Cape Peninsula University of Technology

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Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Tourism Research

Hosted by the Centre for Tourism Research in Africa at the The Cape Town Hotel School, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa

18-19 March 2024

Prof. Rishi Balkaran and
Dr Chris Hattingh

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Proceedings of the

7th International Conference on Tourism Research

ICTR 2024

Hosted By

the Centre for Tourism Research in Africa at the Cape Town Hotel School, Cape Peninsula University of Technology South Africa

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Preface

These proceedings represent the work of contributors to the 7th International Conference on Tourism Research (ICTR 2024), hosted by the Centre for Tourism Research in Africa at the Cape Town Hotel School, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa on 18-19 March 2024. The Conference Chair is Prof Rishi Balkaran and the Programme Chair is Dr Chris Hattingh, both from Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), South Africa.

ICTR is a well-established event on the academic research calendar and now in its 7th year the key aim remains the opportunity for participants to share ideas and meet the people who hold them. The scope of papers will ensure an interesting two days. The subjects covered illustrate the wide range of topics that fall into this important and ever-growing area of research. Today, more than ever, there is a need for research and scientific guidance as the tourist sector struggles to cope with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, inflation, socio-political turbulences, climate change and disaster risk.

The conference will open with a keynote presentation given by *Associate Professor Kamilla Swart*, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar on the topic of *The Future of the Olympic Games - When will it be Africa's turn?* Before the lunch break a second keynote presentation by *Associate Professor Kaitano Dube*, Vaal University of Technology, South Africa will take place. He will discuss the *Opportunities and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Tourism and Hospitality Research*. The second day of the conference will open with an address by *Professor Ike Ezeuduji*, University of Zululand, South Africa who will talk about *Bleisure Travel Reimagined: Implications for Research*. Finally, there will be a fourth keynote address by *Professor Catheryn Khoo*, Torrens University, Australia who will talk about *Contested HIStory: Representation in HERitage Tourism*.

With an initial submission of 120 abstracts, after the double blind, peer review process there are 52 Academic research papers, 2 PhD research papers, 1 Masters Research papers and 1 work-in-progress papers published in these Conference Proceedings. These papers represent research from Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Cyprus, Finland, India, Indonesia, Italy, Nigeria, Oman, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Türkiye, United States and Vietnam.

We hope you enjoy the conference.

Prof Rishi Balkaran and Dr Chris Hattingh
Cape Peninsula University of Technology
South Africa
March 2024

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Biographies

Conference and Programme Chairs

Prof Rishi Balkaran is the Deputy Vice Chancellor: Teaching & Learning at CPUT. He has been an academic for the past 25 years and has a particular flair and passion for the Hospitality & Tourism sectors as well as Policy Studies, Education and the Social Sciences. As an academic his experience extends to that of Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Head of Department, Deputy Dean, Executive Dean and currently Deputy Vice Chancellor Teaching and Learning at CPUT.

Dr Chris Hattingh is a senior lecturer in the Department of Tourism and Events Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). He has been teaching in the leisure, tourism and events programmes at CPUT for 11 years. He is a dedicated researcher in the field of social sciences with a deep-rooted curiosity and a genuine desire to contribute to the understanding of human behaviour in marketing and uncovering the dynamics of LGBT tourism.

Keynote Speakers

Dr. Kamilla Swart is Associate Professor and Director of the Masters in Sport and Entertainment Management program, College of Science and Engineering, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar Foundation. Her research interests include sport and event tourism, with a specific focus on mega-events, impacts, sustainability, legacy and inclusion in sport. Kamilla has nearly 30 years' experience in sport, tourism and events that spans academia and the private sector and has consulted broadly in both the public and private sectors. She was instrumental in developing the 2010 FIFA World Cup Research Agenda and was project lead for South Africa as part of an EU-funded project on mega-event legacy and management which culminated in the publication of Legacies and Mega-events: Fact or fairytales? (Routledge, 2018). Her work focuses on contributing to sport, tourism and event knowledge in the developing context, and in the global South in particular. Shworked closely with Qatar Foundation 2022 FIFA World Cup Master Program and the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy in driving the 2022 FIFA World Cup Research Agenda. Kamilla also serves as Senior Research Associate, School of Tourism and Hospitality, University of Johannesburg, South Africa. She serves as Associate Editor for the Journal of Destination Marketing and Management and Frontiers in Sports and Active Living, and on the editorial boards of the International Journal of Sport Marketing & Sponsorship, Alternation Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa, International Journal of Sport Marketing & Sponsorship, Cogent Social Sciences – Sport section and Event Management. Kamilla was the Co-Chair of the World Association of Sport Management Conference Qatar 2023. She has been appointed to the Scientific Committee (research pillar) of the UNESCO Chair on Governance & Social Responsibility in Sport.

Kaitano Dube is an Associate Professor for Tourism Geography at the Vaal University of Technology under the Department of Tourism and Integrated Communications, Faculty of Human Science. He serves as an Acting Faculty of Human Science Research and Innovation Professor. He is a visiting Professor at Emirates Aviation University in Dubai, UAE. He is an NRF rated researcher. He boasts of 9 published books edited and co-authored. He has published over 35 Journal articles mostly in Q1 and 2, and over 50 book chapters. He serves on several journal editorial boards, including in Tourism Geographies, and is an Associate Editor for Cogent Social Sciences Tourism Section. He is a tourism curriculum expert who has reviewed for several universities. He has graduated a number of Masters students and currently hosts 5 Post-

Doctoral Fellows. His research interest is in tourism, climate change, sustainability, and tourism aviation.

Ikechukwu O. Ezeuduji, South African National Research Foundation (NRF) rated researcher, is full Professor at the University of Zululand, South Africa. He obtained both his Master of Science (2005) and PhD (2008) from the BOKU-University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria. He thereafter obtained a Master of Business Administration (2013) from The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK; and a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (2019) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He has more than 12 years of teaching experience in Higher Education Institutions. He has widely published in broader areas of tourism development (rural and events tourism), tourism management (strategic tourism management and tourism entrepreneurship) and tourism marketing (brand essence, brand competitiveness, brand image and brand loyalty). He is a Member of the Economic and Management Sciences standing panel; The National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa, for the 2019/2020 to 2022/2023 period. He is serving as Associate Editor and Guest Editor for national and international journals and has won numerous national and international research awards.

Professor Catheryn Khoo from Torrens University Australia, is a distinguished scholar in the field of Tourism and Hospitality and Editor-in-Chief of a leading journal, Tourism Management Perspectives (Q1-tiered, Impact factor 8.205, ranked A in the Australian Business Deans Council Journal List, SSCI-indexed). Professor Khoo's research includes consultations for governments and tourism businesses. Notably, she led the authorship of the influential UNWTO Regional Report on Women in Tourism, and co-authored the 2019 UNWTO Global Report on Women in Tourism. Her impactful research appears in 100+ international publications.

Mini Track Chairs

Prof. Teresa Costa holds a PhD in Management and developed her Post PhD in Entrepreneurship and Social Capital in Tourism at the University of São Paulo. She is a coordinator professor in the Department of Eco¬nomics and Management at the Business School at the Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal. She is a researcher at CiTUR - Center for Applied Research in Tourism, member of the scientific board of CITUR-Estoril, editor-in-chief of EJTHR (European Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation) during 2018-2021. Her current research interests focus on entrepreneurship, innovation, so¬cial capital, networks, governance, and sustainability in tourism. Her re-search has been published in several international journals and several book chapters and co-editions of handbooks and eBooks related with entrepreneur¬ship, innovation, social capital, and networks with IGI Global.

Dr. Tracy Daniels holds a PhD in Tourism and Hospitality Management. Her research and teaching focusses on sport event tourism and sport mega events, with a particular focus on resilience building. She has over 15 years lecturing in the field of tourism and event management. Tracy is the Academic Head of Hospitality Management at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) School of Tourism and Hospitality (STH).

Dr Fernanda A. Ferreira is a full Professor at the School of Hospitality and Tourism of Polytechnic of Porto, Portugal. She is Director of the Department of Information Systems and Mathematics. She holds a M.Sc. (in 2002), and a PhD in Applied Mathematics from the University of Porto (in 2007). A researcher and coordinator of UNIAG (Applied Management Research Unit), her publications, more than 150, cover her main research interest areas Tourism Research, Hospitality Management, Industrial Organization, and Operational Research. (ORCID ID: orcid.org/0000-0002-1335-7821).

Mr Shamil Isaacs is the Manager: Technology Station: Clothing and Textiles (Technology Transfer for Clothing and Textiles Small Businesses). He has been part of Department of Science and Technology initiative to support SMMEs in clothing, textile and related sectors throughout South Africa. He is an executive board member of various panels and has been a jury panellist at the SA Mercedes Benz Fashion Awards 2009 to name a few. He has been part of various research projects and has attended the Study tour "Skills for Green Jobs" Germany, invitation from GIZ (German Technical Co-operation Agency) and the Steinbeis Foundation.

Prof. Brendon Knott is Associate Professor in Sport Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and Director of the Centre for Sport Business and Technology Research. His research focuses on sport tourism and events. He has published widely on place branding as a legacy from sporting mega-events, particularly the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. He serves as Regional Editor for Event Management and Associate Editor for Journal of Leisure Research.

Dr Christopher Moon is a multiple award-winning eco and social entrepreneur and Senior Lecturer in eco-entrepreneurship at Middlesex University. He has a PhD from Imperial College and is a fellow of the RSA, HEA and EEUK. He was formerly Head of Sustainability at two companies and teaches sustainable tourism, sustainable business and entrepreneurship and sustainability. He has over 100 publications including in the International Journal of Hospitality Management 2018. Chris has taken tourism students to Mallorca on study tour regularly where Middlesex has an Erasmus agreement with UIB, Palma. He has presented at UIB international week and was interviewed by Spanish TV on sustainable tourism. He is Visiting Professor at NUP, Cyprus.

Dr Alcina Nunes, PhD in Economics, is a Professor in Business and Social Sciences at the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Portugal. She is responsible for the bachelor degree in International Business Management (European Degree) and is an integrated member of UNIAG. In the past was an integrated member of GEMF and researcher at the Office of Strategy and Studies of the Ministry of Economy (Portugal). She has collaborated with national and international higher education institutions throughout her academic activity, participated in research projects, and published scientific articles in conference proceedings, indexed scientific journals, and book chapters.

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Invited Keynote Paper

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).

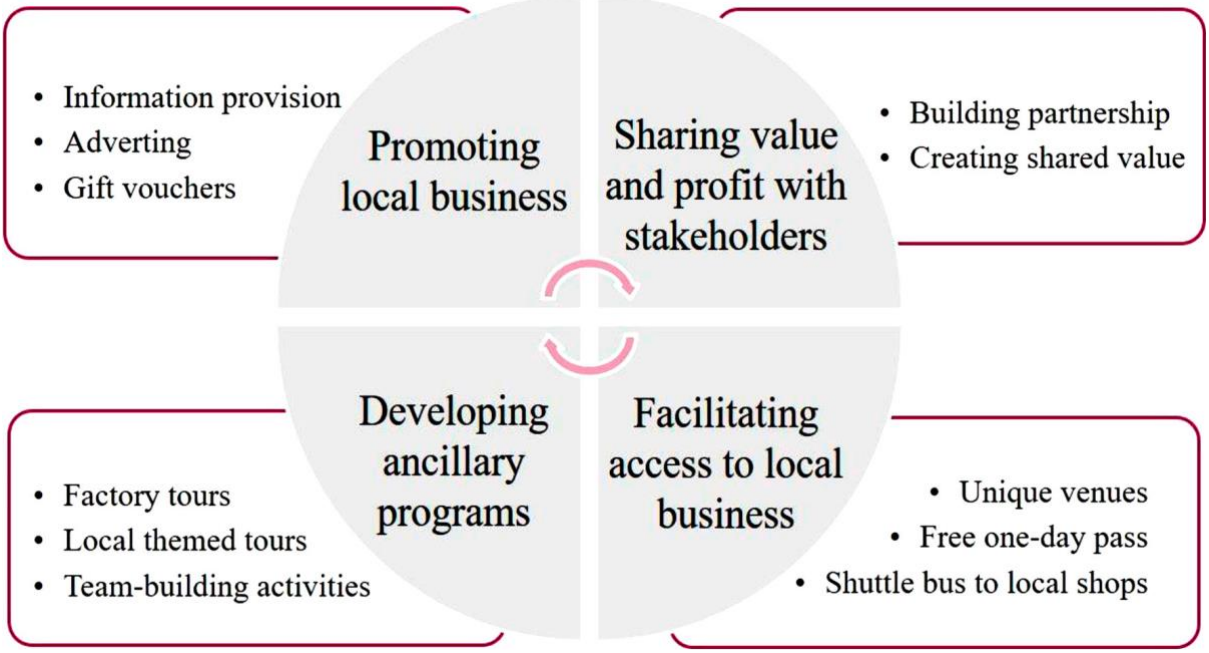

Figure 2: Bleisure marketing scheme (Chung et al., 2020: 305)

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).

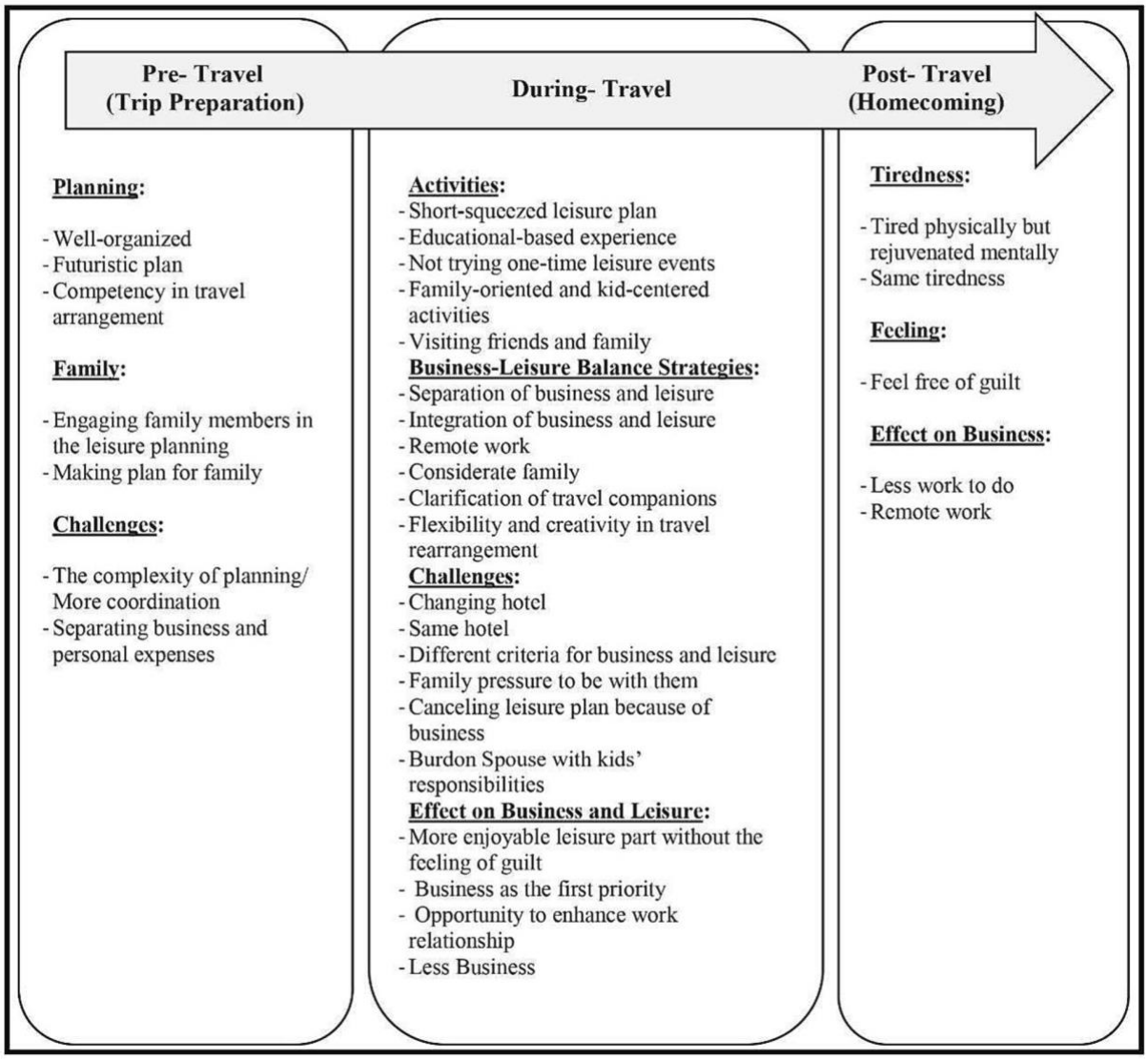

Figure 3: Identified themes and sub-themes of the Bleisure travel experience across three phases: Pre-travel, during-travel, and post-travel (Batala & Slevitch, 2024: 7)

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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Academic Research Papers

Indigenous Therapeutic Tourism: Challenges, Emerging Trends, and Sustainability

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Abstract: A healthy, harmonious, proactive, and contented life is not just desirable; it is a fundamental human aspiration in our increasingly threatened contemporary world. This social research, applied to tourism, centres on the indigenous peoples of Aldeia Fulkaxó in the state of Sergipe, Brazil, conducted between 2022 and 2023. The main aim of this study is to investigate the healing ceremonies and rituals practised by this indigenous community, which represent a complex, systemic, and transdisciplinary phenomenon. The research seeks to recognise and evaluate the integrative and complementary aspects of the health practices of these indigenous peoples and their impact on governance. The methodology used is exploratory and entails a review of the current state of knowledge in this field from 2003 to 2023. Additionally, qualitative research methods are employed, including audiovisual ethnography and field diaries. This approach uncovers the challenges and opportunities presented by indigenous phytotherapeutic processes as ethnocultural attractions for tourists. We witness their annual retreats offered to both national and international groups. Initial findings suggest an increasing demand for tourist experiences that fully immerse individuals in nature and the indigenous way of life, with a particular focus on therapeutic benefits. Moreover, this study accentuates the socio-cultural emergence of therapeutic tourism as an innovative offering in the domain of health and well-being, specifically addressing concerns such as anxiety, stress, and depression.

