Tourism social sustainability in remote communities in Vietnam: Tourists' behaviors and their drivers

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the social practice theory, theory of planned behavior, social contagion theory, and social exchange theory, this study focused on tourist behaviors affecting tourism social sustainability and their drivers. Besides its unique contribution to distinguishing positive behaviors from negative ones, this study is the first exploring tourism social sustainability in remote communities in Vietnam, an emerging country and focusing on domestic tourists. The study reveals that tourists' knowledge about tourism social sustainability is not only the safeguard against conducting improper behaviors. Behaviors negatively impacting tourism social sustainability can be instigated by crowd, pampering of one's convenience, and superiority feeling. Furthermore, inappropriate behaviors can be nurtured by the community and service providers. This study also indicates a mixed finding regarding the role of tour operators and tour guides in enforcing the code of conduct and regulations; however, both leader and members of the community can play a critical role in promoting socially sustainable tourist behaviors.

1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism has gained scholars' interest since the late 1970s [1] and become one of the critical research areas [2] and a development paradigm for tourism since the early 1990s [3]. Starting with the focus on environmental issues, the debate on sustainability has finally agreed on three key dimensions, including economy, environment, and society [4,5].

However, most of tourism studies have been focusing on the environmental and economic dimensions [6], leaving social sustainability the least discussed dimension in sustainable tourism research [7–10] and a major gap of relevant research on social dimension in achieving sustainable tourism and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals [9,11]. Yet, there is, for tourism, a need to advance social inclusion and justice [12]. Tourism social sustainability attempts to improve the locals' lives while reducing negative impacts on the local culture and environment [13]. Furthermore, it is crucial to identify key factors that drive individuals' behaviors because this helps develop interventions guiding right behaviors [8,14]. However, little is known about the drivers of

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socially sustainable tourist behaviors [8,9,15], paving the way for further studies.

Additionally, most of negative impacts of tourism come from improper behaviors by tourists [16,17]. However, limited research has shown how tourists should behave to contribute to sustainable tourism socially [18] and distinguished positive behaviors from negative ones.

Tourists' behaviors, their drivers, and their impact on remote communities are tempting scholars since COVID-19 has led to a new trend of escaping from cities to countryside or coastal areas, seeking out non-traditional and remote settings [19,20]. Romeo et al. [21] suggested that in the post-COVID-19 era, there is a growth in demand for less crowded destinations and an increase in the need to reconnect with open spaces and nature. In the other hand, the number of tourists using Internet to make travel arrangements has increased sharply [22], making tourists stay independent from tour operators (TO). Traveling without using the TOs' service reduces the education and supervision by TOs and tour guides as part of their jobs as teachers or disciplinarians [23] or behavioral motivators [24], and this is what they do well [25]. Moreover, Meschini et al. [26] suggested that educational briefings by tour guides in tourist sites could promote tourists' sustainable behaviors. Thus, traveling without accompanying by TOs and tour guides may make it more likely for tourists to behave inappropriately. This brings more concerns to tourism social sustainability in emerging economies like Vietnam [27], where domestic tourists, the largest market in Vietnam, are tending to make travel arrangements on their own [28].

While the growing demand brings opportunities for tourism development in remote settings, it can also be a threat for these areas because local people can experience negative impacts linked to tourism, including cultural authenticity distortion, disruption of local habits, changes in values and lifestyles, loss of identity, among others [21]. For example, Seraphin and Dosquet [19] pointed out that mountains are fragile ecosystems. In addition, Jha et al. [29] agreed that remote communities are vulnerable to external factors including tourism. If not well managed, the socio-ecological system of these areas is threatened with disappearance and tourist activities in these places would lose their attractiveness. This is because the attractiveness of tourist destinations mainly relies on their natural, cultural, and social peculiarities that remain more or less intact [21].

This study seeks to fill the gap on the discussion of tourism social sustainability narrowing down to the critical aspect of tourists' behaviors and their drivers in the context of remote communities in an emerging market. Vietnam was chosen for this study as it has been rated one of the most dynamic emerging countries in East Asia by World Bank [30] and is an emerging tourism destination in Southeast Asia. Moreover, while the vast number of domestic tourists serve as a stable market for Vietnam tourism, it brings concerns for tourism social sustainability in these communities. Finally, social sustainability must be more considered in developing countries like Vietnam because these countries are facing several problems such as inadequate distribution network, poor infrastructure, slavery, unregulated child labor, corruption, gender inequality, and so on [31,32].

The study, therefore, aims to investigate the following questions:

1) What are tourist behaviors that positively and negatively impact tourism social sustainability in remote communities in Vietnam?
2) What are the drivers of the improper behaviors?
3) What are the drivers of the right behaviors?
4) What should various stakeholders do to promote proper tourist behaviors socially?

By answering these questions, the study is expected to contribute to the sustainable tourism literature by establishing a list of tourist behaviors that positively and negatively impact tourism social sustainability in remote communities in a developing country and the drivers of these behaviors. The findings can be a valuable source for tourism policymakers, businesses, residents, and tourists to build and reinforce tourism social sustainability within remote communities in emerging economies.

2. Literature review

2.1. Tourism social sustainability

The concept of sustainability originates in environmentalism that became prominent in the 1970s [1,2]. In tourism, sustainable development is a primary focus of policymakers and researchers [16,33]. Although there are different definitions of sustainable tourism [34], the definition by the United Nations Environmental Program and United Nations World Tourism Organization [35] is the most widely accepted by scholars. This definition considers the three economic, social, and environmental factors as pillars of sustainable tourism development. While Cater [36] started with the environment as the key objective to fulfil the long-term need of the host population and satisfy the demand of the growing number of tourists, Bramwell and Lane [1] proposed the long-term viability and quality of both natural and human resources. Sustainable development is, thus, viewed in a familiar typology comprising three pillars: environmental, economic, and social (or socio-cultural) [4,32].

