nevertheless, there is also a gap between attitudes and actual behaviour in this group, as environmentally conscious individuals often do not behave sustainably during their vacations (Holmes et al., 2021).

A review of existing literature indicates that anticonsumerist behaviour in tourism results from a complex interplay of symbolic, psychological, and cultural influences. The phenomenon of conspicuous consumption creates social pressures to display status and visibility, while conspicuous non-consumption can serve as an alternative way to express identity. The concept of moral disengagement enables individuals to rationalize unsustainable choices, minimizing internal conflict, whereas feelings of guilt can help regulate behaviour and promote consistency between one's values and actions. Additionally, cultural values shape attitudes toward enjoyment, self-discipline, and restraint in consumption, potentially moderating the effects of psychological factors on behavioural decisions. To understand anticonsumption in tourism, it is crucial to adopt an integrative approach that accounts for these interrelated factors, particularly for young Slovenian consumers.

3 Methodology

A qualitative research design was employed to explore how young Slovenian travellers interpret and negotiate anticonsumption in tourism. A focus group method was selected because it enables interactive discussion and facilitates the construction of meanings, allowing researchers to capture shared norms, tensions, and socially negotiated interpretations.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research topic. The inclusion criteria specified that participants belong to Generation Y and have experience with frequent travel. Eight participants (four females and four males, aged 26–36) took part in a single focus group session lasting approximately 90 minutes. The focus group was conducted in person at the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Maribor, and moderated by two researchers. With participants' informed consent, the session was audio-recorded and later transcribed word-for-word.

A semi-structured discussion guide was developed based on previous research related to anticonsumption, moral disengagement, holiday mindset, cultural factors, guilt, and conspicuous consumption. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to reflect on their travel habits, motivations, perceived contradictions between values and behaviour, and contextual influences on their decisions. Probing questions were included to foster deeper reflection and clarification. Two academics, one from marketing research and one from consumer behaviour, were presented with research concepts and definitions and reviewed the discussion guide prior to data collection to enhance its clarity and content validity.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The analysis integrated deductive coding based on relevant theoretical constructs with inductive identification of emerging themes. Initially, the transcripts were read multiple times to become familiar with the data. Then, initial codes were generated across the entire dataset. These codes were organized into broader themes that reflected recurring patterns in participants' thoughts and experiences. Themes were subsequently reviewed, refined, and clearly defined through an iterative analytical process. Themes are presented and described in detail in the Results section.

To enhance the study's credibility and dependability, the researchers engaged in peer debriefing throughout the coding process. The findings section includes rich, verbatim quotations to support transparency and confirmability. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. They were informed about the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

This study employs an exploratory qualitative design based on a single focus group, aiming to generate in-depth insights rather than generalizable conclusions. Group interaction influenced individual responses, and recruitment within an academic environment may have resulted in a sustainability-aware sample. The findings should therefore be interpreted as contextually grounded rather than representative of the broader population of Slovenian Generation Y travellers.

4 Results

4.1 General Travel Behaviour

Focus group participants reported frequent travel, typically comprising several shorter trips (e.g., city breaks) and one main vacation, usually seasonal. Shorter trips are often aimed at exploring new destinations, while the main vacation is sometimes linked to a recurring location. There is a distinction between participants who prefer popular and tourist-friendly destinations and those who actively seek out less-traveled locations (off the beaten path).

Most trips are organized independently. Participants cited flexibility, lower costs, the freedom to design their own itineraries, and spontaneity as key reasons for this choice. Organized trips through agencies are more common for family vacations or when visiting destinations that are less safe or unfamiliar. In some cases, agencies serve as sources of inspiration or information, helping travellers choose destinations and identify tourist spots to avoid.

Participants described a good trip in multifaceted terms. Key elements include the quality of interpersonal relationships. For example, one of the participants noted:

"It is not the location that matters but being with the right people."