Keywords: Therapeutic Tourism, Indigenous Communities, Health Tourism, Well-being.

1. Introduction

The historical expressions of humanity's pursuit of healthy habits and customs are as ancient as the ancestral practices of indigenous peoples. In the context of tourism, these expressions are linked to the idea of travelling through time and space in pursuit of an enhanced quality of life. In these times of social and cultural transition, both locally and globally, especially in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, which enforced worldwide quarantine measures, there has been a noticeable increase in the demand for tourism experiences in open spaces and amidst nature. Within this context of solidarity and participation, the overarching goal of this study is to analyse the therapeutic activities conducted in Aldeia Fulkaxó, which can contribute to promoting community-based tourism for sustainable tourism development within Aldeia Fulkaxó.

The origins of these tourism practices can be traced back to Brazilian thermal springs (as well as in Europe) and the inception of Health Tourism, among other related segments such as Rural and Ecotourism. According to the Ministry of Tourism, in its specific publication on health and well-being, "it can be said that the 19th century witnessed significant developments in therapies involving water, particularly thermal treatments" (Brazil, 2010a).

Contemporary society grapples with the dilemmas of its systemic complexity and the breakdown of its way of life. This is evident in the resurgence of tourism scenarios where the pursuit of improved health is rooted in overall well-being and a return to a connection with primordial nature. This dynamic reflects conditions mutatis mutandis, as observed in experiences where urban populations seek interaction with nature. People are seeking a form of tourism that occurs in rural areas but doesn't necessarily fall into the category of rural tourism or any specific type of ecotourism (Brazil, 2010b).

The purpose of these individuals and groups is to reconnect with their ancestral heritage and roots, aiming for more "The aim of these individuals and groups is to reconnect with their ancestral heritage and roots, seeking more beneficial outcomes in their tourism experiences, as defined by Alcântara, Grimm, and Sampaio in 2018. This involves forging a stronger connection with elements such as unpolluted air, clean water, toxin-free food, and fertile lands within healthy environments. These elements serve as ethnocultural attractions presented in ceremonial retreats and healing rituals conducted by Brazilian indigenous communities, signifying the

emergence of a new ethos. This situation demands attention from governance stakeholders, whether public or private entities, to ensure the sustainability of tourism initiatives in indigenous territories, quilombola communities, riverine areas, and other native spaces inhabited by indigenous peoples (Feil & Schreiber, 2017).

These cultural aspects of Brazilian indigenous ethnicities, as they transform into ethnocultural attractions, play a significant role in tourism phenomena associated with health and well-being. In contrast to urban life, the practical wisdom offered in rituals, through the utilization of herbal medicinal plants, provides a distinct experience from traditional sun-and-beach tourism (Brazil, 2015). This pursuit of therapeutic tourism activities arises from the fast-paced nature of city life, coupled with the increased prevalence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in both individual and collective life.

These interconnected factors have resulted in a phenomenon known as "silent resignation" in Brazil and globally (BBC, 2023). The repercussions of this socio-emotional transition in the work sphere are particularly felt in urban habits and customs, with the World Health Organization (WHO) noting a significant increase of up to 25% in diagnoses of anxiety, stress, and depression during the first year of the pandemic. In this context, tourism, as a transdisciplinary phenomenon, can be examined through various analytical categories, segments, or modalities. Among rural, cultural, and health tourism, this study aims to acknowledge an innovation: Therapeutic Tourism. This emergent form of tourism is characterized by a still-developing body of literature in Brazil and other countries, as indicated by preliminary results from exploratory bibliometrics. A search for scientific publications related to "therapeutic tourism" on the CAPES platform, Periodicals from 2003 to 2023, only yielded one article that linked both terms (Monsores, Lopes, Bezerra & Silva, 2016).

The longing for a tourism setting amidst nature in a specific region with its distinct cultural identity, as seen in the case of indigenous ethnicities, has progressed in the last decade in Brazil. It has transcended being a local and isolated occurrence in the Amazon region in the north of the country. The unique experiences offered by these ethnic communities, deeply rooted in the cosmology of their medicinal plants, in ancestral therapeutic ceremonies, have become a sought-after demand, shaping itineraries in local and regional tourism facilities (indigenous communities).

The culture of innovation in Therapeutic Tourism encompasses "healing" rituals, natural landscapes, organic food, and its value lies in the enhancement of mental health conditions, contributing to emotional well-being among the tourists visiting the Aldeia.

In this context, Brazil has been implementing new public policies in support of traditional medicine and herbal therapies. The Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) has gradually adopted their implementation in public health facilities since its legal regulation in 2006. This recognition aligns with publications by the World Health Organization (WHO) recognizing practices like Chinese Acupuncture and Indian Ayurveda, among others (Brazil, 2015).

These tourism activities conducted in indigenous communities offer integrative and complementary practices (ICP) applied in therapeutic processes carried out in spiritual retreats with herbal medicinal plants, considered sacred and healing, abundant in the country's vegetation. The coastal and hinterland natives of Aldeia Fulkaxó engage tourists in their cosmological dimension, their way of life, by opening their healing rituals and sharing their ethos as an ethnocultural tourist attraction."

2. Literature Review

The provision of Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (ICHP) as a collective service or product forms a fundamental premise of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) (Brazil, 2009). CBT typically involves a temporal and spatial shift from urban environments to rural areas. While the segment of Rural Tourism or even Ecotourism and Experiential Tourism may conceptually align with the phenomena observed in indigenous communities, closer scrutiny reveals that these segments do not entirely encapsulate the experiences witnessed in these tourism expressions. In this context, the common factor is that all these segments unfold in rural spaces. However, the principal focus of therapeutic tourism is on health and well-being. Therefore, this study opts for Health Tourism (HT) as a starting point. The rationale behind this selection is its closer alignment with the therapeutic perspective found in the cosmology of indigenous peoples, especially concerning herbal medicinal plants. The research is rooted in the field of Health and Well-Being, representing the foundational point in the discourse of both the indigenous community and the tourists engaging in expeditions into the forest, as explicitly acknowledged in online publications extolling the health benefits of spending time in the socio-cultural spaces of Aldeia Fulkaxó.

Nonetheless, the experiences of individuals and groups in nature are sometimes perceived, as reported by the indigenous population of Aldeia Fulkaxó, as a space-time for leisure and quality of life, which has tangible effects on overall health (mental, emotional, physical, and energetic). Some participants on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook express their pursuit of "harmony between mental and physical health and emotional well-being." Therefore, the rural aspect is a component, but not the sole aspect, just as ecology or the experience in healing retreats. In reality, ceremonies conducted by indigenous peoples regularly take place in urban spaces, and the experience does not exclusively occur in nature or solely focus on ecological aspects (Souza & Klein, 2019).

In Brazil, particularly in the states of Acre, Rondônia, and Amazonas, where indigenous ethnicities predominantly inhabit the Amazon rainforest, Health Tourism, emphasizing ICHP rooted in indigenous traditional medicine, has been ongoing for at least fifty years (Henriques, 2023; Proença and Panosso-Neto, 2022; Costa Oliveira, 2017; Shanon, 2003). However, before 2003, neither Tourism nor Health were regulated by law in Brazil. Health as a segment began to emerge in 2010 with its initial guidebook. Indigenous ancestral knowledge, as part of ICHP, was integrated into the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) only in 2006 (Brazil, 2015).

It's important to note that these activities have gained recent prominence, widely promoted on social media platforms today. They are conducted through ceremonies involving Ayahuasca (in the Northern Region) and Jurema (in the Northeastern Region). These ceremonies feature prominently fermented herbal teas based on local and regional medicinal plants, including internationally recognized ceremonies available on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. A simple search on social media using keywords like "ayahuasca" and "jurema," combined with terms like "ceremony" or "spiritual retreat," yields hundreds of results (https://encurtador.com.br/ewK05).

Indigenous peoples from the coastal, forested, and hinterland areas of Sergipe in Northeast Brazil notably use regional herbal medicinal plants, jurema and velandinho, and possess practical wisdom rooted in their cosmology. These tourism activities, not yet categorized or segmented due to the ongoing research in these territories, are prominently highlighted on digital media platforms primarily in common agendas. These include discussions around the "Temporal Framework" (Brasil, 2007), a bill concerning the demarcation of indigenous lands and its potential impact on indigenous communities. Additionally, these activities intersect with positive actions for ethnic rights, such as the creation of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples in 2023, announced by President Lula at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27). There are also concerns regarding the potential cultural appropriation of these ICHP by the Western population and pharmaceutical interests, driven purely by profit motives, which could potentially alter the indigenous ethos through subtle manipulations for instrumental interests.

In the state of Sergipe, Brazil, as depicted in Figure 1, numerous territories occupied by quilombolas (descendants of escaped slaves), riverine communities, and indigenous peoples showcase multiculturalism expressed in their practices, customs, visual arts (songs, dances, and paintings), as well as medicinal, dietary, and agricultural practices.

Figure 1: Location of Aldeia Fulkaxó, (Brazil/SE).

Source: Own elaboration.

One such indigenous community situated ten kilometers away from the town of Pacatuba in rural areas is Aldeia Fulkaxó, led by Chief "Tchydjo-Uê" - Mr. Humberto Cruz. Tchydjo-Uê is esteemed as a healer and conducts

shamanic rituals across various Brazilian states, Europe, Russia, and North America. Together with his brother, the "official" shaman Soyré - Mr. Ademir Cruz, they perform ceremonies utilizing "forest medicines," particularly Jurema and Velandinho, native medicinal plants from the Northeastern region. They have recently integrated the use of Ayahuasca, a fermented tea from the Amazonian tradition, employed for managing stress and depression, as well as Rapé, a powdered mixture of tobacco and ash obtained from the burning of tsuno tree bark. Rapé is insufflated into the nostrils using wooden or animal bone instruments known as Tipi or Curipi and is employed for alleviating muscle and bone pain, clearing nasal congestion, and slowing down thinking. Tobacco, prevalent in indigenous cultures worldwide, is used in various forms to release energies. In this relatively newly established village with a history of fourteen years in Sergipe's geographical landscape, there is an ongoing territorial dispute, and the community is actively engaging in legal procedures to reclaim their territory.

The primary ethnic and cultural influences for this community are drawn from the Fulni-ô people in the state of Pernambuco, the Kariri from the state of Alagoas, and the Xocó, who have a more notable presence in the state of Sergipe - thereby resulting in the name "Aldeia FUL.KA.XÓ." Aldeia Fulkaxó regularly hosts both Brazilian and foreign tourist groups, who spend periods ranging from seven to twenty-one days, participating in healing rituals and ceremonial practices. All visitors seek therapeutic treatment using herbal medicinal plants within the context of ancestral healing rituals, as per the Fulkaxó cosmology.

However, Aldeia Fulkaxó has limited transportation, accommodation, food resources, and lacks a dedicated digital presence or visitation schedule, unlike indigenous villages in the Brazilian Amazon. The weakness in promoting this northeastern Brazilian health and well-being tourism destination lies in the absence of self-management by the indigenous people in organizing the administration of their ethnocultural attractions. The visitation process is primarily arranged and facilitated by non-indigenous individuals, often through exchange agreements with these ceremony organizers and facilitators. At most, these non-indigenous individuals or groups promote expeditions, ceremonies, rituals, and retreats on social media platforms. Despite this, Aldeia Fulkaxó hosts groups for spiritual and energetic work aimed at enhancing the health and well-being of tourists, even in its rudimentary and natural state. This study underscores that these activities are considered ethnocultural attractions with a touristic purpose since the experiences developed in the Aldeia are recognized as Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (ICHP) by the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS). These practices are rooted in indigenous cosmology, which forms part of Brazil's intangible cultural heritage (Velthem, Kukawka & Joanny, 2017).

Considering the numerous possibilities in academic knowledge and ethical research practices, there are innovations across various realms of human understanding that can be envisioned. Globally, new studies are being proposed to analyze, map, diagnose, identify, verify, and measure both intangible and material aspects related to tourism destination management. The objective is to contribute to the development of local and regional communities by connecting diverse landscapes and tourism routes.

As expressed by Scótolo and Panosso-Netto (2015), "contemplating local development means envisioning the transformation of the current condition of a locality, making it improved, better, and enriched." In this context, the challenge lies in establishing a digital platform, a website, with active participation from young indigenous individuals. Such a platform could bolster and empower these Brazilian indigenous peoples in Pacatuba, Sergipe, who presently lack infrastructure support and technical assistance from the Brazilian government. Having been dispossessed of their lands in the mid-19th century, they have yet to regain ownership due to the absence of land titles, impeding access to public support.

3. Methodology

The phenomenology of perception, as described by Ponty in 1999, serves as the guiding framework for approaching Therapeutic Tourism as a complex and systemic phenomenon within contemporary society. While the research is interdisciplinary, a characteristic of applied social sciences, presents various opportunities for providing support and technical aid to communities. In the context of post-normality, sciences have developed tools for conducting anthropological analyses that appreciate the ethnocultural knowledge of indigenous peoples, evident in traditional sources (Rodrigues & Barbieri, 2008) and Ethnoecology (Toledo & Barreira-Bassols, 2009).

The study adopts an anthropological approach, beginning with the Health Tourism segment (Brazil, 2010) to construct an investigative framework based on participant observation, following Cardoso de Oliveira's method in 2000. Through interpretation, the study identifies Therapeutic Tourism as a new form centred on indigenous

herbal practices, attracting tourists on expeditions to Aldeia Fulkaxó. This phenomenon has recently surged post-COVID-19 but has roots in the Amazon (Brazilian, Peruvian, Bolivian) since the 19th century, according to some authors (Henriques, 2023; Proença and Panosso-Neto, 2022; Costa Oliveira, 2017; Shanon, 2003).

The proposed research design follows a path that begins with an approach based on the phenomenology of perception (Ponty, 1999) concerning how we perceive the research universe, Aldeia Fulkaxó, the study's protagonists, the indigenous population, and our research subject—their ethnocultural attractions from a sustainability perspective. This also includes the motivations of their tourists. Fieldwork involves participant observation, wherein the researcher is in direct contact and experiences indigenous life during their retreats, ceremonies, rituals, and herbal therapeutic processes (ICHP).

Alongside this journey, typical anthropological instruments for collecting qualitative data were employed, such as audiovisual ethnography, non-directive interviews, and field diaries. These methods allowed for an empathetic interpretation closer to the native reality. This native reality encompasses indigenous practices—the key informants of the phenomenological study. Quantitatively, bibliometrics were conducted, including an exploratory study of the state of the art using the term "turismo" (tourism) combined with "terapêutico" (therapeutic) in the CAPES Periodicals Portal, which contains 45,000 open-access national and international periodical publications, various databases that compile academic and scientific works, as well as patents, theses, dissertations, and other types of materials, covering all fields of knowledge since 2011.

The bibliometric tool used was ProKnow-C (Knowledge Development Process Constructivist) as depicted in Figure 2. This tool considered the frequency and thematic relevance of keywords in article abstracts. Articles were included after an initial dynamic reading and review of their abstracts to support critical reflection without delving into author dilemmas. The exploratory research began with the expression "turismo terapêutico," which yielded 52 articles and 1 review in CAPES' bibliographic portfolio. Surprisingly, the first article described therapeutic tourism as "a sanitary phenomenon" (Monsores et al., 2016). Subsequently, a more focused bibliometric search was conducted using the term "turismo + terapêutico," resulting in only 6 articles, of which 5 were peer-reviewed. The reference with peer review was chosen, yielding 5 publications with the highest interrelationship between keywords. Unexpectedly, these five publications represented the same source—Monsores et al., 2016, in five different iterations.

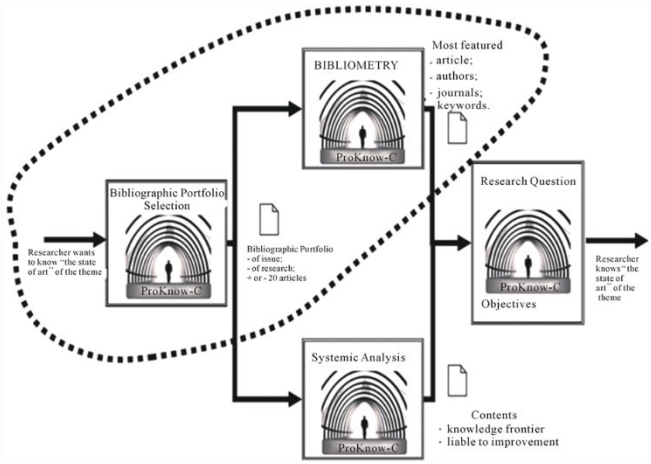

Figure 2: Research Design: Macro-Steps of ProKnow-C.

Source: Ensslin et al., 2010a.

4. Results and discussion

The kind of study presented here is justified in proposing applied social research in tourism centred on practices and services in Therapeutic Tourism. This emerging community reality in Aldeia Fulkaxó concerns the health and well-being of non-indigenous populations. However, there are structural limitations in the complete applicability of these practices to contemporary tourism, which is predominantly digital. This challenge was informally expressed by their leader, Humberto Cruz, during a public meeting held in the village in June 2022, where the researcher participated as an invited anthropologist, essentially considered a 'relative' of the indigenous people. This arose as an active request from their community, seeking the necessary support and technical assistance to cease depending on external actions imposed on the natives' territory.

The manner in which these Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (ICHP) are structured as expeditions, and their ethical and aesthetic principles, align with Ethnoecology (Toledo & Barreira-Bassols, 2009) and Sustainability (Feil & Schreiber, 2009). This is an outcome of the intricacy of the subjects within the study territory and their systemic outlook, deeply rooted in cosmology and ancestral knowledge. This indigenous community engages in tourism focusing on the holistic health of individuals and groups, encompassing mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being through their ceremonial experiences. This demand is growing, reflecting the post-pandemic (COVID-19) scenario and the acceleration of urbanisation, highlighting the need for more comprehensive studies in these areas.

