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# SECTION 1: AI AND SERVICE ROBOTS


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# CRACKING THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ADOPTION CODE: UNLOCKING THE BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

### PURPOSE

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a groundbreaking technology that has the capacity to revolutionise several sectors, including sustainable tourism. Integrating AI into sustainable tourism may result in enhanced operational efficiency, customised customer experiences, and decreased ecological footprints. Nevertheless, the extensive use of AI in this industry is constrained by several barriers despite its potential advantages (Ding et al., 2023; Chi et al., 2023; Majid, 2023). The aim of this study is to identify and empirically analyse the barriers impeding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in sustainable tourism. Drawing from the Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) and the Expectation Confirmation Model (ECM), the study endeavours to construct a comprehensive model that consolidates the factors inhibiting AI adoption and proposes solutions to mitigate these barriers. Moreover, it seeks to provide valuable insights into effectively promoting the adoption of AI in sustainable tourism, thereby unlocking its potential to advance sustainable practices and enhance consumer experiences.

### METHODOLOGY

Employing a cross-sectional quantitative research methodology, following a positivist paradigm, this study utilizes questionnaires as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire was developed through an extensive review of pertinent literature and drawing upon the theoretical underpinnings of PMT and ECM. The assessment encompasses various components, including evaluations of perceived threats, coping strategies, expectations, and confirmation of attitudes towards AI utilization in sustainable tourism. This research's target audience comprises employees in the sustainable tourism sector. Data was analysed using Partial Least Squares 4 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to validate the proposed model and establish the relevant relationships between its components.

### RESULTS

The study models key barriers to the integration of AI in the context of sustainable tourism. Perceived risks, such as potential job displacement and privacy concerns, negatively impacted the willingness to embrace AI. The research underscores the significance of expectations and the reinforcement of beliefs in influencing the behaviour of tourism stakeholders beyond the implementation phase. The findings suggest that overcoming these barriers requires a comprehensive strategy, involving activities such as promoting awareness of the benefits of AI, providing training and support to stakeholders, ensuring data confidentiality and security, and fostering collaboration between technology providers and tourism entities.

### IMPLICATIONS

This study advances the theoretical understanding of AI utilization in sustainable tourism by integrating Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) with the Extended Control Model (ECM). Moreover, it expands the existing body of literature by conducting empirical research to analyse barriers and propose a comprehensive framework. The findings have practical implications for tourist organizations seeking to incorporate AI technologies, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address the identified barriers. These interventions include the development of AI proficiency programs, the establishment of clear data management regulations, and the promotion of the benefits of AI in sustainable tourism.

### VALUE


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This study offers a fresh perspective on the obstacles hindering the integration of AI into sustainable tourism, as well as practical and effective strategies to overcome these challenges. By conducting empirical tests of the proposed model and providing data-driven recommendations, it bridges the gap between theory and practice. This research contributes to the advancement of sustainable tourism practices by highlighting the potential of AI and identifying critical areas that require attention to fully leverage its benefits. It offers a state-of-art perspective to academics, managers, and policymakers.<br/><br/>Keywords: AI, adoption, sustainable tourism, PMT, ECM

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# AI AND JOB INSECURITY: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND RESEARCH DIRECTIONS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

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## ABSTRACT

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing a literature review and critical reflection to examine the societal and workforce impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) integration in the tourism and hospitality industry. The literature review synthesizes existing research on human-centered AI, behavioral studies, and macro-level strategies, offering a comprehensive understanding of key challenges such as job insecurity and workforce resilience. Through a critical perspective, the study reflects on ethical, inclusive, and sustainable AI adoption while providing research directions to address these challenges. This approach enables a nuanced exploration of how AI can balance technological innovation with human-centered growth in the tourism and hospitality industry.

**Key Words:** Artificial Intelligence, Job Insecurity, Tourism and Hospitality, Future Research Directions

## INTRODUCTION

Employees in the service industry, particularly in tourism and hospitality, are essential to delivering exceptional and personalized customer experiences. The human element plays a pivotal role in creating meaningful interactions, with frontline employees shaping customer perceptions and fostering loyalty through their emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, and interpersonal skills—qualities that artificial intelligence (AI) cannot replicate (Baum et al., 2023). However, the tourism and hospitality industry is increasingly grappling with challenges arising from the rapid integration of advanced technologies, particularly AI, which is fundamentally reshaping service delivery and workforce structures (Dogru et al., 2024).

AI, a field of computer science designed to perform tasks requiring human-like intelligence—such as language processing, pattern recognition, and decision-making (Russell & Norvig, 2021)—offers promising benefits, including increased operational efficiency and enhanced customer engagement. yet, these advancements also raise significant concerns about job insecurity and occupational uncertainty. employees in tourism and hospitality roles that emphasize human interaction, such as front desk clerks and reservation agents, are increasingly apprehensive about being replaced by automation (Webster & Ivanov, 2020). This anxiety is particularly acute among workers with limited career advancement opportunities, as greater awareness of technological advancements often heightens feelings of vulnerability (Luo et al., 2023).

The implications of this occupational uncertainty are profound. Job insecurity negatively impacts employee morale, engagement, and productivity, which in turn diminishes service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty (Darvishmotevali, 2025). On a broader scale, reduced job stability affects the mental health and well-being of employees, their families, and local communities—especially in regions heavily dependent on tourism (Darvishmotevali et al., 2024). These psychological and economic effects are often overlooked in discussions of AI adoption, despite their critical role in ensuring workforce sustainability. Moreover, the increasing reliance on automation risks eroding the "human touch" that defines the essence of hospitality, which relies on employees' ability to empathize, solve complex problems, and create genuine, meaningful connections with customers (Wirtz et al., 2023).

To address these challenges, a balanced approach is essential. While AI holds transformative potential to improve operational efficiency, organizations must also acknowledge the irreplaceable value of human employees. Research underscores that employees excel in high-pressure, nuanced situations requiring emotional engagement and complex decision-making—capabilities that AI cannot replicate (Christou et al., 2023). Therefore, sustaining the industry's defining human connection while embracing technological advancements requires prioritizing workforce well-being and job security. this study examines the profound consequences of ai adoption and the resulting job insecurity in the tourism and hospitality industry. It aims to explore these challenges and propose actionable research directions to balance technological innovation with the human-centric values that define the sector. By addressing these issues, the study seeks to provide insights to support


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employees, maintain service quality, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the workforce during this era of rapid technological transformation.

***Research Objectives***

This study critically examines the existing literature, both foundational and contemporary works, that explore the relationship between AI and job uncertainty in the tourism and hospitality industry. Specifically, we investigate the theoretical underpinnings of occupational uncertainty to understand the multifaceted impacts of AI better. The primary goal of this manuscript is to explore the connection between AI and occupational uncertainty, with the following objectives:

1- Critically review and synthesize existing studies on the relationship between AI and job insecurity;
2- Highlight key perspectives on occupational uncertainties through a critical and comprehensive analysis of existing scholarly literature;
3- Introduce and discuss insights from the AI-Occupational Uncertainty (AI-OC) Theories;
4- Propose future research directions and outline policy agendas to address emerging challenges.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a two-part research methodology to explore the relationship between AI and job insecurity in the tourism and hospitality industry. In the first stage, we carried out a scoping literature review. A scoping study is described as "a process of summarizing a range of evidence to illustrate the breadth and depth of a particular field" (Levac et al., 2010). This research method is frequently employed to (a) "explore the extent, range, and nature of research activity"; (b) "assess the feasibility of conducting a comprehensive systematic review"; (c) "synthesize and share research findings"; and (d) "identify gaps in the existing body of literature" (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Given these features, a scoping review was deemed the most suitable methodology to align with the aims of our study. The PRISMA guideline was implemented in this study through several essential steps: formulating the research objectives, determining relevant terminology and search terms, creating a search strategy, setting inclusion and exclusion criteria, conducting a systematic search in electronic databases, screening and selecting eligible studies, and evaluating the quality of the studies for analysis (Moher et al., 2009).

The following criteria were considered for selecting the literature: publications dated between 2015 and 2024 (ten years), peer-reviewed, published as articles in academic journals, written in English, available in full-text format, and specifically focused on the application of AI and occupational uncertainty. Using the Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Web of Science databases, we employed a two-step strategy to develop our search string. Initially, we included terms related to AI alongside those associated with occupational uncertainty, such as "job insecurity", "JI" and "job uncertainty." In the second step, we refined our focus to studies specifically set within the tourism and hospitality sectors. This refined search produced a curated collection of papers, which formed the basis of our primary search string. By applying a filtering process aligned with predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Fig. 1), we arrived at a final sample of papers for further review and analysis.

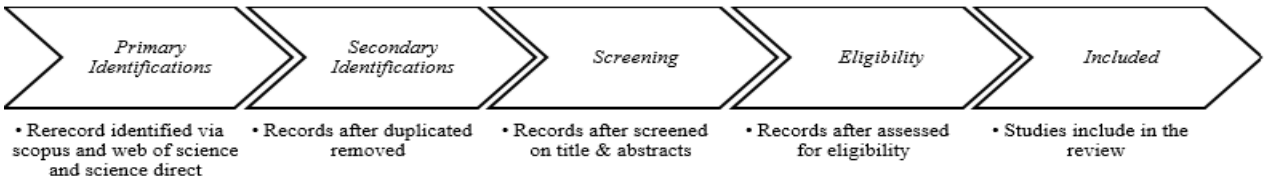


Fig. 1: Filtering process

In the second stage of the research methodology, this study focused on developing key perspectives based on the insights gained from our systematic literature review and subsequent investigations (see Fig. 2). We proposed several distinct perspectives that highlight the multifaceted relationship between AI and job insecurity in the tourism and hospitality industry. Each perspective is accompanied by a discussion of its implications for future research, offering important pathways for deeper exploration. Additionally, we identified relevant theories, drawing connections to existing research that supports these concepts. These theories can be applied in future studies to enhance understanding of the dynamics at play. Alongside these perspectives and theories, we outlined potential policy actions that stakeholders could adopt to mitigate job insecurity and ensure that the implications of AI integration are addressed proactively. Finally, we identified new promising avenues for future research, highlighting specific areas where further empirical studies are needed to fill the gaps revealed in our review. This comprehensive approach aims to build on existing knowledge and encourage ongoing dialogue and investigation into the complexities of AI's influence on job security within the industry.


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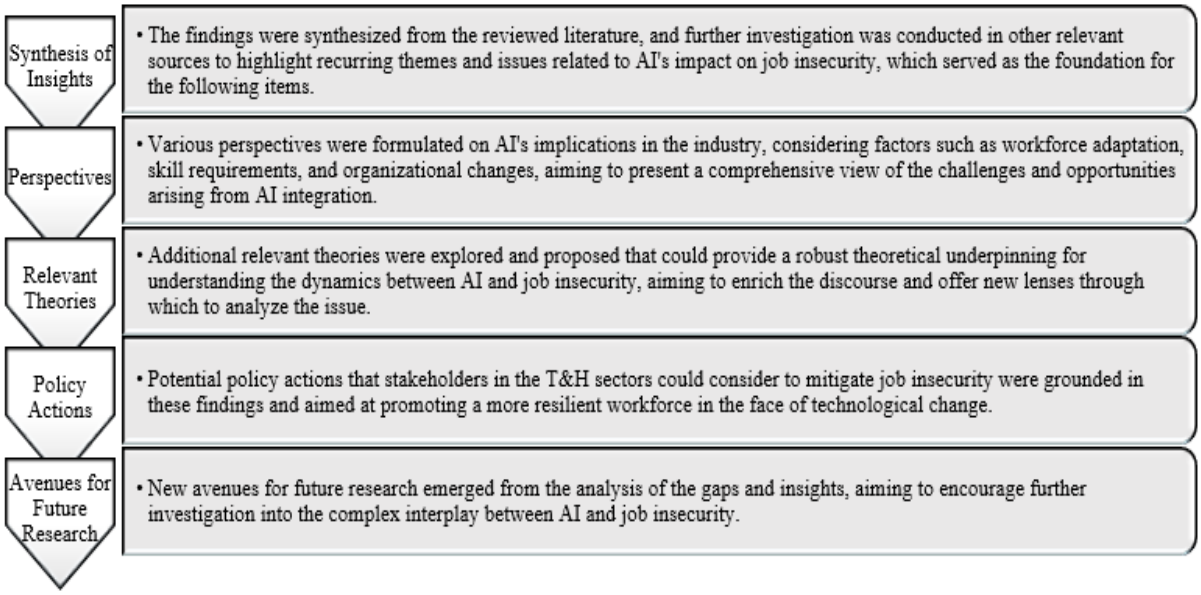


Fig. 2: Reviewing process

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### Findings Based on Systematic Review

#### *Employee Experiences of AI-Related Job insecurity*

The rapid integration of AI in the tourism and hospitality industry has created significant challenges for employees, particularly in terms of occupational uncertainty, job displacement, and the need for continuous skill adaptation. These uncertainties heighten stress, insecurity, and negatively impact employees' well-being and career stability. In a sector that heavily depends on human engagement and personalized service, employees often feel threatened by AI systems, perceiving them as a direct risk to their roles. Awareness of technological advancements can exacerbate these fears, as employees with more knowledge of AI may feel increasingly vulnerable to job displacement. This has been linked to higher turnover intentions, particularly among those seeking opportunities outside the industry, and contributes to rising levels of anxiety, distress, and reduced job satisfaction (Koo et al., 2021).

The psychological toll of job insecurity manifests in diminished focus, engagement, and productivity, ultimately straining employee-guest interactions and service quality. Persistent fears of marginalization or obsolescence lead to emotional exhaustion, withdrawal behaviors, and even resistance to adopting new technologies. This resistance, fueled by competition between human and AI-driven roles, fosters frustration and burnout. Additionally, employees in lower-skilled positions are particularly vulnerable, as automation increasingly replaces tasks traditionally performed by humans (Horpynich et al., 2025; Zhang, & Jin, 2023).
While some workers appreciate the opportunities AI provides—such as freeing up time for more complex tasks—others feel undervalued, which can reduce job satisfaction and motivation. The need for ongoing skill development, while stressful, also presents opportunities for career growth. However, a lack of career development options may result in "quiet quitting," where employees disengage without formally resigning, leading to reduced effort, lower service quality, and undermined organizational effectiveness (Koo et al., 2021; Lestari et al., 2024).

#### *Organizational Experiences of Employee Job Insecurity Due to AI*

The organizational implications of AI-related JOB INSECURITY are equally significant. Elevated employee anxiety caused by AI adoption often leads to higher turnover rates, which disrupt team dynamics, reduce institutional knowledge, and increase recruitment and training costs. Furthermore, if employees perceive a lack of transparency or support from management regarding AI’s impact on their roles, morale declines, fostering disengagement and resistance to change (Horpynich et al., 2025). This disengagement can hinder innovation and operational efficiency, as employees become risk-averse and less willing to adopt new technologies or contribute ideas . Over-reliance on AI may also undermine the importance of human skills and interpersonal relationships, which are critical in the hospitality industry. Organizations that fail to address these concerns risk


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cultivating a culture of distrust, which further erodes collaboration, communication, and employee morale (Zhang, & Jin, 2023).

High JI and stress also diminish proactive service behaviors, crucial for maintaining customer satisfaction and gaining a competitive edge. Employees facing feelings of inadequacy or obsolescence are less likely to engage fully with their roles, negatively impacting service quality and organizational performance. The cumulative effects of these dynamics—quiet quitting, disengagement, and reduced commitment—can compromise service delivery, hurt customer satisfaction, and damage an organization's reputation (Huang & Gursoy, 2024). Organizations that proactively address these challenges by investing in employee training, fostering a culture of transparency, and emphasizing the complementary nature of AI and human roles are better positioned to mitigate the negative effects of job insecurity (Darvishmotevali et al., 2017). Such efforts not only improve employee retention and morale but also enhance operational efficiency and service quality, allowing organizations to maintain a competitive edge in a rapidly evolving market (Zhang et al., 2023).

***AI-Job Insecurity Theory Insights***

This study underscores the principal theories from prior research, thereby establishing a robust foundation for investigating AI-related job insecurity within the tourism and hospitality sector. The review identified 15 essential foundational theories utilized in the examined articles (see Table 1). Table 1 highlights the principal theories employed in the reviewed articles, their fundamental assumptions, and the articles that applied each theory. More specifically, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) was employed in four articles, Social Cognitive Theory in three articles, Cognitive Appraisal Theory in two articles, and various other theories in one article each.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Conservation of resources theory** (Hobfoll, 1989) | As AI technologies are increasingly integrated into security jobs, professionals must balance the loss of traditional roles with the acquisition of new skills and resources to maintain their job security and well-being. |
| **Social cognitive theory** (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) | Employees must adapt to changes that influence their self-efficacy and perceptions of job stability while navigating potential displacement and the need for new skills |
| **Cognitive appraisal theory** (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) | As employees strive to reduce uncertainty about their roleEmployees facing AI-related JI assess their situation by weighing the threat of job displacement against their available coping resources, which in turn affects their emotional responses and their decisions on how to adapt to the evolving work environment. |
| **Self-determination theory** (Ryan and Deci, 2000) | Employees' motivation and well-being are impacted by their ability to meet needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; those who assert control over their career development, adapt well to new technologies, and maintain supportive relationships are better equipped to cope with JI due to AI |
| **Person-environment fit theory** (Kristof,1996) | The compatibility between an individual and their work environment—encompassing values, beliefs, and abilities—significantly influences job satisfaction and performance; a strong fit enhances well-being, while a poor fit can increase stress and dissatisfaction, particularly in the rapidly evolving context of AI. |
| **Social exchange theory** (Cook et al., 2013) | Employees thrive in supportive environments; otherwise, especially in AI-related JI context, they may feel isolated and uncertain about their roles, which heightens feelings of vulnerability and increases turnover intentions, as a lack of strong social capital or supportive networks drives them to seek alternative employment to escape perceived instability and insufficient support. |
| **Job demand-resource theory** (Bakker et al., 2014) | High job demands, such as adapting to new technologies and managing increased workloads, can lead to stress and burnout; however, adequate job resources—like training, colleague support, and opportunities for skill development—can mitigate these negative effects and enhance employee engagement and well-being. |
| **Disruptive innov. theory** (Christensen et al., 2018) | When employees possess a negative awareness of advanced technologies, this perception fosters a sense of threat that heightens their fear of replacement and JI, ultimately driving them to consider leaving their positions, thereby disrupting the employee-technology relationship and making them feel vulnerable and expendable. |
| **Technology risk decision theory** | As organizations adopt advanced technologies, the perceived risks and uncertainties surrounding job displacement grow, resulting in increased anxiety among workers about their future employment prospects. |
| **Prospect theory** (Kahneman & Tversky, 2013) | Individuals tend to be risk-averse when faced with high-stakes situations and more willing to accept risks when the stakes are lower; employees may demonstrate risk-averse behaviour if they perceive the adoption of AI in the workplace as a high-stakes scenario. |
| **Transactional theory of stress** (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987) | Employees' assessments of the effects of AI technology integration into the service delivery process on their jobs will critically influence their proactive service behaviours, as their hindrance appraisals of this integration significantly impact both their perceptions of JI and their proactive engagement in service activities. |
| **Complementary theory** (Fiske, 2014) | Employees may experience increased JI when working alongside AI systems because they prefer to collaborate with colleagues whose skills and attributes complement their own; this dynamic can lead to feelings of inadequacy or displacement in the presence of robotic counterparts, ultimately undermining their sense of job stability and security. |
| **Uncertainty reduction theory** (Berger, 1979) | As employees strive to reduce uncertainty about their roles and future within an organization, they experience anxiety due to the unpredictable impacts of advanced technologies on their job security. |

Table 1. Theories and Core assumption in the AI-job insecurity relationships



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**Discussion Based on Systematic Review and Supplementary Insights**

***Employees' Perspectives***

Recent research underscores the significant challenges employees encounter in the AI-driven era, particularly in the tourism and hospitality industry, regarding their job security and career stability (Koo et al., 2021). Employees are increasingly concerned about job displacement, the need for reskilling, and disruptions to work-life balance due to AI integration. These fears, particularly in industries reliant on human engagement, negatively impact mental health, emotional well-being, and professional performance. The stress caused by job insecurity leads to diminished productivity, strained guest interactions, and resistance to adopting AI technologies, which are often viewed as threats (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020). The rapid pace of AI adoption also creates pressure for employees to acquire new skills, such as using AI-powered tools like chatbots and virtual reality systems, as well as knowledge of eco-friendly practices and social media marketing. While this upskilling offers growth opportunities, it often triggers learning anxiety and fears of inadequacy. Additionally, AI-related job insecurity disrupts work-life balance by pressuring employees to engage in training outside working hours, exacerbating stress and reducing personal time. Increased productivity expectations from AI efficiencies further amplify this imbalance, contributing to employee burnout and dissatisfaction (Tan et al., 2024).

***Family Perspectives***

AI-related job insecurity extends its impact beyond employees, affecting their families by creating financial strain and emotional stress. Families often face challenges in meeting daily expenses and achieving financial security as job displacement or reduced work hours disrupt traditional income streams. Coping with economic uncertainty requires families to adopt adaptive strategies, such as diversifying income sources or engaging in proactive financial planning (Khogali & Mekid, 2023). The psychological toll of job insecurity on families is significant, as financial instability can strain relationships and communication. Concerns about job loss and future income security often lead to heightened stress and anxiety within households, affecting individuals' self-esteem and mental health. These emotional pressures can disrupt familial dynamics, requiring open communication and mutual support to navigate these challenges effectively.

***Industry Perspectives***

Industries, especially in service sectors like tourism and hospitality, face considerable challenges in managing the implications of AI integration. The adoption of AI requires substantial investments in infrastructure, training, and workflow restructuring, raising concerns about return on investment. While AI promises operational efficiency and innovation, rapid implementation can disrupt operations, while delays may hinder competitiveness (Javaid et al., 2022). The transformation of job roles due to automation also necessitates retraining employees, which involves significant costs and resources. Additionally, ethical considerations, such as data privacy and security, become critical as AI relies heavily on data for decision-making. Organizations must navigate complex legal frameworks to maintain customer trust while ensuring workforce support during transitions (Floridi, 2023). Occupational uncertainty stemming from AI adoption can exacerbate workforce anxiety, leading to reduced morale, resistance to change, and increased turnover rates. Furthermore, over-reliance on AI risks undervaluing human skills and interpersonal relationships, which are critical to maintaining high-quality customer experiences in the tourism and hospitality industry (Huang & Gursoy, 2024). A balanced approach, involving employee training, transparent communication, and ethical practices, is essential to mitigate these challenges and foster sustainable growth.

***Society Perspectives***

At the societal level, AI-related job insecurity can have profound implications, particularly in the tourism and hospitality industry. job displacement due to automation can increase unemployment rates, reducing purchasing power and consumer spending in local economies reliant on tourism (Javaid et al., 2022). This ripple effect can disrupt related sectors such as transportation, retail, and food services, leading to broader economic instability. Job insecurity also exacerbates social inequalities, particularly for workers in lower-skilled roles, often from marginalized communities. These individuals are more vulnerable to job loss due to automation, which widens income gaps and raises societal tensions. Without adequate investment in education and training to prepare workers for AI-driven roles, workforce development efforts may falter, creating a skills mismatch that weakens the competitiveness of the tourism and hospitality sectors (Khogali & Mekid, 2023). In summary, the societal, familial, and industry-wide impacts of AI-related job insecurity highlight the need for balanced


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strategies that prioritize workforce well-being, ethical AI adoption, and equitable access to training. These measures are essential to sustaining the human-centric values that define the tourism and hospitality industry while navigating the challenges of technological transformation. Please see Fig. 3.

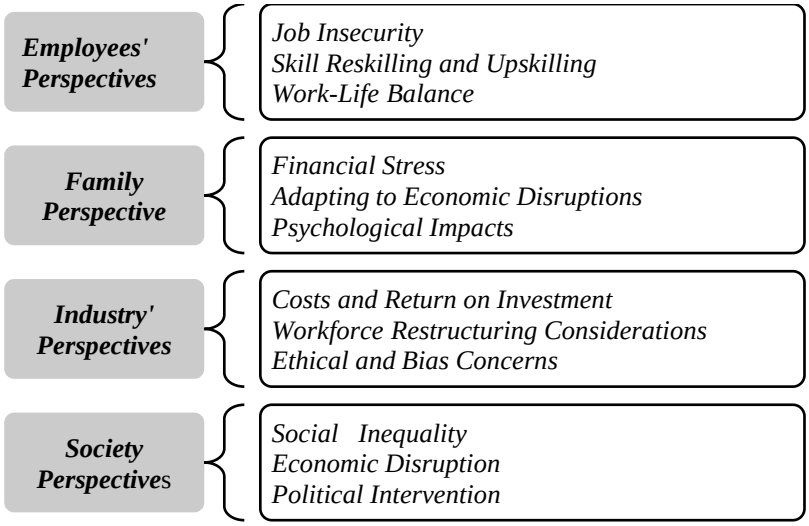


Fig. 3: Perspectives on occupational uncertainty in the age of AI (developed by author)

**Proposed AI-Job Insecurity Theories**

While previous studies have applied various theories to explore AI-related job insecurity (see Table 1), significant gaps remain in the literature regarding the application of different theories that warrant further investigation. Specifically, there is a lack of studies integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, which could offer deeper insights into how employees perceive and react to AI-induced changes in the workplace and their consequences at both micro and macro levels. By broadening the theoretical lens, researchers can better understand the complexities of job insecurity in the age of AI and develop more effective strategies to support employees during this transition. Below are some additional AI-related theories that could be applied and explored in future research on AI-related job insecurity:

*Technological determinism (Kline, 2003)* – Technological determinism posits that the development of technology, particularly AI, drives significant social and cultural changes. This theory highlights how advancements in AI influence various businesses, compelling employees to adapt to new roles or risk job displacement, which necessitates continuous learning and skill development. Industries are urged to innovate and integrate AI to enhance efficiency and remain competitive. Families experience shifts in work-life dynamics as remote work transforms traditional roles and responsibilities. Additionally, societies face challenges related to inequalities, as access to AI technologies and their benefits can be uneven, potentially widening socioeconomic gaps. Overall, this theory suggests a unidirectional influence of technology on society, often sidelining human agency in the face of rapid technological advancement.

*Socio-technical systems theory (Appelbaum, 1997)* – This theory explores the interaction between technology and society within organizations, particularly how AI influences workplace dynamics, employee roles, and productivity. It emphasizes the need for technological advancements to align with human-centric values, fostering collaboration and innovation. While AI can enhance productivity, it may also introduce stress through constant monitoring. Families face challenges in balancing the demands of an AI-driven workplace with home life. Societies must adapt to evolving labor markets and redefine social norms as AI reshapes traditional employment structures. This theory underscores the integration of social and technical elements, highlighting the importance of designing AI systems that consider human factors and organizational culture.

*Actor-network theory (Murdoch, 1998)* – Actor-Network Theory (ANT) posits that technology is part of a network comprising both human and non-human actors, such as AI systems. It explores how these networks shape social relationships and power dynamics. Within organizations, employees navigate complex interactions where AI redefines roles and responsibilities. Industries can enhance efficiency and employee satisfaction by understanding these dynamics and optimizing workflows. Families may experience shifts in communication and


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relationship dynamics due to AI's influence. On a societal level, ANT highlights the urgent need for adaptive governance and policy-making as power structures evolve. Ultimately, ANT emphasizes the intricate interplay of actors in shaping technology's role in society.

*Diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 2014)* – This theory explores how new technologies, such as AI, spread within cultures and industries, focusing on factors that influence adoption rates, including perceived benefits, compatibility, and complexity. Employees may find opportunities for career advancement as AI creates new roles, although they might also face challenges in adapting to these changes. Early adopters of AI technologies gain a competitive edge, while lagging industries risk falling behind. Families benefit from increased convenience and efficiency in daily life but face concerns regarding privacy and security. Societies experience economic growth driven by AI but must address potential digital divides and ethical issues related to uneven access and implementation.

*Critical theory of technology (Feenberg, 2008)* – This theory critiques how technology, including AI, can reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics. It explores the ethical dimensions of AI deployment, highlighting exploitation issues and the need for ethical considerations. Employees may face exploitation through surveillance or control, emphasizing the importance of deploying AI responsibly. Industries must address the broader ethical implications, ensuring technologies empower rather than exploit workers. Families experience impacts on privacy and autonomy, shaping their technology use at home. Societies face the challenge of promoting responsible AI use and advocating for equity and fairness while preventing misuse across all sectors.

**Adaptive Policy Strategies**

Despite the potential for job insecurity, the findings indicate that employees are generally open to collaborating with AI, provided that management actively supports this integration. By endorsing AI technologies that enhance customer satisfaction and by fostering employee engagement in customer relations, hotel management can help alleviate fears of obsolescence. This collaborative approach can lead to reciprocal benefits, allowing employees to focus on higher-level tasks while improving their skills in a technology-driven environment (Koo et al., 2021). Therefore, organizations and governments should plan to create sustainable policies where employees feel supported and equipped to navigate the uncertainties of an AI-driven world. Employers and industry stakeholders need to prioritize strategies that support employees' mental health, foster resilience, and provide avenues for upskilling and professional development to navigate the evolving landscape of work in a digital era. By acknowledging and addressing the ramifications of job insecurity, the industry can cultivate a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes employees' overall well-being while enhancing their capacity to adapt to technological advancements and deliver exceptional guest experiences (Koo et al., 2021). To address the challenges posed by AI integration, organizations and governments must implement agile policies focused on four key areas. Workforce development involves initiatives such as upskilling, reskilling, and job transition support to help employees adapt to changing roles. Employee well-being emphasizes mental health support programs and flexible work arrangements to ensure workers remain resilient and productive. Inclusive practices promote inclusive decision-making and public awareness campaigns to foster equity and collaboration across diverse groups. Finally, governance and compliance focus on establishing regulatory frameworks and data privacy policies to ensure ethical and transparent AI adoption. Together, these components create a comprehensive approach to navigating AI-driven transformations.

**RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Literature highlighting the rapid pace of technological change and its impact on employment dynamics underscores the need for studies that track long-term trends and inform adaptive workforce strategies. Concurrently, the multifaceted challenges posed by AI have prompted cross-sector collaboration, bringing together diverse expertise to address issues such as bias and employee well-being. Human-centered AI research prioritizes user experiences and ethical considerations to enhance job satisfaction. Furthermore, researchers are calling for behavioral studies to understand better how individuals adapt to technological disruptions and macro-level research to examine the broader societal implications of AI. This underscores the need for evidence-based policies that support workers during transitions. Together, these approaches reflect a comprehensive response to the imperative for sustainable, equitable solutions in the evolving AI-influenced landscape of work. This section provides detailed information based on the reviewed paper and additional sources, through which the authors analyzed and synthesized the existing knowledge, ultimately designing and introducing the following categories to structure future research directions.:


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**Longitudinal Studies**

Longitudinal studies are critical for understanding the evolving impact of AI on employment trends, offering insights that cannot be captured through cross-sectional designs. By tracking changes over time using surveys, industry reports, and employment records, these studies can identify how AI influences job availability, skill demands, and workforce dynamics. For example, they can evaluate job quality under AI by assessing employee satisfaction, engagement, and stability, uncovering its effects on work-life balance and job security. They can also reveal shifting skill demands and measure the effectiveness of reskilling programs, helping organizations refine training initiatives and close skill gaps. Additionally, longitudinal research can examine broader societal consequences, such as mental health and income disparities, while providing actionable insights to policymakers for targeted interventions. By continuously monitoring these trends, researchers can help organizations enhance competitiveness, foster workforce resilience, and adapt to AI-driven disruptions. These illustrative examples highlight why longitudinal studies are essential for advancing research on AI's impact in ways cross-sectional methods cannot.

**Cross-Sector Collaboration**

Cross-sector collaboration is critical for addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by AI integration in the tourism and hospitality industry, particularly in areas like guest services, operational efficiency, and workforce management. By bringing together experts from diverse fields—such as computer science, economics, social sciences, and psychology—researchers can comprehensively examine AI's impact on employment, service quality, and guest experiences. This collaborative approach helps bridge research gaps, foster innovative solutions, and promote a holistic understanding of AI's influence on workforce dynamics. For example, computer science can focus on designing AI systems that support human productivity, such as customer service chatbots that enhance human-AI collaboration, while addressing ethical concerns like algorithmic bias. Economics can analyze AI's financial and labor market implications, studying employment trends, wage distribution, and cost-benefit trade-offs, while identifying policy strategies to foster economic resilience. Social sciences can explore the societal and cultural impacts of AI, including its effects on workforce demographics, workplace culture, and employee-manager relationships, as well as how these changes influence service delivery and guest experiences. Psychology can investigate the human impact of AI adoption, such as its effects on mental health, stress, and job satisfaction, while offering insights into how employees adapt emotionally and behaviorally to AI-driven changes. These examples illustrate how cross-sector collaboration can provide actionable insights and drive research that ensures AI adoption in tourism and hospitality is both sustainable and human-centered. This integrative approach is essential for addressing the complex challenges and opportunities AI presents to the industry.

**Human-Centered AI**

Future research should prioritize the development of AI systems that place human well-being at the forefront, ensuring technologies enhance human capabilities, improve job satisfaction, and uphold ethical standards while achieving efficiency. Key directions include integrating principles of transparency, fairness, accountability, and inclusivity into AI design processes. Human-centered AI fosters responsible and sustainable innovation by championing these values, creating equitable and empowering work environments. For example, research can focus on designing AI systems that complement, rather than replace, human roles, enhancing job security through upskilling and hybrid intelligence solutions. It can also explore ways to promote employee well-being, such as AI tools that monitor stress levels and workload to create healthier work environments. Addressing bias and privacy concerns is another critical area, with research emphasizing transparent, fair AI systems that build trust and foster inclusivity. Finally, fostering innovation and adaptability through employee involvement in AI design can ensure solutions align with human values and operational needs, enabling organizations to navigate technological advancements effectively. These research directions highlight the potential of human-centered AI to create sustainable, inclusive, and balanced workplaces amid AI integration.

**Behavioral Studies**

Behavioral research is vital for understanding how individuals and organizations adapt to AI-induced workplace transformations, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sector, where service quality and guest interactions are paramount. By studying attitudes, decision-making, and psychological responses to job insecurity and technological disruptions, behavioral research can identify strategies to foster resilience and promote adaptive behaviors. These insights can enhance workforce transitions, improve guest experiences, and ensure the human element remains central to service delivery. Key areas of future research include exploring


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employee attitudes toward AI and how these attitudes shape perceptions of job insecurity, as well as examining psychological responses like anxiety and stress caused by job displacement. Research can identify coping mechanisms, such as resilience-building or peer support networks, and investigate how demographics (e.g., age, gender, or role type) influence these responses.

Additionally, studies on decision-making can reveal factors driving adaptive behaviors, such as pursuing training or embracing AI, and provide insights into how organizations communicate and manage AI-driven change. Another critical focus is understanding how organizational culture promotes innovation and adaptation. Research could explore leadership's role in fostering a culture of learning and openness, as well as initiatives like innovation labs to balance technological advancements with human-centered service delivery. Training programs addressing behavioral barriers to AI adoption, such as resilience-building or AI literacy workshops, should also be explored for their effectiveness in facilitating smoother workforce transitions. Finally, behavioral studies should examine how AI-induced job insecurity affects guest experiences, including changes in employee behavior and its impact on service quality. Research can optimize human-AI interactions to ensure technology enhances guest satisfaction. Additionally, understanding how social dynamics and peer support mitigate the challenges of AI integration can help organizations build resilience and adaptability within teams. These research directions highlight the importance of behavioral studies in navigating the complexities of AI integration, supporting employee well-being, and ensuring sustainable growth in the tourism and hospitality industry.

**Macro-level Research**

Macro-level research is vital for addressing the societal and economic impacts of AI on the workforce in the tourism and hospitality industry. This research focuses on developing structural and policy-level interventions to ensure sustainable employment, workforce resilience, and equitable outcomes as AI transforms roles, particularly in areas like security. Key priorities include investing in education and training programs to equip workers with AI-specific skills, integrating AI literacy into curricula, and assessing the long-term impact of reskilling initiatives. Adaptive labor market policies, such as job transition programs, wage subsidies, and predictive analytics, should be explored to balance job creation with worker protections. Ethical AI regulations are also crucial, focusing on mitigating biases, safeguarding privacy, and ensuring accountability in AI systems to build trust among workers and guests. Additionally, research should examine social protection measures, such as unemployment insurance, retraining programs, and innovative models like universal basic income, to support displaced workers while addressing the psychological impacts of job insecurity. Finally, stakeholder engagement through collaborative policymaking and public-private partnerships can ensure inclusive strategies that promote equitable access to AI training and opportunities, particularly for marginalized groups. Together, these efforts provide a foundation for navigating AI adoption responsibly while fostering resilience, inclusivity, and sustainable growth in the tourism and hospitality industry.

## CONCLUSION

The rise of AI heralds a transformative era characterized by a spectrum of opportunities and challenges for individuals, organizations, and society. The profound impact of AI on the workforce underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of its implications, particularly in the context of occupational uncertainty. By proactively engaging with the multifaceted dimensions of AI-induced changes in the workplace, stakeholders can navigate the evolving landscape of work and innovation, fostering a future where AI and human workers collaborate synergistically. In the context of the tourism and hospitality industry, where human interaction and personalized service are paramount, the profound impact of AI on workforce dynamics necessitates a nuanced understanding of its implications amidst the industry's unique operational uncertainties. This comprehensive research is a foundational stepping stone for delving deeper into the intricate web of AI-driven occupational transformations and their far-reaching societal and economic repercussions and cultivating actionable insights to inform decision-making and policy formulation.

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# INTEGRATING EXPLAINABLE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INTO HOTEL REVENUE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

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## ABSTRACT

Revenue management systems (RMSs) are sophisticated software that leverages data analytics to enable hospitality, travel and tourism businesses to optimise their pricing and inventory allocations to maximize revenue and profits. With the proliferation of big data and advancement in artificial intelligence (AI), RMSs have become even more sophisticated, operating as black boxes and providing outputs that are not transparent or explainable to users (Rai, 2020; Yeoman, 2019). This has diminished confidence, trust, and heightened aversion to these black-box systems (Mohseni et al., 2021). To address these problems, there is a growing need to make RMSs more transparent and explainable. One promising solution is integrating explainable artificial intelligence (XAI) into these systems. XAI refers to AI systems that provide explanations or insights into their decision-making processes, enabling humans to understand, interpret, and trust the results (Gerlings et al., 2022).

While XAI has the potential to transform black box systems into glass boxes, limited studies are exploring their applications in different industries (Darvish et al., 2024; Liao et al., 2020). Nonetheless, a surge in interest in XAI has been recorded in healthcare, education, insurance, finance and autonomous driving (Subramanian et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2023; Khosravi et al., 2022). However, little is known about how to put this innovation into practice in hotel revenue management. Meanwhile, by explaining its outputs, XAI-enabled RMS can make revenue management more transparent, accountable, and trustworthy. To provide the needed insights into the application of XAI to hotel RM, this study aimed to investigate the capabilities of XAI to meet user requirements or need for explanations and the readiness factors that will influence its adoption.

To achieve the study objectives, a qualitative research design involving semi-structured interviews was conducted with 27 hospitality industry executives with expertise in revenue management and hospitality technologies. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The emergent themes were aligned with the Task-Technology Fit theory and Technology-Organisation-Environment framework, which have been widely applied to understand technology utilisation and readiness to adopt new technologies (Bagheri & van de Wetering, 2024). The findings provide valuable insights into how the integration of XAI into RMS can be used to promote transparency and help users debug and understand the output generated for effective revenue management.

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# THE IMPACT OF AI TRANSFORMATIONS ON THE AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

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## INTRODUCTION

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the agri-food industry represents a transformative shift in agricultural practices, enhancing efficiency, sustainability, and food safety. This study investigates the impact of AI technologies on the agri-food sector, focusing on their applications, benefits, and challenges within the European Union market. The research aims to answer critical questions regarding how AI is reshaping agricultural operations, the primary technologies employed, and the obstacles faced in its implementation. As the global AI market continues to expand, with an anticipated annual growth rate of 28% from 2024 to 2030, understanding its implications for the agri-food industry becomes increasingly vital.

## METHODS

To achieve these objectives, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Data was collected from various sources, including market reports, academic literature, and case studies of AI applications in agriculture. The research analysed the performance indicators of AI-driven operations compared to traditional methods, focusing on key areas such as field farming, livestock management, and indoor farming. Specific examples of AI integration, such as automated sorting in production lines and predictive analytics in supply chains, were examined to illustrate the practical benefits and challenges of AI adoption.

## RESULTS

The findings reveal that AI technologies are predominantly utilized in field farming, which holds over 60% of the market share in the U.S. and continues to dominate the European market as well. Key performance indicators indicate significant improvements in operational efficiency, food safety compliance, and resource management. AI applications, including machine learning and big data analytics, have been shown to enhance the quality of food production, streamline supply chains, and reduce human error. Furthermore, the research highlights the increasing demand for AI-related skills across various sectors, underscoring the need for workforce development in the agricultural domain. The implications of these findings are profound, suggesting that the adoption of AI in the agri-food industry not only enhances productivity and sustainability but also addresses critical issues related to food security and safety. As industry moves towards Agriculture 4.0, the integration of advanced technologies such as drones, robotic farming, and IoT will play a crucial role in meeting consumer demands and optimizing production processes. However, the study also identifies challenges, including the need for regulatory frameworks, investment in technology, and the potential for job displacement due to automation.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research underscores the significance of AI in transforming the agri-food industry, offering insights into its potential to improve efficiency, safety, and sustainability. As the sector continues to evolve, stakeholders must navigate the challenges of implementation while leveraging the benefits of AI to create a more intelligent and resilient food production system. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on AI in agriculture, providing a foundation for future research and policy development aimed at fostering innovation and sustainability in the agri-food sector.

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# UNWRAPPING THE ANTECEDENTS OF VISITORS' ENGAGEMENT TO SERVICE ROBOTS: EXPLORING THE MODERATING ROLES OF PERCEIVED COOLNESS, HEDONIC MOTIVATION AND ANTHROPOMORPHISM ON RECOMMENDATION

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## ABSTRACT

Technology changed the whole behavior of tourists and their ways of enjoying the travel experience. In the near future, with the diffusion of the use of artificial intelligence tools, the use of service robots in tourism service delivery systems will be inevitable, and the service robots may tempt a transformation in the tourism service delivery systems. Despite numerous existing studies on factors that predict the adoption of AI devices in services, this research covers the gaps in tourists-robots interaction and its values beyond engagement, experience expectancy, psychological ownership, and experience co-creation in AI devices for tourism services. Also, few research have examined how perceived coolness affects behavioral intentions while adopting new technologies.

This study investigates whether systemic elements and emotions are influenced by faith in the capacities of social robots, so extending the Artificially Intelligent Device Use Acceptance theory. Four objectives underpin the research. First, the present study researches the effects of experience co-creation and psychological ownership on tourists' expectancy of robotic service experience. Second, the research proposes that the effects of experience co-creation and psychological ownership on service robot experience expectancy by examining the moderator effects of anthropomorphism. Third, the study proposes that there is positive effect of tourists' expectancy of robotic service experience on engagement. Finally, tourist engagement on the impact of which results in recommendation intention by examining the moderator effects of perceived coolness and hedonic motivation. Thus, the model provides crucial insights into the theory and practice of tourism by highlighting the antecedent of service robot experience expectancy. This study uses a methodological stimulus (video) using a scenario approach. 254 respondents from the United Kingdom who travelled last year completed the survey via Prolific. The present research uses structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses.

The findings indicate that collaboration with service robots increment engagement with hospitality industry and develop as critical standards to direct future inquire about and practice in this area. To test the moderator role of anthropomorphism, coolness and hedonic motivation we used factor analysis on SPSS. Factor analysis showed that anthropomorphism and coolness did not have moderate effect. But hedonic motivation moderate the impact of engagement on recommendation intention.

The research adds to the body of knowledge in tourist studies because most studies overlooked the importance of psychological ownership, experience co-creation intents, and the expectancy of robotic service experience in service robots in tourism. Furthermore, it fills the gap in terms of engagement and experience co-creation and psychological ownership efforts for touristic robots. Since suppliers and tourists create a means of co-creation in order to deliver unique value that results in different customer interactions and added value, triggering different emotions, the study extends the underlying basic process in determining tourists' acceptance of the use of social robots for service delivery by identifying an integrated conceptual model of engagement and its intrinsic concepts as the critical determinants. Hence, the research covers one of the gaps in how tourists interact with the robots and other values that concern visitor engagement in experience expectancy, psychological ownership, and experience co-creation for service robots in tourism administrations.


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# AI HOTEL SYSTEM SOLUTIONS AND THE LEVEL OF HOTEL OPERATIONS INTEGRATION

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## ABSTRACT

The integration of AI technologies has the potential to revolutionize the hospitality industry by offering improved operational efficiency and enhanced guest experience. However, understanding the extent of AI integration and its impact on hotel operations remains a critical area of research. To address this research gap, two surveys were conducted: one targeting AI solution providers, and the other focusing on hotel managers. The surveys aimed to gather insights into the adoption and utilization of AI hotel system solutions, as well as perceptions of the level of integration achieved in hotel operations. By comparing the responses from both surveys, this study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of AI adoption and integration practices in the hospitality industry. The collected survey data were analyzed using Structural Equation Model (SEM) techniques to examine the relationships between AI solutions and the level of integration of hotel operations. SEM enables the exploration of complex relationships among multiple variables and provides statistical evidence to validate theoretical models. This analysis offers valuable insights into the factors that influence the integration of AI technologies within hotel operations. Furthermore, the study applied the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of AI hotel system solutions in supporting hotel operations. TAM provides a theoretical framework for understanding users' acceptance and adoption of technology. By employing the TAM, this study investigates the factors that influence the acceptance and utilization of AI hotel system solutions by hotel managers, shedding light on the drivers and barriers to their integration. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between AI hotel system solutions and the level of integration of hotel operations. The results offer valuable insights for both AI solution providers and hotel managers, aiding in the development of effective strategies for AI adoption and integration. Additionally, this study provides practical implications and recommendations for enhancing the seamless integration of AI technologies within hotel operations, ultimately promoting improved performance and guest satisfaction.

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# CAN AI TECHNOLOGY HELP EASE LONELINESS AMONG OLDER ADULTS IN CONTINUING CARE RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES?

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## ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are revolutionizing service delivery across industries, including hospitality and healthcare. Particularly, AI-enabled devices like voice assistants have shown promise in enhancing quality of life by facilitating personalized interactions. However, despite extensive research on AI's impact on efficiency and operational outcomes, the emotional and social dimensions of AI applications remain underexplored, particularly in elder care settings. This gap is especially concerning within Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs), where loneliness poses a critical challenge.

CCRCs provide a continuum of care, integrating independent living, assisted care, and skilled nursing in one organization. Loneliness is a critical issue among older adults in CCRCs, often leading to mental and physical health challenges, including depression, cognitive decline, and increased mortality rates. Addressing this issue requires innovative solutions that support both social engagement and emotional well-being. AI voice assistants offer a unique opportunity to reduce loneliness and foster a sense of connection among residents. Existing studies indicate that these technologies can promote engagement, provide reminders for daily activities, and simulate human-like interactions, creating a sense of companionship. However, a critical gap persists in understanding how residents perceive and engage with these devices and how such interactions affect their emotional well-being.

This study draws on Activity Theory (AT) and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST). AT emphasizes the importance of physical and social engagement for life satisfaction, while SST suggests older adults prioritize emotionally meaningful interactions. These perspectives highlight the potential of AI voice assistants to support emotional well-being and foster social connectedness in CCRCs. This qualitative study aims to explore how AI voice assistants affect CCRC residents' perception of loneliness.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 20 or more residents, representing a range of care levels. Participants aged 65 and older will be purposively sampled to ensure diverse perspectives. Inclusion criteria include prior use of AI voice assistants for at least four weeks, allowing for meaningful interaction patterns to develop. Interviews will explore the devices' perceived usefulness, emotional impact, and challenges with a focus on themes such as reducing loneliness, fostering social interaction, and perceiving human-like qualities. Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, will involve open coding to identify themes and axial coding to explore relationships among them. Nvivo software will be used to facilitate data organization and coding, ensuring systematic analysis. Negative cases where residents report dissatisfaction will also be analyzed to provide a balanced understanding. Member checking will be used to validate findings and ensure trustworthiness.

This research is expected to contribute to the growing understanding of how AI can help older adults confront loneliness in CCRCs. It emphasizes the importance of designing empathetic, human-centered AI technologies to enhance residents' quality of life. AI voice assistants may foster emotional bonds, provide support during transitions, and reduce social isolation by encouraging community engagement and facilitating meaningful interactions, ultimately improving emotional well-being among older adults.


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# UNINTENDED PROSOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF ROBOT PREVALENCE
## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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**ABSTRACT**

With the growing shift to service automation in the hospitality industry, robot prevalence is on the rise. Drawing on the intergroup threat theory, we argue that as service robots become more prevalent, consumers may become prosocial in response to a realistic threat. Additionally, we theorize that these effects will be salient among those who are employed, especially those who use artificial intelligence or robots at work. The results of four studies with mixed methodologies support our hypotheses. Our findings provide practical insight into how companies can leverage such behavioral shifts among consumers to maximize the effectiveness of their prosocial initiatives.

Keywords: Service robots; Robot workforce; Realistic threat; Prosocial behavior

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

This research explores how the rise of a robot workforce impacts consumers' prosocial behaviors. Past studies suggest that humans often feel threatened by robots (Złotowski et al., 2017), categorizing them as an outgroup, which can create a sense of intergroup threat (Tajfel, 1981). More specifically, robots pose realistic threats, such as fears of job loss and economic insecurity (Yogeeswaran et al. 2017).

Threats like these trigger psychological defense mechanisms, prompting individuals to reaffirm their connection to social groups to regain control and stability (Jonas et al., 2014). Research shows that the rise of robots can foster a sense of shared human identity, reducing prejudice toward human outgroups by emphasizing a collective "human vs. robot" distinction (Jackson et al., 2020). Additionally, terror management theory suggests that existential threats, such as the rise of robots, can lead to prosocial behaviors (Jonas et al., 2002). Together, these theories support the hypothesis that the perceived threat posed by robots motivates consumers to act more prosocially, driven by a heightened sense of realistic threat.

**METHOD**

Two hundred and three participants ($M_{age}$ = 35.31, 48.3% female), recruited from Prolific, were randomly assigned to a robot condition or a human condition. Participants were asked to visualize themselves visiting a hotel where service robots or human agents provide frontline hotel services. Then, they were asked to describe how they would experience and feel during their stay in the hotel. After the writing task, participants rated realistic threat on three 7-point scale items ($\alpha$ = .84; Złotowski et al., 2017). Next, participants were notified that one individual would be randomly chosen to receive a bonus payment of US$100. If selected, they would have the option to receive the entire $100 in cash or to donate a portion to a charity that assists individuals living in poverty globally. Participants specified their donation amount on a slider scale from $0 to $100.

Supporting the prediction, participants in the robot condition were willing to donate more (M = 37.20, SD = 31.40) than those in the human condition (M = 26.40, *SD* = 26.82) ($F(1, 201) = 6.94$, $p < .01$). Moreover, participants in the robot condition perceived greater realistic threat (M = 4.89, SD = 1.50) than those in the human condition (M = 3.94, *SD* = 1.36) ($F(1, 201) = 21.83$, $p < .01$). A mediation analysis (bootstrap sample = 10,000; Model 4, Hayes, 2020) revealed that perceived realistic threat mediated the effect of hotel type on willingness to donate ($a \times b = 4.65$, 95% CI = 1.61, 8.51).

**DISCUSSION**

This study clarifies the unintended social effects of service robots. We show that as robots become more common in the workplace, consumers may become more prosocial. Our findings suggest that companies can expect more consumer participation in prosocial initiatives like charitable donations and environmental protection.


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# HOW CAN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?

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## ABSTRACT

The hospitality and tourism sector has been discussed in terms of sustainability, and concepts such as sustainable destinations, sustainable hotels, and sustainable tourism have emerged. Sustainability has become one of the most important topics in today's world. The United Nations defined sustainability in 1987 as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UN). Due to factors such as climate change, drought, ozone layer depletion, and the depletion of natural resources, the concept of sustainability has begun to permeate our lives. Among many other sectors, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has caused an unavoidable quiet revolution in the travel and tourism sector (Dumitru, 2023). AI has evolved into a concept at the intersection of reality and science fiction, encompassing both utopia and dystopia (Naude, 2021). AI is based on big data processing, the ability to process and manage algorithms (Margas, 2021). The hospitality and tourism industry is known to generate and produce a wide range of information that needs to be organized, processed, and utilized to deliver better customer service. The integration of AI has emerged as a significant approach to enhance customer experiences in various industries, including the hospitality sector (García-Madurga & Grilló-Méndez, 2023).

This paper aims to explain how artificial intelligence can contribute to sustainable tourism. For this purpose, a conceptual study is preferred, and the literature is reviewed to identify examples of AI applications and research that aim to achieve sustainable tourism. Literature review provides evidence for the contribution of AI in sustainable tourism. Web of Science revealed 72 papers. (54 articles, 10 reviews, six proceedings, four early access, two editorial material). Moreover, most of them were written in 2023, 2024, and 2025. China was the leading country (12), followed by England (10), Spain (9), India (8), and Portugal (8).

There is evidence in the literature that AI can contribute to sustainable tourism in various ways. AI-powered systems can optimize resource allocation, minimize energy consumption, and enhance waste management, thereby promoting sustainable tourism initiatives and reducing the industry's ecological footprint. AI can help to enhance services and improve health and safety measures (Gaur et al., 2021). Techniques such as social big data analysis, spatial modeling in GIS, and the use of user-contributed, geo-referenced photographs can be utilized in ecotourism. The sustainable use of tourism resources and conservation areas can also be leveraged to develop smart tourism strategies (Rahmadian et al., 2022). Additionally, AI with data mining can predict tourist flows and assist in reorganizing them to aid in cultural heritage preservation (Loureiro et al., 2022). Drones can be utilized to offer live virtual tours of open-space tourist destinations, a concept that represents an eco-friendly innovation (Elkhwesky et al., 2022). AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can further promote responsible tourism practices by encouraging tourists to make informed decisions about their travel and activities (Kirtil & Askun, 2021).

AI can support energy and resource efficiency in hospitality and tourism. AI systems can optimize heating, cooling, and lighting in hotels and resorts based on occupancy, weather, and usage patterns, reducing energy waste. AI-driven monitoring can detect water leaks or excessive usage, and adjust irrigation and water systems accordingly. AI can be used to identify when equipment needs servicing before it fails, reducing downtime and waste. AI tools like Winnow and Orbisk analyze food waste patterns in hotel kitchens and restaurants, suggesting adjustments to purchasing and preparation to minimize overproduction. Predictive algorithms can help manage stock more effectively, reducing over-ordering and spoilage, and ultimately leading to a decrease in food waste. AI can suggest eco-friendly travel and activity options based on user preferences, helping to reduce environmental footprints and providing personalized, low-impact experiences. AI-powered systems can monitor visitor flow in popular destinations and redirect traffic to reduce over-tourism and environmental degradation. This may lead to better crowd management. For example, Barcelona utilizes the data to mitigate overcrowding


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in areas such as La Rambla and Park Güell, directing tourists to less congested locations and promoting sustainability. Data-driven sustainability strategies can help calculate the carbon footprint. AI models can calculate emissions from tourism activities and support carbon offset planning. AI tools can automate the collection and analysis of sustainability metrics for hotels and tourism operators, aiding certification (e.g., Green Key, EarthCheck). AI can predict which guests are likely to opt out of daily cleaning or towel changes, and offer rewards accordingly. Additionally, AI can be used for smart destination management. It can help local governments and DMOs forecast demand, manage resources, and plan infrastructure sustainably. AI can predict natural disasters or environmental risks and help prepare or reroute visitors accordingly. For example, Amsterdam has been utilizing AI to enforce zoning, manage transportation, and encourage sustainable behavior by displaying real-time data to both residents and tourists. Furthermore, chatbots and virtual assistants can promote sustainability initiatives (e.g., towel reuse programs, low-carbon activities) to guests. AI can enhance customer engagement for sustainability. AI-driven platforms can encourage guests to make sustainable choices by offering incentives and providing interactive feedback through gamification.

The paper provides an insight into the contribution of AI in sustainable tourism. AI applications and practices in sustainable tourism from various destinations are presented. The paper is expected to stimulate a discussion about the benefits of AI in promoting sustainable tourism. Artificial intelligence (AI) can significantly contribute to sustainability in tourism and hospitality by optimizing resource use, enhancing visitor experiences, and promoting environmentally and socially responsible practices.

Artificial intelligence supports sustainability in tourism and hospitality by enhancing operational efficiency, promoting environmentally responsible behaviors, and facilitating more informed planning and decision-making. When aligned with policy and community values, AI becomes a powerful tool for building a more resilient and eco-conscious tourism industry. Utilizing AI in sustainability is crucial for destination managers and professionals in the hospitality and tourism sectors. Their initiatives for promoting AI in sustainable tourism can only succeed if they are well-understood and embraced by tourists and stakeholders. Future research should investigate the intentions, attitudes, behaviors, and satisfaction of stakeholders as they use or receive such services.

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# ON THE FUNCTIONALITIES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM OBSERVATORIES

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## ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism observatories are critical for guiding decision-makers toward responsible tourism development. As members of the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO), these entities track performance using various indicators, data visualization tools, and technological frameworks. Yet, their functional differences and technological foundations remain underexamined. This study compared multiple sustainable tourism observatories from diverse regions, including Biscay, Málaga, Barcelona, Mallorca, the Canary Islands, the Algarve, Buenos Aires, Alentejo, and South Tyrol. We investigated their functionalities - such as data visualization, thematic indicators, and interactivity - and the technologies supporting them. Information was gathered from official websites and public documentation, focusing on the types of charts, dashboards, and content management systems employed. The observatories commonly utilize data visualization platforms (notably Power BI) and present information using various chart formats (bars, lines, donuts, stacked bars). Some stand out by offering more diverse visualizations (horizontal box plots, semi-donuts). Many use Drupal or Wordpress, while others incorporate Ruby on Rails. User experience and interactivity vary widely, affecting how easily stakeholders can access and interpret data. Our comparison reveals a heterogeneous landscape of sustainable tourism observatories. While a few excel in offering rich, interactive dashboards and diverse visualizations, others present only limited data and minimal interactivity. The variability in technologies and functionalities suggests a need for more standardization to improve comparability and usability. Clear guidelines and best practices could support more consistent data presentation, ultimately empowering stakeholders to make evidence-based decisions that advance sustainable tourism goals.

**Key Words:** Sustainable tourism observatories; Destination Management Systems; Data visualization; User interactivity; Benchmarking; Tourism sustainability

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism destinations worldwide are increasingly establishing sustainable tourism observatories to systematically monitor tourism performance and impacts. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) launched the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO) in 2004 to support regular monitoring of tourism's economic, environmental, and social dimensions. These observatories collect and report indicators aligned with sustainable development goals and local priorities, providing data-driven insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders. By continuously tracking tourism impacts on destinations, observatories aim to foster evidence-based decision-making and improve destination sustainability and competitiveness. However, the technical implementation and feature sets of such observatory systems can vary widely in practice. Existing literature emphasizes the importance of robust Destination Management Systems (DMS) and observatories for sustainable tourism, but also notes gaps in their development. For instance, prior studies highlight the need for collaborative approaches in tourism monitoring and for integrating diverse data sources and stakeholders. Yet, there is a notable lack of research on the technical architectures and functionalities of in-production tourism observatories. Many DMOs recognize the value of data analytics and smart tourism tools to inform strategy (Fyall & Garrod, 2020), but the specific design features that make an


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observatory effective (or the absence thereof) are seldom examined in depth. This paper addresses that gap by benchmarking the functional and technological landscape of several
sustainable tourism observatories currently in operation. The goal of this study is to analyze how observatories differ in terms of features provided to users (such as data visualization types, interactivity, and customization) and the underlying technology stacks employed. By comparing observatories from different regions and governance contexts, we identify common strengths and weaknesses in current implementations. Key questions include: What tools and platforms are used to build these observatories? Which interactive functionalities are offered to end-users, and which expected capabilities are missing? Ultimately, the analysis seeks to derive recommendations to guide the design of next-generation tourism observatories that can better support sustainable destination management. The following sections describe the methodology for selecting and evaluating the observatories, present the comparative results, discuss the implications of the findings (including the evident heterogeneity and gaps), and propose recommendations for standardization and improved design.

**METHODS**

A comparative benchmarking approach was adopted to assess both the functionalities and technology stack of sustainable tourism observatory platforms. Nine observatories were selected for analysis, reflecting a diverse set of destinations and institutional contexts. These include observatories in Europe (Spain's Biscay, Barcelona, Mallorca, and Canary Islands; Portugal's Algarve and Alentejo; Italy's South Tyrol) and Latin America (Buenos Aires, Argentina), largely corresponding to members of the UNWTO INSTO network. Each observatory's official website or system was examined in depth between 2024 and 2025 to document its features and the apparent technologies used. The selection was intended to cover a range of implementations, from regional initiatives to city-level observatories, providing a broad view of current practices in sustainable tourism monitoring. For each observatory, data on a set of functional criteria were collected, based on features expected from literature and international guidelines on tourism monitoring. These criteria included: support for categorizing indicators (e.g., by thematic area), availability of interactive visualization (dynamic charts or dashboards), ability to download data (e.g., as CSV files), presence of dynamic querying tools (allowing users to define custom queries or indicators), filtering options (by year, category, etc.), diversity of visualization types offered (e.g., bar charts, line graphs, maps), textual search functionality, multi-language (translation) support, and user personalization features such as favorites or saved queries. Table 1 (in the Results) summarizes these functionalities for the nine observatories. The information was obtained by exploring each platform's interface and documentation. In cases where an observatory's platform was not publicly accessible (notably the Málaga observatory), the functionality could not be assessed (denoted as "–" in our results). In parallel, the study investigated the technology stack of each observatory as far as could be determined from public information. This included identifying the use of any business intelligence tools or charting libraries ("graphs" engines), content management systems (CMS), web development frameworks, and front-end/back-end technologies. Sources such as page metadata, technology badges, or repository documentation were used to infer these details. For example, the appearance of Microsoft Power BI logos or embedding links indicated use of Power BI, and references to Drupal or WordPress suggested those CMS platforms. This approach has limitations, as detailed system architecture is not always disclosed; thus, the tech stack analysis is based on best available evidence (see Table 2 for a summary). No human subjects were involved in this research, and all data were gathered from publicly available websites. The comparative analysis was primarily qualitative, identifying the presence or absence of features and technologies, with some basic categorization (e.g., "Yes", "No", or "Partial" support for a given functionality). The results were then synthesized to highlight patterns, unique innovations, and gaps. By examining multiple observatories side by side, the study derives insights into which functionalities are commonly implemented and which are rare, as well as how heterogeneous the technological approaches are. These insights form the basis for the discussion on standardization and design improvements.

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## RESULTS

Functional Features of Observatories: The evaluated observatories demonstrate a range of capabilities, summarized in Table 1. Most systems allow users to view tourism indicators separated by category (economic, environmental, social, etc.), a feature that enhances usability by enabling focused analysis on specific dimensions. For example, observatories in Biscay, Barcelona, Mallorca, Algarve, Alentejo, and South Tyrol clearly organize data by categories, whereas the Canary Islands and Buenos Aires observatories are more limited in this regard (offering fewer or less obvious category filters). A majority of the observatories (eight out of nine) provide interactive visualizations, such as interactive charts or dashboards that respond to user inputs. This is a common strength – platforms like Biscay's Tourism Intelligence System and the Algarve observatory feature dynamic charts that update based on selections. The only exception is the Málaga observatory, which (at the time of analysis) did not have a publicly accessible interactive platform. The prevalence of interactive visualization aligns with the observatories' goal of enhancing user engagement and understanding of data. Several observatories also support data download functionality, allowing users to export datasets for offline analysis. About half of the studied observatories (e.g., Biscay, Mallorca, Canary Islands, Algarve, and South Tyrol) offer downloads of indicator data in formats like CSV or XLS. This feature increases the transparency and reusability of observatory data. In contrast, some notable observatories like Barcelona and Buenos Aires do not provide public data downloads, which can restrict external analysts or stakeholders who may wish to perform their own analyses on the data. Notably, dynamic questioning – defined as the ability for users to formulate new queries or introduce new indicators through the interface – is absent in all observatories. This means none of the platforms allow end-users to go beyond the pre-defined indicators and filters to ask entirely new questions of the data. As described, dynamic questioning would enable a form of ad-hoc analysis (for example, combining variables in novel ways to explore specific hypotheses), but such functionality is currently a glaring gap. Users are generally constrained to the fixed set of indicators and visualizations that the observatory provides, without a sandbox for custom analysis. This represents a major area for improvement identified across the board. Basic filtering tools (e.g., selecting data by year, geographic area, or other sub-category) are present in some observatories but missing in others. Four observatories – Biscay, Barcelona, Canary Islands, and Algarve – support filtering of the displayed data by certain dimensions (such as time period or sub-region). For instance, the Algarve observatory interface allows filtering indicators by year and municipality. However, the remaining systems (Mallorca, Málaga, Buenos Aires, Alentejo, South Tyrol) offer little to no filtering beyond the predefined views. The lack of filtering in these cases limits users' ability to drill down into data subsets, making those observatories less flexible for refined queries. All the observatories provide a variety of visualization types (VT) to represent tourism indicators, usually including standard charts like bar graphs, line graphs (often used for time series), and pie or donut charts. This ensures that users can see data in multiple forms for better interpretation. For example, every observatory has at least bar and line charts, and many also incorporate pie or donut charts for proportional data. Some observatories stand out for offering a greater diversity of visualizations: the Algarve and Mallorca observatories, in particular, include more advanced chart types such as semi-donut charts, stacked bar charts, or even horizontal box plots. These advanced visualization options provide greater flexibility in data representation and suggest a higher level of


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sophistication in those platforms' front-end design. Other observatories like Biscay and Barcelona stick to a more conventional set of chart types (bars, lines, basic donut/pie), covering core needs but without the extended range. When it comes to collaborative and user-centric features, only a few observatories have begun to implement these. The ability to share specific queries or visualizations (sometimes described as shareable or permalinked questions) is a novel feature seen in just two cases. Both the Canary Islands and Algarve observatories enable users to share a particular data view or question with others (for instance, by generating a shareable link). This functionality can foster collaboration by allowing stakeholders to easily disseminate insights. Its rarity among the observatories indicates an innovation that has not yet been widely adopted. Similarly, textual search functionality is largely lacking. Only the Algarve observatory offers a full search tool that lets users quickly query datasets or indicators by keywords. This kind of search can greatly enhance user experience by pointing users directly to information of interest (e.g., typing "hotel occupancy" to find the relevant indicator). In other observatories, if present at all, search is limited (for example, Buenos Aires and Canary Islands might have a basic site search or filter-as-you-type in dropdown menus – effectively "partial" support) or completely absent. The absence of robust search features in most systems makes it harder for users to navigate large sets of indicators or find specific data quickly. Multi-language translation (TR) support is another critical feature, given that these observatories often serve international audiences. Here, the disparity is striking: the Algarve Sustainable Tourism Observatory is the only one that fully supports multiple languages (its interface and content are available in at least Portuguese and English). A few others offer partial translations – for example, the Biscay observatory is available in Spanish and Basque (but not English), and the Buenos Aires observatory provides content primarily in Spanish (with limited English pages). Overall, most systems lack comprehensive translation, which limits their usability for non-local or non-native users. An international researcher or stakeholder may struggle to use data from an observatory that is only presented in a local language. This represents another area for improvement, as tourism is a global industry and observatory findings often interest a global audience. Two additional features were assessed that relate to personalized user experience: recommendations and favorites. These are generally uncommon across the sample. Recommendations (such as suggesting related indicators or insights based on the data viewed) are almost never implemented – the South Tyrol observatory is the only one noted to have even a partially realized recommendation feature. This partial support might mean the system can suggest certain comparisons or notify users of relevant trends, but it is not a fully developed AI-driven recommendation engine. The favorites (bookmarking) feature – allowing a user to mark certain indicators or reports for quick access later – is offered exclusively by the Algarve observatory. By allowing data bookmarking, Algarve's platform enhances user convenience, particularly for frequent users (e.g., local officials tracking the same key metrics over time). No other observatory in the study provides a similar favorites mechanism, indicating that user personalization is still an emerging idea in this domain. To illustrate the comparative functionality of the observatories, Table 1 presents an overview of which features each system supports. In the table, "Yes" indicates the feature is present, "No" indicates it is not, "Partially" indicates limited or preliminary support, and "–" denotes information not available.

Table 1 Functional Comparison Between INSTO Observatories

| Observatory System | CS | IV | DD | DQ | FT | VT | TS | TR | FA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Biscay Tourism Intelligence System | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | bar, donut, horizontal bar, lines | No | Partially | No |
| Sustainable Tourism Observatory of Málaga | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Barcelona Tourism Observatory | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | bar, donut, horizontal bar, lines, stack bars | No | Yes | No |
| Mallorca Sustainable Tourism Observatory | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | bar, pie chart, semi-donut, stack bars | No | Yes | No |


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| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tourism Observatory of the Canary Islands | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | bar, donut, horizontal bar, lines, stack bars | Partially | Yes | No |
| Algarve Sustainable Tourism Observatory (AlgSTO) | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | bar, horizontal bar, lines, stack bars | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Tourism Observatory of the City of Buenos Aires | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | bar, horizontal bar, lines, stack bars | Partially | Partially | No |
| Alentejo Sustainable Tourism Observatory (ASTO) | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | horizontal bar, lines | No | Yes | No |
| Sustainable Tourism Observatory of South Tyrol (STOST) | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | bar, lines, stack bars | Partially | Partially | No |

(Note: "Yes" = feature fully present; "No" = not present; "Partially" = present in a limited form; "–" = no data / not applicable. Málaga's observatory was not publicly accessible for evaluation.) From Table 1, one can observe the variability in features. For instance, Algarve (AlgSTO) stands out as the only system with all assessed features except dynamic questioning – it even has unique offerings like favorites. In contrast, systems like Málaga (with no available data) and South Tyrol have the fewest features publicly visible. Most others fall in between, with common features like interactive charts but lacking the more advanced capabilities. Technology Stack and Implementation: In addition to functional differences, the observatories differ in their technological underpinnings. While a detailed breakdown of each system's architecture is beyond the public information available, Table 2 (below) summarizes notable elements of their tech stack as identified. A clear pattern is the frequent use of off-the-shelf solutions for data visualization and content management. Several observatories integrate Microsoft Power BI as the engine for their charts and dashboards – for example, Biscay, Barcelona, Mallorca, Buenos Aires, and South Tyrol all embed Power BI visualizations in their platforms. Power BI provides a quick way to deploy interactive dashboards, which likely contributed to its popularity; however, relying on it can limit how much the interface can be customized beyond the confines of the Power BI service. Some observatories are built on popular Content Management Systems (CMS). Barcelona and Buenos Aires use Drupal as a CMS, and Mallorca's observatory is built on WordPress with custom PHP code. These choices suggest an approach of extending general web frameworks for the observatory purpose. Using a CMS can ease development (providing user management, basic layouts, etc.), but might also impose certain constraints on functionality or require plugins for advanced features. In the cases observed, the CMS-based observatories seem to have fewer interactive features (e.g., Barcelona's site, while using Drupal, does not have data download or advanced search). This could indicate that a lot of effort went into integrating the CMS with BI elements (like Power BI embeds) but perhaps less into custom interactive components. In contrast, the Algarve observatory was developed as a bespoke web application using the Ruby on Rails framework. This custom development route likely allowed the inclusion of a more comprehensive feature set tailored to the observatory's needs (as evidenced by Algarve's rich functionality). The trade-off is that custom development requires more resources and technical expertise. Another observatory (Buenos Aires) appears to supplement its Drupal front-end with custom scripting, as references to jQuery were found, presumably to add interactive behavior on the client side.

Table 2 Technical Comparison Between INSTO Observatories

| Observatory System | Visualization Tool | CMS Platform | Frameworks / Backend | Frontend Tech |
|---|---|---|---|---|


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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Biscay Tourism Intelligence System | Power BI | – | – | – |
| Sustainable Tourism Observatory of Málaga | – | – | – | – |
| Barcelona Tourism Observatory | Power BI | Drupal | – | – |
| Mallorca Sustainable Tourism Observatory | Power BI | WordPress | PHP | – |
| Tourism Observatory of the Canary Islands | – | – | – | – |
| Algarve Sustainable Tourism Observatory | – | – | Ruby on Rails | – |
| Tourism Observatory of the City of Buenos Aires | Power BI | Drupal | – | jQuery |
| Alentejo Sustainable Tourism Observatory | – | – | – | – |
| Sustainable Tourism Observatory of South Tyrol | Power BI | – | – | – |

As shown in Table 2, at least five of the nine observatories leverage Power BI for their graphs, reflecting a common solution for data visualization. On the content management side, two use Drupal and one uses WordPress, while the others either custom-built their front-ends or the information is not disclosed. The Algarve observatory's use of Ruby on Rails is a distinctive case of a custom framework-driven implementation, likely contributing to its advanced capabilities. Meanwhile, some observatories (Canary Islands, Alentejo, Málaga) do not show evidence of using mainstream web frameworks or BI tools – this could mean they are relatively simple websites, or they use custom in-house systems not easily identified from outside. These differences in tech stack choices have practical implications. Observatories that opted for "plug-and-play" solutions like Power BI and established CMS platforms were probably able to deploy faster and with less coding effort, but may face limitations in extensibility. For example, an observatory built primarily by embedding a Power BI dashboard in a CMS page might struggle to implement custom interactive features (like dynamic queries or complex search functions) that fall outside what Power BI or the CMS can readily provide. On the other hand, those that invested in custom development (like Algarve) achieved a more tailored system but with higher initial development overhead.

**DISCUSSION**

The comparative findings reveal a landscape of sustainable tourism observatories that, while sharing common goals, exhibit marked heterogeneity in both functionality and technology. This heterogeneity suggests that there is currently no standard blueprint for designing a tourism observatory system – each destination has developed its platform with different priorities and constraints, leading to a patchwork of solutions. There are clear frontrunners in terms of feature richness (with Algarve's observatory being the most notable example), while others lag behind or focus on a narrower set of capabilities. One of the most striking observations is the overall gap in interactivity and user empowerment. Despite the rhetoric of "smart tourism" and advanced analytics, none of the studied observatories enables users to go beyond pre-configured views to ask new questions of the


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data in a truly flexible way. The absence of dynamic questioning tools across all cases is a significant shortcoming. This means that stakeholders – whether local policymakers, researchers, or businesses – are limited to the dashboard views and indicators chosen by the observatory managers. If a user's information need doesn't exactly match those pre-set indicators, they cannot directly explore it on these platforms. In an era where business intelligence tools and open data platforms are increasingly allowing users to slice and dice data ad hoc, observatories should consider incorporating such capabilities. Even relatively simple additions, like the ability to combine existing indicators or adjust the parameters of an indicator, could provide more value to end-users looking to tailor the analysis to their context. Relatedly, features that enhance user engagement and collaboration are scarce. For example, only two observatories (Algarve and Canary Islands) support sharing of specific analysis views. This is an important feature if the observatory is meant to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders – the ability to share a link or report with a colleague could spread insights more effectively. The general lack of a favorites/bookmark function also points to limited support for repeat or power users who might want to save a dashboard state for later reference. These omissions likely stem from many observatories using fairly static or packaged solutions (like fixed dashboards). To improve, designers of future observatories could draw inspiration from other domains (e.g., business analytics portals or social data platforms) to incorporate collaboration features such as sharing, commenting, or saving analytic "stories" for later. The use of Power BI and similar tools in many observatories indicates a pragmatic approach to quickly achieving interactive visualizations, but it also suggests a form of technological lock-in or constraint. Power BI dashboards come with predefined interaction modes and require licensing for full functionality; this might limit integration with other website components. Moreover, an over-reliance on such external tools might hinder the development of custom features (like the advanced search or cross-dataset queries we identified as missing). Indeed, the observatories that did not use Power BI (like Algarve) were the ones that managed to implement more novel features. This doesn't mean Power BI is detrimental – it provides excellent visual analytics – but it should be complemented with additional development if advanced interactivity is desired. In practice, a balance might be needed: using BI tools for rapid visualization development, while also investing in custom application logic for features like dynamic querying or user accounts. The finding that some observatories run on general-purpose CMS platforms (Drupal/WordPress) also has pros and cons. On one hand, CMSs make content updates and multi-language support easier (for instance, adding translated text or managing news updates). On the other hand, a CMS not specifically built for data visualization may require substantial customization to accommodate an observatory's needs. The variation in outcomes (Barcelona's Drupal-based observatory is functionally middling, whereas Mallorca's WordPress-based observatory includes a decent variety of charts) suggests that the success of a CMS approach depends on the degree of customization and integration performed. A recommendation here is that if a CMS is used, it should be augmented with specialized plugins or modules for data visualization and interactive filtering – or the team should be prepared to do custom coding to fill gaps. Otherwise, the observatory might end up with a lot of textual content (descriptions, analysis reports) but limited on-site data exploration capabilities. A significant implication of our analysis is the need for standardization in sustainable tourism observatory design. Given that many observatories aim to track similar indicators (often based on UNWTO's suggested framework or the SDGs), there is an opportunity to develop a more unified platform approach. Standardization could involve both the data aspects (common indicator definitions and data formats) and the functional aspects (a baseline set of features every observatory should offer). For example, one could envision a reference software framework for tourism observatories that ensures any new observatory has, at minimum: interactive charts, data download, filtering, multi-language UI, and perhaps a basic search – essentially, a template with core modules ready to deploy. Each observatory could then customize or extend this base according to local needs. Such a framework could be open-source and collaboratively developed by the community of practice, which would lower the barrier for new observatories and improve consistency. Importantly, it would help avoid the situation we see now where some observatories simply omit useful features (like data export or bilingual support) perhaps due to oversight or resource constraints, rather than because those features are not relevant. The lack of translation support in most observatories is a clear example where a standard expectation could make a difference. If all observatory platforms were expected to be bilingual (local language + English at least), it would greatly enhance knowledge sharing and comparative research. Currently, valuable data from, say, the Buenos Aires or Biscay observatory might not reach a wider audience due to language barriers. This is counterproductive to the very notion of an international network of observatories. Technical measures to improve this could include building multilingual capabilities into the core design (for instance, using a CMS or application framework that supports language files for interface text, and providing guidelines for translating indicator names and descriptions). Another dimension for improvement is interoperability and openness. The fact that about half the observatories provide downloadable data is good, but this practice should be universal. Standardizing on open data principles (machine-readable data, open licenses, APIs for access) would multiply the impact of observatories by allowing external developers and researchers to connect to the data. Only a few observatories might have APIs or data portals as of now; pushing this as a standard feature could unlock innovation (e.g., third-party apps or visualizations using the observatory data). Moreover, if observatories adopt


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common data schemas, it would be easier to aggregate or compare data across destinations – enabling meta-analysis of tourism sustainability indicators on larger scales. It is also worth discussing the apparent underutilization of predictive analytics and emerging tech like AI in the public-facing side of observatories. Some observatories (in narrative descriptions) were noted to use predictive models or AI internally to forecast tourism trends (e.g., Canary Islands, Barcelona, Mallorca were described as employing such techniques behind the scenes). Yet, as our results show, none have made such predictive insights available in their public dashboards. This might be due to caution in presenting uncertain forecasts, or simply a focus on historical descriptive data. Going forward, a more dynamic observatory could include scenario analysis or forecasting modules that let users see possible future trajectories under different assumptions. Coupling predictive models with user-adjustable parameters could even be a form of dynamic querying (e.g., "what if" analysis). Of course, this requires careful design to communicate uncertainty and avoid misinterpretation. But it remains an area of potential growth – especially since destinations are interested in forward-looking insights (e.g., anticipating visitor numbers or resource needs). Integrating AI in a user-centric way (rather than just as an internal tool) could differentiate next-generation observatories. For instance, AI could power recommendation features ("users who looked at this indicator also examined…" or "an anomaly was detected this month in beach visitor counts") to guide user attention to significant findings. From a destination management perspective, the varied maturity of observatories could affect how useful they are in practice. An observatory that provides rich, interactive data (like Algarve's) can serve as a decision support tool and a transparency portal, engaging stakeholders and informing policy. One that only offers static or minimal information might end up as a token website with limited audience. Ensuring that these observatories meet a certain quality standard is important if DMOs are to rely on them. It's notable that academic and industry discussions (Fyall & Garrod, 2020; Martins et al., 2021) stress the importance of stakeholder engagement and user-friendly design in destination management systems. Our analysis reinforces that observation: the more an observatory facilitates user interaction (through intuitive design, interactivity, and relevant features), the more likely it is to be actively used by stakeholders beyond just fulfilling a reporting requirement. Finally, the findings suggest recommendations for practitioners and developers of tourism observatories. First, when planning an observatory, carefully consider the core functionalities from the user's point of view: at minimum, enable filtering, comparison, and data export, as these are basic expectations for any analytical dashboard in today's context. Second, leverage existing technologies (BI tools, CMS) to jump-start development, but do not shy away from custom development for critical interactive features – a hybrid approach can yield better results than off-the-shelf alone. Third, design with multiple user groups in mind: policy makers might need high-level dashboards and downloadable reports, researchers might want raw data access and detailed query tools, local businesses might appreciate predictive insights or benchmarks, and the general public may need simplicity and language options. Balancing these needs is challenging, but a modular design (where advanced options can be revealed for power users, while casual users see a simpler interface) could be effective. Lastly, collaborate and learn from other observatories. Given the common goals, sharing best practices (through networks like INSTO or conferences) can help uplift the overall quality. For example, the success of the Algarve observatory in implementing a robust feature set can serve as a model for others – its approach (possibly a dedicated development team, user-centered design, etc.) could be documented and adapted.

## CONCLUSION

Sustainable tourism observatories play a vital role in measuring and communicating how tourism impacts destinations, aligning with global sustainability objectives. This study provided a comparative analysis of nine such observatories, uncovering a landscape of varied functionalities and technologies. We found that while interactive data visualization is now a staple of these platforms, there remain significant gaps in user interactivity, data accessibility, and system integration. No current observatory examined offers the full spectrum of ideal features – notably, dynamic querying and extensive user-oriented tools are missing everywhere – and the underlying technologies range from standalone business intelligence embeds to fully custom frameworks, each with its advantages and drawbacks. The heterogeneity observed suggests that many observatories have been developed in isolation, without a common guiding framework. As a result, some destinations benefit from comprehensive, user-friendly observatories, whereas others must contend with more limited systems. There is a clear need for greater standardization and knowledge-sharing in this domain. By establishing best-practice models and possibly a reference software framework for sustainable tourism observatories, DMOs and developers could avoid "reinventing the wheel" and ensure a higher baseline quality for all observatory initiatives. Key recommendations include: ensuring multilingual support and open data access by design, incorporating flexible data exploration tools to empower users, and balancing the use of ready-made tools (like Power BI, CMS platforms) with custom features to overcome their limitations. Implementing these recommendations would likely improve stakeholder engagement, as users find the observatories more useful and responsive to their needs. In summary, the evolution of sustainable tourism observatories is at a


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critical juncture. As destinations increasingly rely on data to guide recovery and growth in the tourism sector, observatories must evolve from static reporting dashboards to interactive decision-support systems. The findings of this analysis underscore that progress is being made – the building blocks (visualization, web platforms, etc.) are in place – but also that significant room for improvement remains. Future observatories, possibly built on collaborative frameworks and incorporating state-of-the-art user interaction design, can bridge the gaps identified. By doing so, they will better fulfill their mission of enabling continuous improvement in tourism sustainability and resilience (Dias et al., 2017), ultimately contributing to more informed and sustainable destination management in line with global best practices.

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# HOW AI-LLMS TRAINING ENHANCES FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION BY EMPOWERING PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

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## ABSTRACT

While prior research has explored the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (AI- LLMs) in employee training, such investigations remain fragmented. Moreover, the application of AI training for specific workplace challenges remains underexplored. To address these gaps, two field studies were conducted to examine whether the AI-LLM could mentor hospitality employees and improve their job satisfaction when encountering customer mistreatment. The results indicated that AI training enhanced employee job satisfaction by improving deep acting and psychological capital. This research explores the roles of AI-LLMs in the hospitality industry, offers insights into integrating AI-LLMs into employee training.

**Keywords:** *Artificial Intelligence; Large Language Models; Customer Mistreatment; Employee Job Satisfaction.*

## INTRODUCTION

The advent of AI and AI-LLMs has revolutionized industries worldwide, prompting researchers to focus on recognizing its transformative potential. Currently, AI has been harnessed in the hospitality industry (i.e., AI service robot, Li et al., 2021), showing its intersection with conventional human job duties. However, human employees remain irreplaceable, particularly in scenarios requiring empathy, critical thinking, and complex problem-solving competencies (Wong et al., 2023), such as addressing customer mistreatment. Customer mistreatment has been demonstrated to undermine employees' well-being, and reduce their job satisfaction (van Jaarsveld et al., 2021). This detrimental impact may stem from insufficient training programs specifically designed to equip employees with skills for handling such workplace challenges. Although current research on staff training predominantly emphasizes general work-related knowledge and skill development (Waqanimaravu & Arasanmi, 2020; Wirtz & Jerger, 2016), such training is rarely applied to addressing customer mistreatment, leaving a significant gap in this area.

Moreover, while studies on employee training have demonstrated a positive association between training participation and performance improvement, such initiatives are often linked to substantial financial expenses and significant time demands (Z. Chen, 2023; Lee & Bugler, 2017). Additionally, conventional group-based training approaches lack the flexibility to accommodate individual differences such as personality and competence. AI- assisted training may provide a new perspective for addressing these limitations by providing both accessible and personalized training (Z. Chen, 2023). However, despite its potential, the exploration of AI-based training remains in its early stages, and further empirical research is required.

To address these gaps, this study employs an AI-LLM as a mentor (assuming the role of a proficient hotel employee), tailoring its training approach to individual employee in effectively managing customer mistreatment. This training process was proposed to enhance employees' deep acting as well as psychological capital, which would ultimately lead to higher job satisfaction. Two studies were conducted to verify these propositions, Study 1 preliminarily explored the AI-LLM's mentoring efficacy in improving employee job satisfaction when facing customer mistreatment, while Study 2 was adopted to further explore the mediating effects of deep acting and psychological capital. This research extends the current understanding of AI-LLMs' new applications in the hospitality industry, specifically in the context of employee job satisfaction when responding to customer mistreatment. Practically, it provides valuable insights into a possible application of integrating AI-LLMs into employee training systems.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

*Application of AI and LLMs in the hospitality industry*


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Recently, AI technologies have been increasingly leveraged in the hospitality industry to enhance customer service (Limna, 2023). For example, AI has been deployed in online travel agencies, generating personalized itineraries (Seyfi et al., 2025). Within hotels, AI service bots are utilized for tasks such as delivering items (e.g., food and drinks), facilitating check-ins, and engaging in resolving common issues (Li et al., 2021). While these capabilities of AI demonstrate their potential to streamline operations, they also overlap with traditional human job responsibilities, leading to a reduced demand for human employees (Limna, 2023). However, human staff remain indispensable in some situations (Wong et al., 2023). As effective service communication fundamentally requires emotional intelligence - the ability to genuinely convey emotions, adapt responses, and employ nuanced interpersonal skills (Z. Chen, 2023) - a capability that current AI systems inherently lack when dealing with complex situations like customer mistreatment. On the other hand, customers in such contexts demand exceptional service quality and personalized attention, making human staff indispensable (Wong et al., 2023).

*The customer mistreatment experienced by frontline hospitality employees and their training needs*

Frontline hospitality employees, inevitably encounter significant stress and endure customer mistreatment (Wirtz & Jerger, 2016), which often stems from uncivil customers who hold unfair demands, driven by the belief that they hold power in the consumer-provider relationship (Grandey et al., 2004). Research has shown that customer mistreatment negatively impacts employees' well-being, resulting in reduced job satisfaction and heightened
turnover intentions (van Jaarsveld et al., 2021). Therefore, organizations should provide training sessions to equip employees with the skills to address customer mistreatment.

Previous research on employee training has demonstrated a positive relationship between training participation and enhanced job satisfaction (Chiang et al., 2005). Traditional training approaches, such as classroom-based training and mentoring, which involve experienced professionals (the mentor) providing career and psychosocial support to less experienced practitioners (apprentices, Janssen et al., 2016), remain widely adopted. However, their effectiveness varies significantly depending on trainers' abilities and backgrounds (Lee & Bugler, 2017). Moreover, research on staff training primarily focuses on enhancing employees' work-related knowledge and competence (Waqanimaravu & Arasanmi, 2020; Wirtz & Jerger, 2016), remaining a notable gap in the development of targeted training programs designed to address specific workplace challenges, such as customer mistreatment.

*The potential of applying AI-LLMs in employee training*

Although the application of AI-assisted training for developing employees' general skills remains exploratory, preliminary findings have demonstrated its advantages compared to traditional approaches, particularly in enabling personalized, flexible, and accessible learning experiences (Z. Chen, 2023). Unlike conventional group-based training, AI-assisted systems adapt content to individual competencies and learning needs, offering tailored instruction. Additionally, human-AI interaction provides immediate responses to employee queries, enabling on- demand learning regardless of time or location (Z. Chen, 2023). Capitalizing on AI-LLMs' non-deterministic simulation capabilities (Shanahan et al., 2023), researchers have begun leveraging their character-emulating potential for training purposes (e.g., Maurya, 2024). These traits exemplify AI's capacity to emulate core real-time mentoring functions, especially through scaffolded learning with personalized feedback (Kamarudin et al., 2020). However, current applications of AI training for frontline hospitality employee development remain limited, particularly in handling specialized challenges like customer mistreatment.

Building on the character-emulating capabilities and mentoring potential of AI-LLMs, this research proposes utilizing an AI-LLM to play the role of a mentor, designed as a frontline hospitality employee with exceptional expertise (e.g., exhibiting concern, empathy and patience), mentoring employees in addressing customer mistreatment. Specifically, the study aims to explore whether specific interactions with the AI-LLM help employees formulate appropriate work expectations and emulate the positive traits demonstrated by the AI-LLM, ultimately enhancing their job satisfaction.

*Research hypotheses*

This research aims to investigate whether AI training could help enhance employees' job satisfaction- defined as the extent to which individuals like or dislike their jobs (Spector, 1997)- by leveraging the role-playing capabilities of AI-LLMs. During the training, the AI-LLM acts as a mentor (a sophisticated frontline employee) who demonstrates customer care and handles customer mistreatment with professionalism. Previous studies have found the positive impact of training on job satisfaction has been demonstrated (Lowry et al., 2002; Schmidt, 2010). Remarkably, improvements in job satisfaction were observed immediately after a single training session (see Jones et al., 2008). Based on these findings, this research hypothesizes:


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**H1.** AI training leads to higher job satisfaction among frontline staff compared to the non-training group when managing customer mistreatment behaviors.

Emotional labor refers to the emotional regulation strategy where employees are required to display emotions that align with the organization's "service with a smile" policy (Grandey et al., 2005). This means employees must maintain positive emotions even when dealing with impolite or unreasonable customers. There are generally two processes for displaying the required emotions when facing emotional-rule conflicts: either by faking the requested emotion (surface acting) or attempting to modify one's inner feelings to align with the positive emotions -deep acting (Hochschild, 1983). Previous studies have shown that deep acting is positively correlated with outcomes such as well-being and job satisfaction (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011). In this study, it is expected that the traits exhibited by the AI mentor during training — such as empathy, concern and patience—will serve as role models. This, in turn, will encourage employees to emulate the AI mentor's behavior when addressing customer mistreatment through deep acting. Thus, this study hypothesizes:

**H2.** Receiving AI training promotes the utilization of deep acting strategies among participants compared to those in the non-training group when addressing customer mistreatment.

**H3.** Deep acting mediates the relationship between receiving AI training and job satisfaction.

Performing deep acting has been found to positively relate to self-efficacy (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), as employees experience a sense of fulfillment in their capacity to deliver personalized service (Hochschild, 1983). Additionally, by altering their inner emotional state to a positive one, individuals genuinely experience positive emotions, which can contribute to heightened positive effects and overall happiness (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011). It is expected that AI training will enhance psychological capital, a construct comprising four mental resources: self- efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience (G. Chen et al., 2024). As previous studies have demonstrated the positive relationship between psychological capital and job satisfaction, as well as mentoring and psychological capital (Carter & Youssef-Morgan, 2019), this research postulates:

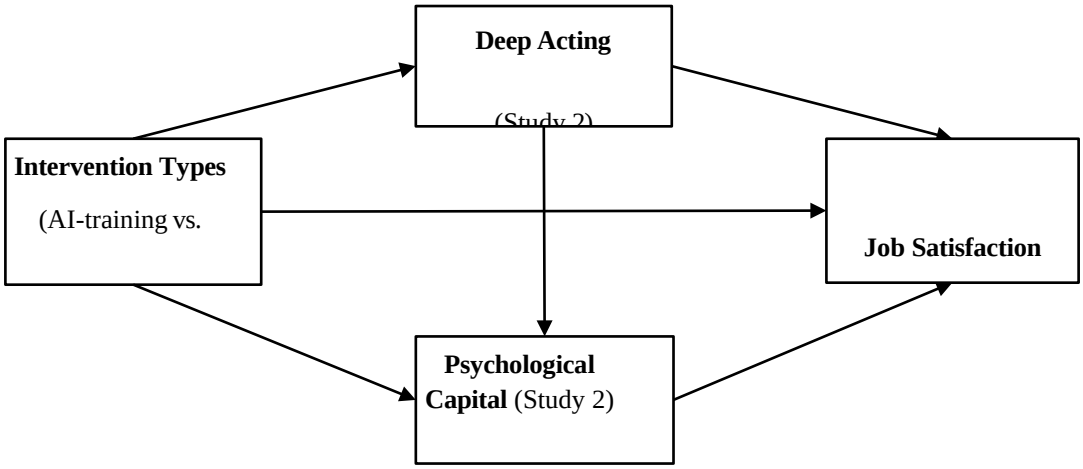
**H4.** Psychological capital acts as a mediator between receiving AI training and job satisfaction.

**H5.** Deep acting and psychological capital exhibit chain-mediation effects in the relationship between receiving AI training and job satisfaction.

*Overview of research*

Experimental methods were implemented to test the proposed hypotheses under the customer mistreatment simulation scenario. Study 1 was designed to examine the AI-LLM's mentoring efficacy in enhancing employee job satisfaction (H1). Study 2 was adopted to replicate Study 1 and to further explore the mediating effects of deep acting and psychological capital (H2-H5). See Fig. 1 for the overview of the research framework.

Figure. 1
The Research Framework




**STUDY 1**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*Sample and design*

Fifty-nine (32% male, 68% female) frontline hotel employees from Four- to Five-star Hotels in Zhejiang Province participated in this study; see Table 1 for the sample details in Study 1. A 2-group (AI training Vs. non-training) between-subjects experimental design was adopted. A mistreatment scenario was pre-validated by eighty-six hotel frontline employees (Mage = 35.57, SD = 10.83) selecting from 7 scenarios (i.e., Spoke aggressively, impatient) that with the highest average value of customer mistreatment scale (Wang et al., 2023). The scenario demonstrated a situation where a customer was trying to get a room at an unreasonable price and yelling at the front desk employee when being rejected.

*Procedure*

Participants were randomly assigned to two intervention groups: AI training and non-training. In the non-training group, employees were required to complete a questionnaire. First, they read a brief customer mistreatment scenario description. Then, they wrote their response from the employee's perspective. Finally, they completed the rest of the questionnaire, which evaluated their job satisfaction. In the AI training group, participants were asked to engage in a five-minute interactive session with Doubao, an AI-based frontline service agent powered by LLMs. In this session, participants played the role of an unreasonable customer, recreating a highly memorable mistreatment scenario from their own work experiences while Doubao was the mentor (a sophisticated front desk employee). The goal was for participants to observe and learn from Doubao's response strategies (e.g., attitude and communication skills) in handling customer mistreatment and apply them in the questionnaire. Then followed the same procedure as the control groups. Besides, they were asked to imagine themselves as an AI employee when giving responses.

*Measures*

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was measured with a three-item scale (i.e., "I am satisfied with my job," Amissah et al., 2021) using a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The reliability for the measure was 0.95.

*Manipulation check*

To evaluate the success of perspective-taking, participants in the AI-training group were asked if they had imagined themselves as AI agents before completing the questionnaire and whether their responses were primarily based on Doubao's response strategies learned during the interaction session. Meanwhile, participants in the non-training group were asked if they had imagined the situation occurring in their real working environment, and whether they relied on their work experiences to handle the scenario.

**RESULTS**

Twenty-seven participants (96.4%, *M* = 1.04, *SD* = 0.19) in the non-training group agreed with the statement that they had visualized the mistreatment scenario in their workplace and confirmed that they mainly used their work experience or intention when responding. In the AI-training group, 29 hotel employees (93.5%, *M* = 1.06, *SD* = 0.25) acknowledged that they had envisioned themselves as AI agents, and 30 of them (96.8%, *M* = 1.03, *SD* = 0.18) stated that they primarily relied on their interaction experience with Doubao when making their response.

**Table 1**

Sample Profile

| | | Study 1 | | Study 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | AI Training | Non-training | AI Training | Non-training |
| Age | 18-25 | 18 (58.1%) | 19 (67.9%) | 44 (57.1%) | 52 (64.2%) |
| | 26-30 | 4 (12.9%) | 2 (7.1%) | 15 (19.5) | 12 (14.8%) |
| | 31-40 | 6 (19.4%) | 5 (17.9%) | 12 (15.6%) | 12 (14.8%) |
| | > 41 | 3 (9.7%) | 2 (7.1%) | 6 (7.8%) | 4 (4.9%) |
| Gender | Male | 10 (32.3%) | 9 (32.1%) | 36 (46.8%) | 26 (32.1%) |



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| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | 21 (67.7%) | 19 (67.9%) | 41 (53.2%) | 55 (67.9%) |
| Education | High School and below | 2 (6.5%) | 6 (21.4%) | 2 (2.6%) | 13 (16%) |
| | Associate Degree | 15 (48.4%) | 12 (42.9%) | 44 (57.1%) | 48 (59.3%) |
| | Bachelor's Degree | 13 (41.9%) | 10 (35.7) | 28 (36.4%) | 20 (24.7%) |
| | Master's Degree and Above | 1 (3.2%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (3.9%) | 0 (0%) |

An independent sample T-test revealed that participants in the AI-training group reported a higher level of job satisfaction when compared to the non-training group ($M_{AI-trainintt}$ = 11.84, $SD_{AI-trainintt}$ = 1.79, $M_{Non-trainintt}$ = 10.11, $SD_{Non-trainintt}$ = 3.28, $t = -2.479$, $p < .05$), indicating that receiving AI training increases participants' job satisfaction. Thus, H1 was supported.

**STUDY 2**

As Study 1 identified the positive effects of AI training on hospitality employees, the underlying process remains unclear. Thus, the purpose of Study 2 is to further explore the underlying mechanism (H2-H5).

*Sample and design*

A total of 158 (39% Male) Four- to Five-Star Hotel front-line employees were recruited from Zhejiang Province. Table 1 shows demographic information in Study 2. A one-factor, between-subjects design (AI-training vs. non- training) was conducted using the same customer mistreatment scenario from Study 1.

*Procedure*

A similar process to Study 1 was utilized. After being assigned to one of the two conditions, participants in the non- training group were required to imagine experiencing the given customer mistreatment scenario and provide a proper response to the customer, then fill out the questionnaire. In the AI-training condition, employees first interacted with the AI agent, Doubao, for five minutes, adopting the perspective of a rude customer. They were then asked to imagine themselves as the AI agent while addressing the mistreatment context before completing the questionnaire.

*Measures*

Deep acting

Deep acting was measured with a three-item scale, using a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree, Amissah et al., 2021). Sample items include "I try to actually experience the emotions that I must express to the customer." The reliability for this measure was 0.86.

Psychological Capital

Psychological capital was measured using three instruments adapted from Chen et al. (2024). A sample item is "I always focus on the positive aspects of my job." Responses to each instrument were given on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The scale's Cronbach's α in this study was 0.86. The same measure of job satisfaction (the reliability = 0.81) and manipulation checks from Study 1 were adopted.

**RESULTS**

Regarding the manipulation check, seventy-seven employees (95.1%, *M* = 1.05, *SD* = 0.22) in the non-training group agreed that they had envisioned the mistreatment scenario occurring in their workplace and confirmed that they relied mainly on their work experience or intention when responding. In the AI-training group, 72 hotel employees (93.5%, *M* = 1.06, *SD* = 0.25) confirmed that they had imagined themselves as AI agents and primarily used their interaction experience with Doubao when giving responses. A mediation analysis was conducted utilizing the PROCESS macro (Model 6) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples to test the indirect effect of thinking strategy on employees' job satisfaction through deep acting and psychological capital. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were calculated to assess significance. The result indicates that AI training contributed to greater employment of deep acting strategy ($\beta$ = 0.39, *SE* = 2.49, *p* = .01), supporting H2. The indirect effect of training strategy on employees' job satisfaction through deep acting and psychological capital was significant ($\beta$ = 0.09, SE = 0.06, CI [0.01, 0.25]), suggesting that receiving AI-training led to more job satisfaction through the sequential mediation of deep acting strategy and psychological capital indicated a significant total


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mediation effect, H5 was supported. However, the indirect effect of AI training on job satisfaction through deep acting was not significant ($\beta$ = 0.21, SE= 0.14, CI [-0.01, 0.53]), suggesting that deep acting did not significantly contribute to changes in job satisfaction. Similarly, the indirect effect of training strategy through psychological capital on job satisfaction was not significant ($\beta$ = 0.1, SE = 0.14, CI [-0.15, 0.4]), indicating that psychological capital failed to predict job satisfaction. Thus, H3 and H4 were rejected.

## DISCUSSION

The results of Study 1 demonstrated that hospitality employees' job satisfaction could be significantly enhanced through AI training compared to the non-training group. This finding aligns with mainstream research, which suggests that receiving training, even a single session, can lead to increased job satisfaction (Jones et al., 2008; Lowry et al., 2002; Schmidt, 2010). Study 2 revealed that receiving AI training encouraged employees to adopt deep acting strategies, suggesting that they sought to internalize the traits demonstrated by the AI-LLMs during the training. Furthermore, the training enhanced the adoption of deep acting, which subsequently boosted psychological capital, ultimately leading to a more positive attitude toward their work. This aligns with findings that deep acting can strengthen psychological capital, fostering an overall improvement in job-related attitudes (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011). The result indicated that deep acting and psychological capital failed to mediate the relationship between receiving training and job satisfaction, which may be attributed to the insufficient frequency of the training, as Ghosh et al.(2019) research revealed that the contact frequency matters.