Alongside the search for uniqueness and a departure from mass tourism, a minimum standard of comfort, cultural experiences (e.g., museums and architecture), new experiences, broadening horizons, and cuisine. Avoiding crowds and maintaining tranquillity are also essential components. Travel is often characterized as a means of regeneration, mental escape, and personal development, for example:

"With every trip, I get closer to myself."

For most participants, travel is a high priority, as one of the respondents said:

"I could not live without it."

Only a few reported a decline in the importance of travel, attributing it to a shift in life priorities. The high value placed on travel is crucial for understanding their attitudes toward reducing tourism consumption.

4.2 Anticonsumption as Selective and Pragmatic Rather Than Ideological

Participants primarily view the reduction of tourism consumption through a financial lens. They often understand anticonsumption as a cost-saving measure rather than as an environmentally motivated decision. Decisions to reduce consumption often involve weighing costs against perceived benefits, leading individuals to forego activities deemed unnecessary. However, this raises a dilemma regarding the uniqueness of experiences: for example, some might wonder:

"Will I have the opportunity to experience this somewhere else?"

Among unnecessary consumption, the purchase of souvenirs is frequently mentioned. Some participants describe this practice as ritualistic yet functionally unnecessary. They express a distance from excessive material consumption, both at home and while traveling, often rejecting shopping tourism in favour of experiences over ownership. There is also a selective rejection of certain tourism forms, particularly cruises, which some participants view as environmentally and socially problematic. This perception is influenced by concerns about their high environmental impact and limited contributions to the local economy.

Participants believe that the trip's destination and purpose significantly influence the extent of consumption. For nearby destinations, where individuals return for their main seasonal vacations, there is a stronger tendency toward self-sufficiency and more control over costs. In contrast, shorter exploratory trips, often involving air travel, are associated with luggage restrictions and different consumption patterns.

The link between consumption volume and experience quality is not straightforward. Authentic experiences can often be achieved with less consumption and greater engagement with the local environment. However, some participants retrospectively associate higher activity levels and, consequently, greater consumption with richer, fuller experiences.

Reasons for traveling less or consuming less include family obligations, security and political concerns, and environmental considerations. Individuals actively involved in sustainability issues tend to evaluate the necessity of returning to the same destination and the justification for certain travel practices. Additionally, physical fatigue and burnout related to the organization and execution of trips serve as limiting factors.

Although participants express ethical concerns about specific destinations, such as human rights violations or labour exploitation, sustainability issues alone have not been decisive in cancelling trips. Thus, environmentally sustainable behaviour often remains separate from the decision to travel.

Participants indicate that they would be encouraged to reduce consumption primarily due to financial constraints, negative experiences, simplified choices, increased availability of sustainable options, and crowds. Burnout from the logistical and physical demands of travel is also a potential factor in reducing travel. Conversely, participants acknowledge that fatigue can prompt greater consumption as a means of compensating for the effort, such as opting for more comfort during their travels.

4.3 The Persistence of Conspicuous Logic in Experiential Consumption

Participants emphasize that they primarily travel for personal interest, curiosity, and a desire to explore, rather than for social recognition. They often describe their travel identity with terms like 'explorer' or 'adventurer', reflecting an alternative form of self-positioning compared to the traditional signalling of material wealth.

However, discussions reveal an awareness that specific destinations and activities serve as clear status symbols that facilitate status differentiation. These include iconic landmarks, luxury experiences, romantic getaways, and more expensive, media-covered destinations. As one participant explained:

"If you spend that much money to go up the Burj Khalifa, you will definitely want to post a photo on Instagram – just to show how much you spent and that you were there."

Participants believe that the status aspect is particularly amplified by social media, where travel experiences become publicly visible and comparable. They note a connection between higher consumption and an increased likelihood of public exposure on social media.

This discussion highlights the dual function of travel: on one hand, it serves as personal achievement and self-affirmation; on the other, it acts as a means of social signalling. Status signalling has become normalized and is understood as an integral part of contemporary digital culture. Meanwhile, participants express criticism toward those who choose destinations primarily for their symbolic value or publishing ability, distancing themselves from the practice of merely checking off destinations to prove something.