However, the term 'Therapeutic Tourism' is still in its early stages in Sergipe and the northeastern coastal region of Brazil. Within this context, there is a growing demand for local development with sustainability—specifically, the creation of associated services that are economically viable, socially equitable, and environmentally sustainable (Burgos & Mertens, 2015).

Based on initial findings, it appears that other remaining and indigenous communities within and beyond Brazil are encountering similar challenges: the digital self-management of the Therapeutic Tourism process. This is either due to a reluctance to embrace technology in their way of life or a lack of openness to scientific work with medium- and long-term outcomes in these communities. Therefore, the promotion of creating ethnocultural brochures, local itineraries, and catalogues in collaboration with these traditional communities should be encouraged within the framework of Community-Based Tourism (CBT).

5. Conclusions

Acknowledging a tourism destination as accessible implies that everyone, irrespective of their physical condition, can access the available offerings, including products, services, and infrastructure, without encountering barriers, as tourism is a right for all.

The study has unveiled that Therapeutic Tourism is an emerging and escalating trend within the phytotherapeutic practices of indigenous communities, focusing on the holistic health of individuals and groups, encompassing mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects. This trend has become even more pronounced in the post-COVID-19 world, reflecting a pursuit of well-being amidst an accelerated urban lifestyle. These practices are complex and involve a systemic approach, aligning with Ethnoecology and sustainability principles.

However, there are structural challenges regarding the full implementation of these practices in the contemporary context, which is increasingly digital. Indigenous communities encounter difficulties in self-managing the digital aspects of the Therapeutic Tourism process, either due to reluctance in integrating technology into their way of life or a lack of openness to long-term scientific endeavours. This emphasises the need for technical support and assistance for these communities to fully develop their ethnocultural tourist attractions and derive economic benefits while preserving the authenticity of their practices.

Preliminary results also suggest that other remaining and indigenous communities, both in Brazil and other parts of the world, may face similar challenges regarding digital management of Therapeutic Tourism. Therefore, collaboration in creating promotional materials, local itineraries, and catalogues, in partnership with these communities, should be encouraged as part of the principles of Community-Based Tourism (CBT).

Ultimately, this study highlights the importance of transdisciplinary and anthropological approaches to understanding and supporting emerging tourism practices in traditional communities. It contributes to local development with sustainability and respect for the cultural authenticity of these communities. Furthermore, it underscores the need for dialogue and collaboration among researchers, indigenous communities, and government authorities to promote equitable development and the well-being of all involved.

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Biographies

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Human Resources Management and the Impact of the Restaurant Opening Hours: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract: The hospitality sector is struggling with a generalized shortage of manpower to cope with the post-pandemic economic recovery. Furthermore, the work-life balance has become a very important issue when it comes to choose a place to work. This has been creating huge constraints in the hospitality industry in running and/or developing new businesses due to lack of qualified human resources.

Considering the importance of this sector in the Portuguese economy, it is of paramount importance to better understand the origin of such constraints and how businesses can adapt to a new labour market reality.

An exploratory study was conducted to understand how restaurant opening hours, as a top-level management decision, affects the work-life balance in the industry thus contributing to enrich the attractiveness of the jobs offered.

To develop the study two groups of restaurants were studied. The first group is comprised of limited opening-hours restaurants, and the second group (as a control group), a non-limited opening hours restaurant. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with proprietors and/or top-level managers to ascertain how the decision on opening hours was weighed in the work-life balance concerns and what are the most important managerial implications, business profitability impacts, and staff retention indicators.

Preliminary results seem to indicate that restaurant opening hours are one important top-level management decisions and the work-life balance has played a crucial role in the definition of the business model of the studied restaurants.

By choosing limited opening hours, managers are able to schedule staff much easier and respect, as much as possible their work-life balance which then contributes to a more stable and motivated workforce. The results also show that this is only possible because restaurants manage to be profitable within the limited opening hours period.

Further studies should be conducted to better understand how these new business model approaches could be used in larger-scale restaurants with non-limited opening hours.

Keywords: Human Resources, Opening Hours, Work-Life Balance, Restaurant

1. Literature Review

The restaurant sector is characterised by low pay, low skills, anti-social working hours, fewer training opportunities, and limited opportunities for career progression. Moreover, it is a stressful working environment with high staff turnover (Sohaih, 2015). Although, human resources are crucial for the operation development and without them the operation does not exist. Human resources managers should pay special attention to this dimension and introduce specific training and career opportunities to promote the commitment of the employees to the job and the organisation.

Nowadays, in U.K. restaurants more than 90% of the employees are part-time workers showing the predominance of casual, temporary, and unstable work with limited career opportunities and a high turnover rate (Sohaih, 2015).

These difficulties related to career development have been exacerbated by COVID-19 (Huo, 2021). In a study with 242 frontline restaurant employees, the researchers concluded that career opportunities improved career commitment and reduced career regret via its boosting effect on employees thriving at work (Huo, 2021). Career growth opportunities are most needed and most beneficial for shaping employees' career outcomes when they experience high levels of COVID-19 anxiety (Huo, 2021).

After COVID-19, it has been increasingly difficult to attract employees to work in the restaurant sector. The organisations have to adapt them to this scenario and introduce changes in human resources practices in order to be more attractive to new employees and also to retain the current employees. These changes can only be achieved with changes in the organisations practices namely introducing and reinforcing career perspectives inside the restaurants.

Restaurant opening hours has not been a major topic of research. A study by Auty (1992), was one of the first to include opening hours as a variable of choice in restaurant purchase behaviour just to realize that, at the time, it was a lesser factor in restaurant selection from the customer's point of view, despite its slightly bigger importance in a convenience driven occasion.

Since then, very few studies have been conducted around this topic and the ones that did, focused only on the demand side of the problem and primarily on perceived quality issues (Friedmann, 2022; Gregory & Kim, 2004; Mondo et al., 2022).

Restaurant opening hours is one of the most important managerial decisions in a restaurant. Restaurants need to adapt to the characteristics of their demand and try to satisfy costumers needs as much as possible. The performance of service industries is affected by opening hours. Shorter opening periods reduce operation costs but harms consumers that might need to advance or postpone their transactions moving away from their ideal time (Shy & Stenbacka, 2006).

Consumption patterns in the restaurant industry are different from other food retail business and services as there isn't much margin for advancing or postponing consumption relative to the ideal time of consumption. Restaurants are characterized for having a fixed selling capacity and a limited time frame for operating which can generate considerable opportunity costs (Kymes, 1998).

So, being able to achieve the best fit between demand and the costs needed to supply that demand is essential for the profitability of restaurants (Kukanja & Planinc, 2020). Restaurants need to have a good understanding of what are the days and periods of the day costumers tend to use the restaurant and manage their resources in accordance (Kyuwan, 2009).

The determination of service hours is generally affected by four major factors: Spill overs between periods by consumers, asymmetric distribution of consumer's ideal service time, the technology for service provision and the intensity of price competition (Shy & Stenbacka, 2006).

Opening hours might be restricted by other reasons such as social and religious, but economic arguments play a major role in determining those restrictions (Rouwendal & Rietveld, 1998).

In the restaurant sector, the concept and type of food plays an important role when defining opening hours. According to the utilitarian and hedonic continuum model (Parsa et al., 2020) of the moments when the restaurant is open and how many hours a day will be valued differently as the costumer shifts from a high utilitarian role to a high hedonic one since hedonic experience at a restaurant involves emotional gratification, affect, need for joy, pure indulgence, pursuit of fun, conspicuous consumption, and entertainment, whereas utilitarian experience encompasses functionality, convenience, cognitive transaction, physiology (hunger), utility, and quick gratification of an immediate need (Parsa et al., 2020). In a study conducted in airport restaurants (Heung et al., 2000), convenient opening hours was one of the highest rated factors by diners, probably due to the convenience nature of the moment.

The type of food is intrinsically linked to opening hours. All day concepts that offer food that caters costumers' everyday needs, from break-fast to dinner an even snack options are getting popular (Masa, 2017). Location can also influence restaurant opening hours. Restaurants situated in places like food malls, airports or other commercial structures may have limited opening hours due to the function hours of the location where restaurants are established.

Competition can drive restaurants to change and/or adapt opening hours. Opening hours can be a way for business to differentiate from each other, mainly when there are considerable fluctuations on demand during a certain time interval (Rouwendal & Rietveld, 1998). Opening hours are considered a competition dimension in the supermarket business (de Haas et al., 2020). It is common for Quick Service Restaurants to extend their opening hours (especially during the night) and use that as way to promote themselves and differentiate from their main competitors (Xie, 2018).

Culture and place of origin also impacts restaurant opening hours as lunch and dinner take place in different moments of the day (Wijnen, 2012). Age should also be considered as a factor influencing restaurant opening hours. Newer generations like the millennials and gen Z have a different understanding of eating habits (Halasi et al., 2021; Okumus, 2021; Pawan et al., 2014) and restaurants must adapt to that reality.

The restaurant industry is considered to be a very demanding work environment, with very intense day-to-day operations and highly unpredictable ecosystem (Zhang et al., 2021), which gives it a reputation for having long

working hours and a high turnover rate (Niu, 2010). These staffing challenges have been a reality for a long time with present record-breaking staffing pressures across the restaurant industry (Auberry et al., 2019).

Staff is one of the hardest resources to manage when it comes to guarantee a certain selling capacity and a good service level. In fact, restaurants can incur in two types of opportunity costs either by not being able to cope with an excess in demand or by deploying excess resources to cater for a smaller demand (Choi et al., 2009; Muller, 1999).

Over the years, the biggest concerns about staff scheduling have been from a managerial point of view, where the most important topics are maximizing revenue, delivering good service and preventing overscheduling (Choi et al., 2009).

As stated by Friedmann (2022), the selection of adequate operating hours can be quite demanding. Extended opening hours increase the opportunity to generate revenue but also increase the need for more staff and more training. On the other side, less extended opening hours result in simpler hiring and scheduling practices but will definitely result in a decrease in revenue. Some authors like Choi, Hwang and Park (2009) or Nonaka, Nobutomo and Mizuyama (2018), studied scheduling from an operations point of view, aiming to optimize scheduling and reducing over and under scheduling as a way to deliver good service and maximize profitability.

Nowadays, new concerns are emerging and becoming crucial. In fact, due to staff scarcity (Holmes et al., 2022; Lusa, 2021; Quito, 2022) and cultural and demographical changes (Gaidhani et al., 2019), staff attraction and a good working environment that retains staff is playing a key role in staff scheduling. Businesses need to understand that the work environment has changed and what used to work in the past may not work for the newer generations such as Gen Y and Gen Z (Holmes et al., 2022). A new point of view is in order: The staff point of view as other concerns such as work-life balance (WLB) emerge.

Employee work-life balance is very important and widely studied in several studies and has been defined as a phenomenon that happens when people are satisfied with their lives and the way they divided time and resources between work, personal, and social roles and commitments (Borbon & Naig, 2021). Additionally, two key dimensions can be identified in this definition: (1) individual engagement in multiple tasks in work and life and (2) minimal conflict between work and life roles (Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

Researchers had tried to understand the impact of sociodemographic characteristics, kind of job, organisational culture and climate, job engagement, leadership, among others on employee's work-life balance (Kumarasamy et al., 2015).

The absence of work-life balance has been related with many negative consequences that can prejudice employee performance (Kumarasamy et al., 2015). Concerns about WLB are becoming one of the most important issues in staff attraction and retention. In fact, psychological well-being is an important issue for hotel industry because it as a huge impact on talent retention (Walbeek & El Hajal, 2022).

Previous research has shown that job demands, such as work overload or insecurity, affect negatively employee well-being, and job resources, such as colleagues' and supervisors' support have positive effects and buffer the negative effects of the job demands (Yucel, 2019).

Work overload is one of the major factors that was said to influence work-life balance. Work overload can be defined as the perception that one has too much to do (Kumarasamy et al., 2015; Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996). Employees who perceive their workload to be more than they can handle report exhaustion and fatigue, which may negatively influence their availability to be involved in other life domains (i.e., friends and family) (Aryee et al., 2005). Furthermore, when employees are overloaded with work, they often get frustrated that their work-life balance does not exist (Kumarasamy et al., 2015) (Vogel, 2012;).

Some studies had analysed the impact of gender on the work-life balance suggesting that women had more difficulties achieving their work-life balance considering the familiar tasks socially associated with their gender role. The restaurant sector is a significant employer of women worldwide. Sohaih (2015) refers that 72% of U.K. restaurant employees are women increasing their difficulties in achieving work-life balance.

As mentioned before, post pandemic recovery has restaurants under pressure. Activity is growing and staff shortage is leaving most restaurants understaffed. A recent study, conducted by Choco (2021) reveals that 73% of restaurant workers inquired think their shift is too long and 67% state that leisure time is left out because of work.

Yu, Lee, and Na (2022) conducted a study with 290 restaurant employees and concluded that work-life balance is directly related to job satisfaction and turnover intention, whereas employees with higher work-life balance have lower turnover intention. These data highlight the importance of understanding the restaurant employees' work-life balance and perceptions in order to promote this balance and decrease their possible turnover intentions.

2. Design Method

This exploratory study uses a qualitative approach to understand how restaurant opening hours, as a top-level management decision, affect the work-life balance in the restaurant industry contributing to enriching the attractiveness of the job offered.

To achieve this main objective, a semi-structured interview was constructed, organised into three sections. Section one was related to the characterisation of the restaurant with questions such as type of restaurant, daily schedule, opening hours, number of places, mean of customers per day, and accepting reservations. Section two was related to the characterisation of the employees with questions such as the number of employees, contract type, kind of shifts, mean age, mean salary, seniority, gender distribution, and turnover index. Section three had a set of open questions related to the schedule definition, how it was defined, the changes made over time, the strategies used to promote the employees' attraction and retention, the strategies that they would like to introduce, and the strategies used to promote work-life balance, among others.

Our participants were organised into two groups of restaurants: the first group is comprised of limited opening-hours restaurants, and the second group (as a control group), non-limited opening-hours restaurant. All the restaurants were located in Oporto City The main characteristics of the restaurants participating in this study are presented in Table 1. As we can observe both groups have similar types of restaurants (Parsa et al., 2020). Although Group 1 has reduced schedules, smaller number of places and monthly sales, and Group 2 has longer schedules, more places and bigger monthly sales. This is a convenience sample to achieve the objectives of the exploratory study. Regarding the participants, we had 1 female and 4 male, and all of them were managers.

Table 1: Characterisation of the restaurants participating in the study

Restaurant characterisation	**Group 1**		**Group 2 (control)**		
	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Interview 5
Type of restaurant (Parsa et al., 2020)	Fast casual	Upscale casual dining	Casual dining	Fast casual	Casual dining
Opening hours	Tuesday: 12.30 am. – 4pm Wednesday – Saturday: 9 am-4pm	Tuesday to Saturday: 7pm -10.30 pm	7 pm – 11 pm (close on Sunday)	Monday – Friday; 12 am – 4 pm; 7pm – 12 pm Saturday – Sunday: 12 am – 1 am	Monday – Thursday: 12 am – 3 pm; 7 pm – 12 pm Friday: 12 am – 4 pm; 7 pm - 1 am Saturday: 12 am – 4,5 pm; 7 pm - 1 am Sunday: 12 am – 4,5 pm; 7 pm – 12 pm
Number of places	22	28 (+16 terrace)	55 (+30)	300	200 (average of 5 restaurants)
Customers per day / per establishment	80	30-45	40	1200	500
Mean monthly sales / per establishment	20.000€	40.000€	55.000€	350.000€	150.000€
Accepting reservations	No	Yes (only)	Yes	No	Yes

Table 2 presents the main characteristics of the human resources of the restaurants. We can observe that in Group 1 they only have direct schedules but in Group 2 one restaurant has direct, split and shift schedules

(according to the functions) and the other have only shift work. In both groups the mean age is similar. Although, in Group 1 the employees are all women. Regarding the turnover index, two restaurants (one in each group) does not have turnover in their teams.

Table 2: Characterisation of the restaurant human resources

Employees characterisation	**Group 1**		**Group 2 (control)**		
	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Interview 5
Number	7	12 (+1 extra)	14	60	N/A
Contractual hours	40hs	40hs	40hs	40hs	40hs
Type of contract	Full contract and part-time	Full contract	Full contract	Full contract	Full contract
Type of schedules	Direct	Direct	Direct, Split, shifts	Shifts	Shifts
Mean salary	1050€	N/A	N/A	N/A	1100€
Mean age	30-35	30	25	20-30	25
Seniority	3 years	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Gender distribution	100% female	100% female	60% men, 40% female	N/A	N/A
Turnover index	0%	N/A	N/A	0%	10%/month

N/A: information not available

The interviews were conducted in-presence, audiotaped, and verbatim transcribed. The interviews occurred between January and February 2023.

All the materials were analyzed according to the thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews were numbered in order to protect the informants' anonymity. All the ethical procedures were considered during the research process.

3. Results

Our preliminary results are organised into two main themes: attraction and retention strategies, and work-life balance strategies.

Regarding the theme **attraction and retention strategies**, in our Group 1 (limited opening hours restaurant) the participants referred the use of strategies such as promoting employee's autonomy and flexibility according to their needs, the presence of fixed and consecutive days off, positive climate and culture, empowerment and employees training, directed schedule, and fair salaries. These participants referred that human resources in the sector are changing, employees have more qualifications and autonomy. The sector has to leave the suffering dimension, "people need to be happy in their work, with their team" (I2). One of the participants referred that the restaurant opening hour was defined, in the beginning, as a way to grow in a controlled way, but nowadays because they "want to maintain quality of life, to me and to the persons that work in my restaurant" (I2). They also recognise that increasing their daily schedule might bring financial benefits in short-time, but in a medium-long-time they would lose quality, persons would be unhappy, and the project would lose his identity.