## IMPLICATIONS

This research fundamentally redefines the AI-human dynamic in the hospitality field by demonstrating how AI-LLM can serve as an empowering mentor rather than a replacement. Specifically, when the AI-LLM, Doubao plays the role of a sophisticated employee (the Mentor), it simultaneously provides staff with practical skills to handle customer mistreatment while modeling exemplary professional conduct (e.g., concern, empathy and patience). This dual function - offering both concrete skill development for workplace challenges and professional role modeling that fosters positive work attitudes - creates a unique value proposition for AI-LLMs in employee training. Importantly, by enabling employees to internalize these professional traits through observational learning and practice, this research explores the possibilities for implementing AI-LLMs in workforce development, ultimately highlighting how artificial intelligence can collaborate with and enhance human capabilities rather than simply automating or replacing them.

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# A CROSS-NATIONAL STUDY ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE-ENABLED PERSONALIZATION, INFORMATION DISCLOSURE BEHAVIOURS AND SATISFACTION WITH TOURISM SERVICES

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## ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is expected to continue to have a transformative impact on the wider business sector as well as the Tourism sectors in the short, medium and long term. Collectively, AI continues to enhance business efficiency and managerial strategic decision-making, and more importantly facilitates higher levels of personalization and improved customer experiences through data driven insights. This study focuses on the interplay between consumer desire for higher levels of personalization, requisite concerns with privacy and trust of AI, across a developed and developing country contexts, specifically, in the USA and Indonesia—respectively. The study aims to critically examine the factors driving AI-Enabled Personalization (AIEP) consumer adoption perspectives across countries and impact on their willingness to share personal data and satisfaction with Tourism Services. In addition, the study investigates the moderating roles of generational differences and technology readiness cross nationally. The researchers propose and test a conceptual model which draws mainly on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), the Trust Model, Privacy-Calculus Theory and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. Data will be collected using surveys with a sample totalling approximately 600-800 domestic and international leisure travellers who have travelled within last 12 months, 300-400 each from the USA and Indonesia. Structural Equation Modelling will be used to analyse the core relationships and proposed hypotheses in the study. The main theoretical contribution addresses the call for the advancement of research around personalisation, privacy and security issues, and the adoption of AI in the tourism sector (Canhoto et al., 2023; Knani et al., 2022; Tussyadiah, 2020) and develops a cross-national conceptual framework for the adoption of AI-Driven Tourism Services. Furthermore, the study will provide beneficial comparative insights into AI and the personalisation-privacy paradox for firms in the sector and enable the effective tailoring of services particularly for those operating across national markets.

**Key Words:** Artificial Intelligence, Personalisation, Privacy, Trust, Disclosure, Satisfaction, Cross-national, Leisure Tourism.


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# LEVERAGING AI IN CO-CREATION: REDUCING STRESS AND EFFORT TO ENHANCE GUEST SATISFACTION IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

**Problem Definition:** Customers planning their vacations are often overwhelmed by the abundance of choices, which leads to heightened choice stress and increased effort. This stress negatively affects their satisfaction with the planning process and their behavioral intentions toward vacation suppliers. While co-creation processes can empower customers by giving them more control over their choices, the complexity of these processes can magnify choice stress and increase the effort required, further diminishing satisfaction.

This is where artificial intelligence (AI) plays a pivotal role. AI serves as a facilitator in the co-creation process, simplifying decision-making, reducing cognitive and emotional burdens, and minimizing the effort required for customers to actively participate in co-creation. By optimizing the co-creation process, AI has the potential to alleviate choice stress, enhance satisfaction, and foster favorable attitudes and behaviors toward vacation suppliers and brands.
Despite the growing use of AI in hospitality, the extent to which it moderates the relationship between customer value co-creation (CVC), choice stress, effort, and satisfaction remains underexplored. This research addresses a critical gap in understanding how AI enhances the co-creation process by mitigating cognitive and emotional barriers, thereby improving customer satisfaction and encouraging positive behavioral intentions toward brands.

## OBJECTIVES

To investigate the moderating role of AI usage in amplifying the positive effects of CVC by mitigating choice stress and effort.
To provide actionable insights for hospitality businesses on leveraging AI tools to optimize customer experiences and foster guest satisfaction.

## METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

This study adopts a quantitative approach, utilizing online surveys to collect data from 450 participants. The survey instrument includes validated scales measuring CVC, AI usage, choice stress, perceived effort, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed for data analysis using SPSS and LISREL software. The moderating effects of AI usage were tested through interaction analysis, and the mediating roles of choice stress and effort were examined via bootstrapping methods.
**Findings:** The expected results reveal significant relationships among the variables in the proposed model. Specifically, CVC was found to reduce choice stress and perceived effort, both of which mediated its impact on customer satisfaction. AI usage emerged as a significant moderator, amplifying the stress- and effort-reducing effects of CVC, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and strengthening behavioral intentions. The findings demonstrate that integrating AI tools into co-creation processes can streamline decision-making, reduce cognitive burdens, and foster greater satisfaction among customers.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study extends the existing co-creation literature by introducing choice stress and effort as mediating variables and AI usage as a moderating factor. The proposed framework bridges gaps in understanding how technology-


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mediated co-creation processes influence customer experiences in the hospitality industry. Additionally, this research integrates theories such as Cognitive Load Theory and Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory to provide a robust explanation of the relationships among CVC, AI usage, and customer satisfaction.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

From a practical perspective, this study highlights the critical role of AI in enhancing customer experiences during co-creation processes. Hospitality businesses can leverage AI tools to reduce choice stress and effort, providing personalized recommendations and simplifying complex decision-making tasks. By incorporating AI technologies, businesses can improve service quality, boost customer satisfaction, and foster stronger behavioral intentions, such as repeat usage. These insights are particularly valuable for organizations seeking to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive market.

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# ROBOTS, EMPLOYEES, AND CUSTOMERS: NAVIGATING THE ETHICAL LANDSCAPE OF SERVICE AUTOMATION IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRIES

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The Hospitality and Tourism (H&T) industries have witnessed an exponential growth in service robot adoption (Fu et al., 2024). While these service robots offer a wide range of benefits, ethical considerations are often overlooked leading to unforeseen circumstances (Law et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2024). In this context, ethics refers to the moral principles and values that govern the development, deployment, and use of these service robots (Coeckelbergh, 2020). Accordingly, this review seeks to identify key ethical considerations surrounding the integration of service robots in the H&T industry. To address this, we draw on stakeholder theory, which posits that organizations must consider the interests and impacts on all relevant stakeholders (Freeman, 2010). This paper qualitatively reviews literature to outline the ethical landscape, guiding responsible robot implementation in H&T from the perspectives of robots, employees, and customers.

From the perspective of service robots themselves, a key issue is developer and programming bias, as robots may unintentionally reflect the beliefs and biases of their creators, leading to discriminatory behavior (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2023). Milwood et al. (2023) report cases where robots fail to recognize or communicate with certain demographic groups, raising inclusivity concerns. Gender stereotyping and lack of ethnic representation in robot design further exacerbate ethical dilemmas (Fusté-Forné & Jamal, 2021; Ivanov & Umbrello, 2021; Seo, 2022). Additionally, as robots rely on continuous data input, risks of hacking, malicious data use, and privacy infringement increase (Etemad-Sajadi et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2024). Robot autonomy further raises accountability concerns, particularly in cases of malfunction (Rana et al., 2024). Ethical discussions also extend to robot rights, as reports of deliberate robot sabotage and harassment prompt debates on their moral status (Huang & Dootson, 2022; Jin, 2024). Mitigating these challenges requires rigorous safety protocols, performance audits, and transparency mechanisms.

From an employee perspective, ethical concerns center on job displacement, wage stagnation, and shifting work dynamics (Skubis et al., 2024; Tuomi et al., 2021). Increased automation threatens employment in roles such as delivery, concierge, and housekeeping (Cain et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2020). Employees also face stress and anxiety due to dehumanization, surveillance concerns, and adapting to robot collaboration (Koç & Baykal, 2023; Etemad-Sajadi et al., 2022). To address these concerns, organizations should ensure transparent communication, provide collaborative training, implement reskilling initiatives, and deploy robots strategically to complement human labor. Strategic deployment of robots for repetitive tasks can free up human employees to focus on roles requiring emotional intelligence, complex problem-solving, and interpersonal skills, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of service.

For customers, ethical concerns revolve around privacy, security, and safety. Continuous data collection and AI-powered surveillance raise transparency issues, heightening privacy anxieties (Belk, 2021; Fusté-Forné & Jamal, 2021). Customers, especially vulnerable groups such as older adults and individuals with disabilities, may experience discomfort interacting with autonomous robots (Rana et al., 2024). Additionally, the absence of human empathy and adaptability in robots contributes to customer dissatisfaction, particularly in complex service scenarios (Koç & Baykal, 2023). Organizations should enhance data transparency, proactively engage customers, and maintain options for human interaction. Maintaining a balance between technological innovation and the human touch is essential for ensuring customer satisfaction and trust.

By addressing the ethical challenges associated with service robot deployment, the H&T industry can harness the full potential of this transformative technology. Overall, this paper contributes to the nascent body of literature on service robot ethics by offering a stakeholder-centric ethical evaluation of service robot deployment in the H&T sector. It provides practical recommendations for organizations and policymakers to navigate the complex ethical landscape and ensure responsible technological advancement


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in the industry. The study is timely and relevant to the academic and industry discourse of service robot ethics.

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# BRIDGING CULTURES IN SERVICE RECOVERY: EXPLORING AI-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS ACROSS BORDERS

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

## PROBLEM DEFINITION

Service failure is inevitable in the service industry because of heterogeneous nature of the service industry in terms of consumer preferences, the inconsistency of front-line employee performance and uncontrollable factors such as weather conditions (Lee et al., 2008). Researchers (Fan et al., 2023; Guo et al., 2024) suggest that AI- driven virtual assistant can play a pivotal role in service recovery strategy, where AI-programmed virtual assistant and chatbot can be as effective as a human service agent in solving initial service failure of a customer. The artificial empathy, such as empathic concern and emotional contagion embedded in the virtual assistants, could enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty during the service recovery process. This can be achieved by narrowing the gap between human and AI through artificial empathy (Liu- Thompkins et al., 2022).

## OBJECTIVES

While there has been a plethora of recent research on AI-driven service recovery (Guo et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2021; Huang & Ha, 2020), the role of AI in service recovery from global consumers' perspective received little attention. Given the global nature of the service industry, from airlines to hotels, it is critical AI-driven service recovery from a global consumer's perspective. Therefore, we compare Korean and American consumers to examine potential differences in their preferences regarding AI-driven service recovery. This study aims to answer the following research questions.

1. Is there a significant difference in preferences for e-service recovery by an AI service agent between Koreans and Americans?
2. How does culture influence perceptions of e-service recovery by an AI service agent?

## METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions, study participants will be recruited from both Korea and the U.S. who have prior experience with AI service agents. A scenario based on experiments, a common method in service marketing research, will be developed to answer research questions (Kim & Jang, 2014).

Theoretical & Practical Contribution

It is expected that the findings will reveal cultural differences in consumer preferences and perceptions of AI-driven service recovery between Koreans and Americans. Our results can provide valuable insights to service industry executives by helping them tailor AI-based service recovery strategies that consider cultural preferences in global markets.

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# THE BENEFITS OF SERVICE ROBOTS IN TRAVEL INTENTION: ROLE OF PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY IN CUSTOMER PERCEIVED VALUE

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## ABSTRACT

For decades, the hospitality industry has emphasized the significance of personalized services in enhancing service quality. While the concept of service personalization was explored long before its advantages were fully recognized, recent advancements have significantly deepened our understanding of service robot adoption. Nonetheless, these developments also reveal persistent theoretical ambiguities in this field. Contemporary studies underscore the influence of service robots on travel intention and hotel loyalty in establishments that employ such technologies.

Previous studies have established that the integration of AI into the service delivery process is not merely a passing trend but a steadily growing phenomenon. This underscores the necessity of aligning service innovations with the specific needs and preferences of users. To address this gap, the present research seeks to investigate the benefit factors of service robots- namely social, functional, and hedonic benefits -from the perspective of hotel guests. By doing so, it aims to provide deeper insights into perceived service quality, and human-robot interaction factors such as value co-creation and perceived empathy, as well as the perceived value process within the context of hotels employing service robots. This study highlights the critical role of personalized services in generating customer value by leveraging the benefits of service robots. Furthermore, it examines the impact of these benefits on the relationship between perceived service quality, value co-creation, perceived empathy, and the perceived value process in shaping customers' intention to visit. The study also examines the moderating effect of anthropomorphism. In this context, it investigates whether anthropomorphism moderates the impact of service quality on co-creation and perceived empathy.

Grounded in the Social Exchange Theory, this study explores the role of perceived benefits associated with service robots in shaping customer intention. A methodological approach involving visual stimuli and scenario-based introductions was employed. Data were collected through a survey completed by 215 respondents from the United Kingdom who had traveled in the past year via Prolific platform. The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling.

The study reveals several key findings. First, the results indicate that functional and social benefits significantly influence perceived service quality. Second, perceived service quality positively impacts value co-creation and perceived empathy. Third, human-robot interaction factors, namely value co-creation and perceived empathy, have a positive influence on perceived value. Fourth, perceived value has a positive influence on the intention to visit. The study also found that anthropomorphism moderates the relationship between perceived service quality and perceived empathy. Specifically, when anthropomorphism is high, the effect of service quality on perceived empathy is stronger.

The study investigates the role of service robot benefits in shaping customers' evaluations of these technologies. Additionally, it expands on the concepts of guests' perceived service quality, perceived empathy, and value co-creation by examining how service robot benefits influence customer intention to visit and the outcomes of perceived customer value. Understanding how the benefits of service robots create value in consumers' minds through human-robot interaction is critical for advancing personalization


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and customization in AI-based services. Consequently, this study emphasizes the need for managers in hospitality sector to integrate personalized travel services into service robot delivery systems.

**Key Words:** service robots, perceived service quality, value co-creation, perceived empathy, perceived value and travel intention.

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# UTILIZING SENTIMENT, THEMATIC CLUSTERING, AND WORD CLOUD ANALYSIS TO TEST THE EFFECTS OF EXPERIENTIALISM THEORY VIA 360-DEGREE VIRTUAL REALITY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores undergraduate student reflections regarding the integration of 360-degree Virtual Reality (VR) content in a foundational tourism class. A sentiment, thematic clustering, and word cloud analysis of student-generated reflections revealed a strong preference for engaging, immersive, and unique experiences. The findings indicate that VR fostered heightened engagement, supported experiential learning, and enhanced perception of tourism destinations via the extensive integration of VR "field trips". Key themes emerging from the data include engagement, uniqueness, emotional impact, and educational values. This study underscored the ability of VR to enhance tourism education through interactive and engaging learning experiences that support experientialism.

**Key Words:** Experientialism; 360 VR; Head Mounted Displays

## INTRODUCTION

Experientialism is more simply defined as "experiential learning." What began in the 1940s in human relations training evolved in the 1970s into experiential education (Seaman, et al., 2017). D.A. Kolb, in his groundbreaking book whose first edition was originally copyrighted in 1984, wrote that "experiential learning is a powerful and proven approach to teaching and learning that is based on one incontrovertible reality: people learn best through experience." Experience across four decades has shown that "experiential learning" has great potential in education, work, and adult development. (Kolb, 2024). And more specifically, in select fields of higher education, experiential education can be a cornerstone and culmination of a student's higher education experience.

Thus "learning by doing" can be achieved in education across a variety of pedagogical processes. Internships across fields such as teaching, medicine, military, entertainment, television, and manufacturing are just a few examples of "learning by doing." Students are immersed in the daily requirements of a future career. Yet immersion can also take on different forms. Some of it can be in a hospital's operating room under the watchful eyes of a supervising surgeon or through an artificial or real-world environment whose content is displayed within a head-mounted display (HMD).

Multiple studies have projected that these technological platforms such as HMDs would grow significantly from as far back as Cheong (1995). With the emergence of HTC Vive headsets by a Taiwanese consumer electronics corporation in 2016, interest in immersive VR increased (Radianti, et al., 2020). However, then came COVID-19. Kim et al. (2021) investigated millennials' VR experience pre- and post-COVID-19. Yet while select retail products worldwide saw declines due to COVID-19, the International Data Corporation (IDC, 2020) again projected that the use of VR and AR will be positive in the long term with hopes that gaming would continue to drive the VR market. Scavarelli et al. (2020, pg. 257) even stated that the use of VR and AR was generating even more attention in education because of the lower-cost stand-alone VR/AR platforms such as the Oculus Quest head-mounted display (HMD). They wrote that there is "an explosion of experimentation and development of novel applications within VR/AR forms such as...educational endeavors." Pirker and Dengel (2020) wrote "The integration of 360-degree VR in education presented promising opportunities to enhance



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learning experience through increased engagement…" And finally, Markets and Markets (2023) most recently reported:

"HMDs market size is projected to reach USD$26.4 Billion by 2029 up from USD$7.5 Billion in 2024…The Head Mounted Display (HMDs) Market Growth is experiencing a dynamic surge driven by substantial investments from key industry players. Notably, Meta, a technology powerhouse, has committed over $21 billion to its Reality Labs division, underscoring its dedication to advancing VR technology. This significant financial boost is propelling the development of cutting-edge headsets and VR software, positioning Meta at the forefront of immersive experiences."

In 2018, two of the authors of this paper decided it was important to begin to integrate 360-degree VR content into classes in two academic disciplines within a major research university via inexpensive HMDs and personal smartphones. However, when the authors visited YouTube and other video hosting platforms, they discovered a dearth of free and public, 360-degree VR educational content related to the academic disciplines in question. Thus, two of this paper's authors began to produce, edit, and host specific 360-degree VR educational content to YouTube related to the tourism and sport management fields.

More specifically, these 360-degree VR projects were concentrated on domestic US and global tourism destination management and the use and management of Olympic Games physical legacies which also can serve as domestic and global tourism attractions. This team has subsequently produced, edited, and hosted to YouTube N=33, 360-degree VR educational public projects viewed over 24,000 times on YouTube. It was discovered that this was one of the first attempts by faculty at this institution to successfully produce and integrate 360-degree, immersive VR experiential educational content across multiple classroom settings.

Preliminary research by Mihalik et al. (2023) then examined student outcomes of the hands-on experiential learning presented via faculty-produced 360-degree Virtual Reality content. Their preliminary research revealed significant results with high student support towards integrating 360-degree VR content into classes. Female students were significantly more responsive to 360-degree VR experiences in HMD than their male counterparts. Students who were more familiar with the content contained in the 360-degree VR videos as noted by their academic "major" also were significantly more in support of the integration of 360-degree VR content via HMD.

However, in the late fall of 2022, the authors discovered that the ability to utilize inexpensive HMDs combined with a student's smartphone was terminated for all users of the iOS Apple devices via YouTube and Vimeo viewing platforms. What was commonly referred to as the "Google Cardboard Icon" was eliminated on YouTube for almost all users. However, the Samsung phone still displayed the Google Cardboard icon, but most students had iOS devices. Thus, students could no longer combine their personal iOS smartphones into an inexpensive $30 head-mounted display and become "immersed" in the 360-degree educational content hosted on YouTube or Vimeo. Academics who had been incorporating inexpensive 360-degree VR content into K-16 classes over the past 5 years could no longer utilize inexpensive headsets with Apple smartphones for an immersive virtual reality experience. The required use of a new Apple HMD priced at USD$3,500 was far out of the reach of a typical undergraduate student (Kerr, 2023).

Thus, once the spring 2023 semester began, two of the authors of this research study were forced to have students watch 360-degree VR, immersive content on a flat-screen monitor or their smartphone without the aid of a HMD. The authors speculated that immersive experientialism would be reduced by this less-than-optimal viewing experience. The authors contemplated requiring students to purchase a more expensive HMD display priced between USD$350 to USD$400. However, student opposition was verbally expressed when asked if they would purchase the "relatively inexpensive" Meta Quest HMD priced at USD$350 for a better-quality, immersive experience as suggested by Scavarelli et al. (2020).

As this semester progressed, the university's Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) revealed that three Meta Quest HMDs were available for free student use. The challenge became how to use three head-mounted displays across two classes of almost 60 combined students to view multiple 360-degree VR projects when classes had already begun.

With the help of one of our co-authors from the CTE, a strategy was devised whereby N=58 students would select a 45-minute time block to visit the university library where these Meta Quest headsets were managed and stored. The faculty member in question then created an out-of-the-class, learning assignment supervised by a


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CTE student assistant. Each of the students registered for a 45-minute interval over a 2-weekday time frame to view the last three, 360-degree VR projects integrated into each of these two classes.

Since students expressed overall, positive feedback via their end-of-semester class evaluations, the integration of a more expensive HMD then became a class requirement in a fall 2024 semester foundational tourism class with N=38 students. In this undergraduate, foundational tourism class, all students were required to either purchase or have access to an advanced 360-degree VR HMD such as the Meta Quest 2, 3, or 3S.

The use of 360-degree VR and HMDs to allow students to participate in educational experientialism in the field of tourism was further reinforced by Meta in December of 2024. Meta announced the development of its new "Travel Mode" for Quest 2 and 3 models. Meta via "Travel Mode" hoped to invest in and open new markets based on the travel and tourism experience. While the 360-degree gaming market was flat (Market Research Report, 2023), Meta saw a new sector for sales of HMDs. The Meta team wrote:

"As Meta continues to refine this technology, the tourism industry, educational institutions, and individual users alike stand to benefit from the carefully crafted experiences secured within the Travel Mode. The future of travel is undoubtedly bright, and as VR becomes more integrated into our lives, embracing this change will lead not only to enhanced travel experiences but also to greater cultural understanding and appreciation in an increasingly interconnected world."

**METHODOLOGY**

The authors required the use of a more advanced 360-degree Virtual Reality HMD. Further, the author integrated N=26, 360-degree tourism-themed, VR projects hosted on YouTube into an 8-week, academic term. Students experienced N=26 tourism "field trips" utilizing 360-degree VR HMDs emblematic of experimentalism. Students were required to provide weekly proof of their access to 360-degree VR headsets such as the Meta Quest 2 or 3 or older Oculus Go HMDs. Some students chose to purchase the head-mounted displays while others borrowed devices from the university library or family and friends.

Below is a list of the N=26, 360-degree VR links published on YouTube and incorporated in this fall 2024 semester foundational tourism class by weekly assignment. Included in the N=26, VR projects were N=21 VR projects produced by two of this paper's authors and N=5 produced by third-party organizations. The tourism project titles are accompanied by a brief description followed by their respective YouTube link:

Week 1: 360 VR video # 1: *360 VR video #1: Paris 2024 360 VR Sing with Netherlands' Olympic House fans!* Join fellow Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games tourists visiting the Team Netherlands Olympic House: https://youtu.be/Qr0ehClnRmg

Week 1: 360 VR video # 2: *Paris 2024 360 VR Team USA House.* Join fellow Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games tourists visiting the Team USA Olympic House: https://youtu.be/ZBrgrnLKTV8

Week 1: 360 VR video #3: *Paris 2024 Team Canada House.* Join fellow Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games tourists visiting the Team Canada Olympic House: https://youtu.be/yfTyam8MWBU

Week 2: Watch the 360 VR video #4: *Gullfoss Waterfalls of Iceland.* Join fellow tourists on the famous Golden Circle tour visiting the Gullfoss Waterfalls in Iceland: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_yymag5siPY

Week 2: 360 VR video #5: *Waterfalls of Southern Iceland.* Join fellow tourists visiting famous waterfalls in southern Iceland: https://youtu.be/N9LSZhIcMm8

Week 2: 360 VR video # 6: *Lago Grey Glacier Boat Tour in Torres del Paine, Patagonia Chile.* Join fellow Patagonia tourists on the Lago Grey boat as it visits the famous Grey Glacier in Torres del Paine National Park in southern Chile: https://youtu.be/fN965oaTsas

Week 3: 360 VR video #7: *Visit Sydney Harbour (Australia) in 360˚ Virtual Reality with Qantas.* Join fellow tourists flying over Sydney Harbour in a helicopter compliments of Quantas Airlines: https://youtu.be/aq9nXIVTkug?si=v0V5WkdBHzqMNBsb


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Week 3: 360 VR video #8: *Visit Hamilton Island (Australia) in 360˚ Virtual Reality with Qantas.* Join fellow tourists visiting Hamilton Island in Australia compliments of Quantas Airlines: https://youtu.be/lJype_TafRk?si=DPF1CK80V7XmRa6n

Week 3: 360 VR video # 9: *African Safari 360 Video - Kruger National Park.* Join fellow tourists taking a third party, open jeep tour surrounded by lions and elephants in Kruger National Park, South Africa: https://youtu.be/_teiyaYic-w?si=EwvBM4Y8exy2r163

Week #3: 360 VR video # 10: *Surrounded by Wild Elephants in 4k 360.* Join 10 Million+ VR tourists as we experience a herd of elephants on the plains of Africa interacting with a 360 VR camera: https://youtu.be/mlOiXMvMaZo?si=QGP4_kZYKRdNOvNG

Week 4: 360 VR video # 11: *Historic Exterior Tour of Berlin 1936 Olympic Stadium in 360.* Via 360 VR, visit the 1936 Berlin Olympic Stadium and experience the writings of author Dan Brown, *Boys in the Boat*, describe some of the last days of WW II at this 1936 Olympic stadium: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0__c-z-ond0

Week 4: 360 VR video # 12: *Berlin 1936 Olympic Stadium Interior Tour in 360 VR.* You just toured the grounds of the Berlin Olympic Stadium above. Now see what the interior and underground components of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Stadium look like today. This is a modern entertainment, professional soccer, & track & field complex with underground training facilities: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63oOto1C3ek

Week 4: 360 VR video # 13: *UofSC Tours Olympic Museum.* Visit the International Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland located on the shores of Lake Geneva*:* https://youtu.be/9Q04PlNdiUY

Week 4: 360 VR video # 14: *Beijing Olympic Venues Night Walk.* Rooftop and night tour of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games Bird's Nest and Water Cube legacy facilities still in use today: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSn-RCFF8nk

Week 5: 360 VR video # 15: *Yellowstone Tourist Experience 2021.* Join fellow tourists enjoying Yellowstone National Park, USA and its wildlife via 360 VR: https://youtu.be/_2IRKdIVN8E

Week 5: 360 VR video # 16: *Grand Tetons & Climate Change.* Experience the negative impacts of global warming at the Grand Tetons National Park as it is blanketed in dangerous smoke from western USA summer wildfires: https://youtu.be/fnHZRU1LWdA

Week 5: 360 VR video # 17: *Mighty 5 National Parks (UT) Whirlwind Tour in 360-Degree.* Visit 5 national parks in southern Utah, USA including a hike to Delicate Arch in Arches N.P.: https://youtu.be/ETIzAqiN_18

Week 5: 360 VR video # 18: *Old Faithful Inn, Yellowstone National Park.* Visit the interior of the historic Old Faithful Inn, Yellowstone National Park*:* https://youtu.be/oYuwdbb598o

Week 6: 360 VR video # 19: *Eiffel Tower in 360$^0$ VR: (Pre-Paris 2024 Olympics).* The Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games Committee decided to make the Eiffel Tower a central component & Olympic venue. Take the tour at dusk of the Eiffel Tower, *pre-Paris* 2024 Games. As you look below, around, & across the River Seine, view the World's Fair sites from the 1800s. These gardens & green spaces were converted into beach volleyball & the free, 13,000-seat Paris 2024 "Champion's Park.": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNZc_kzbSwo

Week 6: 360 VR video # 20**:** *Eiffel Tower During Paris 2024 Olympics:* Visit the Eiffel Tower as it was centrally integrated into the Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games including beach volleyball, Champion's Park & the River Seine: https://youtu.be/8vgjEjmu7a4

Week 6: 360 VR video # 21*: Centennial Olympic Park Legacy of the 1996 Summer Olympics in 360.* Visit a significant Olympic legacy of the Atlanta, GA,1996 Summer Olympic Games: https://youtu.be/rOuz2AnCovA

Week 6: 360 VR video # 22: *Discover VR Atlas: Italy (360 Video).* Via a third-party organization, visit a variety of tourism destinations across Italy: https://youtu.be/CecZb5DjGKg?si=SW_QyAJdOLuPbUMl

Week 8: 360 VR video # 23: *Lake Placid 1980 and 1932 Olympic Rinks.* Visit the ice rink made famous by the movie, *Miracle* when Team USA beat Team Russia at the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, NY: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTlA_RB_tAE


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Week 8: 360 VR video # 24: *Lake Placid Van Hoevenberg 1932 Olympic Bobsled Run in 360.* Enjoy a fast and loud ride on a retrofitted bobsled down the 1932 Winter Olympic sliding track in Lake Placid, NY*:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVsywi4VRvg

Week 8: 360 VR video # 25: *The Comet Bobsled, Park City Utah, Olympic Park in 360.* Experience a legacy of the 2002 Salt Lake City, UT Winter Olympic Games. Join a USC Gamecock fan & ride the modified "Comet" bobsled for free & hit 4.7 Gs in one turn! https://youtu.be/yroH0JRWTQc

Week 8: 360 VR video # 26: *Fly Anna Fly.* Hear Team USA Olympic Ski Jumper, Ms. Anna Hoffmann, talk about female ski jumping and the Olympics. Strap on your skis and jump with Anna at the 2002 SLC Olympic legacy facilities in Park City, UT: https://youtu.be/rthiGFmqwOw

Students were first required to view the 360-degree VR YouTube links over an 8-week term averaging three immersive, VR "field trips" per week. Upon watching all N=26 experiential VR videos, N=38 students then progressed through a Discussion Board assignment. Students were asked to express, in one word, their thoughts that summarized their personal and/or educational experience with integrating 360-degree VR into this foundational tourism class. After picking one keyword, students were asked to repeat this process two more times. Thirty-one students completed this graded assignment and generated N=93 ***keywords***, each reflecting their interaction with the world of 360-degree VR content.

Student cooperation was further incentivized by the presence of a class grade for the completion of this Discussion Board assignment. The presence of a grade for the completion of the Discussion Board assignment allowed this research effort to be classified as "exempt" by our Institutional Review Board. Each student's name was removed from the subsequent aggregate research analysis to ensure student participant anonymity.

The authors then tested the following null hypothesis: Ho: After conducting sentiment, thematic clustering, and word cloud analysis on student written feedback, there will be no positive support for the experientialism theory via 360-degree VR content.

**RESULTS**

Sentiment Analysis

When using OpenAI-Chat GBT to conduct sentiment analysis, scores could range from a heavily positive (+1) to a heavily negative (-1) scale. Words that scored above +.5 were considered by Chat GBT to be very positive. These highly favorable words were as follows: Impressed = 1.00, Fascinating, Exhilarating = 0.70, Appreciative = 0.60 and Appealing, Refreshing, Innovative, Enjoyable, Entertaining, Inspiring, Interesting, Captivating = 0.50. (OpenAI, personal communication, March 14, 2025).

The most frequently repeated word was *Engaging* selected 12 times with a moderately positive sentiment score of +.4. *Unique* was the second most used keyword and was a student choice 7 times with again a moderately positive sentiment score of +.375. *Immersive* was a student keyword six times with a neutral sentiment score of 0.00. *Captivating* (+0.5) was selected as a student keyword five times. *Insightful* and *Different* were keyword favorites four times with neutral (0.00) sentiment scores. *Intriguing* and *Educational* were student keyword choices three times with moderately positive sentiment scores. They were joined by *Fascinating* with a highly positive score of +0.7. The keywords *fun, refreshing, eye-opening,* and *entertaining* were utilized two times each by students with *Refreshing* and *Entertaining* scoring moderately positive with scores of +0.5. *Fun* received a moderately positive score of 0.3. and *Eye-opening* in the neutral range as noted below. (OpenAI, personal communication, March 14, 2025).

These positive words were joined by words deemed "Neutral" by ChatGBT (OpenAI, personal communication, March 14, 2025): Insightful, Imaginary, Involved, Worldwide, Destinations, Helpful, Futuristic, Eye-opening, Immersive, Immersed, Exploration, Hands-on, Perspective, Inspired, Enriched, Affordable, Different, Noteworthy, Enhancing, Mesmeric, Atypical, and Decompressing. These words can be viewed as descriptive versus emotional (OpenAI, personal communication, March 14, 2025).

The following is also a partial list of the remaining keywords selected once by the N=31 students: Vivid, Impressed, Helpful, Futuristic, Exhilarating, Exploration, Extraordinary, Fascinating, Hands-on, Appealing,


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Inspiring, Educational, Exciting, Entertaining, Enjoyable, Decompressing, New, Colorful, Perspective, Fresh, Enriched, Appreciative, Enhancing, Mesmeric, Noteworthy and Innovative. (WORDART, 2025)

When examining negativity toward this aspect of experientialism, there were only two negative words presented in the N=31 student reflections. They were *Frustrating* (-.4) and *Annoying* (-.8). Each negative word appeared only once, suggesting that negative experiences were not encountered by an overwhelming majority of students when integrating 360-degree VR content into this class. Thus, 97.8% of the N=93 student, self-selected word choices were positive, with repeated words reinforcing a strong engagement-focused theme that supported the value of experimentalism via 360 VR immersion. (OpenAI, personal communication, March 14, 2025).

Thematic Clustering

When exploring thematic clustering, the grouping of words based on meaning and context, there were emerging themes listed in descending order: Engagement and Immersion; Uniqueness and Novelty; Educational and Insightful, and Positivity and Emotional Impact. The Engagement and Immersion Cluster was represented by 31 student word selections. It included Engaging (12), Immersive (6), Captivating (5), Fascinating (3), Intriguing (3) and Eye-opening (2). This theme combination focused on immersive, engaging, and thought-provoking experiences as witnessed by utilizing 360-degree VR to expand on its value in experientialism. (OpenAI, personal communication, March 15, 2025).

The second-ranked cluster represented by N=14 students was Uniqueness & Novelty viewed by keywords of Unique (7), Different (4), Extraordinary (1), Innovative (1), and Distinct (1). This theme emphasized originality, uniqueness, and innovation. (OpenAI, personal communication, March 15, 2025).

The third-ranked thematic cluster was grouped focused on Educational and Insightful as noted by N=10 keywords. The keywords of Insightful (4), Educational (3), Perspective (1), Exploration (1), and Hands-on (1). Its theme displayed interest in learning, exploration, and gaining new perspectives again through the lenses of a 360-degree VR HMD. To those experimenting with or contemplating the integration 360-VR into a class, finding positive student reflections such as insightful and educational lends credibility to this pedagogical experiment. (OpenAI, personal communication, March 15, 2025).

The final ranked thematic cluster was Positivity and Emotional Impact as seen by the combination of Fun (2), Refreshing (2), Exciting (1), Enjoyable (1), Exhilarating (1), and Impressed (1). This theme was focused on fun excitement, and refreshing, new experiences as seen inside a HMD "immersed" in a variety of virtual reality tourism destinations. Again, this cluster was yet another aspect of the benefit of experimentalism. (Open AI, personal communication, March 15, 2025).

Thus, when summarizing thematic clustering, the pedagogical integration of 360-degree VR into a class was rewarded with many positive student reflections supporting experientialism. 360-degree VR integration presented students with an experience that was engaging, unique, and immersive. When displaying domestic and international tourism attractions via 360-degree VR, a tourism story was revealed that, to some students, was captivating, interesting, and intriguing. Finally, as student opinions were posted to an educational Discussion Board, their reinforcement of this pedagogical process via select keywords of educational, fascinating, fun, eye-opening, and entertaining rewarded the faculty team who developed this experientialism process.

Word Cloud Analysis

When looking at word frequency, the following Word Cloud (Figure 1) highlights the student self-generated reflections that were top of mind to the N=31 students who answered this Discussion Board question with N=93 keywords.


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Figure 1. Word Cloud Frequency of Student Self-Generated Reflections

The most frequent words as highlighted in Figure 1, Word Cloud Frequency of Student Self-Generated Reflections were “Engaging” (N=12), followed by “Unique” (N=7), “Immersive” (N=6), and “Captivating” which appeared five times. Insightful, Interesting, and Different appeared four times each. All seven of the most selected student-generated reflections support a strong preference for interactive experiences via the world of 360-degree VR which can be a cornerstone of experimentalism. Further, N=61 students' self-selected reflections were repeated by various students a minimum of two times. N=32 keywords were only selected once by the N=31 students. Thus, while the students supplied their keyword reflections independently, there was consensus across the class for N=14 keywords. Further, the positivity and independent agreement of keyword reflections selected across N=31 students reinforced to faculty that the integration of 360-degree VR tourism content had a valuable place in tourism education (WORDART, 2025). Almost 39% of the responding students found the integration of 360-degree VR “engaging.”

**LIMITATIONS**

There were multiple limitations regarding this project. One of the most obvious was the sample size. N=38 students were in this section of the foundational tourism class. Free access to 360-degree VR headsets housed at the university’s library was more manageable due to the smaller class size. However, there were multiple sections of this class with significantly larger student enrollment making the potential access to free, 360-degree VR HMDs at the university library problematic. This, in turn, could have forced more students to purchase a HMD for approximately USD$300 resulting in potentially more negative student keyword reflections.

A second potential limitation could be the delivery mechanism for this foundational undergraduate tourism class. It was delivered 100% asynchronously online via Blackboard Ultra. There was no way to compare the integration of 360-degree VR between these online students as compared to those enrolled in a face-to-face section.

A third potential limitation was noted via antidotal email conversations and class evaluations. One student had significant challenges when utilizing the library's 360-degree VR HMDs. According to one student, multiple attempts to access and utilize these free HMDs housed in the library resulted in poor training, unresolved operational questions, and perceived limited access. It's impossible to verify whether the two negative student reflections were a result of this student's library experiences.

**CONCLUSION**

The findings suggest that integrating VR into tourism curricula can improve student engagement and interaction through the use of experimentalism thus rejecting the null hypothesis. 360-degree VR immersion offered a realistic, risk-free, and inexpensive exploration of national and global tourism destinations. Financial inequality and potential accessibility challenges were overcome by providing 360-degree VR travel experiences.


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Further, despite more restrictive viewing options in the world of 360-degree VR as a result of Apple and Google viewing restrictions, resourceful students had educational options. Some students indicated that the cost of using more advanced Meta Quest HMD was in line with some university textbooks. Other students utilized the free HMD resources available at the university library while only one student expressed their concerns about access to a limited number of library VR HMDs. And finally, some students simply borrowed this equipment from family and friends, reducing their cost.

It should be noted that of the N=93 student-generated reflections, there were only two keywords that were deemed to be negative. The lack of negative words suggested overwhelming student support for integrating 360-degree VR content into a foundational tourism class. It implied an intentional student choice to support this experimentalism process and to minimize negativity regarding the integration of N= 26 VR projects into a foundational tourism class.

Student self-reflections demonstrated that 360-degree VR was a valuable tool for tourism education, fostering captivating engagement, fun and excitement, and insightful learning. As VR technology continued to evolve, especially with reduced price entry points for HMDs, its integration into academic settings had the capability to enhance subject matter learning and potentially stimulate travel and tourism curiosity. VR content bridged textbook constructs with unparalleled opportunities to "experience" the domestic and global tourism markets without leaving their classroom seats via a growing field in pedagogical innovation.

And, if the Meta "Travel Mode" finds momentum, 360-degree VR tourism content can offer a virtual travel experience to those who are place-bound or financially restricted. Or it can serve as a tantalizing and engaging portal to future domestic and international travel, potentially reaping all the economic, financial, social, and cultural benefits that tourism can bring to a global society.

Student-generated reflections suggest that 360-degree VR constituted a transformative pedagogical tool in tourism education. Its ability to foster engagement, stimulate intellectual curiosity, and bridge theoretical constructs with practical applications underscored its value in today's and tomorrow's world of higher education. This research further supported the writings or research of Cheong, R. (1995), Kolb (2014), Seaman, et. al., (2017), Scavarelli, et al., (2020), Radianti, et al., (2020), Pirker and Dengel (2020), and Mihalik, et al., (2023).

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# FROM AI TECH TO AI TOUCH: PROJECTION IN CUSTOMER-AI INTERACTIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

In hospitality, the functional value of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been underscored through various modalities—marketing, work efficiency and customer service. The advent of Large Language Models (LLMs) encapsulating natural language comprehension, context awareness, and extensive knowledge bases further empowers AI to exhibit more anthropomorphic characteristics and endows it with enhanced social value. This advancement leads to the dynamics of the situation in which customer-AI interactions exhibit both 'tech' (i.e., functionality) and 'touch' (i.e., sociality). At this point, AI touch generated in the interaction process between users and AI is largely a mirror-like behavior projected by users. Grounded in the theory of projection, which outlines three core pairs of projection within the interaction—self and other, past and presence, as well as entity and metaphor—this paper aims to offer a conceptual perspective to better understand customer-AI interactions in a hospitality setting. Specifically, the research objectives are to: (1) define the notion of AI touch and (2) develop a theoretical framework to delineate the core and distinct attributes of AI touch from the perspective of projection.

## METHODS

Big data content analysis, a systematic research method used to identify patterns, trends, and insights from the big data will be conducted to achieve the objectives of the study. Actual textual data generated by AI chatbots and customers facilitated by a context-specific large language model developed by a tech company in China will be content-analyzed to identify distinct attributes of AI-customer interactions from the perspective of projection.

## RESULTS

Three main pairs in projection— self and other, past and presence, as well as entity and metaphor are to be explored with customer-AI chatbot interactions, encompassing attributes— para-social interaction, narrative construction and projective imagination. It is expected that in a LLM environment, the roles of self and other seek to change from (semi) implicit narrators to explicit narrator and actor. For instance, when chatting with LLMs, users engage in deeper self-disclosure, higher perception of security and more transmission of information with others (AI chatbots). Additionally, the projected objects are expected to transform from entities to be beyond material. Individuals used to invest emotions in objects (i.e., the moon represents the hometown) while in the AI setting, the touch is generated in the imagined being through the interaction between users and LLMs. Further, this interaction is anticipated to shift from traditional dual ontological relationship to para-social interaction emphasizing more on self-essence.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study will significantly advance the understanding of human-AI interactions through the lens of projection theory. It identifies three mechanisms of projection underlying customer-AI interactions—para-social


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interaction, narrative construction and projective imagination, thus expanding the applicability of projection beyond interpersonal relationships to better understand customer-AI interactions.


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# SECTION 2: TECHNOLOGICAL ISSUESES IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY


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# DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION CHALLENGES of SME HOTELS in TURKIYE

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

## INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation offers significant potential for building effective and sustainable societies by enabling radical changes in services aimed at various stakeholders (Abdelaziz & Naama, 2023). This has allowed hoteliers to seek new competitive advantages by using these technologies. Many see this as "digital transformation", a process that aims to improve an asset by triggering significant changes through the combination of information, computing, communication and connectivity technologies. The increasing accessibility and use of digital technologies has increased the challenges for hoteliers. The search for the most appropriate strategy for investing in new systems and technologies in the digital age has become a critical issue for the sector (Wynn & Jones, 2022; Vial, 2021)

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

As digitalization rapidly spreads across the industry and society, hotel companies face a variety of challenges in developing and implementing their IT strategies. (Wynn & Jones, 2022). The acceleration of digital transformation supports the resilience and sustainable development of the hospitality industry. However, although digital transformation holds great potential, many companies face significant challenges during implementation. This challenge is especially prevalent in small and medium-sized businesses, which often face limitations in terms of their level of digitalization and resources. (Ka et al, 2023). Small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) hotels in Turkiye face significant challenges related to digital transformation in order to remain competitive in the dynamic hospitality sector. This study aims to uncover the digitalization problems specific to SME hotels operating in Turkiye, identify and categorize the primary challenges faced by SME hotel managers. This study also intends to analyze the frequency and emphasis of these challenges through thematic analysis and offer theoretical and practical contributions to improve problem-solving in the hospitality industry.

## METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the challenges faced by hotel managers. The research design is grounded in thematic analysis, a method widely used for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 17 SME hotel managers across the country. Python was used for data analysis and visualization due to its robust capabilities in handling qualitative data.

## FINDINGS

The results reveal that SME hotels encounter a range of challenges including technological barriers, dependency on online travel agencies (OTAs), limitations in staff skills and resistance to change, difficulties in digital marketing, operational inefficiencies, budget constraints, data privacy and security concerns and issues related to guest personalization.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study contributes to the field of hospitality management by employing a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis, leveraging Python for thematic exploration and visualization. It addresses gaps in the existing literature by identifying critical challenges faced by SME hotels.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study offers a comprehensive exploration of the challenges associated with digital transformation in SME hotels, providing an in-depth understanding of hotel managers' experiences and perceptions. By identifying key


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barriers, the study enhances understanding of the practical obstacles to digitalization within the hospitality industry.

**Key Words:** Digital Transformation, Hotels, SMEs, Thematic Analysis

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# CREDIT RISK EVALUATION FOR TOURISM BUSINESSES IN THE "INTERNET+" ERA: A DYNAMIC OPTIMIZATION FRAMEWORK BASED ON MACHINE LEARNING

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## ABSTRACT

Credit serves as a cornerstone of modern economy and legal systems, and is a crucial driver for the high-quality development of the tourism industry. Under the "Internet+" paradigm, the credit risk evaluation of tourism enterprises faces challenges such as diversified data sources, fragmented information, and insufficient dynamic adaptability, making traditional evaluation methods inadequate in comprehensively reflecting their true credit status. This research constructs a novel dynamic credit risk evaluation framework for tourism enterprises by leveraging multi-source data fusion and incorporating industry-specific characteristics. Firstly, heterogeneous data from government records, corporate operations, and social media are integrated, with noise reduction and key feature extraction performed through data cleaning and feature engineering. Secondly, a dynamic optimization credit evaluation framework for tourism enterprises based on machine learning is constructed, integrating multiple machine learning algorithms and performance metrics to dynamically adapt to the data characteristics of diverse tourism enterprises for credit evaluation. While evaluating corporate creditworthiness, it employs feature importance analysis to uncover the key drivers of credit risk across different business models. Finally, an empirical analysis is conducted on 3 typical tourism enterprises, travel agencies, star-rated hotels, and A-grade scenic spots with comparisons against traditional evaluation methods. The results demonstrate that the framework based on machine learning significantly improves the accuracy and robustness of credit risk evaluation. Compared to muti-level fuzzy comprehensive evaluation, the framework exhibits lower prediction bias and higher practical applicability. By introducing dynamic selection and intelligent optimization mechanism, this study addresses limitations of static, inflexible traditional systems and their poor adaptability to diverse business models. The research provides methodological innovations for building intelligent credit risk assessment systems in tourism, offering scientific support for corporate credit management, industry regulation, and investor decision-making.

**Key Words:** tourism enterprise; credit risk evaluation; Internet+; multi-source data fusion; machine learning; empirical study

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of credit, deeply rooted in both Eastern and Western ethical systems, has also evolved into a cornerstone of modern socioeconomic systems. It' role in mitigating market failures and sustaining high-quality economy development has been widely recognized, prompting China to institutionalize social credit as a fundamental market mechanism. With this framework, the tourism market credit system emerges as a critical


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component, where refining evaluation methodologies, expanding application scenarios and leveraging assessment outcomes are pivotal to addressing sector-specific challenges.

Meanwhile, the digital economy era has introduced unprecedented complexities to tourism enterprise credit assessment. Persistent issues, i.e., fragmented evaluation standards across regions, outdated methodologies, and inefficient information-sharing mechanisms, undermine the credibility and scalability of credit management. Concurrently, the tourism sectors' rapid diversification, marked by emerging business models and heightened market complexity, demands innovative regulatory tools. This necessitates data-driven approaches to enhance risk monitoring and align with "Internet+" governance paradigms, emphasizing open data sharing, unified standards, and dynamic classification mechanism.

Big data advancements, fueled by the integration of tourism and digital technologies, offer transformative potential. While platforms generated vast datasets (e.g., corporate websites, government portals and media), systemic "data silos" impede cross-institutional collaboration, constraining the optimization of credit management systems. Overcoming these barriers requires a holistic framework that integrates multi-source data, from government repositories, financial institutions, OTAs, and social media, to enable real-time risk assessment and stakeholders, informed governance (as shown in Figure 1).

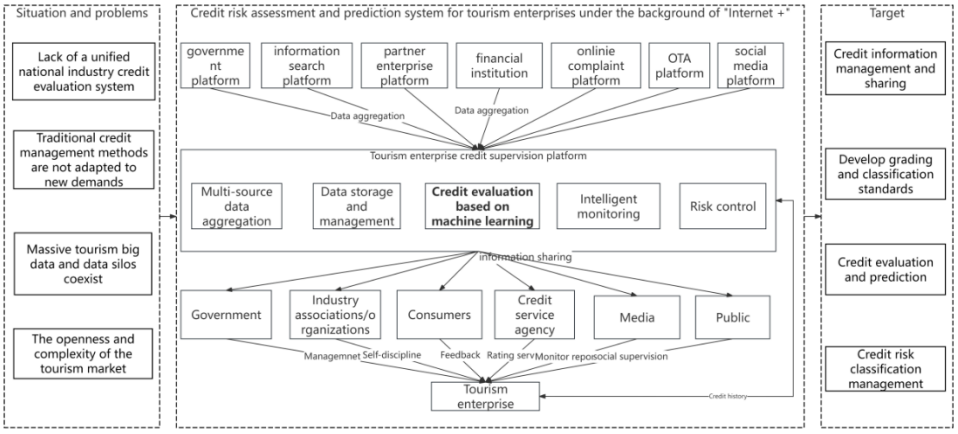


Figure 1 Credit risk assessment and prediction of tourism enterprises under the background of "Internet +"

Machine Learning (ML) presents a paradigm shift in addressing these challenges. By automating feature extraction and risk identification, ML enhances the precision and adaptability of credit evolutions(ChenYijun, Gao Haoran, & Ding Zhijun, 2023), a practice well-established in finance but underexplored in tourism. The dynamic nature of credit behavior, influenced by externalities and sector-specific factors (e.g., six elements of tourism), further underscores the need for models capable of self-optimization across heterogeneous enterprise types, such as travel agencies, hotels, tourist attractions, etc. Therefore, this study proposes a dynamic ML-based credit evaluation model tailored to tourism's unique data dimensionality and temporal variability, which include 3 objectives: 1) Standardization: Develop unified metrics for cross-regional credit assessment; 2) Adaptability: Design an algorithm-selection mechanism responsive to data and enterprise-type variations; 3) Governance: Enable real-time risk warning support regulatory decision-making.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate credit evaluation and default prediction are important topics in business research. Although existing research shows an interdisciplinary trend, it is still concentrated in the fields of economics, commercial finance, and computer science(Fu Xiaokang, Zou Jiangbo, & Ju Chunhua, 2021).ML algorithms are gradually being applied to credit evaluation research and practice due to their accuracy and efficiency.

## CREDIT RATING OF TOURISM ENTERPRISES

Credit evaluation aims to quantify credit risk by building a rating model through the integration of multi-source data(Lu xinxue & Zhao kang, 2012). Its research focuses on three core dimensions: indicator system construction, method innovation and model optimization. Early studies mainly used expert scoring methods (such as 5C/5P factor analysis) to conduct credit assessment through manual weighting, which had limitations such as strong subjectivity and lack of scalability. As computing power increases, artificial intelligence technology begins to merge with traditional expert systems, improving evaluation efficiency while maintaining the interpretability of the method (Estran, Souchaud, & Abitbol, 2022). Statistical learning models (such as hierarchical analysis method and logistic regression) reduce subjective interference through structured algorithms and improve the objectivity and consistency of evaluation results. A typical example is the Z-score model developed by Altman (1968), which constructs a financial early warning indicator system based on


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multivariate discriminant analysis. After continuous optimization, its prediction performance has been significantly improved and it has become a benchmark tool for corporate credit assessment(Altman & Saunders, 1998).

In terms of tourism enterprise credit evaluation, such as three dimensions of performance of willingness-ability-quality and six-dimensional index system laid the foundation for the early tourism enterprise credit evaluation theory (Yu jing, 1996). In addition, methods such as expert scoring, questionnaire survey, interview, and analytic hierarchy process, were used combined with commonly used corporate credit evaluation models, to conduct a series of studies on listed tourism companies, tourist attractions, etc., summarizing a credit evaluation index system suitable for tourism enterprises and verifying it with real data. Multi-dimensional research on tourism enterprise credit evaluation formed a systematic theoretical framework. Based on stakeholder theory, through in-depth interviews and grounded methods, it was proposed that tourism enterprise integrity is composed of emotional integrity, ability integrity, and normative integrity, and the synergy mechanism of internal and external stakeholders was explained (Yao Yanbo, Zhang Dan, & He Lei, 2014). Further an evaluation system from a multi-subject perspective was constructed: in terms of the tourist perception dimension, a questionnaire quantitative analysis was used to form a three-dimensional evaluation index of employee integrity, information compliance and brand credit (Yao Yanbo & Hou Pingping, 2017); from the employee perspective, the grounded theory was used to reveal the four core elements of institutional integrity, contract fulfillment, integrity culture and leadership integrity (Hou, Yao, Lin, & Ren, 2023); based on the needs of industry supervision, the Delphi method was used to develop a composite evaluation model covering economic credit, continuous integrity, compliant operations and corporate reputation (Yanbo & Hou Pingping, 2017).

With the objective requirements of high-quality development in the new era, the credit evaluation of tourism enterprises has received more and more attention, but it still presents the phenomenon of “hot phenomenon, cold research” (Pang Zhaoling & Sun Jiuxia, 2024). Due to the particularity of tourism enterprises themselves, their credit evaluation may have problems such as distorted financial statement data and lack of key information on corporate operations (Srhoj, Vitezić, Giannozzi, & Mikulić, 2024), making it difficult for credit evaluation based solely on financial data to truly reflect the actual credit level. The development of data technology has made it possible to improve the accuracy of credit ratings by enriching data sources, using complex artificial intelligence technology, and introducing dynamic monitoring data (Bitetto, Cerchiello, Filomeni, Tanda, & Tarantino, 2023). As far as the credit evaluation of tourism enterprises is concerned, the selection of evaluation indicators and the construction of the indicator system are still the most critical issues (Chen Honghai, Wang Hui, & Sui Xin, 2021). Reliable company operating conditions and financial information are still the core factors of credit evaluation (Gu, Lv, Wu, Hu, & Yu, 2024). The content on the official website of the enterprise also reflects the operating conditions (Jiang, Yin, Tang, & Wang, 2023). However, too many attributes and features involved in credit evaluation will affect the efficiency of the evaluation model (Shi, Meng, Yang, Wang, & Shi, 2018). Accurate feature selection can both reduce computing time and improve the accuracy of evaluation results (Hajek & Michalak, 2013).

## MACHINE LEARNING AND CREDIT EVALUATION

Machine learning algorithms use large amounts of credit data and complex algorithms to achieve higher accuracy, faster response time, and higher efficiency in evaluation, and analyze high-dimensional unbalanced data (Gu Tianxia & Liu Qinming, 2022) and nonlinear relationships (Li, Mirza, Rahat, & Xiong, 2020), becoming the mainstream method in current credit evaluation research. In response to the time-varying nature of credit evaluation, data heterogeneity, and model interpretability, the academic community has promoted method innovation from three dimensions:

(1) Time series dynamic modeling. In response to the concept drift problem caused by the passage of time in credit data, scholars have proposed a dynamic model update mechanism. An integrated dynamic evaluation model was built (ChenYijun, Gao Haoran, & Ding Zhijun, 2023), which implemented model iteration by incrementally training the base classifier and dynamically adjusting the weights. The principle of movie frame was drawn on to establish a concept drift adaptive framework, and sequential learning technology was used to enhance the model’s robustness in predicting economic cycle fluctuations and sudden crises (Sousa, Gama, & Brandão, 2016).

(2) Integration of multi-source heterogeneous data. The research focus has shifted to integrating unstructured data to enhance the evaluation dimension. The integration of social media public opinion analysis into the corporate credit rating system was innovatively implemented, with traditional evaluation data boundaries being expanded through this approach (Chen & Chen, 2022). A heterogeneous information network tailored for small and medium-sized enterprises was constructed, accompanied by the development of a meta-path feature recognition algorithm designed to effectively extract latent credit signals among corporate-related entities (Du, Ma, & Zhang, 2022)..


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(3) Model architecture and parameter optimization. The research focuses on the balance between algorithm interpretability and performance improvement. Bayesian optimization was used to improve XGBoost hyperparameters and constructed a Bagging integration framework to improve model stability (Gu Tianxia, Liu Qinming, & Ye Chunming, 2023). A deep neural network was designed based on the attention mechanism and enhanced the interpretability of the model through feature cross-visualization technology (Guo, Yang, Wu, Wang, & Chen, 2023). The effectiveness of this method has been empirically supported.
In summary, the successful practice of machine learning in commercial credit assessment provides a reference for the credit evaluation of tourism enterprises. This technology significantly improves evaluation performance by avoiding subjective judgment bias and overcoming data constraints of traditional methods. In the "Internet +" era, establishing an algorithm optimization mechanism based on empirical data is not only a practical need to improve the efficiency of industry management, but also an important breakthrough point for improving the theoretical framework of credit assessment.

## DYNAMIC OPTIMIZATION CREDIT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

A dynamic optimization credit evaluation framework for tourism enterprises based on machine learning, named as TEDOCE-ML Framework, includes 4 layers from data collection and aggregation to application, as shown in Figure 2:
(1) Data collection and aggregation involve the systematic gathering and consolidation of data from diverse sources, including enterprises, governments, OTAs and social media. The process is conducted in accordance with policy documents guiding tourism enterprise credit evaluation, as well as established industry standards, specifications and related research. The complied data serves as a foundational input for assessing the creditworthiness of tourism enterprises;
(2) Data preprocessing is to facilitate construction of a robust and precise credit evaluation model. This involves improving data quality through systematic cleaning and selecting the most informative features from the raw data to enhance model performance;
(3) Model dynamic optimization involves training and fine-tuning the model based on the dataset, followed by selecting the optimal model for application. Parameter tuning is the process of selecting appropriate parameters of machine learning algorithm according to the specific problem domain and resource constraints to enhance model performance. Dynamic optimization selection entails identifying the most suitable model on the distinct characteristics of various types of tourism enterprise credit-related data. The process is supported by a model library, a performance indicator library and an optimization strategy library, which collectively provide diverse models, evaluation metrics and optimization strategies to facilitate dynamic optimization.
(4) Model application involves utilizing the optimized model to conduct tourism enterprise credit scoring, intelligent detection and risk assessment. The results of this application dynamically influence subsequent credit evaluations and contribute to the iterative expansion of the dataset within the dynamic evaluation framework.

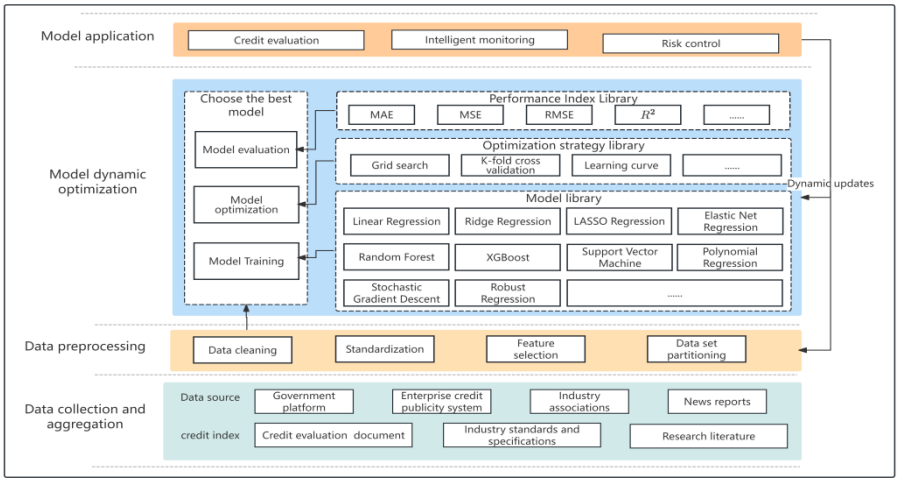

Figure 2 TEDOCE-ML Framework

In this framework, dynamic optimization characteristics are primarily manifested in feature selection during data processing and the co-evolution mechanism of model iteration. Through the closed-loop workflow as showed in Figure 2, combined with grid search and cross-validation technology provided in "optimization strategy library", the continuous improvement of algorithm performance is achieved. At the same time, "data collection and


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aggregation" link supports the dynamic access of multi-source heterogeneous data, and ensures the timeliness and completeness of input data through real-time feature engineering.

## FEATURE SELECTION

While massive amounts of big data offer valuable informational support for decision-making processes, they simultaneously introduce significant challenges in data-driven decision making. Feature selection serves as a critical preprocessing step that identifies the most relevant and informative feature subsets from the original data set, thereby reducing model complexity, enhancing predictive performance, and optimizing computational efficiency. In multiple regression analysis, the presence of highly correlated variables indicates information redundancy, which can result in unreliable coefficient estimates, biased parameters and ultimately unstable model outputs. Correlation analysis quantitatively assesses the strength and direction of linear relationships between paired variables, whereas multicollinearity analysis specifically examines intercorrelations among predictor variables within regression models.

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is a widely adopted metric for quantifying the degree of multicollinearity present in multiple linear regression models. VIF is formally defined as follows:

$$\mathrm{VIF} = \frac{1}{1-R_i^2} \quad (1)$$

where $R_i^2$ denotes the coefficient of determination obtained by regressing the independent variable $x_i$ on all other independent variables in the model. Higher VIF values indicates stronger multicollinearity between the independent variables. Generally speaking, 0<VIF<10 suggests acceptable levels of multicollinearity, while VIF>10 indicates severe multicollinearity that may compromises regression result.

MODEL LIBRARY AND MODEL PARAMETER TUNING

MODEL LIBRARY

Given the characteristic properties and scale constraints of the current tourism enterprise credit assessment dataset, the TEDOCE-ML framework employs machine learning algorithms for data-driven model fitting. A comprehensive model library is constructed which is currently comprised with 10 classic machine learning algorithms, including Linear Regression, Robust Regression, Ridge Regression, LASSO Regression, Elastic Net Regression, Polynomial Regression, Random Forest (RF), Support Vector Machine (SVM), Stochastic Gradient Descent (SGD), XGBoost, etc. The model library maintains dynamic adaptability, allowing for continuous updates and refinements based on evolving data characteristics and credit assessment requirements. The flexible architect ensures optimal model performance across varying tourism enterprise evaluation scenarios.

PARAMETER TUNING

The hyperparameter tuning process for machine learning algorithms serves to identify optimal parameter configurations that enhance model predictive performance while mitigating issues such as overfitting and underfitting. Current hyperparameter optimization approaches include grid search, random search, Bayesian optimization, multi-fidelity optimization, etc (Li Haixi, Song Danlei, Kong Jianing, Song Yafei, & Chang Haiya, 2024). These methods constitute the parameter tuning strategy library for TEDOCE-ML framework, with selection criteria dependent on specific dataset characteristics.

For the present study, given the computational scale and parameter space dimensions, the grid search is employed for parameter optimization. This exhaustive method systematically evaluates all predefined parameter combinations within specified ranges to identify the configuration yielding maxi accuracy. The grid search procedure was complemented with K-fold cross-validation to ensure robust performance evaluation.

The K-fold cross-validation approach partitions the data set into K distinct subsets, iteratively utilizing each subset as a validation set while training on the remaining K-1 subsets. It provides three key benefits: substantially reducing overfitting risks, minimizing bias in performance estimation and decreasing variance in model evaluation metrics. Collectively, this optimization framework enables more reliable assessment of model generalization capability while maintaining computational efficiency appropriate for tourism credit evaluation tasks.

## PERFORMANCE INDICATOR LIBRARY

The TEDOCE-ML framework constructed the performance indicator library for tourism enterprise credit assessment to systematically evaluate of algorithmic performance, consisted of several quantitative metrics which regression analysis typically employs, including mean squared error (MSE), mean absolute error (MAE), root mean squared error (RMSE) and determination coefficient ($R^2$). The TEDOCE-ML framework incorporates these metrics into a performance indicator library, which maintains dynamically adaptability to accommodate evolving algorithmic requirements.

MSE represents the arithmetic mean of squared differences between predicted and observed values. This metric emphasizes larger errors through squaring, making it particularly sensitive to outliers. MAE measures the average magnitude of prediction errors without considering direction. This robust metric provides linear penalty


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for errors. RMSE measures the standard deviation of prediction errors, which is a dimensionally consistent metric which offers intuitive interpretation as it shares units with the original data. For MSE, MAE and RMSE, smaller values indicate superior model accuracy.

$R^2$ quantifies the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the model, as following formula (2). Bounded between [0,1], values approaching 1, indicates better explanatory power of the model.

$$R^2(y,\hat{y}) = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i-\hat{y}_i)^2}{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i-\bar{y})^2} = \frac{ESS}{TSS} = 1 - \frac{RSS}{TSS} \quad (2)$$

where $TSS = \sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i - \bar{y})^2$, $RSS = \sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2$, and $ESS = \sum_{i=1}^{n}(\hat{y}_i - \bar{y})^2$.

## EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

### CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

Travel agencies, star-rated hotels and A-level scenic spots serve as the primary providers of tourism products and services, which play a critical role in constructing the credit system of tourism market. Therefore, these three types of entities are selected as empirical study, with 2137 travel agencies in Zhejiang Province, 1431 star-rated hotels and 337 A-level scenic spots in China. To ensure data validity, a three-stage screening mechanism was implemented:

(1) Basic viability check: Enterprises were filtered based on business duration (≥3 years) and legal independence, verified through industrial and commercial registration records;

(2) Compliance and safety screening: Entities involved in major safety incidents or with recorded service quality complaints within the past three years were excluded, as identified via the Ministry of Culture and Tourism;

(3) Creditworthiness verification: Institutions listed on abnormal operations registries or severe dishonest databases were removed after cross-referencing the national credit information sharing platform.

### DATA PREPROCESSING

The results of distribution test, correlation analysis and multicollinearity analysis for three cases are showed in Table1. Distribution tests detected 1 feature of travel agencies and star-rated hotels with a single-point distribution, which means that feature is unable of the supervised model to extract effective information. Correlation analysis with absolute values of the correlation coefficients for each case are mostly below 0.1, indicating that there is no significant linear relationship between features. Multicollinearity analysis identifies redundant variables for removal with VIF>10 indicate severe multicollinearity, while only 1 feature of star-rated hotels had a variance inflation factor of more than 1.

Table 1 Data processing results

| Case | A single-point distribution | Correlation analysis | Multicollinearity analysis |
|---|---|---|---|
| Travel agency | 1 feature | no significant linear relationship between features | / |
| Star hotels | 1 feature | | 1 feature with VIF >10 |
| A-level scenic spot | / | | / |

The feature dimensions and sample sizes after preprocessing for each case study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Data processing results

| Case | Feature | Dataset | Training Set | Testing Set |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Travel agency | 19 | 2137 | 1710 | 427 |
| Star hotels | 18 | 1431 | 1144 | 287 |
| A-level scenic spot | 17 | 337 | 270 | 67 |

### MODEL DYNAMIC OPTIMIZATION

After parameter tuning, the performance metrics of 10 algorithms in the model library are shown in Table 3. The comparative study of credit assessment models based on empirical analysis shows that different machine learning algorithms show significant performance differences in the tourism industry segmentation scenarios. For 3 cases, XGBoost demonstrated the optimal performance with $R^2$value 0.5776, 0.9797 and 0.9202 individually for travel agency, star hotels and A-level scenic spot. It is noteworthy that the polynomial


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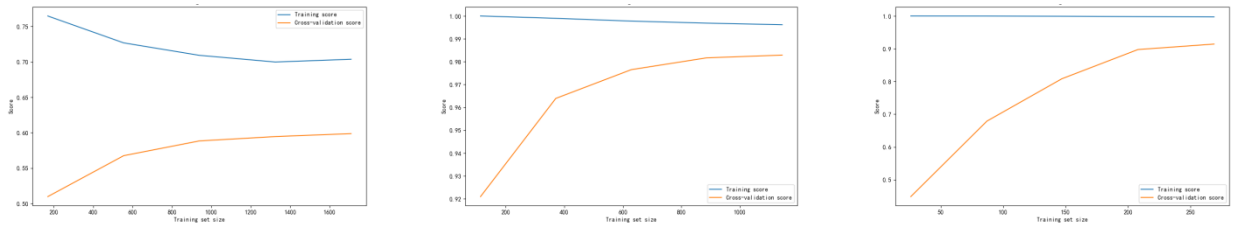
regression performed particularly poorly in addressing the credit evaluation of the three cases, indicating that the enterprises credit does not follow a polynomial relationship with features.

Table 3 Evaluation results of the credit evaluation model for cases

| Model | Case | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Travel agency | Star hotels | A-level scenic spot |
| Linear Regression | 0.4270 | 0.2469 | -0.4625 |
| Robust Regression | -0.8516 | -1.4412 | -1.9353 |
| Ridge Regression | 0.4286 | 0.2448 | -0.3005 |
| Lasso Regression | 0.4270 | 0.1010 | -0.0435 |
| Elastic Net Regression | 0.4172 | 0.2068 | 0.0958 |
| Polynomial Regression | $-0.4174\times10^{22}$ | -35.7954 | $-0.8795\times10^{8}$ |
| Stochastic Gradient Descent | 0.4271 | 0.2188 | -0.1915 |
| Random Forest | 0.5688 | 0.9332 | 0.8369 |
| Support Vector Machine | 0.5040 | 0.3852 | 0.2799 |
| XGBoost | 0.5776 | 0.9797 | 0.9202 |

In summary, XGBoost models performed best in terms of prediction accuracy and reliability, which is due to their advantages in being able to handle complex feature interactions and nonlinear relationships. XGBoost is an efficient gradient boosting algorithm library that combines multiple weak learners (usually decision trees) to build a powerful ensemble model. It continuously iterates and trains new decision tree models and integrates them into the overall model. It also introduces regularization technology to effectively prevent overfitting. The travel agency credit evaluation index system used in the study constitutes a high-dimensional feature space (n=20). After feature detection, only one single-point distribution feature is excluded. Models such as XGBoost may not have enough complexity to capture all patterns in the data, but the feature importance ranking reveals that the importance of 14 features is less than 0.05, indicating that redundant features may weaken the inductive bias advantage of integrated models such as XGBoost.

Figure 4 illustrates the learning curve of the optimal model for the three cases. The blue curve represents the performance of the model in the training set, and the orange curve represents the performance of the model in the cross-validation data set that did not participate in the training. The learning curve compares the error curves of the training set and the validation set to reflect the performance trend of the model as the sample size increases. When the two curves converge and the gap narrows, it indicates that the model has reached the upper limit of generalization ability, and the marginal benefit of increasing training data on performance improvement is significantly reduced.



(a) Travel agency (b) Star hotels (c) A-level scenic spot

Figure 3 Learning curves of the optimal algorithm

**FEATURE IMPORTANCE**

Feature importance refers to the quantitative assessment of each input feature's contribution to a model's predictive outcomes, revealing which variables truly drive the model's decision-making behavior and helping identify key influencing factors. A higher score indicates a greater impact of that feature on the model's output. The results are shown in Figure 5.

The travel agency credit evaluation system prioritizes enterprise scale (0.3206), qualification certification (0.1367), and operational longevity (0.1173) as core indicators. Enterprise scale, quantified by employee count, reflects operational capacity and market competitiveness. Qualification certification signifies regulatory compliance and service quality assurance, functioning as a reputation proxy. Operational longevity indicates industry experience accumulation and business stability. In contrast, safety management indicators (e.g.,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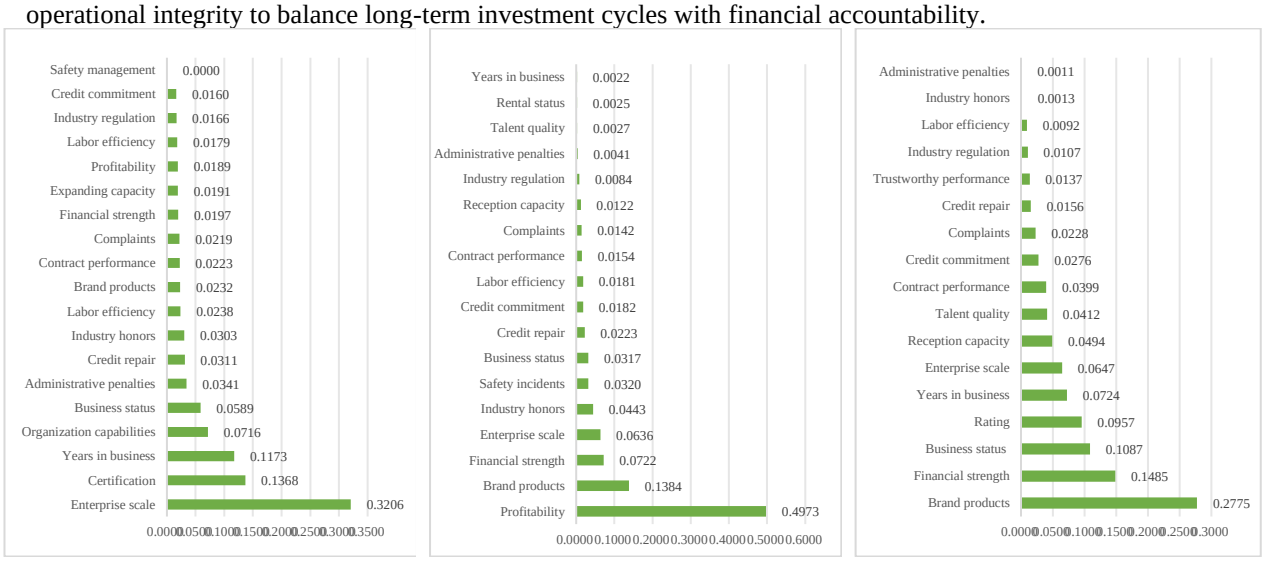
emergency protocols, drill frequency) exhibit negligible weight due to limited correlation with direct credit risk exposure.

The star-rated hotel credit evaluation system identifies profitability (0.4973) as the predominant factor, correlating with debt repayment capacity and operational efficiency. Brand product quality (0.1384) ranks second, directly affecting customer preference and revenue generation. Financial robustness and enterprise scale constitute supplementary determinants, reflecting fiscal stability and competitive positioning: financial health ensures operational resilience during market volatility, while larger establishments demonstrate resource allocation advantages. Notably, these metrics collectively underscore market-driven performance over non-financial attributes, as evidenced by profitability's dominance in capturing management efficacy and revenue sustainability within hospitality enterprises.

The credit evaluation framework for A-level scenic spots prioritizes brand products (0.2775), capital strength (0.1485), and business conditions (0.1087) as core determinants, reflecting the industry's capital-intensive, slow-return paradigm. Brand influence drives tourist consumption through reputation effects and crisis resilience via accumulated goodwill. Capital adequacy underpins heavy-asset operations by financing landscape preservation, disaster mitigation, and facility modernization while serving as collateral for credit financing. Business health metrics assess operational sustainability through revenue structure optimization, cost efficiency, and data transparency, mitigating compliance risks. These weighted indicators collectively address the sector's critical requirements: brand-driven market responsiveness, capital-backed infrastructure stability, and verifiable operational integrity to balance long-term investment cycles with financial accountability.




Travel agency Star-rated hotels A-level scenic spots

Figure 4 Feature importance

## COMPARISON WITH TRADITIONAL METHODS

The multi-level fuzzy comprehensive evaluation method is a widely adopted comprehensive assessment approach, primarily employed to address scenarios involving ambiguous indicators and quantification challenges. It effectively integrates qualitative-quantitative factors in credit risk evaluation. However, its reliance on subjective weight assignments introduces potential bias, while computational complexity (fuzzy matrix construction, membership determination) limits applicability to datasets with insufficient quality, high dimensionality, or poor data integrity.

The difference between the fuzzy method and TEDOCE-ML Framework are shown in Figure 6. The fuzzy method is a rule-driven approach that relies on predefined membership functions and weight matrices, emphasizing the formalized representation of expert knowledge. However, it requires manual adjustment of indicator systems and weights, leading to inherent latency in updates. In contrast, machine learning is a data-driven methodology that automatically extracts nonlinear relationships and complex patterns from massive datasets through algorithms. It excels at processing high-dimensional, multi-source heterogeneous data.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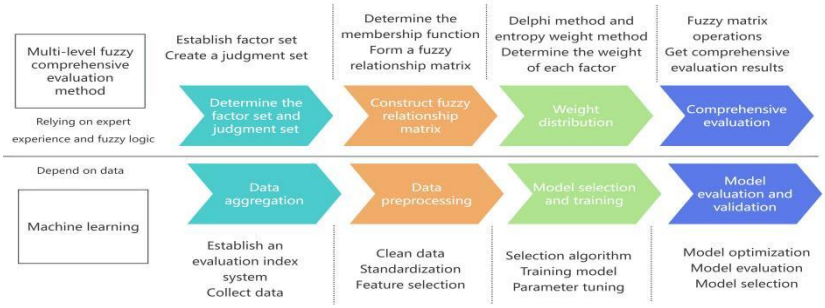


Figure 5 Comparison of the two methods

This study selected travel agency case, which TEDOCE-ML Framework performed worst among 3 cases, for comparison with the multi-level fuzzy comprehensive evaluation method. The fuzzy method was implemented using triangle and Gaussian membership functions, yielding $R^2$value of 0.2498 and 0.2837 respectively. Both values were significantly lower than TEDOCE-ML' $R^2$ of 0.5775 as shown in Table 3.
Based on the above results, the consistency between the multi-level fuzzy comprehensive evaluation method and the machine learning model results and the evaluated results in Zhejiang Province is compared. The results show that the model algorithm results of the machine learning method are more consistent with the evaluation results and have smaller deviations. This once again proves the excellent data-driven decision-making ability, strong generalization performance, and adaptability and flexibility of the machine learning model in the "Internet +" era. The importance of corporate credit evaluation based on multi-source data.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Machine learning demonstrates methodological superiority over traditional statistical approaches by automating risk pattern recognition through multi-dimensional data fusion such as financial histories, compliance records, and market reputation. Through iterative optimization via training on extensive datasets, these algorithms achieve enhanced accuracy in credit profiling while reducing evaluation latency. The computational efficiency facilitates real-time risk monitoring and promotes equitable outcomes by synthesizing heterogeneous data types—structured financial metrics and unstructured digital footprints. This capability enables holistic enterprise risk characterization, advancing predictive accuracy for operational risk management. Crucially, machine learning models transcend expert scoring limitations through continuous self-adjustment, effectively balancing assessment transparency, efficiency, and adaptability to evolving market dynamics.
Taking travel agencies, star-rated hotels and A-level scenic spots as examples, this paper constructs a tourism enterprise credit evaluation system based on multidimensional data, compares the performance of 10 machine learning models such as XGBoost, random forest, and support vector machine in tourism enterprise credit evaluation, and selects the optimal model to analyze the importance of the characteristics of the three types of enterprise credit evaluation. At the same time, the applicability of machine learning models and multi-level fuzzy comprehensive evaluation methods in tourism enterprise credit evaluation tasks is compared. The results show that XGBoost performs significantly better than other models in the three types of enterprise credit evaluation tasks; the most important feature of travel agency credit evaluation is enterprise scale, the most important feature of star-rated hotel credit evaluation is profitability, and the most important feature of A-level scenic spot credit evaluation is brand products; compared with the multi-level fuzzy comprehensive evaluation method, the accuracy of credit evaluation and prediction using machine learning models is higher and the deviation is smaller.
The limitations of this article are reflected in the following aspects: Firstly, although machine learning models have demonstrated strong quantitative analysis capabilities in credit evaluation, their data-driven quantitative analysis characteristics tend to ignore the information contained in qualitative data. Secondly, machine learning algorithms with "black box effect" makes it difficult to intuitively understand how the model makes predictions and decisions. The decision boundaries of nonlinear models are often more difficult to understand and explain, which is a challenge for the field of credit evaluation that requires a high degree of transparency and interpretability. At last, this study only used static data from a single year for analysis, while the incorporation of multi-year dynamic data enables more precise tracking of the evolutionary trajectory of tourism enterprises' credit status, thereby furnishing risk assessment with timelier and more actionable informational foundations.

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# UNDERSTANDING RESPONSIBLE TRAVELLERS ENGAGEMENT WITH A SMART, CROWDSOURCED PLATFORM: A UTAUT2 APPLICATION

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## ABSTRACT

While smart tourism technologies (STTs) have revolutionised the travel industry, there is limited understanding of factors influencing travellers' adoption of these technologies for responsible tourism behaviours. Current research largely focuses on technological and operational aspects, often neglecting the human and psychological dimensions necessary for effective adoption. This study addresses this gap by investigating the factors influencing users' intentions and behaviours towards adopting and using smart, crowdsourced technologies empowering responsible travellers.

This study employs the extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) model, incorporating age and gender as the moderating variables, and focuses on a smart, crowdsourced technology called TripDoodler (app.tripdoodler.com). This online platform enables individuals to find, rate, and share the sustainability efforts of tourism businesses they visit, such as accommodations, eateries, and shops. TripDoodler leverages advanced API integrations with systems like Google Maps, improving the process of identifying and showcasing tourism businesses. Each rating submission improves the user-generated database, supporting other travellers in making informed choices regarding sustainable travel options. Data for the study was collected by implementing a semi-structured online questionnaire, completed by 203 TripDoodler users, using a non-probability sampling method. The hypotheses testing was conducted through partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) using Smart PLS 4.0.

The findings indicate that behavioural intention to adopt and use the platform is significantly and positively related to facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, habitual behaviour, and social influence. Use behaviour is positively impacted by behavioural intention, facilitating conditions, and habitual behaviour. However, effort expectancy and performance expectancy did not show a significant influence on travellers' behavioural intentions. This challenges the foundational assumptions of UTAUT2, which traditionally positions these two constructs as core predictors of technology acceptance. In the context of a platform focused on sustainability and community participation, users appear to prioritise emotional value, perceived social approval, and behavioural routine over ease of use or functional benefits.

This divergence contributes to theory by advancing a more context-sensitive interpretation of technology adoption models, particularly in non-commercial, pro-social environments. It suggests that in mission-driven platforms like TripDoodler, the experiential and communal aspects of technology engagement outweigh utilitarian considerations. These insights build upon emerging work in tourism technology and responsible consumption, reinforcing the need to expand theoretical models to better reflect such contexts.

From a practical perspective, the study offers actionable recommendations. Developers should focus on features that support habitual engagement, such as gamification, personalised reminders, and easy integration with other travel tools. Strengthening social influence through peer testimonials, user-generated content, and collaborations with eco-conscious communities can further drive adoption. Since users value emotional satisfaction and meaning, messaging should emphasise individual contributions to collective sustainability rather than highlighting technical performance.



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These recommendations can inform the design of more engaging and impactful STTs that align with responsible tourism goals.

**Key Words**: Crowdsourced data, Responsible travellers, Smart tourism technology, Sustainable tourism, UTAUT 2

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# GUEST PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES: A MODEL OF ACCEPTANCE AND RECOMMENDATION OF HOTEL TECHNOLOGIES (THRAM)

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## ABSTRCT

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism, one of the pillars of the economy in several countries, requires constant monitoring regarding the adoption of technologies. The digital transformation in Hospitality and Tourism (H&T) and hospitality has been driven by technological advances such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, Artificial Intelligence and Robots. The connection between the physical and digital worlds has allowed the development of ideas that benefit the H&T sector and can promote sustainability, efficiency and innovation. In the context of hotels, guest satisfaction and meeting their expectations through personalized and automated services has become increasingly important. This research is guided by the following question: To what extent does the guest's perception of the technology available in hotels directly influence their behavioural responses? We considered two levels of behavioural response that represent guest engagement with the hotel: the intention to use the technology during their stay and the intention to recommend the hotel because of the technology. Thus, this research aims to analyze the perception/attitude and level of acceptance of guests regarding hotel technologies, as well as the effect of the presence of hotel technologies on satisfaction and recommendation intention.

## METHODS

Based on the review of the Davis TAM Model (1989) carried out by Kim (2016) and Patel (2018), we revisited the model to include new variables that respond to the current context: technological readiness, social influence and technological expectation. In addition, we expanded the technological acceptance model to technological acceptance and recommendation. The PLS-SEM methodology was used to validate the model and hypotheses. The variables were adapted from the literature review, and the scales were previously validated through a Face Validity procedure with experts. Data were then collected through questionnaires with a valid sample of 553 Portuguese guests.

## RESULTS

The validated Model of Acceptance and Recommendation of Hotel Technologies (THRAM) is divided into four main components: the ‘’external and social stimuli’’ that evidence the social influence on the adoption and use of technology by guests; the ‘”cognitive response’’ responsible for the guest’s perception of the technology, including perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness; the ‘’affective response’’, which considers technology preparedness and the level of expectation about finding technology in hotels. Finally, the ‘’behavioral responses 1 and 2’’. The first behavioural response concerns the use of technology, and the second refers to the guest’s satisfaction with the technology and consequent intention to recommend the hotel.



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## CONCLUSION

Technological evolution and guest preferences indicate that perceptions of ease of use give way to other key variables, such as social influence, guest technological preparedness and expectations regarding technology. These findings are a contribution to the theory. The results indicate that conceptual models must evolve over time and that guests' perception of technology is increasingly important for planning marketing and competitiveness strategies, as it positively influences hotel word-of-mouth.

## ACKNOWLEDGENT

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# SECTION 3: BRANDING IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY


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# REVEALING PSYCHOLOGICAL DRIVERS OF BRAND IDENTIFICATION IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY: COMPARING BORN-MASSTIGE HOTELS AND LUXURY BRAND EXTENSIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Despite growing interest in masstige branding, two critical gaps remain: the lack of comparative research between born-masstige brands and luxury brand downward extensions, and limited insight into the psychological drivers of consumer responses. This study addresses these gaps by exploring how self-esteem, self-efficacy, and psychological needs shape consumer reactions to masstige hotel brands. Using self-discrepancy theory and the compensatory consumer behaviour model, it employs a two-study design: an experiment comparing brand strategies and a survey testing a mediation model. The findings are expected to contribute to branding theory and offer practical guidance for positioning masstige brands in hospitality.

Keywords: Masstige branding, self-discrepancy, compensatory consumer behaviour, brand identification, hospitality branding, consumer psychological needs

## INTRODUCTION

In a society where personal identity and self-expression are increasingly valued, consumers often rely on brands to bridge gaps in their self-concept (Higgins, 1987; Malär et al., 2011). Masstige brands, which balance prestige and affordability, offer an accessible means of fulfilling aspirational identity needs (Boisvert et al., 2023; Shahid et al., 2024). This dynamic is particularly significant in the hospitality sector, where masstige hotel brands provide the allure of exclusivity without the prohibitive costs of luxury, addressing psychological needs like self-enhancement and achievement (Sarkar & Roy, 2016; Geerts & Masset, 2022). Despite growing interest in masstige branding, little research has compared the impact of luxury brands' downward extensions and born-masstige brands, particularly in hospitality contexts.

A comparative study of these strategies can provide profound insights into the connection between various masstige branding methods and consumer psychology. Despite numerous recent studies, there is a paucity of research comparing the downward brand extensions of luxury brands with those of born-masstige brands. This gap is pronounced in the hospitality literature. Thus, several questions remain unanswered in the hospitality sector concerning masstige strategies. For instance, how do consumers perceive and respond to born-masstige hotels compared to luxury hotels' downward extensions? (RQ1) What is the role of self-related traits, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, in shaping consumers' responses towards masstige hotel brands? (RQ2) What are the psychological antecedents of consumers' connections with masstige hotel brands? (RQ3) To answer these questions, this study uses an experimental design and survey method for investigating consumers' brand identification and behavioural intentions based on the masstige brand type.



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Grounded in self-discrepancy theory and the compensatory consumer behavior model, this study examines how low self-esteem and self-efficacy, as outcomes of self-discrepancy, drive consumers to identify with masstige brands to alleviate psychological discomfort. It explores the mediating roles of achievement, uniqueness, and self-enhancement needs in linking self-concept gaps with brand identification and behavioural intentions.
By employing an experimental design, this research provides novel insights into the psychological mechanisms underpinning masstige consumption. It extends the literature by comparing two distinct masstige strategies—downward brand extensions and born-masstige brands—within the hospitality industry. This comparative approach offers practical implications for brand managers, emphasizing the need to align branding strategies with consumers' psychological drivers to foster stronger brand connections and positive behavioural outcomes.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### Self-discrepancy theory and compensatory consumer behaviour model

Self-discrepancy theory explains how gaps between an individual's self-concepts—the actual, ideal, and ought self—lead to emotional discomforts, such as sadness or guilt, motivating individuals to address these discrepancies through self-improvement or consumption behaviours (Higgins, 1987; Barnett et al., 2017). This theory highlights why consumers choose brands that align with their ideal or ought selves, using symbolic products like masstige brands to bridge identity gaps, improve self-image, and alleviate emotional discomfort (Ruvio et al., 2008; Al-Issa et al., 2023). The compensatory consumer behaviour model identifies how individuals use consumption to cope with negative emotions arising from self-discrepancies. Strategies like symbolic self-completion and fluid compensation are particularly relevant to masstige brand consumption. Symbolic self-completion involves using products to signal and reinforce traits perceived as lacking, while fluid compensation allows individuals to enhance their self-worth through accomplishments in unrelated domains (Mandel et al., 2017). Masstige brands, with their combination of prestige and accessibility, fulfil psychological needs by helping consumers bridge identity gaps and achieve aspirations, fostering stronger brand connections (Ho et al., 2023; Chaurasia et al., 2024).

### Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

#### Born-masstige brands and downward extensions of luxury brands

Masstige brands, blending "mass" and "prestige," connect the middle-market and premium segments by offering status and luxury without exclusivity (Kumar and Paul, 2018). These brands are divided into born-masstige brands and downward extensions of luxury brands (Lee and Cho, 2022). Born-masstige brands target middle-income consumers by combining premium design with affordability, emphasising elegance, aspirational appeal, and premium experiences (Truong et al., 2009; Silverstein and Fiske, 2003). Examples include Coach and Kate Spade, which offer moderately priced, stylish products (Vogel et al., 2019; Lee and Cho, 2023). In contrast, downward extensions of luxury brands, such as Armani Exchange, make luxury brands more accessible while maintaining their traditional prestige (Boisvert and Ashill, 2021; Quamina et al., 2023). These strategies differ in heritage, origin, and price, shaping consumer perceptions. The study proposes the hypothesis:

*H1: Consumers' brand identification and behavioural intention are greater for born-masstige hotels than luxury hotels' downward extensions.*

Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) suggests that gaps between one's actual and ideal selves lead to emotional distress, such as low self-esteem and poor self-efficacy. These negative self-evaluations motivate individuals to fulfill unmet needs related to achievement, uniqueness, and self-enhancement (Higgins, 1987; Kim & Gal, 2014; Cannon & Rucker, 2022). Based on this, we propose the following hypotheses, supported by the self-discrepancy theory, compensatory consumer behaviour model, and relevant studies.

*H2: Self-esteem negatively influences the need for achievement.*
*H3: Self-esteem negatively influences the need for uniqueness.*
*H4: Self-esteem negatively influences the need for self-enhancement.*
*H5: Self-efficacy negatively influences the need for achievement.*
*H6: Self-efficacy negatively influences the need for uniqueness.*
*H7: Self-efficacy negatively influences the need for self-enhancement.*
*H8: The need for achievement positively influences brand identification with masstige hotel brands.*
*H9: The need for uniqueness positively influences brand identification with masstige hotel brands.*


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*H10: The need for self-enhancement positively influences brand identification with masstige hotel brands.*
*H11. Brand identification positively influences behavioural intentions toward masstige hotel brands.*
*H12: The psychological needs (need for achievement, need for uniqueness, and need for self-enhancement) mediate the relationship between self-concept factors (self-esteem and self-efficacy) and brand identification with masstige hotel brands.*

Moderating effects of brand type and social comparison
*H13a: Brand type moderates the effects of psychological needs on brand identification, such that these effects are stronger for born-masstige hotels than the downward extensions of luxury hotels.*
*H13b: Brand type moderates the effect of brand identification on behavioural intention, such that these effects are stronger for born-masstige hotels than the downward extensions of luxury hotels.*
*H14a: Consumers' social comparison tendencies positively moderate the effects of self-esteem and self-efficacy on psychological needs, such that these effects are stronger for those highly comparing themselves with other people than those with low comparison tendencies.*

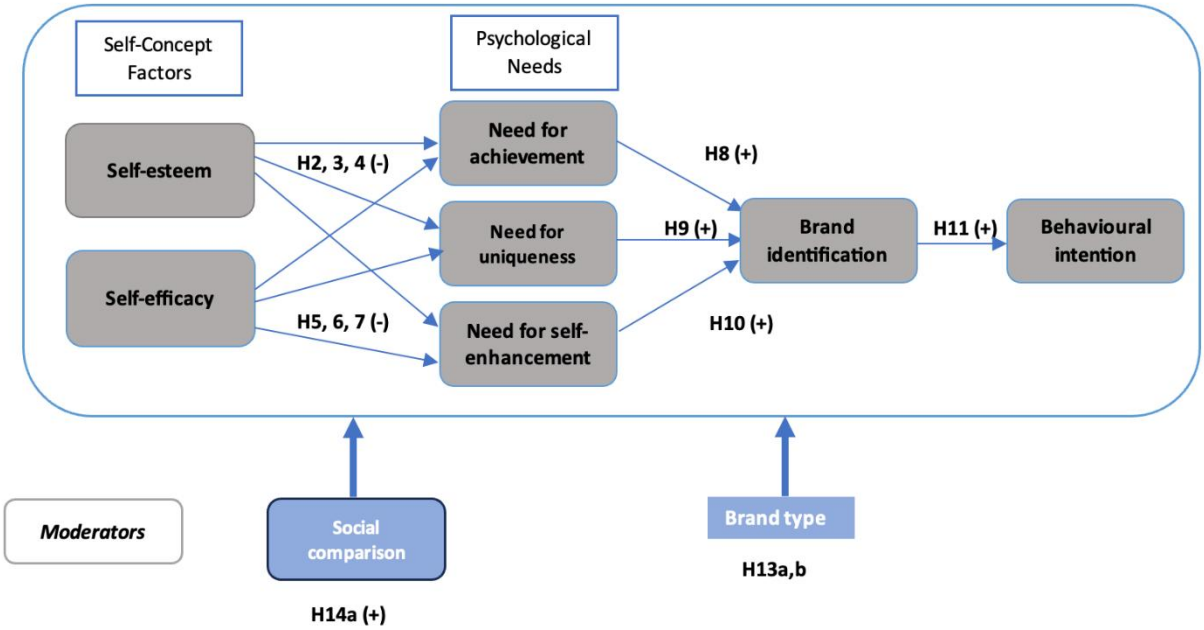


**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model

## METHODOLOGY

This study examines the distinctions in consumer attitudes and behaviours regarding masstige hotel brands. An experimental design and survey-based methodology were utilised to gather data from people subjected to two different brand conditions: born masstige hotels and downward masstige extensions of premium brands.
Before the main study, we performed a pre-test for the manipulation to ensure that these two scenarios were perceived differently. The same scenario was utilised to examine Hypothesis 1, as this hypothesis suggests that born-masstige brands yield more favourable outcomes (i.e., brand identification and behavioural intention) than luxury brands' downward extensions.

*Pre-test 1*
The initial group received a description and visuals of a fictitious born-masstige hotel company, Exora Hotel. In contrast, the subsequent group was provided with a description of Hilton's hypothetical downward extension, Aurora Hotels by Hilton, accompanied by relevant photos. Questionnaire forms involving brand prestige were created following Vigneron and Johnson's (1999) prestigious brand conceptualisation and Tse et el. (2023). Both groups


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thereafter answered an identical series of survey questions to assess their impressions of the brands, encompassing brand status, exclusivity, social standing, emotional satisfaction, and quality. The participants were recruited via Prolific, a widely recognised platform for sourcing diverse and qualified respondents. Examples of the materials and questionnaire forms are shown in Figure 2.

*Results of the pre-test1*

An independent samples t-test was used to assess the perceptions of hotel descriptions between the Aurora Hotels group (Group 1) and the Exora Hotel group (Group 2). The results demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the two groups, $t$ (89) = -2.401, $p$ = .018. Participants who examined the Exora Hotel description (Group 2) demonstrated significantly higher mean scores (M = 3.75, SD = 0.68) compared to those who assessed the Aurora Hotels (Group 1) description (M = 3.40, SD = 0.71). The mean difference between the groups was -0.35 (SE = 0.15), indicating that the Exora Hotel description was perceived more favourably overall. Thus, the findings confirmed the manipulations' success.

Pre-test 2

Referring to the prior studies on luxury, masstige, and brand extension, we generated items for the manipulation. Two groups will see the scenarios regarding born-masstige and downward extension conditions. This pretest is designed to assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation distinguishing between born-masstige hotels and downward extensions of luxury hotel brands. Drawing on established research in luxury branding, masstige marketing, and brand extension strategies (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999; Dubois et al., 2001; Kapferer, 1998; Paul, 2015; Truong et al., 2009; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003), we have developed scenario-based manipulation items that clearly reflect the defining characteristics of each brand type. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the downward extension condition, the hotel will be described as a more budget-friendly version of an established luxury brand—retaining its elitist image but offering more accessible pricing. In the born-masstige condition, the hotel will be introduced as a brand specifically created to offer prestige to middle-class consumers, combining luxury-inspired cues with broad market appeal. Thus, this pretest aims to confirm that participants accurately perceive the intended positioning of the hotel brand in each condition, thereby validating the manipulation for use in the main experiment.


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**AURORA HOTELS by HILTON**

Take a look at the following images showcasing Aurora Hotels, an exclusive yet accessible extension of Hilton. Aurora Hotels seamlessly blends Hilton's renowned luxury and elegance with a fresh approach to affordability …




**EXORA HOTEL**

Take a look at the following images showcasing Exora, a hotel that perfectly balances prestige with affordability. Exora offers the prestige and elegance associated with high-end hotels while ensuring that these qualities remain accessible to a broader range of guests …




This hotel is seen as a symbol of status among others.
This hotel appears exclusive, as not everyone can stay here.
Staying at this hotel enhances my social standing.
This hotel could satisfy my emotional or personal desires.
This hotel offers exceptional quality and service.

Figure 2. Materials and measurement items used in the pre-test

Main study

The main study will replicate the scenarios used in the pre-test to ensure consistency. One group of participants will view a description and images of a fictional born-masstige hotel brand, Exora Hotel, while the other will view Hilton's fictional downward extension, Aurora Hotels by Hilton. Unlike the pre-test, which will focus on evaluating the scenarios, the main study will examine participants' brand identification and behavioural intentions to test the first hypothesis, comparing the effects of born-masstige hotels and luxury downward-extension hotels. Behavioural intention will be assessed using six items from Japutra et al. (2024), focusing on actions like visiting, recommending, or speaking positively about the hotels. Brand identification will be measured using three items from Molinillo, Japutra, and Ekinci (2022).

After validating the causality in the first hypothesis, we plan to use structural equation modelling (SEM) to test a comprehensive model based on the research hypotheses. This approach aims to expand the initial study by investigating deeper connections among the variables. The SEM will enable an in-depth analysis of the relationships driving customer perceptions and responses to born-masstige and luxury downward-extension hotels.

The constructs in the SEM will be measured using validated scales from prior research to ensure data reliability and validity. Brand identification and behavioural intention will be measured with the same items as in the first study. Additional variables will include:

Need for achievement: Measured using Steers and Braunstein's (1976) scale to evaluate participants' motivation to achieve goals.

Need for self-enhancement: Assessed with six items from Paulhus (1988).

Need for uniqueness: Measured using a 9-item scale from Mowen, Fang, and Scott (2010).

Self-efficacy: Evaluated with the 8-item New General Self-Efficacy Scale (Chen et al., 2001).

Self-esteem: Measured via four items from Noh (2022).

Social comparison: Assessed using four items from Roy et al. (2020).


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Variety-seeking: Measured using six items from Jung and Yoon (2012).

Control variables will include materialism and self-oriented perfectionism, as prior research suggests these traits influence attitudes toward luxury. Materialism will be assessed using Richins' (1987) scale, and self-oriented perfectionism will be measured using eight items from Flett et al. (1997).

## CONCLUSION

Although the study is still in progress, the expected findings hold the potential to offer meaningful contributions to both theory and practice. Theoretically, this research may extend self-discrepancy theory and compensatory behaviour theory into the branding domain, particularly within the emerging context of masstige hospitality brands. If supported, the hypotheses could demonstrate that born-masstige hotels are more effective than downward extensions in addressing consumers' psychological needs, providing a solid foundation for future research in this area.

From a practical perspective, the study could guide hospitality brands in refining their strategic positioning. By tailoring brand messages to resonate with consumers experiencing low self-esteem or self-efficacy, brands may enhance engagement and loyalty. At the same time, the findings may caution against the potential risks of diluting brand equity through downward extensions. Ultimately, this research aspires to support the development of symbolically meaningful branding strategies in the hospitality sector.

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# REIMAGINING DESTINATION BRANDING FOR GLOBAL TALENT ACQUISITION: NEW PERSPECTIVES FROM TECH START-UP TALENTS

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## ABSTRACT

In today's globalized world, cities worldwide are fiercely competing for investments, innovations, and top talent. Due to labour shortage issues observed in many cities, attracting highly skilled talents from external sources has emerged as a strategic quick fix that creates favourable conditions for productivity, innovation, and economic growth. Given their potential to generate high-level innovations, create jobs, and attract investments, tech start-ups entrepreneurs are regarded as crucial strategic targets among all global talents. By attracting tech talents to the cities, the cities can foster the development of a knowledge-based economy through task digitization and innovative solutions, lowering production costs while scaling various businesses into high-value enterprises. To attract these talents to establish or relocate their tech start-ups, city governments have introduced "hard" policies and incentives in various areas, such as migration, citizenship, employment, taxation, and funding support. These policies contribute to the growing mobility of global talents across permeable geographical boundaries. However, a conceptual gap exists concerning the "soft" elements that make a city an appealing destination for global start-up talents seeking to relocate.