A shift in the perception of status is evident. While status signalling was traditionally associated with spending, participants now recognize that it can also be constructed through thriftiness, resourcefulness, and the ability to organize a high-quality trip on a limited budget. Boasting about low costs and optimization is becoming an alternative form of symbolic positioning. As one participant reflected:

"Back in our student years, many of us would brag about how much we had spent on a trip. Today, you boast about how little money you managed to spend – you even feel embarrassed if you spend more than necessary."

At the same time, there is a tendency to hide high consumption due to feelings of envy, social condemnation, doubts about its legitimacy, or a desire not to make others uncomfortable.

Participants also show a clear rejection of mass destinations and their symbolic value, stating that these have lost their exclusivity due to overexposure. The search for hidden gems serves as a mechanism for differentiation, allowing individuals to share exclusive discoveries and strengthen their identities. However, they acknowledge the paradox that sharing these hidden gems contributes to their popularization. Sometimes, avoiding tourist spots is about seeking more affordable alternatives.

The role of social networks is primarily seen as exploratory and informational. Participants highlight that these platforms help them reduce uncertainty about destinations, provide insights into travel feasibility, and inspire off-the-beaten-path locations. Nonetheless, some admit they follow travel profiles that influence their decisions and often choose destinations recommended by acquaintances because of realistic expectations. There is a desire to distance themselves from trends, though the influence of their social environment remains significant.

Participants cite various motives for traveling, ranging from personal interest to social pressure and the fear of missing out (FOMO). They also differentiate between motives for posting on social media, such as boasting, proving oneself, and preserving memories. In their view, these motives are reflected in the content of their posts.

Lastly, there is an idea that status can be enhanced through reduced consumption or limited travel, especially when this is connected to other symbolic investments (e.g., a car). However, some believe that this form of symbolic positioning through consumption restriction is more easily achievable for public figures or celebrities than for ordinary individuals.

4.4 Indulgence, Contextual Hedonism, and the "Travel Exception"

Participants often view travel as a unique opportunity to step outside the norms of everyday life. This perspective influences how they consume and perceive the value of money. A noticeable shift occurs across different life stages. While travel during student years typically involved minimalism and low expenditure, individuals today, enjoying greater financial stability, tend to indulge in greater comfort. For example, one participant stated:

"I do not go below a certain standard that I have at home because I can afford it when traveling."

Despite this preference for comfort, participants emphasize moderation and reject living beyond their means, promoting conscious consumption.

When traveling, participants notice a change in how they value money. The significance of money takes on a different psychological meaning compared to situations at home. The context of travel, often characterized by limited time, justifies increased spending. There is notable tolerance for expenses and greater budgeting flexibility, particularly when travel is perceived as a rare or once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Participants often justify their spending with rationalizations, such as stating:

"You only live once," "you must make the most of it while you are there," or " you have to treat yourself; you cannot take anything with you when you die."

These sentiments illustrate a heightened willingness to engage in hedonistic spending while traveling.

Consumption during travel is frequently linked to comfort, safety, time efficiency, and the maximization of overall experiences. Participants face a dilemma between comfort, speed, and responsibility, with their limited travel time often influencing their choices between efficient and comfortable options. Travel also triggers a contextual evaluation of experiences; the same service is often perceived as having a higher subjective value while on vacation than at home, leading to a greater willingness to spend more.

Although participants assert that they generally maintain their values while traveling (for example, by not littering), they also recognize the need to adapt to local customs, sometimes out of concern about standing out. Consequently, environmental standards may be viewed differently based on the context. Behaviour can often be shaped by infrastructure and systemic solutions; when sustainable options are not readily available, individuals may adopt existing practices.

They attribute differences in behaviour while traveling to personality traits. Some believe that responsible individuals maintain consistency in their actions. In contrast, others argue that travel can foster a sense of irresponsibility, as individuals may not perceive the immediate or long-term consequences of their actions.

Their attitudes toward enjoyment and restraint reflect a quest for balance. They endorse indulgence within financial limits, avoid borrowing for travel, and frequently set a flexible daily budget.

