

Bleisure Travel Reimagined: Implications for Research

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Abstract: Bleisure (or Business Leisure) travel growth in recent times has meant a greater focus must be placed on the needs of the corporate traveller who wants to indulge in some leisure activities during their trip. For this keynote presentation, the presenter explored current studies on bleisure travel and reimagined business travel as a means to achieve an end, where leisure travel may be the end itself, especially among academics. This notwithstanding, future studies on bleisure travel are needed to not only identify the actual needs or motivations of *specific* bleisure traveller *groups*, but also the variables affecting their choices, in a highly dynamic industry. The rise of bleisure travel means travellers who are willing to spend more money and stay longer, which is good news for the travel business.

Keywords: Bleisure Travel, Travel Motivation, Market Segmentation, Business Travel, Leisure Travel

1. Introduction

The growth of bleisure travel in recent times calls for a greater focus to be placed on the needs of the corporate travellers who want to indulge in some leisure activities during their trip. The phrase "bleisure travel" refers to travel that blends aspects of leisure and business. Usually, it happens when business travellers decide to stay longer in their destinations, in order to engage in leisure activities. These activities can include hiking, sightseeing, visiting entertainment venues, or attending events. Travelling for both business and pleasure combined is sometimes referred to as a "bizcation", and it can be advantageous for business travellers, their employers, and the travel industry. The popularity of bleisure travel has grown steadily pre- and post- COVID-19 pandemic.

It has been widely argued that the main benefits for the traveller will probably be an increase in confidence and a decrease in tension. Encouraging leisure travel can benefit a company by boosting the proportion of workers who are prepared to travel for work, which can promote morale and increase productivity. The rise of the bleisure tourism means travellers who are willing to spend more money and stay longer, which is good news for the travel business.

In this paper, the researcher explored current studies on bleisure travel, and reimagined business travel as a means to achieve an end, where leisure travel may be the end itself, especially among academics. This notwithstanding, future studies on bleisure travel are needed to not only identify the actual needs or motivations of *specific* bleisure traveller *groups*, but also the variables affecting their choices, in a highly dynamic industry.

2. Bleisure Travel: Industry Views

It is critical to realize that annual spending on business travel is rising. In reality, from 2015 till 2020, business travel expenditures had increased by six to seven percent annually, according to data released by Statista (2023). Global business tourism spending again increased slightly in 2022 after a significant drop due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, after peaking at approximately 1.4 trillion U.S. dollars in 2019, The travel industry has always prioritized business travellers due to the potential for recurring business.

Furthermore, Expedia Group (2016) reported that 43% of work visits now involve leisure time. These numbers demonstrate the expansion of business travel overall and the growing importance of leisure in contemporary business travel. Understandably, the emergence of bleisure travel has caused individuals in the travel business to focus on the characteristics of the typical bleisure traveller. Hotels, travel agencies, restaurants, and other industry participants can more effectively target bleisure travellers with their offers and promotional content by gaining a better understanding of who engages in this type of travel.

One of the most thorough analyses of the contemporary leisure traveller is provided by a study conducted in collaboration with Expedia Group and Luth Research (Expedia Group, 2018). According to the study, most leisure travellers (70 percent) travel for work at least once every three months. This indicates that business travellers often take regular journeys. According to the same study, business and leisure travellers are employed in a variety of sectors, but the most prevalent ones are technology, healthcare, public administration, and manufacturing.

Meanwhile, 38 percent of all bleisure travellers are Millennials, according to SAP Concur (2018) research, making them the generation most likely to travel for bleisure. However, Baby Boomers and Generation Xers also made up 31% of business travellers, meaning that travel agencies must cater to all these age groups.

A survey conducted by CWT Solutions Group (2017) indicates that overall, women travel for work less frequently than males. However, 20% of business travellers (across all genders) stated they took one or more bleisure trips annually. The study concluded that women have a somewhat greater total bleisure rate than men as a result.