By adopting a tourism perspective to enhance global talent acquisition, this qualitative research aims to explore the role of destination brand elements, such as destination brand image (DBI), destination brand personality (DBP), and destination brand experience (DBE), in attracting tech start-ups. Focused on Hong Kong as a research context, the study investigates how Invest Hong Kong promotes the city's destination brand elements to start-up talents. Moreover, the research analyses the disparities between the promoted brand elements and the actualized brand elements perceived by start-up talents considering relocation to Hong Kong, as shared on social media. Moreover, the study conducts semi-structured in-depth interviews with 30 global start-up talents who have relocated to Hong Kong for over six months, exploring their perceptions and experiences of the brand elements that have enticed and retained them in the city thus far. Through abductive thematic analysis, the study uncovers the soft destination brands that can complement the monetary considerations of start-up talents, influencing their further decision to relocate and remain in the city.

The findings highlight the significant role of soft destination brands in attracting and retaining global start-up talents in a city for the long term, contributing to their quality of life beyond their businesses. This research represents a novel study that extends the potential of tourism knowledge to other fields, including entrepreneurship, migration, and global talent acquisition. The study reveals relational, temporal, and spatial dimensions of destination branding when applied to a start-up destination context. While destination branding is typically fixated to a specific tourist destination, for start-up talents who contemplate long-term relocation, destination brands are often interconnected to other similar destinations, evolving through actualization and rationalization processes. Furthermore, start-up destination brands are not confined solely by geographical boundaries but are perceived as a regional base to connect with other cities, extending brand elements to a broader regional level. Additionally, the study offers practical recommendations to policymakers on tailoring branding strategies to position the city as a start-up destination.


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# REALITY SHOW: A POTENTIAL TOOL TO PROMOTE VIETNAM'S TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

Today, with the vigorous development of social media and the widespread coverage of Vietnamese reality shows, integrating cultural and tourism promotion into these programs is being evaluated as an effective approach to introducing Vietnam's culture and tourism to domestic and international tourists.

According to a report by Expedia, two-thirds of global tourists have considered traveling based on inspiration from films, and 39% have booked trips based on stories seen on screen. There is a fact that when a reality show becomes popular, fans often desire to visit and check in at the filming locations, as they want to experience the unique feelings and explore the stories that captivated them through these programs.

Vietnam has significant cultural potential and a wealth of heritage from various ethnic groups. Therefore, if artistic and entertainment programs are thoroughly exploited, there will be numerous tourism and cultural products to develop a creative and sustainable economy and gradually promote Vietnamese tourism globally. The success and audience reception of reality shows further demonstrate that this is one of the most effective communication channels for culture and destinations, serving as a source of inspiration and a promising direction to create connections and drive breakthroughs in domestic tourism.

However, it is a reality that the measurement and evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs on tourism have not been officially confirmed, and no scholar in Vietnam has yet identified the actual mechanisms behind these programs' impact on tourists' consumption behavior. Therefore, the current study can be considered the first to assess and measure the effects of reality shows on tourists' behavior in Vietnam.

Specifically, the study employs cognitive emotion theory (CET) as the foundational theory to elucidate how reality shows influence tourist behavior in three sequential stages: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. In the cognitive stage, individuals are posited to process a series of information to form perceptions of an external stimulus. In this context, the characters featured in reality shows can be regarded as external stimuli, meaning that the audience cognitively receives and evaluates the behaviors and representations of these characters.

In the emotional stage, the perceptions formed from external stimuli are believed to influence an individual, prompting the emergence of internal emotions in response to these external agents. In this regard, the authors argue that travel inspiration is an emotion likely to arise following the audience's cognitive processing of the characters. Thus, the authors hypothesize that the audience's perceptions of the characters in reality programs may inspire them to engage in destination-approach behavior (i.e., travel planning behavior).

In summary, based on the application of CET, this study investigates the credibility characteristics of characters from reality shows that can evoke tourists' travel inspiration and thus influence their travel planning behavior. It can be said that the study provides a comprehensive framework to explain the impact mechanism of reality shows. The study also demonstrates that CET is a reliable scientific basis that can be applied to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of these practical programs on tourist behavior. Additionally, the research results serve as a basis for proposing solutions to enhance the effectiveness and dissemination of these programs to promote and advertise Vietnam tourism further.


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# SECTION 4: CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY SETTINGS


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# THE ROLE OF COOLNESS IN THE SUCCESS OF PRODUCTS AND BRANDS: A STUDY ON SMART AIRBNB HOMES

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates consumer attitudes toward smart Airbnbs, focusing on the roles of coolness and consumer innovativeness in shaping these attitudes. Through a quantitative research design, data were collected from 402 respondents via surveys. The findings indicate that hedonic innovativeness positively influences perceptions of coolness, while social innovativeness negatively affects them. The attractiveness dimension of coolness plays a key role in shaping consumer attitudes, which, in turn, significantly impacts their intention to stay. The study offers theoretical insights into the multidimensional nature of coolness and its practical implications for Airbnb hosts.
**Key words:** Coolness, consumer innovativeness, Airbnb, sharing economy, smart home systems, staying intention

## INTRODUCTION

Coolness is a critical factor in the success of products and brands, as its absence has led to the disappearance of some from history (Warren et al., 2019). This factor is particularly significant for technological products, where new technologies are often perceived as cool. However, even technologically advanced products may face rejection if they lack a cool image (Tiwari et al., 2021). In the sharing economy, Airbnb hosts use unique themes (e.g., Barbie DreamHouse, Private Modern Treehouse, The Ellwood Box Hop) to attract customers (Hall et al., 2022; Airbnb, 2023; 2025; Marti-Ochoa et al., 2024). Coolness, as a desirable quality and a way to provide uniqueness (Warren et al., 2019), can differentiate such accommodations. While previous studies have explored aspects of Airbnb like psychological ownership (Li et al., 2024), motivations for choosing accommodations (Volz & Volgger, 2022), and the impact of coolness on consumer behavior (Zhang et al., 2024), there is limited research on smart Airbnbs. One qualitative study examined the visual elements of touchless check-in systems in smart Airbnbs (An et al., 2022), but research on consumer behavior in this context remains scarce. Considering the critical role of coolness, it is essential to investigate consumer tendencies toward Airbnbs equipped with smart home products. This study focuses on consumer attitudes toward such Airbnbs, examining the roles of coolness and consumer innovativeness and their influence on these attitudes.

## METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

The study ultimately investigates how coolness perceptions shape attitudes toward smart Airbnbs and how these attitudes influence consumers' intentions to stay. It focuses on how consumer innovativeness affects perceptions of coolness and behavioral intentions. Hedonic and social innovativeness—and their effects on coolness are assessed through three dimensions: subculture, attractiveness, and originality. A quantitative research design was used to examine consumer attitudes toward smart Airbnbs. Data for the study was collected through surveys administered via the Prolific platform in the United Kingdom. The survey was developed using scales that have demonstrated established validity and reliability in previous studies: Innovation scale (Roehrich, 2004), coolness scale (Sundar et al., 2014), attitude scale (Lam & Hsu, 2006), and intention scale (Papagiannidis & Davlembayeva, 2021). The analysis, conducted on a sample of 402 responses, employed structural equation modelling for data analysis. The


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findings reveal that hedonic innovativeness positively affects perceptions of coolness, with hedonic innovative individuals rating smart Airbnbs as cool across all dimensions. Conversely, social innovativeness negatively impacts coolness perceptions, likely due to the low external visibility of the selected products. The study also highlights the dominant role of the attractiveness dimension in shaping attitudes toward smart Airbnbs. Finally, consumers' attitudes significantly and positively influence their intention to stay. The study's key findings emphasize the contrasting effects of hedonic and social innovativeness on coolness perceptions. Notably, only the attractiveness dimension of coolness positively impacts consumers' attitudes toward smart Airbnbs.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The study's findings offer both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it highlights how the dimensions of consumer innovativeness (hedonic and social) differently affect the perceived coolness of smart home-equipped Airbnbs, demonstrating that innovativeness is not a unidimensional construct. The positive influence of hedonic innovativeness and the negative impact of social innovativeness suggest the need for more nuanced theoretical models addressing innovative consumer profiles. Furthermore, the finding that only the attractiveness dimension of coolness positively shapes consumer attitudes emphasizes the multidimensional nature of coolness and its varied effects on consumer behaviour. From a practical perspective, these findings provide strategic insights for Airbnb hosts. Highlighting product features and service experiences that resonate with consumers' hedonic innovativeness can boost perceived coolness, encouraging positive attitudes and stay intentions. Focusing on subcultural indicators, like specialized themes, local cultural aspects, or community-driven experiences, can boost perceptions of coolness and have a positive impact on consumer attitudes. Additionally, highlighting the space's visual appeal — through thoughtful design, aesthetics, and ambiance — can strengthen these favourable assessments.

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# DETERMINANTS OF SPECTATOR CONSUMPTION AND THE PROMINENCE OF EVENT ATTRIBUTES IN BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS: INSIGHTS FROM A NON-MEGA SPORT TOURISM EVENT

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to outline the profile of NRS of a non-mega recurring sport tourism event, and analyse their consumption determinants and behavioural intentions. At the Millennium Estoril Open event, 175 questionnaires were applied to the NRS. Consumption determinants and destination/event attributes and behavioural intentions association were calculated. The results reinforce the need for an integrated approach of both consumption determinants and behavioural intentions, allowing a joint analysis of the tangible (short-term) and intangible (long-term) economic benefits. Also, this study highlights the need to study event attributes in a combined perspective, including all dimensions of sport events' service quality.

**Keywords:** Destination revisit and recommendation; Expenditure; Non-Resident Spectators; Recurring events.

Sport events can boost the local economy through the direct consumption of goods/services and by enhancing the destination's image. Existing literature mostly focus on mega-events which contrasts with the need to study non-mega events, considering their economic benefits for the destination especially when they are annually hosted. Studies with a holistic view of economic benefits are also needed to produce knowledge for designing strategies to stimulate the event's tangible and intangible effects on the destination's economic development. Consequently, the study of the determinants of consumption must be integrated with the behavioural intentions of non-resident spectators (NRS) to generate a more in-depth analysis of the potential economic benefits of sport events. Therefore, this study aimed to outline the profile of NRS of a non-mega recurring sport tourism event, and analyse their consumption determinants and behavioural intentions.

At the Millennium Estoril Open event, 175 questionnaires were applied to the NRS. Consumption determinants were calculated with multiple linear regression for total NRS expenditure, using IBM SPSS Statistics v. 28.0. The destination/event attributes and behavioural intentions association was calculated using Spearman's Rho coefficient. The sample reveals a high predominance of male national NRS, young, with university education and whose income is less than 2000 euros. The results show that the majority of NRS went to the event accompanied by friends/family. Additionally, more than half of the NRS arrived early to the event for the following reasons: do not miss the beginning of the event, enjoy the environment, and avoid traffic. The majority of NRS had already been to the destination and did not stay overnight. This result can be linked to the fact that the majority of NRS live in cities not far from where the event was held. Overall, older spectators with higher income, who travelled with family, stayed overnight, and arrived early spend more money at the destination. The significant and positive effect on behavioural intentions of NRS is substantiated by five event attributes but only one respecting the destination. Event attributes are integrated into all dimensions of event service quality, i.e. overall event quality, functional quality, and hedonic quality.


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Theoretically, this study contributes to boost the line of research emphasizing the potential of non-mega sport events for providing economic benefits. To that end, this study reinforces the need for an integrated approach of both consumption determinants and behavioural intentions, allowing a joint analysis of the tangible (short-term) and intangible (long-term) economic benefits. Also, this study highlights the need to study event attributes in a combined perspective, including all dimensions of sport events' service quality.

Also, both sport event managers and local destination tourism managers must develop strategies aimed to attract international tourists, otherwise the advantage/effort of hosting an international elite event is not economically capitalized by the destination. Furthermore, the collaboration of key stakeholders must be a priority, including a wide range of local community agents in event planning, as well as promoting the recurring events' hedonic attributes, which encourage anticipation for entertainment activities and boost spectators' intentions to return.

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# EXPLORING "LEFT UNDONE" AS A FACTOR IN REVISIT MOTIVATIONS

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

Previous studies have established that tourists tend to revisit destinations when satisfied with previous experiences. These studies applied consumer behavior models originally developed for general product repurchase behavior. The consumer behavior models also focus on variety-seeking behavior, where customers may choose not to repurchase despite satisfaction. Similarly, tourism research has examined variety/novelty-seeking behaviors and revealed that variety or novelty seekers choose new destinations over revisiting the same one. Although previous studies have provided rich implications, this study reconsiders the applicability of the general consumer behavior model to repeaters in tourism. One of the reasons is that travel involves various elements (transportation, hotels, restaurants, etc.), and tourists make multiple purchase decisions. Additionally, travel experiences vary according to the visiting season and group members; repeaters rarely have the same experience repeatedly. The motivation for revisiting a destination differs from the motivation behind repeat purchases, as it often stems from a desire for experiences distinct from those previously encountered.

### OBJECTIVES

The objective is to investigate motivations for revisiting destinations and propose the concept of "left undone" as an antecedent factor. This study is ongoing research and lays the groundwork for developing scale items to measure "left undone". The research question is "why do tourists revisit the same destination abroad?" The reason for focusing on revisit behavior in international travel is that, unlike domestic travel, it is less frequent, requiring a strong motivation to revisit a same destination.

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Exploratory interview surveys involving three researchers were employed. At first, the interviews were conducted with seven Thai and six Taiwanese people who had revisited the same destinations abroad. Along with the research question, the interview included questions on the interviewee's memorable experiences of international travel. Each interview lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and was conducted through a translator. After the first interview, other interviews were conducted with Japanese people to confirm the result of the first one. Fourteen Japanese interviewees, all leisure travelers who had been abroad, were recruited from the researchers' networks.

### FINDINGS

Through the first interview, "left undone" was founded as a factor of revisit intention. For example, they could not experience a particular view due to bad weather and they hope to revisit to see it. The second interview with Japanese people also confirmed that "left undone" is a significant factor in revisit intentions. The two interviews yielded nearly identical results.


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## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The main contribution is proposing the concept of “left undone” as an antecedent factor of revisit intention. The “left undone” will be a novel factor of the repeaters’ model. Efforts will be directed toward developing a scale for the concept of "left undone" in preparation for quantitative empirical analysis.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Satisfaction with the previous visit, as highlighted in existing studies, was an important factor in motivating revisit. However, the more direct reason for revisit was the sense of “left undone”—the experiences that could not be fulfilled during the previous visit. Tourist destinations should consider making the tourists how to feel "left undone".


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# FACTORS THAT HAVE SPATIO-TEMPORAL INFLUENCES ON THE BEHAVIOR OF THEATER FESTIVAL PARTICIPANTS: ELICITATIONS FROM CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Arts festivals often promote not only festival attendance but also visits to various sites in festival locations. However, previous studies regarding festival visitors have rarely addressed whether or how festival attendance promotes visits to those sites. The study aim was to gain knowledge about variables that may promote festival participants' visits to and intention to visit sites in festival locations (spatial influence of the festival) and their intentions to visit locations at times outside the festival period (temporal influence).
The Toyooka Theater Festival, held every September at multiple venues across three municipalities in Tajima Region, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan, was chosen as the case. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with festival participants regarding their particularly memorable experiences. This abstract presents the results of a preliminary analysis of responses from 10 participants who have already cooperated. Customer journey mapping (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), a marketing method that elicits and organizes customers' purchasing processes, was applied to interview responses.

The experiences mentioned were categorized as planned or unplanned since spatial and temporal effects may result from secondary (possibly unplanned) experiences. Unplanned experiences were further categorized into four types: Exceeding Expectations, Incomplete Planned Experiences (IPEs), Serendipity, and Accidents. The authors (n.d.) defined IPEs as individuals' evaluations of the fact that they did not have the experiences they had expected or planned at the travel destination before traveling. Serendipity is defined as a set of feelings resulting from a product, service, or experience that is positive, unexpected, and attributed to some degree of chance (Kim et al., 2021). The application of these two concepts in combination is a unique marketing endeavor. A cut-off point of three or more people was adopted for the analysis.

The results showed that memorable experiences spanned a range of categories. Experiences suggested by respondents as satisfying mainly related to stage performances, visits to sites, and encounters with local people. Stage performances and programs related to both the festival and local areas (e.g., locally themed performances and those offering talks about the local community) might have affected the willingness to return to the festival. The spatial and temporal impacts of the festival were related to visits to sites in festival locations or a failure to do so during and outside the festival period.

In summary, the importance of recognizing local attractions in festival locations is suggested. The need to secure time for theatrical performances may prevent participants from visiting desired attractions, which may encourage a subsequent visit to sites in the locations during and outside the festival period. The importance of integrating performing arts and venues is also suggested. The next step is a quantitative study to verify the results.


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# EXAMINING NET PROMOTER SCORE (NPS) FOR VISITING A DESTINATION: A STUDY OF ISTANBUL, TURKIYE

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

## INTRODUCTION

Since its introduction by Reichheld (2003), The Net Promoter Score (NPS) has gained widespread attention as a key metric for measuring customer satisfaction, loyalty, and recommendation likelihood. NPS surveys ask, "On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend [organization, product, service] to friends and family?" Respondents are categorized as Promoters (9-10), Passives (7-8), or Detractors (0-6). Prior studies have examined NPS across various industries, including retail, convenience stores, technology, academic libraries, and tourism. It was also suggested to combine NPS with consumer demographics to enhance strategies for entering international markets. This study examines the likelihood of recommending Istanbul, Turkey, as a tourism destination and explores how visitor demographics of gender, age, education, and marital status affect its NPS. It also examines how reasons for visiting and information sources influence NPS. The study's objectives are to: RO 1: Analyze the demographic profiles, reasons for visiting, and information sources of Istanbul visitors, RO 2: Evaluate the likelihood of recommending Istanbul and calculate its NPS, RO 3: Investigate how demographics, including gender, age, education, and marital status, influence NPS.

## METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted to address the ROs, using a screening question to select respondents who visited Istanbul. The study, based on 398 usable responses, offers valuable insights for Istanbul to enhance its global market share and competitiveness through targeted online messaging aimed at turning visitors into promoters.

## RESULTS

RO1: Visitor (respondents) profiles indicate that most are females (57%), overwhelming majority (79.1%) are between 18-35 years old, most (76.1%) visited Istanbul once, most stayed 1-5 days (47.6%) or 6-10 days (42.4%), most with college, graduate or professional degree (73.6%), and 62.1% are single. Visitors primarily come, in the order of importance, for health and medical treatment, sports, conferences, visiting relatives, business, religious experiences, cultural experiences, and relaxation. The results show that the visitors learn about Istanbul the most through print media, experience, word-of-mouth, and social media.

RO2: Most respondents have a positive view of Istanbul as a vacation destination. NPS categories show 21.1% are Detractors, 32.4% are Passives, and 46.5% are Promoters, resulting in an NPS of 25.4. This indicates more Promoters than Detractors, suggesting a high likelihood of visitors recommending Istanbul.


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RO3: The results show significant effects of demographics on NPS ($p<.05$ or $<.05$), where females having a higher NPS than males, NPS increasing with age, except a negative NPS for 46+, NPS rising with the increased visits, and NPS increasing with staying longer. Lifestyle or marital status has no significant effect on NPS.

**THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The significant effects of demographics on NPS highlight consumer demographics as key to understanding recommendation likelihood and NPS. This supports NPS's potential benefits and underscores the role of demographics in leveraging customer satisfaction and loyalty as NPS drivers.

**PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This research contributes to tourism studies by examining consumer behavior and recommendation intention from the NPS perspective. The results show that consumer demographics significantly influence recommendation likelihood and NPS. Hospitality managers can use these insights to create targeted strategies for competitive positioning.


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# ON THE BACK OF THE BIKE: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF THE MOTORBIKE TOUR IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Vietnam has emerged as a significant player in the tourism industry in recent years. Ho Chi Minh City, the largest city in Vietnam, is renowned for its economic prowess and cultural vibrancy, making motorbike tours popular for international tourists to explore the city and its surroundings. Unlike motorbike tourism in Western countries, which focuses on rural exploration, motorbike tours in Ho Chi Minh City provide tourists with a local urban living experience. A motorbike tour in Ho Chi Minh City, where visitors ride as passengers on bikes driven by experienced guides, typically lasts 3.5 to 4 hours with different themes such as day, night, or foodie tours. The tour usually accommodates 4 to 5 visitors and takes them through narrow alleyways, bustling streets, historical landmarks, modern attractions, food stalls, and hidden gems known only to locals.

This study examines international tourists' experiences on motorbike tours in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. There are two main research questions: 1. What are the impressive experiences of tourists during their motorbike tour? 2. What challenges did tourists encounter throughout their trip?

A qualitative design with a purposive sampling method was conducted in this study, employing participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 15 international tourists who actively participated in motorbike tours in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, from August to October 2023. One of the authors was an experienced motorbike tour guide who served as a supporter in the tour to observe the interactions between the tour guide and the respondents. The interview was conducted right after the tour. In addition, 51 comments from TripAdvisor on motorbike tours in Ho Chi Minh City from March 2022 to July 2023 were collected as supplement data to enhance the understanding of their experience.

By thematic analysis method, this study explored three factors from the destination, including physical aspect (sightseeing, traffic, venues, and weather), service and products (guide quality, tour activities, culinary experience, service quality), social aspect (interaction), and one factor from tourists is tourists related issues (diet preferences, health condition, safety concerns, and other factors) that influence the tourist experience, explicitly focusing on memorable experiences during motorbike tours. Moreover, Tourists highly value motorbike tours in Ho Chi Minh City for their authentic experiences, immersing them in local life, revealing hidden gems, and fostering genuine connections through distinctive culinary experiences with dedicated English-speaking guides. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on motorbike tourism in Vietnam. It provides practical insights for tour operators, enabling them to develop and improve tour strategies, enhance the competitiveness of motorbike tours, and elevate visitor experience.

**Key Words:** motorbike tours, international tourist experience, qualitative design, Ho Chi Minh City.


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# URBAN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND BLEISURE TRAVEL

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## ABSTRACT

Bleisure – the combination of leisure time and business travel- and wellness became an important discussion in corporate travel management to combat burnout of employees and decrease employee turnover. Practising outdoor physical activities at the destination can be part of the stress reduction strategies for employees. In this context, the accessibility and attractiveness of urban green infrastructure can facilitate business travellers' decisions on spending their leisure time on physical activities. Survey research is prepared to understand the preferences of conference and fair attendees and to derive managerial implications for the destination under analysis.

**Key Words:** Bleisure travel, wellness, green areas, tourist behaviour

## INTRODUCTION

Business tourism activities like meetings, conferences, incentive trips, and other related events can have various direct effects on the health and well-being of participants (Ye & Xu, 2020). Therefore, incorporating leisure elements in business travel have seen as a viable solution to meliorate the overall travel experience (Park et al., 2024). Leisure activities increase the satisfaction with business travel and consequently the success of a business event (Park, 2024). The phenomenon is studied more with qualitative analysis (Walia et al, 2023), whereas only few quantitative studies are present in literature, in particular through scale development (Tsaur & Tsai, 2023). A research gap is recognized regarding quantitative analysis of bleisure travellers' preferences on consuming different type of holiday activities.

Regarding the place of consumption of the activities, the focus of this study is on urban green infrastructures (UGI). The health benefits of UGI's are evident in various contexts (Nieuwenhuijsen, 2021). Tourists' perception and usage of UGI were analysed in a cross-cultural study by Terkenli et al. (2020) acknowledging their importance in destination visits for leisure travel. When the UGI is designed to requalify an area, is often result with the reduction of roads and parking places (Nieuwenhuijsen, 2021). Therefore, the increased social and environmental benefits are accompanied by reduced accessibility. Hence, this current research aims to investigate business travellers' preferences on leisure time spent at the destination, outdoor sport activities and accessibility.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND RESULTS

The study area refers to the city of Rimini, a coastal destination of Italy with mature tourism demand. The diversification of the city's offer on business travel manifested in investments in congress and fair facilities, while due to recent focus on environmental sustainability, the UGI of Sea Park was created. The massive project entails the regeneration of the 16km long waterfront. This research looks at bleisure experience in the Sea Park of event participants. A survey is distributed in business conferences and fairs organized at different locations of Rimini that greatly differ in terms of accessibility, leisure activities and distance from the Sea Park. In particular, transportation preferences, time allocation on physical activities in the newly regenerated Sea Park and the propensity to holiday extension are examined with the questionnaire.

The results are presented on the first 155 responses that were collected in three separate business events. The face-to-face data collection was restricted to participants that stayed at least one night in a commercial accommodation at


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the destination. The majority of survey respondents were on a domestic trip and expressed familiarity with the destination (70%). More than half of the respondents have visited the Sea Park in their current business trip, and evaluated on average 6.9 the attractiveness of the area for physical activities, on a scale from 1 to 10. Yet, a bit less than 10% engaged there in physical activities. The study further investigated whether the participants extended their length of stay to engage in leisure activities. Around 30% of the sample extended with one or two nights their stays and revealed the activity consumption they planned for the additional time at the destination. In this setting, on average business travellers plan to dedicate 14% of their leisure for physical activities.

Regarding accessibility, the results reveal high propensity of traveling by private cars. In inquiring the preferences of attendees for various promotional offers, transport related attributes received insignificant interests, while packages related to physical activities were significantly more preferred. Corporate travel policies and individual characteristics are controlled for in the derivation of results and implications. As the satisfaction of event participants is affected by leisure elements they experienced at the destination, this research brings important implications for destination, corporate travel management and event organizers.

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# IS VIRTUAL CYCLING AN EFFECTIVE DESTINATION MARKETING TOOL?

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### INTRODUCTION

Virtual Cycling has been experiencing significant growth during and after the pandemic time with a relevant rise in the number of amateur and professional cyclists who regularly participate via streaming in virtual competitions from all over the world. Despite this, there is still a lack of academic studies devoted to studying the experience of virtual cyclists and assessing whether virtual cycling can be considered an effective destination marketing tool. Specifically, several questions remain unanswered, among others: 1. What are the factors that improve the user experience in virtual cycling? 2. How does virtual cycling influence the user's experience, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions? 3. To what extent virtual cycling might generate the desire and intention to make an on-site visit? This study aims to deepen the scientific debate devoted to this somewhat overlooked research area by applying the stimuli-organism-response model, where we consider vividness and interactivity as two main stimuli, and co-jointly refer to the telepresence and the flow theories.

### METHODS

A theoretically driven model was tested (SEM analysis) on 232 individuals who had enjoyed a virtual cycling-related experience.

### RESULTS

Findings show that vividness and interactivity have a significant positive effect on telepresence which, in turn, affects the flow experience, the level of satisfaction with the virtual experience, and the behavioral intentions (intention to make an on-site cycling experience, and the intention to recommend to others)

### CONCLUSIONS

The study findings are relevant for both researchers and hospitality practitioners. On the one hand, they provide further insights into the scientific debate on the role VR exerts in shaping the users' experience, their satisfaction, and their behavioral intentions in the specific context of virtual cycling. On the other hand, our findings show that virtual cycling can be effectively used as a powerful destination marketing tool.

**Key Word:** Virtual Cycling ; Cyclotourism; S-O-R; Flow of Experience; Telepresence


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# FROM VAN TRAVELLERS TO FULL-TIME DWELLERS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF VANLIFERS IN THE ALGARVE

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Several tourism studies have focused on vehicle-based travel, such as enquiries on Recreational Vehicle Users (RVers) or caravanners. However, some distinct vehicle-based travel groups, such as Vanlifers, are not well understood, despite a growth in popularity, supported by the number of vehicle registrations doubling since 2010. Previous Vanlife research often focused on a Northern American or Australian perspective. The few studies examining European vehicle-based travellers applied a digital ethnography of full-time Vanlifers, analysed motorhome travellers in the Algarve, or conducted a digital ethnography of full-time Vanlifers.

The outlined lack of research on the phenomenon from a European perspective and the suggestions for further study on Vanlifers, their subculture, and the community's motivations offer a rationale for further academic exploration. To address the research gaps, this paper applies the qualitative research approach of phenomenology to uncover a new understanding of Vanlifers and their community from a managerial perspective. The research investigates the behaviours and motivations of European Vanlifers through an inductive methodology, applying Goal Framing Theory (GFT). GFT was selected as the foundation for this research due to its capacity to enhance market segmentation of travel behaviours.

Data was collected with Vanlifers in the Algarve during the high and low seasons of 2024 and 2025 via semi-structured interviews, facilitating the exploration of themes that emerged throughout the interview process and producing rich data. Participant observation is utilised to gain further insights into the habits of Vanlifers, their interactions with each other, other travellers, and the local community. Study participants were selected using snowball and convenience sampling. Only travellers fitting the definition of Vanlife: “individuals travelling (solo or with others) in a rented, borrowed, or owned self-propelled van or camper with limited sanitary equipment and amenities” were deemed eligible for participation. A total of 26 interviews, with single and couple Vanlifers, were conducted for this study. The interview scripts are processed with Quirkos software, utilising coding techniques to identify recurring themes and generate coding sheets. The participant observation field notes are digitised and examined for repeating themes, including exhibited behaviour, social interactions, and the vehicle employed.

The results reveal diverse behavioural tendencies between Vanlife "tourists" and longterm practitioners. Short-term travellers chose Vanlife as a practical, flexible and affordable way to explore countries with inadequate public transport systems. Vanlifers on longer journeys follow the lifestyle due to various convenience factors, including reduced responsibilities and monthly costs. Some reported utilising Vanlife to achieve goals, such as buying a home or land. Others see it as a symbol of freedom and defiance of “the system”.


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This study aims to contribute novel theoretical insights, on a micro level, by elucidating the specific processes and impact of varying goal activations on Vanlifer's travel behaviours. On a macro level, the findings and suggested managerial guidelines may provide practical solutions to European tourism destinations frequented by the travel type. As such, the study could benefit Vanlifers, as well as residents, by improving travel conditions and reducing friction between the two groups.

**Key Words:** Hypermobile Travel Segments; Motivations and Travel Behaviors of Vanlifers; Consumer behaviour; Niche Travel Segments

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# HOTEL GREEN PRACTICES: THE CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

## INTRODUCTION

Since the adoption of the Agenda 21, the United Nations WTO has developed several initiatives to mitigate the impacts of the tourism activity. Such initiatives have placed pressure on the different tourism stakeholders. Tourism businesses, and the hotel industry in particular, aware of the effects of their activities on the natural environment, are increasingly incorporating environmental sustainability in their business models and strategies. However, implementing environmental management practices (EMP) in the hotel industry has proven difficult due to a number of important barriers, including the lack of support of hotel guests. Although, customers seem ready to incorporate a green mindset, and generally have a positive perception and intention to stay at environmentally friendly hotels, they seek tangible evidence of serious commitment to environmental causes. This study analyses the most common EMP implemented by hotels and explores customers' perception regarding such initiatives. The aim is to identify the main hotel EMP and customers' perceptions and assessments of hotel green practices in order to confirm if the hotel EMP that are most frequently employed are the ones that customers find the most relevant.

## METHODOLOGY

: The research employed a qualitative approach to analyse the main hotel EMP, which were categorized according to the existing literature; these data underwent a thorough content analysis. A quantitative approach was used to examine customers' perceptions and assessments of EMP, through a structured questionnaire. A total of 466 valid answers were obtained from customers who stayed at Portuguese hotels. Data were analyzed statistically with R software.

## FINDINGS

Energy efficiency, water consumption and solid waste management are among the main areas of the environmental practices adopted in the hotel industry. The study results also indicate that, overall, hotel customers consider that hotel EMP are relevant; the most valued EMP are related to energy saving, and waste management and recycling. Environmental certification was also valued by most respondents, as it gives a guarantee of quality and reliability. This finding is of particular relevance, since eco-labelling and/or certification schemes are considered an extremely useful tool to promote sustainable tourism activities. Despite valued by hotel customers, water saving practices are perceived as less relevant, when compared to other areas of environmental measures. Initiatives such as automatic water saving system in guest-rooms, and linen reuse programs may be perceived as compromising guests' comfort.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION


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This researh offers a positive contribution by identifying the main EMP implemented by hotels, along with the factors that influence the adoption of such practices. It also analyses customers' perceptions and assessments of hotel green practices, as well as the perceived benefits of staying at a hotel that employs these initiatives.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Determining which hotel green attributes guests value has practical implications: it is crucial to develop more effective green marketing strategies that enhance communication and the perception of hotel EMP. Keywords: Hotel green practices; environmental management; consumer perspective; customer perceptions

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# HOW DO HOTELS AND GUESTS CONTRIBUTE TO VALUE CO-CREATION? LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ALGARVE REGION, SOUTH PORTUGAL

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### INTRODUCTION

Although interaction and customer participation are the two prerequisites of value co-creation in hospitality sector, further research is required to clarify if providing an interactive co-creation platform and facilitating customer participation behavior may also provide hotels with an additional benefit.
As value co-creation is a collaborative process in which the hotel and guest integrate resources to create value that benefits both parties, understanding the value reciprocity is essential for hotels to ensure that their actions not only stimulate gust participation and enhance value co-creation, but also reciprocate additional benefits. Therefore, this research investigates the role of hotels and guests in value co-creation and proposes a model that clarifies how hotel DART activities (Dialogue, Access, Risk, and Transparency) form guests' perceptions, which encourages them to participate in value co-creation that reciprocates extra value for the hotels by increasing guests' citizenship behavior.

### METHODS

Data has been collected from the guests from the UK who stayed in hotels in the Algarve region in southern Portugal. Structure Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied, and SmartPLS was used to analyze the data.

### RESULTS
:
Findings reveal that guests' perceptions drive guests' participation behavior (information seeking, information sharing, responsible behavior, personal interaction), which not only improves value co-creation (co-production and value-in-use) but also increases guests' citizenship behavior (feedback, advocacy, helping, tolerance), reciprocating extra benefits for hotels. Moreover, comparing the data of the first-time guests and repeat guests shows that first-time guests' participation behavior has a stronger effect on value co-creation, whereas repeat guests' perception has a greater impact on value co-creation due to the moderating role of guests' previous experience with hotels.

### CONCLUSION


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This study contributes to the co-creation theory as it deepens the knowledge of how hotels and guests contribute to value co-creation and how the value is reciprocated between them. Accordingly, by implementing the proposed model as a managerial tool, hotel managers can engage guests in value co-creation that enhances their unique experiences with hotels while also increasing their citizenship behavior, providing hotels with additional benefits. Additionally, this study provides practical implications on how hotels can effectively increase first-time guests' citizenship behavior and repeat-guests' citizenship behavior by fulfilling appropriate strategies for each segment.

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# UNLOCKING THE MAGIC OF VIRTUAL TRAVEL: AN ANALYSIS OF ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH

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## ABSTRACT

The rise of online travel experiences has transformed the tourism industry by enabling immersive host-viewer interactions driven by advanced information and communication technologies. Virtual tourism, defined as the use of digital technologies to simulate travel experiences, has grown significantly in recent years, offering an alternative for travellers unable to undertake physical journeys (Guttentag, 2010). Research on virtual experiences highlights the potential of interactivity and telepresence to enhance customer satisfaction, with previous studies emphasising the importance of narrative quality and technological immersion in creating engaging virtual tourism experiences (Tussyadiah et al., 2018; Loureiro et al., 2020). Additionally, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has been identified as a key driver for future demand in virtual tourism (Litvin et al., 2008).

This study examines the online travel experiences of Japanese virtual tourists by analysing 3,500 customer reviews of paid virtual tours. HIS, one of the major tour operators in Japan, has been offering paid virtual tours featuring live streams of various destinations worldwide. The reviewed data were posted on HIS homepage between October 2021 and July 2022. The data were analysed using content analysis to identify themes related to how immersive storytelling, real-time engagement, and technological features contributed to telepresence and enhanced customer satisfaction in live streaming experiences.

The findings revealed several significant trends. First, host-viewer interaction emerged as a critical determinant of quality experience, with many reviews highlighting the importance of engaging with knowledgeable hosts in creating authentic connections. Positive interactions, such as personalised responses and culturally rich narratives, were often cited as drivers of favourable e-WOM. Second, immersive features like high-resolution video, dynamic visual storytelling, and live commentary were key to fostering a sense of presence, with many customers mentioning these factors enhancing their overall experience. Third, telepresence—defined as the sensation of "being there" despite physical absence—was strongly linked to the use of real-time interactive tools such as polls, Q&A sessions, and virtual walkthroughs. Notably, customers who reported higher levels of telepresence also exhibited stronger emotional engagement and were more likely to visit the destination and recommend the virtual experience to others.

These findings have important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they contribute to the growing body of literature on virtual tourism by demonstrating the interplay between telepresence, host interaction, and customer satisfaction in shaping e-WOM communication. Practically, the results provide actionable insights for tour operators. Emphasising interactive features, storytelling techniques, and host training programs can enhance virtual tour experiences significantly. Furthermore, investment in reliable, high-quality streaming technology is essential to minimise disruptions and optimise user engagement. As virtual tourism continues to evolve, integrating these elements will be vital for sustaining growth and meeting the expectations of increasingly sophisticated digital audiences.

In conclusion, this research highlights the transformative potential of online travel experiences, emphasising the pivotal role of host-viewer interactions, technological immersiveness, and telepresence in shaping customer satisfaction and behavioural intention.

**Key Words:** Virtual travel, E-WOM, Interaction, Immersive experience, Telepresence



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# SECTION 5: HUMAN RESOURCE ISSUES IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY


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# THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL LOAFING PERCEPTION ON JOB BURNOUT AND OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT: APPLICATION ON HOTEL EMPLOYEES

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

Productivity in businesses varies depending on the work performance of employees. Since labor-intensive work takes place in the tourism sector, researching productivity and the factors affecting productivity is significant.

### OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research is to reveal the relation between the perception of social loafing and job burnout and occupational burnout of employees in the tourism sector.

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

For this purpose, the relational screening model, one of the quantitative research methods, was used. The surveys prepared for the research data were sent to employees working in four and five star hotels operating in Antalya via email, Instagram and Whatsapp using the convenience sampling method. 393 returned surveys were evaluated. Therefore, the sample of the research consists of 393 employees working in four and five star hotels. Questionnaires including social loafing, job burnout and occupational burnout scales were applied to the sample group. A statistical computer software program was used to analyze the data, and during the analysis, frequency and percentage distributions, Pearson Correlation, Regression analysis, anova and t-test were performed.

### FINDINGS

As a result of the research, a remarkable relation was detected between hotel employees' perceptions of social loafing and their job and professional burnout, and it was noted that the relation was in the opposite direction. In addition, in the regression analysis, it was determined that employees' perceptions of social loafing had a 5% effect on job burnout and a 5% effect on occupational burnout. In addition, when it was examined whether there was a significant difference between the perception of social loafing and job burnout and occupational burnout in terms of age, gender, education status, duty, seniority and administrative duty variables, the differences detected were also given in the findings and conclusion section.

### THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

It was concluded that the perception of social loafing has a significant and inverse relation with job burnout and occupational burnout, and the intensity of this relation also has an effect on job and occupational burnout. When the literature was reviewed, no previous study was found on the effect of social loafing perception on job and occupational burnout among hotel employees, so it will contribute to the literature.

### PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS


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Since the research was conducted on hotel employees in the tourism sector, it was determined that there was a decrease in job and occupational burnout among tourism employees as social loafing increased. However, it is thought that preventing social loafing will provide an idea about the arrangements that need to be made to reduce job and occupational burnout.


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# EASING INTO THE TOURISM WORKPLACE SETTING: A GRADUATE EXPERIENCE OF REAL WORK-LIFE

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## ABSTRACT

Transitioning from academia to the tourism workplace presents significant challenges for graduates, despite the industry's global importance. Many struggles with risk management, complex problem-solving, and adapting technical skills in uncertain environments. This paper explores tourism graduates' experiences and evaluates Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs at a selected University of Technology. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected via an online survey from 150 participants. Findings indicate gaps in advanced competencies, underscoring the need to enhance WIL programs through scenario-based training, immersive internships, and industry collaboration. The study provides recommendations to improve graduate employability and workforce readiness.

**Key Words:** Work readiness, Work-Integrated Learning, Tourism, Employers, Students.


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# TALENTED HOSPITALITY EMPLOYEE WELLBEING: KNOWLEDGE-SHARING AND TEAM-COHESION

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## ABSTRACT

With the continuously increased threat of workforce shortage and quiet quitting imposed on the global hospitality industry, the wellbeing of talented hospitality employees became vital in reducing organizational turnover and increasing employee commitment. Drawing from the conservation of resources theory (COR theory; Hobfoll, 2011), this study examines factors that influence psychological resilience, organizational commitment, and wellbeing of hospitality talent. Following Walsh and Taylor's (2007) definition, talented employees were recognized as individuals who graduated from a well-known USA university with a tourism program and remained in the industry for longer than two years. The responses of 200 talented employees were analyzed using partial-least squares structural-equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Talented employee' perspectives on team-cohesion, knowledge-sharing, and self-actualization at work were examined as factors affecting their psychological resilience, organizational commitment, and subjective wellbeing. Team-cohesion was understood as employees' perceptions of belonging to a work-related team and their feelings related to their membership in the team (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990). Knowledge-sharing refers to employees' willingness to share their experience, expertise, ideas, and job tips with others within the organization (Lin, 2007). Self-actualization was defined as one's ability to fully realize his or her innate potential through work (Kiel, 1999). Little is known about how these factors may affect hospitality and tourism talented employees' personal and job-related outcomes (Shulga & Busser, 2019). The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS4.1.0.9 in two steps following procedures described by Hair et al. (2019). First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed acceptable reliability (Cronbach α ranged: 0.80-0.96), convergent validity (AVE ranged: 0.51-0.85), and using Fornell-Larcker criterion discriminant validity of the constructs. Multicollinearity issues were not detected (VIFs ranged:1.00-2.28). The model was deemed acceptable for further analysis. Second, PLS-SEM was conducted, and the module showed acceptable predictive validity, where the endogenous variable wellbeing showed $R^2$=0.25. When relationships in the model were analyzed, the knowledge-sharing was found to have a significant and positive impact on team-cohesion ($\beta_{team}$=0.18, p<0.05); knowledge-sharing and team-cohesion positively influenced self-actualization ($\beta_{knowledge}$=0.22, p<0.001; $\beta_{team}$=0.61, p<0.001); knowledge-sharing positively influenced talented employees' organizational commitment ($\beta_{knowledge}$=0.53, p<0.001), but was not significant on psychological resilience (p=0.50); team-cohesion positively influenced resilience ($\beta_{team}$=0.21, p<0.05), but was not significant on organizational commitment (p=0.16); self-actualization had a positive and significant impact on organizational commitment (β=0.18, p<0.05), but not on employee resilience (p=0.35). Finally, both psychological resilience and organizational commitment had a positive and significant impact on talented employee' wellbeing ($\beta_{resilience}$=0.25, p<0.05; $\beta_{commitment}$=0.39, p<0.001). When mediation effects were examined team-cohesion served as a full mediator between knowledge-sharing and organizational commitment, self-actualization served as a partial mediator between team-cohesion and organizational commitment, and organizational commitment served as a partial mediator between team-cohesion and wellbeing. These results advance COR theory by revealing that talented employees' perceptions of knowledge-sharing and team-cohesion play the role of cognitive resources that increase their motivation in the form of self-actualization and their psychological resilience, leading to improved organizational commitment and overall subjective wellbeing. Practical implications for human resource and talent management in hospitality and tourism organizations are discussed.

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# EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOSPITALITY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM SECTOR

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

Diversity management encompasses strategies to attract, retain, and oversee employees from varied backgrounds and identities. Diversity management benefits hospitality companies by attracting talent, enhancing customer service, and boosting employee performance. Despite limited research, it is key to gaining a competitive edge. Given their scale, diverse clientele, and service focus, these companies have a greater responsibility to implement DEI practices

### OBJECTIVES

This study focuses on exploring the behaviors, workplace practices, and diversity policies of B Corporations in the hospitality and tourism industry, connecting them to key aspects of hospitality culture. It also aims to: (i) analyze how B Corp leaders express behaviors, work practices, and diversity management policies on LinkedIn; (ii) identify how B Corps measure and monitor diversity initiatives shared on the platform; (iii) map diversity education initiatives promoted by these companies on LinkedIn; (iv) examine how they align diversity policies and practices; and (v) identify organizational culture and diversity management attributes in LinkedIn posts from selected companies.

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Using exploratory qualitative methods the research relied on document analysis from LinkedIn. The research targeted companies with active profiles on the platform and B certification, reflecting their commitment to sustainability and promoting the well-being of people and the environment. A total of 465 posts, published between August 2023 and August 2024, were analyzed using content analysis techniques with the support of MAXQDA 24 software. The analysis categories were derived from the models proposed by Cox (2001) and Pizam (2020), integrating aspects of the diversity change framework and the key dimensions of organizational culture in hospitality.

### FINDINGS

The findings highlight that companies in this sector prioritize integrating and promoting their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts to both customers and external stakeholders. However, there is limited representation of diversity leadership in these initiatives. While B Corporations in the hospitality and tourism industry demonstrate a commitment to diversity management, variations exist in how they promote initiatives supporting different minority groups. Companies tend to prioritize efforts aimed at the LGBTQIA+ community, followed by initiatives addressing gender and ethnic-racial equity. However, there is less focus on publishing content related to people with disabilities and initiatives promoting age equity.

### CONCLUSION


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The study emphasizes the significance of aligning diversity management with hospitality culture to enhance employee well-being, customer satisfaction, and overall business performance. Besides, it highlights the importance of broadly communicating diversity management rooted in a culture of hospitality. This approach should be encouraged through programs and policies that promote employee well-being and engagement, involve external stakeholders, enhance customer satisfaction, and drive better organizational outcomes.

**Key Words:** hospitality organizational culture; diversity; B Corporations; LinkedIn; content analysis.


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# EMPLOYER ATTRACTIVENESS IN HOSPITALITY: INSIGHTS FROM EMPLOYEES IN A FIVE-STAR HOTEL IN ALGARVE, PORTUGAL

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## ABSTRACT

The growth of the tourism sector and the transition to a knowledge-based economy have highlighted the importance of Internal Marketing as a key strategy for hospitality organizations. Employee performance, which is crucial to organizational success, plays a vital role in customer interactions, significantly influencing business outcomes. In this context, Employer Branding emerges as an extension of Internal Marketing, aimed at differentiating organizations in competitive labor markets by fostering an attractive employer identity that attracts, engages, and retains talent (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Employer Attractiveness, a related concept, captures the characteristics that make an organization appealing to both current and potential employees (Berthon et al., 2005).

The recruitment and selection processes in hospitality are shaped by a dynamic interplay between organizational needs and candidates' preferences, experiences, and values, especially in competitive labor markets such as the tourism sector (Breaugh, 2017; Styvén et al., 2022). However, research on employees' perspectives regarding employer attractiveness in international hotel groups, particularly in key tourism destinations like the Algarve, remains limited. This scarcity is compounded by a lack of studies that apply validated frameworks, such as the Employer Attractiveness Scale (Berthon et al., 2005), to investigate the interconnected roles of motivation, satisfaction, and Internal Marketing.

To address these gaps, this study examines Employer Attractiveness from the perspective of employees at a 5-star hotel in the Algarve, part of an international hotel group. By incorporating key theoretical frameworks and applying the Employer Attractiveness Scale (EmpAt Scale) by Berthon et al. (2005) across five dimensions – Interest Value, Social Value, Economic Value, Development Value, and Application Value – this research provides valuable insights into how Internal Marketing, Employer Branding, and Employer Attractiveness intersect to influence employee motivation, satisfaction, and organizational success in the hospitality sector.

A quantitative, cross-sectional approach was employed, with data collected via a questionnaire survey administered to all employees of the hotel. The findings highlighted key factors influencing organizational attractiveness, revealing discrepancies between the attributes generally valued by employees (IDEAL) and their perceptions of the hotel under study (REAL). The "Social" and "Development" dimensions were the most valued, while the "Economic" dimension showed the largest gap between expectations and perceptions.


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By addressing gaps in the literature, these results offer strategic insights into meeting employee expectations, emphasizing the importance of aligning organizational practices with what employees value most to enhance satisfaction and retention. The study also underscores how Internal Marketing and Employer Branding strategies can work synergistically to strengthen employer attractiveness, particularly in luxury hospitality settings where employee engagement directly impacts service delivery.

**Key Words:** Employer Attractiveness, Employer Branding, Internal Marketing, Hospitality Industry.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JOB INSECURITY – WHO SUFFERS MORE?

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

**Background And Objectives**
Job insecurity, a prevalent issue in today's volatile and competitive labor market, is associated with adverse psychological and organizational outcomes. This study provides a comparative analysis of job insecurity, focusing on which groups or individuals (employees & supervisors) are most vulnerable and how insecurity impacts their well-being and job performance. The research particularly examines the hospitality and tourism sector, an industry known for its high turnover rates and precarious work conditions.

**KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS**
The study addresses the following:
Who experiences higher levels of job insecurity?
How do individual and organizational factors mediate the impact of job insecurity?
What are the psychological and behavioral consequences of job insecurity within the hospitality industry?

**METHODOLOGY**

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights. Surveys were conducted among employees in the hospitality and tourism sector, and the results were analyzed to identify patterns and correlations. Comparative analysis was employed to distinguish the varying levels of job insecurity experienced by different demographic and occupational groups.

**FINDINGS**

At the subordinate level, quantitative job insecurity (JI)—the perceived threat of job loss—was found to have a positive influence on two forms of performance: task performance and contextual performance. This suggests that for subordinates, the fear of losing their job may act as a motivator to enhance their productivity and engagement in the short term. However, qualitative JI—the perception of threats to the quality or conditions of one's job (e.g., reduced responsibilities, demotion)—had a negative impact on performance. This indicates that when employees feel their roles or working conditions are being compromised, their ability to perform effectively diminishes.

Furthermore, subjective well-being (SWB) partially mediated the relationship between qualitative JI and performance outcomes. This highlights that employees' perceived well-being plays a crucial role in buffering or exacerbating the negative effects of qualitative JI on their ability to perform tasks and contribute to the workplace environment.

At the supervisory level, the dynamics were notably different. Quantitative JI did not have a significant impact on the measured variables, suggesting that supervisors may experience less fear of outright job loss compared to subordinates. However, the impact of qualitative JI remained notable, as it influenced their subjective well-being and, in turn, their ability to lead effectively. Importantly, supportive leadership partially moderated the relationship between qualitative JI and SWB at the supervisory level. This implies that supervisors who feel supported by higher management are better equipped to handle the stress associated with qualitative JI and maintain their well-being.

**ORIGINALITY AND VALUE**

This study builds on the transactional model of stress and the conservation of resources (COR) theory to provide a nuanced understanding of how hierarchical positions influence perceptions of job insecurity and its consequences.


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The research offers novel insights into how different levels of the workforce experience and respond to job insecurity, emphasizing the contrasting dynamics between subordinates and supervisors.

One key contribution is the identification of a dual burden on supervisors during periods of adversity, such as economic downturns or health crises (e.g., the recent global pandemic). While supervisors are responsible for supporting and motivating their subordinates, they may simultaneously experience their own uncertainties about job security, particularly in terms of qualitative aspects like diminished roles or resources. This dual burden creates a unique form of stress, as supervisors may lack sufficient support from upper management, which exacerbates their own insecurities and reduces their ability to lead effectively.

The findings also shed light on the critical role of organizational support systems in mitigating the negative effects of job insecurity. For subordinates, enhancing subjective well-being through workplace initiatives (e.g., wellness programs, transparent communication) can help counter the adverse effects of qualitative JI. For supervisors, supportive leadership from upper management emerges as a key factor in reducing stress and maintaining their ability to fulfill their responsibilities, even under challenging conditions.

**PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This comparative study not only deepens the theoretical understanding of job insecurity but also provides actionable recommendations for organizations. By addressing the specific needs of both subordinates and supervisors, organizations can foster resilience, improve well-being, and sustain productivity during periods of uncertainty. These findings are particularly relevant in the context of ongoing global challenges, such as economic instability and public health crises, where job insecurity is likely to remain a pressing issue.

The study highlights the need for employers, particularly in the hospitality and tourism sector, to address job insecurity through proactive measures. Recommendations include fostering job stability, offering professional development, and improving workplace communication. These steps can enhance employee well-being and performance, ultimately benefiting organizational sustainability.

**CONCLUSION**

The comparative analysis underscores that job insecurity disproportionately affects certain groups, particularly younger, part-time, and lower-level employees in precarious industries like hospitality and tourism. Addressing these disparities through targeted interventions is essential to improving employee outcomes and maintaining a productive workforce.

**Key Words:** Job insecurity, well-being, hospitality, tourism, psychological outcomes, organizational commitment, workforce stability.

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# HOW AND WHEN DOES PROSOCIAL MOTIVATION EXPLICATE COWORKER-DIRECTED PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR: A STUDY IN INDIAN HOTELS

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the scholarly attention in coworker-directed prosocial behaviour (CoPSB) in the service sector, the mechanisms fuelling it remain unexhausted in the hotel sector compared to other service sectors. Therefore, based on the tenets of social identity theory, this study has two objectives. It examines how FLE's motivation and identity influence CoPSB. Further, it also investigates the boundary condition of injunctive prosocial norms on the linkage between Prosocial motivation→ Role-based Prosocial Identity →CoPSB. A three-wave data collection method was employed to administer an online survey in hotels located in eastern India. The mean age of the respondents was 34.51 years with an average of four years and 3 months of work experience. Females constituted 38% of the respondents, followed by 58% males and 4% transgender individuals. The percentages of FLEs providing services for room and travel bookings (both offline and online), food and beverages, and housekeeping were 24%, 59%, and 17%, respectively. Among the surveyed FLEs, the majority (44.6%) possessed undergraduate degrees in mainstream disciplines such as arts, commerce, and science, followed by postgraduate degrees in management and computer science (25.9%). Using SPSS Process MACRO, a bootstrap analysis of 336 frontline employees from four- and five-star hotels indicated that role-based prosocial identity serves as an intervening mechanism in the relationship between prosocial motivation and CoPSB. Furthermore, the conditional mechanism of high (low) injunctive prosocial norms was observed to have a dual effect, amplifying (attenuating) the indirect effect of prosocial motivation on CoPSB. Five major theoretical contributions are drawn from the findings of the present study. It highlights the impact of motivation and identity on FLEs' CoPSB. Furthermore, it offers novel insights into the boundary conditions that affect the relationship between prosocial motivation and CoPSB. Positioning injunctive prosocial norms as moderators between prosocial motivation and both role-based prosocial identity and CoPSB is a unique approach. Lastly, this study makes a unique theoretical contribution by developing a research model rooted in the SIT wherein the dual role of injunctive norms as a moderator while connecting prosocial motivation with CoPSB via role-based prosocial identity is unlike prior research findings. A broad range of managerial practices suggested are: hotel managers should introduce psychometric tests in the selection process to measure applicants' empathy and agreeableness; may conduct orientation programmes aimed at internalising prosocial identity; cultural values could be fortified so that the strategic intent of the hotel could be attained through optimal employee cooperation; hotel owners should invest in training programs designed to nurture 'a sense of gratitude' among FLEs, could also revise the performance management and reward practices to align them with the hotel's strategic intent and cultural values. During social events such as hotel anniversaries, owners could invite loyal customers and existing visitors to acknowledge FLEs who could successfully achieve a distinct 'identity' that is more inclined towards prosocial behaviour. It also mentions limitations and the futuristic scope of the study.

**Key Words:** Prosocial motivation, coworker-directed prosocial behaviour, role-based prosocial identity, injunctive prosocial norms.


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# EXPLORATION OF HAPPINESS ENTERPRISE ATTRIBUTES IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY: AN IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the key attributes that contribute to a happy enterprise in Taiwan's catering industry, emphasizing employees' perceptions of these attributes and their satisfaction levels. By understanding these dynamics, the research aims to provide actionable insights for fostering healthier and happier workplaces, which can, in turn, enhance employee well-being, productivity, and retention in the competitive catering sector. The study's methodology involves a two-pronged approach: a comprehensive literature review and a qualitative analysis of employee handbooks from recognized "happy enterprises" in Taiwan's catering industry. This analysis identified a set of critical attributes across four major dimensions: employee benefits, career development, workplace safety, and management practices.

To further explore employees' perspectives, a survey was conducted targeting restaurant employees, focusing on their perceptions of the importance and performance of these attributes. A total of 200 valid responses were collected, representing a broad spectrum of the catering industry workforce. The collected data were analyzed using the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) framework, a strategic tool that categorizes attributes into four quadrants: High Importance and High Performance (Concentrate Here), High Importance and Low Performance (Improve Immediately), Low Importance and High Performance (Keep Satisfied), and Low Importance and Low Performance (Low Priority). This analytical approach enables precise prioritization of organizational efforts to address gaps and optimize resource allocation.

The results reveal significant disparities between employees' perceived importance and the actual performance of several key attributes. Specifically, attributes such as “shift allowances,” “year-end bonuses,” “performance and achievement bonuses,” “improved promotion system,” and “empathetic treatment” were identified as having high importance but low performance. These findings underscore the urgent need for improvement in these areas to meet employee expectations and enhance workplace satisfaction. Failure to address these gaps may lead to dissatisfaction, increased turnover, and a decline in overall organizational morale.

In contrast, certain attributes were identified as both highly important and well-executed, such as basic workplace safety measures and accessible training programs. These attributes should continue to be supported and maintained to sustain employee satisfaction. Meanwhile, attributes with low importance and high performance can be evaluated for resource reallocation to address more pressing needs.

The study's findings have practical implications for restaurant managers and industry practitioners. By focusing on areas identified as critical but underperforming, such as employee financial incentives and empathetic management practices, managers can cultivate a more supportive and engaging work environment. Strategic initiatives, such as refining promotion systems, enhancing financial rewards, and fostering empathetic communication, could directly address employees’ concerns and contribute to the development of a happier workplace culture.

Additionally, the research provides a robust foundation for future studies. Scholars are encouraged to expand on these findings by exploring the applicability of the identified attributes in other sectors or cultural contexts. Comparative studies across industries or geographical regions could further enrich the understanding of what constitutes a happy enterprise.


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In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of aligning employee perceptions with organizational performance on key attributes to build a thriving, happy enterprise. The insights derived from this research offer a valuable roadmap for catering industry stakeholders seeking to enhance employee well-being and organizational success.


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# EXPLORING THE FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS TO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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## ABSTRACT

The hotel industry consumes a vast resources, leading to environmental degradation and the depletion of natural reserves (Legrand et al., 2022). This resource-intensive operation not only harms ecosystems but also results in financial losses, highlighting the need for sustainable practices to conserve resources for the future (Chua and Han, 2022).

Interest in sustainability in hotels is increasing, yet the literature has predominantly focused on consumer behaviour (Kamboj et al., 2022, Nimri et al., 2020). However, addressing sustainability in hotels is predicated on the active involvement of its employees (Legrand et al., 2022). Employees play a substantial role in the operational efficiency of hotels, in fostering a culture of sustainability that resonates with both employees and guests (Alipour et al., 2019), which are essential for fostering sustainable practices and achieving long-term sustainability goals (Khalil et al., 2022). Yet empirical research on how to engage employees in fostering sustainability in hotels is in its infancy (Chua and Han, 2022) and what does exist is largely atheoretical (Khalil et al., 2022). However, researching hotel employees is valuable for revealing pertinent issues and offering relevant solutions for environmentally sustainable hotel operations (Chua and Han, 2022).

Employee engagement, as conceptualized by Kahn (1990), is defined as the "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). This definition encompasses the cognitive, emotional and physical energies that employees invest in their tasks, which ultimately influences their performance and satisfaction at work (Kahn, 1990). There has been substantial effort from both scholars and practitioners to explore the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (Saks, 2006, Saks, 2019), with recent hospitality literature highlighting the significant impact of employee engagement on various outcomes, including: service delivery, employee loyalty, retention intentions, turnover rates, proactive behavior, job performance, job satisfaction, guest's satisfaction and financial performance (Jyoti, 2022, Karatepe et al., 2021, Wang et al., 2020). Yet the role of employee engagement in undertaking sustainability initiatives is under-researched (Chua and Han, 2022), despite hotel employees engagement being directly correlates with effective implementation of practices (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2018).

Responding to this lack of research on engaging employees in sustainable initiatives in hotels, and the existing lack of theoretical focus in the field, the main objective of this study is to explore the barriers and facilitators of employee engagement in sustainability initiatives within the hotel industry. Through qualitative research conducted in the UK hotel industry, involving interviews with thirty hotel employees across various positions, the study builds our understanding of the importance of employee engagement in hotel sustainability initiatives and the cognitive, emotional and physical demands on both the employee and organisation for successful implementation of the initiatives.


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**Key Words:** Green Hotel, Employee Engagement, Sustainability in the Hotel Industry, Facilitators & Barriers, Green Practices in the hotel industry

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# SECTION 6: TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCTATION


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# IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION: EXPLORING CROSS-DISCIPLINARY INSIGHTS THROUGH BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines immersive technologies in Tourism and Hospitality Education (T&HE) through a cross-disciplinary bibliometric analysis. Based on 81 T&HE and 1,274 Social Sciences (SS) publications from Scopus and WoS, it applies treemap visualizations, co-occurrence networks, and thematic mapping to compare conceptual structures. Findings reveal that T&HE research is mainly practice-oriented with limited pedagogical integration, whereas SS literature demonstrates broader theoretical engagement. As a result, six strategic directions are proposed to guide future T&HE research, focusing on theory-driven design, learning outcomes, curriculum integration, instructor readiness, institutional alignment, and the use of diverse immersive modalities.

**Key Words:** immersive technologies, tourism and hospitality education, bibliometric analysis, cross-disciplinary, comparison

## INTRODUCTION

Immersive technologies have gained increasing attention in recent years for their transformative potential across diverse fields, particularly in education. While there are different approaches to defining immersive technologies, the term is generally used as an umbrella concept building upon the reality–virtuality continuum proposed by Milgram & Kishino in 1994. This continuum presents two distinct environments at opposite ends and classifies immersive technologies based on the degree of immersion in real and virtual environments (Skarbez et al., 2021). Immersive technology term is commonly used to refer to the technologies situated along this continuum (Suh & Prophet, 2018), which include Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR) and Mixed Reality (MR) (Handa et al., 2012), as well as Extended Reality (ER), which functions as a broader category integrating these technologies (Khlaif et al., 2024).

These technologies offer significant advancements in educational environments by overcoming the limitations of relying solely on two communication channels, visual and auditory, and enabling technical improvements that incorporate visual, auditory, olfactory, and haptic modalities. This creates fully immersive environments with the potential to engage all five human senses (Kovács et al., 2015). Although the implementation of immersive technologies can be considered costly and presents certain limitations (Baxter & Hainey, 2024), their benefits in enhancing educational experiences are well-documented (Kuhail et al., 2022; Rojas-Sánchez et al., 2023), some include improving student engagement and motivation (Calvet et al., 2019), increasing higher education competitiveness (Artyukhov et al., 2023), enhancing the teacher education (Tarantini, 2020), among other pedagogical and institutional benefits (Radianti et al., 2020).

On the other hand, immersive technologies have also attracted the attention from tourism scholars, not only for their applicability in the industry, but also for their growing relevance in educational contexts (Wei, 2019). The integration of these technologies as instructional tools in Tourism and Hospitality Education (T&HE) plays a pivotal role in advancing the field and enhancing educational quality (Huang et al., 2024), a benefit that became particularly evident during the pandemic (Shen et al., 2022). The transformative contributions of immersive technologies are evident across T&HE through diverse implementations and a wide range of technological applications (Bui Vu, 2024). In addition, while the educational use of immersive technologies is often associated with higher education


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and training contexts within education, these technologies have also been implemented within the tourism industry itself for various educational purposes beyond formal academic settings (Fan et al., 2022; Pratisto et al., 2022). These implementations not only support pedagogical goals but also reflect broader sectoral relevance. In addition, immersive technologies have increasingly been explored within T&HE; however, existing research still exhibits theoretical fragmentation and limited conceptual integration (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019).

While these technologies have been widely explored across various disciplinary domains, there remains a need to examine their application within the specific context of T&HE and to advance their integration for enhancing educational and training environments. In order to support the development of this field and to enable cross-contextual benchmarking for future research, it is essential to draw comparisons with studies conducted in other domains. Building on this rationale, the present study adopts a cross-disciplinary perspective by comparing the scholarly discourse on immersive technologies in T&HE with research indexed in social sciences journals. Through the application of bibliometric techniques –specifically treemap visualization, co-occurrence network mapping, and thematic clustering– this study seeks to uncover thematic orientations, conceptual patterns, and developmental gaps in both domains. In this comparative design, the Social Sciences (SS) literature is used as a conceptual reference point to contextualize and benchmark the findings derived from the emerging T&HE literature, which forms the primary focus of this study. The ultimate aim is to support a structured understanding of immersive technology integration in T&HE and to inform future research through evidence-based recommendations.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a bibliometric research approach to explore the current landscape and future research directions of immersive technologies in Tourism and Hospitality Education (T&HE). Bibliometric analysis offers a rigorous and systematic method for examining the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of a research domain, enabling scholars to trace its historical development, identify dominant research trends, and uncover emerging areas for future inquiry (Donthu et al., 2021). Following a four-stage model comprising defining the research aim, collecting bibliographic data, conducting analysis and visualization, and interpreting the results (Öztürk et al., 2024), this study applies a structured analytical design. Two distinct bibliometric analyses were conducted: one focused on immersive technologies within T&HE, and the other on broader educational research in the Social Sciences (SS). The SS literature serves as a comparative reference point, helping to contextualize the findings and benchmark the thematic maturity of the T&HE domain. To achieve these objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions;

- What are the thematic structures and conceptual patterns of immersive technology research in educational contexts within the Social Sciences (SS)?
- What are the thematic structures and conceptual patterns of immersive technology research in educational contexts within Tourism and Hospitality Education (T&HE)?
- What thematic gaps and future research priorities can be identified for T&HE based on a cross-disciplinary comparison with SS?

To ensure a comprehensive data foundation, records were retrieved from two well-established and complementary scientific databases: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). Across both databases, a consistent set of filters was applied to maintain methodological coherence. First, only studies published in English were retrieved from the databases. Second, the dataset was limited to articles and review articles, excluding other publication types. Third, the publication date range was restricted to 2010–2025, in order to capture both the emergence and recent evolution of immersive technologies in educational research contexts. Collection of datasets took place from April 15 to May 1, 2025.

For the T&HE dataset, a stepwise and structured search strategy was implemented, taking into account the relatively limited volume of existing research in this specific domain. To maximize the inclusion of relevant studies, a broader search scope was applied to immersive technologies and education-related terms by targeting the Topic field (title, abstract, and keywords). In contrast, to ensure domain-specific focus, the terms “tourism” and “hospitality” were searched specifically within the Title field. This combination allowed for both a wide conceptual coverage of immersive technologies and education, and a precise anchoring within the T&HE context. The final search structure was composed of the following:

- Immersive Technologies (Topic): "virtual reality" OR vr OR "augmented reality" OR ar OR "extended reality" OR xr OR "mixed reality" OR mr OR "immersive technolog*"


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- Education (Topic): educat* OR teach* OR learn* OR train* OR lecture* OR class OR curriculum
- Area Specific (Title): tourism OR hospitality

A total of 136 records from Scopus and 110 records from Web of Science were retrieved for the T&HE dataset. After removing duplicates during the merging process, the combined dataset consisted of 162 unique records. To ensure thematic relevance, a manual screening process was applied following the initial data retrieval. Titles and abstracts were independently reviewed by the authors, and the studies that did not demonstrate a clear or sufficiently focused connection to immersive technologies within T&HE contexts were excluded from the final dataset. As a result, 81 publications were retained for the final bibliometric analysis.

For the SS dataset, a more targeted search strategy was applied to capture studies explicitly addressing immersive technologies in educational contexts across various social science disciplines. To ensure thematic precision, both search terms related to immersive technologies and education were restricted to the Title field. This approach was selected to improve the specificity of results, given the broader and more heterogeneous nature of the SS literature. The final search structure for the SS dataset was composed as follows;

- Immersive Technologies (Title): "virtual reality" OR vr OR "augmented reality" OR ar OR "extended reality" OR xr OR "mixed reality" OR mr OR "immersive technolog*"
- Education (Title): "education"

Due to classification differences between Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), a manual subject area matching process was undertaken to ensure consistency across databases. The subject area structure of Scopus was used as the reference, focusing on Arts and Humanities (ARTS), Business, Management and Accounting (BUSI), Decision Sciences (DECI), Economics, Econometrics and Finance (ECON), Psychology (PSYC), and Social Sciences (SOCI). Conceptually aligned WoS categories were manually identified to include only thematically relevant and methodologically comparable fields. Based on this filtering, a total of 1,136 records were retrieved from Scopus and 879 from WoS for the SS dataset. After removing 666 duplicates and applying a publication year filter (2010–2025), the final dataset included 1,274 unique records, all focused on immersive technologies in educational contexts across various social science disciplines.

The bibliometric analyses were later carried out using the R programming environment (version 4.5), employing the bibliometrix package developed by Aria & Cuccurullo (2017). For visualization, the Biblioshiny interface was used to generate key outputs such as treemaps, co-occurrence networks, and thematic maps, which supported the identification of thematic structures and keyword patterns within the datasets. These outputs provided the foundation for interpreting findings through cross-domain comparisons, particularly to highlight conceptual gaps and thematic development needs within the T&HE literature.

**FINDINGS**

The two datasets exhibit notable differences in scope and structure. SS dataset consists of 1,274 documents from 499 sources, authored by 4,171 individuals, and includes 2,934 unique author keywords. In contrast, T&HE dataset contains 81 documents from 64 sources, involving 291 authors and 326 keywords. Despite the smaller size of T&HE, it shows relatively stronger citation performance (29.19 citations per document vs. 24.4 in SS) and a slightly higher level of international collaboration (17.28% vs. 14.36%). Both datasets demonstrate collaborative authorship trends, with an average of around 4 authors per document and a small proportion of single-authored publications. SS dataset reflects a significantly higher annual publication growth rate (32.15%) compared to T&HE (14.87%), indicating broader academic integration of immersive technologies in social science education. However, the average age of documents is slightly lower in T&HE (2.74 vs. 3.05), suggesting that research in this domain is more recent and potentially emerging.

To explore the thematic characteristics of these domains, treemap visualizations were generated based on author keywords, which are shown in Figure 1. These visualizations highlight clear distinctions in keyword prominence and thematic orientation.


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**Social Sciences (SS)** | **Tourism and Hospitality Education (T&HE)**



Figure 6. Treemap of SS and T&HE Datasets

In the SS dataset, the most dominant keywords are “virtual reality” (21%) and “augmented reality” (18%), emphasizing the technological foundations of immersive education. These are supported by pedagogical terms such as “education” (9%), “learning” (3%), and “educational technology” (3%), reinforcing the instructional context of the literature. Further keywords like “mixed reality”, “extended reality”, “simulation”, and “gamification” reflect a diverse technological and methodological toolkit. The inclusion of domain-specific terms such as “nursing education”, “medical education”, and “STEM”, as well as broader concepts like “higher education” and “technology”, indicates a multidimensional and interdisciplinary application of immersive technologies, particularly within health sciences and engineering education. These patterns position SS literature as both pedagogically and conceptually rich, with immersive tools embedded in research that spans theory, practice, and technological innovation.

The T&HE treemap, in contrast, presents a more focused configuration. While “virtual reality” (15%) and “augmented reality” (14%) remain central, a strong emphasis is placed on domain-specific and applied terms such as “tourism and hospitality education” (11%), “tourism” (8%), “cultural heritage” (4%), and “sustainability” (4%). These keywords suggest that immersive technologies are primarily used to enhance experiential learning, simulate professional environments, and support digital transformation in tourism-related training. Emerging conceptual terms like “metaverse”, “extended reality”, and “technology” hint at growing interest in future-oriented innovations, though their presence is still relatively limited. In addition, the occurrence of “game-based learning”, “gamification”, and “virtual tourism” illustrates the sector's affinity for interactive and participatory teaching methods. Importantly, the appearance of “pedagogy” and “curriculum” indicates a developing concern with instructional strategy and curricular design, suggesting that immersive technologies are gradually moving beyond content delivery toward structured educational integration in T&HE contexts.

Taken together, the treemaps suggest that while both domains share technological foundations, their thematic orientations diverge significantly: SS literature spans a broader pedagogical and disciplinary spectrum, integrating immersive technologies into diverse educational frameworks and methodological applications. In contrast, T&HE literature remains more grounded in sector-specific use cases and content-focused innovations, reflecting the field’s vocational roots and applied learning priorities. From a first-level analytical perspective, this applied concentration provides meaningful alignment with industry demands; however, it also exposes a conceptual gap in pedagogical engagement. Compared to SS research, the T&HE domain shows underrepresentation of theoretical learning constructs such as cognitive engagement, instructional design models, or learner-centered strategies; factors that are critical for designing immersive learning environments that are both pedagogically effective and scalable across diverse educational settings. To address this imbalance, future research in T&HE may benefit from adopting pedagogical lenses and frameworks that are well-established in SS literature. The following sections provide a deeper examination of these opportunities by analyzing the co-occurrence patterns and thematic structures in each dataset.


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To map the conceptual structure of immersive technology research across both domains, a co-occurrence network analysis was conducted using the Louvain clustering algorithm. This method groups frequently co-occurring author keywords into thematic clusters, revealing the underlying intellectual organization of the field. The resulting cluster structures for both datasets are visualized in Figure 2.

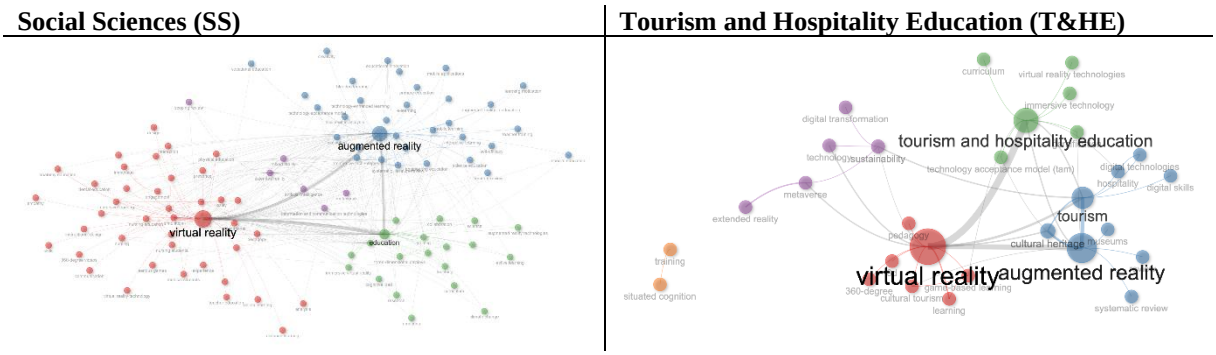


Figure 7. Co-Occurence Network Analysis of SS and T&HE Datasets

The co-occurrence network of the SS dataset reveals a multidimensional and well-structured conceptual landscape, where immersive technologies intersect with various pedagogical frameworks, disciplinary contexts, and methodological approaches. Four dominant thematic clusters emerge from the analysis, each highlighting a distinct educational focus shaped by the implementation and study of immersive technologies.

- Virtual Reality Cluster – Simulation and Immersive Training: This cluster reflects the integration of virtual reality into immersive learning environments that prioritize student engagement, experiential interaction, and structured instructional design. The focus extends to how VR supports skill development, facilitates distance and blended learning, and contributes to pedagogical innovation. Although the core emphasis lies in learner-centered pedagogies, the cluster also shows notable application in practice-based education contexts, where simulation and realism are valued.
- Augmented Reality Cluster – Interactive and Vocational Integration: This theme highlights the role of augmented reality in promoting mobile, blended, and context-aware learning, particularly in vocational and applied educational settings. The cluster captures AR's contribution to motivational dynamics, technology adoption, and creative pedagogy, underscoring its ability to enhance learner autonomy and real-world application. It also reveals connections to teacher training and emerging modes of interaction in formal education systems.
- Education Cluster – Pedagogical and Cognitive Foundations: Immersive technologies are also deeply embedded in core educational constructs. This cluster is oriented around instructional planning, curriculum design, emotional engagement, and cognitive processing, situating immersive tools within learning science and pedagogical theory. The emphasis on interaction and collaboration supports a vision of immersive technologies as enhancers of constructivist and active learning environments.
- Meta-Theoretical Cluster – Futures Thinking and Research Reflexivity: A final thematic layer points to the forward-looking nature of the SS literature, where immersive technologies are not only used but also studied critically as evolving constructs. This includes interest in emerging digital frameworks such as artificial intelligence, mixed and extended reality, and the metaverse. Additionally, the frequent presence of systematic and bibliometric reviews indicates a strong reflexive turn in the literature, supporting the field's methodological maturity and theoretical diversification.

Taken together, the SS literature reveals a conceptually mature and pedagogically embedded engagement with immersive technologies. Beyond functional applications, immersive tools are explored as subjects of inquiry, linked to learner motivation, instructional strategy, and theoretical development. This makes SS a rich testing ground for both using and theorizing immersive educational practices, offering transferable insights for fields like T&HE that seek to deepen their engagement with immersive innovation.

The co-occurrence network of the T&HE dataset reveals a more concentrated but conceptually layered landscape, where immersive technologies are aligned with vocational education, digital transformation, and applied


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pedagogical themes. The Louvain clustering identified four primary clusters—Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Educational, and Strategic/Future-Oriented—along with one smaller theoretical niche. Each reflects the field's disciplinary orientation and emerging research priorities.

- Virtual Reality Cluster – Experiential Simulation and Destination-Based Learning: This cluster highlights the central role of virtual reality in enabling experience-driven and gamified learning environments within tourism and hospitality education. Simulation, 360-degree content, and game-based learning are positioned as tools to replicate service scenarios and engage learners through realism and interactivity. The inclusion of cultural tourism and virtual experiences suggests alignment with destination-specific content. Pedagogy also appears in this cluster, indicating a growing interest in grounding VR applications within structured instructional frameworks.
- Augmented Reality Cluster – Cultural Mediation and Digital Competency Development: This cluster emphasizes AR's use in place-based learning and skill development, particularly in cultural and hospitality contexts. Keywords such as museums, cultural heritage, and hospitality reflect its application in heritage interpretation and context-rich education. Concurrently, digital skills and digital technologies point to efforts in building technological competencies relevant to tourism and hospitality industries. The presence of systematic review also suggests increasing academic scrutiny of AR-based learning outcomes.
- Educational Cluster – Curricular Integration and Technology Adoption: This cluster anchors immersive technologies within formal institutional and curricular structures. Centered on tourism and hospitality education, it is closely linked to curriculum, immersive technology, and technology acceptance model (TAM). These terms reflect ongoing attention to curriculum integration, user acceptance, and implementation dynamics of immersive tools in vocational education. The cluster underscores the field's movement toward evidence-based instructional design and organizational adoption.
- Strategic/Future-Oriented Cluster – Sustainability and Innovation: This forward-facing cluster captures macro-level strategic trends in immersive technology use, including sustainability, digital transformation, metaverse, and extended reality. While some terms such as 'metaverse' are still emerging in the broader literature, their presence in this cluster reflects a forward-looking orientation rather than conceptual consolidation. This suggests growing interest in these themes within T&HE, even if they remain underdeveloped in other parts of the field. The prominence of technology as a linking term signals the convergence of immersive methods with institutional change.
- Theoretical Niche Cluster – Situated Learning Potential: This smaller cluster links situated cognition with training, indicating a currently underexplored theoretical dimension. Though relatively isolated from the core structure, it points to promising directions for future research—particularly in designing immersive experiences that foster context-dependent skill acquisition and experiential learning models.

The T&HE literature reveals a practice-oriented and contextually grounded engagement with immersive technologies. Research in this domain is characterized by its emphasis on experiential learning, digital skill development, and curricular alignment within tourism and hospitality contexts. While the field demonstrates increasing interest in pedagogical framing and institutional integration, its overall conceptual landscape remains more application-driven than theoretically expansive. The presence of sector-specific themes such as cultural tourism, heritage interpretation, and professional training indicates that immersive technologies are predominantly employed to replicate and enhance real-world service environments.

To better understand how the research priorities and conceptual developments compare across both domains, a thematic map analysis was conducted. The next section provides a strategic overview of the conceptual structure of the SS and T&HE literatures, highlighting the development level and centrality of key themes. This analysis identifies areas of strength, specialization, and conceptual gaps, offering deeper insights into the evolving research agendas within immersive technology.

To complement the co-occurrence findings and gain a deeper understanding of how immersive technologies are positioned within each domain, thematic maps were developed for both the SS and T&HE datasets using the Walktrap algorithm. The resulting maps classify clusters of author keywords according to their centrality (relevance to the field) and density (development within the cluster). This enables the identification of four thematic categories: Motor Themes (well-developed and highly relevant), Basic Themes (central but underdeveloped), Niche Themes (well-developed but peripheral), and Emerging or Declining Themes (underdeveloped and peripheral). These maps serve to reveal the conceptual maturity, strategic focus, and possible research gaps within each domain. The visual representation of these thematic structures is provided in Figure 3.


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**Social Sciences (SS)** | **Tourism and Hospitality Education (T&HE)**

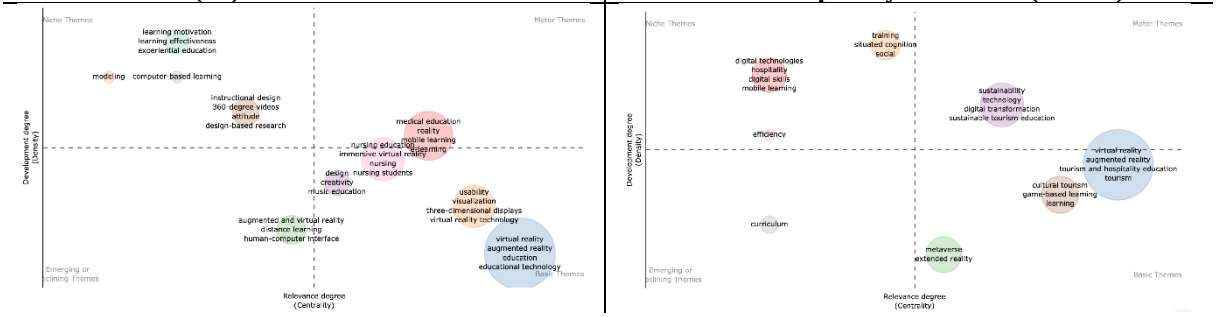


Figure 8. Thematic Maps of SS and T&HE Datasets

The thematic map for the SS dataset demonstrates a well-distributed structure across all four quadrants, reflecting a conceptually diverse and mature research field.

- Motor Themes: This quadrant includes well-developed and influential clusters such as medical education, reality, e-learning, and mobile learning. These themes represent immersive technologies' strong application in digital learning environments, particularly in healthcare and remote instruction contexts. Their prominence reflects both pedagogical engagement (e.g., realism and simulation) and practical implementation in flexible and mobile settings.
- Basic Themes: Foundational terms such as virtual reality, augmented reality, education, and educational technology dominate this quadrant, marking them as core pillars of the SS literature. While these concepts are central, their relatively low density indicates opportunities for deeper theoretical development. Notably, the adjacent cluster that includes usability, visualization, and three-dimensional displays reflects growing interest in the design and interface aspects of immersive systems. These terms link technological infrastructure with learner experience. The proximity of design and creativity to this cluster signals a pedagogical concern with how immersive environments are shaped to enhance educational outcomes—suggesting a possible convergence between user experience research and instructional innovation.
- Niche Themes: This quadrant contains clusters such as learning motivation, learning effectiveness, and experiential education, representing affective, motivational, and outcome-oriented research strands. These themes appear to be internally cohesive but less connected to the field's core debates. Meanwhile, terms like instructional design, computer-based learning, design-based research, and attitude form a subcluster that reflects rigorous methodological and planning-focused approaches. As also observed in the co-occurrence network, the thematic map highlights instructional design as a specialized but under-connected theme, underscoring its potential for conceptual bridging. Their niche positioning may indicate specialized lines of inquiry that could offer greater impact if integrated more closely with broader pedagogical and technological discussions.
- Emerging or Declining Themes: Keywords like distance learning, augmented and virtual reality, and human-computer interface appear in this quadrant. These themes may represent early-stage inquiries, residual interest from earlier technological paradigms, or areas awaiting renewed theoretical framing. Given the global expansion of online education following the COVID-19 pandemic, themes like distance learning may witness renewed conceptual development, particularly when combined with immersive delivery formats. This quadrant may also signal an opportunity to reframe these topics within updated hybrid and multimodal pedagogical models that leverage immersive tools beyond simple digital replication.


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The thematic map of the T&HE dataset reveals a concentrated yet conceptually layered structure, reflecting the field's emerging and application-oriented nature.

- Motor Themes: The most developed cluster includes sustainability, technology, digital transformation, and sustainable tourism education. These themes highlight immersive technologies' increasing association with institutional modernization and long-term strategic innovation. Their strong centrality and internal development suggest that immersive tools are being positioned as part of broader educational transformation agendas in tourism and hospitality contexts.
- Basic Themes: Core concepts such as virtual reality, augmented reality, tourism and hospitality education, and tourism occupy central positions within the conceptual map. While these topics define the backbone of the field, their lower density indicates that theoretical consolidation and pedagogical elaboration remain limited. Within this quadrant, game-based learning and cultural tourism may represent applied focus areas, potentially linked to the design of immersive experiences aimed at enhancing engagement and contextual relevance. Additionally, terms such as extended reality and metaverse, although not fully embedded, appear near the quadrant border, suggesting possible conceptual relevance and future integration into central themes.
- Niche Themes: This quadrant includes terms like hospitality, digital technologies, mobile learning, and digital skills, reflecting focused development around operational and technical competencies. The proximity of training and situated cognition may point to an emerging theoretical niche, though this area remains under-connected to the field's core structure.
- Emerging or Declining Themes: Curriculum, efficiency, and metaverse are located in this quadrant, indicating limited development or currently peripheral positioning in the conceptual landscape, possibly due to the emerging nature of pedagogical research in T&HE. These themes may represent underexplored areas or early-stage topics that have yet to be fully conceptualized or pedagogically framed. Depending on future research directions, they could evolve toward greater integration with instructional and strategic concerns in tourism education.

This strategic mapping illustrates the conceptual breadth and pedagogical maturity of the SS domain in engaging with immersive technologies, in contrast to the more focused and application-driven orientation observed in T&HE. This contrast helps identify key priorities for future research, particularly in addressing conceptual gaps and strengthening theoretical foundations in the T&HE field.

**RESULTS**

This section synthesizes the findings of the treemap, co-occurrence, and thematic map analyses to propose a research agenda for immersive technologies in T&HE. By systematically contrasting the SS dataset with the T&HE dataset, it becomes evident that while both fields engage with similar technological constructs, the conceptual maturity and pedagogical integration observed in SS remain underdeveloped in the T&HE literature. Drawing from the analytical strengths of the SS, several transferable insights emerge to guide the evolution of T&HE research.

The treemap analysis underscored that although both datasets are anchored in technologies such as virtual and augmented reality, the SS literature expands these tools into broader pedagogical, disciplinary, and theoretical contexts. Keywords such as "education," "learning," and "educational technology" appear with strong thematic support in SS, whereas the T&HE literature focuses more on domain-specific terms such as "cultural heritage," "tourism," and "sustainability." These patterns suggest that immersive technologies in T&HE are predominantly applied in service simulations and content enrichment, but are less frequently explored through the lens of learning theory or instructional design. To advance, T&HE research should begin embedding immersive tools within pedagogical frameworks, connecting them to concepts like learner engagement, emotional design, or motivation.

The co-occurrence network analysis further revealed the conceptual breadth of the SS field, where immersive technologies intersect with simulation-based training, affective learning constructs, and meta-theoretical models. In contrast, the T&HE network displayed a more compartmentalized structure, concentrated around experience-based applications and digital skills. While such focus is consistent with the vocational requirements of the field, it leaves gaps in areas like instructional planning, curriculum development, and teacher training. Insights from the SS domain point to the need for research that examines immersive technologies not only as tools for engagement but also as structured components of educational design, aligned with clear learning outcomes and adoption strategies.

Thematic mapping reinforced this asymmetry in conceptual development. The SS map revealed a dynamic landscape spanning all four quadrants of the strategic diagram, with well-developed motor themes (e.g., mobile


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learning, e-learning), foundational but underdeveloped pillars (e.g., virtual and augmented reality), and niche areas (e.g., instructional design, learning motivation) reflecting deep methodological and theoretical engagement. In contrast, the T&HE map was more narrowly configured, with its motor themes centered around sustainability and digital transformation, and critical educational concepts like "curriculum" and "efficiency" positioned at the margins. These patterns suggest that future research in T&HE must not only keep pace with technological trends but also contextualize them within broader educational architectures.

Building on the comparative insights generated across the treemap, co-occurrence, and thematic analyses, several strategic directions can be articulated to expand the conceptual and methodological scope of immersive technology research in T&HE;

- Pedagogical Framing: Immersive technologies should be examined through established learning theories such as constructivism, situated cognition, and self-efficacy. This would support a more theoretically grounded application of these tools in educational settings.
- Affective and Cognitive Outcomes: Future studies should give greater attention to student engagement, emotional presence, and cognitive load, which are central to understanding how immersive experiences shape learner motivation, memory, and behavioral outcomes.
- Curriculum Integration and Instructional Design: There is a need to systematically incorporate immersive technologies into instructional planning and design, as well as into curricular structures and formative assessment. This would enable the transition from experimental use cases to scalable, pedagogically informed implementations.
- Instructor Readiness and Technology Acceptance: Research should more closely examine the roles of teacher preparation, institutional support, and technology acceptance in enabling the sustainable integration of immersive tools into teaching and training contexts.
- Strategic Alignment with Broader Agendas: Immersive technologies should be leveraged not only for content delivery but also for achieving macro-level objectives such as digital transformation, sustainability, and future-ready workforce development. This calls for research that connects immersive pedagogy with strategic educational planning.
- Diversity of Immersive Technologies: Beyond the dominant focus on VR and AR, future research should explore the pedagogical potential of other immersive modalities such as mixed reality (MR), extended reality (XR), 360-degree video, and AI-enhanced environments, especially in the context of hybrid and multimodal learning.
- Reflexive and Evidence-Based Research Approaches: The field would benefit from systematic reviews, conceptual modeling, and meta-analyses that synthesize existing studies and evaluate the broader impact, challenges, and opportunities of immersive technologies within T&HE education.

Advancing research along these thematic and methodological pathways may support the T&HE field in developing a more theory-informed and pedagogically grounded use of immersive technologies. By aligning educational innovation with institutional objectives and learner needs, future studies can contribute to immersive learning ecosystems that are not only aligned with technological advancements but also responsive to educational goals and contextual relevance.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to explore the conceptual and thematic landscape of immersive technologies within the context of Tourism and Hospitality Education (T&HE) by applying a cross-disciplinary bibliometric approach. By comparing T&HE-focused publications with a broader corpus of immersive technology research in the Social Sciences (SS), the analysis identified significant differences in thematic maturity, pedagogical integration, and methodological diversity across the two domains. While the SS dataset was not the main focus of the study, its conceptual richness and pedagogical maturity provided a valuable lens through which the thematic limitations and research opportunities within T&HE could be critically assessed. The selection of the SS literature as a reference point is grounded in its broader theoretical engagement with immersive learning, offering a structured foundation for identifying transferable insights.

The findings reveal that while immersive technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and mixed reality are widely recognized and utilized in both fields, their integration into educational theory and design frameworks remains limited in T&HE. In contrast, the SS literature demonstrates a more structured and theory-driven engagement with these technologies, encompassing diverse pedagogical constructs, learner-centered strategies, and reflective research practices.


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By leveraging treemap, co-occurrence, and thematic map analyses, this study identified several underdeveloped areas in T&HE research—particularly with respect to instructional planning, learner engagement, teacher readiness, and strategic alignment with broader institutional goals. In response, a set of evidence-based research directions was proposed to foster a more pedagogically grounded and theoretically informed application of immersive technologies in the T&HE context. This study contributes to the literature by offering a systematic, evidence-based roadmap for integrating immersive technologies into T&HE, informed by comparative insights from a mature pedagogical domain.

As immersive technologies continue to evolve, future research in T&HE should not only adopt innovative tools but also align them with robust educational frameworks. Doing so will ensure that immersive experiences are not merely novel additions to vocational curricula but integral components of meaningful, scalable, and contextually relevant learning ecosystems. Through cross-disciplinary learning and methodological refinement, the field of T&HE can move toward a more holistic and impactful use of immersive technologies in education.

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# THE PERCEPTION OF THE TOURISM AND HOTEL BUSINESS SECTOR ON THE SKILLS OF GRADUATES OF THE ESCOLA DE HOTELARIA E TURISMO DO ALGARVE

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**ABSTRACT**
The growing tourism and hotel activity in the Algarve region requires companies to regularly recruit staff to ensure smooth operations during peak seasons. This study aims to understand how hotel companies perceive the skills and qualifications of graduates from the Algarve School of Hospitality and Tourism (Escola de Hotelaria e Turismo do Algarve), specifically from Level 4 and Level 5 courses. It identifies the most valued skills and examines how these perceptions affect recruitment and hiring processes. This knowledge is vital for facilitating a smooth transition for students into the job market. Furthermore, ongoing dialogue between industry stakeholders is essential to adapt graduates' skills to the sector's evolving needs.
The research involved a questionnaire distributed to 138 companies in the Algarve hospitality and tourism sector that had previously hired or collaborated with the school, such as through internships. A total of 44 companies responded, providing both quantitative and qualitative data. Results show that while companies recognize and appreciate the role of EHTA in training young professionals, they do not clearly differentiate between the various training levels offered by the school. Although they value the skills and knowledge of graduates, they do not distinguish between Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications during recruitment. The findings also indicate that companies are willing to support the school's efforts to improve its programs and better align them with labor market demands. Overall, fostering stronger communication and understanding between the school and industry will help ensure graduates are well-prepared for the sector's needs.
Key Words: Professional qualification; Hotel and Tourism School of the Algarve; Hospitality; Tourism; Skills

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's fastest-growing and most resilient economic sectors, generating significant employment—about 6% of jobs in G20 countries (UNWTO, 2020). The sector's success heavily depends on well-qualified human resources. However, a shortage of skilled professionals persists, emphasizing the critical role of human resources managers in attracting, retaining, and developing talent.
Companies in the tourism and hospitality sector are aware of market needs and seek candidates with specific competencies. However, the assessment of these competencies depends on factors such as the recruitment process, the experience of recruiters, and the tools used. This leads to the research question for this study: "What is the perception of companies in the tourism and hospitality sector in the Algarve region regarding the competencies and qualifications of graduates from the School of Hotel Management and Tourism of Algarve, and how does this perception influence their recruitment and selection decisions?"
Proper training is essential because performing tasks without adequate skills can compromise service quality and employee morale (Smith & Kemmis, 2010). Despite high labor demand, many companies tend to prioritize filling positions quickly over thoroughly evaluating candidates' competencies, risking a mismatch between skills and job requirements.
EHTA is a key regional training institution offering courses tailored to hospitality and tourism industry needs. Its dual-certification programs target young people with a 9th-grade education, lasting three years, including two internships. These programs provide Level 4 qualifications under Portugal's National Qualifications Framework, equivalent to secondary education (12th grade) and offering pathways for further study (Order no. 102, 24 April 2020).


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For students with a 12th-grade education, EHTA offers one-year technological specialization courses, also including an internship. These confer Level 5 qualifications, focused on technical professional certification (Order No. 206/2022, 19 August). However, a challenge exists in aligning the skills taught at EHTA with industry expectations. Companies may not differentiate between Level 4 and Level 5 training when recruiting, often approaching students without clarifying their qualification level. As a result, graduates from EHTA may be perceived as having varying skill levels, affecting hiring decisions.

The specific objectives are: *(i)* To identify the competencies most valued by companies in the tourism and hospitality sector in the Algarve region; *(ii)* To analyze the perception of companies regarding the competencies of EHTA students upon completion of mandatory schooling; *(iii)* To identify the qualifications most valued by companies, considering different levels of education (Level 4 and Level 5); *(iv)* To compare the importance attributed by companies to competencies and qualifications in recruitment and selection processes; and *(v)* To analyze the professional integration of EHTA graduates in the tourism and hospitality sector, including the types of roles they perform in companies and other aspects related to their integration into the labor market.

Understanding these factors is crucial for aligning EHTA's training programs with industry needs. While the school aims to bridge the gap between education and market demand, challenges remain in ensuring graduates' skills meet employers' expectations. The study also sheds light on the criteria companies use for recruitment, emphasizing the importance of both technical skills and transversal competencies (Gretzel et al., 2015) for delivering high-quality service.

In summary, this research highlights the importance of clear communication and alignment between vocational training institutions and industry requirements. By understanding employer perceptions, EHTA can adapt its programs to better prepare students for the labor market, ultimately supporting the growth and resilience of the tourism sector in the Algarve.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, there has been significant discussion about qualifications in the tourism sector, mainly due to a shortage of skilled professionals in hospitality and tourism. The industry faces challenges such as recruitment difficulties, high staff turnover, low wages, irregular hours, holiday work, and limited career development and training opportunities (Fominiene et al., 2015). To address this, companies are turning to training providers to prepare qualified workers. Education options include higher education and vocational schools. Vocational training, which emphasizes practical skills and hands-on experience, contrasts with university programs that are more theoretical (Moodie, 2002). UNESCO defines vocational education as focused on equipping students with specific skills for employment, unlike general education, which promotes broader understanding.

Germany is recognized as a leader in implementing vocational systems, influencing other countries' approaches (Gessler et al., 2021). Studies suggest that proper qualification and training are vital for delivering high service quality in hospitality. Human resources are central to a successful hospitality business, with the quality of service being a key transaction between provider and consumer (Burke, 2018). Companies should employ effective selection techniques, considering candidates' training levels and internship experiences (Machado & Portugal, 2013, 2014).

Research by Waqanimaravu & Arasanmi (2020) emphasizes that perceptions of access to training and its benefits are crucial for service quality. Customer satisfaction depends heavily on well-trained staff capable of providing excellent service. Continuous employee training enhances performance and offers a competitive advantage (Dhar, 2015). Huang & Baker (2021) highlight that positive perceptions of training benefits directly improve service quality, urging managers to develop stronger training strategies. Overall, the literature confirms that training and qualifications are essential for improving service standards in tourism and hospitality, making them key factors in recruitment and staff development.

### Professional Qualifications

The quality of services in the tourism industry relies heavily on workers' skills, qualifications, experience, and education, which add value to the services offered (Grenčíková et al., 2013). A lack of skills can lead to poor task execution, harming service quality and employee morale (Smith & Kemmis, 2010). Currently, the sector faces a shortage of skilled labor, making recruitment and retention challenging due to low wages, long hours, and limited training and career growth opportunities. Skilled tourism workers tend to remain in the sector longer than unskilled workers (Fominiene et al., 2015).

External factors like seasonality and location also impact job mobility, prompting workers to seek better conditions (Romão, 2022). Professional qualifications encompass technical skills and social attitudes, along with ongoing learning (Flaszyńska & Klementowska, 2022). Skilled employees enhance productivity, efficiency, and service quality, while reducing turnover and associated costs (Lazear, 1998; Rocha-Vidigal & Vidigal, 2012). However, a mismatch between skills and job requirements, known as overqualification, can lead to dissatisfaction and increased


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turnover (Farooq et al., 2009; Portugal, 2021). Overqualification occurs when workers' skills exceed job demands, reducing their commitment to the organization (Liu & Wang, 2012).

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020), it is essential for professionals to continually develop their skills, especially those that are more complex, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, emotional intelligence, and cognitive flexibility. Baum (2002) highlights that defining competencies (skills) is not simple, as it is a subjective and variable perception.

Competencies can be divided into two categories: technical (hard skills) and transversal (soft skills). Hard skills are technical knowledge essential for specific professions, measurable and acquired through training and learning (Rongraung et al., 2014). Soft skills complement hard skills and involve interaction capabilities such as communication, negotiation, teamwork, and relationship building (Ahmed et al., 2021; Purwanto, 2020).

In the tourism sector, soft skills are crucial as they contribute to entrepreneurship, innovation, multicultural competence, diversity, emotional intelligence, employability, and sustainability—factors essential for the industry's success (Carlisle et al., 2023).

**Vocational Training**

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), maintained by UNESCO defines vocational or technical education as training that equips participants with practical skills and knowledge for specific careers. This education benefits individuals through better salaries and career growth, and companies by boosting productivity and competitiveness (CEDEFOP, 2021).

Originally, vocational education targeted students with low academic achievement, focusing on social inclusion and preparing them for manual tasks. Today, it is recognized as vital for economic growth, helping young people meet future challenges and fostering innovation (Barbosa, 2023). Vocational courses provide alternatives for students at risk of leaving school without qualifications or aiming for technical and skilled jobs (OECD, 2015).

Qualifications validate an individual's ability to work in a specific profession, obtained through formal education or practical experience (OECD, 2007). Training should prepare workers for specific tasks, emphasizing technical skills while also developing broader competencies such as communication, negotiation, and social skills, especially in tourism (Busby & Fiedel, 2001; Varra et al., 2021). In tourism, qualifications not only require technical knowledge but also attitudes like responsibility, initiative, flexibility, and teamwork (Fominiene et al., 2015; Rodionova et al., 2016).

**Perception**

This research explores how the tourism and hospitality industry perceive the skills of graduates from the School of Hospitality and Tourism of the Algarve (EHTA). "Perception," a multidisciplinary concept, refers to the process by which individuals interpret sensory information, influenced by factors such as past experiences, sociocultural context, and organizational needs. Several theories explain how people perceive the world, such as the Perception Theories (Reid, 1810), the Unconscious Inference Theory (Helmholtz, 1867), the Gestalt Perception Theory (Wertheimer, 1938), Vygotsky's Perception Theory (1930), the Top-Down and Bottom-Up Processing Theories (1950-1960), Piaget's Perception Theory (1961), the Constant Perception Theory (Skinner, 1974), the Direct Perception Theory (Gibson, 1979), to name a few, each offering different approaches to understanding how perceptions are formed.

Perception is a personal process shaped by sociocultural factors. For instance, Markus and Kitayama (2014) found that cultural background influences how people see themselves and others. Hwang, Wang, and Pomplun (2011) noted that perception of objects depends on features like shape, color, and semantic meaning. Past experiences stored in memory further influence how individuals interpret their environment, from simple object recognition to complex concepts like art (Perrone & Tridapali, 2021).