Under the umbrella of sustainable development, social sustainability has been neglected for a while. The approach to sustainable development without social sustainability has shown failure, leading to a renewed interest in the concept of social sustainability which then makes it a concept in chaos in the literature [37,38]. Boström [4] suggested that the obstacles are due to the difficulty in defining and understanding the concept of social sustainability and practicing social sustainability. This could have been traced down to the late integration of the social into debates on sustainable development [39]. Weingaertner and Moberg [40] indicated that definitions of social sustainability are often derived according to discipline-specific criteria rather than general ones. Later, Shirazi and Keivani [10] confirmed the lack of a singular definition in social sustainability discourse. There is also significant overlap between sustainability and corporate social responsibility in research and practice [41]. While there are works on social sustainability in different disciplines and domains, e.g., environment [10], urban design [42], energy [43], few works relatively go straight to tourism social sustainability like

those of Helgadóttir et al. [44] and Zhang et al. [6]. In most recent studies on tourism social sustainability, the UNEP and UNWTO's [35] perspective has highly been regarded with the highlights on the host community' quality of life, distribution of benefits, life-supporting systems, and cultural preservation. Boström [4] argued that the social pillar of sustainable development can be seen as including both substantive aspects focusing on "what" is to be done and procedural aspects referring to the "how" or the means to achieve the "what". The "what" can imply fair distribution, equality, accessibility, employment, opportunity for learning and self-development, social cohesion, inclusion, interaction, cultural diversity and traditions, a sense of community attachment, a sense of belonging, identity, social recognition, quality of life, happiness, and well-being.

2.2. Tourist behaviors and tourism social sustainability

Liu [2] pointed out that tourism development is supply- and demand-driven. To achieve sustainable tourism development, the participation of both supply and demand sides to any tourism projects is vital. According to Hall and Lew [16] and Seraphin and Vo-Thanh [17], most of negative impacts of tourism come from tourists' improper behaviors. Thus, managing tourists' behaviors can minimize tourism's adverse environmental and social impacts [45]. However, there have been few studies on how tourists should behave to contribute to sustainable tourism socially [18,46].

While some studies have examined tourists' socially responsible consumption, there remains a need for further research that explicitly addresses socially sustainable tourist behaviors [47]. For example, Zhang et al. [6] proposed a scale for assessing socially sustainable tourism, but in this scale, only a few specific tourist behaviors were mentioned. Furthermore, the study was conducted in Hong Kong, a populous and developed city, which may be different from the context of communities in remote areas. UNWTO [48] released guidelines for responsible travel including recommendations related to socially sustainable behaviors that fall within four dimensions: respecting hosts and heritage, using digital platforms wisely, supporting the local economy, and being an informed traveler. These guidelines provide specific recommendations on learning about the destination, respecting local customs and people, posting reviews and pictures responsibly, buying local services, following local laws, and protecting children. Dias et al. [47] developed a scale comprising 19 items that measure responsible tourist behaviors. Of these, 12 items are closely related to socially sustainable tourist behaviors, classified into civic responsibility and philanthropic responsibility. Although these items align with the guidelines by UNWTO [48] and set initial steps for studying socially sustainable tourist behaviors, they remain vague. Additionally, Dias et al. [47] focused on how tourists could behave without compromising the ecological footprint; however, their study discussed the tourists' perspective only.

The above review of the extant literature clearly showed a lack of research on tourists' behaviors that negatively and/or positively impact tourism social sustainability and their drivers, especially in remote settings in emerging countries from the stakeholder perspective. Therefore, further investigation with a stakeholder perspective is needed to better guide tourists how behave properly, especially in the context of tourism in remote communities.

2.3. Related theories

While tourists' behaviors that can have a positive or negative impact on tourism social sustainability can be observable, theories to explore the drivers of these behaviors are needed.

Sustainable tourism can be seen as a social practice [49,50] referring to a routinized type of behavior [51]. Thus, to explore socially sustainable tourist behaviors and especially their drivers, social practice theory (SPT) [52,53] has been mobilized by previous studies (e.g. Refs. [50,54,55]). SPT suggests that tourist behaviors can be influenced by the "understandings" (know-how and practical interpretation), "procedures" (rules, principles, instructions), and "engagements" (a range of ends and projects, as well as affective and normative orientations).

Theory of planned behavior (TPB) [56] has been employed to predict a wide range of tourists' behaviors (e.g. Refs. [57,58]) and thus it is relevant to the purpose of this research, especially in looking at drivers of tourists' behaviors. TPB emphasizes behavioral beliefs which produce favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards behaviors, normative beliefs (subjective norms) resulting in perceived social pressure, and beliefs about the presence of factors facilitating or hindering the performance of the behavior [59]. However, the social context in SPT may temporarily change the attitudes or subjective norms of tourists formed at home when they travel to an "atypical environment" [60]. Additionally, tourists' behaviors may be shaped by their fellows' attitudes and behaviors, as suggested by the social contagion theory (SCT) [61]. Moreover, Zhang et al. [6] found that convenience is another factor influencing sustainable behaviors, as suggested by the social exchange theory (SET).

It has been observed that in most existing studies, the four theories mentioned have been used separately. However, as discussed, in our study, since tourism social sustainability is a complex issue, a combination of these theories is required to fully seize it. Indeed, in a single qualitative study, mobilizing these theories together can provide clearer guidance for the exploration of the drivers of tourists' behaviors.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling and data collection

As proposed by Saunders et al. [62], due to the shortage of literature on a deep understanding of behaviors that can impact tourism social sustainability in remote communities in emerging economies and drivers of these behaviors, a qualitative study was adopted.

Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in tourism activities in a community-based tourism village of It Thai (Yen Bai province) were conducted. Some sample questions include: "What are the factors that dive improper tourist behaviors socially?", "What are the factors that shape proper tourist behaviors socially?", "What behaviors by tourists can have positive social impact on the host community?", "What behaviors by tourists can have negative social impact on the host community?". These open-ended questions allowed informants to provide a more comprehensive insight on the topic and express themselves in their own words [63]. Therefore, we could capture proper/improper behaviors and factors that encourage/discourage these behaviors from different tourism stakeholders. Based on previous research, these stakeholders include tourists, tourism researchers, community-based tourism experts [64], villagers [11,65], tour guides [64,66], government officials [35,64], and tour operators [64].