It is also fascinating to observe that a lot of bleisure travellers find it difficult to communicate the fun things they do when on business trips. According to the National Car Rental State of Business Travel (2020) Survey, baby boomers, millennials, and Gen Xers agreed that personal activities should be minimized to a lesser extent. The concept of bleisure travel is very appealing to business travellers for several important reasons. Fundamentally, a lot better work/life balance is produced when work is combined with leisure or personal pursuits. As a result, people typically experience happier, less stressful lives and feel more strongly that business travels are worthwhile. Bleisure travel is frequently a great way to reduce the expense of travelling when taking a vacation overseas. Importantly, this makes it possible for those who might not otherwise be able to take a personal vacation to do so. Because their company will pay for at least some of their travel and lodging expenses, they will also have extra money to spend on leisure activities.

A lot of business travellers visit the same spot again, or at least several times. Considering this, bleisure travel provides a chance for visitors to learn more about the destination and its culture. Consequently, this can enhance the calibre of the job produced and facilitate the development of deeper commercial connections. And lastly, work travel with a friend, partner, or colleague is possible with bleisure travel. This can enhance the enjoyment of the journey overall, reduce feelings of loneliness, and relieve boredom.

3. Bleisure Travellers: What are they Looking for?

The aforementioned study by Luth Research and Expedia Group also offers some fascinating insights into the true desires of leisure travellers and the primary determinants of their choices. For instance, it was discovered that the top three factors influencing a traveller's decision to convert a business trip into a leisure trip are: the person's exciting destination (66%), the additional expenses associated with extending the trip (59%), and the proximity of the trip to the weekend (51%).

A closer look at the data reveals that the weather, dining options, beaches, and tourist spots are some of the local amenities or features that are most likely to tempt business travellers to take a leisure vacation. Large-scale occasions like festivals, concerts, sporting events, and cultural events play a significant role as well.

Moreover, bleisure travellers typically prefer to utilize services that facilitate convenient and adaptable travel. When it comes to lodging, they are probably going to look for hotels and other establishments that provide a mix of 24-hour services, workspaces, and dependable fast internet, along with recreational amenities like restaurants, spas, and swimming pools.

The rise of leisure travellers and the general increase in corporate travel present hotel operators with significant opportunities. After all, business travellers who also have leisure interests tend to extend their stays and may spend more on the hotel's business amenities and other leisure options.

Bleisure is therefore significant to the hotel industry and seven specific suggestions were made to businesses hoping to draw in bleisure travellers (Barten, 2024). These include: 1. *Hotel technology* (travellers prefer brands that use technology to make travel easier), 2. *Fast, reliable Internet in workspaces* (prioritize high-speed Internet and comfortable work areas), 3. *Partner with the right distribution channels* (working with corporate travel agents; consider the global distribution systems you use), 4. *Improved personalisation* (tailoring experiences to individual traveller preferences), 5. *Showcase your business and leisure Amenities* (emphasize facilities catering to business and leisure needs), 6. *Advertise things to do in the Area* (promotes local attractions and activities), and 7. *Promote specific bleisure offerings* (offer deals that encourage extending business trips for leisure purposes).

Enthusiasts in the travel industry, particularly lodging providers, prioritize catering to business travellers. To do this, one must stay abreast of current developments and comprehend the needs, desires, and expectations of business travellers. Ten of the major trends influencing business travellers' decisions in the article "The Latest Business Travel Trends Business Travellers Desire" (Barten, 2024) include 1. *Bleisure Travel* (a growing trend combining business with leisure, appealing to millennials), 2. *Personalisation* (tailoring travel experiences to

individual preferences enhances loyalty), 3. *The Internet of Things (IoT)* (hotels can stand out by offering seamless check-ins, automatic payments, and rooms that can be unlocked via a smartphone, etc.), 4. *Sharing Economy* (hotels are responding to this, offering room-share options and ride-share access), 5. *Customer Experience* (customer experience has arguably become an even more important competitive differentiator than product or price), 6. *Virtual Reality* (a business traveller can use virtual reality previews to see what your hotel looks and feels like), 7. *Healthy Options* (this includes access to wellness amenities, healthier meal choices, and facilities that support physical well-being), 8. *Workspaces with Fast and Reliable Internet* (the reliability of the internet access you can provide is critical, as business travellers will likely need to access their company intranet, download, upload, or send files, and use online communication tools), 9. *Self-booking* (self-booking tools gain traction, offering travellers control and customization of their trips), and 10. *Unconventional Accommodation* (this could include boutique hotels or other properties with unique qualities, or it may include apartments or Airbnb accommodations - it allows travellers to enjoy an experience that more closely resembles their own home).

