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Attitudes of Tourism Entrepreneurs and Support towards Sustainable Tourism Practices in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

There is a limited understanding about the attitudes and support for sustainable tourism practices among entrepreneurs who operate tourism-related businesses in regional and remote areas. Therefore, the study's objectives were threefold: (a) to investigate the nature of attitudes toward sustainable tourism among entrepreneurs in remote areas of Sri Lanka; (b) to determine if entrepreneurs' attitudes significantly impact support for sustainable tourism; and (c) to identify the barriers entrepreneurs face and the type of support they expect. Data were collected from 250 entrepreneurs in a field survey in two regional tourism destinations and analyzed using descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and thematic analysis. The entrepreneurs were selected via a quota sampling method from providers of accommodation, food and beverage, and guide services industries. Despite operating in remote areas, the entrepreneurs generally have positive attitudes toward sustainable tourism practices ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 0.2$), and such attitudes significantly impact their support for sustainable tourism ($\beta = .43$, $p = .000$). Partial correlations indicate that *maximizing community participation* dimension contributes uniquely and powerfully to entrepreneur support ($r = .95$, $p = .000$). The entrepreneurs recognize the importance of sustainable tourism, which would otherwise jeopardize the survival of their businesses. The main barriers identified are a lack of knowledge about sustainable tourism practices, inconsistent government policies, and a lack of government initiatives. The findings shed light on policy decisions to encourage sustainable practices among entrepreneurs operating in regional destinations, where sustainability issues are becoming increasingly visible and relevant.

Tourism has been continuously growing over the last 50 years and has become 'a key component of export diversification both for emerging and advanced economies and an important source of foreign revenues for many destinations in the world' (World Tourism Organization, 2019, p. 8). Now it has boomed into a captivating enterprise throughout the world due to its significant role in stimulating consumption, employment, and economic growth worldwide. Tourism creates employment and raises local income levels, resulting in reduced government spending on social welfare payments and increased tax revenue from the tourism industry, enabling both developed and developing countries to realize positive economic

benefits. Though countries and nations realize such positive economic outcomes of tourism, its negative side in social and environmental impacts should not be overlooked. Most of these negative consequences occur due to unplanned and unsustainable tourism developments and, more often, over-tourism activities. These negative consequences are increasingly alarming to tourism destinations and the stakeholders involved in the tourism sector to engage and sustainably develop tourism. Hence, there is a broad consensus that tourism development should be sustainable; however, how to acquire this remains an object of debate (Font et al., 2021; Lansing & Vries, 2007).

Tourism involves a range of stakeholders who are fascinated and connected with tourism, such as tourists, residents, authorities, service providers, different enterprise entities, and entrepreneurs. This multi-stakeholder involvement in the industry necessitates the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders for sustainably developing tourism. Plenty of research has revealed stakeholder involvement in promoting sustainable tourism developments in the literature (Font et al., 2021; Roxas et al., 2020; Sánchez-Oro Sánchez et al., 2021). In predicting stakeholder behaviors (regarding sustainable tourism), attitudes towards sustainable tourism have been identified as a critical antecedent (Godfrey, 1998; Hsu et al., 2019) since attitudes often affect people's behavior (Ajzen, 2001). Thus, a vast amount of research has examined how attitudes affect sustainable behaviors among tourists and residents (Buckley, 2012; Choi & Sirakaya, 2005; Hsu et al., 2019; Qian et al., 2018). Still, the literature lacks studies that examine entrepreneurs' perspectives on the issue, particularly in remote destinations. Entrepreneurs in remote areas may face additional challenges and barriers in adopting sustainable practices, and context-specific factors can affect their sustainable behaviors (Augustyn, 1998; Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2016), which have not been adequately researched.

Hence, studies combining quantitative and qualitative data on entrepreneurs' perspectives would provide rich insights for promoting sustainable tourism in remote destinations. The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and support towards sustainable tourism practices of entrepreneurs who operate tourism related businesses in remote areas of a destination and to identify the barriers they face when adopting sustainable practices. Overall, the study contributes to the sustainable tourism literature by shedding light on the sustainable behaviors of entrepreneurs operating in remote tourism destinations.