Days off seem to be a very important dimension for the employee's attraction and retention. According to our participant 1, "the fixed days off and the fact of being during the weekend it is very important, persons need some predictability in their lives".

The main consequences of these strategies are related to the easier hiring, the persons identify themselves with the identity of the project, and therefore, in increasing the team stability, as referred by "our employees do not want to leave, they are identified with this project" (I2).

For the future attraction and retention strategies, our participants referred the need to increase the training opportunities, "if we increase the team skills, if our routines are more structured, we will have more time to talk, it would be easier and better to work together" (I1).

In Group 2 (unlimited opening hours), they defined their schedules according to the customers' needs, and adapt all the practices, namely shifts and days off, to these needs. The attraction and retentions practices are related to better salaries, financial benefits as productivity bonus, attendance bonus, seniority bonus, tips policies, shifts

definition, type of days off, and internal career opportunities. Most of our participants referred the adoption of financial bonus as an important strategy to retain the employees, as referred by "to hire better we have to pay more, nowadays we have to anticipate the market, to adapt to the human resources needs" (I5). Most of the participants referred the presence of split shifts, according to the operation needs, but also referred that, for some functions, they have direct shifts. The days off also seems to be an important strategy for all the participants. In some cases, they have three breaks, in other cases they have two breaks including one weekend day. One participant referred that the internal development opportunities are very important, "all the team leaders begin in low functions, all our employees know that here they have the opportunity to grow and develop their careers" (I4).

Regarding future attraction and retention strategies, one participant referred the importance in increasing the annual bonus for performance in order to stabilise their team, "we need to stabilize the team for optimise the processes" (I3). Other participant referred that they would try to introduce the four working days week, "this seems to be an attractive offer to human resources, in these working conditions we have to adapt our organisation to the human resources needs" (I5).

The theme **work-life balance practices** explain the kind of practices that are adopted by the restaurants to promote the adequacy between professional, personal, and social needs and demands.

In Group 1 (limited opening hours restaurant), the practices implemented to achieve this balance are related to their restaurant schedule, the flexibility managing the employees' specific needs, and in the proximity management. Proximity management refers to the importance of being close to the team, know their characteristics, their problems, being part of the team, as referred by "innovating in a horizontal management, the final decision is always mine, but they participate, I am here every day, we work all together, we know the needs of everyone" (I2). Moreover, participant 1 referred that their schedule is more flexible, although they can make changes according to specific needs, as referred by "it is a more direct and dynamic process".

One of the participants referred that the advantage of implement these work-life balance practices is having a team more autonomous, where trust and care for each one exists. On the other hand, the disadvantages are related to particular moments, when the leader have to take difficult decisions or to have difficult talks with the team.

Regarding the future, one participant does not consider making any change in the schedule. The participant 2 referred that in the future, they would like to be closed all weekend, although this change is not related to the work-life balance or to the unsatisfaction with the current opening hours but with the opportunity to develop the business, as referred by "if we were closed during the weekend, we would be able to do another kind of services, to explore other opportunities, but is very important to maintain the quality service and the project identity" (I2).

In Group 2 (unlimited opening hours), the work-life balance practices are related to the vacations, to flexibility in managing shifts, and giving the anniversary day. Participant 4 referred that they split the vacations, a part is taken during the winter and the others during the summer. Moreover, they manage their human resources needs according to the current occupancy, as referred by "if we do not need them, they can go home earlier, the hours are paid, we do not include the in the bank of hours" (I4). Additionally, all the participants referred their flexibility as a work-life balance strategy, as cited by "we are flexible according to specific situations, we understand the specific needs of our employees" (I3). For future strategies, participant 5 referred that they are considering the creation of a kindergarten for the employees' children.

All the participants consider that these strategies are adequate to the current needs of their employees, and they do not see any disadvantage in adopting these strategies, corroborated by "our employees feel valued" (I4).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This exploratory study aimed to understand how restaurant opening hours, as a top-level management decision, affects the work-life balance in the industry, contributing to enriching the attractiveness of the jobs offered. To achieve this aim, a qualitative methodology was used with two groups: Group 1 with limited opening hours and Group 2 with non-limited opening hours.

Our main results suggested that attraction and retention strategies and work-life balance are main themes in both groups. The group with limited opening hours referred the use of strategies for attraction and retention

such as empowerment, autonomy, flexibility of their employes and fixed breaks, as already suggested by Gaidhani, Arora and Sharma (2019) and Holmes *et al. (*2022). Therefore, for these restaurants it will be easier to hire, they will maintain their identity and increase the team stability as already stated by Friedmann (2022). On the other hand, the group with non-limited opening-hours referred the use of attraction and retention strategies such as better salaries, bonuses, internal career opportunities, and the opportunity to define shifts according to the teams' needs. All the strategies used are defined according to the business needs. We also observed a higher turnover rate in this group suggesting, as already defined by Niu (2010) and Auberry, Faulkenburg and Linares (2019) that long working hours are related to high turnover rate.

Work-life balance seems to be a challenge for both groups, although in Group 1 it seems to be the cause of their limited opening hours. On the opposite, for group 2, the demands of work-life balance it seems to be the consequence of their unlimited opening hours. These results are in line with Wey Smola and Sutton (2002) where companies must accommodate the employee's desire to better balance work goals and personal goals. Such accommodations might include more cafeteria benefits, flexible work schedules, quality-of-life programmes, on-site day care and even elder care (Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002).

Lederer, Van Niekerk and Okumus (2017), identifies exploring flexible work arrangements such as alternative schedules, compressed work weeks, as one of five ways to combat worker burnout.

Park *et al.* (2021) suggests that businesses provide social and organizational support to their employees. Other practical recommendations include the creation of support networks, the implementation of wellness programs and incentives, paid vacation time, volunteer days, on-site health and fitness events, and on- or off-site team-building group activities. Managers should also, as far as possible, match employees' preferences with regard to their work schedules/shifts so that employees can fulfil their family and social obligations (Park et al., 2021). By incorporating the aforementioned suggestions and best practices, restaurant owners should benefit from employees' increased life satisfaction, which should lead employees to adopt positive loyalty OCBs toward their restaurant companies and lower their desire to seek jobs in other industries (Park et al., 2021).

Kossek, Valcour and Lirio (2014) identifies several activities to enhance work-life balance and wellbeing, such as promoting helping behaviour between workers, safeguarding against work intensification and promoting a culture of healthy practices that prevent overworking.

In conclusion, our results suggest that restaurant working hours are decisive for the work-life balance and job satisfaction of the employees.

Our study has some limitations. Restaurants were organized according to their opening hours (limited vs. extended) despite being considerably different in their characteristics. In group 1, the management team consisted only of women, restaurants had a small team and were depicted clearly as personal projects. On the other hand, group 2 had both men and women in their management teams, had larger numbers of staff and restaurants were presented mainly as business ventures. Future studies should consider these characteristics in the definition of the groups.

Business size and company culture seems to play an important role in how restaurants handle WLB. Additionally, we only consider the manager perspective, being more influenced by social desirability. In future studies, it should be considered also the employees' perspective.

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Preparing for Pandemics: Reflecting on the Impact of Strategic Elements in the COVID-19 Influenced Online Travel Agencies' Marketing Mix

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Abstract: The landscape of online hotel booking, particularly through online travel agencies (OTAs), witnessed a transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift triggered intense competition among OTA marketers. Interestingly, amidst this competitive environment, while causal predictive models exist that focus on moderate to high effects of major features on Price and hotel BI, the strategic impact of minor features has largely been overlooked. To address this gap, a frequency analysis involving a comprehensive sample of 63 OTAs identified four minor features. Subsequently, a partial least squares structural equation modeling approach explored 499 consumers' perceptions. Two features were shown to be significant (COVID-19 Hygiene Label, Price Discount), with COVID-19 Hygiene Label mediating Price. However, Scarcity and Loyalty Program showed no direct or mediating effects. The model accounted for a strategic 0.298 R^2. As COVID-19 is an ongoing recurring issue and preparation for future pandemics is prudent, the results provide valuable insights for OTA app developers aiming to gain additional predictive marginal performance advantages (i.e., .10 or greater). Implications and suggestions for future research are also offered.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Hotel Booking Intention, Online Travel Agency, Marketing Mix, Minor Features, Tourism, Pandemic, COVID-19

1. Introduction

The landscape of online hotel booking, particularly through online travel agencies (OTAs), witnessed a transformation due to a greater focus on local tourism, resulting in a reduction in the availability of international destinations and a decrease in incoming international tourists. This triggered intense competition among OTA marketers, who focused on major features (those included in a large percentage of OTAs) influencing consumers' perceptions of Price and booking intention (BI). Interestingly, however, the strategic impact (.10 or greater, Raithel et al., 2011) of minor features (those included in less than 60% of OTAs) has largely been overlooked. As OTA features are costly to develop and maintain, COVID-19 is an ongoing and recurring issue that continues to affect BI, and additional future pandemics are a potential concern, it is prudent for marketers to understand the strategic, predictive marginal performance advantage of minor features.

To inform this area, this study, drawing on accepted BI-related theories (Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behavior, Technology Acceptance Model), we posed and tested a partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) to explore the effect of four minor features (COVID-19 Hygiene Label, Price Discount, Scarcity, Loyalty Program) on Price and BI.

2. Literature Review

2.1 COVID-19 label

Consumer (BI) is inherently complex, and COVID-19 has exacerbated this by heightening consumer safety and health risk anxiety (Kim, 2023), leading to a demand for safety assurance signals (Bove & Benoit, 2020) and resulting shifts in preferences and consumption patterns (Japutra & Situmorang, 2021). In response, the hotel industry has utilized hygiene safety marketing strategies to restore confidence and trust (Jimenez-Barreto et al., 2021). For example, communicating COVID-19 hygiene and safety efforts through digitized marketing, including COVID-19 Hygiene Labels (Pappas & Glyptou, 2020) aimed at addressing customer anxiety levels to facilitate industry revival (Sahoo & Mangaraj, 2020).

These efforts, in combination with other factors (e.g., brand, brand loyalty, pandemic-perceived risk), have generally demonstrated a positive impact on BI (Jimenez-Barreto et al., 2021; Ju & Yang, 2023), although results are inconsistent (Volgger et al., 2023). Moreover, this feature has been shown to interact with other elements, including Price (Pappas & Glyptou, 2021). Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. COVID-19 Hygiene label has a significant influence on booking intention.

H1a. The influence of Price is mediated by COVID-19 hygiene label.

2.2 Scarcity

Scarcity occurs when commodity demand exceeds supply (Kemp & Bolle, 1999) and is employed as a marketing strategy, i.e., scarcity cues or messages (Aggarwal et al., 2011). By influencing consumer value and urgency perceptions, these cues encourage consumers to think, feel, or act in a particular manner (Teubner & Graul, 2020). These behaviors are driven by psychological reactance theory (Föbker, 2018), i.e., consumers are more motivated by fear of loss rather than gain, so limited-availability products appear more attractive (Parker, 2011). Aligned with this, when consumer behavior is restricted, a sense of now more than ever may increase BI (Brehm, 1966).

A growing number of studies have found that Scarcity, in conjunction with other features, positively affects BI (popularity and price reviews, perceived enjoyment) (Biswas, 2023; Nake, 2020). However, results are inconsistent as scarcity can infer risk due to crowded spaces during pandemics (Li et al., 2023). Hence, the following hypotheses are posed:

H2. Scarcity has a significant influence on booking intention.

H2a. The influence of Price is mediated by scarcity.

2.3 Loyalty programs

Consumer loyalty program marketing efforts reward and encourage loyal consumer behavior (Sharp & Sharp, 1997). Guided by customer relationship management theory, loyalty programs establish and maintain profitable customer relationships by identifying and rewarding customers (Chen et al., 2020), which increases customer satisfaction and retention. These programs can vary in form. For instance, members may earn rewards by collecting points, stamps, or coins (Meyer-Waarden, 2008), potentially motivating members to increase purchase frequency to earn rewards (Joe, 2014), which, in turn, drives BI.

Loyalty programs, in conjunction with other factors (e.g., convenience, digital media engagement, customer service experience, Internet-based communication, employee knowledge, satisfaction, price) have generally shown positive results (Chanchomsri, 2023; Saber et al., 2021), although findings have been inconsistent (Iranmanesh et al., 2023). Hence, the following hypotheses are posed:

H3. Loyalty programs have a significant influence on booking intention.

H3a. The impact of Price is mediated by loyalty programs.

2.4 Price discount promotion

Price discount promotions involve redeemable price reductions at the point of sale (Christou, 2011), providing a direct short-term stimulus to attract and increase sales (Kotler et al., 2017). Aligned with this, potential guests tend to evaluate the value of OTA offers by weighing listings' perceived costs and benefits (Hu & Yang, 2019), preferring to book hotels that offer maximum benefits at low costs. Acknowledging that customers often engage price reductions when booking through OTAs (Hanks et al., 2002), this tool effectively boosts short-term sales (Hu & Yang, 2019) and addresses slow bookings (Lee et al., 2015).

COVID-19 era research has generally shown that this feature, along with others (e.g., advertising) (Yusnita et al., 2021), positively affects BI. However, this has been explored with other features (e.g., offer timing, customer type, consumer reviews, and bundling of mixed membership promotions (Hu & Lee, 2020; Wen et al., 2021; Zhi et al., 2023). Hence, the following hypothesis is posed:

H4. Price discount has a significant influence on booking intention.

2.5 Price

As part of the marketing mix, Price illustrates a products or service's value (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). Although several factors influence BI, only Price generates revenue (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2018). Thus, Price is a critical variable (Lien et al., 2015) when addressing BI. Accordingly, consumers are shown OTAs' comparative prices during information searches, including higher and lower sales prices and those offered by other intermediaries (Kim et al., 2019). Due to the ease and accessibility of OTA apps and this process, potential guests are often attentive to a listed room price and use it as an external reference to help evaluate the value of an available deal (Kim et al., 2019).

This feature has been shown to have a consistent major effect during the pandemic (Kaewkitipong 2021). Hence, it has been included in our model, and the following hypothesis is posed:

H5. Price has a significant influence on booking intention.

2.6 Booking intention

Marketing managers regularly rely on consumer Purchase Intention (PI), a consumer's decision about a future action (Bagozzi, 1983), to pretest and evaluate concepts for predicting sales (Bird & Ehrenberg, 1966) as this informs strategic planning regarding a concept's further development (Morwitz, 2007). This approach extends to online BI, i.e., the willingness to book products or services online (Kambe et al., 2020), especially in the context of online travel app booking

intention, where Internet-assisted reservation systems facilitate the booking and payment of hotel stays. Aligned with supporting these marketing activities, researchers often employ PI as a dependent variable in causal predictive model explorations, estimating statistical structural causal explanations with various independent variables and mediating relationships.

2.7 Gap in the Literature

Previous studies have explained the impact of various minor features alongside groups of other major features found inside and outside apps in composite models. These models often illustrate moderate to high predictive relevance (e.g., R^2 values of 0.50-0.75) (Hair et al., 2011) due to the combined inclusion of major and minor features. However, to our knowledge, no study has explored the strategic impact of minor features' performance advantages (e.g., 0.10) (Hair et al., 2022; Raithel et al., 2011). Acknowledging this, we have developed and evaluated a PLS-SEM model to investigate this phenomenon.

3. Methods

The study examined the impact of minor features in the OTA app mix on consumer online BI during the COVID-19 pandemic. Minor features were identified by analyzing OTAs available on the Apple Store and Google Play (N = 63).

Each OTA was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency analysis), and minor features were identified as those employed by less than 60% of OTA apps. Following this, based on the extant literature, five hypotheses (and sub-hypotheses) were posed regarding four minor features (COVID-19 Label, Discount, Scarcity, Loyalty Program) and Price.

To operationalize the hypotheses, a PLS-SEM predictive model was developed. The first part of the model examined the direct effect of the latent variables on BI (H_1, H_2, H_3, H_4, H_5). The second part explored the effect of the mediating variables (H_{1a}, H_{2a}, H_{3a}) (Fig. 1).

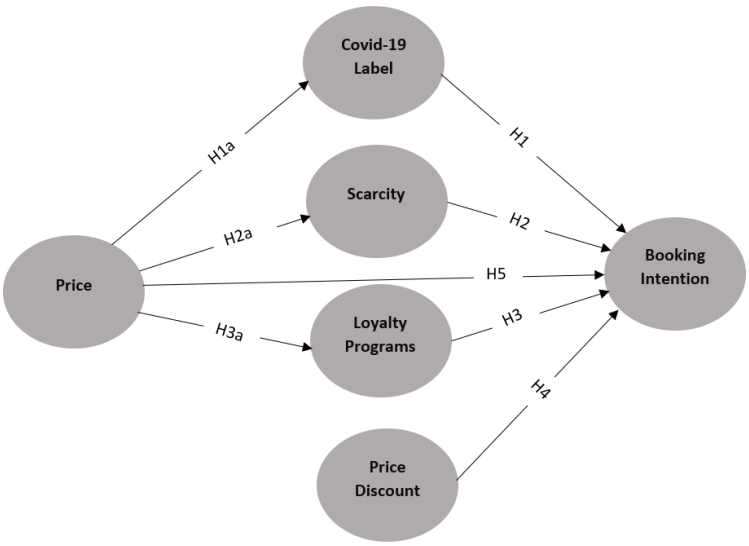

Fig 1: Proposed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model

Drawing further on the literature, a seven-point Likert questionnaire was created to operationalize this model and explore the hypotheses (Table 1).