Through individual interviews, we can deeply understand expectations as well as difficulties of each stakeholder towards a sensitive subject which is tourism social sustainability, helping identify appropriate implications and practices to ensure tourism social sustainability in remote destinations.

We only selected informants with knowledge and experience with tourist activities in remote communities. Along with other stakeholders, we purposely incorporated the voice of insiders (i.e., tourists). It is crucial to explore both their positive and negative behaviors and factors that foster those behaviors because by recognizing their own shortcomings and qualities, they can easily reflect on actions to be taken to correct or strengthen them. In particular, recognizing one's flaws is showing that one needs others. It is just what one should do to make the world a better place, better share one's concerns with others, and better understand others, helping attaint tourism social sustainability.

The informants were selected using various methods. **Government officials** and **tourism researchers** were approached based on their title and expertise as published on the websites of Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, Institute for Tourism Research and Development, and universities with a tourism training program. **Tour operators** and **experts** were selected using snowball sampling. Tour guides were selected from the database of tour guides provided by tour operators in combination with snowball sampling. Tourists were interviewed using the intercept method at the tourist sites. **Villagers (leaders and residents)** in the host community were randomly selected among those who run tourist activities and those who do not run tourist services but are most likely affected by tourists' behaviors. **Tour operators, tour guides,** and **tourists** were chosen among those who have experienced tourist activities within the village of It Thai. We stopped the interviews with tour operators, tour guides, tourists, and villagers when no new information were found. A total of 34 informants were interviewed, as shown in Table 1. Informed consent was obtained from all informants.

The interviews started with a briefing about the research purpose and the ideas of tourism social sustainability. The language used during the interviews was Vietnamese. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 min, and all participants were informed of the recording of the interviews and were willing to join.

When talking about the drivers, besides the free expression by informants on this topic, there were also discussions on the role of understandings, engagements, and procedures (rules, principles, instructions) according to SPT [52,53], the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as proposed by TPB [56], the influence of others as suggested by SCT [61], and the convenience as suggested by SET [6] (Appendix A. Key stakeholders interview protocol).

3.2. Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and then translated into English using the back-translation technique. Next, the corpus was thematically analyzed. To ensure internal validity, the data were performed by two of the researchers using an inductive strategy. Following Vo-Thanh et al. [67,68], to obtain a consensus on the coding procedure, these two researchers first coded three interviews together. Each researcher then coded the remaining corpus separately, strictly respecting the double coding procedure [69]. The discrepancies in coding were settled after a discussion with the third researcher, who reviewed the codes obtained from the other two researchers. The third researcher's experience in the qualitative study came in handy in resolving this issue. Finally, the output of the thematic analysis was reported as per the research questions.

4. Findings

From the thematic analysis, two main themes of (1) behaviors affecting tourism social sustainability and (2) drivers of these behaviors were identified.

Table 1
Informants' profile.

Group	Informant type	Number of informants	Informant number
G1	Tour operator	6	1, 5, 12, 22, 26, 29
G2	Tourism expert	5	2, 7, 10, 11, 27
G3	Tour guide	6	3, 4, 6, 13, 14, 19
G4	Government officer	2	8, 17
G5	Villager	7	9, 15, 16, 23, 24, 28, 34
G6	Researcher	2	18, 30
G7	Tourist	6	20, 21, 25, 31, 32, 33

4.1. Theme 1: behaviors affecting tourism social sustainability

Interview questions regarding behaviors that can have positive and negative impacts on tourism social sustainability yielded two sub-themes with positive and negative impacts. However, negative impacts were predominant.

4.1.1. Behaviors having negative impacts
The findings showed diversity in tourist behaviors that are associated with negative impacts on tourism social sustainability.

(1) Giving money and candies to locals

Behaviors having negative impacts begin with seemingly innocuous ones, such as giving children and local people money and candies, and are extensively mentioned in the responses with a frequency of 10 times covering all informant groups. This behavior is believed to harm the host community: "*Tourists spoil local people, especially the children, with charity as it makes them lazy and try to think of ways to get more charity rather than working.*" (Informant 13). This behavior is taken even when tourists know it incorrect. "*Even when they are aware of the negative impacts, they still do it because they feel good when giving things out.*" (Informant 6).

(2) Improper dressing

We found agreement on this behavior from 5 groups of interviewees. Although tourists want comfort, convenience, and showing off their beautiful clothes while traveling, no carefully selected clothes are incompatible with the local culture. Dress code is a familiar issue that visitors need to be aware of when traveling, as ignorance of the dress code or not wearing proper clothes due to the lack of knowledge is perceived as a lack of respect for the host community. Improper dressing can come in the form of revealing clothes (Informants 3, 6, 9, 12, 24) and "*have a bad influence on the community.*" (Informants 1, 17).

(3) Making a noise

Terms such as "*making a noise*", "*singing karaoke at night*", "*singing karaoke after 9 p.m.*", or "*late at night*" have been mentioned with high frequency in the responses of 14 informants. This behavior harms the quality of life and engenders discomfort and lack of hostility in the host community. In a relaxed and comfortable mood, shouting and singing seem like a natural response, but it causes discomfort and annoyance to the locals who "*work in the fields very early, usually from 4–5 a.m.*" (Informants 19). A villager even "*shots a gun in the air as a warning signal.*" (Informants 14).

(4) Violation of rules, regulations, and taboos

This group of behaviors also reached a high consensus among informants. These behaviors begin with alcohol abuse (Informant 11), leading to intoxication (Informant 12). These behaviors not only make people annoyed but also "*endanger the community*" (Informant 16), "*causing disorder and social safety, affecting the image of the host community, for example, drunk driving*" (Informant 17). At a more severe level, the behaviors mentioned include: "*Violate the taboos and the regulations of the host community*" (Informant 11) or "*engaging in prostitution trade, drug and gambling, sexual abuse*" (Informants 10, 11, 19).