Literature Review

Tourism Impacts

Many nations are increasingly relying on the tourism sector to provide a foundation for economic development and improve the prosperity of their citizens (Baker & Cameron, 2008). Among the three types of impacts of tourism, namely economic, environmental, and socio-cultural, economic impacts are usually considered positive. They are the results of tourism that contribute to employment, an increase in the wealth of an area, a higher quality of life for locals, and social stability (Li et al., 2018; Pablo-Romero & Molina, 2013; Umurzakov et al., 2022). However, in some cases, the positive economic impacts of tourism are offset by its adverse social and environmental consequences (Archer et al., 2005; Elorrieta et al., 2022). The negative side of tourism impact is mainly related to social and ecological issues caused by unplanned tourism activities (Archer et al., 2005; Hindley et al., 2022; Gursoy et al., 2019). Environmental impacts are the consequences of tourism that affect the area's carrying capacity, vegetation, air quality, water, wildlife, and natural phenomena (Pablo-Romero & Molina, 2013). All tourist activities have an ecological impact on the host destination. In rural destinations, activities such as hiking, trekking, kayaking, bird watching, wildlife safaris, surfing, diving, and scuba-diving frequently affect the local ecology (Lee & Chen, 2021). With increasing population and the growth of tourism activities, these impacts appear more, resources end up unsustainable and exhausted, and the carrying capacity for tourists in a destination site may deplete (Lee, 2013). Tourists' interactions with residents trigger socio-cultural impacts. Introducing tourists to sensitive areas could be detrimental and lead to issues such as the loss of the local culture, commodification of culture, and the acculturation of another culture (Pablo-Romero & Molina, 2013; Park,

2022; Sangchumnong & Kozak, 2021; Yu et al., 2011). Though destinations' tourism growth offers many opportunities, severe negative influences may arise. Destinations, including remote tourist places, are negatively impacted by unplanned tourism, and scholars have reported a wide range of impacts such as increased environmental pollution, adverse effects on wildlife and their natural habitats, a growing number of crimes and robberies, issues related to drugs, alcoholism, and prostitution, overcrowding and traffic congestions, and exploitation of the native population (Archer et al., 2005; Chandralal, 2010; Elorrieta et al., 2022; Hindley et al., 2022; Hillery et al., 2001; Pizam, 1978).

Sustainable Tourism and Stakeholder Participation

Due to the growing concerns about the negative aspects of tourism, there is now a broad consensus that tourism development should be sustainable, which will solve many of the adverse problems resulting from the unplanned growth of tourism (Font et al., 2021; Kasemsap, 2020; Qian et al., 2018). It establishes a suitable balance between the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, which performs a vital function in conserving biodiversity, minimizing the impact on the local culture while contributing to economic prosperity (Hakim et al., 2012; Heinen et al., 2019). Sustainability and competitiveness go hand in hand, as destinations and businesses can become more competitive through resource efficiency, biodiversity conservation, and climate change action (World Tourism Organization, 2019).

As a social phenomenon, tourism is concerned with the sum of phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction of tourists, businesses, host governments, and host communities while attracting and hosting tourists and other visitors (Amerta et al., 2018). Thus, communities have a stake in developing tourism in their areas (Chandralal, 2010), and their active involvement will ensure that programs will be sustained. Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders and strong political leadership to make broader participation and consensus-building (Chandralal, 2010; Sautter & Leisen, 1999; Simpson, 2001; Timur & Getz, 2008; Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). Thus, planners should understand the role of such stakeholders in the operational planning and management of sustainable tourism projects (Hardy & Beeton, 2001). Among the various players, entrepreneurs are one of the key stakeholders that can noticeably impact the industry.

Entrepreneur Attitudes and Support for Sustainable Tourism

Human behaviors are mostly affected by attitudes (Ajzen, 1991). Hence, entrepreneurs' support cannot be expected unless they have favorable attitudes towards such sustainable practices. According to Ajzen (2001), attitude indicates how hard people are willing to try or how much of an effort they are planning to exert, to perform a behavior. It is also a good predictor of actual behavior since individuals who intend to conduct would reveal a favorable evaluation or simply known as a 'positive attitude' on that particular conduct (Ajzen, 1991). With reference to environmental practices, the sustainability attitude is also viewed as a major predictor of pro-environment intention (Tonglet et al., 2004). It is a key determinant of exercising sustainability practices in businesses (Freimann et al., 2016; Buckley, 2012).