Furthermore, participants note a change in routine and an increase in motivation when traveling. They perceive travel as a time for heightened activity and self-reflection. Simultaneously, they recognize that traveling encourages consumption, as they encounter products unavailable or perceived as higher quality than at home. There is often an impulsive logic behind additional purchases, with the thought process like:

"Once you are on a trip, you just tell yourself, just this one more thing."

Such thinking can lead to increased overall spending.

Lastly, participants mention the impact of broader cultural values, particularly collectivist norms, which they believe can promote more sustainable behaviours by emphasising the common good.

4.5 Moral Disengagement as a Central Explanatory Mechanism

This discussion highlights the complex relationship between rationalization mechanisms and emotional responses that influence participants' attitudes toward sustainability and consumption in tourism. Participants describe themselves as a generation with a high level of environmental awareness, understanding the broader social and ecological consequences of tourism. However, their responses reveal a tension between their stated values and actual decisions.

Participants recognize both the positive and negative impacts of tourism. They point out economic benefits for local populations, job creation, and contributions to the development of less developed countries. At the same time, they acknowledge rising property prices, resident displacement, and the unequal distribution of benefits. The conversation often involves weighing these benefits against their costs, with some participants stating that:

"I see more good than bad."

The remark:

"Human selfishness has won at this moment,"

reflects an awareness that personal interests often take precedence over collective responsibility.

Participants often rationalize higher consumption by viewing it as a contribution to the local economy and a beneficial act at the macroeconomic level, stating that:

"Good deeds are rewarded with good."

They frame their consumption as positive and legitimate behaviour.

A significant pattern observed is the transfer of responsibility to the government, regulators, service providers, and the broader system. Participants argue that hotels and cruise lines encourage excessive consumption and that many destinations effectively require higher spending to fully enjoy the experience. They feel that tourists are not solely to blame for the negative impacts of tourism, highlighting the need for systemic solutions such as regulation, infrastructure, and policy changes. Participants express scepticism about the effectiveness of individual voluntary behaviour changes.

Many participants convey a sense of limited individual influence, reflected in statements like:

"It is just a drop in the ocean."

or

"I cannot change anything on my own."

This feeling of powerlessness often leads to a reduced willingness to alter their own behaviour. However, there is also a contrasting belief that individuals can influence broader changes through their demand and set an example for others.

Participants openly acknowledge that they rationalize their decisions, with common justifications including time constraints. One of the participants stated:

"If I am already there, I have to take advantage of it."

We also observed a lack of consideration for efficiency, convenience, comfort, financial accessibility, alternatives, and the complexity of making sustainable choices. They frequently mention adopting selective sustainable practices, mixing more or less sustainable options.

Time savings and affordability often justify air travel. Compensatory behaviour, such as paying environmental taxes, indicates a desire for moral balancing. However, the willingness to engage in compensatory actions depends on the context. For trips that would occur regardless of personal choice, there is a lower likelihood of such behaviour. Participants show selective sensitivity to the price premium for sustainable options, often agreeing to accept minimal additional costs, while higher costs significantly reduce their willingness to choose sustainable alternatives.

Additionally, there is mistrust about how funds collected, such as environmental taxes, are used to address adverse impacts. Participants express scepticism about the information provided and often lack the motivation to verify the tourism's effects independently.

Many participants relativize responsibility for sustainability, arguing that there is always room for even more sustainable actions, which creates an unrealistic, endless standard. At the same time, they highlight the complexity of sustainability decisions, acknowledging that even sustainable choices may come with hidden costs or negative impacts from different perspectives.

Some participants report feeling guilty when opting for unsustainable alternatives, especially when the adverse effects of tourism are emphasized. This guilt is often accompanied by an intention to make different choices in the future. As one participant described:

"Whenever I can, I try to choose differently, but sometimes I'm just exhausted and allow myself an exception. I tell myself that next time I'll do better, but it's not a good feeling when guilt follows you."