(5) Vandalism

This category of behaviors is close to violations of rules and regulations. The related behaviors include drawing on the wall of homestays, carving on trees, and damaging local heritages and products, as mentioned by informants 2, 4, and 25.

(6) Irresponsible shopping

While shopping is even classified as an increasingly relevant tourism component by UNWTO (2023), goodwill customers cause problems with over-shopping. Informants 6 and 15 expressed concerns about the over-shopping behavior of tourists leading to high demand for products, increasing the over-exploitation of products. In addition, competition in sales among locals can make them become hostile. Informant 12 pointed out that "*too high demand for local products at a certain time with insufficient supply makes tourists compete to buy*". The low supply also makes it very tempting for locals to sell counterfeit local specialties. Badwill customers cause problems too, but differently, as "*they normally haggle, criticize but end up buying nothing. This behavior shows disrespect to locals, makes them feel uncomfortable*" (Informant 18).

(7) Disrespect for the host community

This group of behaviors ranges from the vague attitude of showing the lack of respect for the host community (Informant 11) to something more concrete of teasing local people through using improper and offensive language while communicating with the host community, making negative comments about local people (Informants 6, 2, 16, 18), disparaging local customs and culture, taking inappropriate photos with traditional dress of the host community, or improperly posing for photos (Informants 18, 21, 22, 23). This is

not about tourists dressing inappropriately or taking photos of locals but about the fact that they intentionally borrow, rent, or buy local clothes and pose for photos with inappropriate manners. Tourists go even further in showing disrespect by *"looking down on the locals, being contemptuous of the local culture and people, posing for photos in a way that does not respect the local culture, among others."* (Informant 6).

(8) Taking photos, filming, and live streaming: the distortion of culture

Filming, live streaming, and taking photos without permission from locals have been long mentioned in the guidelines and codes of conduct and were also reported by informants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, and 16 who represent four groups of interviewees (i.e., G1, G2, G3, and G5). These behaviors can have negative impacts such as annoyance and privacy violations. Besides, more severe behaviors include staging photos and capturing locals' unpleasant moments for entertainment and social media fame. This creates false images and messages about the host community, further perpetuated by cultural distortion through the spread of fake news and distortion of local culture, customs, and lifestyle.

(9) Financial abuse

Financial abuse implies that tourists use money to manipulate local people to act as per their desire. For example, they use money to entice or force locals to do ugly actions or those contrary to locals' cultural values for entertaining or filming and taking photos. Financial abuse also includes forcing locals to drink and join the party with tourists even if it is against the locals' will. For example, *"force local people to join drinking"* (Informant 5), *"use money to make local people act in an ugly way against their cultural values for photo shoots. For example, …kiss each other in public … it is considered shameful in the local culture."* (Informant 4), *"… they stage foolish acts for local people to perform and then film them for entertainment. … use money to force local people to dress in clothing prepared by tourists for filming and shooting photos."* (Informant 6).

(10) Showing superiority over the host community

The manifestations of this type of behavior include directly claiming to be superior to the host community and giving biased comparisons, evaluations, and comments on the life of the host community. The continuation of this harmful behavior is the imposition of tourists' values on the community visited. The informants expressed that tourists often refuse to learn about the community that they visit to adjust their behaviors accordingly. On the contrary, they sometimes seek to give to the locals' advice which is not suitable for them. At a higher level of imposition of values, tourists try to spread their values to make them become common or norms, causing the community to change according to their values.

"They come and give advice on how food should be tasted; how local people should eat. This is based on their living style, and they think it is right for locals, but their advice can destroy the local culture." (Informant 1)

"They give us inappropriate advice like cutting down trees, using material to build houses … This is based on their values, not ours." (Informant 20)

Table 2 summarizes improper behaviors identified from our interviews.

4.1.2. Behaviors having positive impacts

Findings revealed surprising results. Indeed, few behaviors having positive impacts on tourism social sustainability were mentioned. These behaviors were categorized into the following groups.

(1) Doing charity

Behaviors in this group include traveling in combination with doing charity (Informants 16, 20, 11, 22). Informant 16 also clarified that charity tourism is *"traveling in combination with teaching, helping local people in disease prevention, and making a contribution to the*

Table 2
Negative behaviors identified in the present study.

	Behaviors	Frequency (mentioned by)
1	*Giving money and candies to locals*	10 (G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G6)
2	*Improper dressing*	7 (G1, G2, G3, G4, G5)
3	*Making a noise*	14 (G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G6)
4	*Violation of rules, regulations, and taboos*	9 (G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G6)
5	*Vandalism*	3 (G1, G2, G3)
6	*Irresponsible shopping*	4 (G1, G3, G6)
7	*Disrespect for the host community*	9 (G1, G2, G3, G4, G6)
8	*Taking photos, filming, and live streaming: the distortion of culture*	7 (G1, G2, G3)
9	*Financial abuse*	4 (G1, G3, G6)
10	*Showing superiority over the host community*	5 (G1, G3, G5, G7)

construction of infrastructure at the host community".

(2) Responsible purchasing

Responsible purchasing contributes not only to the local economy but also is a way of showing respect to the local culture and helping to improve locals' lives. Eleven informants agreed upon this opinion as tourists' responsible purchasing "… *helps bring sustainable economic benefits to the destination* …" (Informant 5), "*contributes to the economy and improves locals' living standards*" (Informants 8, 25), and *"… positively changes people's lives.*" (Informant 17).

(3) Learning and participating

Behaviors mentioned in this group ranged from the simple and passive level of watching to being interested in learning and finally participating in social activities at the host community. These behaviors are mainly characterized by "*enjoying local products*" (Informant 4), "*watching local cultural shows, appreciating works that help restore the local culture*" (Informant 18), "*learning about the local life*" (Informant 20), and "*participating in cultural exchanges with locals, contributing to preserving local cultural values*" (Informant 5). The highest level of learning and participating is to impart knowledge about the local culture of the community visited by each individual visitor to their family members through "… *bring children when travelling or travel in combination with education.*" (Informant 12).