In the tourism context, attitudes are known as one of the key determinants of support for sustainable tourism, although most previous research has investigated residents' attitudes (Buckley, 2012; Choi & Sirakaya, 2005; Hanafiah et al., 2013; Hsu et al., 2019; Látková & Vogt, 2012; Lee, 2013; Qin et al., 2021). The entrepreneurs who provide tourism facilities in the sector also play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable tourism, which has generally been overlooked (Sigala & Ukpabi, 2019). Therefore, entrepreneurs' readiness to embrace sustainable tourism is questionable in many developing and Asian countries despite sustainability issues that will be of paramount importance and relevance for tourism entrepreneurs during the Covid-19 pandemic as tourism is one of the sectors most negatively affected by the pandemic (Chang et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2020; Sobaih et al., 2021). However, there is a void in the current understanding of entrepreneurs' attitudes and behaviors regarding sustainable tourism practices, particularly in remote destinations where certain context-specific factors may play a significant role.

Hence, this study aimed to study (a) whether there is a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward sustainable tourism among the tourism sector-related entrepreneurs operating in remote tourism destinations; (b) the key aspects to be focused on shaping favorable attitudes towards sustainable tourism among these entrepreneurs; (c) the degree of the link between the entrepreneurs' attitudes and support towards sustainable tourism behaviors in remote destinations; and (d) the barriers faced by these entrepreneurs in adopting sustainable practices in remote areas.

Method

Study Context

The study was carried out at Ella and Heel-Oya, two regional destinations in Sri Lanka, where the authorities promote sustainable practices related to tourism in the areas. Ella is in the Badulla District of the Uva Province, a part of the hill country of Sri Lanka. It is approximately 200 kilometers east of Colombo and situated at 1,041 meters above sea level. The area is rich in biodiversity and dense with numerous varieties of flora and fauna. It offers plenty of opportunities for tourists to engage in adventurous activities such as hiking, trekking, and cycling. During the past few years, Ella town has become a major tourist city with rapidly developing hotels, restaurants, bars, and other infrastructure.

Heel-Oya is a rural, remote agricultural village, another popular tourist destination in the Kandy District of Sri Lanka. Like Ella, Heel-Oya is also blessed with breathtaking scenery such as waterfalls, tea estates, pine forests, plantations, and flora and fauna. The place still provides real authentic sights of a village untouched by mass tourism activities. Still, it is attracting a growing number of visitors, calling for sustainable issues shortly. These two remote destinations provided a proper context to study the major problems of the current study.

Participants

Data were collected from 250 entrepreneurs located in 'Ella' and 'Heel-Oya' regional tourism destinations in Sri Lanka. The two cities were selected for two specific reasons: (a) the two places are turning out to be very popular, thus attracting more visitors to the areas poses a threat of fading their authentic and ecological values, and (b) considering the emerging threat due to the growing commercial tourism activities, sustainable tourism practices are promoted by the local government and tourism-related authorities. Entrepreneurs engaged in accommodation services, food and beverages, and guide services were selected using the quota sampling method. Quotas were decided based on the number of service providers registered under each industry category that are published by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority. Accordingly, the sample was split into accommodation room service providers - 108 respondents, food and beverage providers - 48 respondents, and guide service providers - 94 respondents. The survey was conducted in October-November 2020. Most respondents were male entrepreneurs (85%) since males managed most enterprises in the two areas. According to the age range, 24.4% of the respondents were 20–29 years old, 22.4 % were 30–39, 21.2% were 40–49, and the majority age category (29.6%) belonging to 50–59 years.