Table 1: Operational Variables

Variable	Description	Measurement	
COVID-19 Hygiene Label	COVID-19 safe sign on the OTA website and mobile apps.	This feature would positively influence my decision to make a booking.	Pappas & Glyptou, 2020
		This feature would encourage me to make a booking.	
		This feature increases the likelihood that I would book this room.	
Scarcity	The cues indicate "Only 1 room left!", "booked 13 times today", "7 people are looking at this room right now", "on high demand," and "book right now" on the website and mobile	This feature would positively influence my decision to make a booking.	Huang et al., 2019; Teubner & Graul, 2020
		This feature would encourage me to make a booking.	

	apps.	This feature increases the likelihood that I would book this room.	
Loyalty Program	"Free night after 10 stays", and "Hotel points" in a loyalty program that motivates customers to redeem the points on the website and mobile apps.	This feature would positively influence my decision to make a booking.	Christou, 2011; Joe, 2014
		This feature would encourage me to make a booking.	
		This feature increases the likelihood that I would book this room.	
Price Discount	Price cuts, percentage-off, and special deals listed on the OTA website and mobile apps.	This feature would positively influence my decision to make a booking.	Hu & Yang, 2019
		This feature would encourage me to make a booking.	
		This feature increases the likelihood that I would book this room.	
Price	Hotel listed Price on the OTA website and mobile apps.	Price is a consideration when making an online booking for a hotel.	Augustine & Adnan, 2020; Lien et al., 2015
		I tend to book hotels that offer the best service for its Price.	
		I look for hotels offering the best possible price to meet my needs.	
Booking Intention	Consumer intention to book the hotel room through the OTA.	I am likely to use online travel websites to search for hotel deals.	Chen, 2014
		When I need to book a hotel room, I plan to use travel websites.	
		My willingness to book hotel rooms from travel websites is high.	

The study was operationalized in Indonesia with Indonesian consumers; therefore, the questionnaire used a local scenario-based approach and was translated into Indonesian. To address potential ambiguities in the translation, feedback was sought from several native speakers (N = 20) before launching the survey. Subsequently, a social media marketing company advertised the survey on three platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to gather a purposive sample of Indonesian consumers from April 5 to June 15, 2021. This method is particularly useful when identifying or contacting respondents is challenging (Cooper & Schindler, 2014) and helps minimize researcher bias (Luu & Baker, 2021). No incentives were provided to the respondents. A total of 499 valid surveys were collected from OTA customers who had booked a hotel room through an OTA at least once.

The research scenario was introduced to familiarize the participants with the survey. Afterward, respondents rated how each feature would affect their BI. An image of the feature preceded each question. These images were inspired by those found in the 63 OTAs reviewed for this study. Next, participants rated variables related to their BI. The final section collected demographic data.

Results were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). A PLS-SEM design was employed as it enables the investigation of complex models with various constructs and mediating relationships, estimating a statistical structural model to provide causal explanations (Hair et al., 2022).

4. Results

To present the results, first, respondent demographics are presented. Next, the measurement and structural models are assessed, and the path coefficients' statistical significance and relevance are evaluated.

4.1 Demographics

Females (52.51%) and males (45.29%) were the dominant respondent genders. Others included prefer not to say (2%) and others (.20%). Ages were less than 35 (80.15%), 35 to 44 (17.03%), and 45 and above (2.80%). Domicile was reported as Jakarta (12.83%), Surabaya (9.22%), Bandung (4.81%), Medan (2.20%), and other smaller cities (70.94%). Monthly income was less than IDR 2,000,0000 (47.49%), 2,000,000-3,999,999 (27.66%), 4,000,000-5,999,999 (12.22%), 6,000,000-7,999,999 (4.61%), 8,000,000-9,999,999 (3.81%), more than 10,000.000 (4.21%).

4.2 Assessing the Measurement Model

The first step in evaluating PLS-SEM results involves assessing the measurement model. This consists of an examination of (a) Indicator Loadings, (b) Internal Consistency (Cronbach alpha, Composite Reliability), (c) Convergent Validity, and (d) Discriminant Validity.

4.2.1 Indicator loadings

Reflective measurement model assessment begins with analyzing indicator loadings (Hair et al., 2022), which is the relationship between an indicator and its latent variable. i.e., the contribution of an indicator to its relevant constructs. Each loading was found to be above the 0.70 (0.708) threshold. Thus, item reliability is established.

4.2.2 Internal consistency

The next step is to examine internal consistency. The two most often used methods for establishing internal consistency are Cronbach's alpha (Cα) and Composite Reliability (CR). Cronbach's alpha ranged from .827 to .919, whereas CR ranged from .897 to .961. Accordingly, both indicators have a reliability statistic over the required 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2011). Hence, construct reliability is established.

4.2.3 Convergent validity

The third step in measurement model assessment is to address convergent validity (Hair et al., 2022), the extent to which a construct converges with its indicator through an exploration of the average variance extracted (AVE) across all items associated with a particular construct. All items were above .50, which explains more than 50% of the variance. Hence, there are no convergent validity issues.

4.2.4 Discriminant validity

The final step is to assess discriminant validity, the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in terms of how much it correlates with other constructs and how distinctly the indicators represent only the construct. This is explored in several ways. e.g., (a) the Classical Approach (e.g., drawing on the Fornell and Larcker Criterion and Cross Loadings) and (b) the more recent Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio (HTMT) correlation.

4.2.5 Classical approach

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is established when the square root of AVE for a construct exceeds its correlation with all other constructs. Each construct's square root of AVE was greater than its correlation with other constructs, thus providing strong support for discriminant validity.

Cross loadings determine whether a construct's items load more strongly onto its parent construct than others. All items were found to have stronger loadings on their constructs than on others. Hence, discriminant validity is established.

4.2.6 Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

Henseler et al. (2015) proposed a third approach to assess discriminant validity: heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) correlations, where a threshold of 0.85 or less should be used when constructs are conceptually distinct. Results indicated that the ratio is less than the required threshold (.90). Hence, no HTMT issues were found.

4.3 Assessing the structural model

The next step in PLS-SEM is the assessment of the structural model, specifically, the predictive capabilities of the model as indicated by the following criteria: (a) Multicollinearity, (b) Determination (R^2), (c) Blindfolding (Q^2), and (d) Assessing the Path Coefficients.

4.3.1 Multicollinearity

The first step in this procedure is to check for potential multicollinearity issues that might bias results, checking that Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) levels are below the threshold of 5, since greater levels indicate poorly estimated coefficients and questionable p values. All levels were below 5, except for two items (LP2 and S2), which were removed.

4.3.2 Determination R^2

The second step of assessing the structural model is to explore R^2. This indicates the variance explained in each of the endogenous constructs. R^2 ranges from 0 to 1, with values of 0.10 being considered satisfactory in contexts where small measures (e.g., predicting stock returns), in this case, minor features in a highly competitive OTA hotel industry, explain important predictive marginal performance advantages (Hair et al., 2022; Raithel et al., 2011). The resulting model (Fig. 2) indicated R^2 0.298, aligning with the study's purpose of exploring the strategic impact of minor features.

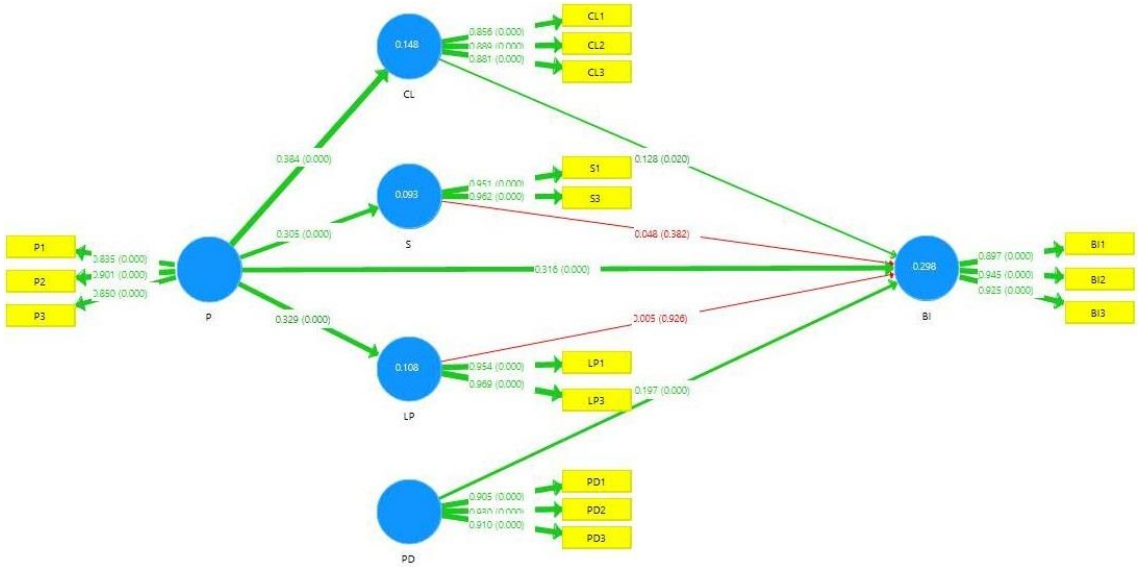

Fig 2. Coefficient of Determination (R^2) and Path Coefficients

4.3.3 Blindfolding test (Q^2)

Model predictive relevance is determined by Q_2, whether the model predicts endogenous latent construct indicators. This value is measured using a blindfolding procedure to explore cross-validated redundancy with a cut-off point of zero, as predictive accuracy is reasonable when values are more than zero for an endogenous latent variable and vice-versa (Sarstedt et al., 2014). Q^2 values for CL, S, LP, and BI were found to be 0.110, 0.082, 0.096, and 0.247, respectively. Hence, the path model has favorable predictive relevance.

4.4.4 Assessing the statistical significance and relevance of the path coefficients

Having substantiated the model's explanatory and predictive power, the final step is to interpret path coefficient relevance, corresponding *t* values, and significance levels (*p*), as well as the hypotheses' direct and mediating relationships.

The results showed that three of the five direct hypotheses were supported. That is, two minor features (H_1 COVID-19 Hygiene Label and H_4 (Price Discount) had a significant influence on BI, as did Price (H_5). However, H_2 (Scarcity) and H_3 (Loyalty Program) were not found to have a significant influence on BI (Table 2).

Table 2. Direct Relationships

	B	T	*P*	Hypothesis
CL -> BI	0.128	2.469	0.020	H_1: Supported
S -> BI	0.048	0.889	0.382^{ns}	H_2: Not Supported
LP -> BI	0.005	0.088	0.930^{ns}	H_3: Not Supported
PD -> BI	0.197	3.693	0.000	H_4: Supported
P -> BI	0.316	5.376	0.000	H_5: Supported

An exploration of mediating relationships showed that one of the three sub-hypotheses (H_{1a}, COVID-19 Hygiene Label) was supported, illustrating a mediating effect with Price. However, two sub-hypotheses (H_{2a} Scarcity, H_{3a} Loyalty Programs) were not supported (Table 3).

Table 3. Mediating Relationships

	B	T	*P*	Hypothesis
P -> CL -> BI	0.049	2.003	0.046	H_{1a}: Supported
	0.365	6.435	0.000	
	0.316	5.448	0.000	
P -> S -> BI	0.014	0.858	0.391	H_{2a}: Not Supported
	0.330	5.576	0.000	
	0.315	5.709	0.000	
P -> LP -> BI	0.001	0.078	0.938	H_{3a}: Not Supported
	0.318	5.096	0.000	
	0.316	5.345	0.000	

H_1 explored whether COVID-19 Hygiene Label (CL) significantly influences BI. The results showed that CL significantly influences BI ($\beta = .128$, $t = 2.469$, $p < .05$). Hence H_1 was supported. The related hypotheses H_{1a} explored the mediating role

of CL. The results showed a significant ($p < .05$) mediating role of CL (β = .049, t = 2.003, $p = .046$). The total effect of P on BI was significant (β = .365, t = 6.435, $p < .001$). With the inclusion of the mediator, the direct effect remained significant (β = .316, t = 5.448, $p < .001$). Thus, CL mediates the relationship between P and BI. Hence, H_{1a} was supported.

H_2 explored whether Scarcity (S) has a significant influence on BI. The results showed that S has an insignificant influence on BI (β = .048, t = .889, $p > .05$). Hence, H_2 was not supported. The related hypothesis, H_{2a}, investigated the mediating role of S. The results showed an insignificant ($p > .05$) mediating role of S (β = .014, t = .858, $p = .391$). The total effect of P on BI was significant (β = .330, t = 5.576, $p < .001$). With the inclusion of the mediator, the direct effect remained significant (β = .315, t = 5.709, $p < .000$). Thus, S did not mediate the relationship between P and BI. Hence, H_{2a} was not supported.

H_3 explored whether Loyalty Programs (LP) significantly influence BI. The results showed that LP has an insignificant influence on BI (β = .005, t = .088, $p > .05$). Hence, H_3 was not supported. The related hypotheses H_{3a}, explored the mediating role of LP. The results showed an insignificant ($p > .05$) mediating role of LP (β = .001, t = .078, $p = 0.938$). The total effect of P on BI was significant (β = .318, t = 5.096, $p < .001$). The direct effect was significant with the inclusion of the mediator (β = .316, t = 5.345, $p < .001$). Hence, LP did not mediate the relationship between P and BI.

H_4 explored whether Price Discount (PD) significantly affects BI. The results showed that PD significantly affects BI (β = .197, t = 3.693, $p < .001$). Hence, H_4 was supported.

H_5 explored whether Price (P) has a significant influence on BI. The results showed that P significantly affects BI (β = .316, t = 5.376, $p < .001$). Hence, H5 was supported.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Acknowledging the absence of a causal predictive model focused on the strategic impact (e.g., 0.10) of OTA's minor features (those included in less than 60% of OTAs) during the COVID-19 Pandemic, we, through frequency analysis, identified four minor features (COVID-19 Hygiene Label, Price Discount, Scarcity, Loyalty Program), posed related direct and mediating hypotheses, and tested a relevant PLS-SEM model.

COVID-19 Hygiene Label was found to have a direct effect (H_1) on BI and a mediating effect (H_{1a}) on Price's influence on BI. These results support literature indicating that consumer concerns about COVID-19 Hygiene Label and related communication contribute significantly to BI (Bove & Benoit, 2020; Jimenez-Barreto et al. 2021; Ju & Yang, 2021) as well as COVID-19 Hygiene Label communication's interaction effect with Price (Pappas & Glyptou, 2020), as COVID-19 Hygiene Labels provide tourists with trustworthy pandemic-related information (Bove & Benoit, 2020). However, these results are converse with literature that has found the contrary (Volgger et al., 2021).

Scarcity was found to have neither a significant direct effect (H_2) nor a mediating influence (H_{2A}) on Price. These findings align with literature arguing that hotels should avoid such marketing tactics due to their potential negative effect on consumers' value perceptions (Li et al., 2023). However, this finding contradicts the literature suggesting these strategies lead to stronger BI (Biswas, 2023; Nake, 2023).

Loyalty Programs were found to have no significant direct effect on BI (H_3) nor a mediating effect (H_{3a}) on Price. These results support studies illustrating that customers do not value loyalty points (Iranmanesh et al., 2023; Saber, 2021). However, this contrasts with studies reporting that consumers value Loyalty Points during the booking process (Chanchomsri, 2023).

Price Discount (H_4) was found to directly affect BI. This result is in accordance with literature that has demonstrated that price discounts have the potential to boost BI (Hu & Yang, 2019), as Price Discounts have a direct influence on consumer value perceptions (Yusnita et al., 2021). However, this finding does not support the literature showing that Price Discounts do not encourage BI (Zhi et al., 2023).

Price (H5) was found to have a significant effect on BI, consistent with other studies (Kaewkitipong et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021), but has a significant relationship with a mediating factor, COVID-19 Hygiene Label (H_{1a}).

This study has shown that minor features played a strategic role in the competitive marketing mix during the COVID-19 era, accounting for 0.298 R^2 of BI. This result and the accompanying model further the literature and inform the strategic development and marketing practices of OTA App developers who wish to be competitive in pandemic eras by addressing marginal performance advantages of minor OTA features (e.g., .10). Suggestions for OTA developers, in addition to minor features' strategic importance, is to consider performance advantages alongside the cost and maintenance of these features. Additionally, the findings extend and enrich existing theories (i.e., the Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behavior, Technology Acceptance Model), as relevant to the focus of this study: the impact of strategic elements in the online travel agencies' marketing mix.

Overall, the study informs OTA marketing development practices and extends the literature during pandemic eras (e.g., COVID-19), but limitations exist that provide opportunities for future research. The medium-sized sample (N = 499), for instance, may be under-representative of a country as diverse as Indonesia, as well as the larger global context. The model's 0.298 R^2 exceeds the 0.10 threshold for competitive advantages; however, further research is recommended to explore additional determinants of online consumer BI. Lastly, while the study highlights features potentially relevant to pandemic eras, additional research is needed for post-pandemic periods.

Disclosure and Ethics statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Data Availability Statement:

Data is available upon reasonable request. Inquiries regarding this article may be directed to the corresponding author, John R. Baker, at the Creative Language Center, Ton Duc Thang University), Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, via email (drjohnrbaker@tdtu.edu.vn). https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3379-4751

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Paradisiacal Lived Experiences of Tourists in Islas de Gigantes

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Abstract: This study explores the viewpoints and experiences of tourists at Islas de Gigantes, a captivating tourist destination located in the Philippines. This research aims to unravel the complex factors that influence tourists' perception of Gigantes as an authentic paradise, using a combination of interviews and observations. This study explores the underlying motives of tourists, their interactions with the local environment and community, and their overall level of contentment during their travels. Moreover, it carefully examines the complex relationship between tourism and the remarkable variety of biodiversity of plants and animals found on these islands. It places special importance on the long-term viability of activities like scallop harvesting and their compatibility with efforts to protect the environment and promote the welfare of local communities. This analysis examines the economic consequences of tourism for local communities, emphasizing the crucial role that tourism plays in promoting local economic growth while also acknowledging the possible disruptions that may occur. The study reveals intricate patterns and underlying patterns, enhancing our understanding of idyllic travel experiences. This research considerably contributes to the global discussion on paradisiacal locations by exposing these findings to a comparison analysis with previous literature. Additionally, it provides practical suggestions to individuals involved in the tourism industry, highlighting the significance of responsible and sustainable actions that protect the natural surroundings and conserve the local cultural heritage. Although acknowledging the inherent constraints of any research undertaking, this study provides guidance for future inquiries. This statement proposes potential areas for future research, including longitudinal studies and evaluations of climate resilience, with the aim of improving the sustainability and resilience of tourism in picturesque locations in an increasingly volatile world. This research offers valuable insights into the enticing appeal of Islas de Gigantes, as well as enhances our comprehension of how pleasant destinations can coexist harmoniously with the environment and local communities, serving as an exemplary model for responsible and sustainable tourism practices worldwide.