4. Bleisure Travel: Synthesis of Academic Literature

When on business travel, employees frequently combine work and play, leading to a "de-differentiation" of work and play (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). This trend, known as "hybrid travel", combines travel for business, medical appointments, political reasons, or migration (Unger, Uriely, & Fuchs, 2016). The word "bleisure", which was coined by scholars like Lichy and McLeay (2018), pertains to the desire of Millennials in particular to combine leisure into work visits (Pinho & Marques, 2021).

Statistics reveal that traditional travel expenses (such as lodging, transportation, and food & drink) still account for around half of the money spent by business travellers. Nevertheless, leisure activities such as guided tours, sporting events, concerts, museums, and galleries account for one-fourth of the expenditure (Expedia, 2018). Stated differently, it is becoming increasingly crucial to comprehend the where, when, and how of business travellers, or MICE (Meetings, Incentive trips, Conventions, and Exhibitions) travellers, as well as the impact of their spending on local communities and enterprises (sometimes even worldwide).

According to Lichya and McLeay (2018), the topic of motivation in travel and tourism research has been mostly dominated by a leisure perspective and has thus failed to consider how business travel is evolving. The fact that most theories of tourist incentives have been created in the context of leisure means that they fall short of capturing the complex interplay between business and leisure motivations. Lichya and McLeay (2018) discovered that the push and pull factors that drive each typology—such as the desire for novel experiences (working vacationers), adventure (escapers), knowledge-transfer (altruistic knowledge sharers), and research/funding partnerships (research-active trailblazers)—are what drive bleisure travellers.

Following from Lichya and McLeay's study, effective marketing communication strategies that target bleisure engagement should be developed using segmented plans that highlight the push and pull forces, as well as the concrete and intangible elements, that drive each typology. Marketing materials aimed at promoting flexible and adaptable learners, for instance, should emphasize the advantages of learning new transformative abilities as well as their beneficial difficulties. For escapers, the emphasis should be on risk and adventure. Similar to the traditional tourism industry, working vacationers are likely to respond favourably to messaging that emphasize culture exploration. Information about chances for knowledge transmission and exchange would be of interest to altruistic knowledge sharers. Research-active trailblazers would be drawn to the possibility of collaborative grant applications and research collaboration. Different sorts of bleisure travellers may exist in other business environments, necessitating managers to take different measures to encourage work-related travel if it is advantageous to the organization.

According to a study by Chung et al. (2020), bleisure travel has grown in popularity recently as the lines between work and leisure travel are becoming hazier. Their research created a bleisure tourism experience chain (Fig. 1) and looks at how bleisure marketing strategies are designed to entice business travellers to spend more money and have better experiences outside of business activities. They used the capital region of Japan as a case study.



Figure 1: The B-TEC (Bleisure Tourism Experience Chain) model (Chung et al., 2020: 304)

The findings demonstrated that local convention bureaus and exposition centres create a range of marketing initiatives with the aim of encouraging business travellers to spend more money, but these initiatives are still implemented haphazardly. Consequently, a marketing plan for bleisure was proposed (Fig. 2).