Research Approach and the Instruments

This research adopted a field survey method and used self-administered questionnaires to measure entrepreneurs' attitudes and their support for sustainable tourism. A scale developed by Choi and Sirakaya (2005) was utilized to measure entrepreneurs' attitudes toward sustainable tourism, whereas entrepreneurs' support for sustainable tourism' was measured using a scale developed by Lee (2013). Three open-ended questions (Why do you think sustainable practices are necessary for this area? What are the barriers you faced in practicing sustainable tourism? What kind of support do you expect from the respective authorities?) were included in the questionnaire to gauge the barriers faced and the support expected by the entrepreneurs when adopting sustainable practices.

The Goodness of Measures

Before data collection, the validity and reliability of the measures used in the study were inspected during the pilot survey. The unidimensionality of the two constructs was examined through Exploratory

Factor Analysis (EFA), and all indicators of the independent variable were loaded only in the respective seven dimensions. Ten indicators were removed due to poor loadings and cross-loadings. The total variance explained by the seven dimensions was 76.8%. With respect to the study's dependent variable, all indicators were loaded to one variable as conceptualized (Lee, 2013), and the total variance explained by the items was 62.12%. Convergent validity and reliability measures met the minimum threshold values indicating the adequacy of convergent validity and reliability of the measures ($KMP > .5$, $CR > .7$, $AVE > .5$). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the squared correlation among constructs with the AVE on the individual constructs (Malhotra & Dash, 2011), and all squared correlations among dimensions were lower than the AVE on the individual dimensions satisfying the requirements for the discriminant validity.

Ethical Procedures Followed

The study was approved by the university vide ethical clearance number USJ/DMM/17, dated 20 August 2020. The researchers followed the general ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association (2017). Accordingly, the study respondents were intercepted during working hours after obtaining their consent. Informed participation was ensured by explaining the purpose of the study and declaring that their decision to participate in the study was voluntary. Before completing the questionnaire, the respondents were informed of the procedures and the average time to complete the questionnaire. Guarantees of confidentiality were also given to respondents regarding the collected data, ensured by secured and confidential data handling, data storing, and reporting of the study findings.

Results

The findings of the quantitative data analysis of the structured questions and the qualitative data analysis of the open-ended questions are presented below. The descriptive statistics and regression results are presented first, followed by the findings derived from the content and thematic analyses of the qualitative data.

Attitudes and Support Towards Sustainable Tourism

In this research, entrepreneurs' attitudes towards sustainable tourism and their support for sustainable tourism were examined by computing the mean values of the two variables. The findings indicate that entrepreneurs have favorable attitudes toward sustainable tourism ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.24$) and a general high level of support for sustainable tourism ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.58$), implying that they have positive beliefs about sustainable tourism and are willing to extend their support to sustainable practices in the industry, despite the fact that they operate in remote tourism areas.

Impact of Attitudes of Tourism Entrepreneurs on Support for Sustainable Tourism

Regression analysis was performed to examine the link between attitudes and support for sustainable tourism and the results are illustrated in Table 1. Accordingly, there is a significant positive impact of entrepreneurs' attitudes on their support for sustainable tourism development ($\beta = .43$, $p = .000$). This means that forming positive attitudes towards sustainable tourism in remote destinations is vital to promoting sustainable behaviors among tourism entrepreneurs.

Table 1
Regression Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-1.34	0.73		-1.84	.07
Attitude towards Sustainable Tourism	1.22	0.16	.43	7.42	.00*

Note. * $p < .05$.

Examining various aspects of the construct domain can provide additional insights into shaping favorable attitudes toward sustainable tourism. Hence, the construct's salient dimensions were examined through exploratory factor analysis, and Table 2 presents the variance explained by each of the seven dimensions of the attitude construct.

Table 2*The Variance Explained by Dimensions of the Attitude Construct*

Dimension	Variance
Perceived Social Cost	26.8%
Environmental Sustainability	12.6%
Long Term Planning	10.8%
Perceived Economic Benefits	8.2%
Community-Centered Economy	7.8%
Ensuring Visitor Satisfaction	5.4%
Maximizing Community Participation	5.2%

Accordingly, the most salient attitude dimension is the 'perceived social cost', suggesting that the social costs of tourism development seem to be the key concern of entrepreneurs when they shape their attitude about sustainable tourist practices. The impact of unsustainable tourism, such as the declining quality of life, overcrowding, and over usage of resources, are the key considerations behind such attitudes. The other two major concerns are the 'environmental sustainability' of tourism (12.6%) and 'long-term planning' in tourism development (10.8%). A multiple regression model was further performed to investigate the impact of each dimension of attitudes on entrepreneurs' support for sustainable tourism; Tables 3 and 4 present the results.