Keywords*:* Sustainable Tourism, Ecological Conservation, Tourist Perceptions, Community Empowerment, Islas de Gigantes Paradisiacal Destination

1. Introduction

The Gigantes Islands in the Philippines beckon travellers with their pristine beauty and untouched landscapes. Nestled in the municipality of Carles in Iloilo, these islands offer a tranquil escape far from the usual tourist hubs. While gaining popularity, they retain their calm nature, devoid of the lively beach parties found elsewhere. Their allure lies in exquisite landscapes, crystal-clear waters, white sand beaches, and diverse marine life. Adding to the appeal are unique caverns and rock formations reminiscent of Palawan. The islands comprise two main ones - Gigantes Norte and Gigantes Sur - and ten smaller islets, each boasting its own scenic wonders. Recent infrastructural developments by the Department of Public Works and Highways (2023) have played a significant role in their growing popularity. An 8.86-kilometer concrete road now provides easier and safer access to the islands' myriad attractions. These improvements enhance not only transport but also the potential for increased economic activity and opportunities in the region. The combination of natural beauty and modern conveniences positions Gigantes Islands (Debuayan, 2013), as a unique destination for those seeking a blend of serenity and accessibility. However, with increasing tourism (Lim, 2023) comes the need for comprehensive travel guides that blend insights from various sources. This is crucial to assist first-time visitors in planning and navigating their trips efficiently (UNDP, 2015). While enjoying the islands' untarnished beauty, it's important to consider (Vito, 2023) the impact of tourism and infrastructure development on the local ecology and community. Ensuring sustainable growth requires a delicate balance, preserving the islands' natural treasures and cultural heritage for future generations.

This research aims to unravel the complex factors that influence tourists' perception of Gigantes as an authentic paradise, using a combination of interviews and observations. The results of this study will form basis for developing a detailed travel guide that promotes sustainable tourism practices and encourages respectful interaction with the local environment and community. By embracing this approach, we can ensure that the Gigantes Islands continue to offer a captivating escape for generations to come.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To delve into the perceptions and experiences of tourists in Islas de Gigantes, focusing on understanding the elements and features of the islands that contribute to paradisiacal perceptions and assessing any discrepancies between expectations and realizations.
2. To explore the impact of tourism on the unique biodiversity of Gigantes Islands, especially focusing on the interaction between tourists and the local flora and fauna, including the endemic species.
3. To assess the sustainability of current tourism practices in alignment with environmental conservation, local community well-being, and the effects on local marine life, particularly the harvesting of scallops.
4. To investigate the economic contributions of tourism to the local communities in Gigantes Islands, examining the benefits and potential disruptions or conflicts, and evaluating the empowerment and overall well-being of the local populace through tourism.
5. To formulate informed and balanced strategies and policy recommendations aimed at optimizing the tourism experience while emphasizing environmental conservation, sustainable economic development, and the well-being of local communities in the Gigantes Islands.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to a nuanced understanding of sustainable tourism within the paradisiacal context of Islas de Gigantes (Scheyvens, 1999). By exploring tourist perceptions and experiences, this research aligns with global constructs of tourism studies, which emphasize the importance of visitor satisfaction, destination image, and experiential value in determining the success of a tourism destination (Chen & Chen, 2010). Additionally, this study addresses the global concept of sustainability, as outlined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), assessing the equilibrium between environmental conservation, economic profitability, and socio-cultural responsibility within the local tourism practices of Islas de Gigantes (UNWTO, 2005).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Related Studies

In exploring tourism experiences in similar paradisiacal settings, several studies offer insights into tourist perceptions, motivations, impacts, and the pursuit of sustainability.

A study by Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2012) delves into the understanding of the nature of the tourist experience in islands and coastal areas, exploring elements like motivation, satisfaction, and emotional experiences. Their findings suggest that the emotional and psychological elements of the experience significantly impact overall satisfaction and the likelihood of recommending the destination to others, underlining the importance of considering these aspects in destination management and marketing.

Another noteworthy study by Jones, Scott, and Khaled (2016) analyses the interplay between biodiversity and tourism in island destinations. Their research highlights the significance of biodiversity conservation in maintaining the appeal of paradisiacal destinations and underscores the need for strategic management to mitigate the adverse effects of tourism activities on local ecosystems, particularly in destinations hosting endemic species.

In examining the sustainability of tourism practices, Koens, Postma, and Papp (2018) present a comprehensive exploration of the impacts of tourism on local communities in island destinations. Their research sheds light on the necessity for a balance between tourism development and community well-being, emphasizing community participation in tourism planning and management to ensure the equitable distribution of benefits (Ebay, 2023) and the preservation of local cultures and traditions.

Stronza and Durham (2008) and Detourista (2016, July 22) provide a valuable perspective on the relationships between local communities and tourists, highlighting the mutual influences and the potential for empowerment and learning on both sides. Their work suggests that responsible and ethical interactions between tourists and local communities can contribute to increased understanding and appreciation of different cultures and can foster positive change in both tourist and host communities.

The concept of sustainable development in tourism has been exhaustively studied by Saarinen (2006), who investigates the potential for sustainable tourism in fragile ecosystems. His research underscores the importance

of adopting sustainability principles in tourism development to ensure the long-term viability of destinations, particularly those in sensitive ecological settings, focusing on minimizing negative impacts and maximizing benefits for local communities and the environment.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Given the title "Exploring Paradisiacal Perspectives: Lived Experiences of Tourists in Islas de Gigantes," the most applicable theoretical framework that was applied in this study was the Experience Economy by Pine and Gilmore (1999). This theory was particularly relevant as it explored how individuals, especially tourists, sought memorable and transformative experiences, valuing these over the consumption of services or goods. This shift in paradigm to experience provided a foundational lens through which the diverse and unique experiences of tourists in paradisiacal destinations like Islas de Gigantes were understood and interpreted. The application of this theory offered insights into what constituted authenticity and value for tourists in such locales and how these destinations could curate enriching and memorable experiences for its visitors. The study, by adopting this theoretical perspective, delved into how the experiences of tourists contributed to their perception of the place as a paradise.

3. Methodology

Research design: In this study, a qualitative research design was employed to explore the lived experiences of tourists in Islas de Gigantes and their perceptions of the destination as a paradise. The qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of tourists' experiences, motivations, perceptions, and interactions within the paradisiacal setting of Islas de Gigantes. It facilitated the exploration of subjective experiences and the generation of rich, detailed data.

Sampling method: The study utilized purposive sampling (Gonzaga et al., 2023) to select participants who had visited Islas de Gigantes. This sampling method was instrumental in ensuring that participants had relevant experiences and could provide insightful information pertinent to the study objectives (Balida & Encarnacion, 2020). The sampling yielded (13) tourists who had visited the islands within the last year and were willing to share their experiences and perceptions were included in the sample.

Table 1: Participants

Tourist no.	Theme	Sub-theme
1	Perception of Paradise	Visual Appeal of Islas de Gigantes
2	Perception of Paradise	Visual Appeal of Islas de Gigantes
3	Perception of Paradise	Visual Appeal of Islas de Gigantes
4	Interaction with Biodiversity	Tourists' Engagement with Endemic Species
5	Interaction with Biodiversity	Tourists' Engagement with Endemic Species
6	Interaction with Biodiversity	Tourists' Engagement with Endemic Species
7	Cultural Engagement and Local Community	Contributions of Tourism to Local Communities
8	Cultural Engagement and Local Community	Contributions of Tourism to Local Communities
9	Sustainability Concerns and Environmental	Impact of Tourism on Marine Life
10	Sustainability Concerns and Environmental	Impact of Tourism on Marine Life
11	Discrepancy between Expectations and Realizations	Discrepancies between Expectations and Experiences
12	Discrepancy between Expectations and Realizations	Discrepancies between Expectations and Experiences
13	Discrepancy between Expectations and Realizations	Discrepancies between Expectations and Experiences

Table 1 presents the number of participants representing the tourists who have visited the island of Gigantes and categorized responses to the interview broken down as themes and sub-themes.

Data collection: Data for this study were primarily collected through semi-structured interviews, guided by a set of carefully crafted questions that were derived from an extensive review of existing literature on paradisiacal

tourism experiences. These questions were further validated through pilot interviews with a small group of participants who had visited Islas de Gigantes. This process ensured that the interview questions were relevant, comprehensive, and capable of eliciting in-depth responses. The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and reflections in their own words. This method provided flexibility during the interviews, enabling the researcher to probe further into participants' responses for clarification and depth, while also allowing participants to express themselves freely. In addition to interviews, observations were conducted to gain insights into the interaction between tourists and the local environment and community. These observations were guided by a predefined set of criteria and focused on behaviours, interactions, and reactions observed in the natural setting of Islas de Gigantes. Field notes were taken diligently during these observations to ensure the accurate documentation of relevant data points.

Data analysis: The data collected from interviews and observations were analysed using thematic analysis. This method involved the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the data. Initial codes were generated, and similar codes were grouped into broader themes reflecting the participants' experiences and perceptions. The analysis aimed at interpreting various aspects of the research topic and answering the research questions by extracting meaningful insights from the collected data (Crisostomo et al., 2020). The iterative process of thematic analysis facilitated the exploration of nuanced perspectives and the identification of commonalities and differences in the lived experiences of tourists in Islas de Gigantes.

4. Findings

The findings section presents a comprehensive analysis of tourists' experiences and perceptions during their visits to Islas de Gigantes. Through thematic exploration, this section illuminates the multifaceted dimensions of the island's allure, encompassing its breath-taking landscapes, diverse biodiversity, cultural interactions, sustainability considerations, and the alignment (or misalignment) of expectations with reality. By delving into the narratives provided by tourists, this section offers insights into the unique blend of natural beauty, cultural immersion, and environmental consciousness that collectively contribute to Islas de Gigantes' status as an extraordinary destination.

Table 2: Major themes

Themes	Description
Perception of Paradise	Tourists consistently perceived Islas de Gigantes as a paradise due to its natural beauty, pristine beaches, and clear waters. They often used words like "unspoiled," "enchanting," and "tranquil" to describe their experiences.
Interaction with Biodiversity	Tourists expressed fascination and delight with the unique biodiversity of Islas de Gigantes. Encounters with endemic species and marine life exploration were highlights, highlighting the significance of biodiversity in shaping their experiences.
Cultural Engagement and Local Community	Engaging with local cultures and communities greatly impacted tourists' experiences. The hospitality and warmth of the local people enhanced the sense of connection and enriched the travel experience.
Sustainability Concerns and Environmental	Tourists showed concerns about sustainability, indicating an awareness of environmental conservation needs. Discussions on sustainable tourism practices like waste management and eco-friendly activities were common.
Discrepancy between Expectations and Realizations	Some tourists reported differences between their pre-visit expectations and the realities they encountered. These discrepancies often related to amenities, accessibility, and infrastructural development, leading to reflections on paradisiacal experiences and the role of unmet expectations.

Tables 2 shows the descriptions of the major themes derived from the participants' responses. Tourists to Islas de Gigantes were captivated by its stunning natural beauty, diverse marine life, and welcoming local culture. They described it as a "paradise" thanks to pristine beaches, unique species, and warm hospitality. However, some faced unmet expectations regarding amenities, sparking conversation about balancing tourism with environmental protection and managing travel expectations.

Table 3: Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Picturesque Landscapes	Visual Appeal of Islas de Gigantes	- Explores the visual elements of the landscape in Islas de Gigantes that tourists find appealing. - Includes unique topography, vegetation, and the surrounding marine environment.
Interaction with Local Biodiversity	Tourists' Engagement with Endemic Species	- Sheds light on how tourists engage with and perceive the diverse flora and fauna, especially endemic species.
Sustainability and Environmental Conservation	Impact of Tourism on Marine Life	- Examines the observed and perceived effects of tourist activities on marine life, including scallop harvesting.
Local Community and Economy	Contributions of Tourism to Local Communities	- Explores how tourism affects the economic and social fabric of local communities, including benefits and conflicts.
Tourists' Expectations and Realizations	Discrepancies between Expectations and Experiences	- Scrutinizes the varied experiences of tourists, focusing on discrepancies between their expectations and reality.

Table 3 indicates that beyond Islas de Gigantes' captivating visuals, researchers delved deeper into tourist interactions with nature, sustainability concerns, community impacts, and unmet expectations. They explored how visitors experience the island's unique flora and fauna, including concerns about marine life conservation, and how tourism both benefits and challenges local communities. Finally, they examined the gap between idyllic pre-trip visions and the realities encountered, offering valuable insights into tourist perceptions and travel dynamics.

4.1 Narratives

Theme 1: Picturesque landscapes - Sub-theme: Visual appeal of Islas de Gigantes

"The vibrant colours of the scenery were mesmerizing," shared one participant, emphasizing the visual allure of Islas de Gigantes. The stunning landscapes seemed to captivate many tourists, with stories abounding of the unique topographical features and lush vegetation that decorate the islands. *"It was like stepping into a painting, every element was so vivid and full of life,"* another visitor expressed, highlighting the enriching and immersive nature of the landscapes.

Theme 2: Interaction with local biodiversity- Sub-theme: Tourists' engagement with endemic species

Several narratives revolved around encounters with the local flora and fauna. One tourist recalled, *"Seeing the unique species that inhabit the islands was a thrilling experience. It made me appreciate the richness of our planet's biodiversity."* This emphasizes the importance of interaction with local biodiversity in shaping tourists' experiences.

Theme 3: Sustainability and environmental conservation- Sub-theme: Impact of tourism on marine life

A recurring theme in the narratives was the impact of tourism activities on marine life. One tourist remarked, *"I was concerned about the effect our presence might have on the delicate marine ecosystem, especially the scallops which are so abundant in the area."* This narrative reflects a growing awareness and concern among tourists regarding the sustainability of their activities.

Theme 4: Local community and economy- Sub-theme: Contributions of tourism to local communities

The benefits and challenges of tourism to local communities were central in participants' stories. A visitor mentioned, *"The influx of tourists surely brings economic benefits, but I wonder about the social disruptions it might cause to the local communities."* This illustrates the multifaceted impact of tourism on local communities and the economy.

Theme 5: Tourists' expectations and realizations- Sub-theme: Discrepancies between expectations and experiences

Many narratives highlighted the contrast between initial expectations and the actual experiences of tourists. *"I expected serene and untouched islands, but the crowd was overwhelming,"* said one participant, signalling a discrepancy between expectation and realization. The varying degrees of satisfaction among tourists (Mayuga, 2017) underlined the diversity in expectations and perceived fulfilment of these expectations during their visit.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The analysis concerning the paradisiacal perspective of tourists, which unveils the intrinsic and extrinsic elements contributing to such perceptions, aligns with the insights presented by Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) about the essence of experiential realms in tourism. They argue that the dimensions of experience significantly contribute to the overall perception and satisfaction of tourists. The intricate interactions with local biodiversity and the discernible impact on endemic species correlate with the notions posited by Buckley (2019). He discusses the nuanced experiences and impacts of tourists interacting with local ecosystems, emphasizing the pivotal role of such interactions in fostering an appreciation for biodiversity and ecological conservation.

The emerging theme regarding the sustainability of tourist activities echoes the global discourse on sustainable tourism delineated by Koens, Postma, and Papp (2018). They spotlight the increasing urgency to integrate sustainability in tourism practices to mitigate the potential detrimental impacts on local environments and communities. The reflections captured in the study mirror the global dialogue on fostering responsible and sustainable tourism. The discussions surrounding the socio-economic implications of tourism on local communities resonate with the concepts elaborated by Sharpley (2018) and Buckley et al (2019). This probes the multifaceted impacts of tourism on community well-being and economic prosperity, reflecting on the delicate balance between tourism-driven economic gains and socio-cultural integrity.

The narratives depicting the divergence between tourists' expectations and their actual experiences correlate with the observations made by Ryan (2018). He evaluates the dynamics between anticipatory expectations and ensuing experiences in the tourism context, underscoring the influence such disparities can have on overall tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. This study advances the understanding of tourists' experiences and perceptions of Islas de Gigantes in relation to global tourism constructs and theories. The extrapolated insights from the findings (Diaz et al, 2019; WCED, 1987) are significant in enhancing the scholarly conversation on sustainable tourism, paradisiacal perspectives, destination choice, and interaction with local ecosystems and communities.

5.2 Comparative Analysis

In the comparative analysis, the findings of this study portray both concordance and divergences with the established literature. The paradisiacal perspective of tourists found in this study, featuring intrinsic and extrinsic elements contributing to such perceptions, shares semblance with Binkhorst and Dekker's (2009) elucidation on the essence of experiential realms in tourism. The parallel is evident in the valuation of diverse experiential dimensions significantly contributing to the overall perception and satisfaction of tourists. There are variances when examining the interaction between tourists and local biodiversity. While Buckley (2019) extensively discusses the profound impacts of such interactions in fostering appreciation for biodiversity and ecological conservation, the present study brings forth a spectrum of interactions, some of which entail unintended consequences, revealing a more intricate dynamic between tourist activities and local ecosystems.

This study builds upon the global discussion on sustainable tourism, echoing concerns raised by Koens et al. (2018) and Sharpley (2018). However, it delves deeper by examining the specific nuances of sustainable practices in Islas de Gigantes, where tourism's impact on both environmental conservation and local community well-being must be carefully considered. The study sheds light on the unique interplay between tourism-driven economic gains and the preservation of local socio-cultural integrity, a point not as prominently addressed in existing literature. Finally, it goes beyond Ryan's (2018) and Esmilla's (2023) exploration of expectation-experience gaps by highlighting a diverse range of discrepancies between tourists' anticipated paradisiacal experience and their actual encounters in Islas de Gigantes, offering valuable insights into how these disparities shape overall satisfaction and loyalty. In short, this study contributes a contextualized and granular understanding of sustainable tourism practices and their impact on a specific island destination.