In the tourism sector, companies generally view EHTA graduates as possessing essential technical skills, including industry knowledge and the ability to apply theory practically. Soft skills such as communication and teamwork are also highly valued. Employers believe these graduates are easily employable and can integrate smoothly into the workforce. A study by Romão (2022) found that graduates are satisfied with their training and find it easy to access employment. The perception of graduates is often based on direct experiences, like internships, and can evolve over time as their workplace performance is observed.

The findings emphasize the need for ongoing dialogue between EHTA and industry partners. Such communication ensures that training remains aligned with market demands and that companies understand the evolving competencies of graduates at different qualification levels. This collaboration is crucial for maintaining relevance and enhancing graduate employability in the tourism and hospitality industry.

## METHODS


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In this research, the methodology adopted is mixed, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to answer the defined objectives. The focus is to address the research question by analysing data from a questionnaire applied to companies that employ or have employed graduates from the School of Hospitality and Tourism of the Algarve (EHTA), at levels 4 and 5. The questionnaire was developed based on the research variables and was pre-tested to ensure its suitability.

The mixed methodological strategy integrates objective data, such as the roles performed by EHTA-trained workers, with subjective perceptions of the companies, allowing for a deeper and more contextualised analysis of the phenomenon under investigation. The qualitative approach, through a case study, is particularly useful for exploring internal dynamics and understanding perceptions of EHTA graduates.

The goal is to analyse the perception of companies in the tourism and hospitality sector in the Algarve region regarding the skills and qualifications of graduates from the School of Hospitality and Tourism of the Algarve (EHTA) and identify how these perceptions influence recruitment and selection processes. To achieve this, a questionnaire was applied to 138 companies in the tourism and hospitality sector in the Algarve region that have collaborated with EHTA. The quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including the paired sample t-test to compare means and assess the statistical significance of differences. However, as the normality assumption (analysed with the Shapiro-Wilk test) was not met, the results obtained with the non-parametric Wilcoxon W test were considered. For the qualitative analysis, a word cloud was created to graphically represent the frequency of the most cited words, identifying the most relevant concepts according to the respondents' perception.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques allowed for cross-referencing of the results, enhancing the validity and depth of the analysis. The analyses were conducted with the assistance of the specific software Jamovi and IRaMuTeQ.

The adopted methodology allows for a detailed understanding of companies' perceptions of the skills of EHTA graduates, contributing to the improvement of the training and professional integration process in the sector.

For this study, the inclusion criterion was companies that, at the time of the questionnaire, were hiring or had previously hired graduates from levels 4 and/or 5 of EHTA. Of the total questionnaires sent to the existing database at the school, 44 responses were obtained, of which 38 were validated as they answered "YES" when asked whether the company structure included or had included EHTA graduates.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Of the 38 validated responses, 63.2% were provided by top-level managers – central directors and CEOs, and 36.8% by employees considered middle management – directors, department heads, and supervisors (Table 1).

Table 1 - Characterisation of the Sample

| | **Qtd** | **%** |
|---|---|---|
| Strategic Vertex | 14 | 36,8% |
| Hierarchical Line | 24 | 63,2% |
| | | |
| Hotel | 26 | 68,4% |
| Restaurant | 10 | 26,3% |
| Other | 2 | 5,3% |
| | | |
| Barlavento | 20 | 52,6% |
| Sotavento | 18 | 47,4% |

Regarding the location of the responding companies, the majority are based in the municipalities of Loulé (23.7%), Albufeira (18.4%), Faro (15.8%), and Portimão (13.2%), representing 52.6% of the Barlavento region and 47.4% of the Sotavento region of the Algarve. In terms of company type, 68.4% of the responses correspond to hotels, 26.3% to restaurants, and 5.2% to companies in other sectors, with no responses received from Travel Agencies. Some companies selected more than one option in response to this question, suggesting they offer these services simultaneously (e.g., Hotel, Restaurant, Tourism Animation).

Due to the seasonality that characterises the Algarve's tourism sector, many companies hire workers through temporary staffing agencies, commonly known in the market as "temporary" during peak season. In this sample, it is evident that the hospitality sector relies more on this type of hiring, where, at the time of the questionnaire, 13.3% of workers are employed solely for temporary services, while the restaurant sector does not show significant figures (Table 2).


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Table 2 - Characterisation of companies by hiring type

| Employment Contract | Hotel | | Restaurant | | Other | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Permanent | 2765 | 44,0% | 491 | 71,6% | 274 | 47,7% |
| Fixed term | 2678 | 42,6% | 188 | 27,4% | 281 | 48,9% |
| Temporary | 837 | 13,3% | 7 | 1,0% | 20 | 3,5% |
| **Total** | **6280** | | **686** | | **575** | |

Table 3 - Average number of employees by company type

| Average | Nº of employees | Permanent | Fixed term | Temporary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hotel | 216,6 | 95,3 | 92,3 | 28,9 |
| Restaurant | 57,0 | 40,9 | 15,7 | 0,6 |
| Other | 191,7 | 91,3 | 93,7 | 6,7 |

In the sample, most companies have fewer than 250 employees, with hotels being the companies with the highest number of contracted workers (Table 2). On average, hotels employ 217 workers, with 44% on permanent contracts and 43% on fixed-term contracts. In the restaurant sector, 71.6% of employees have permanent contracts, which is substantially higher compared to the hotel sector, while 27.4% have fixed-term contracts (Table 3).
Overall, of the total sample, 17 companies (44.7%) do not hire "temporary" workers, 10 companies (26.3%) have hired up to 20 temporary workers currently, 5 companies (13.2%) have between 41 and 60, 4 companies (10.5%) have between 21 and 40, and only two companies (5.3%) have hired more than 60 temporary workers (Table 4).

Table 4 - Companies with "Temporary" workers

| | Qtd | % |
|---|---|---|
| Without Temporary | 17 | 44,7% |
| Between 1 and 20 | 10 | 26,3% |
| Between 21 and 40 | 4 | 10,5% |
| Between 41 and 60 | 5 | 13,2% |
| More than 60 | 2 | 5,3% |
| **Total** | **38** | |

Regarding the areas of training that companies recruit from or have already recruited from, 92.1% admit to having recruited in the "Restaurant" area; 89.5% in the "Kitchen" area; 71.1% in the "Bar" area; 55.3% have already recruited in the "Reception" area; 50% have recruited in the "Pastry/Bakery" area; 23.7% in the "Housekeeping" area, and 10.5% in the "Entertainment" area. No responses were received for the "Travel Agency" area.

**Skills most valued by companies**

Regarding the research conducted to understand the skills and qualifications most valued by companies in the selection and recruitment of workers, with a specific focus on the tourism and hospitality sector in the Algarve region, the research involved analysing the skills required by companies, the qualifications most valued, and the profile of graduates from the Escola de Hotelaria e Turismo do Algarve (EHTA), with the aim of improving the integration process of these professionals into the labour market.
Through a word cloud generated using the Word Cloud Generator programme (Figure 1), it was observed that the most mentioned skill by companies was Communication (Comunicação), highlighting the importance of this skill for the success of candidates in a recruitment process.

Figure 1 - Skills listed by companies


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Responsibility (Responsabilidade) and Technical Knowledge (Conhecimentos técnicos) also stood out, occupying similar positions, reflecting the need for well-informed professionals who take on responsibilities effectively. Other important skills, although mentioned less frequently, included Flexibility (Flexibilidade), Empathy (Empatia), Proactivity (Proatividade), Teamwork (Trabalho em equipa), and Willingness to Learn (Vontade de aprender). These skills, although less cited, remain highly valued by companies, especially in a dynamic sector like tourism and hospitality.

Regarding the profile of skills demanded by the market, the study highlighted that Attitude was the most important skill, being emphasised in comparison to others such as Behavioural Skills (Competências comportamentais), Adaptability (Adaptabilidade), Professionalism (Profissionalismo), and Customer Orientation (Orientação para o cliente). The emphasis on attitude indicates that companies value the posture and behaviour of the candidate, regardless of their technical background.

**Competencies of the Student Profile at the End of Compulsory Education**

The research also addressed the importance of the competencies in the Student Profile at the End of Compulsory Education (ME/DGE). The skills most valued by companies in this context were Reasoning and Problem Solving (86.8% of companies indicated it as relevant), Information and Communication (68.4%), and Critical and Creative Thinking (73.7%). Interpersonal Relationships were also highly valued, with 94.7% of companies considering this skill essential (Table 5).

Table 5 - List of Skills

| **Skils** | **N** | **Yes (nº)** | **(%)** | **No (nº)** | **(%)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Languages and texts | 38 | 8 | 21.1% | 30 | 78.9% |
| Information and communication | 38 | 26 | 68.4% | 12 | 31.6% |
| Reasoning and problem-solving | 38 | 33 | 86.8% | 5 | 13.2% |
| Critical thinking and creative thinking | 38 | 28 | 73.7% | 10 | 26.3% |
| Interpersonal relationships | 38 | 36 | 94.7% | 2 | 5.3% |
| Personal development and autonomy | 38 | 29 | 76.3% | 9 | 23.7% |
| Well-being, health, and environment | 38 | 7 | 18.4% | 31 | 81.6% |
| Aesthetic and artistic sensitivity | 38 | 2 | 5.3% | 36 | 94.7% |
| Scientific, technical, and technological knowledge | 38 | 16 | 42.1% | 22 | 57.9% |
| Body awareness and control | 38 | 5 | 13.2% | 33 | 86.8% |

On the other hand, competencies such as Aesthetic and Artistic Sensitivity, Well-being, Health and Environment, and Body Awareness and Control were less frequently mentioned, reflecting a lower priority from companies, especially in the context of the tourism and hospitality sector, where technical skills and customer interaction competencies prevail.

**Qualifications Most Valued**

The study also analysed the qualifications required by companies based on two levels of education: Level 4 (Table 6) and Level 5 (Table 7), corresponding to the training process in the Schools of Tourism in Portugal. The most valued qualifications at Level 4 were those related to the organisation of spaces and the provision of tourism services, such as cleaning and organising spaces and equipment, pre-preparation and storage of raw materials, and


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the execution of restaurant and beverage services. These competencies were considered very important by companies, with high average scores, highlighting the emphasis on practical skills for operational roles.
At Level 5, competencies related to management and supervision were valued, such as managing special kitchen services and supervising work teams. The average scores for Level 5 qualifications were slightly lower compared to those at Level 4, which may indicate that, for most companies, operational qualifications are more critical than management qualifications in the recruitment process.

Table 6 - List of Qualifications – Level 4

| | N | Average | Median | Mode | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Level 4 Qualifications** | | | | | |
| Ensure cleanliness and organisation of spaces and equipment | 38 | 4.816 | 5 | 5 | 0.563 |
| Carry out the pre-preparation and storage of raw materials | 38 | 4.816 | 5 | 5 | 0.457 |
| Plan and prepare kitchen/pastry/bakery production | 37 | 4.838 | 5 | 5 | 0.374 |
| Perform restaurant, wine, and beverage services | 37 | 4.541 | 5 | 5 | 0.558 |
| Assist in the creation of menus (restaurant/bar/wine) | 36 | 4.167 | 4 | 4 | 0.655 |
| Carry out room service preparations and carving techniques | 34 | 3.618 | 4 | 4 | 0.985 |
| Update tourist information | 32 | 4.094 | 4 | 4 | 0.734 |
| Provide information, promote, and market products | 38 | 4.500 | 5 | 5 | 0.862 |

Table 7 - List of Qualifications – Level 5

| | N | Average | Median | Mode | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Level 5 Qualifications** | | | | | |
| Manage and organise special kitchen services | 38 | 4.500 | 5 | 5 | 0.647 |
| Develop and design new products | 36 | 4.222 | 4 | 4 | 0.591 |
| Supervise, coordinate, organise, and ensure quality | 32 | 4.438 | 4 | 4 | 0.564 |
| Manage, control, and analyse financial results | 36 | 4.222 | 4 | 4 | 0.832 |
| Plan and manage destination services and products | 34 | 4.000 | 4 | 4 | 0.739 |
| Define and implement marketing plans | 35 | 3.800 | 4 | 4 | 1.023 |
| Develop efficient management procedures | 34 | 4.088 | 4 | 4 | 0.933 |
| Manage work teams | 37 | 4.243 | 4 | 5 | 0.895 |

**Comparison between Competencies and Qualifications**
The analysis of the competencies and qualifications of EHTA graduates revealed that companies place greater importance on competencies than on qualifications. Using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponded to Not Important and 7 to Very Important, it was found that 58.8% of companies consider competencies to be very important, while qualifications were also highly valued, albeit with a lower proportion of maximum responses. The p-value of the Wilcoxon test was 0.03641, indicating that the difference in importance between competencies and qualifications is statistically significant, with competencies being viewed as more decisive in recruitment processes (Table 8).

Table 8 - Degree of Importance of Competencies and Qualifications

| | Likert Scale | count | % of total | % cumulative |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Competencies** | 5 | 2 | 5.9% | 5.9% |
| | 6 | 12 | 35.3% | 41.2% |
| | 7 | 20 | 58.8% | 100.0% |
| **Qualifications** | 4 | 1 | 2.9% | 2.9% |
| | 5 | 6 | 17.6% | 20.6% |
| | 6 | 12 | 35.3% | 55.9% |
| | 7 | 15 | 44.1% | 100.0% |


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**Labour Market Integration**

The research also revealed that a large portion of companies (89.5%) employ workers trained by EHTA within their permanent staff.

Table 9 - Number of employees by roles they occupy in the company

| | Yes/No | N | % of total | % cumulative |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Operational Centre** | No | 15 | 39.5% | 39.5% |
| | Yes | 23 | 60.5% | 100.0% |
| **Hierarchical Line** | No | 17 | 44.7% | 44.7% |
| | Yes | 21 | 55.3% | 100.0% |
| **Strategic Vertex** | No | 33 | 86.8% | 86.8% |
| | Yes | 5 | 13.2% | 100.0% |

However, most of these workers occupy roles in the Operational Centre (60.5%), with fewer in the Hierarchical Levels (55.3%) and even fewer in the Strategic Apex (13.2%). This suggests that, despite the significant presence of EHTA graduates in companies, most hold operational and supervisory positions, which may indicate a development opportunity for these professionals to progress into more strategic roles (Table 9).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results obtained and addressing the initial research question for this study, "What is the perception of companies in the tourism and hospitality sector in the Algarve region regarding the competencies and qualifications of graduates from the Escola de Hotelaria e Turismo do Algarve, and how does this perception influence their recruitment decisions?", we can conclude that the research indicates that companies in the region frequently turn to the Escola de Hotelaria e Turismo do Algarve (EHTA) to recruit qualified professionals. However, the study also suggests that the alignment between the qualifications and the specific recruitment needs may be limited. Not all companies identify or clearly distinguish between the qualification levels (Level 4 or Level 5) or the technical and behavioural competencies of graduates. According to some responses, the companies' focus seems to be on the urgency of filling vacancies rather than a more thorough analysis of how well the qualifications match the specific roles.

The results of the study suggest a gap in recognising the different types of training offered by EHTA. Although companies acknowledge the overall quality of the school's training and state that they recruit graduates from both qualification types, they often do not clearly distinguish between the qualification levels (Level 4 or Level 5) and the competencies associated with each level.

Furthermore, the study implies that while companies value the technical and transversal skills acquired by the graduates, there is a need for greater awareness and ongoing dialogue between EHTA and companies to highlight the differences between the courses and the practical applicability of the competencies of the graduates in the sector.

The main conclusions of the study thus point to a positive perception of EHTA graduates by companies, despite the lack of clear distinction between the different qualification levels, and that importance is placed on technical and operational competencies, with a focus on market demands.

The study highlights the need for better communication between EHTA and companies to clarify the differences between Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications, where the companies' interest in contributing to the improvement of EHTA courses through partnerships, workshops, and continuous training is evident.

It was also found through this investigation that most graduates secure employment quickly (in less than 3 months), but job stability varies depending on the type of company and roles performed. Companies recruit graduates from both levels (4 and 5), but do not clearly differentiate between their qualifications.

There is partial alignment between the needs of companies and the qualifications offered by EHTA, but the study highlights that improvements can be made, particularly in the areas of soft skills and management competencies.

Suggestions for curriculum improvement emphasise the need for greater integration between EHTA and the labour market through internships, continuous training, and greater dissemination of the differences between qualification levels.

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# SECTION 7: COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM


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# EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITY CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR: A TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL MARKETING PERSPECTIVE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP IN RURAL TOURISM DESTINATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of Community Citizenship Behaviour (CCB) in rural tourism through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). It investigates how environmental factors—climate change, social sanctions, and public media—influence CCB via psychological ownership, defined as individuals' perceived ownership of their community. Psychological ownership mediates the relationship between environmental factors and community-oriented behaviours, fostering sustainability and local development. The research also examines the moderating role of fixed and growth mindsets in shaping these dynamics. The findings provide strategic insights for sustainable tourism development, emphasizing tailored social marketing strategies to enhance psychological ownership and pro-environmental behaviours.

**Key Words**: environmental factors, psychological ownership, community citizenship behaviour, traveler mindset

## INTRODUCTION

Transformative social marketing is defined as a strategy focused on the transformation of social systems (Lefebvre, 2012). This strategy plays a critical role in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) by encouraging citizens, consumers, and businesses to adopt socially and environmentally positive attitudes and behaviours (Zainuddin & Gordon, 2020). In the context of social tourism, this approach aims to enhance the accessibility of tourism opportunities for disadvantaged groups while supporting the social welfare and sustainable development of communities (Minnaert et al., 2012).

Social tourism researchers have highlighted structural inequalities such as the well-being of tourists and local communities, which traditional tourism studies often overlook, thus focusing on the concept of the right to tourism citizenship (Minnaert et al., 2012). Recent studies addressing the role of social tourism have introduced the concept of community citizenship (Xu et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2023). Community citizenship plays a significant role in contributing to local community development and solving social issues (Xu et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). Recognized as a key factor in improving the quality of life and well-being of local residents, community citizenship acts as a catalyst in this context. Traditionally studied within the domain of organizational behaviour, this concept has recently gained attention within tourism and destination management frameworks. This shift underscores the need for deeper exploration of the relationship and interaction between local communities and tourism development (Xu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2022). Furthermore, this concept demonstrates that social tourism not only enhances individual access but also has the potential to strengthen social bonds and foster solidarity (Gautam, 2023).

This study examines how environmental factors shape critical behaviours related to sustainable tourism through individuals' psychological ties to their communities, using the framework of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). SCT asserts that behaviours are shaped by the reciprocal influence of personal, environmental, and behavioural factors (Bandura, 1986). In rural tourism destinations, Community Citizenship Behaviour (CCB) plays a critical role in promoting sustainability and local development. This research, grounded in SCT, explores the impact of


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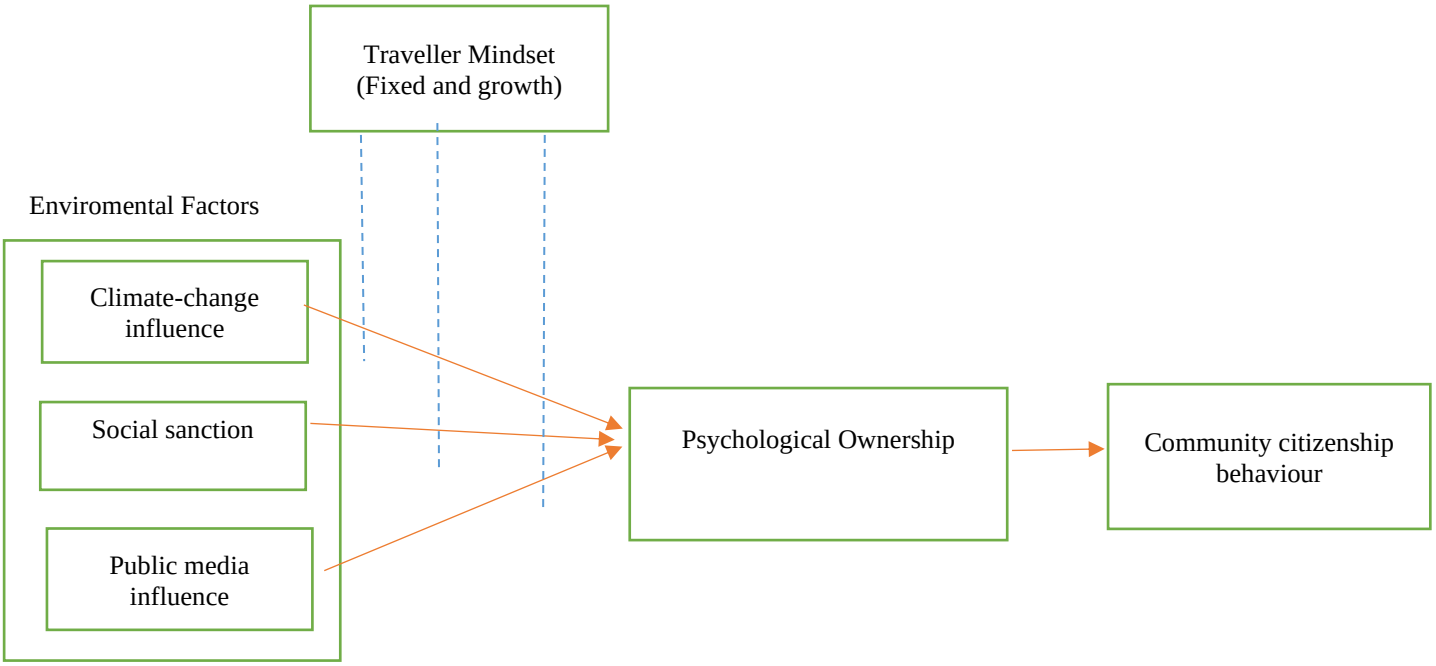
environmental factors on CCB and highlights how these factors foster psychological ownership, encouraging community-oriented behaviours. Psychological ownership is defined as individuals' perceived feelings of ownership over their community and environment (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004) and serves as a mediating mechanism linking personal characteristics with community-oriented behaviours such as participation, protection, and interpersonal harmony (Yin et al., 2023). Individuals who develop a sense of ownership toward their local destination are more likely to engage in behaviours that support environmental sustainability and enhance the collective quality of life (Avey et al., 2009).

Environmental factors are examined through three dimensions: climate-change influence, social sanctions, and public media influence (Lin & Hsu, 2015). Climate change increases sensitivity to local resources, while social sanctions strengthen adherence to sustainability norms. Public media contributes by raising awareness and encouraging individuals to adopt eco-friendly behaviours. Together, these factors cultivate a sense of "ours," creating psychological ownership that drives participation in local resource preservation, volunteering, and sustainable consumption behaviours. Ultimately, environmental factors and psychological ownership serve as foundational elements supporting the sustainable development of CCB in rural tourism.

Additionally, this relationship is posited to be moderated by individuals' mindsets, described as either fixed or growth-oriented thinking patterns. As a moderating variable, these mindsets influence the impact of environmental factors on psychological ownership. Individuals with a fixed mindset are less open to change and innovation, whereas those with a growth mindset are more likely to embrace environmental sustainability initiatives and community attachment (Rahnama et al., 2022). This research seeks to contribute to an understanding of how travelers' mindset frameworks affect community citizenship behaviours and their sense of belonging to tourism destinations in the context of environmental sustainability.

**Research Model**




**Theoretical Contributions**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This study presents an innovative theoretical model examining the role of psychological ownership as a mediator in the relationship between environmental factors and community citizenship behaviour within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). By addressing an underexplored area in tourism research, this study enriches the literature on the connection between environmental factors and psychological ownership.

By investigating the moderating role of fixed and growth mindsets, the research contributes to the theoretical understanding of how individuals' mindset frameworks influence environmental sustainability and community citizenship behaviours. This approach addresses a critical gap in the literature regarding the regulatory role of individual mindsets in environmental behaviours.

**Practical Contributions**

The findings provide strategic insights for the design of sustainable development policies in rural tourism destinations, emphasizing approaches to enhance psychological ownership. These strategies aim to increase the local adoption of sustainable tourism practices by understanding how environmental factors shape community-oriented behaviours.

Incorporating fixed and growth mindsets into the analysis allows for the development of more effective social marketing strategies tailored to different mindset frameworks, thereby promoting participation in environmental sustainability initiatives. This approach offers actionable recommendations for fostering pro-environmental behaviours at both individual and collective levels.

This comprehensive analysis provides both theoretical and practical insights into the sustainable development of rural tourism, addressing significant gaps in the tourism and social marketing literature.

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# ENGAGING RURAL COMMUNITIES IN SUSTAINABLE WINE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

The sustainable development of rural wine tourism and wine routes depends on active local community involvement, where residents help co-create unique terroir experiences with both visitors and tourism agents (Carvalho et al., 2021). However, not all rural communities are automatically supportive of tourism. Some may not view tourism as beneficial or identify negative impacts, while other communities may see tourism as an opportunity for economic development (Kastenholz et al., 2023; McGehee & Andereck, 2004). Research in wine destinations has traditionally focused on wine tourists and producers, often with a narrow focus on winery tourism instead of terroir tourism, also overlooking the perspectives of residents, who are crucial for sustainable and appealing place experiences (Saxena et al., 2007). This study addresses this gap by examining factors influencing residents' support for tourism in Portuguese wine regions.

The research explores various possible conditioning factors, such as residents' interaction with tourists, involvement with the place, community, and locally produced wines, as well as perceptions of the activity's impacts and being working in tourism and/or wine production as possible determinants of residents' tourism support. The study used a structured questionnaire to survey 882 residents in three wine regions of Portugal — Bairrada, Dão, and Beira Interior — addressed mostly face-to-face using a quota sampling approach. With PLS-Path modeling, the study analyzed the effect of the mentioned factors on residents' support for tourism development.

Key findings stress the role of residents working in tourism, perceptions of benefits, involvement with regional wines and community, and interactions with tourists for tourism support. However, residents perceiving the negative social impacts of tourism show less support for tourism development. To foster a supportive local attitude, it should thus be crucial to enhance the positive aspects of tourism while addressing any social concerns that may arise.

The study highlights the importance of sustainable, community-inclusive tourism planning. Destination planners should involve residents through awareness campaigns that explain tourism's benefits and challenges, encouraging them to help co-create positive visitor experiences. This approach promotes respectful, enriching interactions that enhance the destination experience for both residents and tourists.

Limitations of the study include the varied levels of tourism development across the surveyed regions, with some responses possibly reflecting aspirations or concerns rather than actual experiences with tourism. Additional research in other wine regions and qualitative studies could further deepen the understanding of how residents' perceptions and attitudes toward tourism evolve.

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# PEACE AGENDA, GUIDED TOURS IN CONTESTED HERITAGE SPACE AND THE 'OTHER SIDE' NARRATIVE

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural-Heritage spaces are often contested over various issues like identity, ideology, culture, and geopolitics. In such spaces it is possible to use a variety of narratives providing the visitor with historical facts, explanations, and interpretations of the personal and social heritage of the local people that are living in this contested destination. This experience might invite the visitors to a complex dilemma with being expose to the narrative of the 'other side' discourse and its complexity. This study examines the extent and the ways in which, participants' experiences in exposure tours to the narrative of the "other side" within a conflict heritage space contribute to fostering understanding and bringing people involved in the situation closer together. These objectives are based on the idea that direct encounters between people from different cultures, which can take place within a tourism experience, may contribute to greater understanding and closer connections between the participants. The importance of this research is to propose a strategy and model for promoting understanding and reconciliation from the bottom up in conflict areas, independent of the political leadership, through a tourism experience that encourages direct encounters to explore the culture and narrative of the other side. The selected case study focuses on "Alternative Narrative" tours conducted in the Old City of Nazareth with the backdrop of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, particularly concerning its implications for tensions between the Arab minority and the Jewish majority living as neighbours in Israel.

The research problem raised in this study is: examining the ways in which an alternative narrative tour, focused on exploring the culture and society of the other side in a geopolitical conflict, may contribute to greater understanding and reconciliation between both parties. The study sub-questions raised: What are the strategies for exposing participants to alternative narratives in a guided tour of a contested heritage site, and how is it implemented? What is the role of the guides and local hosts in an alternative narrative tour? What are the unique experiences and meanings for Jewish participants, representing the other side of the conflict, in an alternative cultural-heritage tour within a contested space? Moreover, what is the potential of the unique experience of an alternative narrative tour to bring the hearts of both sides—Jewish and Arab Israelis—closer together and to promote peace through tourism? The research methodology includes participance observation on the guided tours, and personal interviews with tour guides, local hosts and participances. The research findings present a model for employing an alternative narrative exposure strategy to foster understanding, bridge divides, and promote peace through tourism in conflict zones. This research may have important implications for the agenda of tourism and peace relations, and the proposed theoretical model can be applied through the development of alternative narrative tourism tours in other parts of the world experiencing ongoing conflicts between nations living side by side.


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# COMMUNITY-BASED INVOLVEMENT AND EVENTS

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## ABSTRACT

A popular component of the hospitality and tourism industry for students is working in meetings and events because they view it as exciting, challenging, and sexy; they get to express their creativity and make client's dreams come true. As such, many students take event classes in their hospitality programs to learn about the event-planning process, apply related theories, and gain hands-on experience – all of which provide the bulk of the teaching material for instructors. Instructors are also providing content that aligns with principles of social responsibility and community engagement, especially as the industry itself incorporates initiatives such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, community outreach events, and sustainable practices that underscore its commitment to making a positive impact on a community, beyond economic considerations. At the same time today's college students are increasingly compelled to work for companies that incorporate such initiatives (Simpson, S. & Aprim, E., 2018).

Events generate jobs and revenue for local businesses to the tune of billions of dollars around the world, which is easy for students to grasp and measure. What can be challenging for them, however, is figuring out how events can align directly with CSR programs and initiatives, and how they can use the events to impact society and the people in each community. A community can include those working for companies who create, execute and host events; those who work the event (volunteers); those who attend events, and those who live within the communities that host events. It is important for students to know how to produce events in an inclusive manner that supports all types of community stakeholders, in addition to generating revenue and jobs. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to outline how a framework focusing on community engagement can be used to structure an event class, incorporate often-required experiential learning into it, and connect students, and others, with their local communities via events.

Integrating Community Engaged Learning (CEL) into an Events Management Course (EMC) is the perfect avenue to expose students to events' potential to make a positive impact on the world and benefit our communities, while at the same time give students practical experience as they are required to work directly with local non-profit community partners. In a CEL-EMC, alongside their partners, students learn how to use events to address complex social and environmental issues which is all integrated with the typical course content. When all is said and done, students walk away knowing how to use events for a greater purpose. This paper, outlined as a case study, informs instructors who teach EMC's how to incorporate CEL into them. It highlights the process, what works, what challenges instructors will likely face, what types of partners to partner with and defines what is meant by CEL in an EMC.

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# MAPPING THE ECOTOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE BINH-TRI-THIEN REGION, VIETNAM: A GIS-BASED MULTI-CRITERIA APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is increasingly recognized as a strategic component of sustainable tourism development, particularly in regions with rich biodiversity and cultural heritage. The Binh-Tri-Thien region in Central Vietnam possesses considerable ecological and cultural resources, making it a promising area for ecotourism development. This study aims to evaluate the ecotourism suitability of the Binh-Tri-Thien region through the integration of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), thereby supporting the development of a regional ecotourism suitability map. The methodological framework combines spatial data analysis with multi-criteria decision-making techniques. Ten criteria were identified and weighted using the AHP method based on expert judgment and literature review, including: (1) elevation, (2) slope, (3) distance to surface water, (4) distance from roads, (5) vegetation cover, (6) distance from protected areas, (7) temperature, (8) rainfall, (9) distance to historical and cultural sites, and (10) population density. Each criterion was standardized and spatially analysed within the GIS environment. The weighted overlay analysis was then applied to classify the region into five levels of suitability, including: (1) highly suitable, (2) suitable, (3) moderately suitable, (4) marginally suitable, and (5) least suitable.

The spatial analysis results reveal that approximately 44.7% of the BTT region falls under the "highly suitable" (18.1%) and "suitable" (26.6%) categories. These areas are primarily located in national parks, nature reserves, and wetland ecosystems, including Phong Nha–Ke Bang National Park, Bach Ma National Park, and Tam Giang-Cau Hai Lagoon. Such zones exhibit favourable ecological characteristics, including diverse terrain, intact vegetation, proximity to water resources, and low population density, making them optimal for ecotourism development. Conversely, areas classified as "least suitable" (9.2%) are mainly concentrated in urbanized, lowland, and intensively cultivated regions, where natural landscapes have been extensively modified or degraded by socio-economic activities. This study provides a scientific foundation for sustainable ecotourism planning in the Binh-Tri-Thien region. The resulting suitability map offers valuable spatial insights for decision-makers, planners, and stakeholders in identifying priority areas for ecotourism investment and conservation. The integration of GIS and AHP proves to be an effective approach for regional-scale assessments, allowing for transparent, replicable, and policy-relevant outcomes. It is recommended that future planning efforts integrate this suitability analysis with participatory approaches involving local communities to enhance the inclusiveness and sustainability of ecotourism development in the Binh-Tri-Thien region.


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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has long been recognized as one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing sectors of the global economy (Butowski, 2019; Dowling, 2000; Telfer & Sharpley, 2015). According to UN Tourism, international tourist arrivals surged from 25 million in 1950 to approximately 1.3 billion in 2023, generating around USD 1.4 trillion in international tourism receipts. Including passenger transport, total tourism-related export earnings reached USD 1.6 trillion in 2019 (UN Tourism, 2024). Furthermore, in 2023, the tourism sector contributed 9.1% to global GDP, supported 330 million jobs (equivalent to 10% of global employment), and accounted for 6.8% of total exports and 28.3% of international service exports (WTTC, 2024). This demonstrates tourism's vital role in stimulating economic activity, generating employment, enhancing foreign direct investment, and promoting overall national development (Gavioli et al., 2025; Guerard et al., 2024).

Amid the impressive growth of global tourism, ecotourism has emerged as a particularly promising and sustainable form of tourism (Fennell, 2001; Le & Nguyen, 2023). Rooted in nature-based experiences and cultural immersion, ecotourism emphasizes responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves (Le et al., 2025; Tiwari et al., 2024). First introduced in 1987, the term reflects the increasing need to harmonize tourism with environmental protection and cultural heritage preservation (Le & Nguyen, 2023). Today, ecotourism is viewed as a strategic tool to address environmental and socio-economic challenges by fostering biodiversity conservation, raising ecological awareness, and promoting sustainable development - particularly in rural and marginalized areas (Asadian & Weiler, 2009; Le et al., 2022; Sahoo et al., 2024).

Effective planning and management are essential to maximize the benefits of ecotourism while minimizing its ecological footprint. A critical first step in this process is the identification of suitable areas for ecotourism development (Ronizi et al., 2020). Traditional site assessments have relied on qualitative or descriptive methods, but recent advances have enabled the integration of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) with Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) to enhance the spatial and scientific rigor of such evaluations (Gigović et al., 2016; Sahani, 2021). This GIS-MCDA approach facilitates systematic assessment based on ecological, socio-economic, and infrastructural criteria, supporting more informed and sustainable planning decisions (Bunruamkaew & Murayam, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2022). Among MCDA techniques, the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) remains widely used due to its transparency and ease of application, although it has known limitations regarding consistency and scalability (Gigović et al., 2016; Samira Molaei et al., 2018). Despite these, its integration with GIS and techniques such as Weighted Linear Combination (WLC) has proven valuable in prioritizing ecotourism zones, particularly in resource-constrained and biodiversity-rich areas like Vietnam.

In this context, the present study applies a GIS-based multi-criteria approach to map and evaluate the ecotourism potential of the Binh-Tri-Thien (BTT) region in Central Vietnam - a region renowned for its ecological diversity and cultural heritage, yet still underrepresented in spatial ecotourism planning. By combining expert judgment with spatial analysis, the study aims to provide a robust framework for identifying ecotourism suitability zones and informing sustainable regional tourism strategies.

## 2. STUDY AREA AND METHOD

### 2.1. Study Area

The Binh-Tri-Thien (BTT) region located in Central Vietnam, spans a natural area of approximately 17,647.1 km², geographically situated between latitudes 16°00' to 18°00'N and longitudes 105°30' to 108°40'E (PCQBP, 2020; PCQTP, 2022; PCTTHP, 2020) (Fig. 1). Strategically located on the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) - which connects Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam - the Lao Bao international border gate in Quang Tri province acts as a major transnational gateway. This corridor enhances the region's role as a logistical and economic link between mainland Southeast Asia and the Pacific, providing landlocked countries such as Laos and northeastern Thailand access to seaports (Hang et al., 2018).

Geographically, the BTT region offers a combination of natural diversity, cultural richness, economic potential, and strategic geopolitical significance. It functions as a bridge between northern and southern Vietnam, as well as between Vietnam and Indochinese nations. This unique location presents substantial opportunities for intra-regional, inter-regional, and international integration, especially in tourism and trade. However, it also renders the region


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vulnerable to natural disasters such as storms, floods, and droughts, which pose recurrent challenges to tourism infrastructure, operations, and scheduling (Phan et al., 2024). Despite these vulnerabilities, the BTT region has demonstrated remarkable growth in the tourism sector. Between 2007 and 2024, it welcomed over 110 million tourist arrivals, with domestic visitors accounting for approximately 81% of the total (PCQBP, 2020; PCQTP, 2022; PCTTHP, 2020). Tourist numbers grew steadily from 2.6 million in 2007 to 11.9 million in 2019, prior to a sharp decline triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic (Fig. 4.5). In terms of economic performance, the BTT region recorded cumulative tourism revenue exceeding 117 trillion VND (approx. USD 4.68 billion) over the 2007–2024 period. Revenue increased from 1,502 billion VND (USD 60.1 million) in 2007 to 16,180 billion VND (USD 647.2 million) in 2024 (PCQBP, 2020; PCQTP, 2022; PCTTHP, 2020).




**Figure 1.** Location of the Binh-Tri-Thien Region

## 2.2. METHOD

GIS is a robust analytical framework for collecting, integrating, and visualizing spatial data (Goodchild, 1991; Ramaano, 2024). Through the integration of various geographic datasets, GIS enables the processing of environmental, topographic, infrastructural, and demographic variables to support spatial analysis (Tomczewska-Popowycz & Quirini-Popławski, 2021; Wieczorek & Delmerico, 2009). In the tourism sector, GIS is widely used to evaluate tourism potential, guide spatial planning, manage natural resources, and inform policy decisions (Quinta-Nova & Ferreira, 2024). In this study, GIS was applied to generate an ecotourism suitability map for the Binh-Tri-Thien region. This map highlights areas with favorable natural and infrastructural conditions for ecotourism, thereby serving as a decision-support tool for sustainable tourism planning. The analysis utilized ArcGIS 10.8 software in combination with MCDA, specifically the AHP, to evaluate the relative importance of various factors.

The GIS-based ecotourism assessment followed a structured workflow comprising four main steps, including: 1) the selection and collection of thematic layers; 2) standardizing and classifying these layers; 3) assigning normalized weights to reflect the significance of each layer; and 4) overlaying and classifying the layers to identify potential ecotourism areas.


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## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Thematic Layers Selection

The first step in the analysis involved the selection of ten thematic layers representing key environmental, infrastructural, and socio-cultural factors influencing ecotourism potential. The choice of layers was guided by data availability in the study area and supported by findings from previous studies (Andemo et al., 2024; Ferdowsi, 2024; Karakuş, 2024; Oinam et al., 2024).

Environmental factors such as elevation, slope, vegetation, temperature, and rainfall reflect landscape attractiveness, ecological sensitivity, and climatic conditions. Infrastructural layers - including proximity to roads, surface water, and protected areas - indicate accessibility and integration potential with conservation zones. Socio-cultural layers, including population density and proximity to cultural sites, help identify areas suitable for community-based and heritage-focused tourism.

All datasets were obtained from reputable sources such as NASA Earth Data, OpenStreetMap, Google Earth Engine, the Vietnam Hydro-Meteorological Service, and the Vietnam Geography Institute. The selection prioritized thematic relevance, spatial resolution (e.g., 30m DEM), and compatibility with GIS-based multi-criteria analysis.

### 3.2. Thematic Layers Standardization

After collecting the thematic layers, the next critical step was standardization to ensure compatibility across datasets. This process included converting all layers to a common coordinate reference system and applying consistent measurement units, thereby enabling accurate spatial analysis and inter-layer comparisons (Roy et al., 2024). Following standardization, each layer was reclassified to reflect its relative impact on ecotourism potential. A five-level suitability classification system was applied, with values assigned as follows: 1) highly suitable; 2) suitable; 3) moderately suitable; 4) marginally suitable; and 5) least suitable.

### 3.3. Determination of Normalized Weights for Thematic Layers

In this study, GIS-based multi-criteria decision analysis was employed to evaluate urban green areas, with a critical step being the assignment of weights to each thematic layer. These weights reflect the relative importance of each criterion in influencing ecotourism suitability (Andemo et al., 2024; Ferdowsi, 2024).

The weights were determined using the AHP, which involves pairwise comparison of criteria (Islam et al., 2024; Gelan, 2021). Following Saaty's (1980) nine-point preference scale (Table 1), each criterion was compared with every other criterion in a pairwise matrix. The final weights assigned to each thematic layer are presented in Table 6.5. Among them, "Distance from protected areas" (27%) and "Vegetation" (16%) were considered the most influential factors, followed by "Distance to historical and cultural sites" (14%) and "Elevation" (11%) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Determination of the Criterion Weight

| **Thematic layers** | **Factor weight** (%) |
|---|---|
| Elevation | 11.0 |
| Slope | 9.0 |
| Distance to surface water | 5.0 |
| Distance from roads | 4.0 |
| Vegetation | 16.0 |
| Distance from protected areas | 27.0 |
| Temperature | 5.0 |
| Rainfall | 5.0 |
| Distance to historical and cultural sites | 14.0 |
| Density of population | 3.0 |

### 3.4. Ecotourism Potential Mapping

After standardizing and assigning weights to the thematic layers, the next step involved integrating them to produce a composite suitability map for ecotourism development. This was carried out using the Weighted Overlay tool in ArcGIS 10.8, which combines the layers based on their respective weights to assess the overall suitability of each location.


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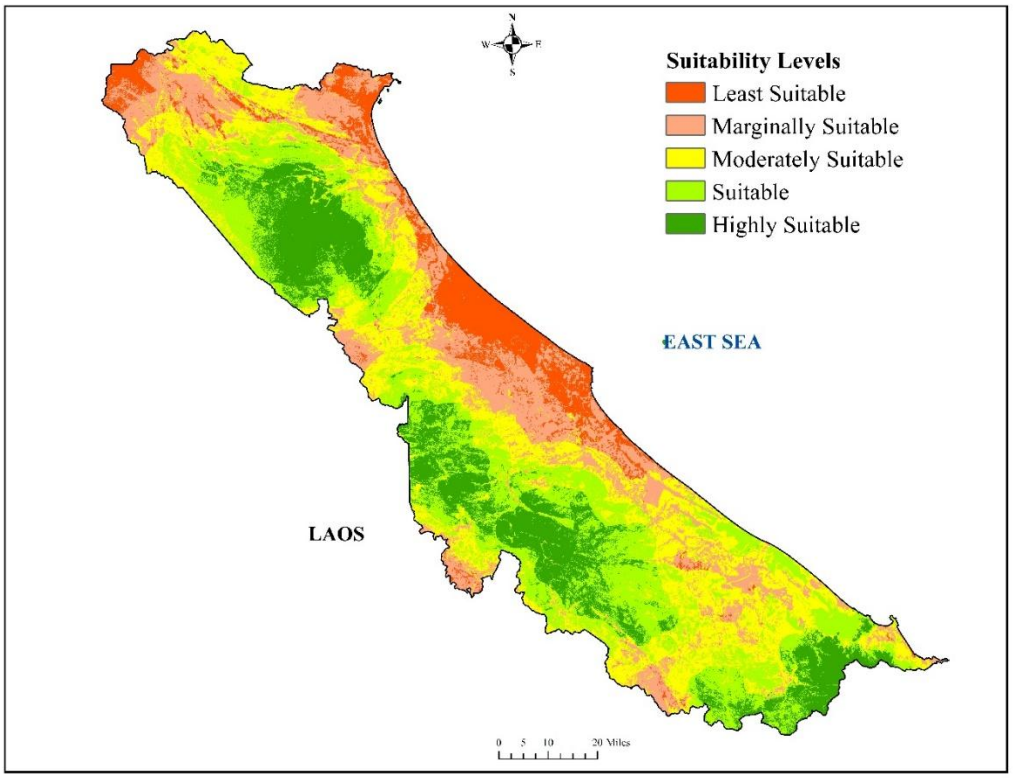


**Figure 2.** Suitability Levels in the Binh-Tri-Thien Region

The analysis reveals that 18.1% of the Binh-Tri-Thien region is highly suitable for ecotourism, primarily located within national parks and nature reserves. These areas offer pristine ecosystems, scenic high-elevation landscapes, and minimal human disturbance - ideal conditions for sustainable tourism and biodiversity conservation (Figure 2).

Approximately 26.6% of the region is classified as suitable, concentrated in buffer zones of protected areas. These zones, typically at elevations of 1001–1500 meters with gentle slopes (5°–15°), are favorable for community-based ecotourism, infrastructure development, and visitor safety. Moderately suitable areas account for 26.3% of the region and are found mostly in the western and southwestern foothills. Dominated by secondary vegetation and farmland, these zones support agro-ecotourism and can serve as buffer zones that reduce pressure on core conservation areas. Marginally suitable and least suitable areas together comprise around 29% of the region, largely covering urbanized zones, coastal plains, and intensively used agricultural land. These areas, such as Hue, Dong Hoi, and Dong Ha, exhibit high levels of ecosystem alteration, low biodiversity, and limited natural appeal for ecotourism, though they retain importance for cultural and logistical tourism functions.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study applied a GIS and AHP to assess the ecotourism potential of the Binh-Tri-Thien region in central Vietnam. By integrating environmental, infrastructural, and socio-cultural factors, the analysis generated a spatially explicit ecotourism suitability map that classifies the region into five categories ranging from highly suitable to least suitable. The results show that approximately 18.1% of the Binh-Tri-Thien region is highly suitable for ecotourism development, largely located in national parks and nature reserves with favorable environmental conditions and minimal anthropogenic disturbance. An additional 26.6% of land is deemed suitable, mainly in buffer zones, providing opportunities for community-based and low-impact tourism. Moderately suitable areas (26.3%) offer potential for agro-ecotourism and reforestation-linked initiatives. Meanwhile, marginally and least suitable areas, comprising 29% of the region, are constrained by urbanization, intensive land use, and ecological degradation. The study demonstrates the effectiveness of GIS and AHP in supporting spatial planning for sustainable tourism, offering valuable insights for policymakers, planners, and conservation managers. Future research may enhance this


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model by incorporating additional dynamic factors such as seasonal accessibility, carrying capacity, and local stakeholder preferences to support more adaptive and inclusive planning processes.

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# SECTION 8: INNOVATION AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY


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# RECREATING HERITAGE THROUGH PRODUCT DESIGN: CONTRASTING ARTISANS' AND DESIGNERS' PERSPECTIVES

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores how traditional craftsmanship and contemporary design intersect in collaborative product development. While design literature focuses on consumer perspectives, this research centers on producers (artisans and designers) and their views on functionality, aesthetics, and symbolism. Based on a qualitative study of the SME *Projecto TASA*, findings reveal distinct yet complementary priorities: artisans emphasize functionality; designers, aesthetic and symbolic value. Despite differences, shared values such as sustainability emerged. The study enriches design theory from a producer-focused perspective and offers practical insights for SMEs, showing how structured collaboration can foster innovation and preserve cultural heritage.

**Key Words:** Craftsmanship; Product Design; New Product Development Process; Product Design Dimensions.

## PROBLEM DEFINITION

The intersection of traditional craftsmanship techniques and contemporary design practices presents both opportunities and challenges for collaboration in product development. This study addresses a gap in the literature regarding the perspectives of producers (artisans' and designers') on product design dimensions (functionality, aesthetics, and symbolism) within a co-creative environment, and how these perceptions influence the New Product Development (NPD) process.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research explores the perspectives of a multidisciplinary team on product design dimensions within a structured approach to NPD process. It aims to identify differences and similarities in their perceptions and to understand the main value this process adds to market innovation. The research questions include: 1) What is the producers' perspective on the dimensions of product design? 2) Which differences, if any, can be identified in the perceptions of the artisans and designers involved in a multidisciplinary team? 3) What is the main value that this collaborative NPD process effectively brings to the market?

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method was adopted, using semi-structured interviews with professionals involved in Projecto TASA (*TASA*). Data were collected via Zoom and analyzed thematically to ensure rigor and credibility. *TASA*, based in Loulé, Portugal, serves as the empirical context of this study (Proactivetur, 2025). As a tourism-related small and medium-sized enterprise (SME), TASA promotes Portuguese cultural heritage by merging traditional techniques


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with contemporary design. Its four-phase methodology - Inspiration (Investigation), Design (Conception), Product (Creation), and Future (Sustainability) - aims to generate both innovative products and local economic and social value by providing fair payment to artisans (Proactivetur, 2025). TASA's values also reflect core principles of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) (United Nations, 2015).

## FINDINGS

The findings indicate that both artisans and designers respect traditional methods and view collaboration as a pathway for innovation. Designers prioritize aesthetics and symbolic aspects, while artisans emphasize functionality. Several subcategories emerged within each product design dimension, illustrating how these contribute to the process.

In terms of Functionality, subcategories include "Level of Involvement", "Multidisciplinary Training" and "Adaptability", all deemed essential to production efficiency (Jindal, Sarangee, Echambadi, & Lee, 2016; Sameti, 2022). "Ease of Production" was further broken down into "Time" and "Communication", while "Resources" and "Sustainable Strategies" emphasized the growing importance of sustainability in the NPD process (Abdou et al., 2022; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

For aesthetics, the findings showed that "Sustainability" and "Origin" are key considerations (Rui-Bo, Xiao-Song, Xin-Yu, & Yuan, 2014). "Material Characteristics", "Costs", and "Time" (Assiouras, Skourtis, Giannopoulos, Buhalis, & Koniordos, 2019) emerged as factors influencing product personalization potential. "Adaptability" was also considered important in creating timeless products (Lin & Chang, 2021). In the Symbolism dimension, the findings revealed that "Personal Identity" contributes to developing the brand's identity (Wang, Liao, Zheng, & Li, 2019). "Language" and "Origin" were crucial for effective communication and product understanding (Baker, Fehrer, & Brodie, 2022). "Emotional Connection" and "Sense of Belonging" reflected strong producer-product connections (Campos, Mendes, Valle, & Scott, 2017) while "Traditions" highlighted the deep cultural influence on the product design process (Brunner, Ullrich, Jungen, & Esch, 2016).

Despite differing disciplinary backgrounds, participants shared a consistent understanding of product design dimensions within the NPD context (Homburg, Schwemmle, & Kuehnl, 2015). The co-creative process was widely recognized for promoting sustainable local development, fair working conditions, and cultural preservation, while also incorporating innovation (Abdou et al., 2022).

## DISCUSSION

TASA's model demonstrates how functionality, aesthetics, and symbolism can be effectively integrated in the NPDevelopment process. Sustainability remains central, aligning with the shift toward environmentally conscious design. While artisans and designers interpret design dimensions differently, these contrasts foster innovation rather than conflict. Dialogue and mutual respect contribute to the creation of products that are culturally grounded and market relevant. These findings underscore the potential of collaborative design to advance innovation and cultural sustainability, offering relevant insights for SMEs in tourism and creative sectors.

## CONCLUSION

TASA exemplifies the coexistence of tradition and innovation, resulting in products that are sustainable, culturally meaningful, and market relevant. Its methodology provides a replicable framework for tourism-oriented SMEs, demonstrating how cultural heritage and market needs can be integrated. The study concludes that innovation in heritage-based contexts depends on investment in collaboration, multidisciplinary learning, knowledge sharing, and supportive structures.

## THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This research contributes to design theory by incorporating the often-overlooked perspective of producers. While previous studies have focused on consumer behaviour and user-centered design (Bloch, 1995; Jindal et al., 2016; Noble & Kumar, 2010; Sanders & Stappers, 2008), on design created for the user (Roberts, Palmer, & Hughes, 2022; Veryzer & Borja De Mozota, 2005; Wu, 2024) and on the Product Design Dimensions (Homburg et al., 2015; Jindal et al., 2016; Sameti, 2022), this study explores the views of those directly involved in NPDevelopment and


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Design. It contributes to a richer understanding of how design dimensions are interpreted and applied in collaborative, heritage-based contexts.
Practically, these findings highlight how multidisciplinary collaboration can address challenges in NPD, balancing innovation with social and environmental responsibility. They reinforce the need to invest in knowledge sharing and multidisciplinary training. The value of the collaborative product development method adopted by *TASA* is also highlighted for creating authentic and innovative products, offering actionable insights for organizations, policymakers, and cultural and creative sectors on fostering innovation while preserving tradition.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research could benefit from a broader and more geographically diverse sample, including professionals from remote regions. Field-based investigation is recommended to explore the nuances of co-creative practice. Longitudinal studies may also help to assess the long-term impact of collaborative design processes. Future research may benefit from exploring customer co-creation using the perspective of customers on designing for product and tourism experience innovation, considering local culture, traditions, and heritage.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest to be declared in this research.

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# SUPPORTING LOCAL RESTAURANTS IN TRANSITIONING TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Linking to food tourism and food tourism marketing; future trends in hospitality ;hospitality product development and innovation and sustainable tourism policy and planning this presentation outlines practical methods, based on the analysis of experiences and insights of practitioners, owners, and managers, to assist local restaurants in transitioning towards more environmentally sustainable operations. While some argue that tourism has made progress in sustainability, the same cannot be said for hospitality. Comparatively, the restaurant industry ranks as one of the least sustainable economic sectors globally due to its substantial resource usage and waste generation (Hu et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2013). Restaurants, which rank second in resource consumption and waste production within the tourism sector, highlight the urgent need for the development of sustainable practices (Perramon et al., 2014). There is significant potential for restaurants to implement sustainability initiatives to meet tourism sustainability objectives and contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities SDG 12 and Responsible Consumption and Production.

Focus groups and interviews with local restaurant owners and managers were conducted to identify the motivation, opportunity, and ability (MOA) factors that underpin successful sustainability practices in independently owned restaurants in the tourist seaside city of Brighton, UK. These findings were analysed to generate insights into MOA factors that drive environmental efforts (see Raimondo, et al., 2023; Shan et al., 2024; Jacobs and Klose, 2016) These insights informed the creation of a free-to-use online restaurant sustainability toolkit, which includes videos and case studies to assist other restaurants on their sustainability journey. A pilot version of a restaurant-specific checklist was also developed to help measure progress.

This presentation will showcase the toolkit, alongside an initial evaluation of its success in engaging local restaurants. The research provides an evidence-based framework for adopting environmentally responsible practices, empowering independent and local restaurants within the tourism industry to operate more sustainably in a practical manner. Additionally, it presents ideas and concepts to support local restaurateurs to addresses the critical question of what conditions entrepreneurs require to support profitable and sustainable ventures (Gast et al., 2017; Hall et al., 2010).

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# WIL AS A COMPONENT OF EDUCATIONAL TOURISM: THE CASE OF THE WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY, EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

South Africa is a developing country in the southern tip of the African continent which has experienced rapid tourism growth since the end of apartheid in 1994. Tourism has become a major part of the economy, experiencing nearly perennial growth which was far higher than the national growth rate of the economy. The fact that tourism became an economic messiah meant that it was integrated into the economic development policies of the South African state. The growth of the tourism industry has been associated with the growth and the development of the special interest tourism such as adventure tourism, religious tourism, eco-tourism, medical tourism, health tourism and volunteer tourism. In the case of South Africa, one form of special interest tourism that has received scant attention is educational tourism. South Africa has a dual higher education system consisting of 24 public higher education institutions and a plethora of private higher education institutions. There is a mismatch between the supply (spaces in Higher Education) and demand by learners seeking to find space in Higher Education. This has led to a scramble for spaces in Higher Education Institutions where would be learners would travel far and wide seeking to gain acceptance and entry. The entry into Higher Education Institutions would be regarded as a form of educational tourism as some learners would be from outside of the geographical area where the university would be located. These educational tourism, in the case of the Tourism Management qualification would as part of their third year studies, are prescribed to undertake a six months on-the job placement, called Work-Integrated Learning. This happens because of the availability of willing employers that would give the students on-the-job-training for the required six months. Employers can be located within the locality of the university, whilst others would be outside of the geographical area, thereby initiating a second phase of educational tourism, in the case of WIL placement. The study would be based on secondary data, from the WIL placement files of the students to investigate the origin destination of the students and the WIL placement of the students. The findings of the study would add to the limited body of knowledge on WIL, within the South African context.

**Key Words:** Work-Integrated Learning, Tourism, Walter Sisulu University, 6-months.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism plays a significant role for many economies throughout the globe. According to WorldBank Group (2024), in 2024, tourism contributed US$10.9 trillion to the global GDP, or 10 percent of the world economy. About one in ten employment or 357 million jobs globally, were supported by this industry, underscoring its crucial position in the labour economy (WorldBank Group, 2024). In South Africa, a developing country in the southern tip of the African continent, the growth trajectory of tourism since the end of apartheid has stimulated both socio-political renewal and economic opportunity. Tourism has become a major part of the economy, experiencing nearly perennial growth which was far higher than the national growth rate of the economy. World Travel and Tourism Council (2024) indicates that tourism accounts for 8.6 percent to the South African economy which is approximately ZAR618.7 billion and also contributes towards 9.2 percent of the entire country labour force. International tourists' expenditure totaled ZAR116.5 billion, while domestic spending totaled ZAR430 billion (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2024). Tourism has become a major part of the economy, experiencing nearly perennial growth which was far higher than the national growth rate of the economy (Rogerson, 2018; Olowoyo, Ramaila & Mavuru, 2021). The growth of the tourism industry has been associated with the growth and the development of the special interest tourism such as adventure tourism, religious tourism, eco-tourism, medical tourism, health tourism and volunteer tourism. However, despite the significant contributions of tourism, there is scant attention on the concept and practice of educational tourism in South Africa. In South Africa, such learning can be understood as students going through a training. South Africa has a dual higher education system consisting of 24 public higher education institutions and a plethora of private higher education institutions. There is a mismatch between the supply (spaces in Higher


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Education) and demand by learners seeking to find space in Higher Education. Mathole (2023) argues that Tourism Management students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, experience a disconnection between their lived realities and the travel-oriented ideals promoted by the curriculum, as travel is usually viewed as a luxury rather than a norm. This mismatch is particularly concerning given South Africa has a well-established and extensive higher education system. This disconnection is further exacerbated by high unemployment rates and was further worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which brutally limited Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) opportunities due to business closures and lack of access to vital training facilities (Bilsland, Nagy & Smith, 2020; Mathole, 2023).

Consequently, both the educational value and employability outcomes of Tourism and Hospitality programs are substantially compromised, highlighting the urgent need to strengthen WIL as a component of educational tourism. This educational tourism, in the case of the Tourism Management qualification as part of their third year studies, demands students to undertake a six months on-the job WIL placement. Therefore, the study aims at assessing Walter Sisulu University (WSU) students' experiences within the context of WIL placement, thereby underlining its contribution as a component of educational tourism.

## 2. Literature review

Tourism is an important sector that relies on different factors to remain functional and efficient in a country. Part of the efficient functioning and effectiveness of tourism depends on the education that is provided to students within the hospitality academic discipline.

### 2.1 Educational tourism

Educational tourism is generally described as engagement in tourism activities with the principal motive of obtaining new knowledge and skills (Tang, 2021). Central to educational tourism is acquisition of new information and competencies that can be used within the tourism and hospitality industry. Tomasi, Paviotti and Cavicchi (2020) also define educational tourism as a category of tourism in which the traveller's primary or secondary intention is learning. Travelling is significant in the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills. Meng et al. (2024) also add that it targets at cultivating students' knowledge through experiential education and research learning. For students to acquire new knowledge and skills through educational tourism, they have to experience and assess different aspects of the work environment enabling to understand the different dynamics with the tourism and hospital industry.

Furthermore, Ritchie (2003) also posits that educational tourism encompasses a spectrum varying from informal learning during leisure travel to formal, structured academic programs. When students embark on educational tourism, they engage in both formal and informal learning. The formal acquisition information and knowledge is obtained through education structured programmes such as university study course, degrees, diplomas, academic conferences or studying academic programmes abroad. Informal learning is obtained through non-structured programmes which usual encompasses experiential learning, guided tours, and visits to heritage sites or museums (Rashid, 2023). Educational tourism also implies that learning in tourism incorporates experiential learning beyond theoretical knowledge from the classroom or a learning institution (Tomasi et al., 2020). The learning process under educational tourism entails obtaining some form of experience by exploring the different activities involved in tourism. This process demands that the students get to participate in work training. Optimal enhancement of career prospects and knowledge acquisition in the tourism and hospitality industry demands a blend of formal and informal education.

### 2.2 Work integrated learning

Work-integrated learning is largely defined as educational curricular, pedagogic and assessment techniques across a variety of academic fields that integrate formal learning with workplace challenges (Maseko, 2018). Essentially, WIL is part of the learning that offers students an opportunity to learn about the work they are taught about in classrooms. It involves methods and strategies to blend theoretical knowledge about the workplace predicated on an established designed curriculum (Berndtsson, Dahlborg & Pennbrant, 2020). WIL has become prevalent transformative educational model globally, gaining popularity in developed countries and exhibiting significant potential in developing countries such as South Africa, where all students in higher education are required to participate in work-based training as part of their studies (Vumbunu, Chikuta & Mogami 2023).

WIL provides students with many needed benefits of experienced-based learning. Explaining its value, Pretti, Etmanski and Durston (2020) contend that WIL initiatives assist students to understand the requirements of an increasingly complex and dynamic work environment and labour force. Nomnga (2024) also underscores that WIL


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helps with employment preparedness which focuses on students' understanding of the labour market and their ability to deliver on the obligations and responsibilities assigned to them in the workplace. Essentially, WIL targets to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and workplace requirements offering students an opportunity to get experience on real world situation.

Furthermore, Gamble, Patrick and Peach (2010) also postulate WIL can facilitate development of various skills among students such as self-management, intellectual and analytical skills, personal and professional growth, communication and problem-solving skills, as well as workplace adaptability. Du Plessis (2010) also asserts that during WIL placement, students interact with the organisation, personnel and other people which improves their effectiveness in the workplace. Essentially, the efficient implementation of WIL depends on the availability of willing employers who provide support and structured training opportunities for the specified period so that students can get a full experience of being in a work environment.

Importantly, the prospective organisations that host WIL students are not usually located in the same geographical vicinity as the institution. While some postings are local, a significant number of WIL placement entail students temporarily relocating to other towns, cities, or even provinces (Ngonda, Nkhoma & Falayi, 2024; Thackrah & Thompson, 2019). This migration for the purpose of WIL denotes the beginning of a new, distinct phase of educational tourism. Iskhakova and Bradly (2022) underscore that WIL placement which involves travelling can offer simultaneous cultural, personal and professional development because of the extreme intense makeup of the program, quality of preparation, assimilated reflection and deep interactions. In this situation, students embark on educational tourism at a university and are able to travel to a new area for practical training, motivated by their need for academic and professional development.

### 2.3 Educational tourism and WIL nexus

The formal learning in tourism plays a significant role in shaping the knowledge that is acquired by students in the discipline. However, Rashid (2023) underscores that while formal education programs offer a robust theoretical foundation, they do not necessarily provide as much hands-on experience as informal learning activities such as WIL initiatives. There is a fundamental intersection between WIL and educational tourism which arises from the need to provide students with experiential learning through on-the-job training. Additionally, WIL placements involves geographical mobility on the part of the student. Hyasat (2022) states that educational tourism has to incorporate knowledge and practice in the tourism and hospitality sector attained through theoretical learning from curriculum courses and practical learning through WIL initiatives, project-based programs, as well as field trips within the tourism and hospitality sector. Tomasi et al. (2020) suggest that for WIL placement to be effective, there is need for partners, internal and external, that can act as a supportive partner for WIL.

There are challenges and impediments that affect WIL placement. Vumbunu et al. (2023) argue that in tourism and hospitality, there are unclear students' expectations concerning the WIL programme. Al-Romeedy, Moosa and Elbaz (2020) and Mathole (2023) comment that there is need to regularly check the disconnection between theoretical knowledge and real work demands because what students are taught is sometimes unrelated to the actual situation and does not follow the latest trends in the tourism and hospitality sector. Hyasat (2022) also posits that some WIL programs are not pre-planned to meet the theoretical teaching curriculum and the students' needs. Mustafa (2012) highlights that the coordination between the tourism universities and tourism employers is neglected, with low expectations of the students' experience needed for the tourism business market. Iskhakova, Bradly and Ott (2023) purport that during WIL placement greater cultural distance can discourage an individual's involvement in overseas travel because of potential risks and uncertainties ranging from exorbitant travel expenses to language barriers. In light of this concerns regarding the WIL placement, this study sought to assess the WSU students' experiences during WIL placements to understand its contribution as a component of educational tourism.

## 3. Methodology

The research employs a qualitative, exploratory research design intended at assessing Walter Sisulu University (WSU) students' experiences within the context of WIL placement, thereby underlining its contribution as a component of educational tourism. Given the objective of adding to a limited body of knowledge on this particular nexus in South Africa, an interpretive approach is appropriate, allowing for a detailed examination through semi-structured interviews offering accounts of lived experiences by students. A sample of ten students was used for this study. The chosen sample was selected using purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling targeted only third year students enrolled for Tourism Management at WSU. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse and present the data in accordance to suggestion by Braun and Clarke (2022). Necessary research ethical considerations were


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utilised during the research process which include informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms were utilised to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

## 4. Findings and Discussions

WIL as a component of educational tourism is an understudied area of research which is significant in human capital development within the tourism and hospitality industry. The major themes that were uncovered from all research question in exploring WIL as a component of educational tourism are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and Sub-themes Captured from Research Questions

| Theme | Sub-theme | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **Educational travel** | Local & intraprovincial travel: rural-urban, urban-urban migration | Patterns depict temporary relocation to university and also WIL placement area |
| | Inter-provincial travel: migration between provinces | Temporary relocation and WIL placement area |
| | International travel: out of the country migration | Temporary relocation outside national borders |
| **Personal and career growth** | Career skills development | Enhancement of skills both soft and hard skills |
| | Work adaptation | Ability to respond to change; making adjustments; learning about organisational culture |
| | Career path development | Career path exposure; clarity on roles and responsibilities |
| **Social and cultural exposure** | Regional and global cultural diversity | Experiencing different cultural norms and social practices |
| | Language diversity | Different languages |
| **Challenges and impediments** | Fear | Fear of relocation |
| | Resources | Medical services inadequacies |
| | Logistics | Travel and accommodation |
| **Improving WIL experience** | Planning and preparation | Institutional support |
| | Partnership | Strengthening partnerships |

*Source: Researcher (2025)*

There five different main themes outlined in Table 1, namely, educational travel; personal and career growth; social and cultural exposure; challenges and impediments; and improving WIL experience. From these main themes there is exhibition of the core elements that influence students' experiences during WIL placement affecting the effectiveness of educational tourism for WSU students in the Eastern Cape province.

### 4.1 Educational travel

When students are enrolled for Tourism Management course they relocate to a new area which means they have temporarily migrated. Employers can be located within the locality of the university, whilst others would be outside of the geographical area, thereby initiating a second phase of educational tourism, in the case of WIL placement. Students have to travel when they undertake WIL placements in areas located away from their home area, university premises and sometimes from their provinces and countries. One student who was placed in Durban voiced that:

> *"I was placed in a different province in Durban for my six months on-the job placement. Others were went to other major cities such as Mpumalanga, Cape Town and Johannesburg. While others remained in Eastern Cape even East London"* (Student 1).

Another student placed in United Arab Emirates added that:

> *"I went to United Arab Emirates in Dubai. Unlike my colleagues I did my placement outside the country. Some moved from their remote location to nearby towns"* (Student 7).

These statements reveal the different forms of educational mobility by the Tourism Management during WIL placement. The educational travel by the students is mainly temporary relocation to different allocated destinations. This finding is in tandem with argument by Ngonda et al. (2024) and Thackrah and Thompson (2019) that some


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postings are local, a significant number of WIL placement entail students temporarily relocating to other towns, cities or even provinces. The indications from this study's findings depict that there is local mobility by students. The students migrated from rural to urban regions within the same area to undergo WIL placement training. Intraprovincial migration patterns were also highlighted among students who undertook their WIL placement within the precincts of the Eastern Cape province.

However, there are some students that embarked on interprovincial migration who partook in WIL placement in other provinces such as the KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga, Western Cape and Gauteng. Student mobility patterns from this study also reveals that some students embarked in temporary international migration. The main country that was mentioned in this study is the United Arab Emirates which involves travelling outside the South African as well as continental borders. Therefore, the educational travel for WIL placement encompasses temporary local, provincial and international migration. This student mobility is for educational purposes which implies that it has to be regarded as crucial in knowledge value addition as students get an opportunity to expand their view on the tourism and hospitality sector.

**4.2 Personal and career growth**

Educational tourism is intended at providing information knowledge formal and informally. The WIL placement undertaken by Tourism Management student is fostering formal and informal learning for those involved in the programmes. The data from this study depicts that WIL placement results in career skills development, work adaptation and career path development. A student that was placed in Johannesburg mentioned that:

> *"It was my first to be in a very big city, so I learnt a lot about people from different places as well duties in the industry. I had to improve my communication, behave professionally in a work environment, time management, meeting expectations and etiquette rules".* (Student 4)

Adding to these sentiments, another student placed in Mpumalanga quipped that:

> *"The whole experience provided me with insights on issues of working independently, self-reliance, being neat, politeness, adapting to a new environment, problem-solving and financial management"* (Student 6).

Another view was from student placed in United Arab Emirates:

> *"I got to understand more different technology within the hospitality industry. Contactless technology and automation of some activities within the industry increasing my confidence"* (Student 7).

The excerpts presented above illustrate that WIL placement as a key component of educational tourism is enhancing career skills development, work adaptation and career path development. From the study data, the experiences obtained during the WIL placement are providing transformative learning opportunities for personal and professional growth. This finding supports the discoveries of Gamble et al. (2010) who emphasized that WIL can facilitate development of various skills among students such as self-management, intellectual and analytical skills, personal and professional growth, communication and problem-solving skills, as well as workplace adaptability. Students are able to gain life skills applicable in work environment as well as day-to-day lives which are predominantly soft skills such as etiquette, self-reliance, time management, adaptableness, neatness and confidence. Additionally, the students are also improving their hard skills such as financial management, networking, information and technology communication skills.

WIL placement is also ensuring that students get to learn how to adapt to change and making adjustments. The student are also learning about organisational culture through different expectations, norms and practices. Furthermore, the students are able to find out the trajectory of their prospective careers in the tourism and hospitality industry. By working in a tourism and hospitality setting, the student are able to self-assess, explore more about the industry and know about the expectations. During this process WIL placement the students are continuously evaluating their progress clearing their career vision and also improving their career planning due to the exposure they get from the on-job training. Therefore, WIL placement is providing students an opportunity to be involved in real-life situation help students to apply their acquired theoretical knowledge in real-life settings and also learn new practical knowledge which broaden their understanding of the tourism and hospitality industry.

**4.3 Social and cultural exposure**

Social and cultural exposure is critical during WIL placement. The study findings during WIL placement, students get immersed in social and cultural norms as well as exchanges. This exposure to diverse cultural and regional norms enables the students to learn and understand about different languages, food, values and traditions. A student who was placed in Cape Town that expressed their view regarding social and cultural exposure said:

> *"The placements help us as students to understand more about their cultures, languages and traditions because you get to meet a lot of people. You get to appreciate how they talk, beliefs, music and simple things like greeting"* (Student 3).

Adding to this viewpoint, another student who was placed in United Arab Emirates quipped that:


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*"There is more understanding about the different culture and norms in a different country and continent. The way to address people is different from place to place, what they value"* (Student 2).

The social and cultural immersion and exposure depicted by the statements above highlights how WIL placement facilitate regional and global cross-cultural understanding, diverse language experience, engagement and ability to navigate social situations. In the same vein, Du Plessis (2010) also mentions during WIL placement students interact with the organisation, personnel and other people which improves their effectiveness in the workplace. The exposure to multicultural landscape from regional and global travel during WIL placement is enriching as it helps with cross-cultural understanding, regional nuances and social etiquette which are valuable for socio-cultural education. More so, from the student mobility during WIL placement allow students to understand engagements improving their linguistic versatility and cultural sensitivity beneficial in tourism and hospitality especially in South Africa which is a multilingual and multicultural nation. Therefore, social and cultural exposure was discovered as a WIL placement aspect underlining WIL significance as part of rich, multidimensional category of educational tourism.

**4.4 Challenges and impediments**

Despite the significant role played by WIL placement as a significant component of educational tourism, there are challenges and impediments experienced during the process. The discoveries from this research depict that there are issues which impede and affect WIL placement, mainly fear, resources and logistics. A student who was going to be placed in United Arab Emirates uttered that:

*"I did not end up going to United Arab Emirates because I was scared to leave the country. Going to another country is not easy, I am not comfortable at all"* (Student 5).

Another view by a student who was placed in United Arab Emirates revealing the challenge of resources articulated that:

*"I discovered an underlying medical condition, therefore, I could not continue with the WIL placement in Dubai unfortunately. If I had adequate medical service access and financial resources I would have found out about this issue before the placement"* (Student 9).

A different challenge on logistical constraints was raised by a student who was placed in East London, who enunciated that:

*"I wanted to go to Cape Town because I was placed there. However, I could not find proper accommodation. I also struggled with transport arrangements"* (Student 10).

The excerpts of the students' experience depict the various challenges and impediments encountered during WIL placement which can be categorized as fear, lack of resources and logistics problems. The fear which emanates from the fear of the unknown and travel anxiety. The hodophobia (fear of travelling) is triggered by several aspects such as previous negative experiences, being away from home and logistics anxiety. This finding substantiates the assertion by Iskhakova et al. (2023) who purport that during WIL placement greater cultural distance can discourage an individual's involvement in overseas travel because of potential risks and uncertainties ranging from exorbitant travel expenses to language barriers.

The study also depicts that some students are not able to undertake WIL placement in their assigned areas due to resources such as medical services access. The discovery of underlying medical condition in the process of enrolling for WIL placement depicts this issues of health and financial resources constraint. Additionally, the aspect of logistic problems is also a concern for WIL placement. There are concerns on accommodation, travelling arrangements and expenses. Therefore, there are different challenges and impediments experienced during WIL placement process. These challenges and impediments might affect intended benefits of WIL placement as an educational tourism component.

**4.5 Improving WIL experience**

Taking into consideration the different challenges and impediments, improving WIL experience to ensure its optimization as an educational tourism component is indispensable. The study examined possible improvements which can be used to enhance WIL placement experience by institutions such as WSU. The main discovered interventions that can be useful in improve WIL placement experience are planning and preparation as well as partnership. A student who was going to be placed in the United Arab Emirates conveying their view about improvements retorted that:

*"I think the institution has to do more, in terms of providing adequate information about the destination, counselling and other things that gets someone with fear to be prepared"* (Student 5).

Another student who was placed in Mbombela emphasized the need for strengthened partnership by stating that:

*"I think there is need for more partnership to help students with access resources and better logistics such as accommodation and travel"* (Student 8).

The statements above by the students depict planning and preparation as well as strategic partnership being some of the imperative improvements needed to enhance WIL experience. The planning and preparation entails providing


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adequate information for students to know more about their prospective travel destination especially if it involves travelling out of the country. Some students need to be equipped with information about the potential host cities which may include the cost of living approximations, cost of accommodation, transport expenses, safety and crime rates. The students will find value in counselling to help deal with social and emotional adjustments that they go through when they are temporarily relocating to a new WIL placement area. Due to the lack of proper planning and preparation, there is gap in information. This supports the view of Vumbunu et al. (2023) who argue that in tourism and hospitality, there are unclear students' expectations concerning the WIL programme. Planning and preparation should equip the students about expectations regarding WIL placement.

Furthermore, there are suggestions of strategic partnership between higher education institutions such as WSU with other corporate and non-corporate entities. Collaborating this assertion, Tomasi et al. (2020) suggest that for WIL placement to be effective, there is need for partners, internal and external, that can act as a supportive partner for WIL. The strategic partnerships are supposed to assist students to access resources such as cheaper medical examinations, accommodation and organized travel when in host areas. Therefore, the optimal value of WIL placement as an educational tourism component can be enhanced through planning and preparation as well as strategic partnership.

## 5. Conclusion

WIL placement form a major part of experiential learning. Experiential learning is in some ways regarded as non-structured learning or informal learning (Rashid, 2023). However, it has to be acknowledged that WIL placement plays a major role as an educational tourism component. The swift development of the tourism sector in post-apartheid South Africa has broaden different special interest in other segments such as adventure tourism, religious tourism, eco-tourism, medical tourism, health tourism and volunteer tourism. However educational tourism remains fundamentally an overlooked domain. This study provides an extensive understanding into educational tourism mainly focusing on WIL placement as one of its major components. The thematic analysis from the study has highlighted the value of WIL placement in providing a platform for educational travel. From the travel students engage in different tourism and hospitality work related activities helping them to expand their view on tourism and hospitality dynamics.

Furthermore, the students' experiences during the travel exposes them to different work related activities which facilitate personal and career growth. There is also the exposure to social and cultural diversity associated with WIL placement experience which improves their ability to work in the multilingual and multicultural South African work environment. However, despite these valuable contributions of WIL placement there are challenges and impediments which are mainly fear, resources constraints and logistics problems. These problems demand improvements such as planning and preparation as well as strategic partnership. In conclusion, WIL placement is an indispensable component of educational tourism which must not be overlooked as it brings significant value with the tourism and hospitality sector.

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# TRAVELLER NEEDS AND MOTIVATIONS IN SHAPING VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCES IN NATURE TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

Immersive technologies like virtual reality (VR) have been predicted to hold great potential for tourism development. However, resource-strained nature tourism companies have been hesitant to adopt these technologies, partially due to knowledge gaps. This study addresses this issue by investigating the travellers' needs and motivations in relation to VR experiences, to inform a user-centric design process. The findings reveal significant differences in attitudes towards VR tourism experiences between European and Chinese responders. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on VR in tourism by offering practical insights into design strategies that support targeted, culturally nuanced digital service development.

**Key Words:** Nature tourism, virtual reality, VR, user-centric design, product development

## INTRODUCTION

The advancing digitalisation and use of new technologies have transformed the tourism industry over the past decades, but the implementation has been lagging in the nature tourism sector (Navío-Marco et al., 2018; Verma et al., 2022; de Lurdes Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). This is particularly evident in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which represent the unused potential that adaptation of new technologies can create (Eller et al., 2020; Ledesma-Chaves et al., 2024). The SMEs might be more hesitant to adapt to the use if there are no visible or direct benefits for the investment of their resources, while also the knowledge required for development and innovation in utilising new technologies places a barrier for companies (de Lurdes Calisto & Sarkar, 2024; Eller et al., 2020).
One prominent technology for the tourism industry is virtual reality (VR), which could be used, e.g. for promotional purposes, development of individual experience products, or creating additional content in in-situ services (Verma et al. 2022). However, one of the challenges in designing VR applications is understanding the holistic user experience in a multisensory environment compared to traditional 2D content (Tcha-Tokey et al., 2018). Additionally, shifting the focus from the mere usability of a product to a design that also concerns the customers' subjective experience is needed in optimising the success of a new virtual product or a service (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006). The key to developing successful VR experiences lies in a thorough understanding of customer needs (Moreira Kares et al., 2025; Dillon, 2001). A customer-centric approach to service development focuses on addressing genuine, well-defined needs of the targeted end-user group. Identifying the needs of a targeted segment is a crucial part of research through design methodology, setting the objectives for the future development process. (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011; Mattelmäki & Sleeswijk Visser, 2011)
The specific research problem this study aims to answer is how SMEs in the nature tourism sector effectively adopt and utilise VR to harness the potential of new technologies. The objective of this study is to address the knowledge gap in implementing VR within the nature tourism context, and especially, to identify the customer motivations, needs, and expectations of international travellers interested in nature tourism and in travelling to Finland, to inform the development of promotional virtual reality products within the nature tourism sector.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND


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## Virtual reality in tourism

Virtual Reality (VR) is an interactive, multidimensional medium that simulates artificial, alternate, or augmented realities through immersive environments. It can integrate storytelling and interactivity to enhance user experiences while blending technological and design elements (Rubio-Tamayo et al., 2017). VR allows users to engage with digital environments in real-time, and the immersive nature of these technologies fosters a sense of travelling in time and place while enabling the users to feel part of the simulated or technologically enhanced environments (Wedel et al., 2020; Verma et al., 2022).

The growing body of research on VR in tourism and hospitality reflects its increasing significance in transforming travel experiences (Verma et al. 2022). The increasing importance is also shown by the increased amount of published research in the sector (de Lurdes Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). It is shown that VR applications have been integrated into various stages of the travel experience: pre-trip (enhancing marketing and decision-making), during-trip (augmenting experiences with interactive tools), and post-trip (encouraging engagement and brand loyalty) (Fan et al., 2022; de Lurdes Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). VR applications have been argued to be one of the key technological innovations, with the potential to shape the tourism industry and experiences today (Peštek & Sarvan, 2020). As far, VR has been most prominent in tourism for marketing, planning and management, accessibility, entertainment, education, and heritage preservation (Guttentag 2010; Peštek & Sarvan 2020)

One of the primary applications of VR in tourism is marketing (Lurdes Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). VR content can foster both emotional and cognitive responses, which further mediate the destination image and intention to visit (Kim et al. 2020). Similarly, Fan et al. (2022) highlight the role of VR previews in reducing perceived travel risks, thereby helping tourists make informed decisions. This perspective is further reinforced by Lim et al. (2024), who argue that VR's usefulness, ease of use, and innovativeness enhance consumer satisfaction and increase the likelihood of bookings.

VR technologies can significantly improve on-site tourism experiences, e.g. by providing interactive storytelling, historical reconstructions, and gamified experiences. VR enhances immersion, sensory stimulation, and engagement while increasing cognitive and emotional engagement to foster a sense of presence (Fan et al., 2022; de Lurdes Calisto and Sarkar, 2024). Furthermore, a study on the use of VR in cultural heritage destinations found a positive impact of VR on the perceived customer value (Jung & Tom Dieck, 2017).

Another key benefit of VR is its role in enhancing tourism accessibility for individuals with mobility limitations or financial constraints, as well as for locations that are dangerous, hard to access, or have vulnerable flora or fauna (de Lurdes Calisto and Sarkar, 2024; Verma et al., 2022). Additionally, VR supports sustainability efforts by reducing the need for physical travel, thereby lowering carbon footprints and protecting fragile ecosystems. This aligns with Fan et al. (2022), who suggest that while immersive virtual experiences are beneficial, there is a "double-edged sword" effect—overly compelling VR experiences might reduce the motivation for real-world visits.

Despite the benefits, VR adoption faces challenges such as usability issues caused by technological difficulties, time commitments for learning to use the technology, high costs, and accessibility constraints (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019; de Lurdes Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). Lim et al. (2024) emphasise that consumers' perceived risks regarding security, reliability, and privacy could hinder adoption, particularly in hospitality. To address these concerns, businesses must enhance trust through security measures and transparent policies. Additionally, individual adoption is influenced by factors like personal innovativeness, cultural background, sensation-seeking tendencies, age, and gender (de Lurdes Calisto & Sarkar, 2024), making it essential for tourism providers to tailor VR applications to different user preferences.

The collective insights from these studies indicate that VR is reshaping tourism by offering immersive experiences, enhancing accessibility, and promoting sustainability. However, finding the right balance between digital and real-world tourism is essential to prevent consumer fatigue and sustain long-term engagement. While VR serves as a powerful marketing tool and experience enhancer, its success depends on cost-effective implementation, user-friendly design, and strategic risk management. As these technologies continue to evolve, they hold the potential to redefine how tourists explore, experience, and engage with destinations, both virtually and physically.

## User-centric design process in digital services

The centre of attention on the development of new technological service innovations has seen a shift from usability, which focuses strongly on the system, to user experiences (UX), that is, a more holistic approach (Moreira Kares et al., 2025; Dillon, 2001). User experience is a comprehensive event that is built on users' subjective experience, personal characteristics, individual expectations, needs, motivations, and values, while using the system (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006; Dillon, 2001). The service itself plays only a partial role, while the user and the digital environment create the ultimate scenery for the process. Therefore, studying solely the usability from a technical point of view of the system does not provide an understanding of the key factors behind the actual usage, like


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motivations to use and quality of the experience. By not addressing these aspects, a service, no matter how usable, can fail in fulfilling the needs of the target group.

As mentioned, one of the challenges in designing VR applications is understanding the holistic user experience in a multisensory environment in comparison to traditional 2D content (Tcha-Tokey et al., 2018). Service design is a method of designing services with a people-centric approach, focusing on the targeted user group's needs and motivations (Curedale, 2013). According to Ostrom et al. (2015), technology and service design are interlinked service research priorities enabling innovation, that blend the barriers between physical and digital, while shaping the roles of the customers and the service providers. Therefore, it is crucial to involve customers and other stakeholders in the design process to widen the core design team's vision about the service or solution under development (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2011; Ostrom et al., 2015).

The British Design Council (2025) outlines four core principles to follow for a successful design process: "put people first", "communicate visually and inclusively", "collaborate and co-create" and "iterate, iterate and iterate". Mattelmäki and Sleeswijk Visser (2011) identified four levels of co-design implementation: 1) end-users being present throughout the process for customer insights; 2) end-users being active participants in facilitated workshops organised by researchers or designers; 3) a designer being actively involved in the creative process; 4) researchers and designers actively facilitating and supporting a multidisciplinary team of representatives of different stakeholders, including non-end-users. Depending on the project, the stakeholders involved can include staff, customers, potential or actual users of the service, designers and managers, who collaborate to explore and develop a particular service experience (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011; Seppälä, 2017).

Tcha-Tokey et al. (2018) reviewed and identified four UX models that are suitable or created for understanding UX in immersive virtual environments: UX based on the theory of Flow; UX based on acceptance and continuance; UX influenced by virtual environment features; and UX and interaction. Additionally, they proposed a new model that comprises features from all the previous, including ten components: presence, engagement, immersion, flow, usability, skill, emotion, experience consequence, judgement, and technology adoption (Tcha-Tokey et al., 2018). However, even though the importance of UX as part of the design process for new service innovations is widely recognised, the underlying factors, such as user motivations, require more attention, especially for establishing clear objectives for successful service development (Moreira Kares et al., 2025).

In conclusion of the literature review, the potential of VR for tourism development seems plausible. Utilising VR for promotional purposes has the ability to foster immersive and emotionally engaging experiences, which may further mediate interest towards and intention to visit a destination. However, despite the potential, the successful implementation of VR technologies, especially within SMEs, does not depend only on overcoming technological and economic barriers, but also on building the services to meet identified customer needs. Without a profound understanding of the target group's motivations, any product risks failing. To unlock the user-centric design process towards a promotional VR nature tourism experience, this study aims to examine the motivations, needs, and expectations of international travellers interested in nature tourism and in travelling to Finland, towards such a product.

## METHODS

To explore the traveller motivations, needs, and expectations towards a promotional VR product, a study containing both quantitative and qualitative measures was conducted from September to December 2024.

### Sample

The data was collected through an online survey. There were no exclusion criteria other than that the participants must be at least 18 years old and not be Finnish natives. The survey was targeted at European and Chinese respondents through existing University contacts. Participation in the study was voluntary, and it was not compensated. One respondent was excluded due to not meeting the criteria. The final sample was *n*=147 respondents (European=62.6%, Chinese=37.4%). The majority of the participants (81,6%) had not visited Finland but would like to visit (93,2%). Most (93,9%) were interested in nature tourism. Table 1 describes the key background information of the respondents.

Table 1

Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample

| Background information | Percentage of participants (*n*=147) |
|---|---|
| Age | 85.0% 18-30 years old |
| | 6.8% 31-50 years old |
| | 8.2% over 50 years old |
| Gender | 66.0% female |
| | 34.0% male |



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| | |
|---|---|
| Nationality | 13.6% France<br>18.4% Germany<br>17.0% Switzerland<br>13.6% Netherlands<br>37.4% China |

Measurements

The survey instrument consisted of 16 questions, from which three were concerning the demographic information of the participants, four explored the participants' relationship with nature tourism, six were concerned about travel to Finland, and three focused on VR tourism. From the main 13 questions, five were nominal, containing *yes* and *no* response options, with two of them having a third option *maybe*, and eight were open-ended questions attempting to gain deeper insights into the topics at hand.

Data analysis

To examine the impact of age, gender, and nationality on attitudes towards VR tourism, a Pearson Chi-square test of association was performed separately for each independent variable. The dependent variables were measuring the interest towards a VR tourism experience prior to physical travel (1=yes, 2=no, 3=maybe), and the likelihood of the VR experience to impact willingness to travel (1=yes, 2=no, 3=maybe). The data cleaning and transformations were performed with Microsoft 365 Excel, and the data analysis with JASP (version 0.19.3.0). The qualitative responses were analysed following the guidelines of Braun & Clarke's (2006) for inductive thematic analysis. In inductive analysis, the themes are formed in a data-driven manner, reflecting the data content provided by the sample. The data was coded independently by two researchers to ensure reliability. Initial codes were compared and discussed to resolve any discrepancies, and final themes were refined through an iterative process.

**RESULTS**

Three separate Pearson Chi-square tests were performed to analyse the impact of age, gender, and nationality towards VR tourism. The results suggest that there is no association between age or gender and attitudes towards VR tourism. The analysis, however, suggested that there is a significant difference between Chinese and European responders in their interest towards VR tourism experiences, $\chi^2$ (2, $N$ = 146) = 16.23, p = < .001, V = 0.333, and the likelihood of the experience influencing their willingness to travel, $\chi^2$ (2, $N$ = 146) = 21.24, p = < .001, V = 0.381. The results (Table 2) indicate that Chinese responders had more positive attitudes towards VR tourism experiences prior to travel.

Table 2

Contingency Tables of the Chi-square Test of Association

| | | Interest towards VR tourism experience prior to travel | | | | Likelihood of the VR experience influencing willingness to travel | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondents | | Yes | No | Maybe | Total | Yes | No | Maybe | Total |
| European | % row | 50.55 | 46.15 | 3.30 | 100 | 45.06 | 45.05 | 9.90 | 100 |
| | % column | 50.00 | 84.00 | 75.00 | 62.33 | 47.13 | 85.42 | 81.82 | 62.33 |
| Chinese | % row | 83.64 | 14.55 | 1.82 | 100 | 83.64 | 12.73 | 3.64 | 100 |
| | % column | 50.00 | 16.00 | 25.00 | 37.67 | 52.87 | 14.58 | 18.18 | 37.67 |
| Total | % row | 63.01 | 34.25 | 2.74 | 100 | 59.59 | 32.88 | 7.53 | 100 |
| | % column | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

The qualitative analysis explored the participants' interest towards Finnish nature, overall motivations and expectations for nature tourism, and perceptions of VR as a tool for experiencing nature. Six key themes emerged from the data, including interest in nature tourism, expectations for nature destinations, activities of interest, challenges and barriers, environmental and sustainable travel considerations, and virtual reality on interest to travel

Interest in Nature Tourism

The first theme describes the participants' overall motivations towards nature-based tourism and describes the factors that make it appealing. The majority of the participants emphasised the importance of connecting and reconnecting with nature. Adventure and exploration were also prominent themes, many mentioning curiosity and a sense of adventure being a major draw. The aesthetic aspect, such as beautiful natural landscapes, including the aurora borealis and untouched forests, was frequently mentioned, reinforcing the country's reputation as an ideal nature tourism destination. All in all, the responses from both Chinese and European participants reflect an appreciation towards nature-based tourism. When looking at the differences between the European and Chinese



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responders, many of the European participants expressed a strong appeal towards Finland's wilderness and unspoilt nature, while describing activities such as hiking, canoeing, and skiing as essential components of their travel experiences. Chinese respondents, on the other hand, frequently mentioned the wellbeing aspects of nature, such as healing, fostering tranquillity, breathing fresh air, and escaping urban life. Chinese participants also emphasised the opportunity for learning about the local ecosystem and culture, while seeing nature tourism as a more sustainable and less commercialized form of travel, promoting environmental awareness and personal growth.

> *It offers a unique opportunity to connect with the natural environment, to appreciate the beauty of the landscapes, and to discover varied ecosystems.* – Swiss, male, 29
>
> *I am interested in nature tourism because I have a passion for outdoor activities and a spirit of adventure. Spending time in nature helps me break away from work, which is beneficial for my physical health. I also appreciate the opportunity to enjoy beautiful natural landscapes and breathe in fresh air. Nature tourism increases my awareness of the importance of protecting the environment.* – Chinese, female, 23

Expectations for Nature Destinations

The second theme describes the expectations the respondents had towards nature tourism destinations. The majority of the respondents emphasise the importance of high quality for natural environments, including aspects like cleanliness and preservation of nature, but also infrastructure, such as good condition trails and visible route signage. Tranquillity and minimal mass tourism were mentioned by several, and the ability to have authentic, relaxing experiences. The European respondents expected good accessibility and appreciated the concept of 'Everyone's Rights,' which allows freedom to explore nature responsibly. They emphasised the possibility for exploration and the availability to rent gear for outdoor sports such as bikes. From the Chinese responders, themes such as meeting the basic needs, including affordable food, comfortable accommodations, and convenient transportation, along with safety, were mentioned by many as top priorities. Appreciation for technology access, like electric bikes and information in Chinese, was also expressed.

> *I would like to have some facilities, but I would also like it to be limited. I want to experience nature but not fully leave comfort behind. I would like a park where people have a few people nearby and maybe a central place to hang out, but nothing more. A place that has good hiking and picnic spots.* – Dutch, male, 21
>
> *I expect a nature tourism destination to provide an authentic and sustainable experience that offers educational insights into local ecosystems, ensures safety and accessibility, and fosters responsible interactions with the environment. It should also support cultural immersion, offer a variety of engaging activities, and feature knowledgeable guides.* – Chinese, female, 34

Activities of Interest

The third theme describes the desired activities that the respondents are interested in doing while in a nature tourism destination. A big majority of the respondents wished to experience the Northern Lights. Activities such as hiking, camping, wildlife observation, and experiencing winter sports were mentioned throughout the sample. Also, cultural experiences such as learning about and visiting the Sámi people, while learning about local traditions such as sauna, interested many. This theme didn't have as big differences between the European and the Chinese samples. A major difference in interest was in Chinese responders' expressions of wanting to experience seasonality and activities that are tied to the seasons, such as berry picking, ice fishing, and dog or reindeer sledding. Additionally, Chinese participants mentioned more frequently appreciations also towards relaxing activities like picnicking, stargazing, photography, lying on the lawn, sunbathing, and "slowing down".

> *Hiking, going out on the lakes, a safe landscape and wildlife observations.* – Swiss, female, 54
>
> *I would love to see the legendary Northern Lights, experience a sauna in Finland where sauna culture is strong, and try dog sledding or reindeer sledding, which sounds amazing. Hiking, birdwatching, and other activities in Finland's national parks would also be fantastic options.* – Chinese, male, 24

Challenges and Barriers

The fourth theme is concerned with respondents' concerns that may create barriers towards travel. The common aspects mentioned among the sample were accessibility, especially concerning reaching remote nature destinations, and availability of adequate information, especially mentioning information relating to transport, infrastructure and available services. Additionally, others highlighted the importance of marked trails and available information to ensure safe and enjoyable exploration within the destination itself. Chinese respondents raised the language differences, lack of Chinese translations, and unfamiliar cultural practices as key obstacles when planning a trip to a Finnish nature destination. The responses also highlight a need for information concerning topics such as weather, preparing for seasonal conditions, and their impact on activities. The Chinese responders seek practical, easy-to-follow guidance, including maps, scenic spots, and activity planning. Without this, some feel overwhelmed or unprepared, reducing confidence and motivation to explore Finland's natural attractions independently.


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*Good signposting of hiking trails in forests; offers of activities even beyond the end of summer... Also offer late bus connections between small and larger towns.* – German, female, 57

*Information in Chinese can help me understand more about Finnish nature.* – Chinese, female, 23

Environmental and Sustainable Travel Considerations

The fifth theme describes the impact of attitudes on sustainability on travel decisions. Sustainability was a significant theme in the responses. Many participants emphasized the importance of responsible and environmentally respectful tourism practices. The participants expect that the infrastructure and activities have been designed with a low impact on nature. European respondents especially emphasise eco-friendly travel options, such as sustainable accommodations, and conservation efforts to protect wildlife and landscapes. Chinese respondents highlight clean, quiet, and authentic environments, while expressing interest towards educational nature tourism experiences and learning about ecosystems and local ways of life, all of which align with sustainable travel values.

*Whatever is sustainable and environmentally friendly.* – Swiss, male, 23

*The scenery is beautiful enough and the supporting facilities are relatively complete, but don't be overly commercialized.* – Chinese, male, 22

Virtual Reality on Interest to Travel

The sixth theme addresses the opinions on VR experiences and their impact on willingness to travel. Many emphasised its potential as a planning aid, giving a better idea of the landscapes and activities involved, and helping in managing expectations and increasing interest towards a destination they were not familiar with before. Some described how virtual tours could spark excitement and help them better prepare their itinerary. Others, however, were sceptical or even resistant, mentioning concerns such as spoiling the surprise, reducing the authenticity of the experience and fears that virtual content might misrepresent reality. European participants were divided on the topic. While some found it useful, especially for planning, others worried that it would spoil spontaneity and emotional discovery. Chinese respondents were more open to the use of VR and saw its potential also for controlling expectations and deepening their emotional connection. The virtual experiences were seen as complementing rather than replacing physical travel.

*By visiting virtually and going there afterwards, I'm afraid of being disappointed because it won't necessarily be the same.* – Swiss, female 20

*A virtual visit would allow you to discover the landscapes and activities before the trip, which would help you to plan better and build enthusiasm. It also helps to adjust expectations and choose the best experiences, making the trip more attractive and personalised.* – French, male, 24

*I would need a virtual visit before travelling to Finland because I need to identify if I should travel thousands of kilometres to see something I have not seen before.* – Chinese, male, 24

**DISCUSSION**

The main objective of the study was to identify and understand the customer motivations, needs, and expectations of international travellers interested in nature tourism and in travelling to Finland, towards a promotional VR tourism product.

The results showcased that nature tourism's common motivations were to achieve a sense of connectedness with nature, escape urban life, and pursue adventure. Participants from both segments also appreciated the aesthetics of nature, such as untouched forests or experiencing Northern Lights, as motivational factors for nature travel. Whereas European participants emphasised active engagement and a desire to experience pristine nature, Chinese participants highlighted the wellbeing, educational and cultural aspects of nature travel. While the results reveal that both segments share a strong appreciation towards nature-based tourism, the underlying motivations and preferred ways to experience nature differ between them. Especially when considering promotional VR products that can influence the perceived destination image and further enhance intention to visit (Kim et al., 2020), the findings have direct implications for the quality of content, which should be designed to address the targeted customer group's preferences. The results of this study indicate that the European responders might respond better to content highlighting active holidays in unspoilt nature, while the Chinese participants might appreciate more themes promoting wellbeing and learning as part of the nature experience.

Across the respondents, the needs reflected both practical travel requirements and emotional and cognitive reassurance. These were tied to gaining sufficient relevant information and learning about the infrastructure to support planning and guarantee safe and effortless travel. The differences between the segments were notable. The needs frequently mentioned by European responders were accessibility to nature, such as well-marked routes, and enabling an active lifestyle, such as availability of rental equipment for outdoor sports. The Chinese responders, on the other hand, seemed more concerned about language barriers, and emphasised a need for clear and accessible information that also takes into consideration cultural aspects. Availability of information in Chinese was strongly


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expressed as a need by many, and this seems to especially connect to feeling safe and confident in navigating unfamiliar places. These emotional and cognitive barriers should not be overlooked, but companies should invest effort into providing information sufficient to meet the needs of different traveller groups with varying backgrounds. By providing this information tailored for different segments, the companies can directly build trust and encourage travel, especially among first-time visitors. Additionally, with the help of VR or other immersive technologies, this information could be provided in a way that makes it more relatable, enhancing the confidence of travellers by enabling them to prepare for the visit better. This would not only help travellers feel more safe and comfortable, but also help in reducing perceived risks and disappointments (Fan et al., 2022).

The expectations communicated by the responders reflect what the visitors think the experience should at least include. Besides shared expectations like cleanliness of nature, the European responders' expectations were strongly connected to the freedom of exploration, and in enabling it with appropriate trails, signage, and rental equipment. The Chinese responders were more focused on being able to experience authentic and safe nature-related experiences. Whereas the majority of European respondents seemed to appreciate more independence, many Chinese responders mentioned guided activities that also give an opportunity to learn. Besides aiding in travel planning, providing realistic ways to experience the destination beforehand helps in managing expectations. Immersive VR experiences can present the environment and available activities in ways that can enhance the positive image of the destination and intention to travel (Kim et al. 2020; Lurdes Calisto & Sarkar, 2024), while also supporting realism-based decision making for travellers who want to ensure that the destination is worth visiting (Fan et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2024). For nature destinations, this could provide a captivating way to promote their destination, while for service providers, it can be an innovative way to advertise their services, such as guided trips or cultural activities that are hard to imagine holistically.

In relation to VR itself, the results revealed a significant difference in attitudes towards VR tourism experiences between European and Chinese responders. Additionally, the Chinese responders were also more convinced that the VR experience would positively impact their willingness to travel to a destination afterwards. Based on the results, it seems that the Chinese sample is more open to the use of new technologies in the context of VR tourism. Overall, the potential of VR was seen in visualising landscapes, previewing environments and activities, and in building excitement. The perceived negative aspects were connected to the same theme. The responders were concerned that the VR previews might diminish the emotional impact and the sense of surprise of real-life physical experiences. One factor explaining the differences towards promotional VR tourism experiences between the segments could be explained by overall attitudes towards the use of immersive technologies. However, the responses highlighted that the overall information needs of Chinese travellers were higher in comparison to European responders. This could be explained by cultural preferences or perhaps by the familiarity effect. If travelling to less familiar places, it can also be likely that all traveller segments would want thorough information because of bigger cultural differences and language barriers.