(4) The spread of positive images about the host community

This group of behaviors includes capturing the beauty and positive images of the community, as suggested by Informants 5 and 15. "*Taking photos to introduce to friends also contributes to promoting the tourist destination.*" (Informant 5). "*The specific cultural and social values of the host community need to be disseminated to a large scale in a way that it helps people be aware of these values, thus contributing to their preservation.*" (Informant 15).

(5) Respecting the host community

With the learning and participating theme, respecting the host community is one of the themes that got agreement from several stakeholders involved in the interviews. Respecting the host community starts with general descriptions such as "*be respectful*" (Informant 6) and then develops to "*respect the local customs*" as indicated by Informants 2, 3, 18, and 19. Informants 2, 3, 6, and 19 related specific behaviors such as "*use proper language*", "*properly dress*", "*take appropriate actions that do not affect the daily life of local people*", and "*respect the living environment of the local community*" respectively.

(6) Observance of regulations and social norms

This theme mainly refers to not asking for illegal trades like prostitution or following regulations and social norms of the host communities, as suggested by Informants 19, 28, 29, 31, and 34. "*Tourism social sustainability is also the compliance with regulations and social norms of the local community; therefore, we have to adopt these behaviors.*" (Informant 34).

(7) Cultural exchange to develop mutual understanding

The behaviors found in this theme concern making friends with local people and having cultural exchange with them, helping visitors better understand their own values as well as those of others (Informants 2, 3, 12, 25). "*The effective cultural exchange helps them (i.e., visitors) better understand their own cultural values and learn unique cultural features from others, thus, developing mutual respect through traveling.*" (Informant 3).

Table 3 summarizes proper behaviors identified from our interviews.

Table 3
Positive behaviors identified in the present study.

	Behaviors	Frequency (mentioned by)
1	*Doing charity*	8 (G1, G2, G3, G5, G6)
2	*Responsible purchasing*	14 (G1, G3, G4, G5)
3	*Learning and participating*	18 (G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G6, G7)
4	*The spread of positive images about the host community*	2 (G1, G5)
5	*Respecting the host community*	12 (G1, G2, G3, G5, G6, G7)
6	*Observance of regulations and social norms*	5 (G3, G5, G6)
7	*Cultural exchange to develop mutual understanding*	5 (G1, G2, G3)

4.2. Theme 2: drivers of negative and positive behaviors

4.2.1. Drivers of behaviors negatively affecting tourism social sustainability
   The analysis indicated that compared to drivers of positive behaviors, the drivers of negative ones are more numerous. These drivers of negative behaviors were grouped into 6 categories.

   (1) Lack of knowledge

   Informants pointed out that some tourists do something terrible to the communities because they are not aware that their behaviors are improper and still think that these behaviors are acceptable. They adopt these improper behaviors due to the lack of knowledge about the host community's code of conduct and customs.

   "*It is the lack of knowledge from tourists that make them have negative behaviors. If they are aware of the necessity to learn about the customs and culture of the visited community, dos and don'ts, then basically they will follow the rules and have positive behaviors. In contrast, most youngsters … just like taking photos and do not care much about learning … They give children money without knowing that it could spoil them.*" (Informant 19)

   According to Su et al. [70], several researchers have specified that knowledge is associated with right behaviors. Thus, this study clearly claims that the lack of knowledge about the visited community's code of conduct and customs is one of the main drivers of improper behaviors from tourists that may harm tourism social sustainability.

   (2) Social contagion and herd mentality

   According to SCT, an individual exposed to others' deviant behaviors is likely to behave similarly. Our findings share this theory but with a slight interesting variance. Indeed, exposed to others' deviant behaviors can make individuals engage in deviant behaviors, thus forcing "good" individuals to become "bad" ones. However, the opposite can happen sometimes, as suggested by the social impact theory and in the field of behavioral economics. The effect of others depends on their strength, affiliation, and number [71].

   "*… but when they (i.e., tourists) see other members in the group adopting improper behaviors, they decide to transform themselves to blend (e.g., changing a proper dress to improper one); … If they are conducting improper behaviors but when they see other people in the group display disapprobation, they will restrain themselves. However, when they get the disapprobation from people of other groups that are smaller than theirs, they still ignore the disapprobation and continue their inappropriate behaviors.*" (Informant 6).

   (3) Convenience

   It is not just the social contagion and the lack of knowledge that contribute to improper behaviors; convenience also does, as mentioned by Han [58] and Su et al. [70]. This is even more obvious when the primary purpose of traveling is for entertainment. When being on holiday, tourists seek to relax by maximizing their holiday enjoyment. They do not like to comply with social and environmental rules that require a lot of cognitive effort [72]. Therefore, tourists do not think of locals' wellbeing and sometimes, for convenience, do not even care about their own safety, let alone the benefit of others.

   "*… tourists like enjoying the freedom and do not want to be controlled.*" (Informant 17). "*… because it is convenient and beneficial.*" (Informant 18). "*For their convenience, they can be very careless and do not think of the consequences.*" (Informant 1).

   (4) Bargaining power

   Sometimes, inappropriate behaviors from tourists "*are nurtured by people in the host communities*" (Informant 11) due to the inferiority complex. Lower socio-economic status leads to lower self-esteem [73], and low self-esteem most likely leads to the imitation of behaviors [74]. This explains why locals in remote communities think that whatever tourists do is right, and if they are not happy with improper behaviors from tourists, they should accept them with resignation.

   "*Local people are too permissive because they see themselves inferior to their guests, and thus they always try to meet all the needs of their guests and do not think of preserving the local cultural values.*" (Informant 11)

   "*Tourists think that they have the right to do what they want because they believe that they have a superior status …*" (Informant 8)

   (5) Service mind-set: the customer is the King

   Promotion and marketing campaigns over-emphasized the importance of customers (e.g., tourists), making them think they have

the right to ask for more than what they deserve to have, and thus they show less respect to service providers. Most domestic tour guides "*are obsessed with the idea that 'the customer is the King' and … always trying to please tourists regardless of their behaviors. … In my view, unfortunately, it represents the common mind-set of most service personnel …*" (Informant 14). However, international tour guides have a certain success in educating international tourists and making them "*adopt the right behaviors.*" (Informant 14).