5.3 Implications of the Findings

This study's implications reach far beyond Islas de Gigantes, influencing future tourism development, management, and research on both local and global scales. Understanding tourists' paradisiacal expectations can guide refined marketing strategies and tailored sustainable practices that maximize appeal while ensuring a delicate balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and community well-being. Locally, Islas de Gigantes can implement context-specific sustainable practices that engage local communities and ensure they share in the economic benefits of tourism.

Globally, the study reinforces the urgency of integrating sustainability principles into destination management, offering valuable insights for developing responsible tourism policies and guidelines. Furthermore, it opens doors for future research exploring tourist-wildlife interactions, optimizing sustainable practices, and understanding the impact of paradisiacal experiences on destination loyalty. Longitudinal studies can also shed light on the long-term effects of tourism development in destinations like Islas de Gigantes, informing sustainable practices for the future. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the crucial need to balance economic growth with environmental protection and community well-being, promoting responsible tourism that safeguards paradisiacal destinations for generations to come.

6. Conclusion

The first objective of this study is to comprehensively investigate the perceptions and experiences of tourists in Islas de Gigantes, focusing on understanding the elements contributing to paradisiacal perceptions and assessing any discrepancies between expectations and realizations. Findings reveal that tourists are attracted to the island's pristine natural beauty, vibrant biodiversity, and warm hospitality. However, discrepancies between expectations and realities suggest the need for tailored tourism strategies to enhance visitor satisfaction. This underscores the importance of aligning tourist expectations with the actual experience to optimize their perception of Islas de Gigantes as a paradisiacal destination.

The second objective is to explore the impact of tourism on the unique biodiversity of Gigantes Islands, particularly focusing on interactions between tourists and the local flora and fauna. This investigation highlights the importance of responsible tourism practices in minimizing negative impacts on the island's biodiversity. Educating visitors about conservation efforts is crucial to promote harmonious coexistence between tourists and endemic species. By understanding and mitigating the environmental impact of tourism activities, the sustainability of Islas de Gigantes' biodiversity can be preserved for future generations.

The third objective is to assess the sustainability of current tourism practices in alignment with environmental conservation, local community well-being, and effects on local marine life, including scallop harvesting. This evaluation emphasizes the necessity of implementing sustainable tourism practices to mitigate environmental degradation and ensure the well-being of local communities. Addressing concerns such as scallop harvesting through context-specific initiatives is vital to balance economic benefits with ecological preservation. By promoting responsible tourism practices, Islas de Gigantes can sustain its natural resources while supporting the livelihoods of local residents.

The fourth objective is to investigate the economic contributions of tourism to local communities in Gigantes Islands, examining benefits, potential disruptions, and evaluating the empowerment and overall well-being of the local populace. This examination demonstrates the significant economic benefits of tourism to Islas de Gigantes while highlighting the importance of equitable distribution of benefits and minimizing disruptions to local lives. Empowering local communities through tourism initiatives is essential for long-term sustainability, ensuring that economic gains are accompanied by social and cultural preservation.

The fifth objective is to formulate informed and balanced strategies and policy recommendations aimed at optimizing the tourism experience while emphasizing environmental conservation, sustainable economic development, and the well-being of local communities in the Gigantes Islands. Based on the study's findings, these recommendations aim to foster a harmonious future for the islands, where paradisiacal beauty coexists with the prosperity and welfare of its inhabitants. By prioritizing responsible tourism, environmental conservation, and community well-being, Islas de Gigantes can continue to thrive as a sustainable and captivating destination for tourists and locals alike.

7. Recommendations

Table 4: Matrix of recommendations

Area of Focus	Recommendations	Responsible Party
1. Destination Promotion	- Develop targeted marketing campaigns highlighting the unique paradisiacal elements of Islas de Gigantes. - Collaborate with travel influencers to showcase the destination's natural beauty and cultural richness.	Local Tourism Authorities Marketing Agencies
2. Tourist Experiences	- Diversify tour offerings to cater to various tourist motivations, from adventure seekers to relaxation seekers. - Offer guided eco-tours that educate tourists about the importance of biodiversity conservation.	Tour Operators Local Tour Guides
3. Biodiversity Protection	- Implement strict regulations for wildlife and habitat protection in popular tourist areas. - Conduct regular environmental awareness programs for tourists to promote responsible interactions with nature.	Environmental Authorities Local Conservation Organizations
4. Sustainable Practices	- Encourage eco-friendly accommodations and activities. - Introduce eco-certifications for businesses adhering to sustainability standards.	Accommodation Providers Activity Operators Local Government
5. Socio-economic Balance	- Establish community-based tourism initiatives that directly involve local residents in tourism activities. - Allocate a portion of tourism revenue for community development and cultural preservation.	Local Community Organizations Tourism Development Agencies

The recommendations in Table 4 suggest that to turn Islas de Gigantes into a tourist haven that thrives sustainably, marketing campaigns should trumpet its paradisiacal beauty while prioritizing environmental and community well-being. Partnering with influencers can showcase untouched nature and vibrant culture, while diverse tours cater to all preferences. Responsible ecotourism, fostered through guided tours, strict regulations, and awareness programs, will ensure conservation efforts flourish alongside tourism. Eco-friendly practices through certified accommodations and activities are key, while community involvement through tourism initiatives and revenue sharing will create a harmonious and prosperous future for both visitors and locals.

8. Limitations

Despite careful selection, the study's sample size limits generalizations to broader tourist populations. Additionally, findings are specific to Islas de Gigantes and may not apply directly to other destinations. Logistical constraints, social desirability bias in self-reported data, limited time frame, and language barriers all played a role in the study's limitations. While external factors like weather were not directly explored, they can significantly impact tourist experiences. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into tourist perspectives in Islas de Gigantes and lays groundwork for future research in similar contexts.

9. Suggestions for Future Research

In the realm of future research in paradisiacal tourism destinations like Islas de Gigantes, several promising avenues await exploration. Firstly, longitudinal studies could be pursued to trace how tourist perceptions and experiences evolve over time. Such research could consider the impact of seasonality, changing tourism infrastructure, and shifting visitor demographics on the destination's allure. Secondly, there is a need for comprehensive environmental impact assessments to gauge the effects of tourism on local biodiversity, particularly the endemic species, and devise sustainable ecotourism strategies. Moreover, researchers might delve into the lasting effects of tourism on local communities, delving into economic, social, and cultural dimensions to better understand community empowerment and cultural preservation.

Further research may involve segmenting tourists based on their motivations, preferences, and behaviours, facilitating more targeted marketing strategies and tailored experiences. As paradisiacal destinations are

vulnerable to climate change, future studies could focus on climate resilience strategies to safeguard their natural beauty and appeal. Evaluating the effectiveness of tourism policies and governance structures, particularly at local and national levels, in promoting sustainable practices and community well-being is another fruitful avenue. Innovative destination marketing approaches, encompassing digital and sustainable strategies, warrant exploration to attract responsible tourists while minimizing negative impacts.

Investigating the impact of visitor education programs on responsible tourism behaviour and conservation efforts in paradisiacal settings can contribute valuable insights. Comparative research across multiple paradisiacal destinations could uncover commonalities and differences in tourist perceptions, experiences, and sustainability challenges, offering a broader perspective. Lastly, developing strategies for crisis management and risk mitigation in paradisiacal destinations, especially in the face of natural disasters or global crises, is a pressing concern. These research directions hold the potential to guide destination management organizations, policymakers, and stakeholders in enhancing the sustainability, resilience, and overall quality of tourism experiences in paradisiacal settings.

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The Competitiveness of Tourist Destinations: A Review of the Scientific Literature

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Abstract: The competitiveness of tourist destinations worldwide is of vital importance for any destination that wishes to develop and improve its positioning in the global, national and/or regional market, because the actors of tourist destinations are aware that the greater the number of tourists and tourist spending in the destination, the greater the economic development that directly and indirectly affects the different actors, the ultimate objective being to improve the quality of life of the people in the community. Therefore, this study focuses on carrying out a review of the scientific literature on the competitiveness of tourist destinations, with the objective of identifying the dimensions, factors and indicators used in the different models of destination competitiveness, which can be applied to a tourist destination at the present time and have greater clarity when evaluating it. In this sense, a bibliographic review of 40 scientific articles from Scopus and Science Direct published between 2000 and 2021 was carried out, of which 29 articles were selected based on the criteria of the proposed models of competitiveness of tourist destinations, factors and indicators used. The results of the study contemplate a theoretical framework of competitiveness in itself, the competitiveness of tourist destinations and the models of competitiveness of tourist destinations, making an analysis of the differences and similarities between them; likewise, indicators used to analyze the destination are presented, and finally, studies that have used these theories and models in different countries are presented. Finally, it is concluded that the theories of the competitiveness of tourist destinations that have most influenced these models have been those proposed by Ritchie and Crouch, and Dwyer and Kim, since they have between 7 and 9 factors in common and 57 indicators.

Key words: Tourism, Comparative Advantage, Dimensions, Factors, Indicators.

1. Introduction

Competitiveness is not the only aspect that companies must take into account when designing their strategies to attract more customers or, in the case of tourism, more tourists (Lopez et al., 2023; Olavarria et al., 2023). Porter (2000) indicates that competitiveness now encompasses different areas, not only companies but also nations, with the aim of safeguarding their prosperity and/or increasing it, with value being the most requested by customers in order to achieve the longed-for customer satisfaction.

In the year 2019 according to the World Travel & Tourism Council [WTT] (2020) the tourism sector contributed 10.3% to the world gross domestic product, being this sector responsible for 1 out of every 10 jobs in the world; the World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] (2020) indicates that in the year 2019 tourism had an income of 1, 481,000 million dollars; being one of the developing sectors that contributed to the economic growth of a nation. Zadeh and Kilic (2021) argue that tourism competitiveness is relevant to stimulate tourism flows to a destination and the contribution it has to the Gross Domestic Product worldwide. Therefore, different countries design strategies to attract more tourists to visit the different resources and attractions of a geographical area for a long period of time, benefiting the community, city, and country through tourism revenues.

When speaking of a destination, it is important to refer to Buhalis (2000) who mentions that the destination experience is composed of the resources located in the regions, as well as the basic and tourist infrastructure; however, destinations do not necessarily refer to a geographical area delimitation, but rather the destination is now a concept of perceptions, since it can be made up of different countries that involve a tour for several days. The most important thing about a destination is that it offers a quality product with value and that it is differentiated so that it can compete with other destinations.

1.1 Objectives

The objective of this study was to identify the dimensions, factors and indicators used in the different competitiveness models of tourist destinations so that they can be applied to a current tourist destination and have greater clarity when evaluating it. Furthermore, it is expected to know if it positively or negatively

influences tourist destinations, as well as the consequences on the actors where tourist activities are carried out.

2. Literature Review

In relation to the competitiveness of tourist destinations, this has been studied by different authors, using methodologies through interviews with experts on the subject from different countries; however, it is a topic that continues to generate controversy; for Ritchie and Crouch (2003) a destination is competitive when it focuses on "its capacity to increase tourist spending, attract more visitors and offer them satisfactory experiences" (p.21), having a positive impact on improving the well-being of the citizens who live in the destination with a focus on preserving resources.

In this sense, there have been several studies with different approaches that are related to the competitiveness of destinations, some focus on profitability, others on economic growth, some relate destination productivity with competitiveness and others focus on the involvement of public and private tourism management participation in the competitiveness of destinations, as well as the identification of unique attributes in the destination to achieve competitiveness (Pulido and Sanchez, 2010; Cucculelli and Goffi, 2016; Knežević et al., 2015; Armenski et al., 2017; De la Peña et al., 2017; Toral et al., 2017), as well as sustainability being one of the determinants present in the tourism destination models of Ritchie and Crouch (2003) and Dwyer and Kim (2003), which are intended to be studied to know how they relate to the perspective held on the competitiveness of destinations, and whether these models vary depending on the resources and attractions, as well as infrastructure and tourism services that a destination has.

On the other hand, when reviewing the theory on the competitiveness of tourist destinations there is talk of destination dimensions, determinants and factors, for such case Ritchie and Crouch (2003) speak of dimensions explaining that the Competitiveness of tourist destinations is multidimensional by the magnitude that covers the analysis, indicating that the traditional investigations are focused on the economic dimensions in relation to the strength and performance of tourist destinations; in that same orientation Dwyer, et. (2004) citing Crouch and Ritchie, 1999, reveal that there are certain determinants for a destination to achieve a certain level of competitiveness, indicating that basic resources and support factors are the fundamental elements for achieving this objective.

The interesting thing about studies on competitiveness will be to determine which of these factors of destination competitiveness coincide and which of these should be considered in new models of tourism destination competitiveness.

3. Methods

Likewise, a bibliographic review was conducted of 40 scientific articles from the Scopus and Science Direct databases that published between 2000 and 2021, from which 29 articles were selected based on the criteria of the proposed tourist destination competitiveness models, factors and indicators used.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Competitive

When talking about competitiveness it is difficult not to mention Michael Porter (2000), who indicates that although there are differences in the competitiveness of each country, no nation can or will be competitive in all sectors, not even in most of them. The competitiveness of a nation is complex, for this reason it is difficult to give a definition of it, however Porter (2000) indicates that the concept that could give importance at the country level is that of productivity, where a nation must reach a high level of competitiveness in the life of its population, generating more labor, producing quality products and services, adding value to compete in its sectors, which is why productivity must be constant, that is, nations and/or sectors must be continuously improving their productivity, to achieve advanced competitiveness.

For Schwab (2017) in The Global Competitiveness report 2017 – 2018, through the World Economic Forum, states that the definition of competitiveness made since 1979 is still valid, which indicates that competitiveness is “A set of factors, policies and institutions that determine the level of productivity of a country” (p. 7). On the other hand, Crouch and Ritchie, (1999) indicate that competitiveness translates into the creation of well-paid

jobs and the generation of the necessary resources for the provision of services, so that the prosperity of a society must be sought at the national level through competitiveness.

The theory of comparative advantage is focused on the diversity of production factors such as the difference in labor, difference in surface area, resources in general, whether inherited or created, which could mean specialization to generate trade; on the other hand, Porter presents a new theory that is competitive advantage where he explains that comparative advantage is based only on factors which are limited, while competitive advantage incorporates spatial differences in making effective use of factors (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003).

In relation to the factors, Porter (1990) divides these factors into five categories: human resources, capital resources, knowledge resources, physical resources, and infrastructure, but Ritchie and Crouch (2003) suggest expanding to a category additional related to the tourism issue such as historical and cultural resources and that the tourist superstructure is included in the infrastructure category, since although comparative advantages involve the available resources of a tourist destination, they also relate to the ability of a destination to use these resources effectively in the long term.

4.2 Competitiveness of Tourist Destinations

Currently, tourist destinations are increasingly designing marketing strategies aimed at improving the competitiveness of tourist destinations due to the existing competitiveness, which is why Buhalis (2000) states that the commercial management of a destination is complex due to the variety of people involved in the sector, but it is very necessary especially in the development plans of the destination.

The conceptualization of the competitiveness of tourist destinations as stated above is complex due to the breadth of actors involved and the expansion of determining factors to achieve competitiveness. To date there are some definitions such as the one provided by Dupeyras and MacCallum (2013), where he points out that competitiveness is the ability of the place to optimize its attractiveness for residents and tourists; however, a definitive consensus has not yet been reached.

For Ritchie and Crouch (2003), competitiveness without sustainability is illusory, since destinations essentially compete in attracting tourist expenditures focused on the development of tourism, showing the place as an attractive destination to live, do business and invest through an efficient destination management, with its sustainability as its pillar, preserving not only nature and wildlife but also cultures for future generations, which makes it difficult to conceptualize the concept of a tourist destination.

On the other hand, Dwyer and Kim (2004) state that destination competitiveness trends are related to the management of the private and public sector and other internal and external variables, and it will be up to managers to identify the elements that the destination requires to compete. with others. In addition to ensuring that its general attractiveness and tourist experience are superior to the many alternative destinations, since the total experience of the tourist or visitor is what is really important for competitiveness, this being a challenge for destinations.

Hassan (2000) explains that the development of destinations depends on sustainable customer-based management, taking advantage of comparative advantages in an efficient and effective manner and to achieve the permanence of the destination and face the challenges of tourism, since it defines competitiveness. of destinations such as the destination's ability to create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources and maintain its market position relative to competitors.

For the competitiveness of tourist destinations, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) are based on economic dimensions focused on tourism expenditure, however, the competitiveness of a destination also involves dimensions related to social and cultural strengths, policies focused on social well-being, technological and environmental, strengths that have been considered due to changes in the macro environment.

Dwyer et. al, (2004) make a classification of eight determinants to explain their theory of competitiveness of tourist destinations, which make up the proposed model, these being: basic resources, support factors, destination management, demand conditions, market conditions. environment which are closely related to competitiveness directly related to the flow of visitors to the destination, the greater this flow, the greater the economic movement, benefiting all actors in their income and that of their families. These determinants will be explained in greater detail when the Dwyer and Kim model is presented.

4.3 Competitiveness Models of Tourist Destinations

When talking about models of competitiveness of tourist destinations, it is essential to talk about the model presented by Ritchie and Crouch (2003), which is a theoretical model developed inductively and composed of factors and sub-factors accompanied by the comparative advantage of a destination, which also refers to the inherited and created resources that are possessed and the competitive advantages focused on generating value to the tourist experience, with the objective of having a greater preference for visiting the place; these advantages, according to the author, should be studied with other factors, indicating that the interaction of the factors depends exclusively on the conditions in which a destination is located and that these are variables due to the factors of the global macro environment and micro environment, and on the other hand the customers that should be considered as the center of attention of the micro environment, the competition, the public that basically would be the stakeholders, the author also emphasizes indicating that the internal environment of the destination affects its competitiveness, since it is important that the actors work together.