All in all, the results of this study are in line with the previous studies emphasising the potential of VR in tourism, especially for pre-travel purposes (Peštek & Sarvan, 2020; Verma et al., 2022). With VR, information could be provided in an immersive manner to enhance destination image and suitability in contrast to motivations to travel, information needs for travel planning, and in fulfilling expectations. We argue that VR is of high potential for promotional nature tourism purposes, as long as the content is designed with specific user groups in mind. The findings of this study highlight the differences between the groups, which will directly impact the appeal of the content. If the content is designed with "one-size fits all", it holds a great risk of not fulfilling its purpose – to engage and raise interest towards a destination. It could be further suggested, as many nature tourism operators in Finland are SMEs, that they should perhaps focus on creating content directly about their services, while a destination management company would be responsible for the overall information, simultaneously curating the content for different markets. Additionally, the readiness of the market for VR experiences should be considered, and perhaps a more targeted approach would be advisable, starting with user segments more open to the use of new technologies.

A few considerations for limitations of the study and future directions for research in this domain are in place. The study had mostly a qualitative approach, and the results cannot be generalised to represent whole nations. The sample was neither representative, as the respondents were mostly young university students, living in urban cities. A preliminary study like this would not be sufficient enough to guide a whole design process, but it would be advisable to collect more qualitative understanding and feedback from real users during the design process and utilise the gained understanding in multiple rounds of iteration to develop the digital product to meet the user needs (Ostrom et al. 2015, British design Council 2025). It would be of interest to study these phenomena in a wider context, especially concerning the attitudes towards VR tourism experiences between different nations. The results of this suggest a difference in attitudes between European and Chinese responders, and besides gathering more


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empirical evidence on this, it could be of interest to explore the underlying factors behind the phenomenon. Additionally, the same study setting could be repeated with an Asian based destination, to see if the relevance of prior information and interest towards VR previews would change in the segments. This would help in connecting the behaviour rather to travel conditions, than to the preferences of a specific traveller group.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study provides interesting new insights into the differences between European and Chinese responders in their attitudes towards VR nature tourism experiences, while highlighting the overall potential of VR for pre-travel purposes. The results reveal that while both segments appreciate clean, preserved nature and infrastructure supporting travel, their underlying motivations and interests to engage with nature travel differ. Additionally, the results suggest that information needs places higher barriers to Chinese travellers, which is partially due to language. While the European respondents were divided on their opinions on the use of VR pre-travel, the Chinese respondents were significantly more open to it. Thus, the findings of this study highlight that while VR as a medium for tourism marketing holds great potential, the implementation must consider psychological and cultural factors, such as the end-users' motivations, needs, and expectations, along with cultural nuances. It can be argued that promotional VR experiences not only hold the potential to leverage marketing, but they can also act as a bridge between potential travellers and destinations. The companies that adapt VR to tell compelling stories and provide information-rich immersive experiences can strengthen their appeal and remove barriers relating to language and unfamiliarity, while gaining a remarkable advantage in the future global market.

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# ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION SERVICE PRODUCTS IN KENYA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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## ABSTRACT

Alternative accommodation service (AAS) products have increasingly become popular in tourism and hospitality space especially in most towns and cities globally. The surge in the AAS products along with the unique and complex nature of their operations have continued to raise positive and negative debates as regards their contributions to tourism and hospitality sector. In touristic popular destinations such like Kenya, unregulated nature of AAS products have occasionally made some of them to be viewed as havens of shady deals and crime scenes including but not limited to drug dealing, sex-orgies among others. The negative publicity that occasionally accompanies the AAS sub sector due to such association means that they continue to bear the brunt of negativity and lose out on optimal return on their investment especially when the government in reacting to negative reports impose blanket stringent regulations on all sub sector players. Limited empirical evidence on AAS products and their contribution to the tourism and hospitality value chain in the country limits discourse. The study aimed at establishing stakeholders' perception of AAS providers and their operations within the tourism and hospitality value chain. It sought to find out the prevalence of AAS products in Kenya, determine drivers of AAS products, establish stakeholder's perception of AAS products and their operations within Tourism and Hospitality value chain and to find out the challenges AAS providers face in their operations as well as their remedies. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to obtain information from tourism and hospitality stakeholders. Data was collected from 237 AAS service providers using questionnaire with open and closed-ended items virtually through google forms. Key informant interview was also conducted with key personnel with leadership responsibilities both in the public and private sector. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis technique were used to analyse the data obtained. Findings illustrated existence of a significant number of AAS providers in the country with approximately 35% being registered and regulated. Their flexibility, competitiveness of their pricing and uniqueness of their products and services were the major drivers promoting preference to AAS products. It was also established that AAS products were a significant stakeholder in the tourism and hospitality value chain acting as a source of employment, contributing towards increase in bed occupancy, boosting tourism, paying taxes and attracting foreign exchange earnings. However, they were facing unhealthy competition, negative publicity, unfair or unrealistic policies from the regulator including high taxation as well as emergence of cons and fake in the sector among other challenges. It is therefore recommended that the AAS providers define themselves in order to enable other stakeholders have a better understanding of them, carry out sensitization, foster self-regulation and work with the government to come up with realistic policies for the sub-sector. Findings of this study are expected to add to existing literature on alternative accommodation products growth and development in Kenya. It communicates knowledge to the regulator, policy makers, tourism sector players and the national and county governments in order to help in developing appropriate short and long-term policies as well as programs for the emerging sub-sector.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of alternative accommodation service (AAS) products though considered as relatively new in the tourism and hospitality sector continues to draw mixed reactions from industry stakeholders. Also commonly referred to as Short Term Rentals (STRs), they are believed to be part of an innovation in the sector that has continued to gain popularity creating huge competition by claiming substantial market share thus posing a threat to the conventional accommodation service products. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) defined STR as "repeated short-term letting, for remuneration, of furnished accommodation to a transient clientele which does not


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take up residence there", either on a professional or non-professional basis, (CJEU, 2020). Within the market, Airbnb created around 2008 to allow landlords and tenants to advertise their homes for short-term rental is recognized as the AAS lead (Colomb & Moreira de Souza, 2021). Since then, several products that vary in terms of their business models (peer-to-peer, business-to-consumer or both), their links with giants of the online travel industry, their geographical coverage and the types of accommodation they offer have since emerged.

Studies have previously shown that the AAS products have emerged as an appealing alternative to the standard hotel products especially to corporate guests and personnel relocating temporarily or permanently (Lima, 2019; Simcock, 2023). Similarly, it has been shown that the products have consistently continued to gain attraction globally as travelers continually seek accommodations that contain basic travel necessities while also offering a sense of personal space in a comfortable atmosphere (Shabrina, Arcaute & Batty, 2022; Todd, Musah & Cheshire, 2022). Thus, the concept has continued to evolve into a number of products with time. Generally, Colomb and Moreira de Souza (2021) has classified the AAS products into three categories; Professional short-term rental which refers to the letting on a commercial basis of an entire property not used as a primary residence to visitors staying for short time periods; Short-term rental of a primary (or secondary) residence which entail the short-term letting of an entire dwelling which is normally used as a primary (or secondary) home while the main resident is away on a temporary, occasional basis and Short-term rental of part of a primary residence which refers to the short-term letting of part of a primary residence (e.g. one or more rooms) while the host is usually present (so-called 'home-sharing').

In Kenya just like many travel and leisure destinations, AAS products have emerged in many forms all under the umbrella of short-term rentals. They include home stays, apartments, Airbnb and hostels among others. Olage (2023) reports on Airbnb making a significant impact on the Kenyan rental market, revolutionizing the way people find short-term accommodations from Nairobi to Watamu, Kisumu to Maasi Mara, and everywhere in between. Similarly, Kenyan Wall Street (2023) observed cunning real estate investors across the country leveraging on Airbnb to tap into the market of short-term stays. All these points to a surge in AAS products in the country's housing market. These housing units, anecdotal reports indicate were increasingly being converted into lucrative tourist havens, displacing residents and driving up rents, particularly in popular tourist destinations (Mutei, 2023 Guttentag, 2015; Hoffman & Heisler, 2020). According to the researchers, real estate investors with a knack for AAS products in recognizing that such investments provide multiple pathways to reap a healthy return on investment, beyond the monthly rent were increasingly converting their real estate investments into AAS products such as Airbnb thus a surge in AAS products. Specifically for the Kenyan real estate market, Mutei (2023) contend that AAS products had arisen as a potentially lucrative substitute, with the possibility for greater rental rates and occupancy rates. The researcher explained that whereas for conventional rentals had return on investment (ROI) of approximately 4.7%–7.1% per year, **Airbnb rentals could offer significantly higher ROI, ranging from 15% to over 25% per year. He explained that such products tended to** have higher average daily rates and occupancy rates compared to conventional rentals, which contributed to increased rental income and a higher return on investment thus making such products very popular.

Along with the surge is the reported influx of vices especially due to the unregulated and complex nature of AAS products, existing literature indicating that AAS products face a number of challenges some of which threatens their sustainability. They include negative reviews, price undercutting, lack of adequate security which compromises safety. AAS products have also been reported to be grappling with increasing regulation and restriction in cities where rental prices are skyrocketing and tourism is high (Matsui, 2019). Colomb and Moreira de Souza (2021) contend that profitability of short-term rentals has opened new markets for real estate investment and rent extraction: in many cities, a significant part of the products being under the management of professional landlords or investors managing several properties permanently used for short-term rental. According to the researchers, such products become the object of contention and debate in the media and political arena entangled in broader concerns about the housing crisis, gentrification and touristification. In response, many governments have sought to design and implement forms of regulation to manage or control AAS products and the activities of platforms that mediate them. In Kenya just like other destinations, limited empirical data exist that can objectively inform discourse considering that AAS products and their operations remain largely unresearched.

**Statement of the Problem**

Alternative accommodation service products have increasi9ngly become popular in tourism and hospitality space especially in most towns and cities globally. The surge in the AAS products along with the unique and complex nature of their operations have continued to raise positive and negative debates as regards their contributions. In


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touristic popular destinations such like Kenya, unregulated nature of AAS products have occasionally made some of them to be viewed as havens of shady deals and crime scenes including but not limited to hideouts for drug dealing, sex-orgies among others. The negative publicity that accompanies such associations has meant that even investors that adhere to ethical business practice also continue to bear the brunt of negativity and lose out on optimal return on their investment especially when national and county government in reacting to the negativity impose stringent regulations. This study sought to establish stakeholders' perception of AAS products and their operations within the tourism and hospitality value chain with the aim of providing empirical data to inform discourse.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study aimed at establishing stakeholders' perception of Alternative Accommodation Service Providers and their operations within the tourism and hospitality value chain. Specifically, it sought to:

i. To find out the prevalence of alternative accommodation service products in Kenya.
ii. To determine drivers of alternative accommodation service products in Kenya
iii. To establish stakeholder's perception of alternative accommodation service products and their operations within Tourism and Hospitality value chain in Kenya.
iv. To find out the challenges Alternative Accommodation Service Providers face in their operations and their remedies

**METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to obtain information from tourism and hospitality stakeholders including alternative accommodation service providers and consumers of their products. Respondents were persons form public, private and academia sectors across the country. Data was collected using both quantitative and qualitative techniques from respondents using questionnaire with open and closed-ended items virtually through google forms. Key informant interview was also conducted with key personnel with leadership responsibilities both in the public and private sector. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis technique were used to analyse the data obtained. Quantitative data collected was analysed, presented and interpreted using descriptive statistics while thematic analysis techniques was used to analyse qualitative data collected using interview schedules and focus group discussion.

**FINDINGS**

Participants were 237 tourism and hospitality stakeholders. They ranged from representatives of National Government Agencies (26.4%), Industry regulator (6.8%), County Government representatives (6.8%), Conventional Accommodation providers (20.0%) and Alternative Accommodation Service providers (40.0%). Participant from Alternative Service Providers included Hosts (26.4%) and Agents (13.6%). They were drawn from the coastal (40.0%), Nairobi metropolis (26.4%), Rift Valley (16.8%) and Western region (16.8%). There were more females (53.2%) than males (46.8%). They were highly educated and experienced professional and practitioners whose educational qualifications ranged from diploma (6.8%) through degree (53.2%) and postgraduate (40.0%) while work experience in the industry ranged between less than 10 years (13.6%) through 10 to 20 years (53.2%) to more than 20 years (33.2%). Figure 1, 2 and three presents a summary of some of the participants' characteristics.

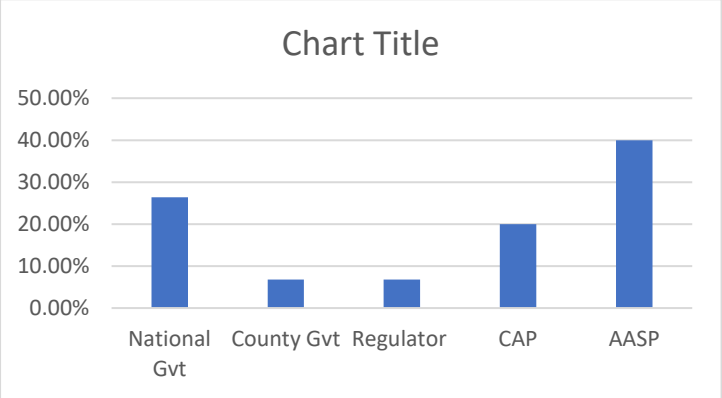


Figure 1: Participants' Representatives


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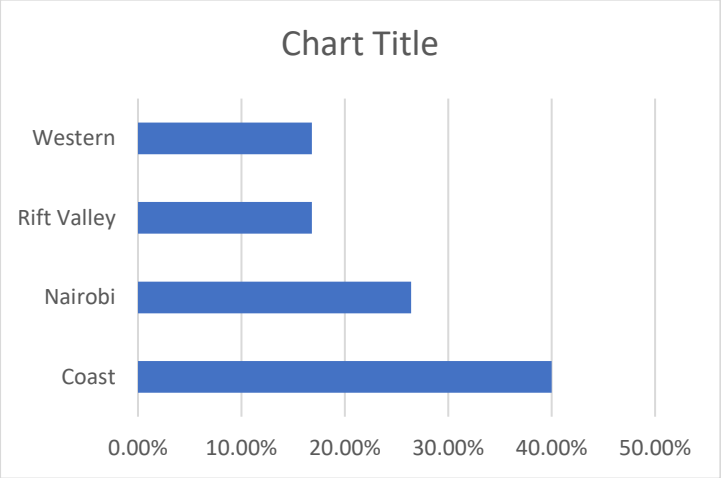

Figure 2: Regions

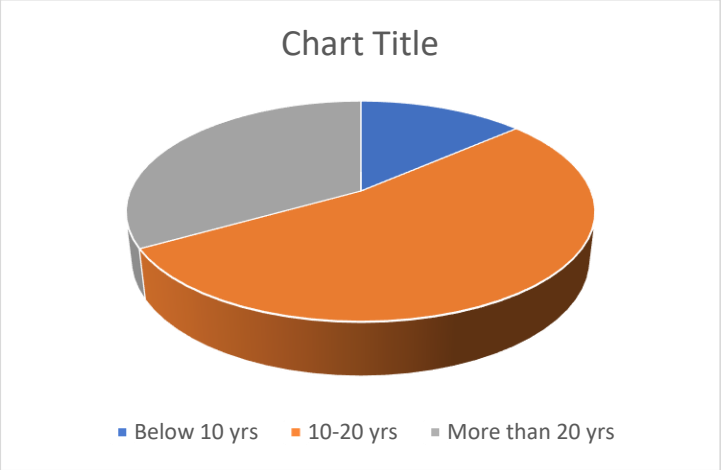

Figure 3: Experience

Information obtained relative to respondents demographics illustrated that they were trained professionals who could be relied on to provide credible information.

**Prevalence of Alternative Accommodation Service Products in Kenya**

The study sought to find out the extent to which alternative accommodation service products exist in the tourism and hospitality value chain in Kenya. Data obtained through focus group discussion with officials of one of the registered associations of AASP indicated the existence of several operators. According to the association;

> *There are about 250 registered and 750 unregistered service providers operating in the AASP value chain in the country.*

This information was confirmed by other sources including Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA) who indicated establishment and registration of a number of alternative accommodation service products. According to sources at TRA which is the industry regulator, some of the alternative accommodation service products available in Kenya include home stays, apartments, Airbnb, "Friends and relatives" as well as lodgings. They are collectively referred to as Short Term Accommodation Service providers in the country.

Stakeholders maintained that there exist a registered body for alternative accommodation service products. Also known as 'Vacation Cribs Association of Kenya', the association brings together 'Host' and 'Agents'. Hosts according to information obtained from the focus group discussion undertaken are "*owner of the alternative accommodation service products*" while agents are "persons *who act on behalf of a host by marketing AAS products and are paid a fee or commission*." It was established that at the time this study was being undertaken, there existed a social media site with about 700 hosts and agents illustrating a significant number of active accommodation service providers in the country. Quantitatively, findings illustrated that only about 36% of the AAS providers were formally registered with the regulator.


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**Drivers of Alternative Accommodation Service Products in Kenya**

The study also sought to determine the key drivers of alternative service products in the country. Respondents were requested to identify some of the contributions of alternative accommodation service products to the economy. Findings illustrated that most clients preferred AASP with the aim of creating long term social relationships, boosting the host community, empowering sustainability perspective, societal, economic benefits. The following were listed from quantitative data as possible drivers:

- Economic growth
- Improved transport connectivity
- The burgeoning middle class
- Online booking platforms.

These factors were found to individually and collectively contributing towards the growth of AAS products. Further, it was established that unlike hotels the alternative accommodations provide various functional benefits also to the consumers. The benefits include larger space, pantry or functional kitchen along with option of home cooked food, better access to household amenities, convenience in location among other benefits. According to one source;

> *These non- commercial accommodations tend to provide highly unique experience contributed by the architecture, location, ambience not normally experienced in the conventional accommodation facilities*.

This is especially amplified by extreme customization efforts of facility owners in response to the unique needs of the clients targeted. Data obtained illustrated that AASP are highly flexible offering services not only to individual clients but also groups and families. They are also said to have very competitive pricing. Findings therefore show that there exist a number of drivers that promote the emergence and establishment of AAS products in the country.

**Stakeholder's Perception of Alternative Accommodation Service Products**

The study also sought to establish stakeholders' perception of alternative accommodation service products. Respondents were requested to identify some of the contributions of alternative accommodation service products to the economy. In response, almost all respondents (97.3%) confirmed that AASP is a significant stakeholder in the tourism and hospitality value chain. Respondents listed a number of contributions that AASP has in the sector. Table 1 presents a summary of some of the contributions to the sector.

*Table 1: AASP Contributions in Tourism and Hospitality Sector*

| Contribution | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Source of employment | 203 | 85.7 |
| Contributes to number of beds in the hospitality sector | 189 | 79.7 |
| Boosts tourism | 215 | 90.7 |
| Pay tax | 173 | 73.0 |
| Attracts foreign exchange | 168 | 70.9 |

Data obtained show that respondents believe some of the contributions of AASP include source of employment (85.7%), increase in bed occupancy (79.7%), boosts tourism (90.7%), pay tax (73.0%) and attract foreign exchange (70.9%). Findings from quantitative data thus illustrates a general positive conception of the contribution of AASP to the sector and the country's economy. This was corroborated by qualitative data obtained from the FGD. According to one of the participants;

> *AASPs are crucial and have a big role to play in employment provision. They are an alternative to hotels and contribute massively within the Tourism and hospitality sector.*

According to another discussant;

> *Earnings from AASP are being ploughed back into the economy by hosts through expenditures and re-investment. Additionally, AASP are a source of employment especially for caretakers and cleaners of the properties as well as promoting use of locally assembled materials in furnishing among others.*

Other contributions highlighted include

> *AASP enhances tourism especially domestic tourism. revenue collection, creates business opportunities, employment opportunities and improved sanitation, tax and permits contributions, opening up the tourism sector to different type of travelers*

Findings from qualitative and quantitative data illustrates that AASP significantly contributes to the hospitality and tourism sector. Respondents estimated that AASP contributes approximately 40% of the tourism and hospitality sector contribution to the gross domestic product.


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**Challenges faced by Alternative Accommodation Service Providers**

The study also sought to establish the challenges that AASP face in the course of their operations. Table 2 presents a summary of some of the challenges highlighted by respondents.

*Table 2: Challenges Faced by AAS Products*

| Challenge | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Unhealthy competition | 205 | 86.5 |
| Negative publicity | 197 | 83.1 |
| High taxation | 217 | 91.6 |
| Unfair or unrealistic policies | 209 | 88.2 |
| Emergence of cons and fakes in the sector | 188 | 79.3 |
| Over regulation | 221 | 93.2 |

Data obtained show that AASP face a number of challenges in the course of their operations including unhealthy competition (86.5%), negative publicity (83.1%), high taxation (91.6%), unfair or unrealistic business policies (88.2%), emergence of cons and fakes in the sector (79.3%) as well as over regulation (93.2%). Quantitatively, findings illustrate existence of a number of challenges with grave effect to the sub-sector. Qualitative data sought from respondents through focus group discussions explained some of the challenges that AAS products face. A discussant observed that;

> *There has been an upsurge of disturbing and sometimes harmful practices among the short-term rentals, exposing guests and hosts to unforeseen dangers.*

In supporting this observation, another participant indicated that;

> *There have been reports of unruly guests, drawn by the anonymity and perceived lack of oversight, turning peaceful havens into party zones, disregarding noise restrictions and disturbing local residents. This disrupts tranquility and fuels resentment towards short-term rentals, threatening the communities they aim to benefit.*

According to another interviewee;

> *Stories abound of guests using rentals for illegal activities, from drug dealing to prostitution, putting unsuspecting hosts at risk of legal repercussions and tarnishing their properties' reputations. Some guests have also reported encountering aggressive hosts or finding themselves in poorly maintained accommodations with compromised security, leaving them vulnerable and exposed.*

All these points to challenges among some of the AAS products which to some extent can be attributed to lack of stringent background checks for guests and hosts, particularly for unlisted properties which raises serious safety concerns. Change of user policies and setup of AAS products in conventional home set up is also believed to be a challenge.

**Conclusion And Recommendation**

The study set out to establish tourism and hospitality stakeholders' perspective on alternative accommodation service products and their suggestions on possible interventions in the light of reported negative publicity of the sub-sector. Findings illustrated existence of a significant number of active accommodation service providers in the country with approximately 35% being registered and regulated. Their flexibility, competitiveness of their pricing and uniqueness of their products and services were found to be some of the major drivers of the sub-sector. AAS products was found to be a significant stakeholder in the tourism and hospitality value chain acting as a source of employment, contributing towards increase in bed occupancy, boosting tourism, paying tax and attracting foreign exchange among others. However, they were found to be facing unhealthy competition, negative publicity, unfair or unrealistic policies including high taxation as well as emergence of cons and fake in the sector were some of the major setback. It is therefore recommended that:

i. AASP should define themselves in order to enable other stakeholders including government agencies and the regulator have a better understanding of the sub-sector thus enable formulation of realistic policies for the sub-sector.
ii. Development of applications to support existing sector platforms
iii. Involvement of stakeholders in formulation of sector regulations
iv. Promote self-regulation in the sector through formation of association thus weed out cons and fakes

**CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**


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Findings of this study are expected to add to literature on alternative accommodation products to the growth and development of tourism and hospitality in Kenya. By addressing the context of alternative accommodation products, it will be easier to understand the factors that put tourists at risk and how to offer solutions. Findings also hope to communicate knowledge to the regulator, policy makers, tourism sector players and the national and county governments in order to help in developing appropriate short and long-term policies and programs to the emerging sub-sector.

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# WHO ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT UNMANNED SMART HOTELS WITH PREMIUM QUALITY? A STUDY BASED ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY TYPES AND FACTORS OF SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

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## ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM

Who are Willing to Accept Unmanned Smart Hotels with Premium Quality? Objectives: It is of great value for hospitality industry to accurately identify customers willing to accept unmanned smart hotels with premium quality. Unmanned smart hotels are bound to be affected by the characteristics of this era. From the "functionalization", "extensive", "coarse-grained", "experience-oriented" services to "humanized" , "intensive" , "fine-grained" , "data-based" services, is development trend of current service industry. Service industry based on this is conducive to improving service quality, service efficiency and customer satisfaction. Obviously, providing differentiated services according to customer's personality type is conducive to cultivating the viscosity of customers in early stage, and it is conducive to cultivating customer loyalty in later stage.

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

The study employs a questionnaire-based approach, validated by the Ethics Committee of Huaqiao University, to collect data from 527 respondents. The questionnaire, structured into three parts—personality types, societal and environmental factors, and demographic characteristics—utilizes a 6-level Likert scale to measure attention levels. The results indicate that factors such as age, education, income, and city level of residence significantly predict introversion, while functional demands and service impressions significantly predict sensing types. Monthly income is a significant predictor for feeling types, and functional demands significantly predict judgment types. Findings: The most important conclusion of this study is that the ISTJ people are more willing to accept the unmanned smart hotel: they pay more attention to the perfect functional demand, ignore the architectural environment and ignore the service impression. In particular, the post70s ISTJ in first-tier cities are willing to pay for high-quality hotels and have the ability to pay.

### THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

Results show that customers of different personality types have significantly different attention level to hotel’s “functional demand”, “service impression”, “architectural environment” and “consumption burden”. Theoretically, using relationship between personality types and social, environmental factors, 16 different styles of hotels can be constructed for customers of 16 personality types. this research provides new theoretical possibilities for building differentiated hotels.

### PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Discoveries of this study are applicable not only to the daily management of hotels, but also to the construction of differentiated hotels. Hotels use MBTI to provide differentiated services, which is conducive to cultivating customer


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loyalty in early stage, and conducive to cultivating customer loyalty in later stage. Secondly, it is a practical need with huge potential to build differentiated hotels to adapt to different personality types of people.


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# SECTION 9: HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT


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# SHAPING MULTI-DESTINATIONS THROUGH SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF TOURISM SUPPLY

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## ABSTRACT

## INTRODUCTION

Aveiro, situated in central Portugal, is a prominent tourism destination known for its cultural heritage, such as moliceiro boats, artisanal salt production, and Art Nouveau architecture. The nearby municipality of Ílhavo enhances the region's appeal with its beaches, including Barra and Costa Nova, and cultural sites like the Vista Alegre porcelain factory. Aveiro and Ílhavo share the unique natural and cultural heritage of the Aveiro lagoon, forming interconnected key tourism attraction zones within the same region. This study uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to analyse the spatial distribution of tourism offerings in the Aveiro and Ílhavo regions. This study has threefold objectives: i) to assess the tourism portfolio of this multi-destination area, ii) to examine the degree of complementarity between these multi-destinations, and iii) to identify the spatial concentration of tourism activities across the multi-destination.

## METHODS

This research applies GIS to evaluate the spatial distribution of tourism offerings in Aveiro and Ílhavo. The analysis is based on criteria that highlight spatial patterns, including the existence of tourism attractions, considering their significance (e.g., local or national) and typology (e.g., cultural, sports, nature), accommodation capacity, and the availability of tourism services and activities. Secondary data from local, regional and national governments, tourism operators, national statistics, and geographic data from OpenStreetMap were used. An index was developed to identify and classify the various key tourism attraction zones and assess their relevance within the Aveiro and Ílhavo regions.

## RESULTS

The analysis reveals distinct spatial patterns in tourism offerings. High activity levels are concentrated in Aveiro's city centre and along the coastal areas of Barra and Costa Nova, where beaches and nautical activities attract numerous visitors. Additionally, lesser-known or complementary destinations were identified. Five key tourism attraction zones emerged in this region: Aveiro's city centre, Praia da Barra, Praia da Costa Nova, the Vista Alegre complex, and the city centre of Ílhavo. Aveiro city centre is the central hub with cultural heritage tourism. Ílhavo city centre and Vista Alegre share overlapping cultural offer, but different focus of Aveiro city centre, as they offer tourism experience centred on maritime heritage and industry. On the other side, Barra and Costa Nova offer complementary attractions focused on beaches and outdoor activities This pattern may explain the stronger tourism activity observed in the coastal areas of Ílhavo.


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## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of spatial analysis in regional tourism development and provides recommendations for Destination Management Organisations to foster cooperation between complementary multi-destination areas. Regional stakeholders can optimise tourism offerings, alleviate overcrowding in popular areas, and increase visitors' average stay. The results suggest that the tourism industry in Aveiro and Ílhavo would benefit from collaborative efforts to diversify visitor experiences. Promoting an integrated tourism offer that combines beaches, the Aveiro lagoon, and cultural activities can contribute to sustainable growth and enhance tourist satisfaction.

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# CHAMPING – AN INNOVATIVE UNIQUE NICHE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRODUCT

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**ABSTRACT:**

This presentation analysis the development of Champing as a niche tourism staycation choice that has developed in the UK over the last 10 years. Champing is the concept of camping in a church, hence the word 'Ch' from church and 'amping' from camping. It can be described as an added product to that of Glamping coined from the words "glamorous" and "camping", but rather a trend for nature lovers or festival goes who want tents with a touch of luxury Champing is a form of inside camping in historical buildings.

The idea was conceived after a group of young adventure Scouts asked to camp overnight in a redundant church cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT), the charity caring for such churches across England. Champing was launched in 2014 as way to raise money for the CCT through allowing and charging people to enjoy the experience of sleeping in historic buildings.

The concept has grown to 22 historic churches England and Wales and accommodating 10,000 guests since 2015. This prestation explores the concept and how within a niche tourism Champing provide a short and nearby vacations alternative in a most economical manner for tourists in exploring domestic destination which also is beneficial for local tourism. Champing provides a new and innovative development to the staycation product portfolio.

Through analysis of the Champing proposition, media articles, social media posts and online reviews the presentation explores how the Champing product contributes a unique innovative cost-effective and alternative accommodation types, how it support the exploration of local and unusual setting, how it can support and help preserves indigenous culture. The presentation evaluates Champing as a form of Niche tourism and how it a specific product that is tailored to meet the needs of a very specific market segment (Novelli et al 2022). In addition the prestation discuss the opportunities for Champing to support, and its contribution to the United Nations sustainable development goals. Specifically Champing's contribution to SDG Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities through protection and engagement with cultural and religious heritage is reviewed alongside Champing's contribution to Goal 12, Responsible consumption and production through reducing the need to build more, supported sustainable options for travel and vacationer education.

Through this transformation and innovation in options for accommodation using redundant churches the presentation highlighting how Champing provides for a new and growing demand in vacation consumption for more holistic, less impactful, experiential and memorable holiday experiences. The presentation contributes to Kou et al's (2024) call for future studies to focus on staycation development, product design, well-being considerations, and sustainability aspects. Finally the presentation considers new innovations that expand on the notion of Champing in alternative locations and situations.

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# BRIDGING PERSPECTIVES: A MULTISTAKEHOLDER APPROACH TO DESTINATIONSCAPE

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores how multiple stakeholders perceive the destinationscape's five main dimensions and how these perceptions differ across different destinations. A stakeholder assessment was conducted through a questionnaire survey, targeting tourists, residents, the private sector, and public entities across Portugal's five mainland regions. The findings reveal that all dimensions are perceived as relevant, validating the destinationscape model's applicability. However, perceptions varied significantly among stakeholder groups while showing convergence across regions, reinforcing the need for a deeper comprehension of stakeholders' dynamics and diverse perceptions. Further theoretical and practical contributions and future research directions are presented.

**Key Words:** Experiencescape; Tourism Experiences, Destinationscape, Destination Environment, Stakeholders.

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A tourist destination is a complex system involving diverse resources, interests, and co-producing actors who (co)create products, services, and experiences. Its management is challenging due to its stakeholders' multiple and intricate relationships. Such complexity implies comprehensive and consistent interaction and synergies, where a multistakeholder approach is imperative. Moreover, destinations are shaped by interconnected "scapes" and interrelated supply-side elements, comprising tourist-staged scenarios and uncontrollable environments that might influence tourists' overall experience. Consequently, a thorough and holistic approach is required when extending the experiencescape application at the destination level. Literature has explored and highlighted the analytical value of experiencescape, applying it in diverse contexts, including destination experiencescape and food-related destinationscape. However, these studies focus on tourists' perceptions, neglecting further stakeholders. Additionally, despite the growth of "scape-based" research, current literature highlights the need for holistic and multidisciplinary approaches that empirically integrate diverse perspectives to analyze how these shared environments and experiences are co-created, and how these dynamics evolve in different contexts. Thus, given that the destinationscape is recognized as a multidimensional, dynamic, and complex system encompassing man-made, natural, and non-controlled scenarios continuously co-created through interactions between the external environment and stakeholders in a collaborative process to outline the stage where tourists and other stakeholders can live


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memorable experiences, this study aims to unveil the stakeholders' perceptions about the destinationscape across distinct tourist destinations. The purpose is to explore whether there are differences in how the destinationscape's five main dimensions (the physical environment, social interactions, core resources and attractions, tourism services, infrastructure, and supplementary features) are perceived by different stakeholder groups in distinct tourist regions. Given the study objectives, a multi-phase research design with a mixed-methods approach, combining perspectives from multiple stakeholders through a multidisciplinary approach. In phase 1, a multicultural expert panel (n = 24) with academics with diverse expertise was applied to evaluate the items reflecting the destinationscape's main dimensions previously identified through an integrative literature review. In phase 2, aiming to elicit distinctive views and review items' clarity and comprehension, two focus groups were held with academics (n = 6) and PhD students (n = 6) with research experience in Marketing and Tourism. Subsequently, in phase 3, a survey was conducted targeting tourists, residents, the private sector, and public entities across the five mainland regions of Portugal. The goal was to capture and compare the perceptions of these diverse stakeholders. Using a convenience sampling approach, data were collected from May to July 2024 through online and in-person questionnaires, resulting in 395 validated responses. Descriptive and inferential data analyses were conducted to determine if differences exist between the stakeholder groups and across the analyzed regions.

The main findings indicate that, while the five dimensions that compose the destinationscape are recognized as important, perceptions vary among different stakeholder groups. In contrast, respondents revealed a more uniform perspective across the Portuguese regions. Despite these dissimilarities, there is a consensus on the importance of elements related to overall infrastructure. These results highlight the relevance of embracing the stakeholders' diversity of views, mainly as local actors are potentially co-producers and users of these shared stages. By covering the perspectives of multiple stakeholders across distinct destination typologies, a still under-researched approach, this study expands current understandings of stakeholder and experiencescape theories as multiple stakeholders' perceptions are empirically involved in composing the destinationscape, stressing stakeholders' critical role in defining its key elements. Understanding how different groups of actors perceive the destinationscape contributes to more equitable destination planning, enhancing the capacity of destinations to adapt, innovate, and deliver sustainable value to visitors and host communities.

Thus, since the destinationscape's five main dimensions were recognized as relevant across the analyzed regions, the results confirm the applicability of the destinationscape conceptual framework in diverse tourist destinations. This framework is a practical tool for capturing multiple perspectives, enabling the monitoring and comparison of attributes across different destinations. It offers insights for practitioners and destination managers to strategically explore appealing features and pay close attention to aspects that require more awareness and development. Also, destination management and marketing should promote regional differentiation and authenticity and design place-based experiences that foster tourist engagement through multiple destination touchpoints, enhancing stakeholder collaboration. Future research should expand this investigation to assess the model's applicability in various seasons and empirical contexts, and based on these findings, develop and empirically validate a reliable scale for measuring the destinationscape construct.

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# PERSONALIZING EXPERIENCES: IMPLICATIONS OF SMART TECHNOLOGIES FOR CUSTOMER SERVICES IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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## PROBLEM DEFINITION

Within the experience economy paradigm framework and considering the growth of smart technologies, the concept of experience personalization in the tourism and hospitality industry is considered an emerging trend. Experience personalization in the hospitality industry involves providing services and effective interactions based on guest preferences and needs, ultimately enhancing customer satisfaction and strengthening long-term relationships with the brand. Although recent years have seen a focus on studying the importance and consequences of experience personalization in attracting customers, satisfaction, and loyalty in the hospitality industry, the conceptual foundation of experience personalization with an emphasis on the application of smart technologies in the hospitality industry is at the beginning of its development path.
The case of this study would be luxurious (4 and 5-star) hotels in Tehran City, Iran. Tehran plays a vital role in redistributing incoming (international) tourists to other destinations; therefore, aligning with global considerations, the hotels must address the necessities and tackle challenges associated with personalizing guest experiences, aligning global considerations.

## OBJECTIVE

Because the personalization of experience and the application of smart technologies in the Iranian hospitality industry are still in their early stages and face numerous challenges, the objective of this study is to identify the drivers of customer experience personalization from the perspectives of hotel managers and innovative technologies experts in the form of an exploratory qualitative study using an inductive approach that addresses the identified gap in the literature.

## METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

The study population consisted of two groups, hotel managers (at various levels) and smart technologies experts in Iran, selected based on the snowball sampling method. The criterion for choosing experts was professional knowledge and experience (at least ten years) in the field under study. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews between October and December 2024. The sample size was determined based on the principle of "theoretical saturation" and was reached at the 15 interviews; the number of interviews continued until the 18 interviews for assurance. Four smart technologies experts and 14 hotel managers (from various levels: senior, middle, and operational) participated in this study. Thematic analysis was used to identify, organize, and interpret the themes.


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## FINDINGS

After implementing and entering the data into MAXQDA software version 24.6, the driving themes of personalized experiences in the hospitality industry were identified in three groups: personalized experience inputs (nine themes such as The stable tourism growth vision, Integrated policymaking for smart technologies, Comprehensive smart technology regulations, Advanced digital infrastructure devel), process components of experience personalization (seven themes including Customer needs and preferences, Co-creating sustainable value, Emotional relationship management), and consequences of the personalized experience (five themes such as Competitive capability and Improving brand image).

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

In conclusion, the findings highlight that personalizing experiences in the hospitality industry should be realized through an interconnected chain of structures and systematic elements in the input, process, outcomes (and feedback). Achieving a comprehensive and stable vision aligned with integrating organizational will for developing infrastructure, regulations, and smart system services is a prerequisite and a strategic priority. Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of fostering experiential immersion and co-creating sustainable value through the collaborative participation of customers and service providers.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

From a practical perspective, the identified drivers of personalized experiences offer valuable tools for hotel managers to enhance guest satisfaction, foster loyalty, and strengthen brand image. Through such personalized experiences, hotels can differentiate their services in highly competitive markets.

**Key Words:** Experience, personalization, customer services, smart technologies, hotel industry.


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# SECTION 10: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICY AND PLANNING


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# EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF WATER SAVINGS INTERVENTIONS IN HOTEL ROOMS

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## ABSTRACT

Water is a key resource for the tourism sector (UNWTO, 2021). Accordingly, hotels place written messages in their rooms aimed at saving water. Research on behavioral interventions to promote water conservation among hotel guests have been mainly focused on towel reuse (Nisa, Varum & Botelho1, 2017), with only a few studies aimed at nudging guests to reduce water consumption (e.g. Joo, Lee & Park, 2018; Pereira-Doel et al., 2022). Research on interventions to encourage in-room water conservation behaviors through boosts – fostering people competences to exercise their own agency (Grüne-Yanoff & Hertwig, 2016) – is even scanter. We examine the impact of informative messages – such as, water scarcity at the destination and best practices to reduce water consumption at hotel bathroom – on hotel guests' water consumption. We conducted a field experiment in Majorca, during the summer 2022 and 2023, at 14 identical hotel rooms equipped with digital water counters. In the treatment rooms, guests were exposed to the designed informative message. In the control condition, rooms had no water saving information. The results show that the informative message (vs. no information) had no impact on water savings. Moreover, a post-stay survey showed that the intervention had no effect on guests' hotel perceptions. Our findings show some limits of behavioral interventions, and in particular of boosts; and give rise to some provocative research questions on when and how information can promote a more sustainable guest behavior – with relevant managerial and public policy implications.


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# SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: THE ROLE OF COOPETITION DYNAMICS IN A TRANSNATIONAL STRUCTURE

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## ABSTRACT

The study explores the interplay of digital transformation and sustainability in destination management, focusing on the Trentino–South Tyrol–Tyrol Euregio Region. Emerging issues, like climate change and overtourism, necessitate new strategies, including enhanced collaboration facilitated by digitalization. A qualitative multi-level analysis examines collaboration among stakeholders, from policymakers to enterprise owners, with data collected via interviews. Preliminary findings from a higher level of analysis reveal a growing emphasis on sustainability, supported by digital tools for data management and tourism flow optimization. While internal collaboration is improving, cross-border coopetition remains limited, presenting an untapped opportunity to leverage digitalization for sustainable tourism development.

**Key Words**: digital transition; sustainable tourism development; overtourism; collaboration; transnational cooperation structure.

## INTRODUCTION

Responsibilities of destination management are constantly adjusting to emerging issues, like sustainability (Sorokina et al., 2022) and digital transformation (Luštický & Štumpf, 2021; Reinhold et al., 2023). Digital transformation contributes to value creation for stakeholders (Ozdemir et al., 2023), competitive advantage (Gutierriz et al., 2023), management of tourism flows through prediction of demand (Zhang et al., 2020) and arrivals (Höpken et al., 2020).

Digitalization and sustainable tourism can be positively related (Gössling, 2021). Digital technology can mitigate the negative impacts of tourism (Schönherr et al., 2023), and contribute to environmental sustainability (Jenkin et al., 2011). Social sustainability can be promoted through effective stakeholder collaboration (Wondirad et al., 2020), allowing for a more bottom-up approach internally (Dickinson et al., 2017). Digitalization also improves collaborative dynamics across competing destinations (Zainal-Abidin et al., 2023). Collaborative strategies can be, thus, analyzed through the lens of sustainability-oriented coopetition strategies (Ozbekler & Ozturkoglu, 2020).

The impact of digitalization on collaboration across national borders is still unclear. This ongoing study focuses on the Trentino–South Tyrol–Tyrol Euregio Region (Italy and Austria), examining its role in fostering collaboration to achieve more sustainable tourism development through digitalization. Euregio regions are transnational cooperation structures located across two (or more) European countries and foster cooperation across sectors, including tourism, mobility, and environmental matters. The area is characterized by a strong Alpine tourism industry.

This study adopts a qualitative longitudinal multi-level study, combining, at different points in time, three levels of analysis (see Figure 1) (Geels, 2004; Mölk et al., 2022). At a higher level, three semi-structured in-person interviews were conducted with key managers of the DMOs: Trentino Marketing, IDM Südtirol, and Tirol Werbung between October 2022 and February 2023. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed (Gioia et al., 2013). The


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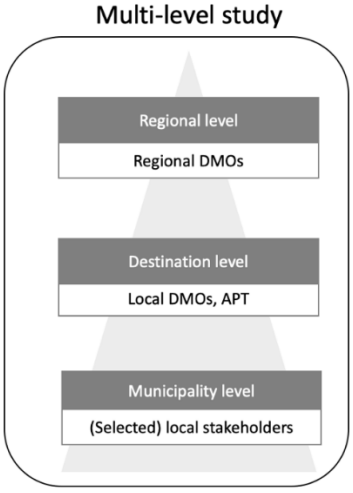
study will also consider a lower level (Mölk et al., 2022). At the meso-level, managers of selected sub-destinations will be interviewed. At the micro-level, policymakers, tourist associations, owners of tourism enterprises in specific areas will be interviewed.

Figure 1: graphical representation of the multi-level study (our representation)




Results highlight that Trentino, South Tyrol, and Tyrol destinations are sensitive to sustainability, by appointing new roles or funding new departments. This will enable destinations to address future challenges, like the effects of climate change on mountain destinations, overtourism, and residents' acceptance of tourism.

This preliminary research confirms the role of digitalization in supporting destination management (Sorokina et al., 2022; Reinhold et al., 2023) by enhancing data collection, processing, and management of tourism flows (Gössling, 2021). Within the three regions, stakeholders are collaborating internally for efficient data collection and analysis and sustainable tourism (Wondirad et al., 2020). However, collaboration and sharing of data among neighboring competing destinations is still in its infancy (Schönherr et al., 2023; Zainal-Abidin et al., 2023), except for specific and isolated events.

In the case of digital and sustainable transformation, the opportunities of coopetition are underexploited. The fact that coopetition through digital transformation is effective during some events can become a starting point for communicating this untapped potential.

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# TOURIST CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR THROUGH THE LENS OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

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## ABSTRACT

Sustainability has become vital for brands, especially for those seeking a competitive edge. This concept includes economic, environmental, and social dimensions. However, the social aspect is often overlooked—particularly in the realm of destination marketing. Social sustainability is a rich and evolving concept made up of several intertwined yet unique elements. In our study, we focus on the aspects of community support and development, cultural preservation, local business support, and social equity. With this in mind, we define social sustainability communication as the marketing efforts designed to show how a destination contributes to the well-being of society and helps improve local communities.

Despite its importance, little is known about how communicating social sustainability impacts tourist behaviour. Furthermore, prior research mostly either exploratory in nature or conceptual, thereby indicating need for comprehensive empirical studies. Hence this research investigates the role of social sustainability communication in influencing tourist citizenship behavior—voluntary actions by tourists that benefit the destination and its community, such as recommending it to others, providing feedback, or supporting local businesses. By applying social identification theory, this study proposes that social sustainability communication fosters a stronger sense of connection between tourists and the destination's community (social connectedness) while encouraging tourists to take responsibility for its well-being (psychological ownership).

This research revolves around two between-subject online experiments. In Study 1, we focused on Kerry, a destination in Ireland that meets 88 percent of the Global Sustainability Movement's social sustainability criteria. An experimental design was employed, with participants assigned to one of two groups: one group saw a general promotional message about Kerry, while the other viewed a message emphasizing social sustainability themes.

To ensure the credibility of the experiment, feedback was collected through five expert opinions including industry professionals and academicians. A pilot test validated the design and confirmed that participants rated the social sustainability message significantly higher for social sustainability dimensions compared to the general message.

The main study recruited 220 participants, all active Instagram users aged 18 or older, recruited from the UK through an online survey platform. Results from an independent t-test showed that social sustainability communication significantly increased tourist citizenship behavior ($M_{DestinationOnly} = 4.21$, $SD = 1.19$; $M_{SocialSustainability} = 4.82$, $SD = 1.09$; $t(218) = -3.944$, $p < .001$). Further analysis using PROCESS Macro confirmed that social connectedness significantly mediates this relationship (Effect = .33, 95% CI: .11, .58).


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Looking ahead, Study 2 will explore the mediating role of psychological ownership using a different destination and social media platform (e.g., Facebook). This follow-up study will also examine whether the combined effects of social connectedness and psychological ownership result in serial mediation.

This research shows that social sustainability communication can influence how tourists behave, encouraging actions that benefit destinations and their communities. It underscores the importance of incorporating social sustainability themes into destination marketing strategies to engage tourists and support long-term development.


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# THE IMPACT OF AWE EXPERIENCES ON METAVERSE ADOPTION IN TOURISM: EXPLORING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS METAVERSE

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## ABSTRACT

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is being affected by over-tourism as many travelers are engaging in revenge tourism post-COVID. Tourist destinations are seeing a significant influx of visitors post-COVID, which has worrying environmental implications that require effective measures. Metaverse immersions have become one of the most significant applications in influencing consumer decisions in this digital era. However, there is a lack of research examining Metaverse's application in tourism. Past studies have examined the Metaverse immersion experience in predicting a traveler's intention to visit a destination. However, this study uses the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model to predict the intention not to visit the destination due to awe experience and pro-environmental behavior.

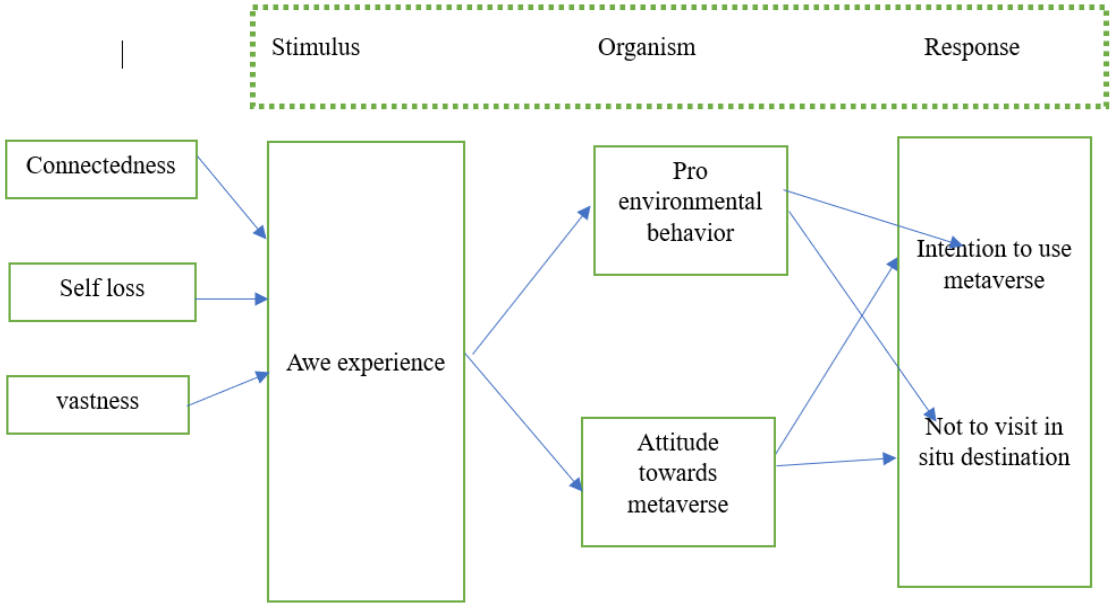


Fig 1. Theoretical model

## METHODOLOGY

The study investigates the relationships between Metaverse immersion's awe experience, attitude towards Metaverse, pro-environmental behavior, intention to continue using Metaverse, and intention not to visit the in-situ tourist destination. The study used a survey method to collect data from 350 respondents using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire. The hypotheses were tested using Partial Least Square- Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The awe experience is a formative construct composed of three dimensions: self loss, vastness, connectedness.

## FINDINGS


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The results show that the awe experience significantly and positively affects pro-environmental behavior and attitude towards the Metaverse. Pro-environmental behavior and attitude towards the Metaverse affect the intention to use the Metaverse and the intention not to visit the in-situ tourist destination. The study provides theoretical and managerial implications. The findings are timely for ongoing immersive technology applications in tourism marketing. This study is one of the few studies that examined the lesser-explored area of tourism and pro-environmental behavior in the Metaverse context using SOR theory. The study expands current literature on underrepresented consumers' behaviors in given contexts. The study investigates the role of Metaverse immersion in combating the problem of over-tourism at tourist places. Policymakers can draw on the findings and work collectively with tourism stakeholders to gain their support in reducing the number of tourists visiting the destinations. The immersive technology application in travel and tourism would decrease the exploitation of natural resources, reduce carbon footprint, reduce human-generated waste and pollution, and promote sustainable tourism. With the rising popularity of emerging technologies such as virtual and augmented reality, virtual tours of tourist destinations and sites can be created and nurtured for sustainable tourism. This will benefit people of all ages, including seniors and those with comorbidities or disabilities. The findings show how immersive technologies can allow visitors to access the travel experience in the comfort of their homes. Marketers can design marketing communication that emphasizes virtual participation in tourism activities, provides a fulfilling travel experience, and encourages sustainable tourism.


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# WAVES OF INNOVATION: THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABILITY IN DRIVING IMPACT IN THE BLUE ECONOMY – A PLS-SEM APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

The Blue Economy, with its emphasis on ocean-based industries, is critical for achieving sustainable development. This study investigates the intricate relationship between sustainability, innovation, and their economic, environmental, and social impacts within Portugal's Blue Economy. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), data collected from a survey of companies operating in this sector revealed that sustainability is a significant driver of innovation, which in turn mediates its impact across economic, environmental, and social dimensions. The findings confirm that innovation acts as both a direct outcome of sustainability efforts and a mechanism for amplifying its broader impacts, especially on economic and environmental performance. These insights provide theoretical and practical contributions, emphasizing the integration of sustainability into organizational strategies to foster innovation and maximize multidimensional impacts. By identifying critical pathways and barriers, this study offers valuable guidance for policymakers and industry leaders striving to enhance the sustainability and resilience of the Blue Economy.

**Key Words:** Blue Economy, Innovation, Sustainability, Economic Impact, Social Impact, Environmental Impact.

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# NATURAL PARKS, TRADITIONAL SALT PANS, AND THE QUEST FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

*In Portugal, the traditional salt pans that are found in the saltmarshes of natural parks are a noteworthy case that illustrates the importance of tourism to revitalize salt activity. Through statistical data and an ethnographic approach, it was possible to obtain relevant information. As a result, it was found that tourism generates an increase in income for producers and raises awareness of cultural heritage, although it may cause some disturbance in the surrounding birdlife. Therefore, it is necessary to have public policies for sustainable tourism so that there can be a balance in environmental conservation, cultural heritage and economic growth.*

**Key Words:** carrying capacity, ecotourism, ethnography, marine salt, salt flower, waterbirds.

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, tourism is one of the sectors that contributes most to the development of societies (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). However, there are several aspects where tourism is not so positive (Archer et al., 2012; Nunkoo & So, 2016; Shahzalal, 2016). One of them is when there is uncontrolled pressure from tourism, which can cause imbalance eventually (Rogowski et al., 2025). To counteract this problem, a sustainable tourism policy that simultaneously balances environmental conservation, cultural heritage, and economic growth is essential (Tosun, 2001; Pai et al., 2025).

Carrying capacity is a particularly important concept here. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defined tourism carrying capacity as "the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, sociocultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction" (UNWTO, 1981). The same principle has been adapted to particular tourism contexts by several authors (McCool & Lime, 2001; Williams & Gill, 2013; Santos & Brilha, 2023). Natural/nature parks are also increasingly sought after for tourist visitation by nature lovers (Mehmetoglu, (2007; Luo & Deng, 2008).

In Portugal, several economic activities are conducted in natural parks, such as aquaculture and salt production (Mateus et al., 2016). Usually, these activities are ancestral and passed down from generation to generation. Its work is generally in balance with the surrounding nature itself. The traditional salt pans (a.k.a. *salinas*) found in the saltmarshes of natural parks are a unique case that illustrates the above-mentioned challenge (Rodrigues et al., 2011; Ramos et al., 2022). Although these landscapes of harsh habitats, being very sunny, windy, muddy and salty, are shaped by centuries of artisanal salt production, they have recently become attractions that offer differentiated tourist experiences, such as salt spas and guided co-created tours (Ramos et al., 2019).

Thus, the erratic flow of tourists can compromise the delicate balance between cultural preservation and ecological conservation (Shultis & Way, 2006). Saltpans are sometimes critical habitats for some species of waterbirds, which face some risks and are potentially disturbed by several factors such as increased human activity, noise and habitat encroachment. Some evidence of this can be found in the literature (Yosef, 2000; Jakulin,& Cop, 2017). Despite the progress made, sufficiently effective measures are still lacking, such as adequate access for visitors/tourists and assessment of carrying capacity, putting pressure on the habitat and the risk of biodiversity loss (Schwartz et al., 2012).

The objective of this research is to find a supply-demand trade-off by assessing the ecological and cultural impacts of tourism on saltpans, identify effective measures to balance tourism and conservation.


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## METHODOLOGY

As a starting point for the methodological procedure, it was necessary to conduct a priori some literature research on the location of traditional salt production sites in Portugal. Furthermore, it was also essential to define these locations and access statistics on the number of production locations. For the purposes of this research, it is particularly important to consider the concept of the carrying capacity in a traditional salt pan. As these sites are usually located in saltmarsh areas, which are very sensitive to human activity, it is important to understand to what extent there must be a balance between an adequate number of visitors so that the work of the salt pans in the extraction of traditional sea salt and other products can proceed normally (Figure 1). It should also be noted that when tourists visit these areas, the impact on the surrounding fauna and flora should not be negative.

Figure 1
Illustration of what could potentially be overtourism in a traditional saltworks area situated in a sensitive salt marsh and showing that limits need to be established on carrying capacity. Source: Image created using generative artificial intelligence in https://clipart-library.com/



From the concept of carrying capacity, the research question that this study intends to explore can be raised. The question that arises is the following:

> *How can the development of sustainable tourism practices support production activities in a traditional salt pan while protecting sensitive ecosystems?*

The cases presented in this research are located in mainland Portugal. There are several locations linked to traditional sea salt production (Sousa et al., 2020; Hueso-Kortekaas & Carrasco-Vayá,, 2024). They are generally located in lagoon areas on land, but with tidal contact (Figure 2). The towns of Aveiro, Figueira da Foz, Alcochete, and the southeastern Algarve have a history of salt production. Because the economic activity of traditional salt production is highly dependent on certain climatic and atmospheric conditions, the areas with the highest production are located in the southwest of the country. Currently, some locations operate practically exclusively for educational and tourism purposes. One such example is found near Lisbon, in the Tagus estuary where the Samouco salt pans are located in the municipality of Alcochete. (Fernandes et al., 2018).

Figure 2
Map of mainland Portugal showing the locations where there is traditional sea salt production.


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In the traditional salt pans, whose production is reported in official statistics, traditional sea salt (i.e., coarse salt) and fleur de sel are usually produced (INE, 2019-2024). More recently, there has also been the production of green clays for skin treatment and use in saline spas. The latter are not yet accounted for in official statistics (Figure 3). A search for official statistics on traditional sea salt and fleur de sel production was conducted.

Figure 3
Telluric activity of the marnoto (top). Traditional salt, fleur de sel and green clay (bottom from left to right, respectively).



A qualitative methods approach with an ethnographic line was employed (Figure 4). Field observations were conducted to assess the effects of tourism on waterbird habitats, and interaction with stakeholders—including salt producers, tourists, and conservationists—provided insights into perceptions and challenges (Ramos, 2023). Visitor behavior patterns were analyzed to assess compliance with ecological guidelines. A review of existing sustainable tourism policies was also conducted in order to understand what strategies can be proposed to reconcile the objectives of tourism and conservation.

Figure 4


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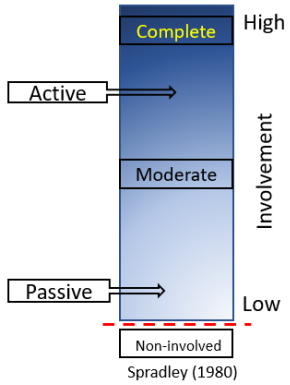
The ethnographic approach shows the involvement of the researcher. Participant observation with active involvement (salt and salt flower salt extraction) and with moderate involvement (tourism guidance).




**FINDINGS**

The analysis of official statistics on the production of traditional sea salt in recent years shows that in 2018 there were 46 traditional salt pans reactivated, most of them located in the central region (Table 1). The following year, the number of traditional salt pans dropped to just 18 and remained so in the years of the pandemic (i.e., 2020 and 2021). In the pandemic years, there was a remarkably high demand for outdoor spaces, where salt pans had some notoriety (Ramos & Garcês, 2023). From 2019 to now, the regions of the Centre and the Algarve have remained more or less with the same number of salt pans reactivated annually. In other regions, there has been no activation of traditional salt pans.

Table 1
Number of traditional salt pans in Portugal according to administrative region from 2018 to 2023. These statistical values exclude industrial production salt pans. Source: Adapted from INE (2019-2024).

| # saltpans / year | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Centre region | 26 | 8 | 11 | 7 | 14 | 15 |
| Algarve region | 19 | 9 | 9 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| Other regions | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total Portugal | 46 | 18 | 20 | 18 | 26 | 28 |

Not all salt pans that reactivate annually develop tourism activities. However, some entrepreneurs involved in traditional salt production have seen a business opportunity due to tourists' curiosity about nature and outdoor spaces.

The analysis revealed that while tourism provides crucial additional income for salt producers and raises awareness of cultural heritage, it can cause some disturbance to waterbird habitats, particularly during peak visitation periods. These findings are in line with literature (Yosef, 2000; McFadden et al., 2017; Ramos et al., 2022). Despite the progress made, sufficiently effective measures are still lacking, such as adequate access for visitors/tourists and assessment of carrying capacity, putting pressure on habitat and the risk of biodiversity loss (Figure 5).

Figure 5
A group of tourists with their guides visiting the salt pan on a predefined route.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The activation of traditional salt pans allows the creation of artificial habitats that are more conducive to certain waterbirds than in purely natural habitats. Educational initiatives aimed at tourists and schools are beginning to be implemented to encourage them to adopt responsible behavior (Figure 6).

Figure 6
An identification of the waterfowl around the salt pan with the help of an illustrative panel (left). Group of tourists with a guide to transmit some knowledge about the birds that are in the surrounding habitat of the salt pan (center). Questionnaire to collect reciprocity from tourists in relation to the visit to the salt pans (right).




**DISCUSSION**

A few decades ago, salt production using traditional methods lost out to industrial salt production due to the development of efficient machinery and the latter's lower production costs. However, traditional salt production has subsequently experienced some revival, not only due to the increased value of salt flower, but also more recently thanks to the tourist interest in outdoor spaces within natural parks and protected areas where the salt pans are located (Ramos, 2022).

Another attraction that draws visitors to the salt pans is the presence of waterfowl specific to these areas, with a particular focus on the iconic flamingo, but also other birds more commonly found in the surrounding areas (Lai, 2013: Ernoul & Wardell-Johnson, 2016). The revival of the salt pans has also sparked educational interest, with schoolchildren and their teachers visiting these spaces (Imaduddin et al., 2020; Calvo et al., 2023).

All of the factors mentioned above are important for encouraging entrepreneurs in this type of traditional economic activity, giving it a new breath on life and serving as a stimulus for the qualification of human resources in sensitive geographic areas subject to various limitations. The growing tourism in the traditional salt pan production area allows producers to increase their liquidity due to the tourism services provided. The development of tourism services in traditional salt pan areas is gradually gaining momentum through co-creation, particularly in spas and guided tours (Figure 7). The interaction between various stakeholders—i.e., producers, salt workers, natural park managers, tour operators, and tourists—enables the creation and boost of an economic value chain in these locations (Muhandhis et al., 2021).

Traditional salt pans allow for the provision of some cultural ecosystem services, as welcoming tourists without jeopardizing the carrying capacity of the salt pans and surrounding areas also allows for the preservation of some historical heritage (Nistoreanu et al., 2024; Utama et al., 2025), as well as adequate interaction with birdlife in the surrounding habitat.

Figure 7
Arouse children's interest from an early age to preserve these sites given their great importance in terms of habitat for waterbirds (left, photo credit Patrícia Cruz), as well as in socio-economic terms in the preservation of cultural


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heritage and production of goods and services with great value cultural ecosystem services (e.g., saline spa on the right, photo credit Veronika Rosová).





## CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to contribute to the theoretical understanding of sustainable tourism by highlighting the intricate interaction between ecological preservation and the cultural and economic development of certain tourism market niches, such as saltpan tourism. This study aims to demonstrate the applicability of integrated conservation strategies in the management of multi-stakeholder dynamics in protected natural areas.
The findings aim to provide practical recommendations for policy makers and stakeholders involved in sustainable tourism planning in natural areas. The proposed strategies include raising awareness among decision-makers about better regulation of access to sensitive areas, the need to identify carrying capacity, particularly of visitors, and promoting ecotourism practices. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of educational actions to raise awareness of responsible tourist behavior and of the ecological and cultural importance of saltpans. The results of this research provide practical insights into managing similar challenges in other ecologically sensitive and culturally significant geographic destinations.

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# PERCEPTIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY IN TOURISM DESTINATIONS: A SEGMENTATION APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

This study reveals the significance of Destination Environmental Responsibility (DER) in tourist segmentation, addressing a gap in understanding its influence on tourist behavior. Eco-engaged, eco-friendly, and eco-restrained segments were identified among 1,909 international tourists in Algarve, Portugal. Eco-engaged tourists, often older, more educated, and first-time visitors from the UK, Spain, and Ireland, showed higher satisfaction and loyalty. The study contributes theoretically by highlighting DER's relevance in segmentation and practically by guiding sustainable strategies that attract eco-conscious travelers, helping destinations manage tourism growth while promoting environmental sustainability. The results offer global applicability for similar coastal destinations facing climate and development pressures.

**Key Words:** Destination Environmental Responsibility; Sustainability; Market Segmentation; Tourist Perception; Destination Social Responsibility.

Environmental responsibility is vital in the tourism industry to address climate change and business sustainability (Tavitiyaman et al., 2024). With continuous tourism growth, destinations must enhance planning and management to meet stakeholder needs and achieve profitability (Buhalis, 2022). Balancing economic growth with environmental management is crucial, as the role of destinations in promoting sustainable development by attracting eco-conscious tourists (Kastenholz et al., 2018; Pitakaso et al., 2024). Understanding tourist perceptions of environmental sustainability is essential for destination competitiveness, yet studies on this topic are limited (Penagos-Londoño et al., 2021; Xu & Au, 2023). Recognizing that visitors are diverse and influenced by various factors (Iamkovaia et al., 2020), destination management experts emphasize the importance of segmenting tourists based on their attitudes for effective management (Lukoseviciute & Pereira, 2021). Although there is prior research based on attitudes and motivations (Albayrak & Caber, 2018; Carvache-Franco et al., 2022, 2023; Ramires et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2023), this study investigates tourists' perceptions of environmental responsibility, which is an understudied topic and a key decision-making factor (Bilynets et al., 2023). Therefore, this study aims to segment and profile tourists based on their perception of DER and to analyze their satisfaction, loyalty, and familiarity with the destination.

A survey at the Algarve, a top Portuguese coastal destination, gathered data from 1909 tourists during the high season 2022. The data analysis via IBM SPSS applied cluster analysis, t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and the Games-Howell test. Three clusters based on DER awareness were identified: eco-engaged (38.3%), eco-friendly (37.4%), and eco-restrained (24.3%). The analysis revealed significant demographic and behavioral differences among these clusters. Findings highlighted those older and more educated individuals valued DER more, with UK, Spanish, and Irish tourists showing higher awareness than Portuguese visitors. First-time visitors prioritized DER, while repeat visitors tended to place less importance on it. Differences in travel behaviors were noted, with those aware of DER


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typically opting for luxury accommodations and engaging in diverse activities. Overall, individuals with higher DER awareness displayed greater satisfaction and loyalty, while these measures declined with lower awareness.

The study highlights the importance of environmental responsibility for tourists and its role in developing segmentation strategies for tourist destinations. It explores hidden differences in tourists' perceptions of a destination's environmental responsibility, addressing a gap in the literature regarding its impact on tourism segmentation. These insights can assist organizations in enhancing sustainable strategies at destinations. That can help managers balance economic growth and climate change challenges in increasing tourism demand by attracting eco-conscious tourists. The results can be utilized in similar destinations worldwide to encourage sustainable development.

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# RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT THROUGH CULTURAL FESTIVALS

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**ABSTRACT:**

Cultural Tourism includes all activities in heritage territories and destinations, meaning their tangible, intangible, cultural, natural, past and contemporary dimensions. ICOMOS International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism (2022), credits heritage as a common resource, its governance and enjoyment become shared rights and obligations. It is a human right to have access to cultural heritage and take part in cultural life. In times of intense tourism use of cultural heritage territories and destinations requires a strengthening of cultural heritage safeguard and community resilience promoting responsible and sustainable development. The exploratory case study of a cultural festival in Portugal sheds light on how to design event experiences that are economically resilient, societally relevant and environmentally sustainable, a central challenge for practitioners, policymakers and academics alike. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are applied to identify and study different dimensions of the festival. The festival can be a model of sustainable cultural tourism, blending music, heritage, and nature into an inclusive program. By aligning with the principles of the ICOMOS Charter, the festival preserves unique territory identity, fostering access, education and enjoyment to national and international cultural tourists while preserving heritage in the region.


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# BALANCING ECONOMIC GROWTH AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION: ANALYZING MOROCCO'S TOURISM POLICIES THROUGH THE LENS OF SDGS 8 AND 11

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## ABSTRACT

In Morocco, the tourism sector has always been a key driver of the economic growth, it plays a major role in the country's development strategies, such as Vision 2030. However, this growth has sparked some concerns about its alignment with the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals "UNSDGs"; particularly the 8th and 11th SDG respectively about Decent Work and Economic Growth & Sustainable Cities and Communities. Our study critically analyzes Moroccan tourism policies and strategies, examining the tension between rapid economic expansion versus the preservation of the country's unique culture and urban heritage.

This study employs an analysis of key policy documents, strategic framework and sustainability reports in order to evaluate how well Morocco's tourism strategies align with the SDGs principles. These documents include Morocco's vision 2020 for tourism, the 2023-2026 tourism strategic roadmap and the Moroccan charter for sustainable tourism; the analysis also incorporates governmental decisions such as the draft heritage protection law and news articles that provide insights into public discourse on tourism development in Morocco. Our research is particularly timely as the country is preparing to co-host the 2030 FIFA World Cup. Such an event will offer significant economic opportunities, including job creation, increased investments and internation recognition, fulfilling the goals of the 8th SDG. Nevertheless, this also underscores the need to present the country's culture in its true and authentic form, aligning with SDG 11.

Despite challenges, Morocco has demonstrated major efforts to preserve its cultural heritage through initiatives such as restoration of UNESCO World Heritage Sites like Aït Benhaddou and Jemaa el -Fna. The city of Meknes serves as an excellent example as it balances its status as a tourist destination along with efforts to preserve authenticity, particularly through the conservation of its UNESCO-listed sites, such as the Heri es-Souani granaries and Bab Mansour gate. However, without robust and coordinated national efforts, the risk of cultural commodification and urban gentrification could undermine Morocco's long-term sustainability goals.

The findings reveal that while Moroccan tourism policies focus on economic development, they sometimes fail to fully integrate sustainable urban and cultural preservation principles. The commodification of the cultural heritage and the transformation of historic cities into tourist attractions highlight the misalignment of these strategies with SDG 11. This is particularly evident in cities like Marrakech and Fez, where tourism-driven urban developments have disrupted traditional lifestyles and eroded cultural authenticity.

The paper finally concludes with various recommendations for harmonizing the tourism policies to support both SDG 8 and 11. These include integrating cultural preservation into tourism strategies, strengthening regulatory frameworks to conserve heritage sites, as well as leveraging the 2030 World Cup as an opportunity to showcase the Moroccan culture in its authentic and true form. By adopting a balanced approach, our country can surely achieve a more sustainable tourism model that respects the cultural heritage while capitalizing on economic occasions. This study contributes to the discussion on sustainable tourism by providing an actionable plan for policymakers in Morocco and other countries facing a similar context and challenges.


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# INTEGRATING ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT AND TOURIST JOURNEY: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR COMPREHENSIVE SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT IN ITALIAN DESTINATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Tourism impact assessment has been a crucial issue since the 1990s (UNWTO, 1996), evolving through various frameworks such as ETIS (European Commission, 2016) and the more recent UNWTO Guidelines (2020). However, a predominant focus on economic and quantitative indicators (arrivals, overnight stays) persists, often at the expense of a comprehensive assessment of environmental and sociocultural impacts, whose available data are usually lower quality (Modica et al., 2018). This emphasis on quantitative growth, while regaining post-pandemic momentum, creates a paradox vis à vis the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), manifesting in phenomena such as overtourism and anti tourism movements, exacerbated by business models associated with the sharing economy and low cost carriers, especially in Europe. Accordingly, sustainability metrics require a thorough re evaluation of what to measure, how to measure it, and at which spatial scale.

Existing metrics (EIA, CCC, LAC, ACAP) and standardized frameworks (ETIS, UNWTO) focus on the impacts at the destination level, often neglecting the system wide consequences of the journey, particularly long haul transport, which is a key driver of the sector's environmental footprint. As a result, they are inadequate for a holistic assessment of the sustainability of different tourism typologies and tourist destinations. The Ecological Footprint (EF), defined as the measure of human pressure on global ecosystems in terms of resource consumption and waste generation relative to the earth's regenerative capacity, emerges as a comprehensive and communicable metric that is particularly suited to the tourism sector given its significant contribution to climate change, especially through transportation.

Despite the potential of EF, the literature reveals fragmentation in approaches (bottom-up, top-down, mixed-methods), data sources (primary/secondary), and coverage of impacts (direct/indirect; transport, accommodation, food, activities, waste). The examined body of knowledge underscores the need for holistic approaches. Integrating the EF, the tourist journey (which captures the processual nature and distinct stages of tourist consumption), and the context-specific characteristics of each destination (which provides the physical, infrastructural, and managerial context where the impact takes place) allows for a more comprehensive and contextualized assessment of sustainability, moving beyond analyses focused only on individual components.

This study proposes a model for measuring tourist EF in Italy, considering the entire travel cycle. The goal is to define a set of indicators able to provide an integrated sustainability assessment, some comparable at the national level, others adapted to specific destination types (pilot areas: coastal, heritage cities, mountain destinations). A multi-stage methodology was adopted that includes 1) a systematic review of the scientific and grey literature on models for measuring sustainability and EF in tourism; 2) Qualitative analysis by in-depth interviews of opinion leaders and opinion makers in academia, government, and industry; 3) Conceptual model and indicator matrix validation by measurement applied to three Italian destinations, integrating the different stages of travel and the main impact categories (transport, food, accommodation, activities, waste), considering their relative contributions (Miralles et al., 2023).

The research is still ongoing. Current efforts address spatiotemporal variability in data and specify the destination and tourism value chain as the unit of analysis within the tourist journey—an alignment that differs across


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disciplines. Preliminary segmentation by market value shows income as a mediating effect: budget travelers register markedly smaller footprints than luxury tourists across all categories (e.g., accommodation and food).


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# SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN CITY DESTINATIONS: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND STRATEGIES

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores sustainability practices in Eskişehir city hotels certified under Türkiye's Sustainable Tourism Program, within the scope of the UN's 2030 SDGs. Based on interviews with hotel managers, it identifies regulatory mismatches, financial constraints, limited stakeholder engagement, and bureaucratic challenges as key barriers. However, employee involvement, local development, and competitive advantage are seen as opportunities. Some hotels show exhibit symbolic compliance, lacking full integration of sustainability. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of sustainability transitions in tourism and offers practical recommendations for both policymakers and hotel managers.
**Key Words:** 2030 SDGs, City Hotels, Sustainability in Hospitality, Sustainability Practices, Institutional Theory.

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism is a critical focal point as the industry strives to balance economic growth with environmental and social responsibilities. The accommodation industry is at a turning point where it has become an integral part of sustainability operations. In fact, over the past few decades, sustainability in the hospitality sector has evolved from a niche concern into a strategic priority (Legrand, Chen, & Laeis, 2022). This broad concept in the hospitality industry is built on a three-pillared foundation encompassing environmental responsibility, social equity, and economic viability (Khatter, White, Pyke, & McGrath, 2021). In other words, the sustainability of urban tourism, which operates in an integrated flow within the daily lives of local communities in urban areas, is crucial for maintaining and preserving ecological, social, and economic balance.

Certification systems are among the most powerful mechanisms that assign responsibility to all stakeholders in the field of sustainability and encourage them to take action. These systems not only certify environmental performance but also help businesses gain institutional legitimacy in the eyes of public authorities and consumers (Mzembe, Lindgreen, Idemudia, & Melissen, 2020; Velaoras, Menegaki, Polyzos, & Gotzamani, 2025). Also in Türkiye, sustainability is guided and monitored through public regulations in line with development plans and tourism management strategies. At this point, it becomes an institutional obligation through regulations developed by government authorities and certification systems based on international norms, in addition to goodwill practices limited to voluntary actions. In 2022, the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program, launched under the leadership of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, became a legal obligation for accommodation establishments through a three-stage certification model based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria (Sustainability Certificate, 2023). However, the implementation of sustainability practices in urban hotels presents various challenges, including efforts to align with regulations, financial constraints, and difficulties in stakeholder participation. Although sustainability initiatives offer opportunities such as promoting local development, increasing cultural awareness, and enhancing competitiveness, there is a need for these practices to be systematically scaled across the industry. In this context, this study aims to examine the current state of sustainability practices in city


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hotels certified under the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program in a multidimensional way. Accordingly, the sub-goals of the study are as follows:

- To examine the intensity of sustainability practices and their practical counterparts at the hotel level across social, cultural, environmental, and managerial dimensions.
- To identify the key challenges that hinder the implementation of sustainability practices.
- To highlight the opportunities that contribute to enhancing sustainability in city hotels.
- To explore the strategies adopted by hotel managers to integrate sustainability into their business operations.

The study adopts Institutional Theory as its main theoretical framework to investigate how urban hotels respond to sustainability requirements and pressures. According to Institutional theory, organizations adopt specific practices not only for efficiency but also to gain legitimacy within their institutional environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In this regard, hotel managers experience coercive pressures, such as legal obligations like the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program; mimetic pressures, such as imitating other certified hotels; and normative pressures, such as professional standards spread through training, consulting, or global frameworks. These institutional dynamics shape how hotels interpret and implement sustainability practices. In addition to institutional mechanisms, the study also draws on Legitimacy Theory to explain hotels' efforts to gain social approval. Particularly, behaviors based on the pursuit of legitimacy become evident in practices such as employee empowerment, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and the public promotion of sustainability (Suchman, 1995). Together, these two theoretical approaches reveal both symbolic and genuine responses of city hotels to sustainability obligations, contributing to an understanding of the strategic and communicational dimensions of sustainability transformation in the tourism sector.

## METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

In line with the research objectives, this study adopts a qualitative case study approach focusing on hotels in Eskişehir, a significant urban tourism destination in Türkiye. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of context-specific dynamics (Yin, 2009). The study's sample consists of city hotels certified under the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior managers from these hotels. The qualitative data collected were analyzed using MAXQDA24 software. During the analysis process, thematic coding and qualitative content analysis techniques were utilized. The coding process is based on both deductive themes and subcategories derived from the data using an inductive approach. Meaningful patterns and relationships were identified between the codes, and the study's findings were systematically structured at the level of main themes and subcategories.

The trustworthiness of this qualitative research was supported through several methodological strategies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Arslan, 2022). The researchers spent extensive time in the field, engaging in prolonged interaction and conducting repeated visits to the hotels, where sustainability practices were directly observed. Triangulation techniques were employed to assess the consistency of the findings. A purposive sampling strategy was applied in accordance with qualitative research principles. In addition, all stages of data collection and analysis were meticulously documented, creating a transparent audit trail.

## RESULTS

The analysis of the interviews revealed that the city hotels in Eskişehir have implemented various sustainability practices, particularly in line with the TR-I Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Industry Criteria. However, it was also found that some hotels only carry out sustainability practices to meet the requirements of external audits and certification processes. This finding indicates that sustainability practices have not been fully integrated into hotels' operational processes, suggesting that rather than a transformational change, a symbolic compliance is being preferred. The findings are presented under four main categories of the criteria. Most hotels utilize *managerial tools* such as employee training, energy and waste tracking, and, in some cases, external environmental consulting. Although sustainability policies are generally in place, the depth and consistency of these policies vary. It has been observed that some practices are more about formal compliance to meet certification requirements rather than creating transformational change. This suggests that strategic and proactive sustainability management is still in the developmental phase in many businesses.


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When evaluating practices under the criterion of *socio-economic contributions to the local community*, it was found that this is one of the most implemented and internalized areas among the participants. All certified hotels collaborate with local suppliers for product and service procurement, employ local people, and engage in partnerships to support the regional economy. Social responsibility projects promote a participatory and inclusive approach to sustainability. These practices have been adopted both for practical benefits and due to the sense of regional belonging they foster.

Within the scope of *cultural heritage preservation and promotion*, it was found that some hotels have incorporated local cuisine, craft products, and cultural tours into their offerings to provide unique experiences. However, these practices are typically limited to guest experience or marketing motivations, and systematic strategies for cultural preservation appear to be more limited. In this context, cultural sustainability is considered an area that is recognized but not sufficiently institutionalized.

Lastly, when evaluating *environmental practices and impact reduction*, it was found that environmental sustainability is the area where hotels are most actively engaged. Many establishments use technologies such as LED lighting and sensor-operated faucets, separate their waste, and prefer natural cleaning products. However, more advanced environmental practices, such as composting, are rarely observed. While there is generally a strong commitment to environmental protection, the wider implementation of certain practices is limited due to infrastructure and supply chain challenges.

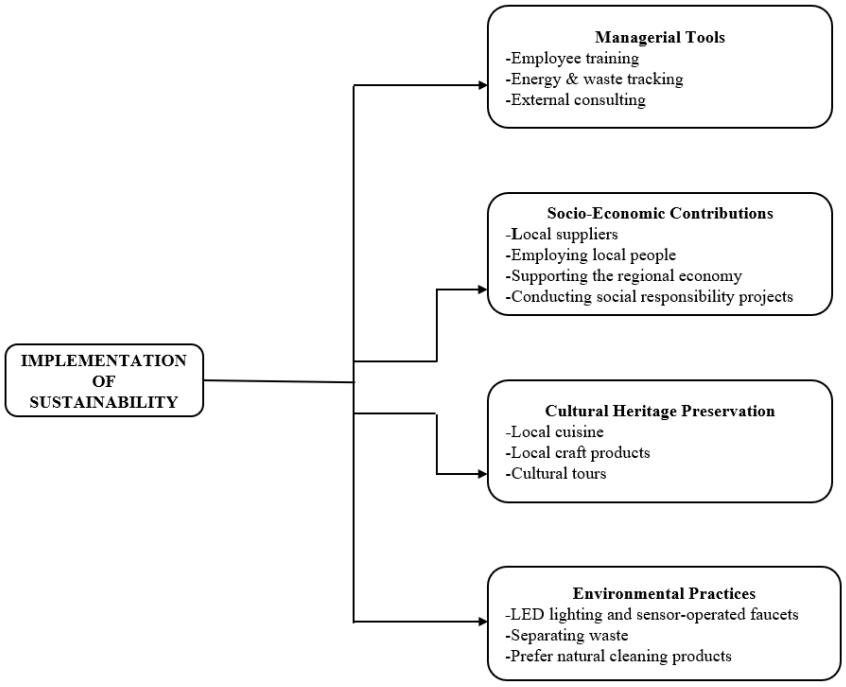


Figure 1. Implementation of Sustainability Practices

Other significant findings of this study concern the challenges encountered in the implementation of sustainability practices in city hotels, the opportunities that support this process, and the strategic approaches adopted. The findings indicate that sustainability is not only an environmental necessity but also a multidimensional transformation process shaped by hotels' efforts to cope with regulatory pressures, financial constraints, and stakeholder involvement. One of the most frequently mentioned barriers by hotel managers is the *issues related to certification and regulations*. A lack of standardization in certification costs, inconsistencies in implementation, and mistrust towards certification authorities undermine the sector's confidence in the process. Additionally, there is a prevailing perception that audit processes are not conducted in a fair and consistent manner.

In addition, *financial constraints* emerged as the second most prominent barrier. The high costs associated with the investments required to implement sustainable practices and the economic burden of the compliance process reduce


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hotels' motivation in this area. The lack of adequate financial support mechanisms pushes businesses toward short-term thinking and leads to the postponement of long-term sustainable investments. Participants also pointed out that the *lack of stakeholder collaboration and limited support from local* governments negatively affects the process. They emphasized the need for stronger cooperation among relevant institutions to develop sustainable solutions at the local level. The limited contribution of local authorities and the lack of institutional knowledge are seen as factors that hinder progress in this field. *Bureaucratic complexity* is another commonly encountered issue. Participants reported that administrative burdens, inefficiencies in communication channels, and the inflexibility of formal procedures in terms of practical implementation disrupt the process.

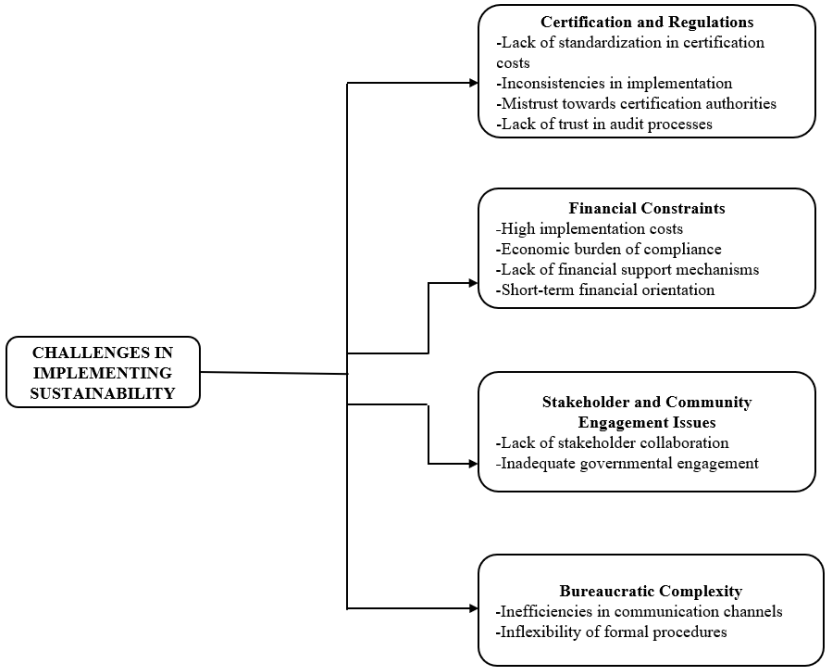


Figure 2. Challenges in Implementing Sustainability Practices

On the other hand, *employee participation and training* emerge as a significant opportunity area that enhances the effectiveness of sustainability practices. It has been observed that sustainability-specific, department-based, and continuous training programs increase employee awareness and compliance. *Local development and cultural awareness* also constitute important opportunity areas for sustainability practices. The use of local products, regional promotional activities, and efforts to preserve cultural heritage contribute not only to environmental but also to socio-cultural sustainability, while also adding value to businesses. Moreover, there are opportunities to use sustainability as a *competitive advantage*, to promote local development, and to *enhance cooperation* and resource efficiency.


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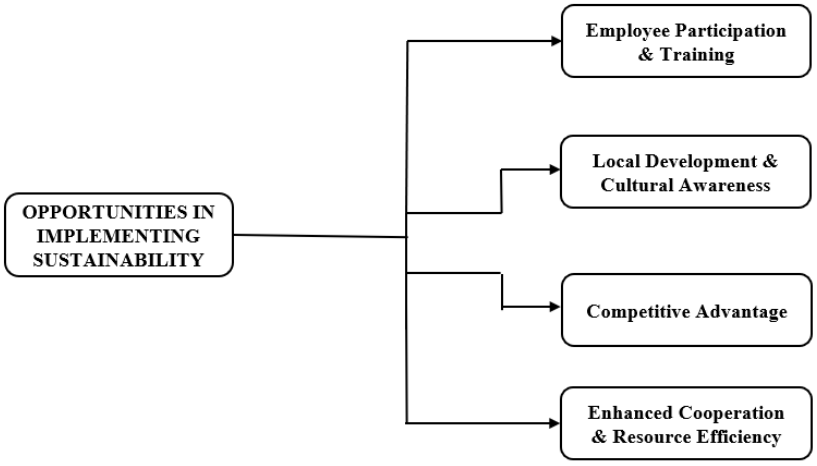


Figure 3. Opportunities in Implementing Sustainability Practices

One of the notable findings of the study is hotel managers' efforts to structure sustainability practices through corporate strategies. In this context, five main strategic approaches stand out. First, *creating awareness and consciousness* plays a fundamental role in the adoption of practices. Participants emphasized that sustainability is not only a technical requirement but also a cultural transformation requiring the active participation of both employees and guests. In this regard, providing periodic training for employees and transparently evaluating implementation mistakes have been considered indicators of a learning-oriented transformation. Similarly, transparently sharing sustainability practices with guests through informational materials stands out as an important practice that strengthens guest involvement. Second, *corporate structuring* has emerged as an essential theme, with participants emphasizing the need to establish dedicated teams within hotels to coordinate sustainability processes. These teams are expected not only to implement the practices but also to monitor, report, and standardize developments across different departments. Participants also drew attention to the importance of ensuring equitable practices across the sector. Third, *knowledge development and learning from best practices* were defined as driving forces in the internalization of sustainability within hotels. During the early stages marked by uncertainty and lack of experience support from consultants, benchmarking successful hotels, and sharing solutions to common problems helped establish a valuable learning environment. Fourth, women's employment and social responsibility projects represent the social dimension of corporate strategies. The interviews revealed that assigning women to leadership roles and implementing socially sensitive responsibility projects expanded the meaning of sustainability to include broader societal concerns. This approach was interpreted as a commitment not only to environmental but also to social sustainability. Finally, *cost management and competitive advantage* were highlighted as important strategic components. While participants acknowledged the high initial costs of sustainability practices, they also noted that such practices could serve as a point of differentiation and a reason for preference in the long term. The belief that sustainable practices will become a decisive factor in accommodation preferences in the future strengthens the motivation of hotels to invest in this area. Additionally, it was emphasized that local governments' contributions in terms of infrastructure and support services (e.g., composting, waste disposal) are crucial for cost-sharing.


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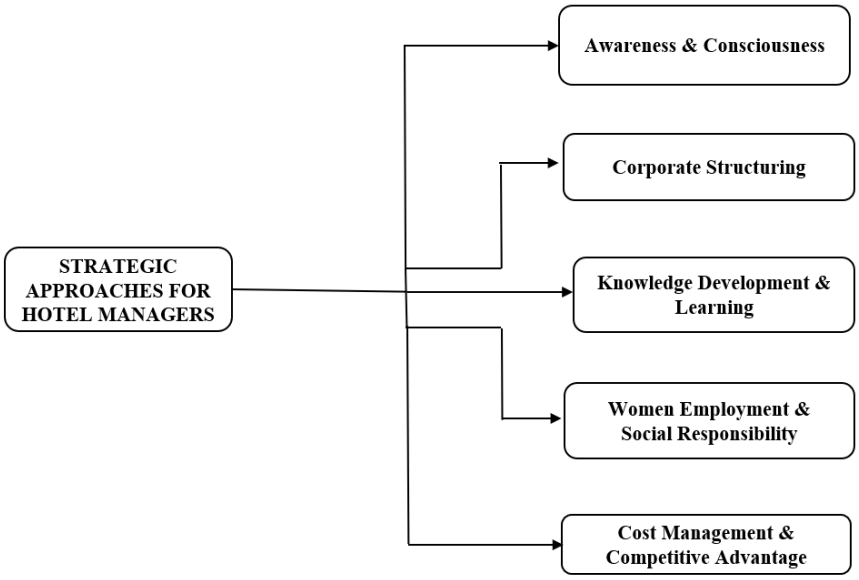

Figure 4. Strategic Approaches for Hotel Managers

## CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of sustainability practices in city hotels, revealing both structural and operational challenges as well as opportunities and corporate strategies within the sector. Key challenges include inconsistencies in certification and auditing processes, financial pressures, and the lack of stakeholder collaboration. In contrast, dimensions such as employee empowerment, contribution to local development, support for cultural heritage, and the creation of competitive advantage represent potential opportunity areas for sustainability. It has been observed that hotels implement these processes in different ways at the operational level, at times attempting to strike a balance between mandatory compliance and symbolic representation.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

This research contributes to the literature on sustainability transitions in the hospitality sector by demonstrating how regulatory frameworks and financial barriers shape the adoption of sustainable practices. Furthermore, it highlights the role of organizational learning and knowledge sharing in overcoming such barriers and emphasizes the need for behavioral and mindset changes to ensure long-term sustainability.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In terms of practical implications, this study offers several recommendations for hotel managers and policymakers. Simplifying legislation and aligning auditing requirements are essential steps to reduce the complexity of certification and auditing processes. Incentive programs (e.g., tax reductions, grants) should be introduced to alleviate financial burdens. Active collaboration between local governments and hotels in areas such as composting, waste collection, and staff training would support a shared responsibility approach. Hotel managers, in turn, should institutionalize employee training and recognize that sustainability practices can generate competitive advantages, thus incorporating them into strategic planning. Additionally, sector-wide networks that facilitate the sharing of best practices should be established.

## LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is a qualitative case study aimed at developing a deeper understanding of how sustainability practices are reflected in city hotels. However, the findings are based on the perspectives of a limited number of hotel managers certified under the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program and located in Eskişehir. This limitation highlights the need for further research to be conducted in different regions and across various types of hotels. Moreover, the study


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only includes the viewpoints of hotel managers, whereas sustainability practices are inherently multi-stakeholder in nature. Therefore, future research should incorporate the perspectives of local authorities, consultancy firms, customers, and employees to achieve a more holistic understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of sustainability practices.

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# AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF FOOD WASTE MANAGEMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: EVIDENCE FROM TWO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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## ABSTRACT

Food waste in the hospitality industry of developing countries poses a significant challenge with economic, environmental, and social consequences. Research indicates that the hospitality industry is a major contributor to food waste, with millions of tons discarded annually. Hotels, restaurants, and catering services contribute to substantial food waste due to overproduction, inefficient inventory management, and consumer behaviour. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach considering operational improvements and the socio-cultural practices shaping food handling and disposal. Given the global urgency, there is a need to evaluate and improve food waste management practices, especially within the hospitality industry in developing countries.
This research aims to analyse and evaluate the current food waste management policies and organisational strategies in developing countries. The goal is to identify effective practices, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in managing food waste. This study applies Social Practice Theory (SPT) as a theoretical framework to examine food waste management in the hospitality sector, emphasising how daily practices, organisational and institutional norms influence waste generation. The study employs quantitative research methods to collect empirical data, providing a data-driven understanding of the factors contributing to food waste and potential organisational and institutional strategies to mitigate the issue.
Social Practice Theory (SPT) offers a useful lens for analysing food waste in the hospitality industry by shifting focus from individual decision-making to the broader social and institutional practices that sustain wasteful behaviours and embrace sustainable development goals. According to SPT, human actions are shaped by three interconnected elements: materials, competencies, and meanings. In the context of food waste management, materials refer to the physical infrastructure and resources available for food storage, preparation, and disposal. Competencies include the skills and knowledge of hospitality staff regarding portion control, inventory management, and waste reduction techniques. Meanings encompass the cultural and organisational norms influencing food consumption patterns, such as expectations of abundance in buffets or aesthetic standards for served dishes. By analysing these elements, this study seeks to understand how food waste is embedded in daily hospitality practices and how interventions can be designed to change these practices effectively.
This research employs a quantitative approach. Data were collected through questionnaires across different hospitality establishments in Nigeria and Sri Lanka, such as hotels, restaurants, cafes, etc. The survey focused on hospitality workers to gain insights into food waste generation, disposal practices, organisational strategies, and attitudes toward waste reduction initiatives. Statistical techniques, including descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, and regression modelling, will be used to identify key factors influencing food waste and assess the effectiveness of existing interventions.
In conclusion, this study will contribute to the growing body of research on sustainable food practices in the hospitality industry by integrating Social Practice Theory with quantitative research methods. This research will provide insights into how developing countries can adopt and implement sustainable food waste management strategies to reduce environmental impact, improve food security, and promote economic growth. By understanding food waste as a product of ingrained social and institutional practices, this research will provide a foundation for designing more effective and culturally relevant approaches to mitigate the food waste issue. The findings will be


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valuable for policymakers, hospitality managers, and sustainability advocates seeking to create a more resource-efficient and environmentally sustainable hospitality sector in developing countries.


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# INTEGRATING HUMAN-CENTRED APPROACHES IN GEOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE ASPIRING GEOPARK ALGARVENSIS CASE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

The Aspiring Geopark Algarvensis (AGA), located in the central region of the Algarve, in the south of Portugal, has a geological history that starts 350 million years ago. AGA was created in 2019 and is now submitting its application to the UNESCO World Geopark list. To UNESCO, a World Geopark is “a unique territory, with a unified geographical area where sites and landscapes of international geological importance are managed in a holistic conception of protection, education and sustainable development, in addition to constituting a territory of excellence for scientific research” (AGA, 2024). The growing significance of geoparks has resulted in the acknowledgement of "heritage status for natural landscapes and features (...), alongside eforts to stimulate economic development in rural areas, predominantly through the promotion of tourism" aligning with the sustainable development 2 principles (Gonzalez-Tejada, Yi Du, Read, & Girault, 2017). Developing a geotourism strategy for a geopark seeking inclusion in the UNESCO Global Geopark Network must be meticulously planned and aligned to enhance the territory's identity across various dimensions, including geological, environmental, cultural, and landscape attributes. Ultimately, the strategy should aim to promote the local community's well-being (Arouca


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Declaration, 2011). To address the above-mentioned challenges, this study exemplifies innovative tourism development, demonstrating how humancentred methodologies and the integration of geological and cultural heritage can drive sustainable tourism. This initiative, a collaboration between the University of Algarve's Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability, and Well-being (CinTurs) and AGA, presents a strategic framework that combines participatory planning with conservation and socio-economic growth. A four-stage research process was implemented by the Design Thinking approach (Golestaneh, Guerreiro & Pinto, 2021). The research phase prioritised inclusivity, using desk research and exploratory field trips to the territory to understand the AGA and consumer behaviour regarding geotourism and geoparks. The Synthesis phase employed exploratory interviews and focus groups to understand the unique attributes of the AGA territory, including its geological significance, cultural heritage, and tourism dynamics. Central themes — Seas, Land, and People — emerged from co-creation sessions involving stakeholders such as residents, municipal teams, tourism operators and cultural and development associations. In the ideation phase, the anchor themes informed the creation of geological trails, cultural heritage paths, and educational events, highlighting the region's rich narratives. In the delivery phase a set of key solutions stands out to inform the strategic planning which emphasised slow tourism and sustainability to enhance the region's appeal while addressing mass tourism's challenges. Proposed solutions include themed tourism routes, community-led events, and the adoption of smart technologies like interactive maps and virtual tours to improve accessibility and visitor engagement. These tools aim to balance environmental stewardship with enriched tourist experiences. Aligning with UNESCO's Global Geoparks principles and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the study also addressed challenges such as tourism seasonality by proposing measures to distribute benefits equitably and mitigate environmental pressures. A notable outcome was the proactive involvement of residents in tourism planning, fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring that initiatives align with local values and aspirations. Collaborations with stakeholders, including businesses, educational institutions, and the Regional Tourism Board, were critical in shaping cohesive branding and marketing strategies. These partnerships positioned AGA as a distinctive destination-area for geotourism within the Algarve. The project successfully 3 integrated conservation, education, and tourism by anchoring tourism products in local narratives and leveraging interdisciplinary research. This study, which constitutes a central piece for AGA UNESCO's Geopark application, underscores the transformative potential of combining human-centred approaches with strategic geotourism development, serving as a replicable model for leveraging heritage to foster regional resilience, environmental preservation, and socio-cultural engagement. Insights gained contribute to global discussions on sustainable tourism, showcasing how inclusive frameworks can preserve natural and cultural heritage while enriching community and visitor experiences.
Keywords: Geotourism; Human-centred approaches; Community engagement; Sustainability.

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# DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF THE NEW RESIDENT EMPOWERMENT THROUGH TOURISM SCALE: RETS 2.0

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### INTRODUCTION

This study developed and validated a new version of the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale - the RETS 2.0 by integrating two new dimensions of empowerment – economic and environmental empowerment – that the original RETS (Boley & McGehee, 2014) left off. The RETS 2.0 also abbreviates the original RETS to three items per construct, reducing response burden, and opening up space for measuring different antecedents and outcomes of empowerment.

### BACKGROUND

Empowerment Theory emphasizes that individuals should have a sense of control, a proactive attitude towards life, and a critical awareness of the social and political landscape (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). The manifestation of empowerment occurs within three layers of social fabric, which enables individuals, organizations, and communities to "gain mastery over their affairs" (Rappaport, 1987). At the individual level, Empowerment Theory is concerned with the psychological factors at play when individuals become independent problem-solvers and feel psychologically empowered (Zimmerman, 1995). The organizational level of empowerment demonstrates how an individual can become politically empowered within an institution, and at community level, empowerment gives credence to socially empower residents to take part in community matters (Zimmerman et al., 1992). However, within sustainable tourism, to ensure collective realization of optimal benefits, economic (long-term/sustained benefits) and environmental (management/protection of natural resources) dimensions of empowerment should also be considered.

### METHODS

Surveying a representative sample of 509 residents on the Island of Sal, Cape Verde, this study followed Churchill's (1979) scale development recommendation, encompassing 7 steps. The first step was to specify the domain in order to generate item pools through an extensive literature review and in-depth interviews. Next, the generated items were purified through multiple rounds of data analysis. This process utilized exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (to refine and purify the item pool) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (to further purify the scale and confirm the


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factual structure and reliability and validity of RETS 2.0) (steps 3,4,5,6). Lastly, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was performed to evaluate the structural relationships between the RETS 2.0 dimensions and residents' support for sustainable tourism development as a test of nomological validity.

## RESULTS

The newly proposed five-dimensional measurement of the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale: RETS 2.0 include Psychological Empowerment, Social Empowerment, Political Empowerment, Economic Empowerment, and Environmental Empowerment. The economic and non-economic factors measured in the RETS 2.0 provide managers with a holistic tool to better understand residents' engagement in the tourism development process. Nomological and predictive validity demonstrate how residents' perception of empowerment influences their support for sustainable tourism development.

## CONCLUSION

The newly developed empowerment framework, the RETS 2.0, contributes to the overarching principle of sustainable tourism by presenting a complete measurement to better understand how residents perceive the development of tourism in their community. This tool can assist destination managers in achieving sustainable practices. By creating structural avenues to engage local communities in tourism, local governments provide residents with the ability to exercise their psychological, social, political, economic, and environmental empowerment and contribute to the sustainability of tourism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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# SECTION 11: TOURISM, HOSPITALITY, AND LEISURE MARKETING


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# REIMAGINING LGBT NIGHTLIFE: UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER PREFERENCES IN A CHANGING SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

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## ABSTRACT

Recent trends suggest a decline in LGBT consumers' preference for exclusive LGBT bars and nightclubs, driven by increasing acceptance within mainstream leisure and entertainment venues. This shift has heightened competition among venues aiming to attract LGBT patrons. This study investigates the key factors influencing the success of LGBT bars and nightclubs in the 21st century, with a focus on understanding customer needs and preferences. A web-based survey with open-ended questions was conducted with 341 members of the LGBT nightclub target market in South Africa. The qualitative data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach to identify emergent themes. The findings reveal specific attributes that enhance the appeal of LGBT bars and nightclubs. Within the context of a competitive and saturated nighttime economy (NTE), these insights provide strategic guidance for LGBT venues to strengthen their competitive positioning by aligning with customer needs.

**Key Words:** 21st century; competitive position; grounded theory approach; LGBT bars and nightclubs, LGBT consumers; nighttime economy.