4.2.2. Drivers of behaviors positively affecting tourism social sustainability
Unsurprisingly, the reasons for positive behaviors are mentioned as poorly as what happened to these behaviors.

(1) Personal traits

Some informants claimed that people do good things because "*they are already good by nature.*" (Informant 16). Others further clarified that tourists have behaviors that positively impact tourism social sustainability because they really desire to do it. For example, they "*look forward to contributing to the development of the community*." (Informant 11), "*… desire to contribute …*" (Informants 2, 3), and "*… want to learn and do good things for the society …*" (Informant 25).

(2) Education and previous experiences

For many informants, the more tourists are educated on how to behave properly when traveling, the more they have right behaviors, helping "*preserving the local culture, reducing the 'natural' convenience in tourists, and enhancing their overall experience.*" (Informants 7, 17). The education can be operated in several ways: "*at school, at the destination, and via tour operators, tour guides, trip fellows …*" (Informants 2, 8, 27) and "*should be concrete, pragmatic, and fun.*" (Informant 2). Some interviewees also mentioned that socially sustainable tourist behaviors "*can be acquired gradually and through previous experiences.*" (Informants 14, 31).

(3) Accompanying by tour operators, tour guides, and the local community

The common practice in monitoring tourist behaviors is setting up a code of conduct before and during the trip. Interestingly, a
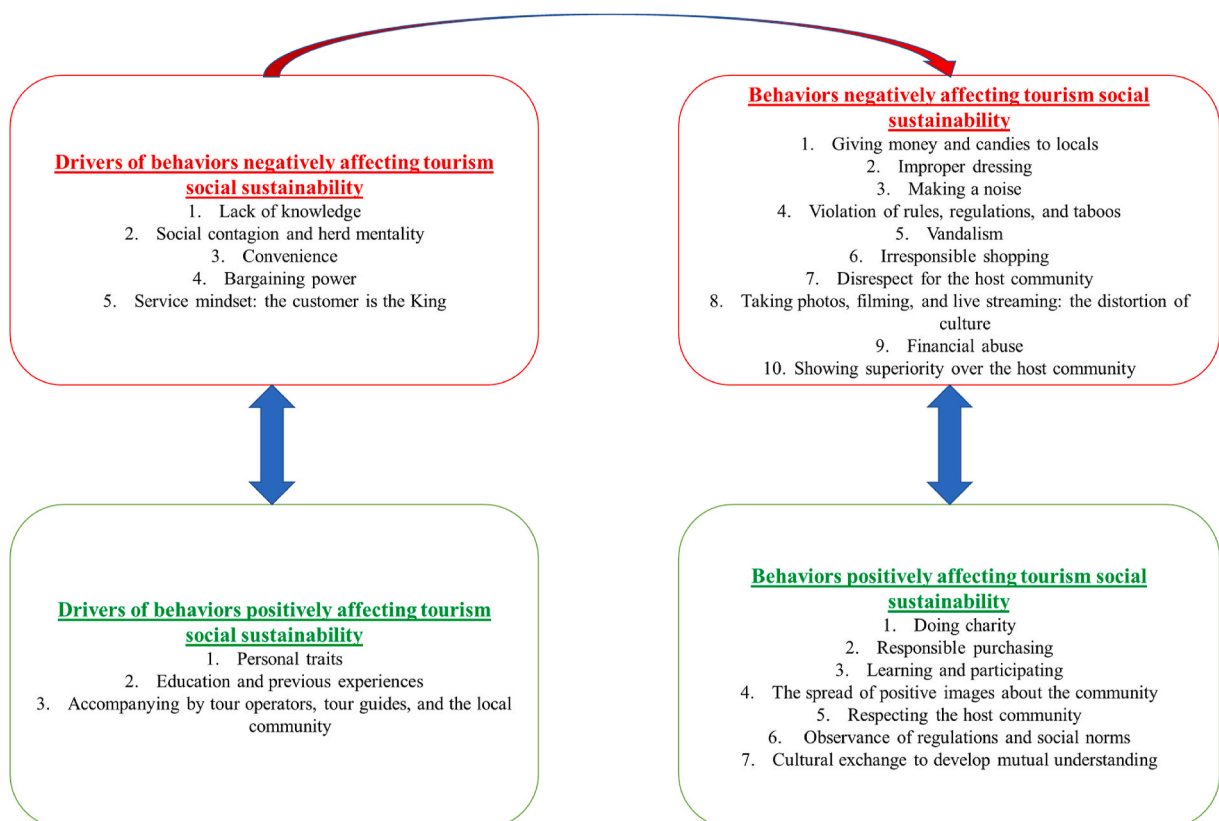

Fig. 1. Drivers and behaviors affecting tourism social sustainability.

mixed result regarding the role of tour operators and tour guides in enforcing the rules and code of conduct was found in the present study. Some informants claimed that setting up a code of conduct or the nudge theory-based interventions does not work in promoting appropriate tourist behaviors.

> "*Signboards of rules and regulations and recommendations from tour guides or tour operators just do not work. … Tourists just keep exhibiting wrong behaviors even though I do careful orientation and remind them to behave properly all the time.*" (Informant 6)

> "*The announcement of rules and regulations may not work effectively or right away … It is hard to change habits. … My staff and I provided recommendations on refraining from making a noise … stopping singing karaoke when it is late … but they (i.e., tourists) did not care about that until a local person got too mad and fired a gun into the air as a warning.*" (Informant 14)

In contrast, some others are more optimistic. They think that tour operators and especially tour guides can play a role in promoting proper behaviors although they do not have the same power and responsibility than the host communities. This finding revealed the crucial role of education in guiding socially sustainable tourist behaviors.

> "*… I trust that if tour guides have a convincing discourse, better explain how we should behave, and better show their concern about the local culture and other social issues at the beginning of the trip, improper behaviors from tourists might be avoided … A more educational and responsible approach should work …*" (Informant 20).