Table 3*Model Summary*

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
.96	.92	.91	413.58	.00*

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 4*Regression Statistics*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.	Partial correlations
	B.	Std. Error	Beta			
Constant	0.37	0.25		1.47	.14	
Perceived Social Cost	0.03	0.11	.01	0.30	.76	.02
Environmental Sustainability	0.19	0.10	.08	1.91	.06	.12
Long-term Planning	0.02	0.09	.01	0.21	.84	.01
Perceived Economic Benefits	-0.26	0.09	-.12	-2.86	.05	-.18
Community-Centered Economy	0.01	0.04	.00	0.35	.73	.02
Ensuring Visitor Satisfaction	-0.05	0.03	-.03	-1.62	.11	-.10
Maximizing Community Participation	0.95	0.02	.94	45.81	.00*	.95

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 4 reveals that the 'maximizing community participation' dimension significantly predicts entrepreneurs' support for sustainable tourism efforts ($\beta = .95$, $p = .000$). Partial correlation figures confirm that the 'maximizing community participation' dimension uniquely contributes to the dependent variable ($r = 0.95$). This implies that allowing the communities and the entrepreneurs to participate actively in

planning and implementing sustainable tourism in regional areas promotes sustainable behaviors among the entrepreneurs greatly.

Need for Sustainable Tourism, Perceived Barriers and Nature of Support Expected by Entrepreneurs

The open-ended responses were obtained on three concerns, i.e., the perceived need for sustainable tourism, barriers faced when adopting sustainable practices, and the nature of support expected from the relevant authorities. Table 5 provides the themes that emerged under each category and the number of respondents who uncovered each theme.

Need for Sustainable Tourism

As illustrated below, three themes emerged as the primary reasons for the importance of sustainable tourism practices.

Negative Impacts on Their Own Business. When asked about the necessity of sustainable business behaviors in the area, the majority emphasized the necessity to minimize the negative environmental impact caused by unplanned tourism activities, which negatively affect their business. For instance, one respondent reported: “Even though the area has been closed down for a few weeks, still they [authorities] don’t have a proper mechanism for garbage disposal in place and have not even initiated implementing one” (R.11). The entrepreneurs generally view it as a key issue in the area. As another respondent clarified: “A proper disposal mechanism is the first thing that has to be implemented before moving to sustainable tourism; otherwise, we won’t be able to continue our business” (R.31). Such comments indicate that business entrepreneurs acknowledge the necessity of sustainable practices for the smooth running of their business operations.

Table 5

Themes Immersed and the Number of Respondents

Themes Emerged	Number of Respondents
Need for sustainable tourism	
- To prevent potential negative impacts on their own business	63
- To reduce unfair income distribution caused by unplanned tourism	52
- To protect the industry as a major source of foreign exchange	38
The barriers faced when adopting sustainable practices	
- Lack of knowledge of sustainable tourism practices	71
- Not economically feasible	61
- Inconsistent government policies	54
- The lack of initiatives from the government authorities	41
- Poor transparency of government authorities	36
The nature of support expected from the authorities	
- Proper educational programs on the application aspects of sustainable tourism	78
- Financial assistance and proper mechanism to distribute income fairly among entrepreneurs	66
- Consistent policies and government support	63
- Government interventions to control behaviors of non-supporters	39

To Reduce Unfair Income Distribution. Another concern the entrepreneurs raised was that visitors to these destinations mostly gather and travel around limited areas, thus leaving out other areas as they are less developed and mostly neglected for tourism by the authorities. This has resulted in unfair income

distribution among the entrepreneurs and residents; one respondent claimed: “Every day, every single tourist travel to the same location where we can’t carry out business activities as such locations are overcrowded with business” (R.22).