Additionally, emotional overload from information about their environmental impact can lead to a sense of distancing from the problem. In some cases, transparency about global unsustainable practices can diminish motivation for sustainable behaviour and reduce the meaningfulness of individual contributions, leading to justifications of their behaviour by comparing themselves to others who are even less sustainable.

Participants also view travel as a time-limited opportunity, associating it with heightened experiences and an increased willingness to spend. In this context, the element of time becomes a more critical consideration in decision-making than financial or environmental factors. Some participants justify their higher travel frequency by referencing their personal histories, such as having taken fewer trips during childhood, which creates a sense of entitlement and legitimacy for their current consumption.

4.5 Conditions for Change and Future Expectations

Participants emphasize that reducing travel intensity and consumption requires increasing awareness of the adverse effects of tourism. They stress the need for greater transparency, verifiability, and clarity of information, which would help build trust in sustainability initiatives and the proper use of collected funds (e.g., environmental taxes). A key aspect for them is the measurability and traceability of effects, as they believe information about tourism's impact is often too complex or dispersed.

According to the participants, they are primarily motivated by sustainability when they can perceive concrete, visible outcomes of change. They highlight the need to simplify data and quantify individual impact, enabling people to understand the consequences of their decisions more clearly. They believe that increased awareness of these consequences would minimize the tendency to ignore or downplay the impact of one's actions.

Moreover, they emphasize the importance of clear rules and institutional mechanisms. Some participants argue that environmental taxes or sustainability measures should be integrated into standard policies, rather than relying on individual choices.

Despite these proposals for change, there is a notable pessimism about future developments. Most participants doubt that attitudes toward travel will shift significantly, especially given rising consumerism and greater travel accessibility. While some believe that first-hand experiences with negative consequences (e.g., climate change) will gradually motivate behavioural change, others are sceptical, suggesting that:

"People will always find an excuse."

Participants also link future developments to the role of the education system, arguing that the impact of such changes will only become evident in the long term. They mention intercultural differences, believing that change is more probable in areas with higher levels of awareness. At the same time, they question whether these changes will spread globally. Additionally, they point out that younger generations have greater choices and convenience, which may further decrease their willingness to limit consumption.

5 Discussion

5.1 Answers to the research questions

This section interprets the findings in relation to the research questions, focusing on the conceptualization of anticonsumption, the mechanisms that sustain the attitude–behaviour gap, and the symbolic factors that influence tourism consumption.

Addressing RQ1, the findings indicate that anticonsumption in tourism is not primarily driven by ideology but is instead justified economically and situationally. This builds upon previous research by illustrating that anticonsumption in tourism manifests as selective and bounded restraint rather than a complete withdrawal from consumption. Travel is viewed as a symbolically protected domain associated with identity, personal regeneration, and value, which limits the impact of sustainability

considerations on behaviour. As a result, anticonsumption is expressed as moderated engagement rather than total avoidance.

In relation to RQ2, the findings indicate that moral disengagement plays a key role in maintaining the gap between environmental awareness and actual tourism behaviour. People are not indifferent; rather, they actively rationalize their choices to maintain a positive moral self-image. This finding extends prior research by highlighting that tourism provides a context in which moral standards can be temporarily relaxed and reinterpreted. While feelings of guilt occasionally emerge, they are typically brief and often neutralized, thereby limiting their potential to drive lasting behavioural change.

Regarding RQ3, the results demonstrate the significant role of symbolic factors in shaping tourism consumption. Even when individuals consciously try to distance themselves from overt status-seeking behaviour, identity signalling continues to play a significant role. This implies that anticonsumption can serve as a symbolic resource, enabling individuals to construct identities based on restraint, authenticity, or resourcefulness. As a result, both consumption and anticonsumption coexist within the same symbolic marketplace, which limits the potential for anticonsumption to bring about substantial changes in tourism practices.