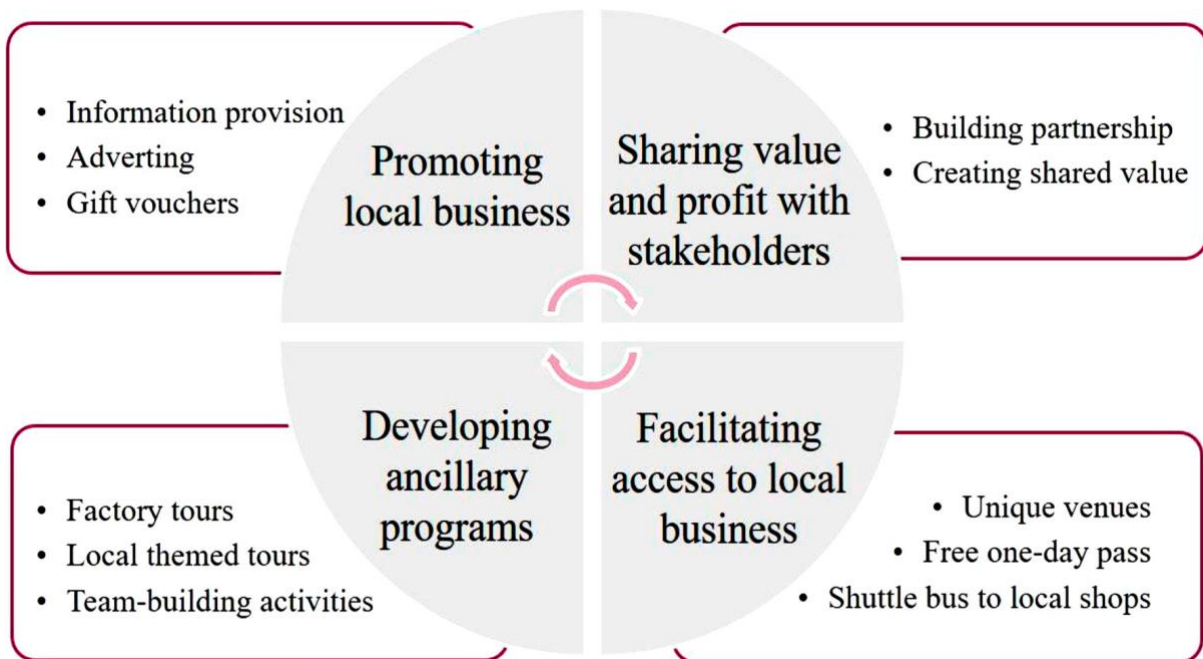


Figure 2: Bleisure marketing scheme (Chung et al., 2020: 305)

According to Caicedo-Barrreth et al. (2020), there is a dearth of tourist services catered to this particular market segment (bleisure travellers), business travel is underutilized, and the tourism industry is still unable to meet the needs of the bleisure market. Their results centre on how business cities might attain tourism competitiveness by including destinations or events that provide tourists with leisure opportunities.

Bleisure travel was assessed before, during, and after a trip by Batala and Slevitch (2024). The study, which involved interviewing 23 bleisure travellers, discovered that during the pre-travel stage, bleisure travellers need more collaboration and more intricate planning. As a result, their travel plans were skilful, forward-thinking, and well-organized. They looked for "educational experiences", "short-cut leisure schedules", "family and kid-friendly activities", and "not trying one-time events" while traveling. To balance the two travel goals, they employed techniques including "flexibility in travel arrangements", "clarification of travel companions", "mixing business and leisure activity", and "remote work". Ultimately, after their journey, bleisure travellers reported feeling "free of the guilt" over their absence from home and "physically tired but mentally rejuvenated". In three stages of

the bleisure travel experience—pre-, during-, and post-travel—they distinguished themes and sub-themes (See Fig. 3).