## INTRODUCTION

Nearly three decades ago, Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgely, and Jenkins (1998) argued that the distinction between Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) communities and heterosexual ('straight') society had become increasingly blurred. They suggested that younger LGBT individuals often share more commonalities with their heterosexual counterparts than with older generations of LGBT people. Sullivan (2005) supports this view, contending that the growing integration and fragmentation of LGBT and 'straight' cultures signal an irreversible shift that may ultimately lead to the dissolution of LGBT culture. Unlike previous generations, post-modern LGBT consumers no longer display a strong preference for exclusive LGBT leisure and entertainment venues, as mainstream establishments are becoming progressively more inclusive (Hattingh & Bruwer, 2020; Nash, 2013).

Villarreal (2017) further observed that post-modern LGBT individuals are more likely to socialize in diverse spaces rather than confining themselves to LGBT-specific environments such as gay bars. Today, social groupings are increasingly structured around shared interests—such as careers, music, lifestyle choices, and recreational activities—rather than sexual identity (Visser, 2003). According to Nash (2013), younger LGBT individuals have grown up in a cultural, political, and social landscape where homosexuality is more widely recognized and accepted within mainstream society. This shift has contributed to the growing presence of LGBT patrons in traditionally 'straight' or mainstream leisure and entertainment venues, including nightclubs, bars, and restaurants (Rink, 2013). Additionally, the temporary transformation of mainstream spaces into LGBT-friendly venues has become a notable trend among this generation (Hattingh & Bruwer, 2020). These events, often referred to as "pop-up parties" (Villarreal, 2017), present a challenge to the sustainability of permanent LGBT leisure and entertainment venues in cities worldwide, including Cape Town (Hattingh & Bruwer, 2020).

To attract a new generation of LGBT consumers, LGBT leisure and entertainment venues are increasingly facing competition from traditional 'straight' and mixed-audience venues, resulting in heightened market rivalry (Voss, 2015). To remain relevant and sustain a steady influx of patrons, leisure and entertainment venues must continuously innovate (Moss, Parfitt, & Skinner, 2008) and undergo regular upgrades (Hollands & Chatterton, 2003). Kubacki, Skinner, Parfitt, and Moss (2007) highlight that many nightclub owners operate their businesses reactively, assuming that success is self-sustaining—an approach that often leads to mismanagement and business failure. Moss et al. (2008) argue that alternative strategies are necessary for nightlife venues to effectively navigate increasingly competitive markets.


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Existing research within the night-time economy (NTE) suggests that gaining and maintaining a competitive advantage requires a deep understanding of consumer preferences (Miyakubo, 2009). However, there has been limited scholarly inquiry into the needs and preferences of LGBT nightclub patrons in South Africa from a social sciences perspective. This study seeks to address this gap by providing the first qualitative exploration of the key factors influencing the success of LGBT bars and nightclubs in South Africa in the 21st century, with a focus on the evolving preferences of post-modern LGBT consumers within a transforming social landscape.

## THE NTE: BARS AND NIGHTCLUBS AS LEISURE AND ENTERTAINMENT HUBS

The NTE refers to leisure and entertainment activities that occur in urban areas during the evening and early morning hours (Shaw, 2010). The Cape Town Central City Improvement District (CCID, 2022) defines this period as spanning from 18:00 to 06:00. Zmyslony and Pawlusiński (2020) describe the NTE as encompassing a diverse range of activities, including music clubs, theaters, cabarets, nightclubs, sex clubs, massage parlors, museums, galleries, shopping, festivals, events, restaurants, cafés, sports arenas, leisure spaces and night markets. The term "night-time economy" emerged in the 1990s as part of efforts to deregulate and expand the alcohol and leisure industries during evening hours (Shaw, 2014). This shift aimed to stimulate economic growth by extending business operating hours, fostering corporate entrepreneurship, and aligning nightlife with the hospitality and tourism sectors (Charman & Govender, 2020). Over time, various terms have been used to describe different facets of the NTE, including "night-time entertainment" (Roberts, 2006), "night-time alcohol and leisure industry" (Shaw, 2014), "city nightlife" (Nofre & Eldridge, 2018), "after-dark economic activities" (Zmyslony & Pawlusiński, 2020), and "the 24-hour city" (Charman & Govender, 2020; Roberts & Eldridge, 2012). Together, these terms highlight the breadth of the NTE, which includes a vast network of venues, service providers, and entertainment experiences (Zmyslony & Pawlusiński, 2020). This study, however, specifically focuses on bars and nightclubs as a central component within the broader NTE framework.

The body of research on nightclubs remains relatively limited, with the existing literature often situating nightclubs within a broader context rather than examining them as standalone subjects (Serra-Cantallops & Ramón-Cardona, 2017). Much of the academic discourse on the night-time alcohol and leisure industry tends to focus on its negative implications, including alcohol and drug abuse, accidents, health concerns (Ramón-Cardona, Álvarez-Bassi, & Sánchez-Fernández, 2021), excessive noise levels (Giritlioğlu & Türkmen, 2014), violence, crime, anti-social behavior, prostitution, human trafficking, gentrification, and environmental pollution (Zmyslony & Pawlusiński, 2020). According to Mintel (2002), nightclubs are defined as permanent venues primarily offering dance entertainment and requiring an entry fee. This definition has since evolved to encompass various nightlife establishments, including large youth-oriented town-center super pubs, pub-restaurants, late-night bars with nightclub-like features, and chameleon bars that adapt their atmosphere throughout their operating hours to attract different clientele (Mintel, 2003). Hollands (2002) differentiated nightclubs from traditional pubs and taverns based on the presence of a dance floor and a DJ booth for recorded music. Miyakubo (2009) classified nightlife venues into three distinct categories: mainstream nightlife, residual spaces, and alternative spaces. Mainstream nightlife consists of well-established venues commonly found in large urban centers, representing the dominant urban nightlife culture. Residual spaces include long-standing traditional establishments such as pubs and taverns. Alternative spaces, in contrast, cater to niche cultural preferences and identities, including specific music genres, ethnic communities, or sexual orientations (Miyakubo, 2009), such as LGBT bars and nightclubs. Additionally, nightclubs vary in their musical offerings, spanning genres such as hard rock, pop, hip hop, jazz, R&B, techno, trance, and more (Voss, 2015).

Cape Town is recognized as a 24-hour city (Charman & Govender, 2020), with its vibrant bars and nightclubs playing a central role in its nightlife, setting it apart from other South African cities. The city’s cosmopolitan atmosphere often draws comparisons to some of the world's most renowned urban destinations (CCID, 2022). According to the State of Cape Town Central City Report, the Cape Town central business district (CBD) housed 3,302 businesses in 2023, with 1,305 operating within the leisure and entertainment sector (CCID, 2023). In recent years, several Cape Town bars and nightclubs have gained international recognition, ranking among the top 100 globally (Peyper, 2022). The city's mainstream nightlife is concentrated in high-density leisure and entertainment hubs such as Victoria Road in Camps Bay, Kloof Street in Gardens, Long Street and Bree Street in the CBD, and Lower Main Road in Observatory (Charman & Govender, 2020). At the same time, alternative leisure and entertainment venues catering to the LGBT community are located in suburban areas such as Zonnebloem, De Waterkant, Sea Point, and Green Point (Hattingh & Bruwer, 2020; Hattingh & Spencer, 2017, 2020).

## METHODS


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This study adopts an empirical and exploratory approach, employing a qualitative methodology to examine the factors influencing the success of LGBT bars and nightclubs in South Africa in the 21st century. It forms part of a broader investigation into LGBT leisure and entertainment audiences (see Hattingh, 2023).

A self-administered online survey was conducted using SurveyPlanet and comprised three sections. The first section collected sociodemographic data from participants, while the second employed a 5-point Likert scale to assess individuals' motives for visiting LGBT bars and nightclubs. The third section consisted of open-ended questions, inviting participants to identify factors they believe contribute to the success of LGBT bars and nightclubs in the 21st century. The findings presented in this paper focus exclusively on the third section. To enhance reliability and validity, the variables were adapted from prior validated leisure studies, specifically Hattingh (2018, 2022) and Hattingh and Niekerk (2020, 2022). The survey was administered in English.

Given the exploratory nature of the research, non-probability sampling techniques were employed, including convenience and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling involved distributing the survey link via the social media pages (Facebook, X [formerly Twitter], and Instagram) of various South African LGBT bars and nightclubs to reach LGBT nightclub visitors. Additionally, snowball sampling was used to extend the reach of the survey, as participants were encouraged to share the link with other South African LGBT nightclub visitors before submitting their responses. Data collection occurred over a three-month period, from June to August 2022, yielding a total sample of 341 respondents.

The qualitative data from the open-ended responses were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1977) to identify emerging themes. The application of grounded theory within hospitality research is well-documented (Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006), supporting its relevance to this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The typical respondent in this study was a single, gay, white male in his twenties or early thirties, holding a tertiary qualification and working either as a self-employed professional or in a management or executive position. Participants primarily visited LGBT leisure and entertainment venues with friends, typically in small groups, and were frequent patrons of LGBT bars and nightclubs in South Africa.

As discussed earlier, LGBT leisure and entertainment venues in a competitive postmodern society face increasing competition from traditional 'straight' and mixed-oriented venues in attracting a new generation of LGBT consumers. Understanding the preferences of both current and potential patrons is therefore crucial for sustaining these spaces (McCarthy & Jinnet, 2001). To effectively shape consumer behavior through strategic marketing, venue operators must first understand the factors influencing customers' choices, which in turn enhances their competitiveness in a crowded nightlife market (Swanson, Davis, and Zhao, 2008). In this study, respondents were asked to identify the key factors they believe contribute to the success of LGBT bars and nightclubs in the 21st century.

Most of the comments and suggestions received could be grouped into five factors: i) unique atmosphere and inclusive entertainment, ii) diverse experience representative of all in the LGBT community; iii) safe and inclusive spaces, iv) competitive prices, and v) efficient service from friendly and well-trained staff.

*Factor 1: Unique atmosphere and inclusive entertainment*

Respondents felt that in order to attract the post-modern consumer, LGBT bars and nightclubs would have to offer "… different music genre nights like Thursday's could be 80's music and Fridays could be a 90's night," which one respondent referred to as "old school classics" or "Golden oldies." He argued: "… If I walk into a gay bar, I want to feel the rhythm of the music and not like I'm listening to Kfm [a local radio station] on my way to work." Another respondent felt that some LGBT bars and nightclubs focused too much on the techno and deep-house genres, stating: "… a lot of the music is techno and deep-house. I want to hear classics like Beyonce, Taylor Swift, Rihanna and Madonna!" Similarly, another respondent commented: "Play more pop dance music, not always the hectic dance stuff [referring to electronic dance music (EDM)]."

Music seems to play a critical role in shaping the nightclub experience, fostering emotional and social connections among patrons. Buckland (2002) highlights the historical significance of music genres such as house, disco, and EDM in LGBT nightlife, which appear to differ from the above findings, while Kubacki et al. (2007) and Skinner, Moss, and Parfitt (2005) argue that carefully curated music contributes to a venue's distinct cultural identity.

Several respondents suggested "theme nights" to enhance the overall experience, as quoted: "… I would suggest embracing queer culture on a bigger scale, going beyond pure clubbing in order to create experiences and events that are fun but also encourage community and connection. I would suggest doing more to listen to the people who go there. As an example, look at Johannesburg's Babylon. They have a range of events that cater to different interests (pop night, hip hop night, karaoke, drag events etc.)," which relates to the comment made by another: "… they need


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to host different themed nights to cater for different sub-cultures." Baker (2018) and Hattingh and Niekerk (2022) highlight the centrality of drag entertainment in sustaining LGBT nightlife, while Lawrence (2004) found that themed nights enhance venue appeal by creating immersive, engaging experiences.

Successful LGBT bars and nightclubs can distinguish themselves by cultivating a unique atmosphere and offering diverse entertainment options that appeal to various subcultures within the LGBT community. Frohlick and Migliardi (2021) emphasize the importance of culturally relevant programming in attracting and retaining patrons. A significant contributor to this distinctive atmosphere is the venue's entertainment offering—particularly drag performances, themed nights, and carefully curated music of different genres—which together foster a sense of belonging and cultural resonance among attendees.

*Factor 2: A diverse experience representative of all in the LGBT community*

More than two decades ago, Sender (2002) described how marketers actively constructed the "ideal gay consumer"—a figure characterized by Coon (2012) and Kates (1998) as a young, white, muscular, attractive, and financially stable gay male. At the time, this "discerning gay man" was seen as the most marketable image for advertizers (Sender, 2002). Excluded from this ideal were individuals at the so-called "extremes" of the LGBT spectrum—such as "dykes on bikes," "drag queens," and "butch leather boys"—who were perceived as the "scary homosexuals" and often represented the stereotypical image of the LGBT community (Clarke, 2000; Hughes, 2006).

A large number of respondents in this study felt that some LGBT bars and nightclubs, perhaps unintentionally, failed to create inclusive spaces for people of all races, gender identities, and sexual orientations. Crew Bar, a well-known LGBT bar in Cape Town, was repeatedly cited in the qualitative feedback. One participant noted: "... we need to address the fact that the post-modern LGBT isn't white and isn't gender conforming. We need to remove these exclusive white cis homosexual spaces and invite more people of color. By inviting more people of color, we can start with this post-modern LGBT nightlife. If we take Crew Bar at any given night, there will be more white cis homosexual males than any other race group." Another echoed this concern: "... The concept of Crew Bar is for white patrons. The barmen are all white, the person standing at the door is white, and the music is aimed at the white gay, lesbian, bisexual and straight patrons. The pictures across the club were just of white people and you would hardly see people of color. The whole outlook is white. Crew to me is a very racist club, that's just what I think."

Other comments focused on diversity among staff. Several respondents suggested greater LGBT representation in staffing—particularly in terms of gender and race. One participant suggested: "... have women dancers as well," noting that most LGBT bars feature only male dancers. Another added: "... have more variety of go-go dancers in terms of race." Similarly, a respondent commented: "... I think representation is very important in our community, so I would like to see more LGBT staff members, specifically bartenders, working at the bar," implying that many staff members in LGBT venues are heterosexual and used as a form of attraction for gay male patrons.

Furthermore, several respondents expressed the need for LGBT venues to be more inclusive of identities beyond cisgender gay men. For instance, one participant stated that LGBT bars and nightclubs should be "... more representative of all the LGBT members and not just gay men," suggesting the inclusion of "... more transgender and female queer individuals, as it is very male orientated." These findings are consistent with the demographic profile of the study's respondents, most whom were white gay men.

As societal acceptance of LGBT individuals grows, many LGBT nightlife venues have shifted from being exclusively "gay" to more broadly "queer" spaces, catering to a wider range of identities (Nash, 2015). While this broader inclusivity can expand audience reach, it is essential that these venues maintain a distinct LGBT identity to ensure they remain affirming, culturally specific spaces. Their ability to adapt to evolving social and cultural dynamics is, therefore, a key factor in their continued success in the 21st century.

*Factor 3: Safe and inclusive spaces*

Research by Mattson (2023) highlights the historical significance of LGBT bars as sites of community-building and resistance, while Brown (2017) emphasizes that these venues thrive when they foster a sense of belonging among patrons who share similar lived experiences and cultural references. LGBT leisure and entertainment venues have traditionally served as safe havens, enabling individuals to express themselves freely without fear of discrimination or harassment (Hattingh & Bruwer, 2020). A key determinant of success for these venues is the presence of a like-minded community that nurtures belonging, shared cultural expression, and mutual support. Several studies point to


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the importance of "the right people" in the decision to visit a bar or nightclub (Kubacki et al., 2007; Skinner et al., 2008).

A number of respondents in this study identified safety as a critical factor for a successful LGBT bar or nightclub. One participant stated that a successful venue is "where the security will make sure by all means you are safe and do not get in harm's way." Another respondent emphasized the importance of a safe space for diversity and inclusivity: "create an environment where people feel completely safe and secure to be themselves and express their identity in whatever way they feel." It appears that, for an LGBT bar or nightclub to be truly successful, safety must extend beyond the physical boundaries of the venue itself. One participant commented, "… once you leave the front door it's like the wild west," while another recalled being "… mugged several times outside the bar."

Many scholars argue that, beyond physical space, the social fabric of LGBT venues plays a crucial role in their sustainability (Hilderbrand, 2023). Unlike mainstream nightlife, LGBT venues often function as sites of collective identity formation and affirmation. Moreover, research by Casey (2020) found that LGBT nightlife venues that actively implement anti-harassment policies are more successful in retaining patrons. Ensuring safety through strict security measures, zero-tolerance policies, and comprehensive staff training is therefore essential for maintaining a welcoming and inclusive environment.

*Factor 4: Competitive prices*

There is evidence in the literature indicating that LGBT bars and nightclubs have historically charged higher prices compared to mainstream venues, often due to external pressures such as gentrification. As neighborhoods gentrify, rents and operational expenses for venues rise, resulting in higher prices for consumers. This escalation can make these spaces less accessible, particularly to marginalized members of the community, effectively pricing them out and altering the social fabric of these venues (Mérida, 2024). Hattingh and Bruwer (2020) discuss how the De Waterkant gay village in Cape Town has experienced gentrification, contributing to such price increases.

Respondents in this study emphasized that in order to attract and retain the post-modern LGBT consumer and compete effectively with mainstream bars and nightclubs, attention must be paid to the pricing structure at LGBT venues. This factor was one of the most frequently raised in the feedback. A number of respondents expressed concern over both beverage prices and entrance fees. One respondent noted, "… beverages are ridiculously expensive and so is the entrance, so those tariffs need to be lowered." Another suggested that bars and nightclubs should "… go into a partnership with other clubs and bars in the area where one can buy a pass that gives one access to all participating clubs/bars on the night, because a lot of people do club hopping, and this will bring more feet to the establishments." One respondent mentioned that, "… prices often seem inconsistent and fluctuated throughout the night," while another echoed this sentiment, stating: "… a set price list with a working till system is needed so customers don't pay whatever the bartender wants." A final comment regarding pricing noted that charging "… a cover charge when the club is empty does not sit well," and that "… student discounts would help a lot with entrance and drinks" to attract the post-modern LGBT consumer.

Price is a key determinant of theoretical demand (Mankiw, 2018). In the food and beverage literature, studies have shown that a reasonable perceived price can enhance customer satisfaction across multiple dimensions, including food quality, service quality, and the overall physical environment. These factors, in turn, significantly and indirectly influence customers' purchase intentions (Ryu & Han, 2009). As such, implementing a competitive pricing strategy emerges as a critical factor that can influence the success or failure of LGBT bars and nightclubs.

*Factor 5: Efficient service from friendly and well-trained staff*

Recent literature highlights the importance of efficient service in LGBT nightclubs, emphasizing that LGBT-friendly practices enhance customer perceptions and increase patrons' likelihood of returning. Several respondents made reference to the importance of well-trained and representative staff. While specific studies focusing exclusively on bartenders in LGBT nightclubs are limited, broader hospitality literature underscores the crucial role of frontline staff in shaping customer experiences (Duque et al., 2020).

One respondent shared a recent experience at an LGBT bar, stating: "Some barmen are very off-putting. There appears to be a lack of interest in serving people (unless they are women), inconsistent drinks (the ratio of vodka to Red Bull vastly differs), and prices charged are often inconsistent." Another respondent suggested that LGBT bars need "hot barmen from all races that flirt even if they are not gay." Bartenders, often serving as the primary point of contact, play a critical role in establishing an inclusive and welcoming environment. Their ability to engage positively with patrons can significantly influence customer satisfaction and loyalty (Mitchum, 2017).

Additionally, one respondent stated: "Stop using the straight bartenders to woo the gay men. It's degrading to the bartenders because they are straight, and all the ladies then come to try to get with the bartenders." This highlights the perception that, for an LGBT bar to be successful, it should employ gay or, at the very least, gay-friendly staff. Taylor (2024) explores the role of LGBT hospitality workers in cultivating inclusive and welcoming environments, noting


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that these employees often draw on their own lived experiences to foster a positive atmosphere—an essential element for customer satisfaction and loyalty. Gay or gay-friendly bartenders are therefore integral to maintaining safe, inclusive, and enjoyable LGBT nightlife spaces. Where heterosexual staff are employed, comprehensive LGBT awareness training is critical to ensure that these venues remain inclusive and affirming, particularly as patron demographics and expectations continue to evolve.

## CONCLUSION

LGBT bars and nightclubs have long served as crucial social and cultural hubs for LGBT communities, offering safe spaces for self-expression, socialization, and activism (Mattson, 2023). However, in the 21st century, these venues face increasing challenges, including the growing acceptance of LGBT identities in mainstream nightlife, shifting consumer preferences, and external pressures such as gentrification (Nash, 2015). The decline of dedicated LGBT venues in many cities has raised concerns about the loss of LGBT-specific spaces, prompting an examination of the factors that contribute to their sustained success.

Despite the significance of LGBT nightlife, limited academic literature explores the specific success factors for LGBT bars and nightclubs in South Africa. From a social sciences perspective, this study's exploration of the key factors influencing the success of LGBT bars and nightclubs in South Africa contributes to the broader hospitality and leisure literature. Although there is a growing body of services marketing research on the NTE, including marketing to LGBT patrons, there remains a significant gap in scholarship regarding the needs and preferences of LGBT nightclub patrons in South Africa. This paper helps to address this gap by identifying the core drivers of LGBT venue success in a South African context. Understanding these elements can provide valuable insights for venue operators seeking to enhance their competitive positioning and maintain relevance in an increasingly fragmented LGBT nightlife landscape.

In practical terms, the success of LGBT nightlife venues in the 21st century depends on their ability to balance tradition with innovation. These venues must adapt to the evolving social dynamics while preserving their role as inclusive and affirming spaces. By maintaining safety and inclusivity, offering a unique atmosphere and diverse entertainment, ensuring fair pricing, fostering representation across the LGBT spectrum, and providing efficient, friendly service, these establishments can remain viable and competitive in a changing nightlife landscape.

Understanding these success factors is essential for ensuring that LGBT nightlife continues to serve as a vital site of LGBT cultural expression and identity formation, while also distinguishing itself from mainstream alternatives. Although the findings presented in this study are not universally representative of all LGBT patrons, the empirical evidence points to a shifting South African landscape—one that requires a reimagined LGBT nightlife offering capable of attracting the post-modern LGBT consumer and securing the future of these important cultural spaces.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

A key limitation of this study lies in its reliance on a convenience sample, which constrains the generalizability of the findings to broader LGBT bars and nightclubs. While the research provides meaningful insight into the evolving bar and nightclub preferences of the post-modern LGBT patron, it does not fully capture the nuanced experiences and identities within this diverse community. Therefore, future research is encouraged to delve deeper into these complexities, particularly by employing more representative sampling techniques. Additionally, comparative studies across different socio-economic and cultural contexts within the Global South would offer valuable perspectives. Exploring LGBT nightlife through multidisciplinary lenses—such as management, economics, and marketing—could further enrich understanding and support the development of sustainable, inclusive, and competitive nightlife offerings in other emerging LGBT urban scenes.

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# INVESTIGATING AGRITOURISM NARRATIVES THROUGH MULTI-METHODS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates narrative coherence in South Tyrol's agritourism, focusing on discrepancies between destination management organizations (DMOs) and SMEs' social media narratives. It explores dominant themes, stakeholder perceptions, and alignment with expectations through a multi-method qualitative approach, combining content analysis of social media with interviews and focus groups. South Tyrol, a leading agritourism destination, offers an ideal context for examining how fragmented narratives impact destination marketing. Findings aim to reveal gaps between stakeholder aspirations and online narratives, providing insights to enhance collaboration, improve narrative consistency, and strengthen the portrayal of agritourism destinations.

**Key Words:** narratives, destination image, agritourism, content analysis, South Tyrol, social media

Narratives are central to tourism, playing a critical role in shaping destination images and enriching visitor experiences (Can et al., 2025). This is particularly true for agritourism, a growing sector of tourism, increasingly popular among tourists seeking sustainable and meaningful rural experiences, with heightened interest in less crowded, nature-focused destinations (Palmi and Lezzi, 2020). However, this sector is often characterized by fragmented micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Grillini et al., 2023), presenting challenges in delivering a cohesive destination image. Despite its increasing popularity, the alignment between the narratives created by destination management organizations (DMOs) and those presented by SMEs on social media remains underexplored.

This ongoing study will address three questions: (1) What are the dominant themes and narratives presented by agritourism SMEs on social media? (2) How do DMOs and other stakeholders perceive these narratives? (3) To what extent do these narratives align with the expectations of key stakeholders? By addressing these questions, the research aims to examine the dynamics of narrative creation and its implications for effective destination marketing. The study context, South Tyrol (Italy), is an ideal case study due to its established reputation as a leading agritourism destination, offering diverse rural experiences. It is the leading region in Italy for agritourism density and ranks second in the total number of enterprises (Grillini et al., 2025). The region's emphasis on sustainable tourism and its network of SMEs makes it a compelling setting for investigating the interplay of local narratives and destination image design.

This study examines the coherence of agritourism narratives in South Tyrol, focusing on discrepancies between the narratives designed by key stakeholders and those conveyed online by agritourism SMEs. Using a multi-method qualitative approach, the research addresses the interplay between the narratives expected by DMOs and the actual narratives emerging on social media. It seeks to provide insights into how these (mis)alignments impact the creation of a unified and compelling agritourism destination image. The research is structured into two main phases. The first one will analyze social media content to identify dominant themes and narratives presented by agritourism through a


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content analysis of visual and textual data (Camprubi and Coromina, 2016). This session will uncover the current state of narratives in the sector, offering a comprehensive overview of prevailing themes and how they reflect agritourism offerings. The second phase will consist of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with DMOs, agritourism network managers, and other stakeholders. This session aims to explore stakeholders' expectations, evaluate their satisfaction with existing narratives, and identify opportunities for narrative improvement.
The findings are expected to reveal potential gaps between stakeholder aspirations and the narratives delivered online, showing where challenges in achieving narrative coherence in agritourism are more significant. Understanding these discrepancies provides actionable insights into improving collaboration between DMOs and SMEs, ultimately fostering a more consistent and engaging portrayal of agritourism destinations. This research contributes to both theoretical and practical discussions on narrative alignment in tourism, emphasizing the importance of coordinated efforts in constructing and delivering destination images.

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# CULTURE AND STEREOTYPES EFFECTS ON DESTINATION IMAGE

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural traits strongly shape tourists' choices, behaviors, experiences, and perceived destination images. This study uses traveler-generated content to explore cultural differences and stereotypes´ influence on destination image. Adopting a semiotic perspective, TripAdvisor travel reviews were analyzed using language as a cultural assessment variable. South Tyrol was selected to investigate destination image as perceived by Italian and German speaking domestic tourists. Results show differences with respect to the cultural origin of domestic tourists. The study highlights the usefulness of semiotics and social media analytics to explore cultural differences in perceived destination images.

**Key Words:** Destination image; semiotic; cross-cultural research; online travel reviews; stereotypes; social media analytics.

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Tourism destination image (TDI) is a multifaceted construct, as it is influenced by a wide range of factors and sources of information (Pan et al., 2021; Yilmaz & Yilmaz, 2020), as well as by tourists' cultural backgrounds, understandings and preconceived notions about places and people. Cultural characteristics play a significant role in shaping how destinations are perceived (Volo, 2004), while stereotypes can further distort these perceptions (Tung et al., 2020). Given these influences, it is essential to consider both culture and stereotypes when examining TDI. To foster a more accurate understanding of how destination images are formed, it is important to explore the ways in which cultural context and stereotypical beliefs affect tourists' perceptions and evaluations of destinations.

This study investigates the roles of culture and stereotypes through a semiotic lens, with three main objectives: (a) to develop a conceptual model of TDI grounded in semiotic theory, (b) to examine how cross-cultural differences and stereotypes shape TDI through the use of language as a cultural assessment variable, and (c) to evaluate the effectiveness of online travel reviews in uncovering cultural dimensions and influences.

Tourists' perceptions of TDI has been significantly impacted by social media and online travel reviews (OTRs) (Pan et al., 2021; Volo, 2018). In this context, social media analytics have emerged as a valuable tool for exploring cultural and cross-cultural influences on tourist behavior (D'Acunto & Volo, 2021; Galati & Galati, 2019). Furthermore, the texts and images shared on social platforms play a key role in shaping meaning and influencing perceptions (Arefieva et al., 2021; Tresidder, 2011). When analyzed through a semiotic framework, this content offers deeper insights into the cultural dynamics and stereotypes embedded in destination imagery (Arefieva et al., 2021; Hunter, 2016, 2022).


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For this study, South Tyrol (Italy) was chosen as the context to explore how diverse cultural backgrounds influence destination image, due to the region's bilingual population and dual cultural identity (IDM, 2019). A total of 4,508 TripAdvisor reviews written by domestic tourists between 2011 and January 2020 were collected using a web scraping tool, including 898 in German and 3,610 in Italian. Both textual and paratextual elements were extracted and systematically organized. Following initial data preprocessing, all reviews were translated into English (Aiken, 2019; Vanjani & Aiken, 2020). Tourist attractions and activities mentioned in the reviews were categorized, and sentiment analysis was applied to assess the polarity and intensity of emotions expressed in the texts, providing insights into visitor satisfaction. Additionally, the data were examined for the presence of stereotypes to understand their role in shaping destination perceptions.

The semiotic significance of online travel reviews (OTRs) in depicting the destination becomes evident through the Germans' stronger connection to their historical roots. The findings support the idea that destination image is relative—both subjective and comparative (Marine-Roig, 2021). Interestingly, the positive emotional and evaluative language used by German reviewers challenges common stereotypes to some extent. This research advances the understanding of tourism destination image as a collective construct, moving beyond individual perceptions to focus on group-based views and their associated ethnic stereotypes. It also demonstrates that semiotic analysis is a valuable method for interpreting tourism reviews, particularly in cross-cultural contexts.

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# THE EFFECTS OF VIRTUAL REALITY ON TOURIST EXPERIENCES: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### INTRODUCTION

This research explores the effects of Virtual Reality (VR) on tourist experiences through a systematic literature review, highlighting VR's potential to transform tourism by enhancing experiences and addressing both its benefits and limitations. VR technology distinguishes itself from other Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by offering a fully immersive experience that simulates real-world scenarios, with a strong emphasis on visual engagement. As VR technology advances, it reshape how tourists interact with travel experiences and explore new environments, bringing changes to methodological approaches and social behaviors. Since both tourism and VR are inherently visual, understanding their interaction is crucial for advancing research and practice in the tourism industry.

### METHODOLOGY

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted following the PRISMA guidelines and completed in September 2024. Data were collected from Scopus, retrieving 964 records published from 2010 to 2024, including journal articles (theoretical and empirical), book chapters, and conference proceedings. Records were screened based on titles, abstracts, and keywords; publications unrelated to Virtual Reality or Tourist Experience were excluded. Studies that used Virtual Reality in their research were included. A total of 54 records were analyzed in detail, with 45 articles selected for final analysis. The analysis focuses on the following key objectives: identifying tourism areas explored through VR and sectors that have adopted VR; reviewing studies employing VR headsets and other technologies; and investigating the positive and negative impacts of VR on tourist experiences.

### RESULTS

Preliminary findings demonstrate VR's transformative potential in tourism research, addressing key challenges and emerging trends. Positive impacts include enhancing pre-travel experiences, influencing travel decisions, and allowing tourists to preview destinations virtually. However, high costs and limited accessibility remain significant barriers. Studies involve diverse participant samples, ranging from students to international tourists. Several empirical studies have used VR as a research instrument for data collection and hypothesis testing, employing devices such as the Oculus BOBO VR (Pratisto, et al., 2023) and the VIVE (Robaina-Calderín, et al., 2023), with some incorporating additional methods such as skin conductance measurement and drone techniques. These technologies effectively measure emotional responses and engagement, providing insights into tourist reactions to stimuli, and their preferences and behaviors. The review identifies VR applications, particularly in virtual museums and cultural tourism, which offer access to otherwise inaccessible sites.

### CONCLUSION


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This ongoing study emphasizes VR's potential to reshape tourist experiences in both research and practice. While it cannot replace physical travel, VR enhances tourism by increasing engagement, accessibility, and opportunities for stakeholders. Its integration supports tourists and benefits areas such as marketing, education, and sustainability, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic future for tourism industry.

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# TOURISM PROMOTION THROUGH TRAVEL INFLUENCERS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THEIR COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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## ABSTRACT

This preliminary study explores how travel influencers use Instagram to promote destinations. Through a content analysis of messages and visuals shared in 2025, it identifies common communication strategies and outlines a methodology for evaluating their relation to user engagement. The proposed approach offers a solid framework for future studies in tourism marketing and digital communication.

**Key Words:** Instagram, travel influencers, content analysis, tourism marketing, social media, user engagement

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has been profoundly transformed by the rise of social media. Platforms such as Instagram have become essential tools for communication, branding, and consumer engagement in tourism. Influencers—individuals who have built a dedicated following and who can affect the purchasing decisions of others—play a pivotal role in this transformation (Sigala, 2018). Their ability to personalize content and generate trust with their audiences makes them attractive partners for destinations and brands seeking to promote their offerings (Mariani et al., 2022).

In recent years, user-generated content (UGC) and influencer-generated content (IGC) have become increasingly central to how potential tourists gather information and form expectations about destinations. Influencers not only offer inspiration and aspiration through their carefully curated posts, but they also provide a sense of authenticity and relatability that traditional marketing campaigns may lack (Abidin, 2018). This evolution challenges conventional notions of tourism promotion and calls for a deeper understanding of how content is being produced, shared, and received (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016).

Moreover, the attention economy fostered by social media platforms encourages influencers to optimize content not only for aesthetic value but also for algorithmic visibility and audience engagement. This results in content strategies that blend emotional storytelling with subtle branding, calls to action, and varied representations of destinations (Casaló et al., 2020; Kay et al., 2020). Given this context, researchers and practitioners alike must consider how different content types perform in terms of visibility, credibility, and interaction (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Despite the growing number of studies exploring social media's role in tourism, there is a lack of systematic research that dissects the communication strategies used by travel influencers. Most existing studies focus on broad marketing outcomes or consumer responses without examining the content features and communicative choices made by influencers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Furthermore, few studies adopt a quantitative approach to categorizing influencer content based on predefined variables and supported by robust methodological frameworks (Lindgren, 2021).

This research addresses that gap by analyzing what types of content formats, destination portrayals, and communication intentions are most commonly employed by top travel influencers. It also explores how these content features relate to user engagement, as measured through likes and comments. The central research question is: What type of communication used by travel influencers on Instagram is most associated with higher levels of user interaction?

The study offers a preliminary framework that can be used to assess influencer communication patterns and their effectiveness in promoting tourism content. The insights gained may help not only to understand influencer impact, but also to guide destination marketing organizations (DMOs) in designing more effective collaborations and content strategies.


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## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social media influencers (SMIs) are increasingly recognized as powerful opinion leaders in the digital age (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). Their perceived authenticity, relatability, and aesthetic presentation can shape consumer attitudes and behaviors (Abidin, 2018). In tourism, where the experiential and visual dimensions are central, influencers serve as both storytellers and curators of destination image (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Their influence can be amplified by algorithmic visibility and user engagement mechanisms inherent in platforms like Instagram.

Instagram is particularly relevant due to its visual-first interface, interactive features, and strong engagement rates in travel-related content. Studies have shown that images of landscapes, travel tips, personal stories, and destination highlights are among the most engaging types of content shared by influencers (Mariani et al., 2022). Influencers thus act as digital intermediaries who not only share content but co-create meaning and experiences with their audiences (Sigala, 2018).

The credibility and impact of influencers have been linked to various factors: follower count, visual aesthetics, authenticity, and alignment with audience values (De Veirman et al., 2017; Kay et al., 2020). The effectiveness of influencer communication is also influenced by the type of content format (e.g., image, reel, carousel), narrative style (e.g., inspirational, commercial), and whether the post contains a call to action (CTA). Lou and Yuan (2019) emphasize the role of message value and perceived credibility in influencing consumer trust and engagement.

Additionally, influencer content plays a key role in the co-creation of destination images, shaping how potential tourists perceive a place even before visiting it. UGC (User-Generated Content), especially when posted by influencers, often integrates emotional, informative, and promotional dimensions that serve to build a desirable image of the destination (Gretzel et al., 2006; Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2021). These contents help reduce uncertainty and encourage travel decisions by providing authentic, peer-endorsed portrayals.

Recent research also emphasizes the distinction between different influencer personas—such as aspirational, relatable, or expert—and how each influences audience perception and engagement (Casaló et al., 2020). This is relevant to understanding not only what content is posted, but how it is communicated and interpreted. The concept of parasocial interaction further supports the idea that followers develop perceived relationships with influencers, increasing the persuasive power of their posts (Labrecque, 2014).

Despite growing interest, few studies have used a standardized deductive approach to analyze influencer content at scale. Traditional content analysis methods can be limited by subjectivity and time constraints. With the increasing availability of digital tools, there is an opportunity to improve consistency, replicability, and scalability in social media research. Lindgren (2021) advocates for integrating computational tools into qualitative and quantitative analyses, especially in the study of digital communication.

This research therefore contributes to two main areas: (1) the systematization of influencer communication analysis based on theoretically grounded categories, and (2) the development of a replicable methodological framework to improve content analysis in the tourism domain.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a deductive content analysis framework. The dataset comprises 1,107 Instagram posts published between January and May 2025 by ten leading English-speaking travel influencers. These influencers were selected based on their presence in recognized industry rankings, high follower counts, and active engagement in tourism-related content.

Each Instagram post was analyzed for both textual and visual components. The main variables of analysis were:

Content Format (Image, Reel, Carousel) — Reflecting Instagram's core formats.


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Type of Destination (Beach/Coast, Urban, Natural non-coastal, Cultural/Heritage) — Informed by classifications in tourism destination studies (Mariani et al., 2022).

Communication Intention (Inspirational, Informative, Personal/Testimonial, Commercial/Promotional) — Drawing from narrative analysis in digital communication (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Call to Action (CTA) (Yes/No) — Identified through the presence of direct or indirect user prompts (Kay et al., 2020).

User Interaction — Quantified by aggregating likes and comments on each post.

The classification of content into categories was carried out using a rule-based interpretation guided by criteria extracted from the literature. The textual content and image descriptions were jointly interpreted to categorize destination type, while the presence of CTAs was determined from textual cues. Posts that could not be reliably categorized were excluded from the analytical sample.

The processed dataset allows for the application of various statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to present frequencies for each category. Chi-square tests were proposed to explore relationships between variables such as content format and destination type, or CTA presence and communication intention. Additionally, the Kruskal-Wallis test was proposed to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in median interaction across the content categories, taking into account the non-normal distribution of interaction data.

This is a preliminary phase of a broader research project. Future stages will expand the dataset, refine the categories, and validate the findings with qualitative analysis and cross-platform comparisons.

## CONCLUSION

The methodological design proposed in this preliminary study demonstrates the potential of combining theory-driven content categorization with statistical analysis in the field of digital tourism communication. It enables a systematic examination of influencer-generated content while maintaining transparency and reproducibility.

The classification framework, based on literature-backed categories, supports consistency and comparability across studies. Additionally, the integration of non-parametric statistics ensures the robustness of the findings in light of the specific nature of social media data.

This approach lays the groundwork for future research aimed at understanding the evolving role of influencers in tourism promotion. It can guide both academic investigations and strategic decision-making in digital marketing practices.

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# FACTORS AFFECTING GEN Z VISIT INTENTIONS OF URBAN TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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## ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

Generation Z has grown to become a significant global tourism market for many destinations. Their contribution to international tourist arrivals is poised to grow in the future, positioning them to become one of the most important demographic group in the tourism industry. Regardless of the potential Generation Z has for international tourism, little is known about their travel preferences, especially in the context of Global South Destinations.

### OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of the study is to investigate factors affecting Generation Z's choice and visit intentions of urban tourist destinations. More specifically, the study aims to ascertain urban tourism preferences of Generation Z travellers and provides insights into what drives their decision-making process in destination choice.

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

A stratified random sampling technique based on respondents' age group was employed and a survey was administered to 290 Generation Z respondents in urban tourist destinations in Zimbabwe. Descriptive statistics, One-Way ANOVA and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) were done with the aid of SPSS (29) to gain an in-depth understanding of factors affecting Generation Z's choice of urban tourism destinations.

### FINDINGS

The findings of the study reveal that Generation Z visits intentions of urban tourism destinations are affected by factors such as the urban cultural experiences, perceived ease of access to the destination and the attractiveness of the destination. In addition, the results indicate that the overall visual appeal and ambience of an urban tourist destination, sustainable and eco-friendly activities, exploring local cuisine and the presence of vibrant entertainment and nightlife significantly influence the choice of urban tourism destinations by Generation Z travellers.

### THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The findings of this study add to the growing literature debates on Generation Z's destination preferences and factors affecting their destination choice from a Global South Perspective.

### PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The study provides insights to destination managers, policymakers and other tourism practitioners on the Generation Z decision-making process. This helps in tailoring appropriate marketing strategies to this demographic group in a way that increases traffic to urban tourist destinations.


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**Key Words:** Generation Z; Visit intentions; destination Choice; Urban Tourism.


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# FACTORS SHAPING SPECTATORS' CONSUMPTION PATTERNS: CONTROVERSIAL ARISINGS FROM AN INTERNATIONAL SPORT TOURISM EVENT

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## ABSTRACT

This investigation aimed to study the profile and shaping factors of the consumption patterns of the several types of NRS in international surf tourism events. A total of 263 questionnaires was applied to the NRS of the EDP Vissla Pro Ericeira 2022. This study provided knowledge on the profile and shaping factors of NRS that can be used strategically for destination development, and others with similar events. Additionally, the results supported the importance of 'casuals' and 'extensioners' as a source of intangible economic benefits, highlighting the advantage of a NRS's integrative analysis of economic benefits (tangible and intangible).

Keywords: Economic benefits, Profile and consumption patterns, Spectators, Sport event, Surf tourism.

Coastal tourism, which includes surf tourism, represents the largest economic share of the sectors that economically exploit the European ocean asset, contributing to the development of the destinations' local economy. Ericeira (Portugal) has been a world surfing reserve for over ten years, whose status is recognized by local stakeholders for its positive and direct impact on local development because it increases tourist flows. The financial flows caused by non-resident spectators (NRS) are a substantial source of direct economic benefits generated by sport events in the host local economy. Nevertheless, research on surf tourism has mainly focused on the characteristics and expenditures of active surf tourists, while literature based on the events' spectators is scarce. Thus, this investigation aimed to study the profile and shaping factors of the consumption patterns of the several types of NRS in international surf tourism events.

A total of 263 questionnaires was applied to the NRS of an international surf event - EDP Vissla Pro Ericeira 2022, at the host event zone, during all days of the event. The questionnaires were randomly applied with the paper and pen, or using Microsoft Forms for which a QR code was provided. The identification of the NRS profile and the predictive factors of their total expenditure were performed through the correlation of factors and multiple linear regression, respectively, using IBM SPSS Statistics v.28.0 software.

Mostly, the event attracted generation Y NRS, with a high level of education, and regular sport practice. The results showed differences among the NRS: (i) 'casuals' included more women than men; (ii) 'extensioners' integrated the NRS whose surfing practice is higher; (iii) 'event visitors'/'time switchers' mostly integrated the domestic tourism flows; (iv) 'casuals' and 'extensioners' spent the most at the destination, and those whose intention to recommend/revisit the destination was higher; and (v) the shaping factor that most influenced the increase in NRS expenditure was the overnight stay, added by older age, higher education level and foreign origin.

Considering the several types of NRS, according to the methodological recommendations, the evaluation of the direct economic impact of the event should only quantify the expenses incurred by spectators at the destination directly related to the event; consequently, both the expenses of 'casuals' and of 'extensioners' who are not associated with the extension of the stay, should not be considered in the referred calculation. However, regardless



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of the initial motivation that led to the trip to the destination, the results verified that 'casuals' and 'extensioners' spectators are of relevant importance as a source of intangible economic benefits (i.e. recommending/revisiting the destination). Consequently, the study of economic benefits (tangible and intangible) provided by sport events in destinations should be guided by an integrative analysis of NRS.

This study illuminated the need to debate the exclusion of some categories (i.e. 'casuals'/'extensioners') of NRS in the study of the economic benefits of sport events. Additionally, it provided knowledge on the profile and shaping factors of NRS that can be used strategically for destination development, and others with similar events.

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# MARKETING TRANSFORMATIVE EVENT EXPERIENCES: ARCHETYPES AND IMAGERY FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

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## ABSTRACT

Transformative experiences are increasingly the focus of festival and event designers. In business event contexts, attendees often redefine their mindset, attitudes, and practices following a transformative event experience. Current research primarily studies the factors that trigger transformation, and highlights the principles of intentional design for change. But there is much less focus on the marketing of transformative events. Using a two-step method that involves free-hand image drawing and sentence completion pre- and post-event, this study explores how transformation is represented in the symbols and words associated with brand archetypes in transformative events. Analysis reveals dominant associations with three out of eight brand archetypes: Sage, Explorer, and Magician. Implications for research and event marketing practice are provided. Using archetype association narratives and transformative imagery represents a novel approach to marketing the unique nature of transformative events.

Highlights
- Transformative experiences (TEs) as an opportunity for the business events sector
- Symbolic associations with TEs elicited through drawings and sentence completion
- Sage, Explorer, and Magician are the main archetypes in transformative events

**Key Words:** Transformative events; event design; brand archetypes; marketing; visual methods.


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# RETHINKING LEISURE SPACES FOR SUSTAINABLE MARKETING: EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR AUDIENCES IN PERFORMING ARTS

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### BACKGROUND

United Nations declared the theme for 2024's International Day of Older People as "Ageing with Dignity" as the world's older persons are expected to surpass the younger in 2030, making care and support of senior citizens a pressing social sustainability issue (United Nations, 2024). While elderly wellbeing and social inclusion of senior citizens in services is an increasingly researched area (Du, 2013; Galiana & Haseltine, 2019; Čaić, Odekerken-Schröder, & Mahr, 2018; Padrón Nápoles, Gachet Páez, Esteban Penelas, García Pérez, García Santacruz, & Martín de Pablos, 2020), research on the relationship between social sustainability, social inclusion, and elderly participation in leisure activities—specifically in the performing arts—remains limited, even in developed countries. As social sustainability is often overshadowed by environmental sustainability, leading to a lack of awareness and action toward its social aspects, healthy aging is frequently reduced to physical well-being, neglecting cognitive, mental, and spiritual dimensions. In terms of subjective wellbeing, leisure participation has been shown to be a catalyst in older adults (Adams, 2010; Ryu, 2016; Zhang 2017). However, the role leisure activities play in the social inclusion of older adults in the society is under-researched. This study addresses this gap by critically evaluating the social inclusivity of artistic leisure spaces – particularly performing arts venues - for senior audiences and examining the implications of current marketing paradigms, particularly segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP), on social inclusion.

Existing marketing paradigms often fail to account for the specific needs of senior citizens, instead reinforcing exclusionary practices. While targeting is widely considered the most efficient marketing approach, it risks further marginalizing already vulnerable groups if inclusivity is not an integral part of the strategy. The study questions whether current audience development techniques in the performing arts contribute to or hinder a socially inclusive society and explores the potential for a new, socially inclusive marketing paradigm. It argues that while socially inclusive practices are inherently socially sustainable, not all socially sustainable practices are necessarily inclusive. As such, marketing solutions designed for special groups like the elderly must integrate inclusion to avoid perpetuating discrimination. Therefore, this study assesses the inclusivity of leisure spaces based on four dimensions of social inclusion—access, participation, empowerment, and representation—while simultaneously critiquing and rethinking marketing strategies in the context of social sustainability.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Aim of this study is two-fold: i) evaluating social inclusivity of a leisure space (specifically performing arts venues) within the social inclusion framework, and ii) critiquing existing marketing paradigms pertinent to segmentation, targeting and positioning (audience development) from a social inclusivity perspective and offer a new paradigm of sustainable marketing. Specific research questions are:


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- What does senior citizens' participation in artistic leisure – specifically performing arts attendance – mean in terms of their social inclusion in society?
- What are barriers to their attendance and hence social inclusion?
- How can current marketing paradigms facilitate a socially inclusive society through the inclusion of senior citizens in artistic leisure?
-

## METHODOLOGY

In order for an in-depth and multidimensional understanding of the experience of senior audiences the study employed mixed methodology involving the perspectives of multiple parties, namely senior audiences, service providers, performing artists and general audience.
The methodological techniques included i) semi-structured interviews with senior audiences (n=15), ii) performing artists, service providers, medical professionals (n=25) ii) surveys with general audiences (n=305), iii) on-site observations, and iv) review of related documents from performing art institutions.

## FINDINGS

Evaluating the performing art participation of the elderly population as a form of leisure activity from a social inclusion perspective, this study shows that this participation plays a crucial role in fostering well-being among senior citizens, yet various structural and cultural barriers restrict their access, representation, empowerment and participation. Furthermore, even though these barriers are overcome, current marketing and audience development techniques in the performing arts may hinder a fully socially inclusive leisure. Findings indicate that while socially inclusive practices are inherently socially sustainable, not all socially sustainable practices are necessarily inclusive for the elderly population. As such, marketing solutions designed for special groups like the elderly must integrate inclusion to avoid perpetuating existing divides and exclusionary practices in the society. This study finally points to the fact that inclusion must extend to the disciplinary and methodological approaches, bringing together various social and positive scientists for sustainable solutions in leisure participation and ultimately a socially inclusive society.

**Keywords:** Leisure, social sustainability, audience development, segmentation, marketing.


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# SECTION 12: HOSPITALITY AND FINANCE TOURISM ECONOMICS AND FORECASTING, GOVERNMENT INVENTION IN TOURISM


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# DETERMINANTS OF FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE IN ALENTEJO'S HOTEL INDUSTRY: THE ROLE OF STRUCTURE, SIZE, AND AGE

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## ABSTRACT

The hotel industry in Alentejo has established itself as a significant pillar of national tourism, making it essential to understand the factors that determine the financial performance of these establishments. This study seeks to address the need for a detailed analysis of the structural elements shaping the financial success of hotels in the region, filling a relevant gap in the literature. Given the growing competitiveness and the importance of effective financial management for regional economic development, evaluating financial performance emerges as a strategic priority for managers and stakeholders.

Previous studies have highlighted multiple determinants of hotel performance. O'Neill et al. (2013) emphasised factors such as the age of establishments, brand size, and guest satisfaction. Sardo et al. (2018) highlighted the positive impact of intellectual capital, particularly the human and relational components, on small and medium-sized hotels. Mallinguh et al. (2020) pointed to factors such as industry sector, company age, and foreign ownership. More recently, Ahinful et al. (2023) identified a relationship between ownership type and financial performance, further reinforcing the influence of company age and size. This study focuses on investigating the determinants of financial performance in hotels in Alentejo, with particular emphasis on business and financial structure, size, and age of the units.

The research used the Sabi database to identify 92 hotels based in the region, established up to 2021. Data analysis was conducted using R software, applying a multivariate linear regression model to explore the relationships between structural and financial variables and unit performance. The results indicate that hotel age, along with business and financial structure, significantly influence financial performance. Specifically, hotels with family ownership structures exhibited distinct financial performance, generally characterised by smaller size and more modest financial results. These findings provide a comprehensive and detailed view of the hotel sector in Alentejo, highlighting how its structural and organisational characteristics can influence financial success.

**Key Words:** Financial performance, Hotel industry, Age, Ownership Structure, Debt.

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# THE IMPACT OF ABRUPT CHANGES IN TOURISM DEMAND ON EARNINGS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY: EVIDENCE FROM PORTUGAL

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how abrupt changes in tourism demand affect hotel firms' earnings management (EM) strategies of Portuguese non-listed companies. According to the existing literature, the study of EM practices in the hospitality industry remains under-researched. This is puzzling since this industry plays a significant economic role, contributing considerably to the global economy. In this context, and since the quality of financial information is questionable in the presence of EM, understanding and analysing these practices is essential for investors, regulators, and supervising authorities.

Although scarce, the empirical evidence on EM within the hospitality industry confirms the presence of such practices and focuses mainly on listed firms or a combination of listed and non-listed firms, which may bias results considering each type of company's distinct characteristics and constraints. Furthermore, the literature on EM in the hospitality industry does not provide evidence of how the business agents operating in this important sector use EM practices to deal with a very sharp and unexpected reduction in tourism demand.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the EM behaviour of non-listed hotels operating in a country where tourism has a significant weight in the economy, such as Portugal and to explore whether their EM practices change when faced with sudden changes in demand, using the example of the COVID-19 event. This paper uses accounting data from 490 non-listed Portuguese hotel firms, over the 2016-2021 period. This study uses the Burgstahler and Dichev's (1997) to confirm the presence of EM practices and explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the EM practices of Portuguese hotels with the help of panel data regression techniques, which allow for dealing with data sets with a time series and cross-section dimension.

The results show that Portuguese hotel managers are not indifferent to the earnings figure, using discretionary accruals to manipulate their reported earnings. In general, earnings are managed to avoid reporting losses. However, a significant portion of companies facing a more favourable financial situation tend to manipulate results downwards, showing that managers engage in EM practices differently according to their pre-managed earnings positioning. Furthermore, this behaviour seems to be influenced by the business conditions. In fact, when facing the COVID-19 pandemic shock, which caused sharp falls in tourism demand, Portuguese hotels changed their behaviour by resorting to discretionary accruals to increase their reported earnings.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first article exploring how a sudden decline in tourism demand affects the EM behaviour of firms operating in the hospitality sector. Given that financial statements represent the main source of information used by the stakeholders (e.g., investors, auditors, and other regulators), the reported information must be reliable. Therefore, by exploring these types of strategies in different phases of the sector's economic cycle, this article exposes the type of financial practices that occur in this industry in different periods, alerting investors and motivating regulators to take a closer look at these types of practices to develop tools and legislation that protect stakeholders.

**Key Words**: Earnings management, hospitality, non-listed firms, discretionary accruals.


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# TRADE FAIRS AS DRIVERS OF TOURISM DEMAND

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## ABSTRACT

Trade shows constitute a critical component of industrial marketing strategies (Sridhar et al., 2015). By incorporating elements of personal selling, advertising, and live communication, they enable exhibitors to fulfill diverse marketing objectives (Blythe, 2002). Notably, trade fairs represent the business events that attract the highest number of professional visitors (Hahn, 2024). Despite their intricate socio-spatial dynamics and substantial influence on host cities, the effects of trade fairs on host regions remain underexamined in existing research (Kourkouridis et al., 2023).

This study seeks to explore the influence of trade fair events on tourism demand, focusing on the cities of Rimini and Bologna in Italy's Emilia Romagna region, which host two of Europe's most prominent international exhibition centers. In general, the Emilia-Romagna region provides the most extensive trade fair offerings in Italy, ranking second in Europe in terms of covered exhibition space after Germany and fourth globally after China and the United States (Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2022). Data on trade fair events pertain to the 2023 event calendars of the Rimini and Bologna trade fairs. Tourism demand data refer to daily tourist overnight stays in the two provinces of Rimini and Bologna for the year 2023.

Tourism demand in the two destinations is modelled as a function of the calendar days of the events. Seasonal effects are captured through binary variables corresponding to the summer months of May, June, July, August, and September. Similarly, controls are included for the effects of public holidays such as New Year’s Day, Easter, and the long weekends, as well as variations across days of the week.

The analysis indicated that while both cities experience an increase in tourist demand due to trade fairs, the scale of this effect varies substantially. A comparative assessment of the two trade fair hubs reveals notable differences in both tourism demand and the overall significance of trade fair events for each destination.

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# ON-CAMPUS HOTELS WITH HOSPITALITY PROGRAMS IN THE US: FROM A MAPPED INVENTORY TO A PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

Campus hotels often justify their existence within higher education by adding value, fostering the local economy, and serving as a live experiential educational lab for students that connects theory and practice. An interesting observation is that only one-fourth of these properties are flagged (or chain-affiliated) when more than three-quarters of all U.S. properties are flagged.

To understand this segment, a previous study started in 2015 created the first inventory of on-campus hotels associated with hospitality programs in the U.S. This study shifts from a qualitative to a quantitative approach to analyze 40 on-campus hotels, offering insights into their markets, environments, and future development of this segment. Four groups of stakeholders with potential interest in this research:
Campus Administration with its strategic plans.
Hotel Developers/Operators/New Brands (e.g., Graduate Hotels, Study Hotels).
Students looking for an engaged learning experiential education.
Faculty and HM Program Innovation.
By incorporating CoStar STR SHARE performance data, the purpose of this study is to extend previous research in the following ways:
a) By studying profile data of campus hotels in connection with the operation's financial performance data.
b) By characterizing these best-performing on-campus properties.

This qualitative study uses content analysis of web profiles to identify institutions with Hospitality and Tourism Management programs featuring on-campus or adjacent lodging with at least two rooms, including experiential learning partnerships. The hotels-on-campus list gained further characterization, crossing secondary qualitative and performance quantitative data specific to the hotels' operations, such as KPIs—RevPAR, Occupancy Percentage, and ADR.
The study utilized other secondary sources, including:

The ICHRIE's Guide to Hospitality Programs,
The Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA),
Program websites, and rankings.
While the current study is still in progress, it is anticipated the current pilot study will result in the development of:

An inventory of the population of on-campus hotels and conference centers in higher education institutions in the U.S. with its lodging KPI's within a Federal Information Processing System (FIPS): hospitality program.
A properties inventory mapped out according to the U.S. Census Bureau Region and Division Codes and Federal Information Processing Systems (FIPS), further expanding its explanation and characterization.
The study found that the majority (65%) are not only Public Universities but also have on-campus Public Private Partnerships (P3) with better KPI's than the national averages.

The resulting inventory of on-campus hotels complements current published research and is a prerequisite to any study of educational campus ventures and their contribution to the discipline or industry.

The long-term repercussions of such investment/partnerships can be:

Financial: Leases of payment streams for the universities or their foundations.
Educational: Its integration on campus as an amenity plus supporting learning outcomes for hospitality-related curricula and research.


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This will further inform policy and decision-making at all levels of the institutions about partnerships with — mostly unaffiliated — third-party hotel owners, developers, and managers to lease university-owned land parcels for hotel development.


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# STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND THEIR PERCEPTION TOWARDS HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY PERFORMANCE IN KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

The tourism and hospitality sector continues to be one of the sectors that significantly contribute to the country's Growth Domestic Product (GDP). It has been touted as one of the largest source of Kenya's foreign exchange revenue over time. However, being one of the major casualties of the Covid - 19 disruption, stakeholders appear divided on the extent of industry turnaround which could be attributed to a gap in collaboration and stakeholder involvement. Within the country, the sector is made up of a number of stakeholders including Ministry of Tourism and wildlife, agencies affiliated to the ministry, sector regulatory authorities as well as trade associations and the professional body representing sector professionals. Effective and efficient collaboration among stakeholders enhance synergic relationships which in-turn results in optimal performance. The study sought to establish stakeholder perspective of their involvement and its perceived contribution to industry performance. It sought to establish extent of stakeholder involvement in generating and disseminating key decisions and strategies, their involvement in generating and disseminating policy directives and pronouncements, the extent to which the Ministry of tourism and wildlife promotes collaborations and linkages among stakeholders as well as industry support for innovation, training and capacity building, sustainable partnership within the ministry and independence and autonomy of operations. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to obtain information from tourism and hospitality stakeholders from public, private and academia across the country. Data was collected from 187 industry stakeholders using questionnaire with open and closed-ended items virtually through google forms. Key informant interview was also conducted with key personnel with leadership responsibilities both in the public and private sector. Quantitative data collected was analyzed, presented and interpreted using descriptive statistics while thematic analysis techniques was used to analyze qualitative data collected using interview schedules. Findings illustrated minimal involvement of stakeholders especially from the private sector and academia in generating and disseminating key decisions and strategies. Stakeholders also indicated minimally involvement in generating and disseminating policy directives and pronouncements. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife as a primary stakeholder in the industry upscale involvement of other industry stakeholders in the affairs of the industry for optimal industry performance. Findings of this study are expected to add to literature on the performance of tourism and hospitality sector in Kenya. It adds to the body of knowledge on the importance of stakeholder involvement in industry performance. Findings also hope to communicate knowledge to the the government, sector regulator, policy makers and tourism sector players in order to help in development and implementation of appropriate short and long-term policies and programs to the tourism and hospitality sector.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism and Hospitality (T&H) sector is made up of a number of stakeholders mainly drawn from Tourism and Hospitality either affiliated to the public or private sector. Freedman (1984) defines stakeholders in an organization broadly as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives. The same author provides a list of 12 main categories of stakeholders relevant for the organization as owners, employees, political groups, government, suppliers, competitors, trade associations, unions, customer associations & groups, customers, activists groups and the financial community. From the perspective of T&H, stakeholders could mean owners of tourism and hospitality enterprises, employees of these enterprises, suppliers of goods and services to the sector as well as its clients. Some of its other stakeholders include the government represented by the Ministry of Tourism and wildlife, agencies affiliated to the ministry, sector regulatory authorities as well as trade


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associations and the professional body representing sector professionals among others. All these stakeholders ideally contribute towards T&H performance, their contribution through collaboration enhancing partnerships and networks capable of generating a greater yield (Patricia, Ombaka & Ann, 2019). According to New Zealand Tourism Research Institute (2011), effective and efficient collaboration among stakeholders enhance synergic relationships which in-turn results in optimal performance. The study sought to evaluate the extent of engagement and collaboration among tourism and hospitality stakeholder and their perception towards industry performance in Kenya.

The T&H sector continues to be one of the sectors that significantly contribute to the country's Growth Domestic Product (GDP). It had for some time now been touted as one of the largest source of Kenya's foreign exchange revenue over time. In the late 1990's and early to mid-2000, it accounted for 10 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), making it the third largest contributor to Kenya's GDP after agriculture and manufacturing, and Kenya's third largest foreign exchange earner after tea and horticulture (Valle, & Yobesia, 2009). In 2021, travel and tourism contributed 5.4 billion U.S. dollars to Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the amount being nearly 35 percent more compared to 2020, when the tourism industry struggled with the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (Kamer, 2022). Due the above reasons, tourism was identified as one of the key drivers in achieving the goals of the Vision 2030. Further improvement in the performance was observed in the succeeding years up to 2019 when the industry became a major casualty of COVID-19 pandemic disruption. Since then, reports of efforts towards recovery of the sector have continued to be received with mixed reactions.

Destinations Kenya relies heavily on international; business and events tourism is particularly vulnerable and continue to reel under a number of challenges, the effect of the continuing pandemic included. Domestic tourism had restarted and is helping to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on jobs and businesses in some zones with significant tourism activities in the county (Barkas, Honeck & Rubio, 2020). However, real recovery can only be possible when concerted efforts and strategy are put in place. This requires the co-operation of all stakeholders and evidence-based solutions so that workable strategies are generated and implemented going forward. The tourism industry in Kenya is highly private sector driven in terms of investments (Kibara, Odhiambo & Njuguna, 2012). This means that that private sector players have more interest on its performance which to them implies return on their investment. Their participation should constitute an important element in sustainable tourism development in the country (Khalfan, 2021). This study sought to establish the extent to which sector stakeholders are involved in industry activities and its contribution towards industry performance.

The sector received its performance approval rating for the period ending 2022. The Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs and Special Programmes in their Annual report on the evaluation of the performance of Ministries, State Corporations and Tertiary Institutions for the financial year 2020/2021 returned a highly favourable rating of fifth overall position for the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife Performance consequently the sector performance (GoK, 2022). About the same time, the sector received a strategy paper titled "new vision for tourism in Kenya" purportedly developed with a "strong industry engagement." Since then and in the course of industry consumption of the report, mixed reactions arose. While a few of industry players lauded the favourable rating, a majority of practitioners aver that the rating does not represent the true state of the industry on the ground. Accurate diagnosis of industry status and reliable strategic approach are critical to industry lifeline. Findings from this study was therefore meant to benefit industry stakeholders including Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife with better policy that could promote formulation and dissemination of best practices. Industry practitioners, professionals included could also benefit from realistic strategies for turnaround.

**Stakeholder Involvement and Industry Performance**

Stakeholders' involvement or participation in activities significant to their lives and livelihoods continue to be an area of concern to developmental studies practitioners. Existing literature show that at its most basic level, involvement of stakeholders in various activities have been shown to positively impact performance and sustainability of the undertakings they are involved in (IJCR, 2013; Maina, 2013; Nyandika & Ngugi, 2014). In recognition of its significance, the constitution of Kenya 2010 provides for the rights of its citizens to take part in activities with a direct bearing on their lives (Mbaabu, 2012). This means that the constitution anticipates that its citizens have the right and responsibility to be proactively involved and engaged in matters that directly and indirectly affects their lives. For stakeholders in the T&H sector it implies being part and parcel of the process of planning, implementing and evaluating of industry programs and processes since this is what participation entail.


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Participation in developmental discourse continuous to be a controversial term with different meaning and application. According to World Bank (1996) it could either mean a principle, a practice or an end result of a process. Ruwa (2016) observes that the term participation is sometimes used in political circles to mean involving the people in political decisions, or for others, their having reasonable control over decisions of the organization they belong to or as an instrument to enhance project efficiency. This in compliance with the provisions of the 2010 constitution created a new space for interaction, declared the citizen sovereign and demand that the public must be involved in every aspect of public governance. In its policy document it defines participation as:

*"The process by which citizens, as individuals, groups or communities (also known as stakeholders), take part in the conduct of public affairs, interact with the state and other non-state actors to influence decisions, policies, programs, legislation and provide oversight in service delivery, development and other matters* (Draft Policy on Public Participation, 2018).

This means that in compliance with the draft policy and in an attempt to better the experience of T&H industry stakeholders in their engagements and in the process enhance ownership of programs, processes and attendant outcomes by the stakeholders, it was anticipated that they be appropriately involved in the affairs of the industry. This would actualize the expectation of the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife's recognition of the role of stakeholder participation in strengthening and legitimising state decisions, actions and development interventions. Though the ministry of Tourism and Wildlife is considered as one of the T&H industry stakeholders by Friedman (1984), it occupies a unique position as a primary stakeholder in the industry.

Primary stakeholders are persons, institutions or groups with legal contractual relationship to a project and who are responsible for providing infrastructures and markets, whose laws and regulations must be obeyed and to whom taxes and other obligations are owed (Peric, Đurkin, & Lamot, 2014). Categorization of the ministry as a primary stakeholder spring from the understanding of its mandate at inception. Kibara, Odhiambo and Njuguna (2012) observed that the government of Kenya established a tourism ministry called "The Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife (MTW)" out of the realization of the socioeconomic significance of the tourism industry. From inception, its core mandate was twofold; 1) to oversee the overall formulation and implementation of the country's tourism policy and 2) to manage Kenya's tourism and wildlife resources. Since then, and even though the government has invested in the industry with the aim of eliminating bottlenecks and providing infrastructure (GoK, 1970), the main role of the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife has mainly revolved around formulation and implementation of policies, coordination of activities within the industry as well as facilitating private investment. It was envisaged that by diligently discharging its mandate, the ministry would facilitate investment in the sector ultimately spurring the industry performance.

**Statement of the Problem**

It has become customary for the Government of Kenya to provide a report on the performance of its Ministries and departments to the general public. In the same breadth, the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife also periodically gives a report of the industry performance commonly referred to as Tourism Sector Performance report. Whereas these reports have consistently presented favourable industry performance ratings, and lauded by some stakeholders as an indictment of the industry' positive growth, there has persistently been a feeling amongst other stakeholders that the reports fall short of representing the true dynamics of industry performance. They have averred that the industry has immense potential and there exist a missing link which continuously drags the industry and whose discovery would unlock the potential of the sector for possible realistic performance. This study therefore sought to establish stakeholder perspective of industry performance with a specific focus on stakeholder involvement and its perceived contribution to industry performance.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study aimed at establishing stakeholders' perspectives on industry performance and ranking. Specifically, it sought to establish extent of Stakeholder:

i. Involvement in generating and disseminating key decisions and strategies
ii. Involvement in generating and disseminating policy directives and pronouncements
iii. Promotion of collaborations and Linkages
iv. Engagement in industry Support

**METHODOLOGY**


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The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to obtain information from T&H stakeholders from public, private and academia across the country. Data was collected from respondents using questionnaire with open and closed-ended items virtually through google forms. Key informant interview was also conducted with key personnel with leadership responsibilities both in the public and private sector. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis technique were used to analyze the data. Quantitative data collected was analyzed, presented and interpreted using descriptive statistics while thematic analysis techniques was used to analyze qualitative data collected using interview schedules.

## FINDINGS

Participants were 187 industry stakeholders (43.9% from tourism and 56.1% from hospitality sector). A significant proportion were from the private sector (62.0%) followed by those from public sector/government (26.8%) and lastly from academia (11.2%). Slightly more than a quarter (27.8%) had less than 5 year's work experience in the sector, 57.7% had between 5 and 20 years while 14.4% had more than 20 years' experience. This is summarized in Figure 1, 2 & 3.

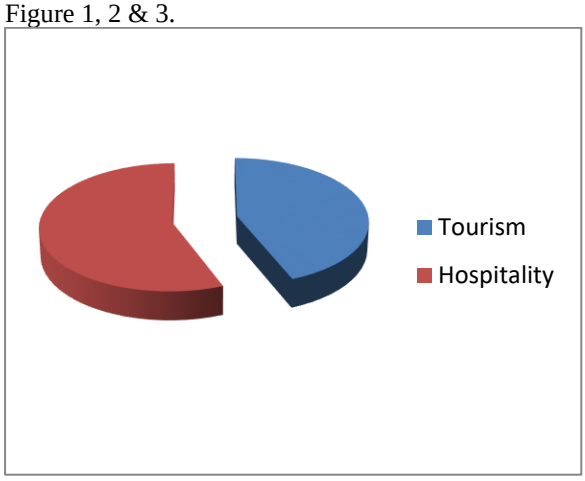


Figure 1: Affiliation

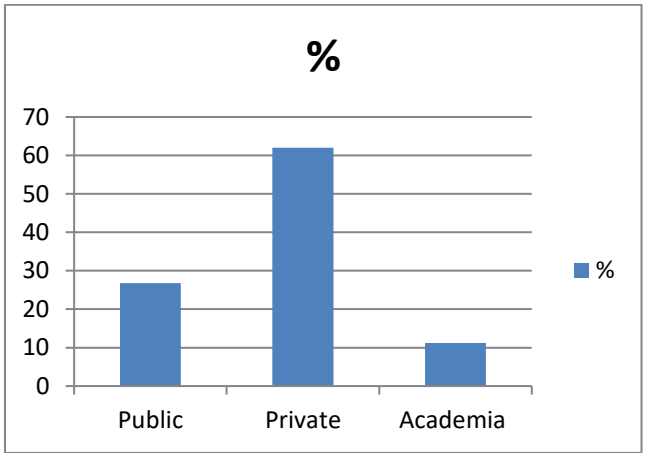


Figure 2: Inclination

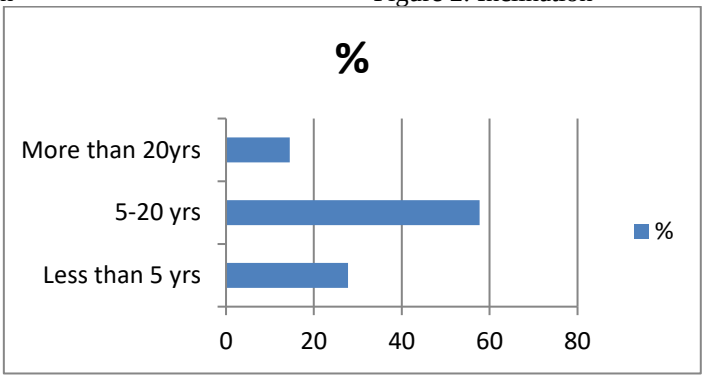


Figure 3: Experience

**Involvement in generating and disseminating key decisions and strategies**

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife involved their organization as a stakeholder in generating and disseminating key decisions and strategies. Findings were as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** *To what extent has the Ministry involved your organization as a stakeholder in generating and dissemination of key decisions and strategies*

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **NE** | 92 | 49.2 | 49.2 |
| **SE** | 37 | 19.8 | 69.0 |
| **ME** | 34 | 18.2 | 87.2 |
| **GE** | 9 | 4.8 | 92.0 |
| **VGE** | 15 | 8.0 | 100.0 |


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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 187 | 100.0 |

Findings indicated that a majority of the respondents were either completely not involved in generating and dissemination of key decisions and strategies at all (49.2%), a small proportion were either involved to a small extent (19.8%), to a moderate extent (18.2%) or to a great extent or very great extent (12.8%). Findings imply that the ministry in compliance with the requirement of public participation involved stakeholders in generating and dissemination of key decisions and strategies. However, the proportion of stakeholders involved was insignificant cross-tabulation indicating that a significant proportion of those in academia (5.9%) and private sector (36.9%) reporting not being involved compared to those from the public sector. On the contrary, more stakeholders in the public sector (16.6%) reported being involved either to a moderate, great or very great extent compared to those from the private sector (11.2%) or academia (3.2%). Chi square analysis ($\chi^2$=39.46, df=2, $p<0.001$) indicating significant variation in extent of involvement and contingency coefficient measure of association indicating a 41.7% likelihood of a stakeholder from the public sector being involved compared to those from private and academia. Finding imply that it is mainly stakeholders from the public sector who are mainly involved in generating and dissemination of key decisions and strategies. Minimal involvement of stakeholders from the private sector as well as from academia implies that they are denied the opportunity to participate in the process which could lead to their disenfranchisement and ultimately negating their positive uptake of the decisions and strategies generated.

Findings from qualitative data illustrated that for those who were involved in generating and dissemination of key decisions and strategies, areas of involvement included Covid marketing strategy, product diversification, EAC and Northern Corridor countries Tourism Strategies, Cruise Tourism Strategy and County Tourism Strategy. Others included Kenya's Tourism Marketing Strategy, Business Operating Procedures, TRA guidelines, Coastal Tourism Transformation Strategy and Branding Kenya as destination through sports tourism. An analysis of these decisions show that they directly impact almost all industry stakeholders significantly and therefore should result from exhaustive consultation between all industry stakeholders.

**Involvement in generating and disseminating policy directives and pronouncements**

Respondents were also asked to indicate the extent to which the Ministry involved their organization as a stakeholder in generating and disseminating policy directives and pronouncements for the industry. Findings were as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** *To what extent has the Ministry involved your organization as a stakeholder in generating and dissemination of policy directives and pronouncements for the industry*

| | **Frequency** | **Percent** | **Cumulative Percent** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **NE** | 124 | 66.3 | 66.3 |
| **SE** | 23 | 12.3 | 78.6 |
| **ME** | 24 | 12.8 | 91.4 |
| **GE** | 10 | 5.3 | 96.8 |
| **VGE** | 6 | 3.2 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | 187 | 100.0 | |

A significant proportion (66.3%) indicated they were not involved at all in generating and disseminating policy directives and pronouncements for the industry, 12.3% were involved to a small extent, 12.8% were involved moderately while 8.5% were involved either to a great or very great extent. This means that just like involvement in generating and disseminating key decisions and strategies, very few stakeholders especially from the private sector and academia indicated being involved in generating and disseminating policy directives and pronouncements for the industry. This is despite the fact that the policy directives and pronouncements for the industry directly affect their lives and livelihood.

Information obtained from respondents through open ended questions and interviews showed that specific areas of involvement included coming up with schemes of service for government institutions, Covid rules, Designation of the Tourism heritage sites and Establishment tourist police. Others include Tourism Product development, Tourism sector plan, Funding of the tourism sector, marketing and promotion of tourism in the region and stakeholder analysis and Magical Kenya Health and safety protocol. These areas of involvement similarly appear to significantly affect almost all T&H stakeholders and therefore should result from exhaustive involvement of a cross-section of stakeholders rather than the few who indicated being involved.


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**Collaborations and Linkages**

Inquiry was also made on respondents' perspective of the extent of Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife engagement in collaborations and linkages with industry stakeholders. Issues of concern included sensitivity and proactiveness towards industry concerns, having linkages with other sectors and promotion of collaboration within the industry. Figure 4 presents the results obtained on sensitivity and proactiveness.

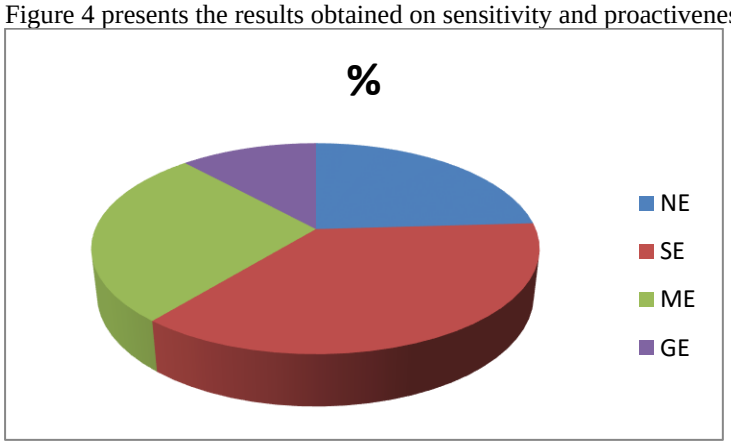


**Figure 4:** *Extent of sensitivity and proactiveness towards industry concerns*

As regards sensitivity and proactiveness towards industry concerns, 24.1% felt that the ministry was neither sensitive nor proactive towards industry concerns, 36.9% indicated that it was sensitive and proactive to a small extent, 27.3% felt that is to a moderate extent while only 11.8% indicated that the ministry is sensitive and proactive towards industry concerns to a great or very great extent. This means that a majority of the respondents (more than half) indicated that the ministry was either not sensitive or less sensitive and proactive towards industry concerns. Table 3 presents findings on extent of linkages

**Table 3**: *To what extent does the Ministry have linkages with other sectors?*

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **NE** | 31 | 16.6 | 16.6 |
| **SE** | 76 | 40.6 | 57.2 |
| **ME** | 61 | 32.6 | 89.8 |
| **GE** | 16 | 8.6 | 98.4 |
| **VGE** | 3 | 1.6 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | 187 | 100.0 | |

Findings on extent of linkages with other sectors showed that 16.6% were unaware of any linkages which the ministry has with other sectors, 40.6% were aware of a few linkages, 32.6% reported being considerable number of linkages while 10.2% reported being aware of the ministry having substantial number of linkages with other sectors. This means that a majority of stakeholders felt that the Ministry either had few or no linkages with industry stakeholders. Figure 5 presents data obtained on extent of promotion of collaborations.


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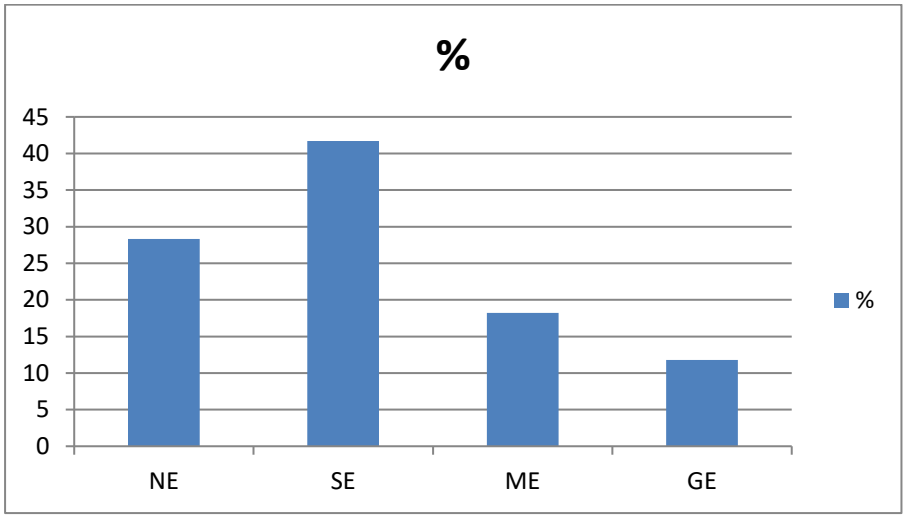


**Figure 5:** *Extent of promotion of collaborations within the ministry*

Findings on extent of promotion of collaborations within the ministry showed that 28.3% felt that there were no collaborations within the ministry, 41.7% reported little collaboration, 18.2% were aware of moderate extent of collaborations while 11.8% reported that there was great extent of collaborations within the ministry. This means that a majority felt that the ministry had very few or no collaborations with stakeholders

Specific examples of the collaborations reported by the respondents included cabinet forums/KTF/KEPSA, Collaboration in the sports sector like the magical Kenya Open to promote tourism, working with local communities to alleviate human-wildlife conflict and Collaboration with KUC, TRA, KAHC. Other reported collaborations include Collaboration with the tourism police to protect tourists, TRA and TF in licensing of establishments, Engagement of the private sectors by the Ministry, collaboration with all tourism stakeholders including community-based tourism organizations as well as Kenya tourism board, Kenya wild life services, magical tourism Kenya and Kenya National Culture.

**Industry Support**

Study also sought to establish Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife support for innovation, training and capacity building, sustainable partnership within the ministry and independence and autonomy of operations. Ministry's level of pro-activeness towards specific legislative process was perceived to be minimal; a majority of respondents suggesting that it is not proactive at all (45.5%) or proactive to a little extent (28.3%) compared to those who suggested that it is moderately proactive (14.4%) or highly proactive (11.8%). Figure 6 presents a summary of the findings.


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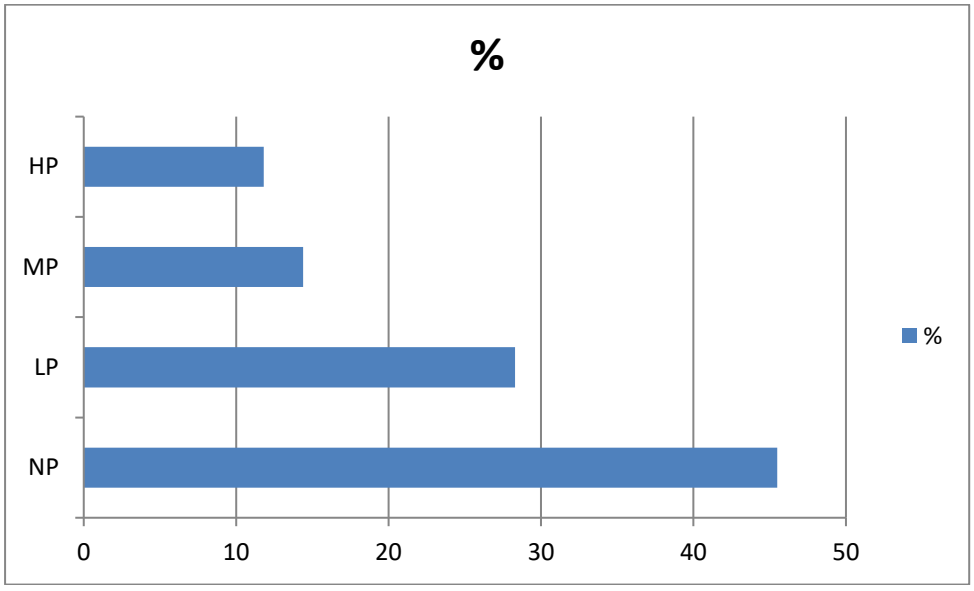


**Figure 6:** *Ministry's proactiveness towards specific legislative process*

Examples of legislative agendas respondents were aware of included Creation of laws on compensation for victims of wildlife attacks, developing a strategic digital platform to market Kenya as a tourism destination, Environmental Conservation, Establishment of Statutes providing for Tour guiding Associations and Tourism Act 2012,

Extent of support for industry specific innovations was also considered minimal a significant proportion of the respondents indicating no support for innovation (48.1%) and very little support (30.5%) compared to those who received moderate level of support (11.2%) or high level of support (10.2%) for innovation. Table 4 presents a summary of this information

**Table 4:** *To what extent has the Ministry supported industry specific innovations?*

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **NE** | 90 | 48.1 | 48.1 |
| **SE** | 57 | 30.5 | 78.6 |
| **ME** | 21 | 11.2 | 89.8 |
| **GE** | 13 | 7.0 | 96.8 |
| **VGE** | 6 | 3.2 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | 187 | 100.0 | |

Some of the innovation for which stakeholders received support includes branding of Kenyan Beaches, Classifications of Accommodation/Private Homes, Digital Marketing, Formation of regional tourism association and forming organizations that drive conservation of Kenya attractions. Other innovations reported include global Tourism Resilience & crisis management centre, development of technologies that assist in ending human-wildlife conflict, online travel and accommodation booking machines and sites as well as refurbishing of Uhuru gardens.

Information on ministry's support for training and capacity building for industry professionals show that stakeholders received minimal support, 27.8% reporting no support, 32.6% had little support while 24.6% had moderate level compared to 9.6% with high level and 5.3% with very high level of support. Specific areas of training and capacity building suggested include KUC refresher courses, MDP and Refresher programs and short courses for tour operators. This information is summarized in figure 7.


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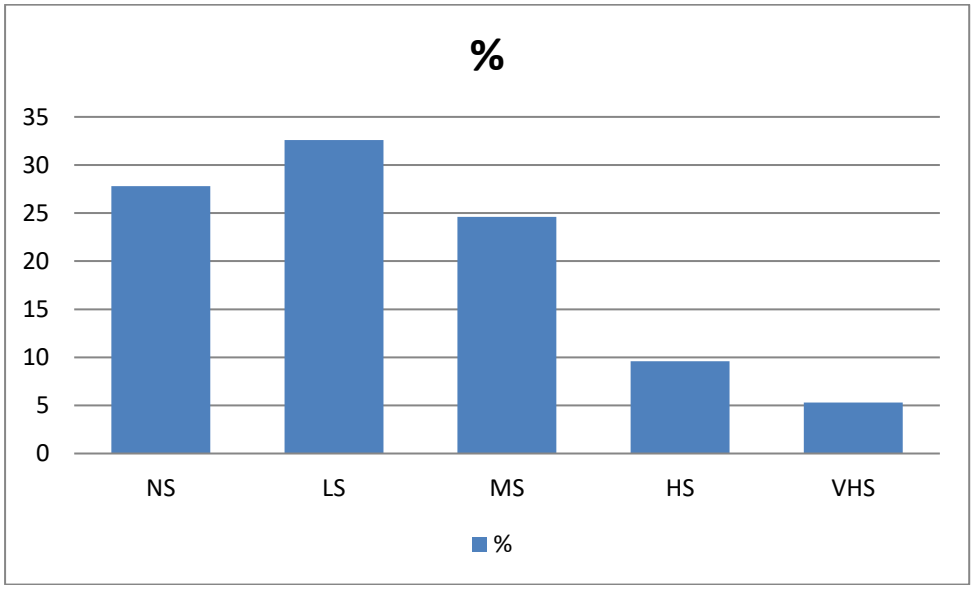


**Figure 7:** *Ministry's support for training and capacity building*

Findings on extent of formation of sustainable partnerships with industry professionals show that 37.4% were unaware of any partnerships, 41.2% were aware of few partnerships, 14.4% of moderate while 6.9% reported the ministry having substantial number of partnerships with industry professionals. Examples of the partnerships reported include Interagency partnership and partnership with general stakeholders, Domestic Tourism partnership, green movement conservation and awareness and Industry partnership with maritime. Other partnerships include Partnership between Kenya and Jamaica to promote conference tourism, Private public partnership, KTB-KWS and KATO, KATA, KTF.

An inquiry was also made on ministry of Tourism and Wildlife support for independence and autonomy of operations within its departments and sector organizations. Findings show that 45.5% of the respondents reported no support, 27.8% had observed minimal support while 16.6% reported moderate level of support and 10.1% high level of support for independence and autonomy of operations within its departments and sector organizations. This means that a majority of the respondents felt that the ministry minimally supported independence and autonomy of operations within its departments and sector organizations.

**Stakeholder Perception of Industry Performance**

Lastly, the study sought to gauge stakeholder's perspective of industry performance. Respondents were required to rate the level of industry performance in the last ten years. Findings were as summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5:** *Rate the level of tourism industry performance in the last ten years*

| | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Very Poor** | 33 | 17.6 | 17.6 |
| **Poor** | 50 | 26.7 | 44.4 |
| **Average** | 76 | 40.6 | 85.0 |
| **Good** | 15 | 8.0 | 93.0 |
| **Very Good** | 13 | 7.0 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | 187 | 100.0 | |

Data obtained show that slightly less than a half of the stakeholders (44.4%) rated industry performance as either poor or very poor compared to those who felt it was fair (40.6%) or those who rated it to be good or very good (15.0%). This means that a majority of stakeholders feels that the industry has not been performing very well. Cross tabulation illustrated that the opinion was fairly spread across the category of respondents.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**


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The study set out to establish stakeholders' perspective on their involvement and its link with Tourism and Hospitality industry performance. Issues of involvement included generating and disseminating key decisions and strategies as well as generating and disseminating policy directives and pronouncements. Stakeholders were also required to gauge the extent to which the Ministry engaged in collaborations and linkages with industry stakeholders, their extent of support for innovation, training and capacity building, sustainable partnership within the ministry and independence as well as autonomy of operations. Finally, they were required rate the Ministry's performance. Findings showed minimal involvement of stakeholders especially from the private sector and academia specifically in generating and disseminating key decisions and strategies. They were also minimally involved in generating and disseminating policy directives and pronouncements. Further, findings showed relatively low levels of Ministry's sensitivity and pro-activeness towards industry concerns, few linkages with industry stakeholders as well as very few or no collaborations with industry stakeholders. Ministry's level of pro-activeness towards legislative processes was perceived to be minimal; a majority of respondents suggesting that the Ministry was either not proactive at all or proactive to a little extent. Similarly, Ministry's level of support for industry specific innovations was reported to be minimal, a significant proportion of the respondents indicating Ministry lack of support for innovation or very little support. Support for training and capacity building for industry professionals was also rated lowly. a majority of the respondents confirming ministry's lack of support for independence and autonomy of operations within its departments and sector organizations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

First and foremost, and in line with the study's main objective which was to assess the extent of stakeholder involvement, it is recommended that the ministry in the spirit of ensuring public participation, should strive to enhance stakeholder involvement in generating and disseminating key decisions and strategies as well as policy directives and pronouncements. In particular, more stakeholders from the private sector and academia should be incorporated in critical sector working groups charged with generation of the key decisions as well as policy directives.

Secondly, promotion of collaborations and linkages is a key function that the ministry is expected to prioritize. Yet findings indicate minimal facilitation of collaboratives especially between the private sector, academia and the public. It is recommended that the ministry should institutionalize and advance collaborations and linkages with and between all industry stakeholders as well as facilitating agencies.

Thirdly, best practice requires that the ministry facilitate support for innovation, training and capacity building. They are also expected to ensure sustainable partnerships between and within the ministry as well as independence and autonomy of operations for departments and parastatals with the ministry in line with their mandates.

Findings indicate lack of pro-activeness by the ministry in fulfilling its mandate. It is therefore recommended that strategies are put in place to ensure autonomy of operations by sector departments and parastatals as well as maximum support of sector stakeholders such as industry professionals and academia. This could help maximize generation and implementation of homegrown solutions for the sector.

### Contributions of the Study

Findings of this study are expected to add to literature on the performance of tourism and hospitality sector in Kenya. By addressing the context of stakeholder involvement and industry performance of tourism and hospitality sector, it contributes toward knowledge on the sector dynamics and factors that contributes towards optimal sector growth. Findings also hope to communicate knowledge to the the government, sector regulator, policy makers and tourism sector players in order to help in development and implementation of appropriate short and long-term policies and programs to the tourism and hospitality sector.

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# THE EFFECTS OF REGIONAL REGULATIONS IN THE BALEARIC ISLANDS ON TOURIST ACCOMMODATIONS: THE CASE OF PIAT

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

The Balearic Islands, a leading global tourist destination, face significant challenges due to the rapid, unregulated expansion of tourism. This growth has strained resources, exacerbated housing shortages, and heightened environmental degradation, prompting widespread social resistance among residents. In response, the Balearic Islands introduced the Plan for Intervention in Tourist Areas (PIAT) between 2018 and 2020, aiming to regulate tourist accommodations and address overtourism. However, the economic impacts of such legislation, particularly on household spending patterns in tourist accommodations, remain underexplored.

### OBJECTIVES

This study examines the effects of the PIAT reforms on household expenditures in the Balearic Islands, focusing on spending across hotels, campsites, and tourist apartments. The analysis seeks to uncover how the legislation reshaped consumer preferences and budget allocations, thereby informing future regulatory approaches to tourism management.

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Using data from the Spanish Family Expenditure Survey (EPF), the study employs a robust econometric framework to analyze household expenditures pre- and post-PIAT implementation. A Tobit regression model captures the effects of the legislation on expenditures in three accommodation categories. The analysis incorporates key household characteristics, including income, age, education, and household size, to assess their influence on spending behavior. Additionally, the study employs budget share analysis to evaluate shifts in household preferences driven by the reforms.

### FINDINGS

The results reveal that the PIAT significantly altered spending patterns, particularly favoring tourist apartments. Household expenditures on apartments increased by approximately 5.509 percentage points post-PIAT, reflecting a structural shift in consumer preferences. Spending on hotels and campsites also rose, albeit modestly, with hotels experiencing a decline in budget share allocation. These findings suggest a redistribution of expenditures away from traditional accommodations toward alternative options. The robust statistical significance of the results underscores the causal relationship between regulatory changes and spending dynamics.

### THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study enhances the understanding of how local legislation impacts tourism markets by introducing a novel analysis of the PIAT's effects on consumer spending. It advances tourism economics by integrating household behavior into the analysis of regulatory impacts and highlights the role of structural shifts in shaping market


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outcomes. Furthermore, the findings contribute to policy discussions on sustainable tourism by demonstrating the nuanced effects of targeted interventions.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

For policymakers, the study provides evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of tourism regulations, emphasizing the importance of balancing economic growth with community well-being. Destination managers can leverage these findings to anticipate shifts in demand and optimize resource allocation. The results also underscore the potential of alternative accommodations, such as tourist apartments, to alleviate pressures on traditional lodging sectors while meeting evolving consumer preferences.


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# SECTION 13: FOOD TOURISM AND FOOD TOURISM MARKETING


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# GASTRONOMIC ADVENTURES: AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY OF MEMORABLE GASTRONOMY TOURISM IN NORTHEASTERN THAILAND

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## ABSTRACT

This auto-ethnographic study investigates the rich tapestry of gastro-tourism in northeastern Thailand, offering a personal narrative that connects culinary exploration with cultural immersion. The region, known for its vibrant and diverse culinary landscape, serves as a backdrop for a journey that delves into the heart of local gastronomy. Through firsthand experiences and reflective storytelling, this research captures the essence of northeastern Thai cuisine, highlighting its unique flavors, traditional cooking methods, and the cultural significance embedded in each dish. The study explores interactions with local chefs, food artisans, and communities, providing insights into the ways in which food tourism fosters cultural exchange and mutual understanding. By documenting the sensory and emotional aspects of this gastronomic journey, the research aims to illuminate the role of food as a conduit for cultural connection and identity. The findings emphasize the potential of gastro-tourism to enhance appreciation for regional culinary heritage and to promote sustainable tourism practices that honour local traditions and environments.

## INTRODUCTION

Gastro-tourism, a burgeoning segment of the travel industry, emphasizes exploring destinations through their culinary offerings, providing travelers with a deeper understanding of local cultures and traditions. This trend aligns with a broader shift in tourism, where travelers increasingly seek authentic and immersive experiences that foster a connection with local cultures. Food serves as a powerful medium for storytelling and cultural transmission, allowing travelers to gain insights into the social and historical framework of a region. Despite the growing academic interest in gastro-tourism, notable gaps persist, particularly in exploring the gastro-tourism experience through the lens of Destination Brand Experience (DBE) and its connection to brand image. While there is a nascent interest in examining gastro-tourism in Thailand, such studies remain scarce, indicating a promising area for further scholarly inquiry.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an auto-ethnographic approach to explore the gastro-tourism journey in northeastern Thailand, offering a personal narrative that captures the interplay between food, culture, and identity. Auto-ethnography, as a research method, facilitates a deep, reflective engagement with the subject matter, enabling researchers to draw on their own experiences to provide insights that are both personal and culturally resonant. This approach is particularly suited to the study of gastronomy tourism, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the sensory, emotional, and cultural dimensions of culinary experiences. By integrating the researcher's lived experiences and reflections, auto-ethnography provides a holistic understanding of the transformative potential of gastro-tourism.

## IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights the interdependence of various experiential dimensions—behavioral, emotional, sensory, cognitive, spiritual, and relational—in gastro-tourism. This interconnectedness suggests that enhancing one dimension can positively influence others, offering a more holistic approach to designing gastro-tourism journeys. For instance, sensory engagement through tasting local cuisine can evoke emotional responses, while cognitive


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learning about cultural practices can deepen spiritual connections. By recognizing the interplay between these dimensions, this research provides a framework for creating more integrated and impactful tourism experiences that cater to the diverse needs and interests of travelers.

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# FOODSCAPE IN PORTUGAL: EXPERIENCE, NOT JUST LIST

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT.**

**PROBLEM DEFINITION**

The dietary patterns and foodscapes exhibit unique cultural appeal of a country or a particular region. Portugal shares "the Mediterranean Diet" as one of its Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of UNESCO, together with other six states of the Mediterranean since 2013. However, unlike its neighbor Spain, which leverages the Mediterranean Diet for food tourism, Portugal's integration of this diet into its tourism industry appears underdeveloped. This study aims to explore the potential of Mediterranean diet-based food tourism in Portugal.

**OBJECTIVES**

As one of the Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of UNESCO, this study tried to explore the factors of the "the Mediterranean Diet" in the Portuguese Cuisine as its tourists' attraction. Besides, this study tried to identify the regional food diversity in Portugal, according to its characteristics of different regions within Portugal, since the "regional authenticity" might be a factor for food tourism visitors in their decision making for destination choice.

**METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS**

Following to the definition of "the Mediterranean Diet", a textual analysis has been developed to construct a corpus of Portuguese traditional recipes as raw material. The software NVivo 20.0 was adopted for coding and qualitative data analysis. By verifying the factors of "the Mediterranean Diet" affecting the attractiveness of Portuguese Cuisine, as well as obtaining the regional foodscape, typical dishes of the regions in Portugal may be classified as an empirical finding. Thus, the mentioned finding would be compared by conducting a series of semi-structured interview to native professionals' relatives to the Portuguese Cuisine. From the narrative analysis from the interview, the regional foodscape might be concluded.

**FINDINGS**

A list of typical dished by region in Portugal would be generated in order to facilitate the food tourism visitors for their "regional authenticity" identification. The findings reveal that by enhancing the promotion and integration of "the Mediterranean Diet" elements into food tourism in Portugal.

**THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION**

This study would be focus on the exploration of foodscape in different region of a country. The methodology of this study might be employed in other similar studies of food tourism.

**PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**


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As a contribution, all above measurement would be helpful for Portugal can capitalize on this intangible cultural heritage to boost food tourism. The significance of this study lies in identifying a category of typical dished by region in Portugal, as well as a list of regional recipe diversity would be generated..

**Key Words：** Mediterranean Diet，Cultural attraction, Portugal, Foodscape，Textual analysis

## INTRODUCTION

Food has a natural connection with landscape, which is not only a manifestation of regional culture, but also an aesthetic experience derived from life. The term "foodscape" has been widely used since the 1920s. It is a product of human activities, a complex of cultural phenomena composed of food, fields, buildings, villages, factories and mines, cities, vehicles and roads, and people. It reflects the characteristics of the cultural system and the dietary characteristics of a region. Therefore, it can be said that foodscape is a cultural heritage. Through the local food, we can not only see the wisdom of human development process, but also look into the regional aesthetics and culture. Therefore, the foodscape has not only realistic economic benefits, but also profound cultural connotation. It is the carrier of regional culture and can increase the local cultural attraction.

Nowadays, the "Mediterranean diet" originated from countries around the Mediterranean region is highly praised by medical and nutritional researchers and has become a highly respected healthy diet model. The concept of Mediterranean diet was first put forward in the middle of the 20th century. It can be traced back to the American nutritionist Ancel Benjamin Keys who conducted a non-clinical study called the “Seven Countries Study (SCS)” in seven countries in the 1950s. This research report studied the dietary patterns of people in seven countries, observe how dietary fat affects blood cholesterol, and finally put forward the proposition about the correlation between dietary fat content and heart disease (Aboul Enein et al., 2020). This research report is the first multi country epidemiological study in the academic world. Through this research, the characteristics of eating habits in southern Europe and the Mediterranean region began to be seen in the eyes of the world. In 1993, the Harvard University School of Public Health, the European Office of WHO and other institutions jointly released a set of "Mediterranean Diet Pyramid", which formally framed the "content" of Mediterranean diet: olive oil, legumes, natural grains, fruits and vegetables, fresh fish and shrimp, red wine, dairy products, and meat products, forming the six-floor diet structure map. With the effectiveness of Mediterranean diet in the prevention of cardiovascular diseases confirmed by many scientific studies, Mediterranean diet has begun to receive high attention from global nutrition and medicine and has become a healthy diet recognized by the World Health Organization (Renzella et al., 2018). Gradually, the knowledge, rituals, symbols, and traditions behind Mediterranean diet began to attract people's attention and research.

Mediterranean diet has not only gained recognition in nutrition and medicine, but also attracted attention to the cultural attraction of its cuisine and its dietary pattern. In 2013, after the joint declaration of Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Morocco, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Cyprus and Croatia, UNESCO included "Mediterranean diet" in the list of intangible cultural heritage of mankind. According to the resolution of UNESCO, each of the above countries needs to choose an Emblematic Community as an example of maintaining a Mediterranean diet in their respective countries. Among them, Tavira (UNESCO, 2010; 2013) is the city selected by the representative settlement in Portugal. Although there are still many differences in the cooking methods of different countries, the name of "Mediterranean cuisine" conveys a common diet concept: healthy, simple, and fresh. The common geographical conditions make it possible to summarize the "rules" of food: the Mediterranean coastal areas are dry in summer with little rain, and warm and humid in winter, which are most suitable for planting subtropical fruits. Citrus, figs, tomatoes, grapes, and other fruits have excellent quality here; Olive, a woody oil crop, grows luxuriantly and is easy to extract as olive oil; The geographical location close to the sea brings more fresh seafood and fish.

Portugal's geographical location is not directly bordering the Mediterranean Sea, but as one of the provinces (Lvsitania/Lusitania) in the ancient Roman Empire, Portugal has traditionally had a high degree of exchanges and exchanges in politics, economy, and culture with other Mediterranean regions within the scope of the ancient Roman Empire. In addition, Portugal's eating habits are quite similar to those of Spain, Italy, Greece and other countries in the region today. Therefore, Portugal, whose coastline is close to the Atlantic Ocean, is still one of the hometowns of Mediterranean food. However, unfortunately, compared with neighboring Spain, which actively uses Mediterranean food as the theme of food tourism, Portugal's Mediterranean food seems to have no good relationship with its food tourism.