For RQ4, the findings suggest that the willingness to reduce tourism consumption emerges under specific conditions, particularly when faced with financial constraints, fatigue, negative experiences, and the availability of clear, trustworthy, sustainable alternatives. Structural elements such as regulations and default options have a greater influence than voluntary individual motivations. This indicates that behavioural change is dependent on contextual enablers rather than purely value-driven intentions.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

Consistent with prior definitions of anticonsumption as a voluntary, value-driven reduction of consumption (Kropfeld et al., 2018; Iyer & Muncy, 2009), participants engaged in certain forms of consumption restraint. However, these practices were primarily selective and pragmatic rather than ideologically motivated by environmental concerns. Souvenirs, shopping tourism, and cruises were commonly

avoided, yet for reasons related to perceived lack of utility, cost-benefit evaluations, or situational ethical discomfort. Importantly, participants did not question the legitimacy of travel frequency or air transport as such. Rather than rejecting tourism consumption at its core, they targeted peripheral elements. This suggests that, within tourism, anticonsumption rarely manifests as an absolute reduction. Instead, it takes the form of selective moderation within what may be described as a structurally protected consumption domain. Travel functions as a symbolically and emotionally privileged activity, closely tied to identity, regeneration, and social legitimacy. Consequently, reduction efforts remain bounded and negotiated. This reconceptualization implies that anticonsumption in tourism is better understood as symbolically negotiated restraint rather than structural withdrawal. This aligns with research suggesting that environmental motives do not operate in isolation (Cherrier et al., 2010; Ziesemer et al., 2021) but intersect with financial considerations, fatigue, life-stage transitions, and perceived necessity. In a context where travel embodies experiential value and personal growth, sustainability concerns appear insufficient to challenge its core legitimacy.

Although participants explicitly distanced themselves from overt status-seeking behaviour, the findings confirm that tourism remains embedded in the logic of conspicuous consumption (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019). Travel simultaneously functions as personal enrichment and symbolic capital. Even when rejecting luxury-oriented signalling, participants engaged in alternative forms of distinction, emphasizing hidden destinations, authenticity, thriftiness, and resourcefulness. This reflects Effler et al.'s (2022) argument that anticonsumption and conspicuous consumption are not strict opposites. Identity signalling may also occur through restraint. The emergence of status through optimization, such as organizing a high-quality trip at low cost, indicates that symbolic value shifts rather than disappears. Social media further amplifies this dynamic by normalizing visibility, comparison, and the fear of missing out (FOMO). Thus, anticonsumption in tourism operates within the same symbolic marketplace that sustains consumption. Even when travellers deny seeking recognition, structural pressures of visibility and peer comparison shape decision-making. This limits the transformative potential of voluntary restraint and helps explain the persistence of high travel intensity despite environmental awareness.

One of the most notable findings concerns the pervasive role of moral disengagement. In line with Bandura's (1996) framework, participants employed multiple rationalization strategies to reconcile environmental awareness with continued travel. These included moral justification (*"tourism supports local economies"*), diffusion of responsibility (attributing accountability to governments or corporations), moral licensing (offsetting or selective sustainability), and comparative justification (comparing with others who behave worse). The holiday context was consistently framed as an exceptional space governed by different norms. Time scarcity, reward narratives, and once-in-a-lifetime framing legitimized indulgent decisions. Tourism thus creates moral distance, weakening self-regulation mechanisms (Wu et al., 2021; Mkono & Hughes, 2020). Importantly, participants demonstrated reflexive awareness of their rationalizations. This suggests not ignorance, but a motivated negotiation between identity, pleasure, and responsibility. Moral disengagement did not eliminate environmental concern. Instead, it enabled the preservation of a positive moral self-concept without substantial behaviour change ("I will die with a clear conscience, because I did what felt right for me and for the people around me").

Eco-guilt emerged episodically, particularly when environmental consequences were made salient. However, consistent with Nielsen et al. (2024), guilt was often fleeting and neutralized through cognitive reframing. Only when personal responsibility was perceived as direct and unavoidable did guilt appear to strengthen intentions for future change. The findings indicate that moral emotions alone are insufficient to drive durable reductions in tourism consumption. Excessive exposure to environmental problems may even lead to emotional distancing and reduced efficacy, reinforcing defensive coping mechanisms (Stoll-Kleemann & O'Riordan, 2020).