> "*Of course, we need time to change habits. However, apart from what the host community can do on site by implementing rules and enforcing regulations, tour operators can also contribute to monitoring tourists' behaviors by providing them with a code of conduct and other useful information before the trip, helping them better behave during the trip …*" (Informant 18)

However, consistency in rules, policies, and regulations enforcement from the community leader and its members would help promote right tourist behaviors.

> "*… Ugly behaviors are not allowed. We accept only tourists who follow the rules. We even declined requests to organize activities that, we think, can harm the local culture. For example, having a meal with female members of the community serving liquor and drinking it with tourists is not a good way to tourism social sustainability. This may be a common practice in most of communities, but it is not what people in our community do, and in any case, it is not our vision of tourism social sustainability.*" (Informant 15)

> "*… Educating tourists and other stakeholders such as tour operators, tour guides, and other service providers in preserving the socio-cultural values of the host communities is obviously indispensable. However, the host communities (i.e., local authorities and residents) play a key role in fostering socially sustainable tourist behaviors … It is only the host communities who have the absolute right to prohibit or promote a given activity on their territories.*" (Informant 30)

Fig. 1 summarizes the findings regarding drivers and behaviors that positively and negatively affect tourism social sustainability. Sometimes, for a given issue, the behaviors can be both positive and negative.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical implications

The major gap in the literature on tourism social sustainability [4,9–11] encourages research on tourist behaviors that have substantial impacts on tourism social sustainability and their drivers [9,16]. In this study, we explored tourist behaviors that impact tourism social sustainability in a remote village in Vietnam and their drivers. This study focused on a stakeholder perspective. Despite the differences in interests, overall, informants (i.e., different key stakeholders) shared the same outlook on tourist behaviors that positively or negatively impact tourism social sustainability.

This study is the first attempt to highlight the relevance of mobilizing together four theories (i.e., SPT, TPB, SCT, and SET) in exploring tourists' behaviors that can have positive or negative impacts on tourism social sustainability and their drivers in the context of remote communities in developing countries. Given that tourism social sustainability is a complex issue and insufficiently investigated in the literature thus far, combining these four theories was found to be an effective way to explain tourists' behaviors that positively or negatively influence tourism social sustainability in remote areas in emerging economies.

Additionally, from a theoretical point of view, our study has the merit of dealing with tourism social sustainability in a remote setting in an emerging country. Its findings both in behaviors and drivers may be of great importance for similar zones in developing countries since these countries have their specific characteristics. Indeed, as stated by previous research (e.g. Refs. [31,32]), emerging economies often suffer from problems such as work overload, poor infrastructure, inadequate distribution, slavery, unregulated child labor, corruption, gender discrimination, and so on.

Regarding the behaviors, this study is one of the rare studies investigating in a detailed manner various tourist behaviors that impact tourism social sustainability. Additionally, it has the unique contribution of distinguishing positive behaviors from negative ones. Furthermore, this study is the first qualitatively exploring tourism social sustainability in the context of remote communities in emerging countries (i.e., Vietnam) and exclusively focusing on domestic tourists. Given that socially remote communities' ecosystems in emerging countries are often vulnerable to external factors including tourism [19,27,29], this study significantly contributes to discussing the literature on tourism social sustainability in remote communities in emerging economies. Interestingly, the context of domestic tourists in remote communities in emerging countries such as Vietnam revealed a surprising finding: informants reported

more negative behaviors than positive ones. This could be due to a lack of knowledge about sustainable tourism among Vietnamese tourists, who may have different living conditions and incomes compared to those in developed economies. The limited knowledge of sustainable tourism among residents in the studied community is also a crucial factor.

The study identified ten groups of negative behaviors and seven groups of positive behaviors that impact tourism social sustainability. Among the positive behaviors, learning and participating was mentioned by all informant groups, while respecting the host community was claimed by six out of seven groups. This study also highlighted doing charity as a positive behavior group, which, in comparison with the current literature, is seen as a significant contribution to tourism social sustainability in remote areas in emerging countries. This finding is noteworthy because it may be specific to tourism in remote areas in less developed countries where access to education, infrastructure, and sanitary conditions are limited. This is in accordance with previous research on pro-environmental behaviors which claimed that those behaviors are not shaped by universal drivers [14] and that they are often guided by various variables including social norms and perceived behavioral control [8].

Regarding the behaviors negatively affecting tourism social sustainability, some of them are somewhat in line with previous research [35,47,48]. However, they are much more detailed and nuanced, compared with those mentioned in previous studies. Indeed, our study provided thorough insights into tourist behaviors. Among the ten negative behavior groups, giving money and candies to locals, making a noise, and violation of rules, regulations, and taboos were cited by six of seven informant groups. While violation of rules and regulations is rather a prevalent negative tourist behavior [35,47,48], making a noise and giving money and candies to locals may be specific to tourists from emerging and relatively high collectivist countries like Vietnam [75]. The new rich (i.e., tourists) may think of their past (i.e., the period in which their living conditions, especially financial conditions, were much less comfortable) and thus, by their collective sense, would like to "spoil" the locals, especially the children in remote and much less economically developed communities. This may be a mark of gratitude and love. "*We are living in an interdependent society, it is natural that we share with people in difficulty what we have and promote communalism. ... You know, a Vietnamese proverb says that a good rice season should not deprive us of respect of corn and potatoes* (it means it is both a gratitude and a long-term orientation; when we have become better off, we should think about the difficult times to better behave and value what we are having.", as highlighted by Informant 33. Making a noise may also be explained by collectivism. When traveling, collectivist tourists may congregate more often. Indeed, collectivist relationships are centered around the ingroup and collectivists' relationships are more likely to be deeper and more emotionally devoted than those of individualists. Thus, when collectivist tourists are together, they may tend to tell each other stories, talk loudly, and be noisy. Moreover, singing karaoke may be an Asian specificity.