Therefore, in this paper, the authors tried to explore the food tourism in Portugal beyond the Mediterranean Diet. From the textual analysis to the traditional recipes of Portuguese Cuisine, the dietary characters of the


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Mediterranean Diet in Portugal would be demonstrated by establishing a foodscape within the tourism sector of the country. However, it is very embarrassing that when Mediterranean diet was declared as Portugal's new intangible cultural heritage in 2013, according to the survey results conducted by the Portuguese Society of Cardiology (Sociedade Portuguesa de Cardiologia) and the professional research company GfK, more than half of Portugal's citizens were unfamiliar with this so-called diet pattern inherited from their ancestors, or do not understand the meaning of Mediterranean diet (Real et al., 2021).

## OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY AREA

Tavira, as the case of this paper, has been selected as the representative settlement in Portugal to interpret the Mediterranean diet lifestyle since 2013 (UNESCO, 2013). Tavira, covering an area of 611 square kilometers, has a population of 27536 (CCDR Algarve, 2021). Its administrative division is under the jurisdiction of the District de Faro in the Region of Algarve in the southern of Portugal. It is close to Faro, a famous coastal resort in the south of Portugal, in the west, and is only 30 kilometers away from Río Guadiana, the border between Portugal and Spain. The annual average temperature of Tavira is about 18.1℃, and the best tourist season is summer (June, July, August, and September). August is the hottest month, with the average monthly temperature of 26.1℃; January is the coldest month, with an average monthly temperature of 11.2 ℃. The average annual rainfall in Tavira is 474mm. The month with the rainiest days is December (7.40 days), and the month with the least rainy days is July (0.33 days). The annual sunshine duration is about 3252.44 hours. On average, there are 106.8 hours of sunshine every month. The annual average temperature of the sea water near the Atlantic Ocean is about 18.40℃(Climate Data. Org, 2022).

Foodscape in Tavira is a form of sustainable food resources. Its basic characteristics in climate, landscape, economy, culture, and lifestyle are all very similar to the environmental conditions of Mediterranean food life. Therefore, Tavira has won the favor of Portuguese officials and become the only representative community of Portuguese inland sea food. As the representative of Mediterranean food culture in Portugal, Tavira contains typical food culture symbols.

## RESEARCH METHOD

In this paper, 57 recipes from Algarve Region where the town of Tavira is located are selected as research samples from the cookbook "PORTUGAL THE COOKBOOK" by famous Portuguese chef Leandro Carreira. With the help of the ROST Content Mining 6 software, the text analysis method is used to conduct high word frequency statistics on the obtained text data and try to find out the characteristics and symbols of food culture in Tavira.

ROST Content Mining 6 is a content mining system software, which can perform word segmentation, word frequency statistics, clustering, correlation, similarity, emotional tendency, co-occurrence, co citation, time sequence, trend, word frequency explosion, semantic network and social network analysis for information sources to achieve content mining, text analysis, knowledge processing and other purposes.

The authors analyzed the research samples through the user-defined word segmentation thesaurus, filtering thesaurus, word frequency analysis and other functions of ROST Content Mining 6 text analysis software. Before analysis, delete the irrelevant fields such as spaces, serial numbers, prepositions, etc. in the text document, add meaningless words to the filter vocabulary, and use the word frequency analysis function to sort the words from high frequency to low frequency to obtain the high-frequency vocabulary. On this basis, use the content analysis method to construct the analysis category for further analysis.

## FINDINGS

The authors used ROST Content Mining 6 software to extract the first 150 high-frequency words in the research text. After screening, the authors divided them into three categories and nine subcategories according to their meaning.


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**Table 1.** High Frequency Vocabulary Table of Cooking Method

| Cooking method | | |
|---|---|---|
| Non-heated | | |
| Serial Number | High Frequency Words | Word Frequency |
| 1 | cut | 35 |
| 2 | mixture | 29 |
| 3 | stir | 26 |
| 4 | peel | 9 |
| 5 | wrap | 8 |
| 6 | soak | 7 |
| 7 | slice | 5 |

| Cooking method | | |
|---|---|---|
| Heated | | |
| Serial Number | High Frequency Words | Word Frequency |
| 1 | heat | 131 |
| 2 | boil | 32 |
| 3 | bake | 22 |
| 4 | fry | 20 |
| 5 | preheat | 9 |
| 6 | stew | 2 |

| Cooking method | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cooking utensil | | |
| Serial Number | High Frequency Words | Word Frequency |
| 1 | saucepan | 68 |
| 2 | oven | 22 |
| 3 | pan | 11 |


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The first category is cooking methods. Among heating cooking methods, the word "boil" appears most frequently, 32 times. It can be said that "boil" is a very common cooking method in this region. The fresh and nearby ingredients are processed in a relatively simple cooking way, matched with seasonings, which is similar to the simple cooking process advocated in the Mediterranean diet model. The second most frequent is bake, which is usually used to make desserts. The frequency of "fry" is relatively low, 9 times. In the non-heated cooking method, the top five-word frequencies are cut (35 times), mixture (29 times), stir (26 times), peel (9 times) and wrap (8 times), respectively. It can be seen that the relatively simple cooking methods such as cutting, mixing and stirring occupy the majority of the word frequency. It is worth mentioning that in the category of cooking utensils, the word "saucepan" has appeared 68 times, which indicates that stewed dishes account for a large proportion of the study samples. The stewing method is indeed a very common cooking method for Portuguese traditional dishes, which also confirms the characteristics of the Mediterranean diet mode mentioned above.

**Table 2.** High Frequency Vocabulary Table of Seasoner

| Seasoner | | |
|---|---|---|
| Plant based flavoring | | |
| Serial Number | High Frequency Words | Word Frequency |
| 1 | olive/oil | 76 |
| 2 | onion | 40 |
| 3 | garlic | 30 |
| 4 | pepper | 20 |
| 5 | parsley | 17 |
| 6 | lemon | 10 |
| 7 | bay | 9 |
| 8 | cinnamon | 6 |
| 9 | jam | 6 |

| Seasoner | | |
|---|---|---|
| Non-plant flavoring | | |
| Serial Number | High Frequency Words | Word Frequency |
| 1 | salt | 68 |
| 2 | brine | 10 |
| 3 | wine | 10 |
| 4 | butter | 8 |
| 5 | rinegar | 8 |
| 6 | lard | 5 |

The second category is seasoning. The authors divided the high-frequency words about seasoning appearing in this study into two subcategories: non-plant flavoring and plant-based flavoring. Among non-plant flavorings, the word with the highest frequency is "salt" (68 times), and the word with the second highest frequency is "brine" (10


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times). Tavira, as the case of this paper, has abundant sunshine and has been famous for sunning sea salt since ancient times. So far, the local area still maintains the sea salt field produced by traditional sunning methods. The most famous example of the Portuguese use of salt can be traced back to the Great Navigation Period. During this period, the Portuguese had to overcome the problem of food preservation, so many new ways of food preservation came into being with people's wisdom. In order to preserve the food for a long time during the journey, Portuguese sailors used sun drying and salting to deal with the catch, so that they could carry the catch to all parts of the world where they sailed. This ancient seasoning or preservation method also affected today's Portuguese cooking. For example, “bacalhau” (dried cod) preserved with a lot of sea salt is a very common fish ingredient in Portuguese diet today. The word "wine" has a frequency of 10 times, which is mainly used to match with food. The combination of food and wine is related to the cultural and historical characteristics of a region, which may constitute an interesting and unique destination attraction (Carvalho M et al, 2021). The production history of wine crops in Algarve can be traced back to the time when Muslims ruled the Iberian Peninsula. Thanks to the mild Mediterranean climate, stable and sufficient sunshine, soil conditions formed by mixing sand, clay and schist, and geological conditions of limestone outcrop, Tavira has become an excellent hotbed for wine production. Portuguese people will drink different kinds of wine at the right time, for example, they will choose the wine type for appetizing before meals, and they will also match the right wine according to the order of dishes during meals. For example, when enjoying seafood or fish dishes, “vinho branco” (white wine) should be used; Enjoy red meat dishes with “vinho tinto” (red wine); When enjoying cold dishes, they will choose to match with “vinho rosé” (rose wine); enjoy dessert with “vinho espumante” (sparkling wine); after dinner, it will be paired with “vinhos fortificados” (fortified wine), which can help digestion. The frequency of "butter" and "lard" is 8 and 5 times respectively. As representatives of animal oils, their frequency is far lower than that of "olive oil" (76 times), a vegetable oil. Olive oil contains the highest proportion of monounsaturated fatty acids, which can prevent and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. In addition, vitamin E and polyphenols in olive oil are natural antioxidants, which inhibit the production of free radicals and reduce the incidence of cancer. The Iberian Peninsula is the best environment for olive cultivation. The olive oil produced by Iberian Peninsula provides more than 60% of the global market demand; As a producer of olive oil, Portugal has been taking olive oil as the main oil source in food cooking since ancient times. The huge difference in the frequency of animal oil and olive oil undoubtedly confirms this feature of the Portuguese diet.

In the plant-based flavorings, except for the olive oil mentioned above, they are listed in descending order of word frequency: onion (76 times), garlic (30 times), pepper (20 times), parsley (17 times), lemon (10 times), bay (9 times) and cinnamon (6 times). Onion is a common ingredient in Mediterranean diet. Like garlic, it contains rich sulfide, which can help the body metabolize carcinogens and fight inflammation. It has a long history of cultivation. It was cultivated in Persia 5000 years ago. At that time, the Karidan Dynasty took onions as a kind of talisman, which was introduced to Egypt in 1000 BC (there are pictures of harvesting onions in ancient Egyptian stone carvings). Pepper, parsley, bay leaf and cinnamon, which are now ubiquitous cooking spices, were the harbingers of the great sailing era centuries ago. They, together with gold, jewelry, local specialties, and other products, constitute a rich wealth in the East. Marco Polo's rendering aroused the Portuguese's desire and attracted them to come from afar. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the Portuguese carried out great maritime exploration and opened new routes, partly because they wanted to get gold, spices, jewelry and other specialties from the East directly beyond the control of Turks and Arabs. In the long time before the opening of the new route, the world was far vaster and more mysterious than it is now. Western Europeans are full of desire for spices, and the spices they desire are the ones we mainly use as cooking condiments today.

**Table 3.** High Frequency Vocabulary Table of Ingredients

| Ingredients | | |
|---|---|---|
| vegetables | | |
| Serial Number | High Frequency Words | Word Frequency |
| 1 | tomatoes | 33 |
| 2 | potatoes | 24 |
| 3 | beans | 9 |
| 4 | peas | 5 |


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| Ingredients | | |
|---|---|---|
| seafood | | |
| Serial Number | High Frequency Words | Word Frequency |
| 1 | clans | 36 |
| 2 | fish | 27 |
| 3 | tuna | 22 |
| 4 | shells | 11 |
| 5 | cod | 7 |
| 6 | octopus | 6 |
| 7 | cockles | 5 |

| Ingredients | | |
|---|---|---|
| meat and other | | |
| Serial Number | High Frequency Words | Word Frequency |
| 1 | egg | 22 |
| 2 | pork | 18 |
| 3 | steaks | 13 |
| 4 | flesh | 11 |
| 5 | chicken | 7 |
| 6 | guts | 6 |
| 7 | partridge | 6 |
| 8 | blood | 5 |
| 9 | hare | 2 |

| Ingredients | | |
|---|---|---|
| cereals/nuts | | |
| Serial Number | High Frequency Words | Word Frequency |
| 1 | flour | 17 |
| 2 | rice | 15 |
| 3 | bread | 15 |
| 4 | almonds | 7 |

The third category is ingredient. The authors subdivide the high-frequency words about food materials appearing in the research text into four subcategories: vegetables, cereals/nuts, seafood, and meat/other categories. In vegetables, the word frequency from high to low is tomato (33 times), potato (24 times), bean (9 times) and pea (5 times). In the era of great navigation, a large number of products originating in America, Africa and Asia were brought back to Europe by navigators; For example, tomatoes, peppers, potatoes and beans from America (Albala, 2011). Potato and tomato, two kinds of plant food materials originating in America, are one of the trophies of the Portuguese during the "Great Geographical Discovery" period. They have become frequent customers of Portuguese food materials, and then they are taken to other parts of the world by sailors. These agricultural products from foreign countries have made Portugal's diet and food materials more diversified and richer. Tavira is located in southwest Europe, where the climate is relatively warm. With sufficient sunshine, it is suitable for the planting and


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production of tomatoes, potatoes, peas, and other fruits and vegetables. Therefore, these have become the main ingredients of today's food culture.

In cereals and nuts, the authors ranked flour (17 times), bread (15 times), rice (15 times) and almonds (7 times) in descending order of word frequency. The plant derived food plays a leading role in the Mediterranean diet, and the emphasis of the Mediterranean diet model on the basis of plant food materials is also reflected in this study sample.

In the category of seafood, the authors ranked in descending order of word frequency as follows: clams (36 times), fish (27 times), tuna (22 times), shells (11 times), cod (7 times), octopus (6 times) and cockles (5 times). Clams, shells, and cockles are shellfish. It can be seen that the seafood ingredients in Algarve where Tavira is located are mainly shellfish. In addition, because of the natural conditions of the current meeting, Tavira has created good local fishing ground conditions, abundant fishery resources and convenient location, making it an important fishing port, mainly engaged in tuna fishing and processing. Therefore, the high frequency of the word "tuna" also has considerable reasons. The "cod" appearing seven times in the recipe text and the dried cod (bacalhau) preserved by a large amount of sea salt are very common fish ingredients in the Portuguese diet. Portuguese people are famous for their love of cod, which is mostly described by their diversified cooking methods, showing that cod is an important feature of Portugal's traditional diet. In fact, cod is not produced in the Atlantic Ocean adjacent to Portugal. The reason for the high occurrence rate of cod in Portuguese food culture should be related to religious traditions and cultural factors, in addition to the flavor and nutritional value of the ingredients. In the past, believers were required to follow the rule of not eating meat during fasting, which made cod rich in high protein and low fat become the alternative to meat intake during the period when most Catholic Portuguese observe the precepts. Nowadays, fasting is no longer as strict and frequent as it used to be, but the delicacy originally belonging to the fast day has gradually become a part of Portuguese eating habits and living culture. The sea has endowed Tavira with rich marine resources, such as deep-sea fish, octopus, shells, and other rich seafood ingredients. The superior geographical conditions and the long history of marine activities make it used to using marine fishing resources to eat a lot of seafood.

The livestock industry prevailing in the interior of the Iberian Peninsula also supplies the source of meat in Portugal's diet, including pork, beef, mutton, and dairy products, which are common ingredients in Portugal's daily diet. Tavira is close to mountains and sea. Besides seafood, it also has mountain treasures. Its inland mountains provide abundant ingredients. The "blood" that appeared five times is related to a characteristic sausage. There are many livestock in the mountain area, and the animal husbandry is developed. People use pig blood to make blood sausage with various animal fats, garlic, and other spices. The industrial pattern of Tavira is mainly family agriculture. Up to now, activities such as community agriculture, animal husbandry, beekeeping, hunting, and handicraft manufacturing are still maintained in the inland mountain forest area, which has the characteristics of forest land in the Mediterranean region (Município de Tavira, 2021). It is worth noting that, in other regions, the village and the hare are rarely used as food materials, and this game can be said to be one of the characteristics of the region.

## CONCLUSION

Foodscape is not a list, but an experience. Tavira, as an example of the community that maintains Mediterranean food in Portugal, retains fresh intangible cultural assets in human life, which has symbolic significance. Through the text analysis of the traditional recipes in the Algarve Region, this paper analyzes its food characteristics and culture, and explores the cultural attraction behind it.It is worth mentioning that now the Chinese government has obviously relaxed the control over the novel coronavirus pneumonia, and Chinese people's demand for tourism has increased greatly. If Tavira's unique cultural attractions can be exploited to develop tourism activities, it will have a positive impact on the development of tourism in the region.

This paper summarizes the characteristics of diet culture in Tavira from the aspects of cooking, ingredients, cultural background, etc. The typical vegetable ingredients commonly seen in Tavira include tomatoes, potatoes, beans and other vegetables, garlic, onions, pepper, parsley, bay leaves, and olive oil. In addition, dishes in Tavira mainly use simple cooking methods such as stewing and frying, among which stewing is the most popular. At the same time, Tavira not only has rich marine resources, such as deep-sea fish, octopus, shells, and other rich seafood ingredients, but also has developed animal husbandry. The superior geographical conditions make Tavira people accustomed to eating a lot of seafood (especially shellfish) and game. On the basis of exploration of dietary characteristics in Tavira, it is beneficial for the Portuguese tourism department to establish a food landscape to reflect the best display window of the Mediterranean diet model in Portugal.


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# TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF NEGATIVE MEMORABLE FOOD, DRINK, AND CULINARY TOURISM EXPERIENCES

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## ABSTRACT

Memorable tourism experience and memorable food tourism experience studies have focused mainly on positive experiences. This has limited theoretical development because categorising positive experiences may not cover all memorable experiences. However, in the context of tourism, travelers can have negative experiences during their stay at a destination despite the best efforts of the service providers (Kim et al., 2021). It is important to understand negative memorable experiences because memory researchers believe that both positive and negative memories can have similar impacts (Jorgenson et al., 2019). Kensigner and Schacter (2006) found that negative valence leads to the creation of a stronger memory than positive valence does. Thus, this study explores travelers most memorable negative food travel experience.

This study was conducted using a sample of American leisure travelers. Respondents recorded their own answers and submitted the survey using Qualtrics. The survey included both openended and closed-ended questions about general food and drink tourism attitudes, behaviors, and reflections. The sample consisted of adult Americans (18 years or older) who had taken a leisure trip overnight and at least 50 miles (80 km) from home in the past two years. 514 adult American leisure travelers completed the survey. About 30% stated they never had a negative memorable negative food travel experience. Factors contributing to a negative memorable negative food travel experience were food/drink quality; sanitation/food safety; cultural differences; dietary/menu restrictions; service attributes; price/perceived value; and destination's lack of food or restaurant availability. These factors differ from positive memorable food tourism experience. Negative memorable negative food travel experience focused more on food and service than other attributes (e.g. social, touristic) found with positive memorable food tourism experience. Some factors (e.g. food, service) contribute to both positive and negative memorable negative food travel experience, while others (e.g. sanitation) only to negative memorable negative food travel experience. Thus, Herzberg's twofactor theory can be applied to memorable negative food travel experience: attributes may be satisfiers (leading to positive memorable tourism experience), dissatisfiers (leading to negative memorable tourism experience), or either.

Research in memorable food tourism experience has categorised previous data to exclude negative items and has mainly focused on positively remembered experiences. In fact, most classifications of memorable tourism experiences (Ng et al., 2022) or food tourism experiences (Stone et al., 2018) in the literature have focused only on positive memorable food tourism experience. However, to advance theory on what comprises memorable food tourism experience, negative experiences must also be understood. Many elements said to contribute to memorable tourism experiences were not found to apply to negative tourism experiences, while new factors were identified. Thus, Herzberg's two-factor theory is an appropriate theory for explaining attributes of memorable food tourism experiences: some attributes (e.g. socialization or celebration) contribute only to positive experiences (akin to "satisfiers"), while others (e.g. special diets, spoiled food) contribute only to negative experiences (akin to "dissatisfiers").


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# SECTION 14: FUTURE TRENDS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY, MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT


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# UNDERSTANDING CROWD MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AT LARGE SCALE EVENTS: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

### OBJECTIVES/ RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study's main goal is to understand crowd management practices at large-scale events from a South African Perspective. The research questions entail determining the most effective practices for crowd management for large gatherings and identifying how crowd behaviour impacts the practices of crowd control and management taking into consideration theories that have been adopted worldwide.

### METHODOLOGY

The population for this part of the study refers to event safety officers and stakeholders involved in safety planning and implementation at large-scale events in South Africa (Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town). A sample size of (N=20) participants was selected for the study compiled from a list provided by SACIA of competent, experienced stakeholders who are involved in safety at large-scale events. The data will be collected using personal interviews (qualitative) which will be semi-structured in nature and will be conducted on a one-to-one basis using Microsoft Teams. The questions are guided by the research questions. Thematic analysis will be used to identify and present recurring patterns or themes using Atlast ti.
Theoretical and practical contributions
The theoretical contribution of the study aims to provide extensions, refine and critique some of the existing theories and models used for crowd control and management at large gatherings. The practical contributions aim to assist the event safety officers and practitioners in improving safety processes, problem-solving and guidance of crowd management practices.

**Key Words:** event safety, crowd dynamics, crowd management, event artificial intelligence.
*data collection still in progress

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# ECONOMIC RESILIENCE IN TOURISM: EVIDENCE FROM COVID-19

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the determinants of resilience of tourism companies and the role of governmental policies and location as sources of competitive advantage during downturns. While resilience has been widely explored in regional and macroeconomic contexts, firm-level resilience remains underdeveloped, particularly in tourism. The industry's vulnerability to external shocks (Prayag et al., 2020), coupled with its significant contributions to global GDP and employment (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024), underscores the urgency of understanding how tourism firms withstand and recover from crises. Investigating such a theme is timely and crucial, following globally disruptive events which impose significant economic and social costs (Bertschek et al., 2019).

To bridge this gap, a novel approach to company resilience is introduced, through the adaptation of a sensitivity index from the regional resilience literature. Through the application of this index, companies are classified as resilient or non-resilient, allowing for an examination of the factors that determine the likelihood of resilience. To do so, binary logistic regression models are employed to investigate how the resilience of these firms to COVID-19 is influenced by their characteristics, country of origin and Eurozone membership, using firm-level data from ten European countries.

The results show that human capital reductions, size, and past profitability diminish resilience, while higher leverage and capital intensity strengthen it. Additionally, the findings of this paper also suggest that the effects of these characteristics differ across countries, highlighting the consequences of Eurozone membership. Furthermore, the importance of human capital is emphasized, as well as the role of governmental policies in developing the resilience of the tourism industry.

The main implications from this study are twofold. First, a cross-country analysis of the resilience determinants of tourism firms is provided, which broadens the understanding of how companies can strengthen their resilience, providing valuable insights into future preparedness strategies for both tourism firms and policymakers. Second, a novel measure of company resilience is proposed, adapted from the regional resilience literature, which is also a relevant contribution. The main findings support the resource-based view (Barney, 2001) and dynamic capabilities (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009) in crisis contexts, by emphasizing the differentiating effect of certain firm-level resources on tourism firms' resilience.

Key Words: covid-19; crisis; hospitality; resilience; tourism.

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# HOLISTICSCAPE FRAMEWORK AND A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR ENHANCING TOURISTS' HOLISTIC HEALTH THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL STIMULI

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

Tourism aims to promote well-being. However, frameworks like servicescape and experiencescape fail to address tourist's perceived holistic health. This study highlights gaps in understanding how the surroundings' stimuli promote holistic health in tourism. Most studies on environmental stimuli were based on accommodation and food experiences and prioritised emotional and behavioural outcomes. Even though a few studies conceptualised the holistic wellness experience in tourism, the setting stimuli with perceived tourists' holistic health remain underexplored, limiting providers' ability to design health-promoting experiences. Thus, further research in Holisticscape is necessary to explain the environmental stimuli with perceived holistic health within the tourism experience.

### OBJECTIVE(S)

(1) Introduce the novel construct of "Holisticscape," bridging the gap between environmental stimuli research and tourists' perceived holistic health;
(2) Categorise the key dimensions and subdimensions of environmental stimuli in the tourism experience;
(3) Develop a theoretical and practical framework to guide future research and applications in tourism and hospitality.

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted focusing on peer-reviewed papers on environmental stimuli published between 2018 and 2022 in Scopus and Web of Science databases using the search terms "atmospherics," "servicescape," and "experiencescape" combined with "touris*." The Prisma Flowchart structured the number of articles screened and excluded at the different steps. Thematic coding analysis was used to categorise the dimensions, subdimensions, main disciplines, theories, methods, and research approaches.

### FINDINGS

The study identified 66 papers with three principal stimuli dimensions: physical, social and experience. Moreover, 14 subdimensions were found (e.g., sensorial ambient, social interactions, activity factors). Environmental psychology and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) followed by marketing and experiential economy were used to underpin the findings. Most studies explained the effect of environmental stimuli on emotional and


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behavioural outcomes. Integrating the perceived holistic health within servicescape and experiencescape frameworks is identified as a research gap. This paper advances the literature by conceptualising Holisticscape as an extension of the servicescape, a comprehensive framework for tourism experience stimuli with perceived holistic health. Moreover, three research propositions were identified: (1) Holisticscape as the multidimensional stimuli on tourists' holistic health construct, (2) the development of a measurement scale for Holisticscape and (3) the Holisticscape's potential to enhance hedonic and eudemonic well-being effects.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The study contributes to tourism and environmental psychology by introducing the Holisticscape construct, expanding the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model to include perceived holistic health. It bridges gaps between marketing, health promotion, and experiential design theories, offering an interdisciplinary perspective on the tourism experience.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION

Practitioners can use the Holisticscape framework to design experiential settings that enhance holistic health, such as integrating nature-based solutions and curating culturally enriching activities. At the macro level, this research contributes to sustainable tourism by promoting global health and well-being aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being). At the micro level, it empowers businesses to create competitive, health-focused experiences, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty while addressing emerging demands for wellness tourism.

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# CITY CREATIVE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM ENGAGEMENT DIMENSIONS

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## ABSTRACT

## INTRODUCTION

The present study aims to identify the effects of the different degrees of engagement on the development of the creative tourism city. Creative Tourism presupposes active engagement between tourists and the local community, with the degree of involvement varying in intensity. According to Richards' model (2011), there are four steps of creativity (Products, Processes, People, and Environments), with an increased tourist engagement across these four dimensions. A literature review provided a list of variables affecting the development of creative tourism and the creative city, categorised into these four engagement dimensions.

## METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative methodology, employing questionnaires conducted in the ten UNESCO Creative Cities in Portugal. The target population comprises residents, representatives of the tourism supply sector, the creative industry ecosystem, and public entities. The questionnaire includes variables related to the development of creative tourism and creative cities extracted from the literature review. The sample consists of 301 validated responses, and the data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to explore complex interrelations between constructs.

## RESULTS

The analysis validated the dimensions of People and Products; however, the results did not validate the dimensions of Processes and Environments. The Portuguese cities analyzed an inversion of Richards' (2011) sequence, with Products and People—both aspects already developed in these creative cities—effectively leveraging creative tourism development. The unvalidated dimensions suggested an absence of processes for developing creative tourism in these cities and a lack of a creative environment. The latter dimension would be the result of greater tourist engagement. Despite being classified as creative cities, these cities also lack strategy and governance for developing creative tourism.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the order of engagement defined by Richards, (2011) i.e., products, process, people, and environment, can occur differently. The order can depend on the development model, that is, more top-down or bottom-up. Findings from the Portuguese city demonstrate that products and people can develop first, then process and environment, as these last dimensions rely on governance models. That means there are two ways of development: product-centered creative city tourism development and process-centered creative city tourism development. Both should achieve the maximum level, that is, the creation of a creative ecosystem. Research results pointed out a flexible framework for creative tourism city development that can be adapted to different contexts.


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# ESG FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BUSINESSES: A CASE OF LARGE HOTELS IN JAMAICA

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## ABSTRACT

The environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiative was introduced by the United Nations (UN) in the early 21st century ( Krantz, 2024) The aim is to encourage the integration of ESG into organizations for a more responsible and sustainable operation. Since then, ESG has become an important measure for a company's attitudes toward sustainability. With a set of metrics ESG is used to measure an organization's environmental, social and governance impacts and in doing so, it has become a very important decision-making tool (Alama and Peterb, 2022) The ESG framework is used by these organizations to guide their operations in terms of opportunities and risks that are related to the environmental, social and governance aspects of the business Peterdy, 2024).

It is now expected that businesses are to act differently, especially through their decision-making, operations, supply chains, policies, management tools, and the governance of their operations (Alama and Peterb, 2022). A major reason is that the ESG standards and strategy are being used by investors to evaluate the behavior and financial performance of companies and this has been supported by Li et al., (2021). Having an ESG framework in place will not only allow them as well as investors to develop sustainability reporting standards but will facilitate better modalities to evaluate associated risks. In general, people have also become concerned about sustainability, respect and diversity in the workplace (Bryne, n.d). The implementation and monitoring of ESG in tourism businesses are now required to address related concerns. This is because there are new operating expectations and regulations by stakeholders inclusive of government, consumers and investors (UN Tourism, n.d).

Overall, there is limited studies in the domain of ESG (Li et al., 2021). There is a low level of awareness of tourism and the ESGs, and hence, more understanding is required. Furthermore, only few studies focused on ESG within the operations of tourism businesses. Tourism has an important role to play in the sustainable management of the ESGs due to its propensity to be a catalyst for social and cultural exchange (Woo, 2023). Consumers have also are more environmentally aware and they tend to favour companies that practice sustainability (UN Tourism, n.d). In addition, tourism businesses tend to focus only on the environmental component of the ESG (Woo, 2023). Therefore, more needs to be done with regards to the social and governance aspects of their operation.

This research seeks to examine ESG within the context of large hotels in Jamaica. This allows for an assessment of the environmental, social and governance practices of these hotels. An explanatory research design will be used to examine extant literature to adequately explain the notion of ESG in relation to the sustainability of tourism businesses, particularly in the accommodation sector. The literature will explain the concept and practice of ESG and controversies surrounding ESG. Secondly, a netnography approach will be used to determine if the large hotels in Jamaica are communicating their ESG practices through their websites. The study will conclude with a discourse on the way forward for the accommodation sector, particularly large hotels, in implementing ESG for the sustainability of their business. This explanatory research intends to provide greater depth and new insights into ESG for all tourism stakeholders.

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# SECTION 15: DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUAL MODELS


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# ON THE ROAD AGAIN'; PROPOSAL FOR A TYPOLOGY OF EUROPEAN MOTORHOMERS TRAVELLING IN THE ALGARVE (PORTUGAL)

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## ABSTRACT

Motorhoming consists of a way of travelling in vehicles incorporating a living space. These vehicles usually include a sleeping area, a kitchen, a dining area and, in some cases, a bathroom and shower. People who travel in motorhomes choose a type of tourism that does not rely on traditional touristic infrastructures. They sleep in their beds, cook their food and can be self-sufficient and independent for several days. Trips in motorhomes vary in duration: from a weekend away from home to long periods of nomadism, and, according to the literature, the primary motivations for travelling in a 'house on wheels' are, firstly, the desire for autonomy and independence regarding the tourist system. Thousands of motorhomes from northern Europe travel annually to the temperate regions of the South, where they stay during the winter; many of these travellers have the Algarve as their leading destination. Although the official numbers show a global trend of growth in this form of travel, several authors have warned of the lack of scientific interest in the subject, which has generated some gaps in knowledge about the phenomenon of motorhome travel. This communication forms part of a broader investigation aiming to fill some of these gaps. This study used a 'mobile methodology'. Therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen using participant and non-participant ethnographic observation and a significant set of semi-structured interviews. During the observation periods, the authors visited several places in the Algarve using rented motorhomes.

Seen from the common-sense point of view, this way of travelling appears homogeneous, but a closer sociological look reveals the diversity of its participants. The intellectual construction of a typology constitutes a way of providing intelligibility to the diversity found. Just like any other sociological typology, the one proposed is made up of ideal types. According to Max Weber, «An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent, concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct (einheitlich). We will not find empirically anywhere such a construct in its conceptual purity: it is a utopia. » (Weber, 1965:172-173).

So, the main objective of this communication is to disclose a typology of European motorhome travellers, taking the Algarve region in southern Portugal as a case study. Although previous investigations conducted in other regions of the world have already proposed some typologies of motorhome travellers the sociocultural contexts where these typologies were elaborated are very different from the European reality and, specifically, the studied region. Contrasting with the previous typologies, which used only one or two characteristics of the motorhomers, this one is based on five criteria. These criteria combine objective attributes – the age of the travellers (or the generation to which they belong), the type of vehicle used, and the duration of the trip – but also the subjective discourses about the trip: the motivations to continue travelling; the pleasure derived from the trip; or the limitations or constraints that prevent full-time enjoyment. The three resulting types were designated as 'enjoyers', 'seekers' and 'vacationers'.

The enjoyer's type comprises full-time or mid-term seasonal travellers who own modern motorhomes usually equipped with all the comfort features. Most of them are retirees from wealthy European countries, so they have the


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time and financial means to dedicate themselves to travel full-time, following their rhythms and searching for warm weather conditions. The seekers are motorhome travellers on an existential quest. Their narratives are marked by search, restlessness and reflection. The travellers of this second type tend to present some form of discontent and discomfort with the constraints generated by the social structures of modern society. Vacationers comprise, for the most part, adults in active life; they are people seeking temporary diversion during short breaks or summer holidays in owned or rented motorhomes. They contrast with the enjoyers and seekers, who engage in voyages from several months to a lifetime.

One of the virtues of the investigation that gave rise to this typology was precisely the diversity of age groups that it was able to cover, which allowed obtaining perspectives from three different generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials). This generational diversity was achieved, above all, thanks to the different stages of the fieldwork that was carried out both in the summer and winter months and in formal and informal parking spaces. It is also the first typology that seeks to integrate what can be considered a 'youth subculture' within the motorhome travel lifestyle: the vanlifers. The 'vanlifers' may be understood as a subtype situated between the enjoyers and the seekers.

Typologies add intelligibility to social relations and social practices, and the one that will be presented constitutes a tool that allows a better understanding of motorhome tourism as it is practised in Europe; it opens the discussion around the motivations and interests of people who travel in Europe in their 'houses on wheels' and reinforces the potential of motorhoming as an object of multidisciplinary study.

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# TOURISM DESTINATION VULNERABILITY: (DE)CONSTRUCTING A "RED LIST" APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

Monitoring the global health of tourism destinations has never been as important, as evidenced by their vulnerability to contemporary poly-threats (Becken and Coghlan, 2022). The urgency to address these challenges is clear, with recent impacts including deadly droughts and wildfires across the Mediterranean, increased incidences of flooding in Venice, and deadly heatwaves affecting the Americas, India, and Saudi Arabia where the Mecca pilgrimage tragedy occurred earlier this year. These climate-related emergencies are exacerbated by intersecting factors such as increasing competition for resources (water, land), migration, economic and political instability, and food and energy shortages.

Combined, these crises threaten the holistic viability of tourism destinations as their complex and multi-faceted impacts affect the sustainability of ecosystem-derived services and products, resulting in broader foreseen and unforeseen societal implications beyond the immediate tourism concerns. However, there remains no consensus in approach regarding how to assess tourism destination vulnerability on a global scale. Following a systems thinking perspective, if tourism destination risk assessment is to be recentred within its Socio-Ecological-Systems (SES) theoretical context, there is a practical need for a holistic and systemic approach to destination vulnerability assessment that can examine the interconnections between external stressors, tourism pressures and associated impacts across the various components of the Socio-Ecological-System, ideally at a global scale.

Seeking to close this conceptual gap, this paper draws on the field of ecology and the Red List of Ecosystems framework. Developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the framework is recognised as the global benchmark for ecosystem health assessment. From this foundation, this paper poses the novel question of whether the framework could be transposed to classify the global health of tourism destinations through two interrelated objectives. The first evaluated the nexus between foundational ecosystem health designations and tourism. This involved analysing the current framework methodology and criteria to establish if the existing Red List ecosystem classifications of: Collapsed, Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable, Near Threatened or Least Concern (Keith et al., 2013) could be used as proxies by tourism destinations. We then examined the potential for developing a dedicated Red List of Tourism Destinations which would extend the scope of the habitat-health focused Red List approach.

Our findings in relation to Objective 1 revealed that the existing Red List habitat classification criteria have limited transferability for designating the health of tourism destinations. However, our pro-con analysis in relation to Objective 2 revealed that the Ecosystem Red List classification scheme criteria could be applied to destinations by identifying "tourism equivalent criteria". Thus, this derived approach positions a dedicated Red List of Tourism Destinations as a complementary framework, thereby helping to achieve the necessary reconnections between tourism and ecosystem health.


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Principally, our conceptual appraisal makes the following contributions. Foremost, it offers a new approach to assessing the systemic vulnerability of destinations to contemporary ‘polythreats’. In doing so, it also addresses the need for holistic, systemic approaches and tools that examine the trajectory of tourism pressures and impacts across the various components of the SES (Glyptou, 2024).

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# THE FRAMEWORK OF TOURISM ACTIVITIES, WELL-BEING AND BEHAVIORAL DESIRE

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## ABSTRACT

Hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are critical factors in determining a good life. Given the significance of well-being, tourism researchers and governments have focused on how to increase continuous engagement with positive activities, which might be because such activities can ultimately reduce the healthcare burden. If we know better about particular activities leading to well-being, such activities can help explain how to achieve a good life. However, the Department of Health in the United Kingdom pointed out that "sometimes we may lack relevant evidence." Among well-being-inducing activities, taking a trip is one of the core activities enhancing both types of well-being. Indeed, tourism markets have focused on hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives of well-being. Given the social impacts of a trip, tourism researchers and organizations attempt to increase not only one's well-being but also encourage individuals to have a holiday trip. Relatedly, understanding wellbeing-enhancing activities is important in effectively managing individuals' well-being and destinations. Tourism destinations often share different but similar destination resources, while having distinctive activities that necessitate differentiation from other competitive tourism destinations. Therefore, past studies have focused on tourism activity and attributes. However, previous studies did not capture individual differences in one's perception of well-being. Not all people experience the same level of well-being given individual differences. Despite the diverse features of tourism destinations, the core attribute (e.g., tourism activities) and well-being perception (e.g., hedonism, eudaimonism) have been considerably underexplored in predicting well-being and future behaviors.

To address this gap, this research aims to suggest conceptual frameworks of activities, well-being, behavioral components (e.g., desire), and well-being perception. This research addresses the research aim by identifying well-being-inducing activities happening in individual's' travel life and their effects on post-event desire. To achieve the research aim, this study takes deductive approaches with a survey as a core research strategy. The expected findings explain the relationships between tourism activities, well-being and behavioral desire. The present study will make significant contributions to tourism literature and organizations. This research is expected to address significant research gaps by explaining how tourism activities can contribute to individuals' well-being and future behaviors; and why individual differences exist in interpreting post-trip well-being and behavioral outcomes. Understanding wellbeing-inducing activities is significant in that governments can provide and promote such activities as a part of core well-being schemes. Also, tourism organizations can utilize the expected findings to improve their product marketing and management by evaluating each component of well-being-inducing factors. Lastly, the current work can explain the impacts of tourism on people's well-being and their behavioral desires, which ultimately provides tourism organizations with a model that can be applied to tourism destination(s). Therefore, the expected research findings will help understand the capability of a destination to attract visitors and regulate the necessary components of tourism destinations.

**Key Words:** Tourism, well-being, activity, perception, framework.


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# THIRD AGE LIFESTYLE MOBILITY: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA FROM THE TOURIST/MIGRANT PERSPECTIVE INCLUDING A RURAL AREA DEEP DIVE

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## STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

Understanding third age lifestyle tourist and migrant studies since 1980.
Objectives: Systematize current body of knowledge, identify mobility commonalities between tourist and lifestyle migrants broadly and detailing findings for rural destinations

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) systematic literature review of 136 studies retrieved from Web of Science with bibliometric analysis using VOS Viewer and antecedent, decision, outcome (ADO) and theories, methodologies and context (TCM) framework.

### FINDINGS

Third age tourist and lifestyle migrants share several choice determinants, namely geographical location and culture. As their stay extends, aspects such as cost, safety, communities and health infrastructures gain more relevance. Studies in rural areas found country variation in declared intentions for rural migration based on local amenities access. Integration and commitment with local communities stands as key aspects of sustainable development.

### THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Third Age lifestyle mobility can be developed through a spectrum of commitment to the destination, starting from a short-stay tourism to permanent retirement migration.


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# MEASURING TOURISTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY: DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF THE TOURIST CIRCULAR ECONOMY SCALE (TCES)

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**ABSTRACT:**

As the tourism sector grapples with its environmental footprint, transitioning toward a circular economy (CE) model has become an urgent imperative. Despite increasing attention to sustainability in tourism, existing research lacks a validated, multidimensional instrument to measure tourists' cognitive, behavioural, and motivational engagement with CE principles. This study addresses that gap by developing and validating the Tourist Circular Economy Scale (TCES). Using a multi-phase, mixed-method design, the research began with in-depth interviews with ten British tourists to explore CE-related awareness, practices, and motivations. A comprehensive item pool was then developed through qualitative content analysis and an extensive literature review, resulting in 70 items across seven dimensions. Expert panel reviews and content validity assessment refined the scale before it was tested using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) on a sample of British tourists who had travelled abroad in the previous 12 months. The EFA and CFA revealed a seven-factor structure reflecting first-order dimensions grouped under three broader engagement constructs: cognitive, behavioural, and motivational. This presentation outlines the theoretical and empirical process underpinning TCES, demonstrating its relevance for sustainable tourism research and practice. The TCES enables destination managers, researchers, and policymakers to evaluate tourists' readiness to participate in CE initiatives and design targeted interventions accordingly.


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# DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE MODEL TO ENHANCE THE PACKAGING AND PROMOTION OF TOWNSHIP TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

South African townships, originally established during Apartheid to segregate non-white populations, are places of rich cultural heritage and historical importance. Despite their tourism potential, these areas remain underdeveloped due to poor visibility, limited community engagement, and a lack of cohesive marketing and promotional strategies. Current tourism models often ignore marginalized communities, resulting in unequal benefit distribution and limited social and economic impact. This study aims to address these issues by proposing a sustainable model that emphasizes community participation, cultural authenticity, and digital marketing to boost township tourism.

**Keywords**: Township Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Community Participation, Cultural Heritage, Digital Marketing, Stakeholder Collaboration

## INTRODUCTION

Township tourism in South Africa represents a dynamic and culturally rich segment of the tourism industry, with significant potential to contribute to local economic development and social empowerment. Townships were originally established during the Apartheid era as designated residential areas for non-white populations who were forcibly relocated under segregationist policies. These areas were often located far from urban economic centers and lacked adequate infrastructure, resulting in densely populated communities with diverse cultural identities and histories marked by social and political challenges, including periods of intense political violence (Rogerson, 2021; Magi & Nzama, 2020). This complex socio-historical background continues to shape the unique character of townships and presents both opportunities and challenges for tourism development.

Township tourism occurs across a variety of settings, from rural townships to urban informal settlements, each characterized by distinct cultural attributes and developmental needs. These differences require tailored, sustainable tourism approaches that prioritize local contexts and promote meaningful community participation. Internationally, similar forms of tourism, often referred to as slum tourism or community-based tourism, emphasize cultural exchange and inclusive economic benefits, providing useful parallels for understanding and advancing township tourism in South Africa (George & Booyens, 2022; Scheyvens, 2011).

Despite the rich cultural heritage and historical significance of South African townships, tourism in these areas remains underdeveloped. Key barriers include poor visibility caused by inadequate marketing strategies, limited engagement and empowerment of local communities, and a lack of cultural authenticity in tourism offerings (Butler & Rogerson, 2021; George & Booyens, 2022). Consequently, the tourism potential within townships is largely untapped, and the economic and social benefits remain unevenly distributed.

Although the value of township tourism is widely acknowledged, critical gaps continue to undermine its effectiveness. Many existing tourism models fail to adequately involve marginalized communities, leading to inequitable benefit sharing that threatens the sustainability of township tourism initiatives (Mahajan, 2021; Rogerson, 2021). Moreover, there is a notable absence of a cohesive, coordinated strategic framework to guide the packaging, promotion, and growth of township tourism. This lack of an integrated approach limits the sector's ability to harness its full potential sustainably and inclusively.

In response to these challenges, this study proposes a sustainable, stakeholder-driven model that emphasizes collaboration among governance structures, NGOs, tourism operators, and local communities. Central to this model is the promotion of cultural authenticity, enhanced community participation, and effective use of digital marketing to increase visibility and market access. By integrating these elements, the model aims to foster sustainable tourism


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development that balances economic upliftment, cultural preservation, community empowerment, and environmental stewardship (Nkosi, 2020; Rogerson, 2021).

Through a quantitative approach involving key stakeholders in township tourism, this study seeks to generate evidence-based insights that can inform policy and practice. The proposed model offers a holistic framework designed to overcome existing barriers and to support the packaging and promotion of authentic township tourism experiences. Ultimately, this research positions township tourism not merely as a product for consumption but as a platform for cultural expression, social inclusion, and equitable economic development. Therefore, this study aims to develop a sustainable model for township tourism by:

- Examining community participation in tourism development.
- Exploring the impact of digital marketing on tourism visibility.
- Identifying sustainable practices that preserve culture.
- Proposing an integrated strategic framework.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarship underscores the potential of township tourism as a catalyst for economic growth and cultural preservation in South Africa. Magi and Nzama (2020) and Rogerson (2021) highlight the cultural richness and historical value of townships, which attract both domestic and international tourists seeking authentic experiences. However, development in these areas faces persistent challenges, including insufficient marketing strategies that limit visibility (Butler & Rogerson, 2021), a lack of meaningful community involvement that undermines local ownership (George & Booyens, 2022), and limited capacity to deliver sustainable tourism experiences (Smith et al., 2022). Research emphasizes that community-driven initiatives and culturally authentic experiences are essential for long-term success (Mahajan, 2021; Mthiyane & Nyawo, 2023), while Nkosi (2020) notes that the growing trend of eco-conscious tourism provides opportunities to align township tourism with responsible practices that engage communities and protect cultural heritage. Despite these promising insights, there remains a clear gap in the literature: no comprehensive framework systematically integrates community engagement, digital marketing, and sustainability principles into a cohesive model for township tourism development. This study seeks to address this gap by proposing an integrated, sustainable model designed to enhance packaging and promotion while ensuring equitable benefits for local communities.

## METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

The study adopts a quantitative research approach targeting tourism operators, community leaders, and policymakers 2in key township areas. A purposive sampling method was used to select 150 participants, comprising 50 tourism operators, 50 community leaders, and 50 policymakers, based on their relevance and expertise in township tourism. Data are being collected through structured surveys distributed both in person and online, focusing on challenges, opportunities, levels of community involvement, perceptions of cultural authenticity, and marketing strategies (Mahajan, 2021). Responses are being analyzed using SPSS version 28.0, employing descriptive statistics to summarize patterns in the data and chi-square tests to assess relationships between community participation, marketing practices, and perceptions of tourism success. This analysis will inform the development of a sustainable model aimed at enhancing the packaging and promotion of township tourism.

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Preliminary findings from the study emphasize that active community participation plays a crucial role in strengthening ownership, inclusivity, and authenticity within township tourism initiatives (George & Booyens, 2022; Mahajan, 2021). Early data indicate that cultural authenticity is a primary driver of tourism success, as visitors increasingly seek immersive experiences that connect them to local heritage and traditions (Smith et al., 2022). Digital marketing, particularly through social media platforms, has emerged as a powerful tool for boosting visibility and attracting diverse domestic and international audiences, although many tourism operators still face capacity and resource constraints (Butler & Rogerson, 2021). Furthermore, the findings underscore that adopting sustainable practices such as equitable economic benefit distribution and cultural preservation is essential to ensuring long-term viability and positive community impact (Nkosi, 2020; Rogerson, 2021). These results are preliminary and will be refined through further analysis as the study progresses.


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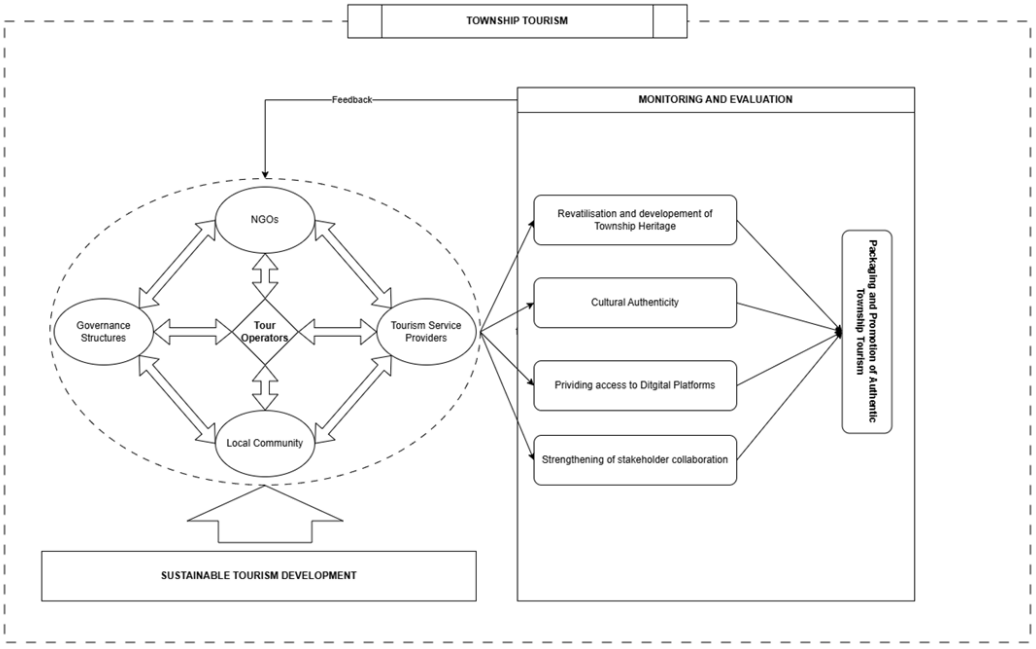
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Township Tourism




Discussion and Application of the Conceptual Model for Sustainable Township Tourism

The conceptual model places tour operators at the core of the stakeholder system, acting as essential intermediaries among governance structures, NGOs, tourism service providers, and local communities. Governance structures, such as local municipalities and tourism boards, play a crucial role in policy development and infrastructure support (Rogerson, 2021). NGOs contribute by providing funding, skills training, and community advocacy (Mahajan, 2021). Tourism service providers, including accommodation owners, guides, and transportation providers, support the operational foundation of tourism activities (Smith et al., 2022). Local communities are key as custodians of cultural heritage, with their involvement ensuring authentic and engaging tourist experiences (George & Booyens, 2022).

These stakeholders interact through a reciprocal exchange of communication, resources, and decision-making. A collaborative system grounded in two-way engagement promotes inclusive planning and accountability, both of which are necessary for sustainable tourism development (Scheyvens, 2011; Moswete & Thapa, 2017).

The results of this stakeholder collaboration directly support the broader goal of sustainable tourism development. This aligns with Nkosi (2020), who argues that sustainable development must balance economic growth, cultural preservation, community empowerment, and environmental protection. Rogerson (2021) also highlights the importance of local ownership and long-term benefits for marginalized areas.

The model features a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) process that enables stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of township tourism strategies. It targets key intervention areas, including revitalizing township heritage, promoting cultural authenticity, enhancing access to digital platforms for visibility, and strengthening stakeholder collaboration. These components align with the suggestions by Smith et al. (2022) and George and Booyens (2022), who emphasize the importance of ongoing assessment to achieve sustainable development outcomes.

The feedback loop embedded in the model ensures that insights gained from monitoring and evaluation are reintegrated into the planning and implementation process. This promotes adaptive management and encourages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resilience in tourism development practices, echoing the findings of Mahajan (2021) and Moswete and Thapa (2017) regarding evidence-based planning in community-based tourism

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

This study advances theory in sustainable tourism development by integrating community engagement, cultural authenticity, stakeholder collaboration, and digital marketing into a comprehensive framework. It addresses an important gap in the literature related to township tourism in marginalized areas. Building on previous research by Rogerson (2021) and George and Booyens (2022), the study proposes an inclusive model specifically designed to reflect the unique characteristics of township settings. The model adopts a multi-dimensional approach that emphasizes socio-economic empowerment of local communities, the strengthening of governance structures, and the incorporation of digital transformation in tourism marketing. Future theoretical development will focus on validating this model across diverse township contexts to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in promoting sustainable tourism.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION

The study aims to provide actionable strategies for tour operators, local communities, policymakers, and municipal tourism offices. The emerging model is intended to guide collaborative planning and decision-making processes, support the packaging of culturally rich tourism products, and promote equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms (Rogerson, 2021; George & Booyens, 2022). Additionally, the digital marketing recommendations included in the model will assist stakeholders in boosting their online visibility, improving targeted promotions, and attracting eco-conscious and culturally curious markets (Sigala, 2020). Through fostering stakeholder collaboration (Moswete & Thapa, 2017) and emphasizing community-driven approaches, this model has the potential to promote sustainable economic development in marginalized areas through community-based tourism initiatives (Scheyvens, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

This ongoing study highlights the need for a sustainable model aimed at enhancing the packaging and promotion of township tourism. The findings so far underscore that community participation, sustainable tourism practices, and stakeholder collaboration are critical factors that can contribute to the success of township tourism. However, the proposed model must also incorporate effective packaging of tourism experiences that reflect the local culture, heritage, and eco-friendly practices, ensuring that township tourism is both attractive to tourists and beneficial to the community. To enhance the promotion of township tourism, the model should include joint marketing strategies, leveraging the strengths of local communities, tourism operators, and government bodies to create a cohesive promotional approach. This would include showcasing the unique experiences offered by the community, such as guided tours, local crafts, and cultural experiences, while also highlighting the sustainable practices that make the destination appealing to environmentally conscious tourists. The preliminary findings about moderate collaboration in marketing and promotion (62%) point to the need for more coordinated efforts in this area, an issue that the model aims to address by facilitating more integrated marketing campaigns. Ultimately, the proposed model seeks to balance the economic, environmental, and cultural aspects of township tourism, ensuring that these communities can benefit from sustainable tourism while preserving their heritage. Future research will explore how this model can be applied practically in different township settings, with a focus on improving promotional strategies and ensuring that tourism products are well-packaged for diverse target markets.

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# SECTION 16: HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY; HEALTH, MEDICAL, SPA, AND WELLNESS TOURISM


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# TOURIST ACCOMMODATION SECTOR IN THE FACE OF CRISIS: GIS APPROACH AS THE LESSONS FROM THE HEALTH TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN POLAND

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## ABSTRACT

The management of urban destinations is a challenge, which becomes readily apparent in times of crisis. The complexity of the situation is exacerbated by the absence of reliable data. The necessity for data arises in the context of planning and management. The acquisition of data is facilitated by contemporary technologies, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and mobile applications. The objective of the research was twofold: firstly, to assess a data collection method, and secondly, to capture the presence of changes. The present study examined two health tourism destinations in the Carpathian Mountains. The extant research literature has not focused extensively on the accommodations industry in the context of the changes triggered by the pandemic caused by the novel corona virus. The subject of this paper is the particular industry and the changes that have taken place in it in the post-pandemic era. The following list enumerates the three questions deemed to be of particular significance in this research study:

- How has the post-pandemic era affected the size and other fundamental parameters of the tourist accommodation sector, as well as its spatial distribution?
- Which types of accommodation facilities are less resilient in the face of operating restrictions resulting from major crises?
- What share of the accommodation sector is not covered by official tourist statistics?

The creation of a database of accommodation facilities was achieved by employing GIS techniques on the basis of information collected from various tourism websites (including well-known platforms) such as Google Maps, Booking.com, Airbnb.com, along with regional websites. The data in the database were verified in the field using the mobile application Collector for ArcGIS. Data for the years 2020 and 2022 were then analyzed. The two years were selected due to the dissimilarity of the data collected – one year with substantial health restrictions on the accommodations sector, and another with almost no restrictions. First, by 2022 the number of facilities had changed, along with the location of some facilities. Second, many more accommodation facilities were found than what would be discerned from official statistical data. In addition to mapping changes in the spatial concentration of accommodation facilities and analyzing these changes, we also identified changes in the structure of infrastructure types. In both destinations, the trend is quite clear – there is a shift from classic types of accommodation, such as hotels or bed & breakfast facilities, in the direction of facilities that are less visible in terms of official statistics. We supplemented this research with telephone interviews focused on owners and managers of facilities, which confirmed that Covid was a major actor on the tourism scene in 2020. Respondents pointed to important factors in the post-pandemic phase that complemented the quantitative research on the accommodation sector. The paper is designed to also examine best practices, limitations, and directions for future research.

**Key Words:** health tourism destinations; tourism statistics; post-COVID-19; tourist facilities; GIS techniques.


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# THE IMPORTANCE OF AI IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTH TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

### BACKGROUND

The path to building strategies and business models based on artificial intelligence (AI) is based on the conclusions drawn from the development of business analytics (Davenport & Harris, 2017), the first stage of which is business intelligence, analytics 2.0 is represented by predictive and prescriptive Big Data analytics, analytics 3.0 – operational, while the most advanced form of generation is analytics 4.0, which includes autonomous (cognitive) analytics, AI and cognitive technologies, machine learning, neural networks, deep learning and natural language processing. Building multiple models quickly means the organization can become much more granular with customers and markets and respond to rapidly changing data. This allows for modeling the propensity of a specific customer to purchase specific products or respond to specific marketing approaches. Creating new, including sustainable and network business models requires the development of AI capabilities (Madanaguli et al., 2024): integrated intelligence (people), process automation and augmentation (process), AI infrastructure and platform (platform) and ecosystem orchestration (partner) as drivers of AI-enabled circular business models. AI may be also used for the development of ecosystem-based business models that require better orchestration of multiple stakeholders for a dynamic, sustainable balance among people, plant, and profit.

### OBJECTIVE

Identifying and explaining the importance of artificial intelligence (AI) in the development of health tourism destinations and providers. Research question was posed: how can new technologies be used to: create new business models, forecast new business scenarios, build resilience and understand threats using innovative AI solutions for destinations and providers of health tourism (medical, therapeutic/balneological, spa and wellness); response to changes in consumer behavior and ways of interacting?

### METHOD



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The article uses a qualitative approach, based on the analysis of scientific literature on the subject and an exploratory case study of the use of AI in health destinations.

**RESULTS**

The study allowed for the typification of management technologies used in health destinations and the determination of the great importance of AI as a key technology within Business Intelligence & Analytics (BI&A) solutions. The study also contributes to explaining the diversity of the scope of use of AI technology in health destinations. Health-related tourism destinations that aspire to be intelligent create ecosystems in which, thanks to BI&A systems equipped with advanced AI solutions, data from various sources are obtained and processed into information supporting management decision-making.
Originality. The article is a contribution to research on the scope of AI use in health destinations.

**Key Words:** artificial intelligence, business intelligence, health destinations, business analytics, smart destinations, IT management systems.

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# SEEKING PLEASURE OR MEANING? EXPLORING HEDONIC AND EUDAIMONIC MOTIVES, LIFESTYLE CONGRUENCE AND QUALITY OF LIFE: THE CASE OF MUAY THAI FITNESS TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the motivations, lifestyle congruence, satisfaction, and quality of life (QoL) of Muay Thai fitness tourists in Phuket, Thailand. Using data from 529 international participants and analysed through PLS-SEM, the research identifies eudaimonic motives—such as self-improvement and personal growth—as dominant drivers. Motivation and lifestyle congruence were found to significantly influence both satisfaction and perceived QoL. The study introduces lifestyle congruence as a critical construct in wellness tourism and offers a multidimensional understanding of how wellness-oriented travel experiences contribute to tourists' QoL. Practical recommendations are provided to enhance service delivery and tourist satisfaction in this niche market.

**Key Words:** hedonic, eudaimonic, lifestyle congruence, quality of life, wellness tourism, motivation

## INTRODUCTION

Wellness tourism has rapidly gained traction as a high-potential niche market, driven by increasing global interest in health and well-being (Heung & Kucukusta, 2013; Voigt & Pforr, 2014). Destinations worldwide now incorporate wellness into their development and marketing strategies. Wellness tourists are typically characterised by a focus on self-responsibility, healthy lifestyles, and personal growth. Despite economic challenges, the wellness tourism market continues to expand (Global Wellness Institute, 2018; Kazakov & Oyner, 2020; Pyke et al., 2016)). The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily impeded the growth of the wellness tourism sector, resulting in an 11% decline in 2020 (Global Wellness Institute, 2022).However, it has ultimately reinforced consumer interest in health-focused travel (Wen et al., 2021). In 2023, the wellness economy was valued at $6.3 trillion, with North America leading in wellness spending ($2.1 trillion), followed by Asia-Pacific ($1.8 trillion) and Europe ($1.6 trillion) (Global Wellness Institute, 2024). Previous research has explored motivations for wellness travel (Chen et al., 2008; Damijanić, 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Lee & Kim, 2023), expenditure determinants (Medina-muñoz & Medina-muñoz, 2012) and the role of culture and values in tourist satisfaction (Kan et al., 2023). However, current studies largely focus on spa, yoga, and spiritual retreats (Backman et al., 2022; Lehto et al., 2006; Voigt et al., 2011), with limited attention given to the fitness and sports sector—particularly Muay Thai fitness. As a culturally rooted, physically intensive wellness activity, Muay Thai represents a growing segment within sports and fitness tourism. This study addresses the gap by examining Muay Thai tourists' hedonic and eudaimonic motivations, lifestyle congruence, satisfaction, and perceived quality of life (QoL).

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are: i) to investigate the hedonic and eudaimonic motives and lifestyle congruence of Muay Thai fitness tourists; ii) to analyse the influence of these factors on tourists' satisfaction; and iii) to evaluate how motivations and lifestyle congruence shape perceived QoL.

## LITERATURE REVIEW


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The rise of wellness tourism reflects a growing global interest in health-conscious travel (Damijanić, 2019; Global Wellness Institute, 2024). As a subcategory of health tourism, wellness tourism centres on individuals seeking to preserve or enhance their well-being (Global Wellness Institute, 2024; Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). While core motivations include health improvement, wellness tourists often pursue additional experiences such as cultural engagement, social interaction, and sightseeing (Global Wellness Institute, 2024). Motivation plays a central role in shaping travel decisions. It influences destination choice, the type of services sought, and overall tourist behaviour (Kim et al., 2017). Scholars define motivation as encompassing needs, expectations, preferences, and benefits sought (Bočkus et al., 2023). Sheldon and Bushell (2009) identified wellness as the guiding principle in such travel, while others (Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015; Tiwari & Hashmi, 2022) emphasize its complexity, noting that diverse wellness experiences are driven by diverse motivational patterns. Earlier studies have explored motivations across various wellness travel types—spas (Chen et al., 2008; Koh et al., 2010; Mak et al., 2009), yoga retreats (Lehto et al., 2006; Telej & Gamble, 2019), spiritual getaways (Kelly, 2012; Voigt et al., 2011), hot springs (Handler, 2022), and lifestyle resorts (Chen et al., 2008; Voigt et al., 2011). These studies confirm that wellness travel motivation is not one-size-fits-all but shaped by destination type, tourist demographics, and personal values (Kim et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2022). A widely used framework for analysing motivations is the push-pull theory. Push factors refer to internal desires such as stress relief or escape, while pull factors relate to destination attributes that attract travellers (Damijanić, 2020; Hallab, 2006; Konu & Laukkanen, 2010). Some studies use both push and pull (e.g., Damijanić, 2020), while others examine them separately (Dryglas & Salamaga, 2017; Mak et al., 2009b; Ting et al., 2021). Motivation also plays a role in shaping satisfaction (Lim et al., 2016) and behavioural intentions (Gan et al., 2023; Tiwari & Hashmi, 2022), and is often used to segment wellness tourists (Handler, 2022; Pesonen et al., 2011).

Relaxation, stress relief, and escape consistently appear as dominant motivators (Chen et al., 2008; Bočkus et al., 2023; Dryglas & Salamaga, 2018; Lim et al., 2016). Spas, in particular, are strongly associated with the desire to relax (Mak et al., 2009; Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015). However, Voigt et al. (2011) found that while escape and relaxation scored high on average, their explanatory power for visitor behaviour was relatively low, suggesting other factors also play key roles. Health enhancement and physical fitness consistently emerge as key motivational factors across various wellness tourism settings, including among spa users and hot spring visitors. (Chen et al., 2008; Handler, 2022) to wellness resort guests and fitness-focused travellers (Damijanić, 2020; Deesilatham, 2016). Tourists who are health-conscious in their daily lives are more inclined to seek wellness-focused holidays (Bočkus et al., 2023; Hallab, 2006; Konu & Laukkanen, 2010).

Novelty and knowledge-seeking—defined as the desire for new experiences and personal growth—also appear across wellness travel literature (Damijanić, 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2022). These motives help explain first-time visits to wellness destinations (Lim et al., 2016), though they may be less influential among returning or more seasoned tourists (Voigt et al., 2011). Transcendence, the pursuit of experiences beyond the ordinary and oriented toward self-discovery, spiritual growth, and psychological well-being, has been explored as a deep-rooted wellness travel motivator (Lehto et al., 2006; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Deesilatham, 2016). Voigt et al. (2011) found transcendence to be a significant motivation among visitors to spiritual retreats and lifestyle resorts. However, it remains underexamined in many wellness tourism studies.

While push-pull and intrinsic/extrinsic frameworks dominate motivation research, recent literature has begun to incorporate concepts from positive psychology—particularly hedonic and eudaimonic motivation.Huta and Ryan (2010) define hedonic motives as the pursuit of pleasure, enjoyment, and positive emotion, while eudaimonic motives involve striving for personal growth, meaning, and alignment with personal values. Both contribute to well-being, though in distinct ways: hedonic motives are linked to short-term happiness and life satisfaction, whereas eudaimonic motives foster long-term fulfilment and purpose (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Peterson et al., 2005; Zeng & Chen, 2020). Individuals who balance both hedonic and eudaimonic motives tend to report higher overall well-being (Anic & Toncic, 2013). However, studies show that eudaimonic motives may have a stronger influence on life satisfaction than hedonic ones (Zeng & Chen, 2020). Huta and Waterman (2014) suggest these motives can be analysed not only as orientations or reasons for action but also through behaviours, experiences, and functioning, broadening the scope of motivation research in wellness tourism. Although the hedonic and eudaimonic frameworks are increasingly applied in psychological research, their adoption within wellness tourism studies remains limited, with the majority of existing research continuing to rely on conventional motivational models. Accordingly, this study adopts the HEMA-R framework (Huta & Waterman, 2014) to evaluate hedonic and eudaimonic motivations


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among wellness tourists, providing a more nuanced and theoretically grounded understanding of their impact on travel decision-making and perceived well-being.

## HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

In tourism research, travel motivation is frequently linked to satisfaction (Correia et al., 2013; C. Lee et al., 2004; Lin et al., 2012; Xia et al., 2024). However, empirical evidence on this relationship is inconsistent. While Yoon and Uysal (2005) found that while pull motivations had a significant impact on tourist satisfaction, push motivations did not exhibit a comparable effect. Similarly, Lim et al. (2016) found that accessibility, as a motivational factor, did not significantly influence tourist satisfaction. Conversely, some studies have found no significant relationship between motivation and satisfaction (Meng et al., 2008; Su et al., 2020), highlighting inconsistencies in the literature and the need for further investigation. According to the previous discussions, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H1: Motivation positively affects satisfaction with the trip experience.*

Wellness tourism is increasingly associated with improved subjective well-being (Bosnjak et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2015). Kim et al. (2015) reported the positive relationship between motivation to perceived quality of life (QoL). Huta and Ryan (2010) found that both hedonic and eudaimonic motivations support well-being. However, Huta et al. (2012) reported that only eudaimonic motives had a strong positive link to QoL. Given these mixed findings, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H2: Motivation positively affects quality of life.*

Few studies have examined how lifestyle congruence affects satisfaction in tourism. However, evidence from branding and consumer behaviour suggests a strong positive relationship, including among senior tourists (Hasnah et al., 2017; Nam et al., 2011; Simpson & Siguaw, 2013). The discussions above lead to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

*H3: Lifestyle-congruence positively affects satisfaction during the trip.*

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated a link between tourist satisfaction and perceived quality of life. (Kan et al., 2023; Neal et al., 1999, 2004; Xia et al., 2024), emphasizing the value of fulfilling experiences. Building on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4: Satisfaction during the trip positively affects the incremental quality of life.*

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Questionnaire Development

This study employs multi-item scales to assess first- and second-order constructs. Tourist motivation is modelled as a multidimensional second-order reflective construct with two dimensions—hedonic and eudaimonic—measured using items adapted from Huta and Waterman (2014) HEMA-R scale and prior tourism studies (Bočkus et al., 2022, 2023; Chen et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2017; Mak et al., 2009; Voigt et al., 2011). Hedonic motives reflect the pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment, while eudaimonic motives relate to meaning, growth, and fulfilment (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Zeng & Chen, 2020). Lifestyle congruence is measured as a second-order construct using 15 items on wellness-related activities and perceived wellness (Adams et al., 1998; Dolnicar et al., 2013). Trip satisfaction is measured with five items (Neal et al., 2004, 2007), and quality of life is assessed using 12 items from the Satisfaction with Life (Diener et al., 1985; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) and Flourishing Scales (Diener et al., 2010). All items use a 7-point Likert scale.

### Samples, data collection and data analysis

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with international Muay Thai fitness tourists on Soi Ta-iad, Chalong, Phuket, Thailand. Eligible participants were required to have engaged in Muay Thai fitness training for a


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minimum duration of three days. Trained research assistants facilitated an online questionnaire via iPad and offered assistance as needed. As a token of appreciation, participants received a power bank keychain. Based on the 10-times rule for factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019), the sample size was sufficient, with 599 valid responses. The sample was predominantly male (81.3%), with most respondents aged 25–34 (40.3%), followed by 18–24 (32.1%), 35–44 (19.8%), and over 44 (7.8%). Over half (55.8%) held a university degree. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 21 and SmartPLS 4.1.0.4. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the proposed model.

## FINDINGS

### Measurement Model

To evaluate the normality assumption, skewness and kurtosis values for all scale items were examined and found to be within acceptable thresholds, indicating no violations (Kline, 2016). The psychometric properties of the reflective first-order constructs were assessed using factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). All factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.60, and had t-values greater than 3.29 (Kline, 2016). Internal consistency reliability was confirmed, with Cronbach's alpha and CR values surpassing the thresholds of 0.70 and 0.80, respectively (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Convergent validity was supported, as all AVE values exceeded 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was established using the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, which is considered more robust than the Fornell–Larcker criterion. All HTMT values were below the 0.85 threshold, confirming discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

A two-stage approach was employed to assess the higher-order constructs—motivation, lifestyle congruence, and quality of life—as recommended by (Hair, Hult et al., 2022). In the first stage, latent variable scores for each lower-order dimension were obtained. In the second stage, these scores were used as manifest indicators in the re-estimation of the second-order constructs. All second-order factor loadings were statistically significant and exceeded 0.60. Reliability and validity were further confirmed through Cronbach's alpha, CR, and AVE values, all of which met established criteria. Collectively, these results provide strong evidence for the reliability and construct validity of motivation, lifestyle congruence, and quality of life as reflective second-order constructs.

### Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was assessed using $R^2$ values, standardized path coefficients (β), and t-values. Significance was tested via bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples (Hair, Hult et al., 2022). $R^2$ values for satisfaction (0.304) and quality of life (0.588) exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.10, indicating adequate explanatory power. The SRMR value of 0.055 confirmed good model fit (Henseler et al., 2014). Predictive relevance, assessed through Stone-Geisser's $Q^2$, was acceptable for both satisfaction (0.295) and quality of life (0.485). As shown in Table 1, all hypothesized relationships were supported. Motivation significantly influenced satisfaction ($\beta = 0.365$, $p < 0.001$) and quality of life ($\beta = 0.461$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H1 and H2. Lifestyle congruence positively affected satisfaction ($\beta = 0.307$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Satisfaction also had a significant positive effect on quality of life ($\beta = 0.433$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4. These results provide strong empirical support for the proposed structural relationships.

**Table 1. Structural Model Results: Path Coefficients, $R^2$, and $Q^2$**

| Construct | Satisfaction (β) | Quality of life (β) |
|---|---|---|
| Lifestyle-congruence | 0.307 | - |
| Motivation | 0.365 | 0.461 |
| Satisfaction | - | 0.433 |
| **$Q^2$** | 0.295 | 0.485 |
| **$R^2$** | 0.304 | 0.588 |

## DISCUSSIONS


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The majority of Muay Thai fitness tourists in this study were male (81.3%), a significantly higher proportion compared to previous wellness tourism research, where male representation typically falls below 60% (Gan et al., 2023; Hallab, 2006; Han et al., 2018; Tiwari & Hashmi, 2022), with the exception of Dar and Kashyap (2022), who reported 62.1% male participants. Prior studies focusing on spa or mixed wellness tourists have often found predominantly female samples (Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015; Dryglas & Salamaga, 2018; Liu et al., 2022; Mak et al., 2009b; Voigt et al., 2011). Given Muay Thai's masculine and physically intensive nature, the gender imbalance observed here is expected. Most participants were aged 18–34, consistent with Tiwari and Hashmi (2022), and highly educated, aligning with Voigt et al. (2011) and Han et al. (2018). A majority were employed (69.7%), travelled alone (56.9%), and were repeat visitors (58%). Most were from Europe, particularly the UK, Germany, and France. Notably, the average stay was 32 days—significantly longer than the 8-day average in wellness hotels (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001)—likely due to the time-intensive nature of fitness training associated with Muay Thai. Over half (55.4%) had never previously taken a wellness-related holiday.

This study extends wellness tourism research by validating a structural model that includes hedonic and eudaimonic motivations, lifestyle congruence, satisfaction, and multidimensional quality of life. Findings confirmed significant direct effects from motivation and lifestyle congruence to satisfaction, and from motivation and satisfaction to quality of life. Motivation, lifestyle congruence, and quality of life were conceptualised as second-order constructs, each comprising two distinct dimensions (Amaro & Duarte, 2015; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Huta & Waterman, 2014). Eudaimonic motivation had stronger factor loadings than hedonic, indicating Muay Thai fitness tourists are primarily driven by self-enhancement and purpose, rather than short-term pleasure (Voigt et al., 2011; Smith & Kelly, 2006). Similarly, lifestyle congruence, measured through perceived wellness and wellness activities, showed high internal consistency, though limited comparative studies exist (Deesilatham, 2016). Quality of life was strongly influenced by satisfaction ($\beta = 0.433$), consistent with prior research(Kan et al., 2023; Xia et al., 2024). Eudaimonic aspects contributed meaningfully to perceived life enhancement, affirming the relevance of both motivational types (Huta, 2016; H. Kim, Woo, et al., 2015). These findings offer a multidimensional perspective on wellness tourism motivations and outcomes, highlighting Muay Thai fitness as a distinctive and purpose-driven travel experience.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study advances the theoretical understanding of wellness tourism by proposing and validating a holistic model that integrates hedonic and eudaimonic motivations, lifestyle congruence, satisfaction, and quality of life (QoL). By distinguishing between hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of motivation, this research provides a more refined conceptualisation of tourist experiences and their impact on well-being outcomes. It underscores the distinct roles of pleasure-oriented and purpose-driven motivations in shaping both satisfaction and perceived quality of life. A key theoretical contribution of this study is the introduction of lifestyle congruence—the degree to which tourists' travel experiences align with their habitual wellness-oriented behaviours. This construct, while conceptually significant, has remained largely underexplored in the wellness tourism literature. By incorporating lifestyle congruence into the model, this study extends current frameworks and provides a more comprehensive perspective on the factors contributing to tourist satisfaction and well-being in a wellness context.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Wellness providers should align their offerings with tourists' wellness-oriented lifestyles, placing emphasis on self-improvement and personal transformation. For Muay Thai fitness tourists—many of whom travel alone—customisable itineraries and socially engaging activities such as cultural excursions, cooking classes, or amateur Muay Thai competitions can enhance the overall experience, leading to higher satisfaction and loyalty. The study revealed that a significant portion of Muay Thai fitness tourists originate from non-English-speaking countries, including Germany, Russia, and France. Language barriers were identified as a key challenge, particularly in training sessions where clear communication is essential for delivering instructions, safety guidelines, and feedback. To mitigate this, Muay Thai camps should integrate real-time translation tools during both group and individual sessions. Additionally, multilingual signage displaying essential information—such as training schedules, camp rules, and cultural etiquette—can further reduce miscommunication and foster a more inclusive environment. Training staff in the effective use of translation technology can enhance one-on-one interactions, contributing to a more personalised and welcoming atmosphere. These strategies not only support the wellness goals of international tourists but also strengthen their sense of belonging. Ultimately, improved communication and culturally sensitive


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programming can increase repeat visitation and amplify the long-term economic contributions of Muay Thai fitness tourism.

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# THE HOLISTICSCAPE FACTORS AMONG STAKEHOLDERS OF WELLNESS SPA TOURISM: AN EXPLORATORY INQUIRY.

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## ABSTRACT

Problem definition: Despite the growing importance of wellness tourism, research on Holisticscape, a multidimensional framework integrating tourists' holistic health through experiential surroundings stimuli, remains underexplored. Although some experiential stimuli are acknowledged, the holistic health (body, mind and spirit) stimuli are still understudied. Additionally, previous studies primarily focused on tourists' perspectives, neglecting other crucial stakeholders. This study bridges these gaps by incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives to redefine the Holisticscape framework, offering new insights into enhancing holistic health experiences in wellness spa tourism.

## OBJECTIVE(S)

(1) To identify and examine the Holisticscape stimuli factors influencing the tourist's wellness spa experience.
(2) To integrate diverse stakeholders' insights into the Holisticscape framework shaping the wellness spa experience.
(3) To propose actionable guidelines for industry stakeholders to design holistic wellness experiences and enhance competitive advantage.

## METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

The study employed a qualitative approach using a thematic analysis of in-depth stakeholder interviews. Data collection used a convenience sample of twenty stakeholders, including two DMOs, eight professionals with more than twelve years of experience and ten regular wellness spa tourists with more than two experiences per year using wellness spas in Algarve, Portugal. Interviews were analysed and coded through MAXQDA software, focusing on six themes (ambience, social, activity, body, mind and spirit stimuli) predefined by previous literature. These stimulus themes were further analysed to reveal sub-themes and patterns influencing tourists' holistic health.

## FINDINGS

This study identified six stimulus factors (ambience, social, activity, body, mind and spirit) for the Holisticscape framework within the wellness spa experience. (1) Ambience stimuli, including sensory conditions, nature's presence, functionality, and attractiveness of the setting, are perceived as necessary to the experience. (2) Social stimuli, namely social interactions, density, similarity, employee performance and appearance, and customised care, are perceived as significant to the experience. (3) Activity stimuli, including passive and active services, facilities/equipment, connection with nature, traditional culture and local food, are significant to the experience. (4)


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Body stimuli perceived as changes in appearance, energy/vitality, pain, and sleep are significant to the experience. (5) Mind stimuli perceived as introspection, thought, focus, memory, and learning are meaningful to the experience. (6) Spirit stimuli perceived as mood and emotional changes and loss of consciousness of time and space are meaningful to the experience.
This study highlights the importance of personalised holistic wellness experiences from the stakeholders' perspectives. Operational insights such as sensory elements and professional qualities were emphasised to enhance tourists' health experience and satisfaction.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

This study enhances the understanding of Holisticscape as a multidimensional framework linking servicescape and tourists' holistic health in wellness spas, incorporating practitioner and DMO perspectives.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION

Findings guide spa design, activity programs, and staff training to optimise the tourist's holistic health experience. At the macro level, the study positions wellness tourism as vital for public health and economic growth. At the micro level, it provides actionable insights to managers and providers to improve service offerings, tourist satisfaction and business competitiveness.

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# A NEW TYPOLOGY OF SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN IN WELLNESS TOURISM

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## PROBLEM DEFINITION

Self-employed women play an important role in tourism, particularly in the wellness sector. While self-employment offers women opportunities to overcome discrimination, gain flexibility, and foster independence, systemic barriers remain, especially in developing countries. The intersection of self-employment and tourism offers a unique opportunity to study women empowerment. However, our understanding of how entrepreneurial orientation and psychological empowerment intersect remains an under-researched area. The study addresses gaps in the literature by adopting a multidisciplinary approach that integrates insights from tourism, entrepreneurship, and empowerment research.

## OBJECTIVES

Drawing on entrepreneurial orientation and psychological empowerment, this study develops a novel typology of self-employed women massage therapists working in the wellness tourism sector. Entrepreneurial orientation, which includes traits like risk-taking, innovativeness, and autonomy, and psychological empowerment, defined by dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact provide a valuable framework for profiling self-employed women.

## METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Thailand was chosen as the setting for this research due to its prominent position as a leading health tourism destination, with wellness tourism as a central pillar of its strategic master plan "An International Hub of Health Tourism in Asia." The wellness sector, which includes traditional Thai massage, is a significant contributor to the economy, currently valued at around THB 35 billion with a growth rate of 5-7% annually. Thai massage is recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage. The industry heavily relies on self-employed female massage therapists, known as mour nuad, whose entrepreneurial endeavors are vital for their professional and personal growth. Self-employment empowers these women by offering financial independence, control over their income, flexible working hours, and career advancement, contributing to both their job satisfaction and economic sustainability.

Traditional Thai massage is a key activity for international tourists. Data were collected from 379 self-employed professional massage therapists at five top tourist destinations in Thailand: Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Hua-Hin, and Pattaya. Methodologically, the study uses cluster analysis to propose a taxonomy of self-employed women entrepreneurs.


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## FINDINGS

Cluster analysis identified three groups: Challengers, Explorers, and Visionaries. The three clusters represent varied combinations of entrepreneurial traits and empowerment levels, offering a nuanced understanding of how self-employed women operate within the tourism industry. For instance, Challengers might exhibit high risk-taking and resilience in overcoming barriers, while Visionaries are likely to combine strategic innovation with a sense of purpose and impact. These profiles have implications for theory, policy, and practice, including targeted interventions and support systems tailored to each group.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Overall, this research advances understanding of self-employed women in tourism based on entrepreneurial orientation (traits like risk-taking and autonomy) and psychological empowerment (dimensions like meaning and self-determination). It emphasizes the importance of gender-sensitive approaches, highlights the empowering potential of self-employment, and calls for research to further deepen theoretical insights.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Empowering women in tourism not only fosters economic growth but also addresses gender inequalities, making it a significant area for sustainable development. Findings underscore the role of the institutional environment, economic policies, and social dynamics in shaping the self-employment experiences of women.


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# SECTION 17: KNOWLEDGE INNOVATION IN HOSPITALITY MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT


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# ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS, MANAGERS' PERCEPTIONS AND INNOVATION IN TOURISM DESTINATION

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## ABSTRACT

In this scenery of the tourism industry making-decision about innovation is a crucial factor for managers who must face threats while take advantage of opportunities generated by the environment. Previous studies claim that innovation, in the current turbulent environment due to digital revolution, globalization and increasingly scarce resources, must be not only creative ideas or new technology applied to organizations but an autonomous ecosystem including know-how, artefacts, technology or strategies, as well as different tourism agents to create value in the tourism destinations. Thus, innovation is a complex phenomenon that require diverse types of changes which achieve convergence innovation (Lee & Trimi, 2021). The literature traditionally highlighted that the degree of innovation in the tourism industry is lower and more incremental than in manufacturing. However, empirical evidence show that tourism destinations are contexts in which both incremental and radical innovations are encouraged.

The strategic management literature has highlighted that environmental conditions generate threats and opportunities affecting a firm's strategic decision-making process (Zhou, 2006); specifically, the depth of change in the innovation processes. Previous studies have addressed the effect of uncertainty due to demand changes and technological progress, namely market dynamism (MD) and technological turbulence (TT) (Jaworski & Kohli 1993). Some studies have examined other factors linked to rivalry that influence the degree of depth of innovation such as the threat of imitation (TI) and the competitive intensity (CI) (Zhou, 2006). The perception of these environmental factors is particularly relevant to decisions of innovation. Thus, we seek to shed light on the effects of these environmental factors -MD, TT, TI, CI- on radical and incremental innovation engaged tourism firms.

The empirical analysis focuses on tourism firms located in the World Heritages Cities in Spain. A survey of 2,037 firms yielded a sample of 215 firms, which is a 10.55% response rate. In the empirical analysis were tested linear and quadratic relationships for environmental factors and both dependent variables -radical and incremental innovation. The findings show heterogeneous linear and curvilinear relationships with innovation, depending on whether they engage in incremental or radical innovation

The paper contributes with an in-depth analysis and disaggregation of the specific effects of each environmental factor on both radical and incremental innovation in the context of tourism destinations. From a theoretical approach, we connect the cognitive perspective of management with the tourism industry to better understand how managers interpret the environment and make decisions on the radicalness of innovations. In addition, we provide empirical evidence about the balance between different types of innovation. Specifically, in this paper we find that tourism firms achieve a balance between radical and incremental innovation when there are high levels of MD, TT and CI, and medium-high level of TI.


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# AUTHENTICATION OF TOURIST ATTRACTIONS: USING NEUROSCIENCE METHODS FOR MARKETING RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

## INTRODUCTION

Destination marketing aims to elicit positive emotions in the target audience, such as interest, anticipation, and excitement about the place. Measuring emotions has long relied on study participants' self-reports; however, the neuromarketing methods that capture the physiological responses to advertisements have been gradually expanding their applications. Given the rapid growth of online influencer marketing and its relevance for tourism destinations, understanding the neurophysiological reactions of viewers to influencer-created marketing materials is both important and timely. Using physiological and self-reported measures, the study examined the role that tourists' emotions and authenticity orientation play in the authentication of tourist attractions.

## METHODS

In a laboratory setting, we examined the heart rate variability (HRV) in viewers (72 people) watching an influencer deliver a promotion of a staged attraction - Hobbiton Movie Set in Rotorua, New Zealand. We compared several HRV measures with self-reported emotions. Before watching the video, viewers were classified according to their attitudes toward the importance of tourism attractions being objectively authentic as realists, constructivists, and post-modernists (Stepchenkova & Belyaeva, 2021). Heartbeat data was converted into three measures of heart rate variability: time-domain, frequency-domain, and qualitative non-linear measure.

## RESULTS

The study found correlations between physiological and self-reported measures. The heart rate variability differed among authenticity groups. People with realist attitudes stayed more focused and had lower heart rate variability. Postmodernists were most likely to accept the staged attraction as authentic and their kind of place to visit. Promotional materials generating positive arousal contributed to positive authentication.

## CONCLUSION

The perceived authenticity of destination attractions impacts the tourist experience (Stepchenkova & Belyaeva, 2021), and positive tourist experiences, in turn, are consequential for the individual's well-being, creating an effect beyond destination loyalty (Park et al., 2019). Thus, 'matching' tourists to attractions in recreated settings has a better chance of resulting in satisfaction with the experience, all other things being equal. Narratives provided by attraction management that are consistent with the site's authenticity nature would increase the chances of selecting the attraction by the 'right' audience at the trip-planning stage. It would likely lead to higher satisfaction and positive word of mouth, thus adding value to the brand. The benefits of 'matching' can even extend to the local communities by regulating tourist flows, ensuring the optimal experience for satisfied tourists and their hosts.


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The study shows that the absence of 'matching' can be compensated to some degree with the design of video materials in terms of their emotional focus. The challenge, however, is to make visitation to those attractions enjoyable for people with 'incompatible' authenticity values. The choice to disclose or veil the staged nature of an attraction demands thoughtful deliberation about its potential effects on tourists' perceptions and future satisfaction with the visit. Overall, this study points to the areas in marketing communications that can help manage tourist flows more effectively, increasing satisfaction with the tourist experience, well-being, and loyalty.

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# DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF A SMART DESTINATION PERCEPTION SCALE FOR TOURISTS AND RESIDENTS (SDPS)

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## ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

The tourism industry is undergoing transformative shifts driven by technological advancements and evolving consumer demands. Despite the growing emphasis on "smart destinations," a lack of standardized, comprehensive tools to measure and compare stakeholders' perceptions remains a critical gap. Existing research primarily explores isolated dimensions or stakeholder perspectives, neglecting an integrative approach that considers both tourists and residents.

### OBJECTIVES

The study aims to develop and validate a Smart Destination Perception Scale (SDPS) to provide a robust, multidimensional framework for assessing smart destination perceptions. It integrates the perspectives of both tourists and residents, fostering a unified approach to evaluating destinations. Furthermore, the research aims to identify key dimensions influencing stakeholder perceptions and evaluate their importance to facilitate effective destination management strategies.

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

The SDPS was developed through a structured scale development process. Domain specification was the initial step, involving a thorough literature review and expert consultations to identify seven key dimensions: Innovation, Connectivity, Market Intelligence, Accessibility, Sustainability, Intelligence Systems, and Information and Promotion Systems. The second phase focused on item generation and refinement, pilot-tested on a sample of 76 participants, and refined using reliability and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Primary data collection involved surveying a representative sample of 1,200 participants (600 tourists and 600 residents) using a 7-point Likert scale. Finally, the model was validated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which refined the model to six dimensions and 29 items, ensuring validity and reliability. Metric and scalar invariance tests confirmed the scale's applicability across different groups.

### FINDINGS

The SDPS identified two high-order dimensions: Market Intelligence and Social and Environmental Responsibility. Market Intelligence, comprising Intelligence Systems and Information and Promotion Systems, emerged as the most impactful, highlighting the importance of digital tools and omnichannel strategies. Social and Environmental Responsibility, encompassing Accessibility and Sustainability, underscored the necessity of inclusive and


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sustainable practices. Additional first-order dimensions included Innovation and Connectivity, emphasizing technology's role in enhancing experiences. The scale demonstrated strong reliability, and validity.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study advances the understanding of smart destinations by introducing a validated, multidimensional scale that integrates perspectives of diverse stakeholders. It reinforces stakeholder theory by aligning the goals of tourists and residents, thus promoting a holistic approach to destination management. Additionally, it identifies critical dimensions—Market Intelligence and Social and Environmental Responsibility—as pivotal for effective smart destination management.

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The SDPS provides actionable insights for various stakeholders. Destination managers can assess and compare stakeholder perceptions, prioritize interventions, and align strategies with user expectations. Policymakers can use the scale to promote sustainable and inclusive tourism by addressing identified gaps in accessibility and sustainability. Certification bodies can evaluate smart destination progress and the effectiveness of implemented measures. Marketing professionals can leverage insights into key perception drivers to enhance communication strategies and strengthen the destination's brand image.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# THIRD-PARTY DATA PROVIDERS FOR SHORT-TERM RENTALS AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE AND SOME EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

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## BACKGROUND

Accommodation platforms, of which Airbnb is the prototypical example, exemplify the sharing economy by enabling short-term rentals of underutilized private spaces. This model has developed within a context of deregulation (Fitzmaurice et al., 2018), providing economic benefits through nearly unrestricted market access. While traditionally regulated industries such as taxi services and accommodation have operated under strict regulatory frameworks, the sharing economy has disrupted these sectors by promoting more efficient use of resources (Frenken & Schor, 2017).
These rentals can disrupt local housing markets and traditional lodging industries, contributing to rising rents and altered neighborhood dynamics. Furthermore, they are linked to gentrification, as commercial investors increasingly convert residential properties into Airbnb accommodations. Residents frequently voice concerns about noise disturbances, traffic congestion, parking shortages, waste management issues, and safety risks stemming from an influx of unfamiliar visitors (Meyer, 2024; Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020).

## PROBLEM DEFINITION

Local governments must strike a delicate balance: protecting the long-term rental market by preventing reductions in rental supply and controlling rising rents while safeguarding the welfare benefits that peer-to-peer platforms can offer (Duso et al., 2024). To achieve this, local authorities must not only develop regulatory initiatives to mitigate the negative externalities of short-term rental activities but also establish an effective system for addressing complaints and enforcing these measures.
The Sharing Cities Declaration(Sharing Cities Action, 2018) highlights the concerns of 33 cities regarding the negative externalities arising from the rapid and unanticipated expansion of platform activities within their jurisdictions. It also emphasizes the challenges in enforcing effective short-term rental regulations, particularly due to the lack of cooperation from platforms in providing the detailed data necessary for regulatory compliance.

## OBJECTIVES

Platforms consistently treat their data as proprietary and protect it through legal and technical means (Makela et al., 2018; Scassa, 2017). This stance serves as their justification for refusing to collaborate in sharing first-hand, direct data. Consequently, local and, in some cases, national authorities have been compelled to explore alternative methods for gaining insights into short-term rental activities.
One of the most widespread practices is purchasing scraped data from third-party actors, such as AirDNA. The objectives of this research are twofold: firstly, to analyze the accuracy of estimations for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (e.g., occupancy rate, Average Daily Rate, etc.), and secondly, to evaluate the accuracy of aggregate statistics, such as the number of overnights, arrivals, total revenue, and similar metrics.

## METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

The methodology involves comparing estimations of various measures (KPIs and aggregate statistics) derived from different data sources. These sources vary in type and geographical scope: AirDNA (third-party data at the national


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level for Switzerland and Albania), Interhome (first-hand data for the canton of Valais), and a press release from Airbnb containing aggregate measurements for Switzerland in 2022 (Airbnb, 2023).
For the Airbnb press release, we recalculated the figures using AirDNA data to assess their consistency and alignment with publicly available statistics.
To further investigate, the research includes an additional analysis using Interhome data. A sample of properties listed on both platforms (Airbnb and Interhome) was created, enabling a comparison of calendar-related variables such as the number of days available, blocked, or booked, as provided by AirDNA and Interhome.

## FINDINGS

For the Airbnb press release, we recalculated the figures using AirDNA data to assess their consistency and alignment with publicly available, firsthand statistics from Airbnb. The findings offer insights into both the accuracy of AirDNA's analytics and the strategic communication efforts employed by Airbnb to strengthen its market presence.
At the current stage of our research, significant differences have been observed across data sources, particularly in aggregate measurements. However, we are actively engaging with the data providers to perform a second review and validate these findings.
The lack of detailed cancellation data in AirDNA may result in an overestimation of aggregate measurements, such as the number of bookings and total revenue.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

One important finding is that the AirDNA database provides a better description of the supply side than the demand side. A key reason appears to be the limited information available on cancellations. However, this limitation does not invalidate research papers aimed at analyzing host behaviors, most of which rely on econometric methods (i.e. Falk & Scaglione, 2024).

## PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This research will, on the one hand, provide guidelines for the utilization of different variables such as revenue and ADR in native currency and, on the other hand, propose empirical interval limits for aggregate measurements (e.g., total revenue, number of bookings/closed days). Journalists, national statistical offices, consulting firms, and others will be made aware of the need to use third-party data with caution.

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# SECTION 18: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT


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# HOW FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES OVERCOME TRAVEL CONSTRAINTS: INSIGHTS FROM USER-GENERATED CONTENT

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**ABSTRACT |**

**INTRODUCTION**

This study examines the strategies used by families with children with disabilities (FwCwD) to overcome travel constraints, through user-generated content (UGC). The goal was to identify the different travel constraints faced by the parents of children with disabilities (CwD), as well as the negotiation strategies adopted to overcome these constraints.

**METHODS**

Conducted in April 2024, the research employed a qualitative approach to gather comments on families' travel experiences shared by members of FwCwD in various online forums and blogs. This qualitative data underwent a thorough content analysis using Nvivo. Categories of analysis considered both existing literature on travel constraints and negotiation strategies of families and people with disabilities and categories that emerged from the analysed. Constraints were categorized into intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural, according to Crawford et al. (1991). Furthermore, the negotiation strategies were classified into cognitive and behavioural following Jackson and Rucks (1995). Differences in travel constraints and negotiation strategies were examined considering type of family and type and severity of the children's disabilities, permitting a nuanced understanding of how FwCwD overcome travel constraints.

**RESULTS**

The present study identifies several pivotal findings about the travel constraints encountered by FwCwD, out of which the following can be highlighted: i) a variety of constraints can be observed, as the specific travel challenges faced by this segment are dependent on the type of family and the specific type and degree of the child's disability; ii) logistical challenges, including the ability to navigate airports and to secure appropriate accommodation; iii) sensory issues, which remain a significant concern for children with disabilities, particularly those on the autism spectrum, who may experience sensory overload in unfamiliar environments or in response to noise and unfamiliar environments; iv) the necessity for thorough planning of, for instance, medical and dietary needs; v) physical accessibility, as children requiring wheelchairs face significant barriers in terms of mobility and accessibility; and vi) emotional constraints, as many families experience frustration and sadness when destinations, facilities, or attractions failed to provide the necessary adjustments to assure a good travel experience, leading to feelings of sadness and disappointment. The diversity of constraints highlights the need for adapted strategies to support these



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families in overcoming travel barriers by developing inclusive environments designed to meet the diverse needs of CwD and their families.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings highlight the relevance of UGC to provide relevant information to improve the accessibility level of tourism, facilitate planning and guaranteeing satisfactory travel experiences. They highlight the importance of inclusive and well-adjusted travel environments and specialist support targeting the unique needs of these families. By recognizing the diverse travel constraints faced by these families and the strategies used to overcome them, stakeholders in tourism can work towards more appealing facilities, services and destinations that enhance the travel experiences of FwCwD, ultimately contributing to more fulfilling and enjoyable family vacations as well as more sustainable and competitive tourism supply.

**Key Words**: Family travel, families with children with disabilities (FwCD), travel constraints, negotiation strategies, user-generated content.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# THE INFLUENCE OF COLLECTIVIST AND POWER DISTANCE CULTURES ON LEADERSHIP STYLE AND EMPLOYEES' ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT: THE CASE OF SMALL HOSPITALITY ENTERPRISES IN KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

This comparative study replicates prior research conducted in Ghana to investigate how national cultural dimensions—specifically collectivism versus individualism and power distance—influence leadership styles and employees' organizational commitment in Kenya's small hospitality sector. Responding to calls for empirical studies in other emerging African contexts, this research examines the interplay between cultural norms and workplace behaviours within Kenya, a significant tourist destination in East Africa. Moreover, it seeks to address the leadership development gap by offering insights into appropriate leadership styles for the African continent.

Effective leadership and employee engagement necessitate adaptability to a country's cultural and societal norms. This study, therefore, replicates similar research conducted in Ghana by exploring how collectivist versus individualistic orientations and power distance cultural dimensions shape leadership styles and employees' organizational commitment in small hospitality enterprises in Kenya. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the research integrates cultural, leadership, and organizational studies to enrich the existing literature by comparing Kenya's cultural context with findings from Ghana. The study's specific objectives are twofold: (1) to determine the influence of collectivist versus individualistic and power distance cultural dimensions on employees' organizational commitment, and (2) to evaluate how these cultural dimensions affect leadership styles in Kenya's small hospitality enterprises.

The study focuses on Indigenous Kenyan-owned small hospitality businesses in the Mombasa Metropolitan area, employing a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews and a multiple case study approach. Four small hotels were selected based on shared characteristics, including the number of rooms, number of employees, ownership by Kenyan individuals, and operation in the lower-market segment. For each hotel, one leader and five employees participated in the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by assigning pseudonyms, such as "Hotel 1" and "Interviewee No. 1," and avoiding the collection of identifiable personal information. Data analysis utilized both within-case and cross-case synthesis to conduct a thematic analysis of the interview findings.

The findings from this Kenyan study will be compared to the Ghanaian research, which concluded that collectivist and power-distance values significantly influenced leadership styles and employees' organizational commitment. This research aims to provide actionable recommendations for fostering effective workplace behaviours in Kenya's small hospitality sector, while also contributing to broader cross-cultural leadership and organizational studies.

The study is expected to advance both practical and theoretical understanding of African leadership development. It highlights the necessity of grounding leadership practices in African cultural values and learning from other non-Western contexts, rather than relying exclusively on models imported from Western countries. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of examining the relationship between leadership styles and employees' workplace


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behaviours, particularly in fostering job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as a critical area for future research.

**Key Words:** collectivist, power distance, small hospitality, organizational commitment, employees, Kenya, leadership.


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# SLUM TOURISM INFLUENCERS: NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T

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## ABSTRACT

### PROBLEM DEFINITION

The prominent visual nature of tourism influencers makes it surprising that few studies employ visual methods to analyze their content (Smith, 2021; Arzbaecher et al., 2022; Ray Chaudhury et al., 2021; Motahar et al., 2024; Gretzel, 2023; Bakri et al., 2023). These studies often adopt a narrowly literal approach to visual phenomena, neglecting the emphasis that visual studies place on the invisible (Bratchford, 2018; Joanou, 2017; Roberts, 2011). Slum tourism provides a critical context for examining the interplay between the visible and the invisible, as it reflects tensions between the desire to see marginalized spaces and the marginalization caused by pushing these spaces out of sight (Altamirano, 2023; Freire-Medeiros and dos Santos Moraes, 2022). Visual methods also remain underutilized in slum tourism research (Lavrenova, 2021; Povoa et al., 2019; de Araujo et al., 2018), and no studies have specifically analyzed slum tourism influencers through visual methods.

### OBJECTIVES

This study has two main objectives: (1) to use visual methods to examine the phenomenon of slum tourism influencers and (2) to expand the scope of visual analysis by considering aspects that are invisible or strive to become visible.

### ANALYSIS

The research analyzed YouTube content from the three most-watched slum tourism influencers in Brazilian *favelas*, which collectively garnered 24 million views. The study employed Jacques Rancière's (2004) qualitative visual analysis alongside a hermeneutical interpretation of the most frequently occurring words in 27,000 comments on these videos with the help of the *AntConc* software (Anthony, 2024).

### FINDINGS

Slum tourism influencers frequently grapple with depicting aspects that cannot be shown (e.g.: gangs, criminal activities, violence) due to potential risks to both the hosts and the influencers. To address this challenge, they rely on alternative imagery that suggests or alludes to the unseen. Analysis of followers' comments reveals that while the drive to explore the unseen is a key motivator for viewers, the visual focus shifts predominantly to the influencers and local residents. As a result, the marginalized spaces of the slum often recede into the background, with individuals becoming the central subjects of viewer discussions.

### THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

This study investigates the role of the invisible for visual methods in the content produced by slum tourism influencers and in the reactions of their audiences. The findings demonstrate that instead of limiting the visible, the invisible acts as a catalyst, encouraging the creation of alternative imagery that conveys what cannot be directly shown.

### PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Investing in slum tourism influencers, as a development policy, risks participating in a digital economy that privileges those who can film and showcase these areas, while excluding those who live there. A backlash against


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influencers, on the other hand, might exclude these lives from visibility and reinforce the marginalized allure of the stigma of these areas.


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# TOURIST'S NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURS: 'LIMINALITY' AND 'MORAL DISENGAGEMENT; THE FIRST STEPS OF A RESEARCH PROJECT…

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## ABSTRACT

This communication aims to outline the initial reflections that will form the theoretical framework and analytical model for an empirical research project on tourists' negative behaviours to be implemented in the Algarve region.