Protecting the Industry as a Major Source of Foreign Exchange. The respondents also believed that tourism is the key to promoting Sri Lanka and should be the primary source of foreign exchange earnings for the country; thus, it should be appropriately planned. Some entrepreneurs clarified that there is already a drop in the tourism industry because it has reached its saturation point: “The tourism industry is over now, and we have to think about a new foreign currency inflow” (R.56). A major reason for such a drop is the lack of new experiences for tourists to gain from the area: “We can’t sell nature forever; we have to create new experiences for tourists” (R.27). These responses indicate that the absence of a long-term sustainable tourism plan for the industry can ruin the industry within a few years. Most entrepreneurs believe that they will not be able to continue in this industry because they do not see any long-term plan or confidence. As one highlighted: “Even though authorities said that tourism would be the main foreign exchange earner for the country, the sustainable way of achieving that has not been communicated to us” (R.23). These viewpoints were common to many entrepreneurs who participated in the study, signaling that practicing sustainable tourism behaviors is inevitable for their survival in the industry and, more broadly, for the entire country as a tourist destination to sustain the global tourism industry.

The Barriers Faced when Adopting Sustainable Behaviors

Several themes emerged as the major barriers for adopting sustainable tourism practice by the entrepreneurs.

Lack of Knowledge of Sustainable Tourism. The respondents were asked about their opinion of the barriers they faced when adopting sustainable tourism behaviors. They reported several barriers, as presented in Table 6. They believed that initiating sustainable tourism would fail without solving these barriers. Some respondents highlighted that lack of proper knowledge of sustainable tourism practices among the entrepreneurs is one such barrier. For instance, one said: “Yes, we have heard about the word on television, but don’t know what it really means” (R.43). Another affirmed that by saying, “Yes, once one of the authorities talked to us about that a long time back, but we don’t have much of an idea of that” (R.15)”.

Not Economically Feasible. Some respondents seemed to have a perception that the word ‘sustainability’ is very expensive and thus not economically feasible for many entrepreneurs in the area, particularly under the prevailing negative economic situation of the country: “You know, many of the businessmen here are micro- or small-scale enterprises. They are already struggling to earn money and have many other things to think of. So, they don’t have time to think of these things” (R.87). Some entrepreneurs viewed that sustainable practices would negatively affect their businesses since most tourists to these areas belong to the low-budget category:

If we practice that, it will increase the cost of services and products, which will finally lead to a spike in the prices that will have to be paid by the tourist. Since most of the tourists that come to Sri Lanka are in the low-budget category, this will de-motivate them to visit the area eventually. Even the entrepreneurs wanted to initiate sustainability with the help of the authorities, but they were not interested. (R.16)

Inconsistent Government Policies and Lack of Initiatives. Some respondents highlighted that inconsistent government policies in promoting sustainable tourism is another issue: “In Sri Lanka, different economic policies are initiated by different governments” (R.6). “When a new government is elected, within the first few months, authorities come to initiate sustainability in the area, after three months they

disappear with the project, again after a new government, the same people come” (R.17). Another similar response was:

In most cases, the previous government’s policies are not continued by the later government. In such a situation, entrepreneurs are not confident about the long-term effectiveness of these sustainability efforts, and they are not interested in supporting them because of this lack of confidence regarding the policies of the authorities (R.42).

The lack of initiatives of the government authorities was also mentioned by some respondents: “What authorities usually say is that you have to make the initial investment, after that we will support if it succeeds” (R.22).

Poor Transparency. The findings also revealed that the authorities encouraged entrepreneurs to register their businesses with the official tourism bodies to be in line with sustainable goals with a hidden agenda: “They ask us to register the business, then they send us a letter from the income tax department” (R.5). Some respondents further mentioned poor transparency of government policies and unfair treatment of entrepreneurs. They tend to believe that, in many cases, the authorities favor large-scale businesses and businesses that have political connections. One respondent clarified: “We are not big people and not big businesses to receive such backing” (R.22).

The Nature of Support Expected from the Relevant Authorities

Following themes were derived as the nature of support expected by the tourism entrepreneurs for embracing sustainable tourism in the industry.