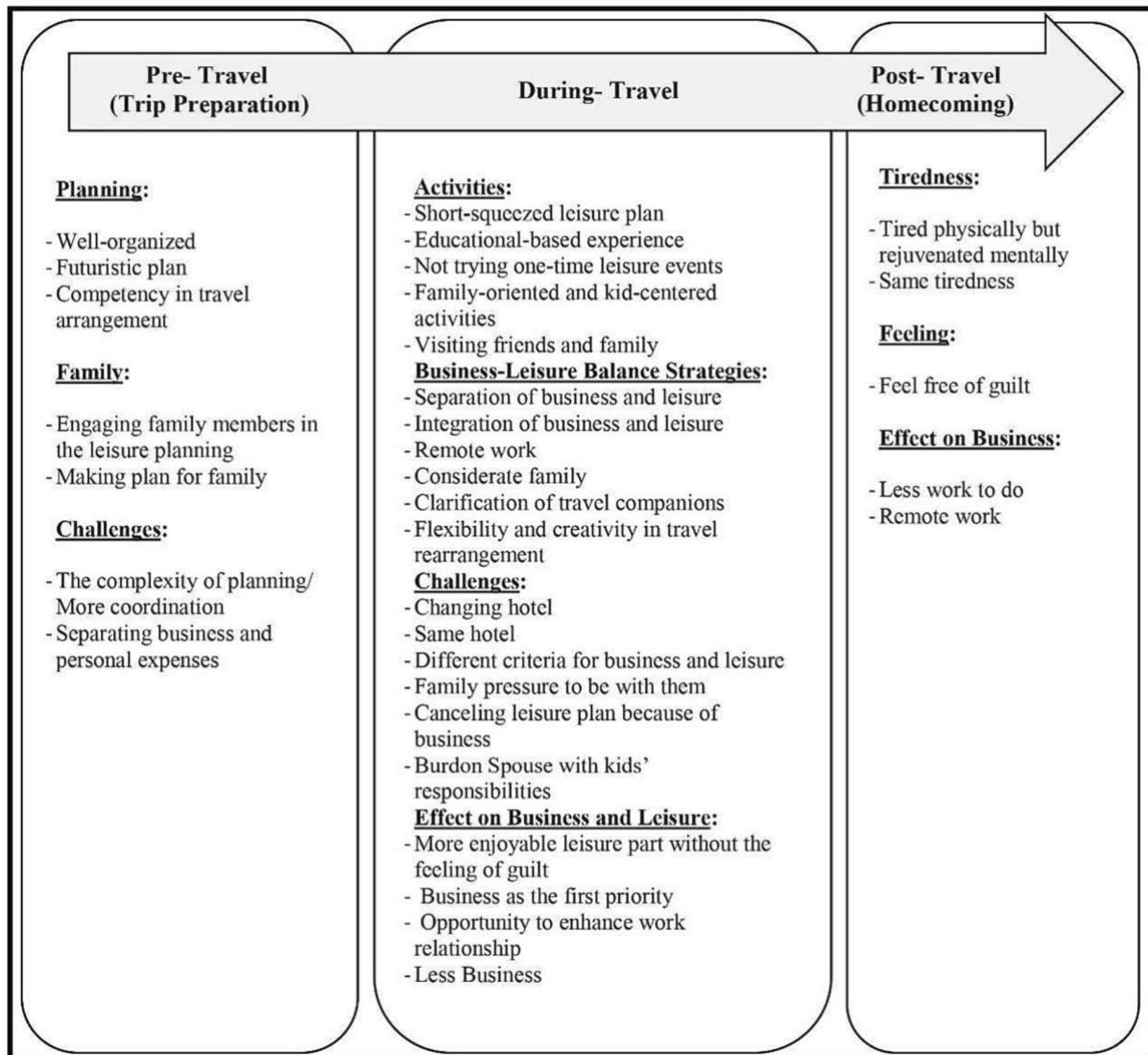


Figure 3: Identified themes and sub-themes of the Bleisure travel experience across three phases: Pre-travel, during-travel, and post-travel (Batala & Slevitch, 2024: 7)

The results of this study demonstrate that, although business and leisure travellers were recognized as the two main segments in the tourism and hospitality industries (e.g., Millar, Mayer, & Baloglu, 2012; Yavas & Babakus, 2005; Zhang, Seo, & Ahn, 2019), bleisure travellers are a new segment with unique characteristics. For instance, a number of characteristics like "weekend for leisure", "using leisure as a motivation", and "realistic expectations" of bleisure travellers set them apart from other traveller segments. Their study's examination of the bleisure travel experience enables service providers in the tourism and hospitality sectors better understand this market niche and tailor their offerings to bleisure travellers based on their preferences. Additionally, this research added to and broadened the body of knowledge on mobility and postmodernist thought. The study's findings were consistent with the postmodernist tourism viewpoint, which holds that current travellers, who value combining many experiences and motivations, cannot be well described by outdated, inflexible classifications (Maoz & Bekerman, 2010; Uriely, 1997). The focus should move from viewing societies as totalities to taking a "both-and" rather than an "either-or" approach, drawing on postmodern social theory.