The perspective of the indulgence-restraint dimension provides further insight into this contextual shift. Participants consistently described a shift in the psychological significance of money and consumption while traveling. They justified spending through narratives of deserved reward, rarity, and the maximization of life experiences (*"you only live once"*). Although Slovenia is not generally categorized as a highly indulgent society at the macro level, indulgence orientations were clearly activated in the tourism context. Simultaneously, participants emphasized the importance of moderation and fiscal responsibility, avoiding debt and maintaining

self-imposed limits. Rather than completely abandoning restraint, tourism appears to enable a negotiated form of indulgence – pleasure-seeking intensifies yet remains bounded by perceived legitimacy. This contextual amplification of indulgence suggests that tourism temporarily reorders value hierarchies, prioritizing experiential fulfilment over sustainability norms.

The findings further highlight the ambivalent position of Generation Y. Participants demonstrated strong environmental awareness and openness to systemic solutions, while simultaneously maintaining a strong attachment to frequent travel, experiential intensity, and comfort. This duality aligns with previous research (Holmes et al., 2021; Ziesemer et al., 2021), positioning young consumers as both potential agents of change and active participants in consumption-driven norms. A particularly noteworthy finding concerns the strong emphasis on institutional responsibility. Participants indicated a greater willingness to accept mandatory structural measures (e.g., integrated environmental fees) than to voluntarily restrict their behaviour. Trust, transparency, and measurability were identified as prerequisites for change. When responsibility feels diffuse and has negligible impact, disengagement prevails. These findings suggest that meaningful reductions in tourism consumption depend less on moral persuasion and more on systemic design. Embedding sustainable options into default structures, increasing transparency, and reshaping symbolic norms are more effective than relying solely on individual guilt or awareness.

This study contributes to the literature in three primary ways. First, it reconceptualizes anticonsumption in tourism as a selective and symbolically negotiated restraint rather than an absolute reduction. Second, it demonstrates how moral disengagement, indulgence narratives, and identity signalling interact to sustain the attitudes-behaviour gap within a hedonically privileged consumption domain. Third, it positions tourism as a context in which sustainable values are not abandoned but temporarily reframed, helping to explain the persistence of high travel intensity despite environmental awareness.

5.3 Practical implications

The findings have several important implications for the tourism industry and policymakers. Firstly, strategies to reduce tourism consumption should not rely solely on moral appeals or sustainability messages, as individuals often dismiss them

through a process known as moral disengagement. Instead, interventions should concentrate on structural solutions, including regulations, default options, and integrated pricing mechanisms. Secondly, since financial considerations play a significant role in influencing behaviour, it is crucial to make sustainable options economically viable. Lowering price barriers and increasing cost transparency could enhance their adoption. Thirdly, communication strategies should focus on specific and measurable outcomes. Participants expressed a need for straightforward, verifiable information regarding the environmental impact of their choices, suggesting that vague sustainability messages are insufficient. Lastly, since identity signalling is important in tourism, sustainable behaviour should be positioned as socially desirable and visible. Highlighting the symbolic value of reduced consumption practices may increase their attractiveness.

5.4 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it is based on a single focus group of eight participants recruited from an academic environment, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include more diverse samples across socio-economic and cultural contexts to examine whether similar patterns of negotiated restraint emerge. Second, the qualitative design provides insight into interpretative processes but does not allow for testing the relative influence of mechanisms such as moral disengagement, guilt, or indulgence narratives. Quantitative and experimental studies could assess how these factors shape willingness to reduce tourism consumption. Third, the study relies on self-reported reasoning. Future research could incorporate behavioural or longitudinal approaches to explore discrepancies between stated intentions and actual travel behaviour.

Overall, anticonsumption among young Slovenian travellers emerges as bounded, negotiated, and contextually contingent. Tourism functions as a morally flexible domain in which sustainable commitments are recalibrated rather than rejected. Understanding this flexibility is crucial for designing interventions that move beyond green substitution toward genuine reductions in tourism consumption intensity.

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