Proper Educational Programs. Regarding the third question, i.e., the nature of support expected from the respective authorities to practice sustainable tourism, the most frequently mentioned request was to provide proper educational programs on the application aspects of sustainable tourism: “We don’t just want the knowledge about what sustainability is, what we want to know specifically is why we want it, how it uplifts the industry, how beneficial it is to us and more importantly, how we can practice it” (R.13). Another respondent expressed the same view: “Yes, we know that we need it but how we can relate to our business is what we want to know more” (R.64). It seems that entrepreneurs expect sufficient knowledge about the practical aspects of sustainability since most entrepreneurs in the study areas are SMEs and micro-businesses operating in remote regions of the country.

Financial Assistance. Financial support is another aspect highlighted by the respondents. Particularly, they believe in the availability of an effective and proper mechanism and government intervention in distributing financial benefits among the entrepreneurs regardless of the business size. As one respondent mentioned: “If there is no equal opportunity for support and benefits, they [entrepreneurs] will not be interested” (R.49).

Consistent Policies and Government Support. Another concern among the entrepreneurs is that all these efforts, policies, and support need to be continued for a considerable period irrespective of different government agendas: “Usually what happens is, at the end we just get lost because authorities just disappear after the initiative” (R.7); “The effort for a shorter period of time is worthless” (R.7). Some entrepreneurs further mentioned that the authorities should take actions to measure and evaluate the initiatives taken by the entrepreneurs and investments made by them for sustainable practices when deciding the financial and other support. One respondent clearly pointed out that authorities need not plan everything by themselves; they must ask people to initiate on minor issues first and focus on big issues later: “First, they need to focus on the minor problems that entrepreneurs and the industry can provide proper solutions for them before stepping into bigger issues” (R.10).

Controlling Behaviors of Non-Supporters. Some expressed the view that the authorities should take strict actions against business entities that have a high negative impact on the environment and society: “All our efforts will be useless if we don’t have a proper mechanism to minimize the efforts of non-supporters” (R.19).

Discussion and Conclusion

The sustainability of tourism has become a significant issue in the last decade due to the growing degree of negative impacts caused by unplanned tourism developments across the globe. As a result, the sustainable tourism concept is widely acknowledged and promoted as a system of protecting the tourism industry for long-term survival. The success of such efforts depends on stakeholder involvement and support, including entrepreneurs who play a vital role in the tourism industry (Elias, 2022; Lalicic & Weber-Sabil, 2021; Sautter & Leisen, 1999; Simpson, 2001; Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019).

It is commonly acknowledged that attitude influences a person’s intention toward behaving in specific manners. In many extant works of literature, ‘attitudes’ have been determined as a vital factor of entrepreneurial intention. However, there is a dearth of studies available in the tourism sector that examined the association between entrepreneurs’ attitudes toward suitable tourism and their support for sustainable practices, particularly in remote destinations. Many studies have investigated the residents’ attitudes and support toward sustainable tourism (Hsu et al., 2019; Kitnuntaviwat & Tang, 2008; Lee, 2013; Qin et al., 2021). In this study, both attitudes and support toward sustainable tourism were examined from the perspectives of entrepreneurs operating in two remote destinations in Sri Lanka. The results found more favorable responses toward sustainable tourism in the two destinations.

These results imply that the entrepreneurs operating tourism-related businesses, even in remote areas, hold positive beliefs and attitudes about adopting sustainable practices for benefiting their own business and the betterment of the tourism industry. The findings are consistent with previous research on the significance of community perception of and engagement in sustainable tourism in rural areas (Petrović et al., 2017; Muresan et al., 2019). Examining the salient dimensions of entrepreneurs’ attitudes revealed that ‘perceived social cost’, environmental sustainability, and ‘long-term planning’ tend to be the major concerns among the entrepreneurs in forming their attitudes towards sustainable tourism. These findings were further supported by the qualitative insights of the study, which uncovered that the entrepreneurs generally understand the need for and the importance of sustainable practices in the sector, considering the potential negative impacts of unsustainable ways of doing tourism to their own business entities, especially regarding the long-term survival. Qualitative findings also affirmed the importance of placing a long-term perspective on promoting sustainable behaviors in the industry. Previous studies have shown that long-term orientation is a good predictor of the formation of environmental attitudes in Sri Lanka (Samarasinghe, 2012). Overall, forming positive attitudes towards sustainable tourism is noteworthy because such attitudes significantly impact the degree of support extended by entrepreneurs to sustainable practices. These findings correspond with the previous test results conducted on other destinations and the stakeholders such as residents (Hanafiah et al., 2013; Kitnuntaviwat & Tang, 2008; Lee, 2013).