Additionally, by illustrating how bleisure travellers manage to strike a balance between their work commitments and leisure activities while traveling, their study added to the body of knowledge regarding work-life balance in the context of tourism. In particular, the results broaden Staines' (1980) Compensation Theory of work-life balance. According to this hypothesis, people often increase their resource investment in the other area of their

lives, such as job, to make up for deficiencies in other areas, like family or employment. Bleisure travellers use their vacation as an opportunity to unwind after the strain and rigors of their business portion. The Compensation Theory in tourism is extended in their study by examining how bleisure travellers strike a balance between these two domains.

Furthermore, by examining how bleisure travellers encounter and resolve conflicts between their business and leisure worlds, the findings support the Conflict Theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). According to the Conflict Theory, a person's time and resources are competing between their personal and professional lives, which causes tension and conflict. The results demonstrated that bleisure travellers could reduce conflicts between work and personal life by putting different strategies into practice, such as separating or integrating work and leisure, working remotely, being flexible and creative when rearranging their travel plans, and making clear who their travel companions are. All these actions would eventually lead to a more integrated experience.

Companies can help employees achieve a work-life balance and increase productivity by encouraging them to travel for both business and pleasure and allowing family members to accompany them. To improve their mental health and general well-being when they travel for bleisure, they ought to provide them more time off or wellness initiatives. By doing this, companies can profit from the rejuvenating effect that bleisure travellers have after their journey.

According to Petrenko et al. (2023), hotel companies might use the certain tactics to draw in bleisure travellers (these are similar to the earlier presented industry viewpoint, recorded by Barten in 2024). According to Pinho and Marques (2021), the growth of bleisure in cities should be based on the evaluation of particular services (venues, lodging, support services), local tourist resources (natural resources, culture, heritage), accessibility and global connectivity (particularly through air connections), hospitality (both the hospitality offered by the local population and qualified technical human resources), and destination promotion and marketing strategies. All of these should be implemented in a coordinated manner with local stakeholders.

Studies on bleisure travel have primarily used a qualitative research approach, according to Tsaur and Tsai (2023). Thus, they (Tsaur and Tsai) carried out their research to create a bleisure travel experience scale that they perceived are valid and reliable for evaluating business travellers' bleisure travel experiences. This was done through a rigorous approach. It was demonstrated that the scale, which has 28 elements spread over 6 dimensions, is valid and reliable. These characteristics are "escapist experience", "job-related learning experience", "sociocultural experience", "prestige experience", "smart technology experience", and "entertainment experience".

5. Bleisure Travel: Academics' Stance

This scholar reimagined bleisure travel behaviour among academics to differ somewhat from other sectors' bleisure travel behaviour (for instance, technology, healthcare, public administration, and manufacturing). Among academics, business travel (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions) could arguably be a means to achieve an end, where leisure travel may be the end itself. It has become a common knowledge among academics to attend, especially conferences, in their preferred destination. Many academics avoid submitting conference papers to conferences organised in a destination which is undesirable to them. They consciously search for suitable conferences in their preferred destinations (with particular attributes), where they eventually engage in leisure activities, and share their experiences with colleagues, who will in turn seek out their own preferred destination and attributes, and the cycle continues. Future research may therefore establish this trend among academics.

6. Bleisure Travel: Gaps in Recent Studies and Future Studies

Majority of the current studies did not differentiate among bleisure travellers. For example, interviews were conducted with both frequent and occasional bleisure travellers without comparing their travel experiences. To take into consideration the heterogeneity among bleisure travellers, more research might be conducted. Additionally, comparing bleisure travellers who travel domestically with those who fly internationally can yield intriguing new findings. It may be beneficial to look into the percentage of time that bleisure travellers devote to business or pleasure.