The findings also indicated that taking photos of, filming, and live streaming locals' activities at the destination are becoming contemporary behaviors that can have a detrimental impact on tourism social sustainability. In particular, tourists sometimes ask or force local people to do and say things incorrectly from an ethical standpoint when filming or live streaming. Tourists also seek to capture unflattering moments for self-promotion or attention-seeking purpose, which is the trend that has been promoted by the growth of social media as noted by Weiser [76]. This behavior misleads the public about the host community's culture and can harm its dignity. If left uncontrolled, the spread of user-generated falsified content could have severe consequences on tourism social sustainability.

Based on SET, another negative behavior (i.e., financial abuse) is the use of money by tourists to manipulate people in the host community to act as per their desire, which is quite popular in most of remote communities. Given that most of residents in these communities are often not well off, they could more easily be manipulated by means of money. Tourists take advantage of this "weakness" of the residents to ask them to do what they want them to do. This goes, in many cases, against the host village's cultural values. This type of behavior is often difficult to control, as it is a personal matter.

As for "showing superiority over the host community", this behavior may be explained by the concept of the moral tourist [77]. "Moral tourists engage in a search for selfhood, one which locates a spiritual center in the destination. The new moral tourists seek respite from modernity through a temporary immersion in a culture they perceive to be less sullied by modern society" [77, p. 78]. When traveling to "underdeveloped" places, tourists may see the physical landscapes and cultures of these places as an escape from the real life. They force, thus, a label of innocence on the visited people. "Culture as the past denies the host their creativity ... Hypnotized by images of the past we risk losing all capacity for creative change. The problem with the moral elevation of the past is that traditional communities become a living museum piece, valued for their authenticity in the way one values of a piece of antique furniture" [77, p. 84], leading these communities to places of stagnation that tourists visit to get away from their real life of constant momentum. This thinking promotes superiority over a locality and its inhabitants because these inhabitants and their culture are regarded as an artifact of innocence.

Regarding the drivers of behaviors positively or negatively affecting tourism social sustainability, the findings support the relevance of TPB and SPT by indicating that despite their key role, knowledge and education and previous experiences are not the only factors that determine right or wrong behaviors. The influence of herd mentality and crowd as explained by SCT and the pampering of one's own convenience may temporarily change the social norms. Furthermore, while the acceptance of wrong behaviors with resignation due to the prevalent service mindset (i.e., the customer is the King) works as a motivator for wrong behaviors, accompanying by tour operators, tour guides, and the local community can contribute, in a certain way, to promoting proper tourist behaviors.

5.2. Practical implications

This study has implications for key stakeholders in the tourism industry, including tour guides, host communities, tourism enterprises, and policymakers. The findings provided a consensus view on right behaviors that should be adopted and improper behaviors

that should be avoided when building a code of conduct for tourists in remote areas in emerging countries.

As indicated by the findings, both leaders and members of the community can play a critical role in promoting socially sustainable tourist behaviors, policymakers should focus on helping them overcome their inferiority complex. For example, offer them training programs on tourism management skills and sustainable tourism can reinforce their confidence when dealing with tourist activities to put in place. Especially, for residents, it is crucial for them to be aware of their own cultural values and promote them at their right value, ensuring that these distinctive cultural values are not distorted by tourists. Indeed, low self-esteem and feeling of powerlessness can limit their ability to control visitors' behaviors. To improve the capacity of host communities, providing them with solid tourism management skills and sustainable tourism knowledge, making them aware of the importance to preserve their unique cultural values, and teaching them how to behave faced with improper behaviors by tourists are effective ways to achieve tourism social sustainability.

Furthermore, in the context of Vietnam, where there is a high-power distance and service providers tend to satisfy guests' needs at all costs, the "the customer is the King" philosophy should be promoted with caution. In addition, inappropriate behaviors can be nurtured by the community and service providers. Service providers should really "walk the talk" and be exemplary to better monitor tourists' behaviors.

Although this study showed a mixed finding regarding the role of TOs and tour guides in enforcing the code of conduct and regulations, accompanying by TOs and tour guides before and during the trip is, in our opinion, necessary to driving tourists to adopt proper behaviors socially. If TOs and tour guides are the first to be exemplary in opting for socially sustainable behaviors and persistent in enforcing the regulations and code of conduct, tourists will, according to SCT, be more likely to think and behave sustainably from a social point of view. Previous research clearly indicated that TOs and tour guides can act as behavioral motivators [24] or teachers or disciplinarians [23]. Thus, it is recommended that information on code of conduct should be given and fully explained to tourists by TOs and that tour guides, alongside authorities, should enforce the regulations and advise tourists on appropriate behaviors to conduct during the trip.

6. Limitations and further research

This study focuses on behaviors of domestic tourists when visiting communities in remote areas where residents are often, in the current Vietnamese context, at a lower status and income than tourists. The findings may not be generalized in other contexts. Further studies in other contexts should be conducted to complete the findings of this study. Moreover, future research can explore the issue from foreign tourists' perspective and according to their nationality. Furthermore, a quantitative study is needed to confirm and generalize or disconfirm the findings of this qualitative study. Additionally, the study revealed that personal traits can foster socially sustainable tourist behaviors. It is suggested that further research precisely identifies personal traits that contribute to enhancing socially sustainable tourist behaviors. This may assist the host communities, especially the most vulnerable ones in their marketing strategy. Finally, with the aim of extending the present study, based on the findings, future research can be conducted to prioritize, for example, behaviors positively affecting tourism social sustainability, using a multi-criteria decision-making method. The results obtained will assist the host community in deciding on priority areas of investment, proposing appropriate activities, and choosing a right communication policy in order to achieve tourism social sustainability.

Data availability statement

Has data associated with your study been deposited into a publicly available repository?
NON.
Has data associated with your study been deposited into a publicly available repository?
Data will be made available on request.

Ethics statement

CRediT authorship contribution statement

An Dan Vu: Writing - review & editing, Writing - original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Tan Vo-Thanh:** Writing - review & editing, Writing - original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Thi Tuyet Mai Nguyen:** Writing - review & editing, Writing - original draft, Visualization, Validation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Ha Linh Bui:** Writing - review & editing, Writing - original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Tan Nhat Pham:** Writing - review & editing, Writing - original draft, Visualization, Validation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e23619.

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