Inspecting individual dimensions of the ‘attitudes’ construct revealed that the ‘maximizing community participation’ dimension uniquely and strongly predicts the entrepreneurs’ sustainable tourism behaviors. Hence, facilitating community participation in sustainable tourism development is the most influencing factor in obtaining support for such efforts. This is especially important in community development programs where people may be unfamiliar with their surroundings and new initiatives (Goudy, 1990). The results derived from qualitative data support this claim by revealing that some entrepreneurs perceive that they have not been equally treated by the authorities and only ‘big players’ have a voice. Thus,

they are not interested in sustainable tourism projects. Therefore, fair and transparent community participation is mandatory for successful sustainable tourism projects, as confirmed by several previous research (Basile et al., 2021; Chandralal, 2010; Li, 2006; Saufi et al., 2014). While enabling these requirements, the results further suggest tourism planners must pay equal attention to meeting the expected support by the entrepreneurs while helping them overcome various barriers when adopting sustainable practices, given that they operate their businesses in remote areas.

Behavioral Science Implications

The findings of the study provide both theoretical and practical implications. Concerning the practical implications, the study findings provide insights into the policymaking efforts in obtaining entrepreneurs' support for sustainable tourism initiatives in remote destinations. First, the respective authorities need to form favorable attitudes towards sustainable tourism by highlighting its potential benefits. Spotlighting the link between sustainable tourism and the long-term growth potential for entrepreneurs' own businesses as well as for the well-being of the entire tourism industry would be useful for forming such positive attitudes. Potential negative impacts of unsustainable tourism activities, such as the social costs and other environmental consequences, should be the focal point of such attitude-changing efforts. In addition, policymakers should develop confidence among the entrepreneurs that sustainable plans and initiatives are introduced with a long-term vision but not as 'a short-run drama' to obtain their support. These entrepreneurs must be convinced that they are allowed to actively participate in planning and decision-making related to sustainable tourism initiatives. In particular, it is important to provide a level playing field by ensuring that the entrepreneurs have an equal opportunity to voice their opinion regardless of their size or other connections with the authorities. Undertaking proper educational programs on sustainable tourism would be beneficial to enhance the entrepreneurs' knowledge about the necessity, benefits, and practical applications of the concept, particularly in remote destinations where the general education level is minimum.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study contributes to the literature by examining attitudes and support related to sustainable tourism from the entrepreneurs' perspectives, lacking in the current body of knowledge on the topic. Furthermore, the findings advance our understanding of the sustainable behaviors of entrepreneurs who operate their tourism-related businesses in remote destinations.

The study has some limitations though it contributes to knowledge. First, the study explored the key research objectives in a limited geographical scope, i.e., only two remote destinations in Sri Lanka. Further investigations may extend this study by examining more remote areas to improve the generalizability of the findings. Future research may also investigate the role of entrepreneurs in the sustainable tourism development of both high tourism density areas and remote areas. Such studies can employ other factors considered, such as organizational norms, shared values, and cultures, to lift the findings to a higher level of generalization. This study evaluated entrepreneurs' perspectives on sustainable tourism only. Still, future researchers can study the impact of other stakeholders' attitudes, including residents, with a moderating effect on tourists' viewpoints of sustainable tourism.

Conclusion

The primary focus of this study was to examine the association between entrepreneurs' attitudes toward sustainable tourism and their support for sustainable tourism development in remote tourism destinations. The data collected through the structured questions were further supported by open-ended questions aiming to examine the expected support and the barriers faced by the entrepreneurs in adopting sustainable behaviors in rural areas. The study enhances the existing knowledge of sustainable tourism

behaviors among entrepreneurs in remote destinations. The results also provide critical behavioral implications for the application aspects of sustainability in the tourism sector.

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