More research can investigate whether they prioritize business above all else or if they want to make the most of living in a new nation / destination and spend more time relaxing. Future research can also concentrate on the traits, difficulties, and issues that bleisure travellers face from the standpoint of the service providers

The earlier research that was done had certain limitations. It was difficult to guarantee the validity and reliability of the findings as done in quantitative research because many of these employed qualitative research methodologies. The earlier research used case studies and attempted to infer important conclusions from the data (inductive reasoning) as an alternative to statistically evaluating hypotheses and creating statistically validated connection models. There were some practices that were consistent between locations, but there might still be some variations. Therefore, more instances and data in other contexts should be gathered to address this issue.

To the conceptual models that have already been created, information regarding governance and pertinent stakeholders can also be incorporated. Ultimately, in addition to the financial data, evaluating the efficacy of marketing for a bleisure market would also benefit from knowing customers' reactions and degree of satisfaction with the marketing. To understand how visitors truly perceive the marketing programmes, which in turn effect their behaviour, more research from the demand viewpoint is thus required.

More study is required to better understand the effects of restrictions on bleisure travel, the shifting nature of the tourism industry, and the evolution of visitor motivations. Further research should examine the motives of bleisure travellers who travel due to contractual obligations (a push factor) and those who travel due to self-initiated mobility (pull factors) from a management standpoint. The traveller's "experience" is an additional factor to take into account. To determine the significance of motivators and to cross-validate the typologies reported earlier, quantitative research could be carried out.

An examination of the ways in which motives change over time may be helpful in determining, for instance, how much bleisure travellers may shift from one typology to another as they become older and climb the travel industry ladder. We may expand our research to include corporate sectors, underdeveloped nations, and other cultures. It would be interesting to investigate how a destination or place influences a bleisure traveller's choice to visit a specific spot. Prior research highlights a new development in the bleisure travel sector inside the turbulent and fiercely competitive global market. The increasingly multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nature of modern travel is embodied by bleisure travel. It is recommended that managers gain insight into the reasons behind these visitors in order to modify tourism offerings for a more leisurely and business-oriented clientele.

To verify the proposed scale's usefulness, researchers should test it on foreign business travellers from various nations and areas. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has badly impacted all forms of travel, including international business travel. Subsequent research on the bleisure travel experience may consider associated factors, like anxiety connected to travel (Zenker et al., 2021) and anxieties associated with COVID-19 (Ahorsu et al., 2022). To further our understanding of bleisure travel experiences, researchers can also look at how various bleisure experiences—like virtual or digital tours—affect bleisure travellers' perceptions.

Long-haul and short-haul business travellers can participate in separate questionnaire surveys for studies to make sure the scale is appropriate for both kinds of travellers. Other traveller characteristics (such being a member of Generation X or Generation Y) were not taken into account in several research. These attributes may be considered in subsequent research to increase the produced scale's generalizability. We still do not fully understand the causes and effects of bleisure travel, nevertheless. The scales that were established can be used for empirical study on causal models.

7. Conclusions

Bleisure travel refers to the act of extending a business trip for personal reasons or integrating work and play in any other way while on a business vacation. Many in the travel business place a high focus on appealing to this expanding population, so it is critical to comprehend their needs and the variables affecting their choices.

Many in the travel industry are paying more attention to the corporate travel sector, in part because business travellers frequently spend more on their trips—especially when their company pays for them. More significantly, though, business travel is expanding as a result of things like globalization and availability of flights.

Regardless of the popular understanding that business travel motivation precedes leisure travel motivation within the bleisure concept, I reimagined business travel as a means to achieve an end, where leisure travel may be the end itself, especially among academics. This may be different from the other bleisure travellers in the other sectors. This assertion needs further validation through research. This notwithstanding, future studies on bleisure travel are needed to not only identify the actual needs or motivations of *specific* bleisure traveller *groups* (including academics), but also the variables affecting their choices, in a highly dynamic industry.

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