Excessive drinking and drug use, violent behaviour and street fighting, public nudity and public sex, vandalism in hotel rooms, graffiti in heritage sites, damage to the environment, etc., are events that often appear in the media and are frequently accompanied by opinion movements that tend to anathematize tourism and tourists. All these behaviours are increasingly observed in Portugal, particularly in the Algarve in the streets of bars and nightclubs. There is even a strong concern among the stakeholders about the possibility of this region follow in the footsteps of other tourist destinations such as Ibiza (Spain) or Faliraki (Greece). It is, therefore, a strategic imperative for the region and the country, to scientifically understand the patterns and, eventually, the causes of tourists' negative behaviors, but also to produce and disseminate knowledge about possible strategies for mitigating its effects.

Negative tourist behaviours have been interpreted through the lens of the theory of liminality, which suggests that, during their tourism experiences, daily obligations and moral rules are suspended or even reversed, offering travellers opportunities to do what they wouldn't usually do—or might not even be able to do— in their everyday lives. Research on deviance among young tourists reveals that they seek not only to escape the constraints of their routines but also that the excitement caused by transgression serves to produce intense emotions and create memorable experiences during vacations. Engagement in negative behaviours occurs when individuals find ways to justify their actions to themselves, often by transforming less appropriate attitudes into ones that align with their moral principles. Some tourists' behaviours (namely in the contexts of dark tourism and film tourism) have also been studied using the theory of 'moral disengagement'. This refers to a set of psychological justification mechanisms that facilitate individuals' involvement in immoral behaviours without feeling guilt for violating societal values and norms. However, to our knowledge, this approach has not yet been used in a sun, beach and clubbing destination, as the Algarve.

The main objectives of the mentioned research are 1) to produce empirical knowledge about the negative behaviours of the tourists who visit the Algarve; 2) To contribute to the theory of deviance in tourism contexts; 3) to understand if the tourist's negative behaviours affect the image of the destination 'Algarve'; 4) to provide policy recommendations that can reduce or minimise those behaviours. Our research questions will be the following: what are the prevalent negative behaviours of the tourists that visit the Algarve? What are the 'patterns' of these 2 negative behaviours? What are the main sociological characteristics of the tourists who misbehave? Do tourists use the 'moral disengagement' mechanisms to justify their behaviours? Which and how? Does the image of the Algarve that the tour operators are selling promote negative tourist behaviours? Do these behaviours affect the image of the Algarve as a tourist destination? The contexts of this research will be a) the towns of the Algarve region where negative behaviours have been reported to the authorities; b) hotels, resorts and camping sites; c) Faro Airport (for the application of a survey).

Since this is a sensitive subject, a creative methodological approach is required. The methodology to be applied foresees a mix-methods approach: first, in-depth interviews with privileged informants (police, mayors, tourism board, bartenders, taxi drivers etc.), second, ethnographic observation, and finally a survey about tourists behaviours and moral disengagement to be implemented in the Faro Airport. The scales that will be included in this survey are still being constructed and will be subject to prior validation. Data will be analysed through SPSS. The interviews will be subject to a categorial analysis, using NVivo software.


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# CHANGE THE BETS! IS PROBLEM GAMBLERS' GAMBLING BEHAVIOUR DIFFERENT SINCE COVID-19?

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## ABSTRACT

The South African gambling industry continues to expand, generating significant revenue and tax contributions in the billions of Rands for the South African Government. South African gamblers have access to various gambling and betting options, including bingo, land-based casinos, horse racing, sports betting, limited payout machines, and increasingly popular online betting options. Pathological gambling is viewed as a public health problem to both the community and the problem gamblers, who experience various mental health issues, depression, stress and substance abuse due to their unhealthy gambling behaviour (Sachdeva et al., 2022). Mohamed et al. (2023) reiterated that COVID-19 contributed to the widespread psychological stress among people, which could have contributed to increased gambling as a coping mechanism. It is, therefore, vital to understand the current gambling behaviour of problem gamblers and how it has evolved in recent years. The objectives of this study were to specifically focus on online gambling behaviour, mental health issues and Quality of Life (QOL) of South African problem gamblers post-COVID-19. This study focuses on self-identified problem gamblers in South Africa, individuals who seek help through the South African Responsible Gambling Foundation's (SARGF) National Responsible Gambling Programme (NRGP). With the COVID-19 pandemic potentially altering gambling behaviours, this study aimed to assess the perceived impact of COVID-19 on these gamblers' behaviour and overall QOL experience. Using a quantitative, exploratory approach, the study had access to 1,012 registered problem gamblers. In 2023, interviews were conducted by professional SARGF-trained counsellors, with 68 participants agreeing to participate in the study. Responses were captured in Excel and analysed in SPSS. Despite the low response rate, a robust Cronbach's alpha of 0.78 to 0.90 was achieved, indicating reliable measurement of the various items. Frequency tables were compiled, and Fisher's exact test and a two-sample test were conducted on the results. The findings reveal that over half of the respondents (53%) reported changes in their gambling behaviour due to COVID-19, such as participating in online betting more. Notable concerns included high unemployment among problem gamblers (23%), mental health issues and the inability to abstain from gambling (20%). Respondents expressed dissatisfaction across the various QOL domains, particularly in their family life, finances, health, and social connections. The study contributes to the field of gambling, and specifically problem gamblers changing behaviour from a South African perspective. The results of the study highlight the urgent need for responsible gambling authorities to continuously enhance their responsible gambling programs and incorporate proactive strategies to address problem gamblers' evolving challenges, such as the accessibility of online gambling, mental health concerns, and the negative impacts on QOL domains. The recommendation is, therefore, for a significant overhaul of the NRGP, how it is facilitated, and to incorporate the findings of this study better to support problem gamblers during their journey of gambling sobriety.

**Key Words:** Problem gambling, mental health, gambling, responsible gambling, South Africa

## INTRODUCTION

South Africa has a generous offering of gambling options, such as bingo, land-based casinos, horse race betting, sports betting and limited payout machines (LPMs), which generate enormous amounts of annual gambling tax for the South African Government. With at least 1 in every 10 South Africans being a gambler and 38 casinos operating throughout South Africa, casinos currently make up 72% of the gambling revenue collected (Mashiane, 2020). COVID-19 and the universal lockdowns brought the world to a standstill in terms of business/trading, entertainment, socialising, tourism, and travelling. These lockdowns not only impacted problem gamblers' gambling behaviour due to the lack of access to on-site gambling but severely impacted the gambling industry. The National Gambling Board (NGB) (2021) described the South African gambling industry as being brought down to its knees following the outbreak. The South African Gross Gambling Revenue (GGR) for the 2020/2021 financial year was R23.3 billion. The previous financial year's GGR was R33.3 billion, resulting in a massive 50% revenue decline (NGB, 2021). Due to the mandatory lockdowns, online gambling was the only form of gambling that showed growth during


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these unsettling times. It grew by 21.2% (NGB, 2021). However, the Remote Gambling Bill introduced by the government in 2014 has still not been passed, thus making online gambling illegal (Pamhirwa, 2023).

With recent changes in the gambling industry due to COVID-19, such as the growth of online gambling and illegal sites, responsible gambling programmes are challenged to improve based on problem gamblers' current experiences and needs. A study conducted by Sachdeva, Sucheta and Sarangi (2022) questioned changes such as the number of gamblers and the intensity of their gambling, differences in various gambling modalities and the psychosocial effects of lockdowns on gambling behaviour. This, therefore, necessitated the study to understand the current state of problem gamblers' gambling behaviour and QOL post-COVID-19.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *The South African gambling industry*

Gambling in South Africa was illegal until 1996, when the National Gambling Act (1996) was passed. The Act regulates gambling to protect society, generate revenue through gambling taxes, and create employment opportunities (DTIC, 2020). Since this momentous occasion, numerous amendments to the Act supported by the National Gambling Policy of 2016 have occurred (DTIC, 2020). Legal gambling activities currently include bingo, gambling at casinos, horse race betting, LPMs, and betting through bookmakers, while illegal gambling activities include dice games, dog racing, online gambling, sports betting, and betting on lottery results (DTIC, 2020; Pamhirwa, 2023).

### *Mental health and quality of life of problem gamblers*

Gambling is a popular entertainment given the potential and excitement of winning massive jackpots that could change one's financial situation. However, this form of entertainment has dangers and negative consequences, with the prevalence of mental health issues among gamblers being an undisputed fact. Pathological gambling is viewed as a public health problem to both the community and the problem gamblers, who experience various mental health issues due to their unhealthy gambling behaviour (Collins, 2011; Black, Shwa, McCormick & Allen, 2013; Sachdeva *et al.*, 2022). Sachdeva *et al.* (2022) described problem gambling as an emerging public health concern, which necessitates that stakeholders are constantly updated with the latest developments and changes. Savolainen, Vuorinen, Sirola and Oksanen (2022), Sharman, Roberts, Bowden-Jones and Strang (2021) and Brodeur, Audette-Chapedelain, Savard, and Kairouz (2021) state that with the uncertain and stressful times during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk was there that people's anxiety levels and overall mental health would be impacted. The typical mental health issues that gamblers struggle with include anxiety, depression, domestic violence, crime, reduced work hours, substance abuse and gambling under the influence, as well as suicide (Price, 2020; Van der Maas, 2016; Black *et al.*, 2013).

Petry and Weinstock (2007) noted the increase in mental health issues due to the rise of online gambling, especially among younger, more tech-savvy individuals. McCormack and Griffiths (2011) stated that gambling is often used as an escape or coping mechanism to deal with negative mental states, thus creating an even bigger problem. Furthermore, a study by Gainsbury, Swanton, Burgess, and Blaaszczynski (2021) and Mohamed, Rukh, Schiöth, Vadlin, Olofsdotter, Åslund and Nilsson (2023) reiterate that COVID-19 contributed to the widespread psychological stress among people, which could have contributed to increased gambling as a coping mechanism. The occurrence of these issues was reportedly the highest among self-identified "Potential Problem Gamblers" (Sharman *et al.*, 2021). Ginsburg et al. (2021) noted that responsible gambling programmes should continue at the same pace even though the availability of gambling opportunities is limited. QOL has been viewed as an emerging field of study in both the behavioural and social sciences in recent years (Uysal, Sigy, Woo & Kim, 2016). QOL is a construct comprised of various domains of satisfaction, ultimately determining one's overall life satisfaction (Uysal *et al.*, 2016). During studies conducted by Loo, Shi, and Phu (2016) and Black et al. (2013), problem gamblers were identified to have a much lower QOL than non-gamblers, especially in the domains of physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and the environment.

### *The South African Responsible Gambling Foundation*

The SARGF was established in 2004. The foundation provides free and private counselling and treatment for those affected by problem gambling, including the immediate family members of the problem gamblers (SARGF, 2022). For the past 18 years, the SARGF has treated more than 18 500 people and tirelessly worked to educate South Africans on gambling and the harmful effects that it may have (SARGF, 2022). The SARGF operates a toll-free


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helpline 24/7, with multilingual counsellors available to assist problem gamblers (NGB, 2022). For 2019, the line answered 16 192 calls, 2 891 of which were explicitly regarding problem gambling (NGB, 2022).

The SARGF counsellors are all qualified with at least a Bachelor of Psychology (BPSYCH), a Bachelor of Social Work, or a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, and many of them are further registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). On average, the counsellors spend 90 to 102 hours per month in counselling sessions with problem gamblers, which equates to between 3 to 8 counselling sessions a week. Hodgins and Stevens (2021) highlighted the importance of understanding problem gamblers' behaviour in response to the COVID-19 lockdowns, mainly due to this group being so vulnerable. They suggested further studies be conducted based on the different lockdowns and measures of various jurisdictions to identify current gambling trends. During the study conducted by Sharman *et al.* (2021), the comment was made that the enforced lockdown contributed to either the development, the maintenance or the relapse of gamblers into gambling problems. It is vital for the SARGF to understand problem gamblers and how their gambling behaviour might have changed in recent years. However, minimal literature regarding problem gamblers is available that can be utilised in South Africa and Africa. The data attained in this study could assist the SARGF in adapting their responsible gambling programme in line with problem gamblers' most recent gambling behaviour post-COVID-19.

## METHODS

### *Research design and data collection method*

This study used a quantitative approach employing an exploratory research design. The data were collected using a structured telephonic questionnaire, as well as a questionnaire developed on Google Forms, where the responses were captured. The questionnaire was developed based on a combination of SARGF questions regarding problem gamblers' behaviour and previously used QOL questions. The questionnaire was compiled as per the requirements of the SARGF. The questionnaire developed for this study consisted of three sections: Section A, which captured information relating to the demographic profile of the respondents; Section B, which measured constructs relating to problem gamblers' gambling behaviour; and Section C, which covered the QOL constructs. The responses to the variables were guided by a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = mildly, 4 = much, and 5 = very much. The telephonic interviews were conducted by counsellors employed by the SARGF who deal with problem gamblers daily. The counsellors were familiarised with the questionnaire and how to capture the data via a video recording. The interviews were conducted specifically with problem gamblers on the SARGF's database who indicated their need to go through the responsible gambling programme. Problem gamblers also had to attend at least one counselling session before the COVID-19 lockdowns were instituted. The confidentiality of the respondents was maintained to the highest degree, and no personal information, such as their name or surname, was requested in the survey.

### *Population and sampling*

A pilot study was conducted in October 2022, and a total of 25 responses were received. The statistical analysis of the reactions was satisfactory, and the instruction was given to continue with the study from November 2022 until February 2023. The total number of problem gamblers on the dataset is 1,174, who were referred from January 2019 to December 2020 (L. Lekalakala, personal communication, 27 February 2023). A total of 1 012 problem gamblers were contacted, with only 68 willing to participate in the study. Despite the low response rate, this study is still deemed vital and insightful, with satisfactory reliability and validity results.

### *Data analysis*

Data generated on Google Forms were exported to Excel and then imported into SPSS version 28 for statistical analysis. Despite the small sample set obtained, the data still delivered an acceptable Cronbach's alpha of between 0.78 and 0.90, confirming the reliability of the survey items. Frequency tables were compiled, and Fisher's exact test and a two-sample test were conducted on the results discussed in the subsequent sections.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results in this section are based on the data collected in this study. Table 1 displays the reliability test results on the measures of gambling behaviour and mental health issues. A Cronbach's alpha test confirmed the reliability of the measures used and therefore confirmed the internal consistency of the scale or test. A value of Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0 to 1, where the higher values would then suggest that items are measuring the same dimension


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(Bujang, Omar & Baharum, 2018:85). Bujang *et al.* (2018:89) recommended to achieve a Cronbach's alpha of between 0.7 and 0.8 with the overall result of 0.7846 thus being satisfactory.

**Table 1: Reliability of gambling behaviour and mental health issues**

| Item | Observations | Significance | Item-test correlation | Item-rest correlation | Average interitem covariance | Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urge to gamble | 47 | + | 0.4463 | 0.2300 | 0.0586165 | 0.7909 |
| Cope without gambling | 46 | - | 0.4085 | 0.2461 | 0.0611373 | 0.7885 |
| Enjoyed as before | 32 | - | 0.3538 | 0.1804 | 0.0594087 | 0.7914 |
| Lockdown impact | 47 | - | 0.6020 | 0.4657 | 0.0530862 | 0.7602 |
| Anxiety | 46 | + | 0.7653 | 0.6626 | 0.0456162 | 0.7277 |
| Stress | 46 | + | 0.7470 | 0.6480 | 0.0479852 | 0.7378 |
| Depression | 46 | + | 0.8083 | 0.7207 | 00.0449408 | 0.7256 |
| Substance abuse | 45 | + | 0.4697 | 0.3461 | 0.0589714 | 0.7766 |
| Alcohol consumption | 46 | + | 0.5462 | 0.4133 | 0.0560747 | 0.7695 |
| Suicidal thoughts | 45 | + | 0.4846 | 0.3580 | 0.058048 | 0.7748 |
| | | | | | **0.544302** | **0.7846** |

Similarly, despite the low response rate obtained, the QOL measures still delivered a good Cronbach Alpha of 0.9010, as displayed in Table 2. The decision was, therefore, made to continue with statistical analysis despite the low response rate.

**Table 2: Reliability of QOL measures**

| Item | Observations | Significance | Item-test correlation | Item-rest correlation | Average interitem covariance | Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Job life satisfaction | 39 | + | 0.6947 | 0.5803 | 0.0962638 | 0.8940 |
| Family life satisfaction | 37 | + | 0.8335 | 0.7693 | 0.0898203 | 0.8850 |
| Financial life satisfaction | 40 | + | 0.5486 | 0.3693 | 0.1013161 | 0.9067 |
| Educational life satisfaction | 43 | + | 0.7480 | 0.6435 | 0.09472 | 0.8869 |
| Health life satisfaction | 36 | + | 0.6987 | 0.5688 | 0.0945762 | 0.8931 |
| Social life satisfaction | 37 | + | 0.7255 | 0.6356 | 0.0953188 | 0.8905 |
| Cultural life satisfaction | 40 | + | 0.7140 | 0.6357 | 0.0953188 | 0.8928 |
| Spiritual life satisfaction | 38 | + | 0.7302 | 0.6384 | 0.0957864 | 0.8896 |
| Leisure life satisfaction | 35 | + | 0.7764 | 0.6985 | 0.0937904 | 0.8854 |
| Quality of Life Satisfaction | 31 | + | 0.8195 | 0.6924 | 0.0968211 | 0.8915 |
| | | | | | **0.0957995** | **0.9010** |

The study focused on the demographics of the problem gamblers. Table 3 indicates that 63% of the respondents were male, while 37% were female; 51% were single, while 34% were married; and 62% were employed, while a worrisome 23% were unemployed. This poses a considerable challenge, as one would not want a problem gambler to be in this position. Looking at the languages spoken by the respondents, 31% spoke English as their first language, while 20% spoke isiZulu. Finally, 56% of the respondents resided in the Gauteng province, while 44% resided elsewhere.

**Table 3** Demographic profile of the problem gamblers

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Male** | 43 | 63% |
| **Female** | 25 | 37% |


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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Divorced** | 7 | 10% |
| **Living together** | 2 | 3% |
| **Married** | 23 | 34% |
| **Single** | 34 | 51% |
| **Widow/widower** | 1 | 2% |
| | | |
| **18-25** | 4 | 6% |
| **26-35** | 32 | 47% |
| **36-45** | 21 | 31% |
| **46-55** | 9 | 13% |
| **56-65** | 2 | 2% |
| | | |
| **Employed** | 41 | 62% |
| **Pensioner** | 1 | 2% |
| **Self-employed** | 8 | 12% |
| **Student** | 1 | 2% |
| **Unemployed** | 15 | 23% |
| | | |
| **isiZulu** | 13 | 20% |
| **isiXhosa** | 6 | 9% |
| **Venda** | 4 | 6% |
| **Tswana** | 2 | 3% |
| **Shangaan (Tsonga)** | 5 | 8% |
| **Afrikaans** | 1 | 2% |
| **Sotho** | 10 | 15% |
| **Ndebele** | 2 | 3% |
| **English** | 20 | 31% |
| **Serrel & Sepedi** | 2 | 4% |
| | | |
| **Eastern Cape** | 2 | 3% |
| **Free State & North West** | 3 | 5% |
| **Gauteng** | 36 | 56% |
| **Kwazulu-Natal** | 9 | 14% |
| **Limpopo** | 5 | 8% |
| **Mpumalanga** | 5 | 8% |
| **Western Cape** | 4 | 6% |

The study also focused on the behavioural profile of the problem gamblers and how their gambling habits have changed post-COVID-19. 39% of the respondents were able to cope without gambling, while a concerning 26% were not able to deal without gambling at all or even just a little bit. A follow-up question was asked as to whether the problem gamblers 'currently need to gamble', to which 26% responded that they did have a strong need. The respondents were asked if they had returned to a physical gambling site since the COVID-19 lockdown, with 30% of the respondents indicating that they had. 59% of the respondents stated that it was not as enjoyable to go to physical gambling sites as before. When enquiring further as to why problem gamblers return to physical gambling sites, the reasons, as listed in Table 4, were: they feel relaxed and do not feel bored at the site (4%), to socialise (12%), to win


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back their money or to make up for their lack of funds (16%), and just for the fun of it (8%); 12% of the respondents indicated that they would rather gamble online. The study by Savolainen et al. (2022) concluded that the most significant mediator for gambling was social motives. People long for social interaction, which was especially limited during the lockdown periods.

**Table 4.** Reasons for returning to a physical gambling site

| | |
|---|---|
| Feel relaxed and do not feel bored | 4% |
| Gambles online | 12% |
| N/A | 48% |
| To socialise | 12% |
| Because of lack of money | 16% |
| For fun | 8% |

The respondents were asked if they had embraced a new form of entertainment. Table 5 indicates that 40% of the respondents have taken part in new forms of entertainment. These included passive entertainment such as watching TV, playing chess and other games, or doing scrapbooking (26%); online gambling or betting on sports (16%); engaging in physical activities such as gymming or playing soccer (10%); drinking (6%); socialising and going out (6%); getting involved in ministry (6%); or focussing on business (3%).

**Table 5** New forms of entertainment

| | |
|---|---|
| Passive entertainment (watching TV, playing chess and other games, scrapbooking, etc.) | 26% |
| Drinking | 6% |
| Physical activity (gymming, playing soccer, etc.) | 10% |
| Gambling and betting on sport | 16% |
| Socialising, going out | 6% |
| Focusing on business | 3% |
| Getting involved in ministry | 6% |

When enquiring as to whether the COVID-19 lockdown had any impact on the respondents' gambling behaviour, 53% of them confirmed that there was indeed an impact. 40% of the respondents further indicated that this impact was positive, while 60% indicated that the effect was negative. The respondents were then asked how the lockdowns specifically impacted their gambling behaviour. Table 6 suggests that most of the respondents, at 31%, have started gambling more responsibly or have completely stopped gambling and have therefore saved money. In comparison, 26% indicated that they now gamble more and/or have started gambling online. These results are consistent with findings by Price (2020) and Sarangi (2022), who noted the growth of online gambling and the associated mental health concerns of this increased usage. Mohammed *et al.* (2023) came to the same conclusion in that the respondents who indicated increased gaming behaviour also reported increased feelings of loneliness, depression and anxiety. Other responses included that they did not have the time or money to gamble anymore (9%) or that they did not believe that they won like they used to since the lockdown (6%). Since some of the respondents indicated that they were now gambling online and/or more than before, they were asked whether they had started other modes of gambling. The respondents listed bookmakers as the most preferred gambling mode (69%), followed by casinos (13%).

**Table 6** Impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on problem gamblers' gambling behaviours

| | |
|---|---|
| Being dishonest | 3% |
| I started spending more time with my family | 3% |
| Started spending more time on social media and technology | 3% |


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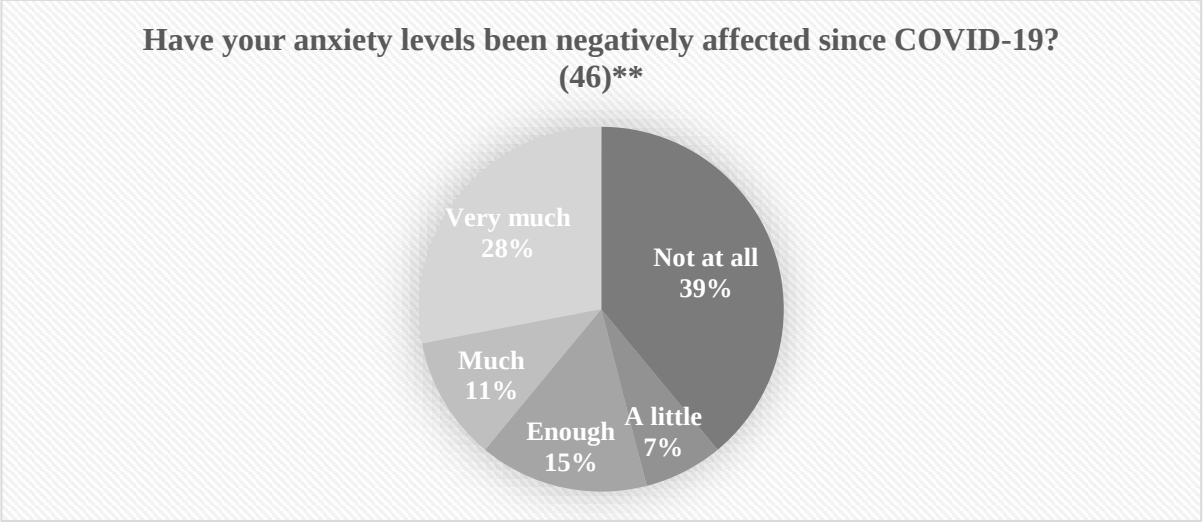
| | |
|---|---|
| Started gambling responsibly/stopped gambling and saved money | 31% |
| Started gambling online/gambling more | 26% |
| No impact | 16% |
| I had no money/time to gamble | 9% |
| Was not winning like before | 6% |
| Was unemployed | 3% |

The following results had the most statistical significance. Associations between the COVID-19 lockdown and the respondents' mental health were done. Overall, the measure of Anxiety to Suicidal thoughts achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7778, implying the reliability of the measure. Additional analysis, such as Fisher's exact test, looked at the association between the two variables, indicating statistical significance in the results. Fisher's exact test is used explicitly due to the small sample size of this study, with the required result: $p<0.05$ (Frost, 2023).




**Statistically significant findings: Fisher's exact = 0.002; 1-sided Fisher's exact = 0.002
**Figure 1.** Anxiety levels since COVID-19

When enquiring as to whether the respondents' anxiety levels were negatively affected since COVID-19, 39% of them responded that their anxiety levels were negatively affected, as displayed in Figure 1. This complements the findings by Sundqvist and Wennberg (2022) and Savolainen *et al.* (2022), who stated that anxiety disorders are repeatedly linked to problem gambling. Savolainen *et al.* (2022) concluded during their study that COVID-19 anxiety had led to increased mental health problems among gamblers, which further resulted in increased gaming and gaming problems. Similarly, when enquiring whether the respondents' stress levels were negatively affected since COVID-19, 45% responded that their stress levels were definitely elevated, with the findings again statistically significant, with a Fisher's exact score of 0.002 (<0.05). When enquiring as to whether the respondents' depression levels were negatively affected since COVID-19, 24% of them responded that their depression levels were negatively affected.. These findings contribute to the study of Barrault, Mathieu, Brunault and Varescon's (2019), stating that depression, anxiety, and problem gambling are significantly correlated to each other. Sharman *et al.* (2021) concur that problem gamblers experience mental health challenges, specifically depression, stress and anxiety levels. Furthermore, Barrault et al. (2019) concluded that depression is a predictor for problem gambling because gambling is often used as a coping mechanism for problem gamblers, providing them with temporary relief from their depressive states.

Table 7 presents the details of ten QOL domains and the responses on a 5-point Likert scale. Four domains emerged that problem gamblers were unsatisfied with: their family life, financial situation, health, and social life. Some of these findings were similar to those of Mythily, Edimansyah, Qiu and Munidasa (2011), that the mental, physical, social, and environmental domains of problem gamblers were impacted.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From the results in Table 7, it is evident that gambling negatively affects problem gamblers' finances, indicating the need to control their spending habits while gambling. Another area that is negatively affected by problem gamblers' unhealthy gambling behaviours is their family and social life. Problem gamblers will need to be motivated to spend time with their loved ones as they are the support system for their responsible gambling journey. Finally, problem gamblers must be motivated to focus on their mental and physical health. Black *et al*. (2013) found that the severity of one's gambling behaviour positively correlates with the number of medical conditions one experiences.

**Table 7** Quality of life domains

| **Quality of Life Domains: I am currently satisfied with my….** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| Job life | 51% | 15% | 5% | 5% | 24% |
| Family life | 50% | 6% | 20% | 4% | 20% |
| Financial life | 39% | 11% | 13% | 9% | 28% |
| Educational life | 56% | 15% | 7% | 13% | 9% |
| Health | 36% | 9% | 23% | 6% | 27% |
| Social life | 44% | 16% | 18% | 7% | 16% |
| Cultural life | 59% | 13% | 13% | 6% | 9% |
| Spiritual life | 52% | 11% | 17% | 9% | 11% |
| Leisure life | 54% | 4% | 24% | 11% | 7% |
| Quality of life in general | 59% | 2% | 17% | 9% | 13% |

**Limitations**

- The first limitation of the study was that the data collection had to be done by the counsellors employed by the SARGF, resulting in incomplete questionnaires.
- The second limitation was the low response rate obtained during the study. This could be because people generally do not want to be questioned on their unhealthy behaviours and habits, in this case, unhealthy gambling behaviours. It could also be due to the stigma surrounding the term 'problem gamblers'. It is, therefore, suggested that the term be reconsidered as it has a negative connotation. Should the term be amended to a more forgiving one, i.e. recovering gamblers, the respondents might be inclined to participate in the study.
- The third limitation was that this study only focused on problem gamblers enrolled in a responsible gambling programme during the time of this study. Thus, masses of potential respondents were not contacted due to either having finished the programme or not identifying themselves as problem gamblers and, therefore, not having joined the programme.

**DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to inform the SARGF management about problem gamblers and how COVID-19 might have impacted them and their gambling behaviours. To do this, a general demographic and behavioural profile of problem gamblers was developed, and QOL domains were analysed. The results of this study have identified numerous insights that responsible gambling programmes should consider post-COVID-19. First, it would be advisable to identify problem gamblers who are currently unemployed. This is not an ideal situation for problem gamblers to be in, and it is suggested that a more intensive programme is designed for them.

Generally, problem gamblers were able to cope without gambling, and only the minority indicated that they still had a strong need to gamble. Several respondents have returned to a physical gambling venue, although most of them did not enjoy it as much as before. Reasons why problem gamblers still prefer going to a physical gambling site include: they feel relaxed and do not feel bored, to socialise, just for fun, or in an attempt to win back their losses. Post-COVID-19, almost half of the problem gamblers have embraced a new form of entertainment such as watching


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TV, playing chess and other games, or scrapbooking; online gambling or betting on sports; engaging in physical activities such as gymming or playing soccer; drinking; socialising and going out; getting involved in ministry; or focusing on business. These are reassuring results since problem gamblers engaged in other activities, except for the rise in online gambling, sports betting, and drinking, that should be noted.

Problem gamblers further indicated that COVID-19 has impacted their gambling behaviour, some negatively and some positively. Some of the observable changes include that they now prefer spending time with family, they prefer spending time on social media and technology, they have started gambling more responsibly or completely stopped gambling altogether, they have begun gambling online or started gambling even more, especially on bookmakers. Some problem gamblers believed that they no longer win like they did in the past, and others wanted to try to win back their losses, which is a hazardous view for problem gamblers to have. The most significant findings of this study are concerning the mental health of problem gamblers post-COVID-19. Important findings on problem gamblers indicate that their anxiety levels, stress levels, and depression levels were severely affected since COVID-19 were made.

These findings are indicative of where responsible gambling programmes' main focus should be during counselling sessions. The QOL dimensions problem gamblers were not satisfied with were their family life, financial situation, health, and social life. Designing programmes that provide advice and guidance regarding these areas will be beneficial to problem gamblers. Finally, problem gamblers indicated the need to be educated regarding online gambling, which is illegal in South Africa, as the majority of them were not aware of this fact. The current responsible gambling programme was also praised for the current design and problem gamblers, indicating their willingness to be contacted further for more guidance on how to deal with their gambling issues. The results highlight the effectiveness of the current responsible gambling programme in South Africa, with the need indicating that mental health issues should be addressed with more vigour. Further studies going into more depth on mental health issues should also be considered to discover the core of the problems. Numerous suggestions and findings have been made during this study of where responsible gambling programmes can improve and what issues to address during counselling sessions.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The study did not receive any funding from any institution and was funded by the author herself. The research project took place on request from the SARGF due to a Memorandum of Agreement that is in existence between the Tshwane University of Technology and the SARGF. Interviews were conducted by trained counsellors in the employ of the SARGF. The interview questions were compiled on behalf of the SARGF by Mr Laurence Lekalakala, who is employed by the SARGF as the Research and Statistical Analysist together with the author and were accordingly approved by the SARGF for the purposes of ensuring that the questionnaire did not have questions that will harm its patients or disclose their personal information. Although the SARGF played a role in the design of the questionnaire, it had no influence on the study design, data analyses, or the interpretation of the data. The SARGF has given written approval for this study to be published.

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# LEVERAGING PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CLUBS AND THEIR INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY DEVELOPMENT IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores how sport, hospitality, and tourism intersect to create opportunities for destinations to add value, benefiting a broad range of stakeholders. While much research in this field has focused on sport's mega-events (Chalip, 2017; Beesley et al., 2011) and what Tobar et al. (2024) describe as "global touristic football clubs," this work shifts attention to the potential of less prominent professional sports clubs as tourism assets in regional contexts (Proctor et al., 2023). The research focuses on SC Cambuur, a Dutch professional football club, and its new stadium in Leeuwarden, the capital of the province of Friesland. Friesland, an economically disadvantaged region by Dutch standards, seeks to bolster its economy through tourism and hospitality.

Problem definition and objectives: Regional areas may struggle to maximise the economic and social benefits of tourism due to limited resources and their geographical location. Professional sports clubs, often symbols of regional identity, represent untapped potential for tourism and hospitality development. This study investigates how such clubs can be leveraged as tourism assets to deliver broad stakeholder benefits. It forms part of a longitudinal project tracking the tourism and hospitality footprint of SC Cambuur as it relocates to its new stadium.
The research seeks to:
1. Develop a conceptual framework for leveraging sports clubs to benefit economically disadvantaged regions that will inform the next stages of the longitudinal study.
2. Explore how professional football clubs and their facilities can contribute to sustainable tourism and hospitality development.
3. Provide insights relevant to policy makers, destination marketing organisations and professional sports clubs.
4. Deliver a practical and replicable model for destinations seeking equitable and sustainable tourism outcomes.

## METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

In its current phase (objective 1) the study employs a qualitative inductive design to develop a conceptual framework for leveraging professional sports clubs in regional tourism development. The framework is informed by theoretical sampling of both academic and "grey" literature, including online platforms such as club websites, tourism reports and municipal/provincial policies. Unstructured participant observations are also used to capture contextual insights. This approach allows for an understanding of the interplay between sports infrastructure, regional development, and stakeholder collaboration, laying the foundation for future empirical research.

## FINDINGS/CONTRIBUTIONS

As this study is at the framework development stage, its primary contribution lies in developing a conceptual model to guide further research on leveraging professional sports clubs for tourism and hospitality purposes. Integrating stakeholder theory, social capital theory, actor network theory (ANT), and the concept of tourism leverage, the framework offers a structured approach to analysing and designing initiatives that deliver regional benefits. By the time of the conference, the study anticipates sharing updates on the application of the framework.
In practical terms the framework serves as a strategic guide for sports clubs, policy makers and local business. It is actionable in helping researchers and other stakeholders to identify leverage points and provides a scalable edifice that can be adapted to other provincial contexts sharing similar characteristics.

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# WHAT DISTINGUISHES WINE INTERESTED VISITORS FROM NON-WINE INTERESTED VISITORS?

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## ABSTRACT

Wine tourism accounts for high numbers of visitors traveling worldwide. To maximize the potential benefits of this tourism activity, service providers and managers of tourism destinations are analysing the wine tourism market. Recognising the importance of tourism motivations, researchers have been trying to identify the specific characteristics of wine enthusiast visitors to better cater to their expectations. However, studies in this context tend to compare these visitors to others, only in a limited range of aspects (Bruwer et al., 2018; Quintal et al., 2017; Vorobiova et al., 2020). They tend to disregard differences, for example, regarding the experience lived, despites the crucial role this construct plays in consumer behaviour. Even though, research points some potential characteristics of these visitors, suggesting that more wine interested visitors are likely to differ from other visitors regarding some aspects of sociodemographic profile and travel behaviour (Vorobiova et al., 2020), and tend to have better images of the destinations in some aspects (Bruwer et al., 2018), as also higher levels of loyalty towards the destination (Quintal et al., 2017).

The present study intends to overcome some gaps of the previous research, comparing visitors with lower and higher motivations regarding wine tourism, in one wine region of the Centre of Portugal – Bairrada (n=533) – on a broader range of features, including the experience lived. Wine interested visitors and non-wine interested visitors were compared using independent-samples t tests and chi-square tests.

Findings provide useful insights on differences between the wine interested and the non-wine interested, especially regarding motivations other than wine-related ones, travel behaviour, experience lived and satisfaction. Wine interested visitors, besides having higher education than non-interested, and traveling more by plane and bus, are likely to be more motivated, to have more immersive and positive experiences and to be more satisfied. Regarding the experiences, the results suggest that these interested visitors are more likely to have more enriching educational, as well as interactional and sensory wine-related experiences, that may account for higher levels of satisfaction. A discussion of all results, and especially on experiences lived, provides valuable information, mainly for managers of wine tourism attractions or wine destinations, to better attract this market and cope with its requirements, and offer wine interested visitors the opportunity to live enriching, satisfying and memorable experiences.

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# THE HEALING POWER OF TRAVEL: SOLO FEMALE TRAVEL AND POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

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## ABSTRACT

This netnographic study explores the role of solo female travel in the post-traumatic growth process of women over the age of 50 following traumatic life experiences such as divorce, grief, or serious illness. Based on an in-depth thematic analysis of personal narratives collected from online communities of solo female travelers, the study reveals the relationship between the healing and transformation expectations attributed to solo female travel after trauma and the psychological changes experienced following such journeys. Framed within Calling Theory and Post-Traumatic Growth Theory, the study demonstrates that solo female travel functions not only as a coping strategy for trauma, but also as a vehicle for emotional healing, empowerment, identity reconstruction, and the discovery of new possibilities in life. The findings show that solo female travel, undertaken in response to inner callings such as the desire for recovery, community support, or independence, enables women to rebuild their self-confidence, reconnect with their inner strength, and develop new perspectives on life. Moreover, the results reveal that solo female travel reflects not only the transformations that occur during or after the journey, but also a strong intention for psychological change formed prior to departure. In this respect, the study highlights not only actualized transformation but also the pre-growth process (PRE-PTG) and the motivational power of anticipated transformation. By examining the role of solo female travel in psychological recovery and personal transformation through the lens of PTG and Calling Theory, the study offers original theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature on post-traumatic growth.

**Key Words:** Solo Female Travel, Post-Traumatic Growth, Calling Theory, Trauma Recovery, Psychological Transformation.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism contributes significantly to human health through novelty, the discovery of unique experiences, interaction in new socializing spaces and creating positive emotions (Buckley, & Westaway 2020; Buckley, & Oam, 2021; Hu et al., 2024). Influenced by the positive psychology approach, there has been a noticeable increase in studies examining the relationship between tourism, health, happiness, and well-being, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic (Liu, Zhou, & Sun, 2023; Zheng, Liang, Liu, & Wu, 2022). However, much of this literature focuses on the experiences of healthy individuals and does not adequately examine the recovery processes of psychologically vulnerable individuals or those who have experienced traumatic life events through tourism (Buckley & Westaway, 2020; Hu et al., 2025). This highlights a significant research gap in understanding the potential contributions of tourism in the post-trauma context.

Traumatic life events such as divorce, marital crisis, abandonment, partner loss, intimate partner violence, and illness, which can have profound psychological effects on women, may lead to disruptions in self-perception, and result in depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and social isolation (Bacchus et al., 2018; Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; Dillon et al., 2013; World Health Organization, 2021). These traumas are considered not only as crises but also as turning points that trigger the search for meaning and the need to reconstruct one's life (Fullagar, 2008; Ridgway, 2024). It is known that women seek various ways to support their personal healing processes after traumatic experiences, and solo female travel holds a particularly significant place among these strategies (Sengupta, 2021).


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Solo female travel emerges as a space in which women rebuild their psychological resilience, discover their inner strength, and transform their sense of self, particularly following relational ruptures such as divorce or the loss of a partner. In feminist literature, solo female travel is regarded as a practice through which women reclaim their individual freedom, challenge social norms, and redefine their autonomy (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Ridgway, 2024). Especially for women, meaningful travel experiences shaped by the search for self and identity, empowerment, and the development of connections with others encompass both individual and social dimensions of post-traumatic reconstruction (Wilson & Harris, 2006).

Indeed, solo female travel undertaken during midlife is seen as a significant tool for the reconstruction of identity, the discovery of personal boundaries, and the reestablishment of inner strength (Nikjoo et al., 2023). However, existing literature on solo female travel tends to focus primarily on younger women, paying insufficient attention to the unique experiences, safety concerns, physical limitations, and relationships with social expectations of middle-aged and older women (Barrett & Douglas, 2020). The process of healing and transformation experienced by women who turn to solo female travel, especially after experiencing breakdowns such as divorce, abandonment, emotional violence and loss, and how this process integrates into their psychological well-being and self-structure has not been sufficiently researched. This gap suggests that more in-depth studies are needed to understand the role of solo female travel in post-traumatic recovery (Sengupta, 2021; Tiyce, 2008).

The current study investigates how solo female travel emerges in response to the "call to heal" following traumatic life experiences and how the response to this call functions in women's posttraumatic growth processes. For this purpose, Calling Theory and Posttraumatic Growth Theory were adopted as theoretical frameworks. Calling Theory proposes that individuals desire to follow a meaningful and fulfilling life path that is compatible with their abilities, values, and passions (Duffy, Dik, Douglass, England, & Velez, 2018), while PTG theory suggests that individuals who experience traumatic experiences can achieve positive psychological changes as well as recovery from these experiences (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). In this context, solo female travel, which plays an active role in the transformation, recovery, and reconstruction processes of women aged 50 and over, is examined within a posttraumatic framework in order to contribute to the literature by focusing particularly on the experiences of middle-aged and older women.

**Methodology and Analysis**

This study was conducted using a qualitative research design to examine the psychological transformation, recovery, and reconstruction processes of women who traveled alone after traumatic life experiences. Data were collected through netnographic observations in a Facebook group (n=592) of women who traveled alone. The study focused specifically on the experiences of women aged 50 and over because this age group coincides with a life stage in which intense relational, social, and identity-related transitions are experienced (Dresler, 2024; Heimtun, 2011; Kleiber et al., 2002). The qualitative data obtained was analyzed using MAXQDA24 software. The thematic coding method was used in the analysis process. The coding process was based on both deductive theoretical categories and categories derived from the data with an inductive approach.

Ensuring the trustworthiness of this study involved a careful and transparent research design shaped by the specific demands of netnographic inquiry. Rather than relying solely on textual data, the researchers observed deeply the digital community over time, allowing meanings and patterns to emerge naturally within their social context. The interpretive process was supported by detailed analytical documentation, which allowed for a clear trace of how codes and themes were developed. Attention was also paid to the consistency and coherence of the thematic framework, with cross-checks between theoretical assumptions and empirical observations. These efforts aimed to ensure that the findings were not only grounded in the data but also presented with methodological clarity and integrity.

**Results**

The analysis of the data is structured around five main themes: traumatic life experiences, motivation and calling, responding to the calling through solo female travel, pre-growth process (pre-PTG) for women who were just planning the travel, and post-traumatic growth (PTG) for women who had already undertaken the journey. The analysis results revealed that women plan or travel solo after traumatic life events due to self and psychological reconstruction, and an inner call that triggers a meaningful orientation in their lives. Traveling solo after traumatic life events is not only a physical action for women, but a gain in self-awareness, discovery of inner strength, a step


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towards rebuilding their lives, and a conscious rebirth. In this sense, one can conclude that women are motivated by an inner call and relate it to the search for a new purpose.

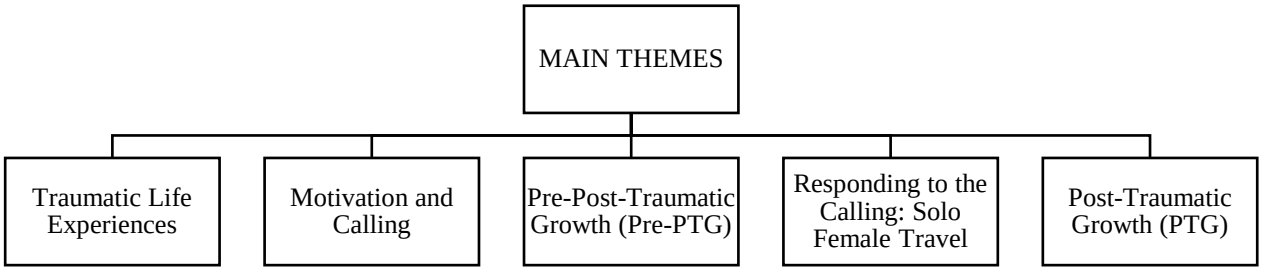


Figure 1. Themes Identified Through Thematic Analysis

The research further explored that women were heavily driven to solo female travel by intense desire to rediscover their identity and life path, to heal, to search for meaning, to start over, to gain self-understanding, and to achieve independence. These feelings were frequently accompanied by the rise of long-suppressed emotions, and inner turmoil.

Some group members expressed both a desire to heal and a fear before taking off for travel. One of the group members stated, "*I have very complicated feelings, but I hope to return as a different and happier woman*," which shows how the effectiveness orientation toward healing is intertwined with other complex feelings. Further, despite the complicated and sometimes frightening feelings, experiencing solo female travel alone became a real "hope for healing" for these women. Many women, especially those inspired and encouraged by the stories of the other women in the group, believed that the journey would be a step toward freedom, autonomy, starting over, and regaining personal power. These findings suggest that although women may not be able to fully move into a phase of post-traumatic growth by traveling, they are ready for change or have reached a state of mind to embrace healing. Besides, it is evident from these findings that solo female travel appears as a multidimensional and transformative psychological process for those women.

Encountering and overcoming loneliness, fear, hesitation, and decision-making responsibility during the travel provided women with the opportunity to regain their self-confidence and strengthen their sense of autonomy. These experiences led women to feel more valued and capable and provided deeper engagement, especially in the emotional regulation, self-esteem, and spiritual awareness contexts. Many group members stated that solo female travel helped them calm emotional turmoil, increase their emotional resilience, and make peace with their past and different emotions.

Solo female travel has also emerged as a way of coping strategy for women to feel prepared for new beginnings, believe that a better life is possible, discover new opportunities, and stimulate their sense of hope and curiosity. Following the challenging life experiences, solo female travel has been described as a life-changing activity. Group members reported that they reoriented their lives and developed a freer, more open perspective on the future, free from the weight of the past.

The majority of group members reported that by traveling alone, they rediscovered the value of life, gained a new perspective on life, and looked at life with a deeper appreciation, gratitude, and joy of life. Women emphasized that the connection they established with nature during their travels played an important role in their healing and inner peace. In addition, consciously traveling on special occasions such as birthdays, divorce anniversaries, etc. made women feel that they were putting themselves at the center of their lives, and this symbolic meaning of the experience created a new meaning and direction.

The findings of the study showed that the experience of solo female travel served as a means for women to establish social connections where they did feel alone. Group members emphasized developing new friends during their travels, establishing lasting connections with them, and feeling supported throughout these relationships. Some women also noted that these connections were sustainable during and following the travel. Some of them further stated developing meaningful connections with local communities through volunteer social activities. On the other


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hand, virtual platforms (e.g., Facebook groups) served as spaces for solidarity. In these virtual groups, they inspired and collectively accompanied each other and found encouragement through the healing process.

Conceptualizing solo female travel as a powerful personal transformation movement, women had the opportunity to know self-better, confront inner resistance, realize their autonomy, and rediscover their personal passions while discovering the value of their own friendship. During this period of growing self-awareness, many women expressed that they were able to reveal aspects of self that they had repressed in the past, gained courage and determination, and became more emotionally resilient. Thus, solo female travel functioned as a path to heal in post-trauma as well as dynamic means of self and life re-construction.

The findings of the study indicate that following post-traumatic life experiences solo female travel initiated a meaningful and multidimensional transformation process for women. Having been subjected to traumatic life experiences, the inner selves of the women are awakened by feelings of calling to begin over and to heal, and at this point, as a transition to a new life, solo female travel is imagined, planned, and undertaken. This pre-transformational process (PRE-PTG) shapes individuals' intentions to reconstruct themselves; with the realization of the travel, these intentions progress into post-traumatic growth (PTG). Women not only recovered through solo female travel; they also developed emotional resilience, redefined their social relationships, and added new meaning to their lives. In this context, the study reveals that solo female travel plays a comprehensive and transformative role in the post-traumatic growth process, both prior to and following the travel, opens up a new theoretical space at the intersection of calling, travel and post traumatic growth.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrate that traumatic life events lead to a profound existential questioning in women and that such ruptures often evoke a sense of calling, directing individuals toward a renewed search for meaning. Following experiences such as divorce, the loss of a partner, child, or parent, or emotional abuse, women began to imagine, plan, or undertake solo female travel with an inner awakening, viewing it as a potential pathway for healing and reconstruction. Accordingly, solo female travel is both a physical movement and a part of a pre-growth process beginning even before the travel, offering hope to recover, reorientation of life, and strengthening the psychology.

Once the travel is undertaken, the inner response of the women becomes a distinct process of post-traumatic growth (PTG). The solo female travel experience is consistent with the fundamental dimensions of PTG, such as personal empowerment, awareness of new possibilities, appreciation of life, transformation in relationships, and spiritual growth. Additionally, the physical and symbolic space offered by travel provided women with a path to recovery and served as a basis for self-construction, identity renewal, and life redesign. In conclusion, the current study demonstrates that solo female travel functions as an act of responding to a sense of calling and as a transformative process initiating and sustaining post-traumatic growth.

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes by examining the role of solo female travel in post-traumatic recovery processes through the lens of Calling Theory and Post-Traumatic Growth Theory (PTG) and highlights how these two theoretical frameworks operate in the context of tourism and recovery. While Calling Theory is applied in the existing literature to the fields of career, spirituality, or vocational orientation, this study uses it to understand the motivations behind travel after traumatic life experiences and demonstrates how an internal sense of direction after trauma can guide individuals toward a meaningful journey. In this context, the study demonstrates that a sense of calling can be addressed not only in professional terms, but also within the framework of life reconstruction and personal transformation. For group members, solo female travel emerged not only as a physical change of direction, but also as a way of responding to an inner calling; this finding extends the potential scope of applications for Calling Theory. On the other hand, when evaluated within the framework of Post-Traumatic Growth Theory, the study reveals that the experience of solo female travel is compatible with the five basic dimensions of post-traumatic growth (personal strength, awareness of new possibilities, deepening of relationships, appreciation of life, and spiritual growth) and that this transformation represents not only a short-term effect but also a long-lasting reconstruction potential integrated into daily life. This suggests that the PTG theory can be expanded beyond traditional clinical contexts and applied to tourism and leisure experiences.


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Furthermore, through its observations regarding the concept of pre-PTG, the study draws attention to the fact that the transformation process in individuals may begin before solo female travel, that is, during the phase when decisions are made and internal intentions are shaped. In this context, the study provides an expanding contribution to the classical linear of PTG in the literature by showing that PTG processes may start to take shape even before the actual travel begins.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study offers valuable practical insights into how solo female travel can serve as a transformative experience for women navigating the aftermath of trauma. From the standpoint of the tourism industry, the findings underscore the importance of creating travel opportunities that are safe, supportive, and rich in meaning—especially for women seeking healing and personal renewal. Programs designed specifically for women, such as nature-based retreats, guided solo journeys, or destinations focused on therapeutic engagement, have the potential to meet these needs effectively.

Equally important is the role of social support, encouragement, and the collective sharing of experiences in shaping women's decisions to travel alone. These findings point to the potential of digital communities and platforms to be more intentionally designed to promote solo female travel through content that empowers and connects. For instance, social media groups, blogs, or travel-focused applications could be developed to provide inspiration, practical advice, and emotional support tailored to solo female travelers.

From a policy perspective, recognizing tourism as a supportive element in post-traumatic recovery can contribute to the development of inclusive strategies that support women's health and well-being. Public initiatives that enable women to travel safely can help cultivate alternative spaces for healing, particularly in the context of gender-based violence.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Even though significant results were found regarding role of solo female travel in post-traumatic recovery processes, it also has some limitations. Most notably, the data were drawn exclusively from netnographic observations within a closed Facebook group. As a result, the dataset may have been limited to individuals who were both willing and able to share their experiences in a public online space. Furthermore, since the insights were gathered from naturally occurring posts rather than direct interviews, it was not feasible to explore participants' personal histories, the specific nature of their traumatic experiences, whether they had received professional support, or the full depth of their travel narratives. These factors necessitated an interpretive approach to analysis, and in some instances, led to contextual uncertainties.

Future studies could address these limitations by incorporating diverse data collection strategies, including in-depth interviews, diary methods, or ethnographic fieldwork, to gain a more layered and context-sensitive understanding of how solo female travel influences individual recovery. Especially in face-to-face interviews, participants may be more inclined to articulate the emotional and relational dimensions of their experiences with greater clarity.

There is also a need for longitudinal research that examines how the effects of solo female travel unfold over time and become integrated into the fabric of everyday life. Such studies would clarify whether solo female travel acts as a temporary relief or a long-term catalyst for personal transformation. In addition, complementing qualitative findings with quantitative methods would allow researchers to assess the broader impact of solo female travel on post-traumatic growth using larger and more generalizable samples. These efforts would also support empirical validation and refinement of emerging theoretical frameworks.

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# ESTIMATING THE RISK OF UNDER- OR OVER-ESTIMATION BIAS IN VISITOR EXPENDITURE SURVEYS

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**ABSTRACT**
Measurement error in the survey-based estimates of visitor expenditure has been commonly neglected. This paper adds to the literature by exploring follow-up questions on response certainty and task difficulty in assessing the risk of response bias in the expenditures of nautical tourists. Based on responses to these questions, they were categorized as Optimizers (65%), Satisficers (23%), Cognitively Overloaded (11%), or Disengaged (1%). The Optimizers recorded a significantly higher mean of total trip expenditure. The convergent validity was lowest for Cognitively Overloaded and Disengaged. The study suggests there is a high risk of under-estimating true expenditures and offers guidelines for improving expenditure estimates.
**Key Words:** visitor expenditure; measurement error; response certainty; task difficulty; nautical tourists

## INTRODUCTION

Visitor expenditure is one of the key measurement themes covered by SF-MST (UNWTO, 2024). The estimation of average tourism expenditure per visitor is a fundamental measure/metric for understanding the economic impacts of tourism and analyzing the costs and profits associated with tourism industry (Jingwen & Mingzhu, 2018; Mihalič et al., 2002). Visitor expenditure forms integral part of cost-benefit analysis of events and evaluating the effectiveness of promotional programs to guide the design of appropriate tourism policies and marketing campaigns (Brida et al., 2013; Sun et al., 2010; Mortazavi & Lundberg, 2019). It also serves as an important criterion for market segmentation and tourism product innovation (Díaz-Pérez et al., 2005). Moreover, visitor expenditure forms a critical component of tourism satellite accounts (TSA) for calculating the contribution of tourism to the economy (UNWTO, 2024). Considering the crucial role of visitor expenditure in assessing the economic impact of tourism, this study aims to mitigate the biases inherent in the estimation of visitor expenditure.

Although emerging data sources, such as bank card transaction data (Alvarez & Velasco, 2024), are gaining traction, traditional survey-based methods remain the most reliable data source for capturing visitor expenditure. However, while visitor expenditure surveys are often conducted with methodological rigor (e.g., following strict survey design rules) to ensure the accuracy of the estimates, their validity has rarely been explicitly tested. This should be of no surprise considering the complexities in setting up an appropriate research design for testing the validity of estimates in visitor expenditure surveys.

## RESPONSE ERROR IN THE ESTIMATION OF VISITOR EXPENDITURE

Validity of visitor expenditure measures in earlier studies was studies by comparing two different methods for collecting the data on visitor expenditure – diary method, which asks participants to record their daily activities and expenditures during the entire stay, and the recall method, which surveys visitors at a single point in time to find out their expenditure during the stay. Faulkner and Raybould (1995) concluded that some visitors cannot recall their activities or expenditures reliably through a visitor survey. It is commonly known that survey respondents often make data reporting errors (Gabe & McConnon Jr., 2018). As possible explanations for a greater accuracy of diary method, previous research has suggested memory decay and prestige bias (or social desirability), which have been often recorded in visitor surveys (Raybould & Fredline, 2012). Misreporting the expenditures because of recall error/ bias is commonly classified either as omission, i.e., under-reporting, or as telescoping, i.e., over-reporting of actual expenditures. Under-reporting occurs when respondents forget some relevant expenditure that ought to be included, while telescoping occurs when they include some irrelevant or non-existent expenditure (e.g., expenditure outside the study region) (Raybould & Fredline, 2012). The likelihood of omission increases with the complexity of


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transactions and the time elapsed between the event and the participation in a visitor survey. On the other hand, telescoping issue has been linked with prestige bias and social desirability. In general, earlier research supports the conclusions that the recall method may lead to under-estimation of visitor expenditure in certain key categories due to memory decay (Breen et al., 2001). However, the previous studies lack the measure of external validity of expenditure estimates, due to the unavailability of data on true expenditures. The general finding is that a recall method embedded within a visitor survey is a more cost-effective method than a diary method, which is more expensive and imposes a high respondent burden, therefore requiring a great commitment from research participants (Raybould & Fredline, 2012; Breen et al., 2001).

Visitor surveys are the most frequent source of data on visitor expenditure (Frechtling, 2006; Sun et al., 2010). Several studies investigated measurement error in survey-based estimates of visitor expenditure. While respondent error (the difference between actual and reported expenditures) in visitor surveys has been commonly explained by recall error (Raybould & Fredline, 2012), we argue that another (but related) source of error – response heuristics or satisficing – has an important role in explaining this response bias. The bias could be introduced by respondents who are not willing to invest enough cognitive effort to provide an accurate estimate of their expenditure and/or have trouble recaling all their expenditures due to the length of recall period or complex patterns of their expenditure, despite cognitive effort invested. In this study we show that the interplay of these two sources of error may be more effective in detecting and mitigating respondent error than studying each type of error on its own. This is especially relevant for traditional survey-based measures. In contrast to incentive-compatible measures in experimental economics, the traditional survey-based measures do not provide incentives to respondents to answer truthfully or provide the best possible response, i.e., the most accurate measure of their expenditure (Chetty et al., 2021).

The objective of this paper is to mitigate measurement error in visitor expenditure data introduced by recall bias and/or response heuristics. This paper adds to the literature by addressing the potential usefullness of specific follow-up questions on response certainty and task difficulty to assess the validity of responses on tourist expenditures. The proposed framework was empirically tested using the survey on attitudes and expenditures of nautical tourists in Croatia.

**METHODS**

The proposed approach for improving the validity of estimates on visitor expenditure was empirically tested using the survey on attitudes and expenditures of nautical tourists in Croatia, conducted in 2022 on 2,508 yachtsmen. A stratified quota sampling was used, and the data were collected through a computer assisted personal interview. Study participants were asked to estimate their expenditure related to a current sailing trip in Croatia (total expenditure and on 14 individual items), using an open-ended format. The respondents – nautical tourists – were interviewed on site. Following the similar approach as Jeong et al. (2015), they were asked to recall their overall expenditure and expenditure in each of 14 categories, estimate their additional spending until the end of the yachting/sailing trip, and then report the aggregated total of these amounts. Finding an optimal response to this question is cognitively demanding; however, the cognitive effort of participants invested in their response may range from minimal to considerable, highlighting the potential for a significant reporting error (Jeong et al., 2015).

The two follow-up variables used to assess the validity of visitor expenditures and mitigate measurement error related to recall bias and response heuristics or satisficing were response certainty and task difficulty, which have been commonly used in the choice modelling studies for improving the validity of the outcomes of discrete choice experiments. Response certainty was assessed on a ten-point rating scale anchored by 'very uncertain' and 'very certain', and task difficulty on a four-point scale anchored by 'very difficult' and 'very easy'. Based on these measures, the participants were categorized into four groups: a) Optimizers – certain in their response and finding the task difficult, b) Satisficers – certain in their response and finding the task easy, c) Cognitively Overloaded – uncertain in their response and finding the task difficult, and d) Disengaged – uncertain in their response and finding the task easy.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the means of total sailing trip expenditure between the segments. The data on total expenditure was skewed and log-transformed prior to analysis. The values were transformed back to the original scale for reporting and thus reported as geometric means. Chi square test wes used to identify the determinants of segment membership.

In each group we tested convergent validity by calculating the partial correlation coefficient between the total expenditure and participant's household income (adjusted for vessel ownership, trip length and number of persons). A positive relationship between income and expenditure has been well established in tourism literature (Almeida & Garrod, 2021; Brida & Scuderi, 2013.

**RESULTS AND CONCLUSION**

The geometric mean of total sailing trip expenditure (adjusted for vessel ownership, trip length and number of persons) was 4,426 Euros for Optimizers (n=1,576), 3,922 Euros for Satisficers (n=553), 3,872 Euros for


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Cognitively Overloaded (n=254), and 2,514 Euros for Disengaged (n=27) (Table 1). The group membership was statistically significantly associated with participants' education level (chi-square test; $p < 0.001$), country of residence (chi-square test; $p < 0.001$), travel party (chi-square test; $p < 0.001$) and income (Kruskal-Wallis test; $p < 0.001$). A significantly higher prevalence of those with university degree was observed for Optimizers (50%) and Satisficers (47%) in comparison to Cognitively Overloaded (35%) and Disengaged (33%). The average number of expenditure item non-responses was the lowest for Optimizers (2.4), followed by Satisficers (2.7), Cognitively Overloaded (3.2), and Disengaged (3.6). The convergent validity, measured as the correlation coefficient between the total expenditure and participant's household income, was low for Cognitively Overloaded (0.25) and Disengaged (0.24), and moderate and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) for Optimizers (0.42) and Satisficers (0.48).

Table 1. Comparison of mean total sailing trip expenditure among segments

| Segment | Segment size | | Mean expenditure estimate | 95% confidence interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | | Lower | Upper |
| Cognitively Overloaded | 254 | 10.5 | 3871.7 | 3620.1 | 4140.8 |
| **Optimizers** | **1576** | **65.4** | **4425.7** | **4306.0** | **4548.7** |
| Disengaged | 27 | 1.1 | 2513.6 | 2047.3 | 3086.3 |
| Satisficiers | 553 | 22.9 | 3922.3 | 3748.4 | 4104.3 |

*$R^2 = 0.444$*
*Log-transformed expenditure estimates were transformed back to the original scale for reporting.*
*Vessel ownership, trip length and number of persons were used as control variables.*

A limited number of tourism studies addressed the measurement error in the estimation of visitor expenditure. This is surprising considering the importance of this metric for estimating the economic benefits generated by tourism. Fundamental issue related to economic impact assessment – the quality of the data on visitor expenditure – has often been overlooked in the literature (Raybould & Fredline, 2012). The well-known principle of „garbage in, garbage out" refers to the idea that the quality of output is determined by the quality of the input, so minimizing measurement error as well as other survey errors is an important consideration in economic impact assessment. Moreover, overestimating or underestimating direct expenditures related to an event can impact future investments in the event (Raybould & Fredline, 2012).
In this paper we investigated the utility of specific follow-up questions on response certainty and task difficulty, which are commonly used in the choice modelling studies, to assess the validity of and mitigate measurement error in visitor expenditures related to recall bias and response heuristics or satisficing. The findings suggest there is a high risk that the average survey estimate of total tourist expenditure may underestimate true expenditures. The proposed framework offers researchers and practitioners a tool for assessing and mitigating biases in estimating survey-based visitor expenditure, thus improving the quality of data critical for tourism planning and policy. Previous studies suggested that visitor expenditure is influenced by a wide range of socio- economic, psychological and trip-related variables, such as education level, country of origin, frequency of visitation, age and travel purpose (Almeida & Garrod, 2021; Brida & Scuderi, 2013). Our findings raise concerns that some of the determinants of expenditure may be more related to reponse error than the magnitude of true expenditure, thus confounding the magnitude of visitor expenditure with response error. Separating these two sources of response variability could lead to more meaningful and accurate market segmentation analysis and more effective policy planning.

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# CO-CREATION IN CULTURAL HERITAGE PLATFORMS: INSIGHTS FROM CONTENT CREATORS IN THE CULTURATI PROJECT

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores co-creation in digital cultural heritage through insights from content creators involved in the CULTURATI Horizon Europe RIA project. Drawing on qualitative interviews with the content creators involved in the project including museum professionals, heritage site managers, and local artisans in Türkiye, the research highlights motivations, challenges, and collaborative dynamics. Findings show that co-creation enhances authenticity, fosters creative expression, and uncovers hidden cultural narratives. However, technological and resource-related challenges remain. The study contributes to cultural heritage innovation by offering practical strategies to support participatory approaches.

**Key words:** co-creation, cultural heritage, digital platforms, content creators, visitor engagement, Horizon Europe

## INTRODUCTION

The CULTURATI Horizon Europe project, funded by the European Union, seeks to foster innovation in cultural heritage through the development of a collaborative and inclusive digital platform aimed at enhancing visitor engagement. This study examines the dynamics of co-creation within the CULTURATI platform, focusing on the active involvement of content creators and their significant role in shaping the platform's development and functionality.

## DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH


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This research adopts a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with content creators actively contributing to the CULTURATI platform. Participants include museum professionals, heritage site managers, and local artisans from two pilot sites. The interviews explore their motivations, challenges, and experiences in co-creating content. Data analysis, conducted with NVivo software, identifies recurring themes and provides insights into the co-creation process. The theoretical framework is based on co-creation literature (Kasnakoglu, 2016; Mohammadi et al., 2021; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004 a,b), emphasizing collaborative value generation in cultural heritage.

## FINDINGS

Preliminary analysis of interviews with over 20 content creators reveals key themes. Collaboration was identified as vital for integrating local knowledge and professional expertise, enhancing the platform's authenticity and relevance. The platform's flexibility in accommodating diverse content types fosters creative contributions, allowing creators to share unique narratives. The co-creation process also led to uncovering hidden cultural treasures, enriching visitor experiences and the narratives of the pilot sites. Despite these benefits, challenges such as technological constraints and resource limitations highlight the need for targeted support and training.

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

This study is limited to two pilot sites in Türkiye within the CULTURATI project, which may affect the generalizability of findings. However, the research provides valuable insights into co-creation dynamics, offering practical recommendations for enhancing participatory approaches in digital cultural heritage platforms. Future studies could expand the scope to additional sites and explore longitudinal impacts of co-creation on visitor engagement.

## ORIGINALITY/VALUE

This study contributes to the understanding of co-creation in digital cultural heritage by providing empirical evidence of its benefits and challenges. It underscores the transformative potential of participatory approaches in enriching cultural experiences and fostering inclusivity. The findings offer actionable strategies for practitioners in the cultural and creative industries, advancing theoretical discussions and showcasing the CULTURATI project as a model for innovation in cultural heritage management.

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# CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS OF DELIVERING QUALITY HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE IN PROTECTED AREAS

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## ABSTRACT

The impact of climate change on protected areas are described in this scientific literature. Studies conducted in the past have shown both direct and indirect impacts of climate change on protected areas and their biodiversity. This study examines climate change's impacts on delivering extraordinary experiences in protected areas. Articles that Scopus have indexed are examined in the study and 20 articles were selected after a meticulous screening process. The thematic findings indicate that climate change impacts biodiversity severely in protected areas which in turn affect the delivery of extraordinary hospitality experience in protected areas. This leads to protected areas losing their appeal, which affects the tourists' experience.

**Key Words:** Climate change, Protected area, Biodiversity, Greenhouse gasses, Wildlife, Weather patterns

## INTRODUCTION

Protected areas (PAs) represent unique and highly commemorated tourists' attraction (Jacovic, Bakan & Tubic, 2020; Abbass, Qasim, Song, Murshed, Mahmood & Younis, 2022). These areas seek to increase the interest and experience of tourists through their natural fauna and flora (Jacovic et al., 2020), however, climate change poses a huge threat to them. Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns (United Nations, 2022). These shifts can be natural due to changes in the sun's activity (United Nations, 2022), however, since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, mainly due to burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas (United Nations, 2022). These activities have adverse effects on protected areas.

PAs have been the cornerstone of conservation practice for over a century (Xin, Yang, Du, Cui, Xi & Liu, 2023). Optimising where PAs are placed to conserve species and habitats most efficiently has been a significant research theme in conservation science for decades (Xin et al., 2023). However, until recently, robust attempts to evaluate the performance of protected areas have been lacking (Xin et al., 2023). Numerous studies have shown that protected areas slow habitat and wildlife loss (Namkhan, Sukumal & Savini, 2022). It is these natural environments that entice tourists to PAs (Radjanovic, Veselinovic, Vujovic, Krstic & Zivkovic, 2022). Unless a drastic move is taken to mitigate these impacts, we cannot sustain and preserve our biodiversity. Consequently, crucial that an assessment of the effects of climate change on PAs be conducted to enhance tourists' experience in protected areas.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Nafrees and Shibly (2021), it is imperative that any scientific research study must be conducted upon an established or credible theories. In this study, the analysis has been conducted using grounded theory methods, and the study scope has been determined by conducting a systematic literature review. Systematic literature reviews aim to incorporate all published literature on the subject and evaluate the quality of that evidence in order to synthesize scientific information in a transparent and repeatable manner to address a specific research problem (Lame, 2019). On the other hand, Nunn and Chang (2020) define systematic reviews as the type of review where secondary data is gathered and analysed using standardised analytical research methods. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the effects of climate change on delivering extraordinary hospitality experiences in the South African PAs.


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Table 1: A Systematic Review - Grounded theory method in five steps

| Grounded Theory Steps | Grounded Theory Process |
|---|---|
| Define | Establishing the field of study, the inclusion/exclusion criteria, the paper's source, and the search of key terms |
| Search | Searched publications were published after 2020, although the methodology section also included previously published papers. |
| Select | The critical appraisal skills program (CASP) was utilized to select the papers. |
| Analyse | Qualitative analysis performed |
| Present | Most suitable climate change articles found |

Qualitative research approach was employed to analyze data collected through the grounded theory method in systemic literature review. A qualitative method in a secondary study involves analysing and interpreting existing non-numerical data to understand patterns, themes, and meanings within a specific context (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). Grounded theory was employed for the content analysis in a systematic review, and a five-step procedure was presented in Table I (Wolfswinkel, Furtmueller, and Wilderom, 2013). A five-step process was established in Table 1 to do a systematic review that used grounded theory for the content analysis.

The study primarily focused on research papers published between the 2020 and 2025 with an aim of guaranteeing the relevant knowledge that is up to date, valid and applicable. After reviewing 50 primary studies at the end of this step, only 20 were used for the data extraction stage. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for manuscripts in this systematic literature review on climate change impacts in protected areas will be covered in this section. The researchers wanted to make sure that the most rigorous and pertinent studies were selected for the review and that no studies that did not fit the criteria were included. The publication in which the paper appears, the nature of the issues addressed, the scientific rigor, the creativity, and the relevance of the subject were among the criteria used to exclude manuscripts, combining effects of climate change on delivering extraordinary hospitality experiences in the South African protected areas (Xiao and Watson, 2019). The table 2 below summarizes a number of criteria that were followed to choose the journals mentioned below:

Table 2: Systematic Literature Review selection criteria

| **Inclusion** | **Exclusion** |
|---|---|
| Published in the last 5 years (2020-2025) | Published before 2020 |
| Accessible in full text | Not accessible in full text |
| The international journals | Not national journals |
| According to the theme of the study | Not in line with the research field |

Academic Articles that were Scopus indexed were the sources of the imported data set used in this investigation. The sources are well recognized for possessing the most extensive collection of peer-reviewed literature documents, conference papers, books, articles, and review papers. Numerous scholars have utilized them for conducting systematic analyses as part of their research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### An overview of Climate change

Climate change refers to a long-term variation in environmental variables such as temperature, precipitation, snowfall, and wind patterns (Kakar, Qurat-ul-ain & Hassan, 2024). This variation can cause significant impacts to the environmental conditions for ecological diversity through both natural and human-caused mechanisms (Ranius, Widenfalk, Seedre, Lindman, Felton, Hamalainen, Filyushkina & Ckinger, 2022).The most common phenomena include thunderstorms, dry conditions, rising sea levels, melting ice, salinization, wildfires, lower yields from agriculture, shortages of water, and health issues caused by extreme temperatures that impact species (Kakar et al., 2024). Extreme temperatures and increasing frequency such as severity of rainfall and drought have been shown to alter the movement of species and ecosystem processes, with indirect effects on the food supplies available to organisms (Namkhan, 2022).


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Global warming is another aspect of climate change which is primarily caused by the release of greenhouse gases, which produce heating to be absorbed by the earth's atmosphere (Fawzy, Osman, Doran &Rooney, 2020). These emissions primarily come from human activities and natural processes (Fawzy et al., 2020). Human activities have been the main driver of climate change, mainly due to burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas and cutting down forests also put high pressure on native species and ecosystems (Stralberg, Carroll & Nielsen, 2020. These activities have a substantial impact on 75% of terrestrial ecosystems (Rahimi, Dong, Ahmadzadeh & Jung, 2024). These modifications, known as human footsteps, operate as indications of human activity in the natural environment (Rahimi et al., 2024). While natural processes include Forest fires, earthquakes, seas, permafrost, wetlands, mud volcanoes, and volcanoes (Fawzy et al., 2020).

According to United States Protection Agency (2024) water vapor seems to generate the most significant positive impact. Whenever the earth warms up, the rate of absorption and the level of water vapor in the atmosphere both rise (EPA, 2024). Since water vapor is a greenhouse gas, it contributes to increased warmth. Another benefit is that warmer temperatures and increased precipitation in tropical places may benefit the environment, even if certain organisms perish resulting from climate change (Kakar et al., 2024). This phenomenon may also alter the geographic location of species, as well as the ensuing community structure and ecological function (Xin, Yang, Du, Cui, Xi & Liu, 2023). Climate crisis has also jeopardized the sustainability and continued existence of numerous organisms due to fluctuations in ideal temperature ranges, hastening extinction by gradually altering ecosystem architecture (Abbass et al., 2022).

It also serves as a worldwide hazard that has caused stress in a variety of sectors. (Abbass et al., 2022) In particular, the agricultural sector's fragility is a worldwide severe issue, since adequate production and food supply are challenged by persistent weather variations (Abbass et al., 2022) Climate warming, in addition, has a major effect on the expansion and efficiency of international forests by altering patterns of rainfall and temperature (Rahimi et al., 2024).This phenomenon causes particular shifts in the typical framework and operations of ecosystems, as well as affects the condition of forests, and has a number of devastating effects, including forest fires, droughts, pest outbreaks, and, last but not least, the livelihoods of communities that rely on forests (Kakar et al., 2024).

**Quality experience of tourist in protected areas**

The term tourists' experiences are referred to as psychological occurrences in a visitor's mind, with response to the tourism-related service or product supplied by tourism providers (Obradovic, Stajonovic, Tesin, Secerov, Pantelic & Dolinaj, 2023). Tourists' experience are transformational attitude and behaviours that occur during the tourism journey both actively and unconsciously (Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2022). The consumption of a tourism product or service is an essential component that allows tourists to gain experience and meet their intrinsic needs (Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2022).

People travel for various distinct reasons which include the need to escape from one's everyday life, and personal problems, seek unique experience and satisfactory that serve as psychological and compensation thereby providing quality of life (Duran-Roman, Cardenas-Garcia & Pulido-Fernandez, 2021). Protected areas are tourism attractions that compete amongst each other as travel destinations to provide quality experience for tourists, hence researchers strive to investigate tourists' experiences and their rating of those experiences (Chi, Lee, Ahn & Kiatkawsin, 2020).

Tourists experience is a perceived quality seen as an essential requirement that leads to tourist loyalty (Chi et al., 2020). Factors such as the natural scenic beauty, availability of information, wildlife, recreational activities, and infrastructure have a greater influence on tourists' experience and satisfaction in protected areas. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has acknowledged that recreation and tourism is one of the most vulnerable sectors to climate change (Phuyal, Bhuju, Devkota, Acharya, Bishwokarma & Devkota, 2020). Climate variability and change pose significant threats to the biophysical environment, this in turn threatens and compromise the ecological integrity and capacity to ensure sustainable tourism and the provision of quality experience for tourists.

The effects of climate change in PAs landscapes influence tourist behaviour which include spending their vacations at higher elevations and latitude in search of the natural resources that include rich biodiversity, ample bird, and wild animal populations (Phuyal et al., 2020). A study by Mcneely (2020) states that tourists experience protected areas


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to enhance their sense of well-being because they perceive being in the forests to be therapeutic (it lowers blood pressure, reduces production of stress hormones, and improves the functioning of the human immune system). Qiu, Sha, and Scott (2021) further state that apart from physical and psychological restoration, tourists travel to protected areas to enhance one's travel experience, acquire new knowledge about nature, experience the beauty of nature, create awareness for others, and intensify social relationships.

**Overview of protected areas**

The International Union for Conservation of Nature defines protected areas as geographical spaces that are recognised, dedicated, and managed through legal or other effective means to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values (Mcneely, 2020). From their establishment, protected areas were anticipated to conserve iconic landscapes and wildlife, however, they have gone through a pronounced expansion geographically and conceptually in the past few decades (Stone, Stone, Mokgomotsi & Mokgomotsi, 2022). PAs are accepted as a tool to preserve, reinstate, and strengthen critical natural resources (Bhammar, Li, Molina, Hickey, Pendry & Narain, 2021; Stone et al., 2022; Muinera-Roldan, Collof, Kerkhoff &Andrade, 2023; Cannizzo, Belle, Smith & Mommsen, 2024).

These areas also serve as a tool for climate change adaptation and mitigation through its preservation and conservation of carbon sinks and reservoirs, natural infrastructure that protects human communities, species threatened by climate change, and the ecological processes and services that humans depend on in a progressively variable world (Anand & Kim, 2021; Namkhan et al., 2022; Cannizzo et al., 2024). The global agenda for biodiversity conservation has set ambitious goals to strengthen the protection of protected areas for its exceptional importance towards biodiversity conservation and its contribution to humanity (Nguyen & Jones, 2022; Muinera-Roldan et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the areas also represent a unique biogeographic region that is highly ranked as a tourism attraction; however, it is evident from studies conducted by (Nwe, Zomer & Corlett, 2020; Jacovic, Bakan & Tubic, 2020) that climate change poses a threat on its effectiveness by reducing its size, scenic beauty, wildlife encounters and recreational activities. Climate change builds on a profound aspect to the question of how much protected area is needed to ensure conservation of wildlife, biodiversity stability and tourism satisfaction (Robert et al., 2020; Filho, 2021; Carroll & Ray, 2021). Altered species distribution, extreme temperatures, increased frequency of extreme events, intensity of precipitation, rising sea levels are direct effects of climate change (Namkahn et al., 2022; Ranius et al., 2022).

Although PAs were implemented with the dual acceptance of landscape and species protection and public use, in the mid-twentieth century tourism started accelerating within these areas (Stone et al., 2022). The combination of protected areas and the economic development model (tourism) has been implemented in various places at a different and varying scale with the main purpose of promoting biodiversity conservation (Birendra, 2021). According to Anand and Kim (2021) biodiversity in protected areas is of immerse importance in the tourism sector as it attracts tourists for mostly its scenic beauty, wildlife encounters and recreational activities. Protected areas offer a unique tourist experience, including nature-based activities, wildlife viewing and adventure activities (Nguyen & Jones, 2022).

**Climate change and its effects on protected areas**

Studies show that the global biodiversity is rapidly disappearing because of rising human global changes like climate change (Xin et al., 2023). PAs are regarded as the foundation of local, national, and global biodiversity preservation efforts (Xin et al., 2023). Climate change, for example, may have an impact on the efficiency of PAs for species protection by lowering habitat suitability and causing species range shifts (Xin et al., 2023). PAs are regarded as refuges for species and can help to mitigate the effects of climate change on them (Liu, Tian, Lu, Zhu, Peng, Li, An, Li, Xu & Wang, 2023). However, recent research suggests that present PAs are likely to be threatened by projected climate change and may fail to offer adequate habitat for species. (Liu Et al., 2023). As a result, managers must make accurate predictions about future species distribution to establish policies that will limit the adverse effects of future climate change on biodiversity (Liu et al., 2023).


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PAs are affected by subsequent effects, such as a spike in wildfires, extreme temperatures, precipitation, the process of deforestation, and biodiversity loss (Folharini, Vieira, Bento-Gonçalves, Silva, Marques & Novais, 2023). Biodiversity is threatened by mountaintop extinctions, loss of climate specialists, woody encroachment into grasslands, open forests due to climate change, and increased carbon dioxide (Nwe et al., 2020). According to Mirea, Miu, Popescu, Brodie, Chiriac and Rozylowicz (2024) Climate change poses a hazard to species and ecosystems around the world, particularly forest ecosystems that support diverse invertebrate populations. This phenomenon can affect vegetation features, resulting in increased height and productivity or a loss of natural canopy cover (Ranius et al., 2022). Human adaptations to climate change, especially in land management, include increasing forestry and agriculture, changes in crop and tree composition, and changes to management systems (Ranius et al., 2022).

Considering climate change PAs will not be useful because many species are projected to relocate away from defined regions in response to both temperature and hydrological change (Gillingham et al., 2024). A study conducted by Duncanson, Liang, Leitold, Armston, Moorthy, Dubayah, Costedoat, Enquist, Fatoyinbo, Goetz, Gonzalez-Roglich, Merow, Roehrdanz, Tabor and Zvoleff (2023) Protected areas (PAs) are an important tool for forest conservation, but they are rarely established with the primary goal of preventing climate change. On the other hand, Climate change is posing new challenges to protected area conservation measures (Ranius et al., 2022). Nonetheless, a complete assessment of the vulnerability of PAs to various global change processes, such as climate change, is still lacking which is critical for future systematic conservation planning of PAs in the context of rapid global change (Xin et al., 2023).

## DISCUSSION

From literature, it is evident that Climate change puts the integrity and survival of many species at stake due to shifts in optimum temperature ranges. The thematic findings indicate that climate change affects wildlife which in turn affects the experience of visitors. The most significant effects of climate change on wildlife include metabolic and behavioural changes brought on by heat stress in wildlife, impairment of animal function. Increase in temperature impacts two aspects of growth and development in plants and animal. Plant and animal species have adapted to their native habitat and as the temperature gets warmer in their native habitat, species tend to move to higher altitudes and towards the poles in search of suitable temperature and other environmental conditions.

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# ECHOES OF TOMORROW: ANTICIPATORY NOSTALGIA, EMOTIONS, REVISIT INTENTIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN[1]

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## ABSTRACT

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine the relationships between anticipatory nostalgia, emotions, and revisit intentions. The qualitative phase used scenario and image-based stimuli to investigate anticipatory nostalgia and its associated emotions. Findings from this phase informed the quantitative model. They reveal that anticipatory nostalgia triggers negative emotions and positively influences tourists' revisit intentions. Emotions also positively predict revisit intentions. Furthermore, environmental concern moderates the relationship between anticipatory nostalgia and emotions, with individuals high in environmental concern experiencing more intense emotional responses. This study reframes nostalgia-based approaches by extending them beyond past memories to explore how anticipatory nostalgia shapes tourist behavior. It offers theoretical and practical insights for sustainable destination marketing, in environmentally vulnerable settings.

**Keywords:** Anticipatory nostalgia, emotions, revisit intentions, environmental concern.

## INTRODUCTION

Nostalgia is a multi-layered emotional experience that spans the past, present, and future. In tourism research, nostalgia has primarily been examined in its personal and past-oriented form, with considerable attention given to individuals' memory-based longing and its effects on travel decisions, tourist attitudes and behaviors, well-being, and revisit intentions (Karagöz & Ramkissoon, 2024; Cho, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021; Jian et al., 2021). In contrast, anticipatory nostalgia, a future-oriented type of nostalgia, has received limited scholarly attention and remains underexplored (Batcho & Shikh, 2016; Bergs et al., 2020). This form of nostalgia emerges from the perception that an ongoing experience may be missed in the future and is characterized by mentally experiencing the loss of something not yet gone. Anticipatory nostalgia can evoke both positive and negative affect simultaneously. However, how it shapes individuals' present experiences and its consequences for tourists' attitudes, decision-making processes, and tourism-related outcomes remain unclear. A systematic investigation of this concept would not only deepen our theoretical understanding of nostalgia but also contribute to a better grasp of affect-based behavioral mechanisms in tourism.

Nostalgia, which involves cognitive processes such as thinking, remembering, and imagining, is experienced through a combination of positive emotions such as happiness and gratitude and negative emotions such as longing and sorrow (Stern, 1992; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016). Thus, nostalgia often reflects an ambivalent emotional structure (Batcho, 2007; Sedikides et al., 2015). Prior research has shown that personal nostalgia is positively associated with emotional outcomes such as hope, optimism, happiness, social connectedness, and life meaning (Karagöz & Ramkissoon, 2024; Akgün et al., 2020; Cheung et al., 2013). Yet due to the scarcity of research, the emotional nature of anticipatory nostalgia remains a subject of debate. Bergs et al. (2011) suggest that tourists may form mental representations of moments they believe will end in the future, triggering complex emotions during travel. While anticipatory nostalgia may initially be characterized by joy, it can gradually turn into sadness.

Research has argued that anticipatory nostalgia is particularly associated with negative emotions such as sadness and anxiety. Batcho & Shikh (2016) and Batcho (2020) note that this type of nostalgia reflects a general reluctance to let go of the present. Anticipatory nostalgia is neither dissatisfaction with the current moment nor a pessimistic view of the future; rather, it is an emotional state shaped by the imagined loss of the present and varies by context.


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Imagining the end of experiences or situations may reduce the enjoyment of ongoing experiences and increase the tendency to feel sad (Batcho & Shikh, 2016; Zhou et al., 2020). Indeed, Zhou and colleagues (2020) found that anticipatory nostalgia reduces pleasant affect and positive emotional responses. However, whether this nostalgia has a predominantly positive or negative influence on individuals' emotional states, and under which conditions these effects arise, remains unclear. Thus, the first aim of this study is to identify the emotional responses triggered by anticipatory nostalgia.

Nostalgia is not only a past-oriented emotional experience but also a guiding force that shapes individuals' future behaviors. Nostalgia enable people to derive meaning from significant past memories and approach the future with a greater sense of purpose (Stephan et al., 2014). Previous research has shown that positive nostalgic emotions can transform travel destinations into extraordinary places and increase revisit intentions through positive affect (Karagöz & Ramkissoon, 2023; Chi & Chi, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Similarly, anticipatory nostalgia, which is based on the thought that an ongoing experience will be missed in the future, may enhance the perceived value of the present moment and foster a desire to relive that experience (Kurtz, 2008). Therefore, anticipatory nostalgia can be viewed as a key emotional driver of tourists' revisit intentions. Nevertheless, the relationship between anticipatory nostalgia and revisit intentions has not yet been empirically tested. On the other hand, it is unclear whether the negative emotions associated with anticipatory nostalgia, such as sadness, anxiety, and a sense of loss, serve to encourage or discourage revisit intentions. By addressing this ambiguity, the current study aims to offer an in-depth understanding of how anticipatory nostalgia and its emotional outcomes relate to behavioral intentions.

In addition to shaping personal awareness of a potentially vanishing experience, anticipatory nostalgia may also highlight the fragility of that experience in a broader environmental or cultural context. Particularly in destinations with natural or cultural heritage significance, such awareness may lead individuals to evaluate their experiences beyond the personal level. Environmental concern, defined as individuals' awareness of environmental threats, their beliefs about the necessity of conservation, and their sense of responsibility (Pham & Khanh, 2020), emerges as a critical individual difference factor. Individuals with high environmental concern may respond more intensely to imagined future loss, thus experiencing stronger emotional reactions to anticipatory nostalgia. Environmental concern may therefore influence the intensity and direction of these emotions and play a determining role in whether they translate into behavioral outcomes.

This study argues that anticipatory nostalgia is not merely a future-oriented longing in the present moment but a dynamic experience that triggers specific emotional and cognitive responses. However, its emotional structure, behavioral implications, and contextual moderators remain insufficiently understood in current literature. The first aim of this study is to systematically examine the emotional responses triggered by anticipatory nostalgia. Second, it investigates how anticipatory nostalgia and the emotions it elicits influence tourists' revisit intentions. Third, it explores whether environmental concern moderates these relationships.

Thus, this study repositions nostalgia-based approaches beyond their conventional focus on the past by offering a forward-looking emotion-cognition perspective. Additionally, within the context of sustainable destination management, it provides a novel lens to understand how anticipatory nostalgia interacts with emotions, behaviors, and environmental concern.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach structured within a concurrent design to examine the relationships between anticipatory nostalgia, emotions, and revisit intentions (Creswell, 2014).

*Qualitative study*

In the first phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights into anticipatory nostalgia and the emotional responses it evokes. The interviews, carried out in April 2024, involved 17 participants: some had previously visited Venice, while others had not. This sampling strategy allowed for a comparative exploration of how individuals with direct experience and those familiar with Venice through indirect representations respond to anticipatory nostalgia. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. Their ages ranged from 24 to 57, with a balanced gender distribution. Interviews were concluded when data saturation was reached.


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To guide participants' perceptions of anticipatory nostalgia, scenario and visual materials were developed using Generative AI tools. Venice was selected as the focal destination due to its symbolic cultural significance and vulnerability to climate change. The generated content was continuously reviewed by the researchers throughout the development process. During the interviews, participants were shown a scenario and an image related to Venice and were asked how these materials triggered feelings of longing and concern about the future. The data were analyzed using content analysis.

*Quantitative study*

All main constructs in this study were measured using multi-item scales adapted from prior research. Anticipatory nostalgia was assessed with four items from Zhou et al. (2020). Anxiety was measured using four items from Zuckerman (1960) and Russell & Mehrabian (1974), whereas sadness and guilt were evaluated using 13 items adapted from Zhang et al. (2021). Revisit intentions were assessed using three items from Zhang et al. (2018), and environmental concern was measured with three items from Miller et al. (2015). All items were rated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The data collection process was conducted through the Prolific platform, targeting participants aged 18 to 69 with an approval rate of 95% or above. A total of 260 responses were obtained, exceeding the minimum required sample size determined by G*Power analysis. After excluding 12 responses due to incorrect answers to control questions, 248 valid responses were retained for analysis. Among the participants, 53.8% identified as female; 57.1% held a bachelor's degree, and 26.9% had completed postgraduate education.

*Data analysis*

The data were analyzed using PLS-SEM, and both direct and moderating effects within the structural model were tested. To control for common method bias, a two-step approach was employed. The results of Harman's single-factor test indicated that the first factor accounted for 47.4% of the total variance, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of 50%. Additionally, all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below the recommended cut-off, indicating no issues with multicollinearity. These results suggest that common method bias did not pose a threat to the validity of the findings.

## FINDINGS

*Qualitative findings*

All participants immediately recognized the destination as Venice, primarily due to the gondolas and canals depicted in the images, and consistently associated the visual cues with the effects of climate crisis. The images frequently elicited terms such as "natural disaster," "sudden climatic change," "drought," and "climate crisis." Words most commonly reported as first impressions included "destruction," "gloom," "anxiety," "worry," "disaster," "imprudence," "crisis," "irresponsibility," and "reality." The visual stimuli triggered thoughts about the potential future loss of Venice, which in turn evoked a range of emotions including sadness, longing, anxiety, fear, helplessness, worry, and hopelessness. These emotions highlight the emotional intensity associated with anticipatory nostalgia and appeared in different forms: memory-based longing among those who had previously visited Venice, and imagination-based longing among those who had not. For instance, one participant described their emotional reaction as follows: "Maybe we will never come here again, or even if we do, it will not be the same Venice. We might never see all that magnificent beauty again. I felt a sense of longing even as I looked from that bridge." (A8, male). Another participant similarly stated: "Venice no longer feels beautiful. Even before it is truly lost, the thought of losing it already creates a sense of grief." (A10, male). Figure 1 conceptually illustrates the primary emotions associated with anticipatory nostalgia as identified through participants' narratives.


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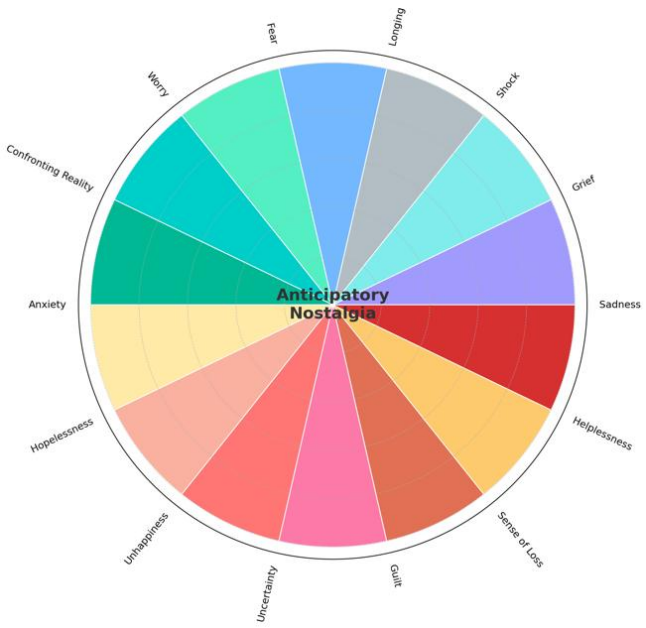


Figure 1. Emotional Responses Associated with Anticipatory Nostalgia

*Measurement model*

The reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed through item loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability (CR). As presented in Table 1, all item loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, and the AVE values for each construct were above 0.50, supporting convergent validity. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha and CR values were above 0.70 for all constructs, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019).

**Table 1**. Measurement model

| **Constructs/Items** | **Loadings** | **Cronbach alpha** | **CR** | **AVE** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Anticipatory nostalgia** | | **.837** | **.891** | **.672** |
| AN1 | .813 | | | |
| AN2 | .849 | | | |
| AN3 | .769 | | | |
| AN4 | .845 | | | |
| **Anxiety** | | .896 | .928 | .763 |
| A1 | .899 | | | |
| A2 | .887 | | | |
| A3 | .854 | | | |
| A4 | .852 | | | |
| **Sadness** | | .910 | .930 | .690 |
| A5 | .860 | | | |
| A6 | .831 | | | |
| A7 | .843 | | | |
| A8 | .775 | | | |
| A9 | .831 | | | |
| A10 | .842 | | | |
| **Guilt** | | .918 | .948 | .859 |
| A11 | .931 | | | |
| A12 | .921 | | | |
| A13 | .928 | | | |
| **Revisit intentions** | | .871 | .921 | .796 |
| RI1 | .924 | | | |
| RI2 | .894 | | | |



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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| RI3 | .856 | | | |
| **Environmental concern** | | .875 | .923 | .800 |
| CE1 | .887 | | | |
| CE2 | .899 | | | |
| CE3 | .897 | | | |

HTMT results were examined to assess discriminant validity among the constructs. As shown in Table 2, all HTMT values ranged between 0.294 and 0.805, remaining below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). These results indicate that each construct is empirically distinct, confirming discriminant validity.

**Table 2**. HTMT ratio

| | Anticipatory Nostalgia | Anxiety | Environmental concern | Guilt | Revisit intentions | Sadness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anticipatory Nostalgia | | | | | | |
| Anxiety | 0.657 | | | | | |
| Environmental concern | 0.517 | 0.576 | | | | |
| Guilt | 0.447 | 0.715 | 0.294 | | | |
| Revisit intentions | 0.724 | 0.543 | 0.450 | 0.456 | | |
| Sadness | 0.657 | 0.735 | 0.576 | 0.805 | 0.538 | |

Negative emotions were modeled as a second-order construct to capture the multidimensional nature of tourists' emotional responses, which include distinct yet conceptually related dimensions such as sadness, anxiety, and guilt. Table 3 presents the weights of the first-order constructs on the second-order construct, Negative Emotions. All three first-order constructs were found to load significantly on the higher-order construct. Among them, Sadness exhibited the highest positive weight (0.917), indicating its dominant contribution to the second-order factor. To assess potential multicollinearity among the dimensions of negative emotions, variance inflation factors (VIF) were examined. The results revealed very low VIF values, ranging from 1.000 to 1.020, which are well below the recommended threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2006). These findings confirm that the first-order constructs were distinct and did not exhibit problematic multicollinearity, supporting the validity of the second-order measurement model.

**Table 3**. Assessment of Negative Emotions as a Second-Order Construct

| Second-order construct | First-order construct | Weights | t-value | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Anxiety | .906 | 59.083 | 1.000 |
| | Sadness | .917 | 185.947 | 1.000 |
| | Guilt | .856 | 46.661 | 1.000 |

*Structural model*

The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, t-values, effect sizes ($f^2$), and significance levels. As shown in Table X, anticipatory nostalgia had a significant and strong positive effect on revisit intentions (β = .501, t-value = 8.561, $f^2$ = .287), supporting H1. Anticipatory nostalgia also significantly predicted emotions (β = .473, t-value = 8.882, $f^2$ = .307), supporting H2. The effect of emotions on revisit intentions was also significant (β = .211, t-value = 3.849, $f^2$ = .051), providing support for H3. Furthermore, the interaction effect between anticipatory nostalgia and environmental concern on emotions was statistically significant (β = .120, t-value = 3.625, $f^2$ = .039), supporting H4. This indicates that environmental concern strengthens the relationship between anticipatory nostalgia and emotional responses. The model explained 42% of the variance in revisit intentions ($R^2$ = .420) and 41% of the variance in emotions ($R^2$ = .407), indicating substantial explanatory power.

**Table 4**. Structural model

| **Relationships** | ***β*** | **t-value** | ***f*²** | **Decision** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anticipatory nostalgia à revisit intentions | .501 | 8.561 | .287 | Supported |
| Anticipatory nostalgia à Emotions | .473 | 8.882 | .307 | Supported |


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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotions à Revisit intentions | .211 | 3.849 | .051 | Supported |
| Environmental concern*anticipatory nostalgia àEmotions | .120 | 3.625 | .039 | Supported |

Figure 2 illustrates the moderating effect of environmental concern on the relationship between anticipatory nostalgia and emotions. The simple slope analysis indicates that the positive relationship between anticipatory nostalgia and emotions is stronger for individuals with high environmental concern (β = 0.613) compared to low levels (β = 0.313). This finding suggests that individuals with higher levels of environmental concern experience more intense emotional reactions when anticipating the potential loss of environmentally vulnerable destinations.

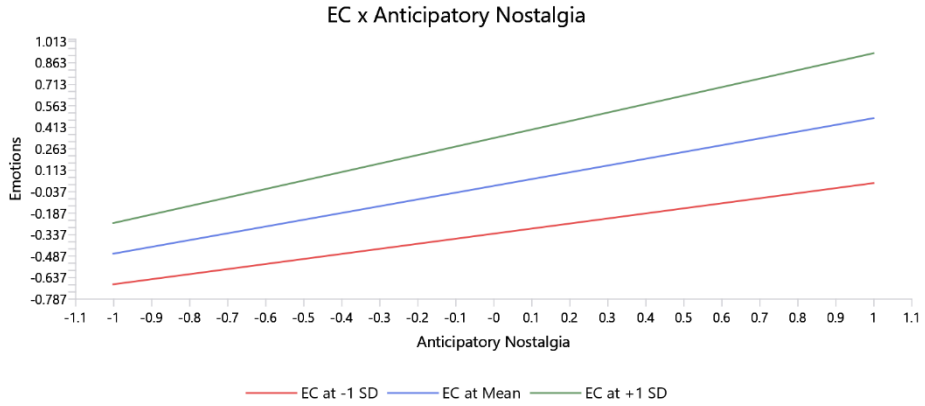


**Figure 2**. Moderating Role of Environmental Concern in the Anticipatory Nostalgia and Emotions

## CONCLUSION

This study focuses on anticipatory nostalgia, conceptualized as a multidimensional construct involving emotional responses to imagined future loss in present moment. It offers a nuanced understanding of how this form of nostalgia influences tourists' affective states and behavioral intentions. Specifically, the research empirically examines the relationships between anticipatory nostalgia, negative emotions (such as anxiety, sadness, and guilt), and revisit intentions, while also considering the moderating role of environmental concern. This research offers a novel contribution to tourism studies by empirically investigating how anticipatory nostalgia shapes emotional reactions and revisit intentions, particularly in environmentally vulnerable contexts. By integrating environmental concern as a moderating variable, the study sheds new light on the psychological mechanisms through which imagined future loss influences tourist behavior.

Theoretically, this study enriched knowledge about anticipatory nostalgia by framing anticipatory nostalgia as a multidimensional experience with both emotional and behavioral consequences. It repositions nostalgia beyond retrospective longing and introduces anticipatory nostalgia as a construct that engages present awareness and imagined future loss.

Empirical findings revealed that anticipatory nostalgia is highly context-sensitive and can elicit different tones of emotional responses depending on how individuals mentally project the fragility of ongoing experiences, thereby supporting the findings of Zhou et al. (2020). In this study, anticipatory nostalgia was triggered through scenarios and visuals depicting a vulnerable destination under the threat of climate crisis. Participants who were exposed to these stimuli reported heightened feelings of anxiety, sadness, and guilt. These findings demonstrate that anticipatory nostalgia is not merely a neutral or reflective sentiment; rather, it is an emotionally charged experience capable of evoking negative emotions, especially when the imagined loss is associated with environmentally or culturally significant contexts.

This study also showed that such negative emotional responses did not inhibit but rather strengthened revisit intentions, suggesting that anticipatory nostalgia may paradoxically foster a stronger desire to reconnect with places perceived as threatened or ephemeral. These results offer new theoretical insight by highlighting the emotionally


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ambivalent and motivationally complex nature of anticipatory nostalgia in tourism settings, particularly when sustainability and loss are perceived as imminent realities.

This study showed that both anticipatory nostalgia and the negative emotions it elicited, such as anxiety, sadness, and guilt, positively influenced revisit intentions. Rather than deterring future travel behavior, these emotionally charged responses directly enhanced tourists' desire to reconnect with destinations perceived as vulnerable or at risk. This paradox underscores the emotionally ambivalent and motivationally complex nature of anticipatory nostalgia, offering new theoretical insights into how affective experiences shaped by perceived loss and environmental fragility can motivate sustainable tourist behavior.

The findings of this study highlight the moderating role of environmental concern in the relationship between anticipatory nostalgia and emotional responses. Individuals with higher levels of environmental concern tended to experience more intense negative emotions, such as anxiety, sadness, and guilt, when anticipatory nostalgia was evoked, suggesting that awareness of environmental vulnerability amplifies emotional sensitivity. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for destination managers and policymakers, particularly in environmentally vulnerable destinations. Communication strategies that carefully evoke anticipatory nostalgia may be effective in promoting both emotional engagement and sustainable revisit behaviors.

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