The model also includes the Basic Resources and Attractors factor, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) divide them into seven categories: physiography and climate, culture and history, market linkages, activity mix, special events, entertainment and tourism superstructure, which represent these basic resources and attractors as the fundamental reasons why potential visitors choose one destination over another; however, if the destination does not have supporting factors and resources, it will be difficult for it to achieve tourism development in the shortest possible time. This factor is composed as the first subfactor of infrastructure and accessibility to the destination, where the destination must offer the visitor an efficient and effective transportation system to generate confidence in the traveler. Other sub-factors are facilitating resources and companies, the latter must be willing to invest in the destination and this will happen if these investments are motivated by economic stability promoted by governance, political will becoming one of the supporting sub-factors and finally the sub-factor of hospitality, which must be oriented to provide an unforgettable experience to the visitor.

Another of the central factors in the Ritchie and Crouch (2003) model is that of policy, planning and development of the destination, made up of the sub-factors: definition of the system, philosophy and values, vision, positioning and branding, development, analysis competitive and collaborative, monitoring and evaluation and auditing; as they indicate that there must be a strategic or policy-driven framework for the planning and development of the destination with specific economic, social and other objectives as an intended outcome can serve as a guide for the direction, form and structure of tourism development. Such a framework can help ensure that the tourism development that occurs promotes a competitive and sustainable destination while meeting the quality-of-life aspirations of those who reside in the destination.

The other factor presented in the Ritchie and Crouch (2003) model is destination management, which is made up of: organization, marketing, quality of the service experience, information and research, human resources administration, capital, capital management. visitors, resource management and administrative crisis, this factor of the model is one of those that focuses on activities oriented to the policy and planning framework of the destination as well as providing support for the previous factors, which are basic resources and attractors, to the support factors and resources, because this factor lands with projects, programs, systems, processes that are worked on in the destination.

the determining qualification and development factor presented in the Ritchie and Crouch (2003) model is made up of sub-factors: location, safety and security, cost-value, interdependence, image awareness and accessibility, these factors are also called situational conditioners because its effects on the competitiveness of a tourist destination are to define its scale, limit, or development potential. The authors state that, depending on the case of the location sub-factor, in certain cases it determines the visitor's decision due to the proximity of the destination and even more so if it has great attractiveness; Likewise, another of the sub-factors that will influence the choice of the destination is the security and protection that will be provided to the visitor, social conflicts, wars or other problems that may be happening in the destination will be negative aspects for their eligibility, as well like not having a good image and awareness of the destination. The ideal is for tourists to perceive the destination positively. Another of the sub-factors belonging to the determining qualification and development factor is cost-value, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) divide it into three factors: The cost of transportation to and from the destination; the currency exchange rate (in the case of international travel); and the local cost of tourism goods and services.

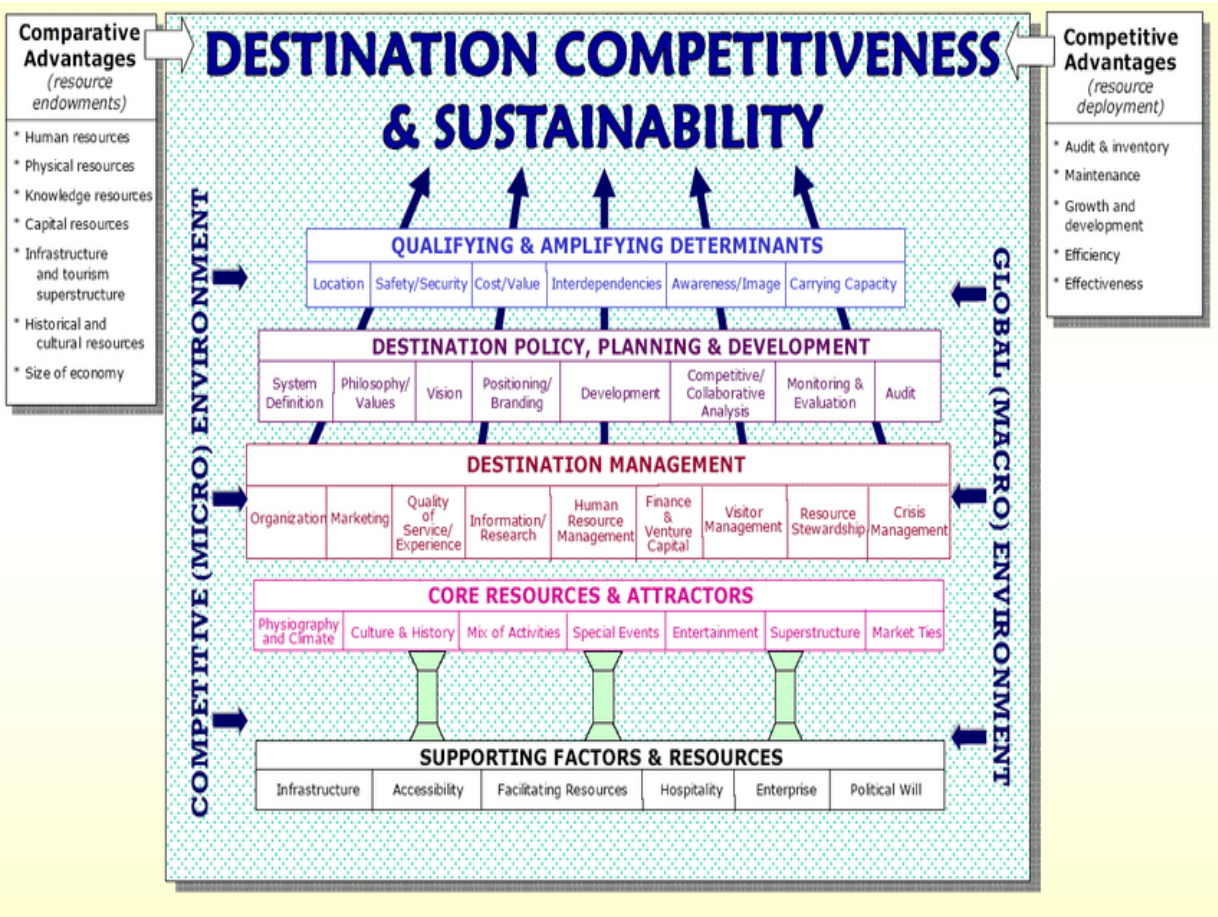

Figure 1: Crouch and Ritchie Destination Competitiveness Model

Another model of destination competitiveness is the one presented by Dwyer et. al, (2004) who classified eight determinants in the model, being these basic resources made up of inherited and created resources which can be divided into natural, cultural, gastronomic, among others, and the supporting factors are related to infrastructure, accessibility to the destination, quality of services, hospitality and communication with the market; the next determinant is related to the management of destinations, where the main role is played by the destination stakeholders who are responsible for improving the quality and efficiency of resources and supporting factors; This determinant has been extensively studied by Marketa (2020) who determines that a solid governance is common in developing countries, but development patterns differ from one country to another and that the challenge of destination management is given due to the change of government since this may differ according to the policy implemented, on the other hand it is imperative to understand how the competitive environment works if you want to reach a development of tourism activity.

Another determinant is the demand conditions, which is made up of three important elements, which according to (Dwyer, et. al, 2004) are: awareness, perception, and preferences, which depend on the implementation of marketing strategies to achieve a positive perception and preferences to visit a place. The next determinant is to review how the external environment influences the destination, I call this determinant the environmental conditions, expressed by D'alessio (2008) as PESTE + C analysis, representing each initial of the word by political, economic, social, technological and ecological and Competitiveness is added, these conditions directly affect the attributes of the competitiveness of destinations as also asserted in his research Gomez and Picazo (2019).

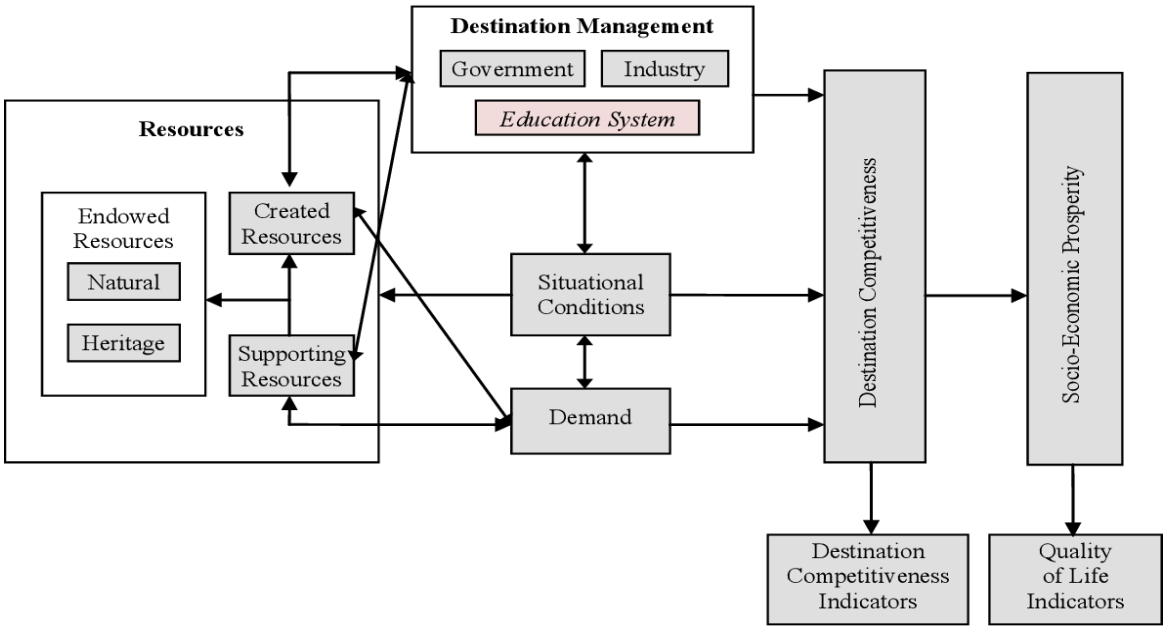

Figure 2: Dwyer and Kim Destination Competitiveness Model (2003)

Another model is presented by Goffi (2013), which is made up of the following boxes: policy, tourism planning and development, destination management, conditioning and support factors, general infrastructure, main resources and key attractors, tourism services and demand. Goffi (2013) explains that tourism policies guide the development of a competitive destination in the long term and destination management is focused on economic profitability and avoiding the deterioration of tourist areas; likewise, the conditioning and support factors are related to the facilities provided by the destination to enter the place; infrastructure is the support for tourism activity as well as demand, which according to the model is focused on promoting respect for culture and heritage and care for the environment.

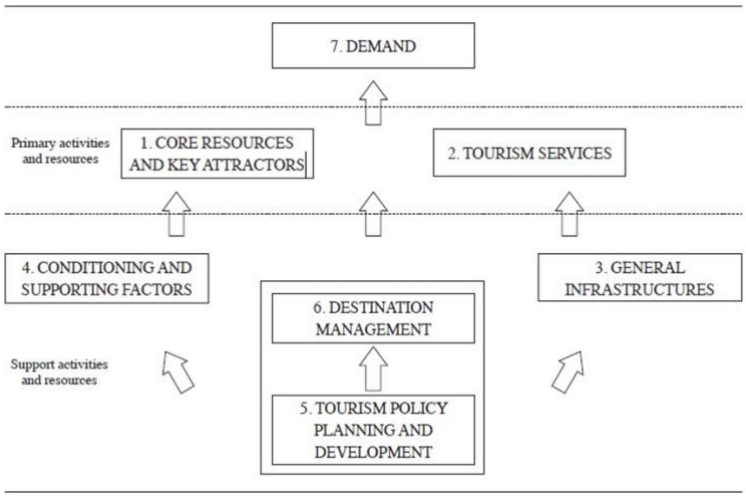

Figure 3: Competitiveness and sustainability of a tourist destination: an evaluation model.

A model of competitiveness of tourist destinations oriented to sustainability is that of Hassan (2000) which is oriented on the experience of tourist destinations that are number one in relation to tourist arrivals, income and tourist expenditures, which were based on focusing their strategies on long-term environmental sustainability to achieve tourism development, this model Hassan (2000) classifies it into determinants, which are: Cultural aspects, Political factors, Technological changes and Socioeconomic factors, coinciding with the dimensions of Ritche and Crouch (2003) and the determinants of Dwyer et. al (2004).

In addition, Hassan's model (2000) presents at the center of the model the competitive market based on sustainable tourism, which depends on comparative advantage, demand orientation, industry structure and

commitment to the environment, since the author indicates that destinations must compete with other globally competitive destinations to reach the most experienced visitors to attract them. The model is shown below.

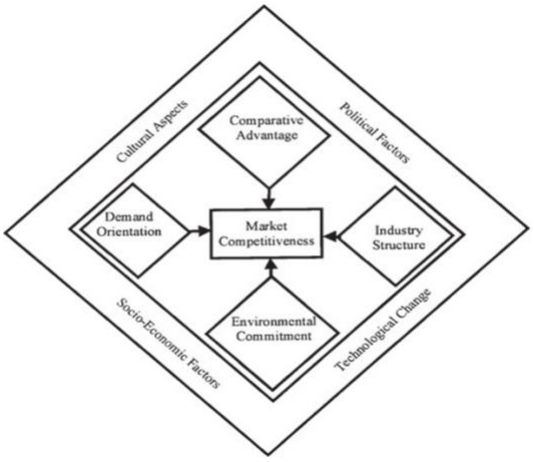

Figure 4: Determinants of market competitiveness in Hassan's environmentally sustainable tourism industry.

A review of the four models of competitiveness of tourist destinations indicates that there are determinants that are found in all and in more than 02 models of destination competitiveness, which leads to the inference that these determinants must be taken into account if the competitiveness of a destination is to be known; the determinants that coincide in the models are the analysis of the macro environment, comparative advantage and competitive advantage, support factors and resources, attractions and basic resources, destination management and the determinant of demand conditions, the latter Ritchie and Crouch (2003) do not consider it as a determinant in their model, and only Hassan's model (2000) considers the determinant of environmental care, these last two determinants should be considered in the model; the above is detailed in the following table.

Table 1: Determinants and/or factors of the models of competitiveness of tourist destinations according to authors' coincidence.

Determinants and/or Factors	Authors
Macroenvironment	Crouch y Ritche (2003), Dwyer, et. al, (2004), Hassan (2000)
Microenvironment	Crouch y Ritche (2003)
Comparative advantage	Crouch y Ritche (2003), Dwyer, et. al. (2004), Hassan (2000)
Competitive advantage	Crouch y Ritche (2003), Dwyer, et. al, (2004)
Supporting factors and resources	Crouch y Ritche (2003), Dwyer, et. al. (2004), Goffi (2013), Hassan, (2000)
Attractiveness and basic resources	Crouch y Ritche (2003), Goffi (2013)
Destination management	Crouch y Ritche (2003), Dwyer, et. al, (2004), Goffi (2013)
Destination policy, planning and development	Crouch y Ritche (2003), Goffi (2013)
Qualification and development determinants	Crouch y Ritche (2003)
Demand conditions	Dwyer, et. al, (2004), Goffi (2013) y Hassan (2000)
Environment	*Hassan (2000)*

4.4 Competitiveness Indicators of Tourist Destinations

The models explained above are made up of determinants or factors that, if they do not work together, it will be difficult for destinations to achieve competitiveness; each of these determinants has indicators that will allow the destination to be diagnosed and evaluated, Molinar et al. (2015) compiled 28 theoretical and empirical articles related to the competitiveness models of tourist destinations, grouping the indicators into: Number of visitors, evolution of the number of visitors (occupancy rate and tourist spending), occupancy rate, length of stay, tourist spending, income per available room, Social well-being (distribution of income from tourism, contribution of tourism to economic growth), conservation and increase in market share, comparison with competing destinations, conservation of natural resources and cultural, efficiency, loyalty (positive behavioral intentions, attachment to the tourist destination)

On the other hand, one of the models that clearly detailed the indicators according to the determinants of competitiveness is that of Goffi (2013), which consists of 57 indicators related to determinants such as basic resources and attractors; the quality and quantity of tourist services; basic infrastructure that would support tourism activity such as communication systems, medical care center, among others; Another determinant is the conditions and supporting factors where the accessibility to the destination is found, as well as the management capacity of tourist destinations; In the policy, planning and tourism development determinant there are indicators such as clear policies in relation to economic development, environmental care and visitor satisfaction management; and the determinant of demand factors focuses on proposing respect for values and culture as well as care for the destination by the visitor.

Mendola and Volo (2017) conduct research on the indicators of the competitiveness of tourist destinations, indicating that these indicators are used by different studies regardless of the location, the segment of the destination or the types of resources it has, adding that Comparative and competitive advantage indicators are of limited usefulness for destination managers and planners. With which the question arises, if all these indicators will allow us to evaluate all destinations, whether they are focused on mass, rural or cultural tourism, it is important to further expand the research on the indicators to have greater certainty for their utilization.

5. Conclusion

The present study began with the review of different theoretical and empirical articles, working with the deductive method on the competitiveness of tourist destinations, starting from the definition of competitiveness focused on the territory. The purpose of the essay was to identify the dimensions, factors and/or determinants that are present in competitiveness models, concluding that the most studied models are those of Ritchie and Crouch (2003), Dwyer and Kim (2003) and that of Hassan (2000). And most of these are based on the dimensions of Macroenvironment, followed by the determinants of comparative advantage, competitive advantage, infrastructure, destination management and sustainability, which are also studied in empirical research; Therefore, it is recommended to take these determinants into account as fundamental when using them for competitiveness studies of a tourist destination.

It is important to mention that, as indicated by different studies, the competitiveness of tourist destinations is a multidimensional theory and its application in the evaluation of the competitiveness of a destination will vary depending on its characteristics, therefore remains a topic to be studied. It should also be noted that the indicators are a fundamental part of the evaluation of the competitiveness of the destinations, since they were used according to what we wanted to highlight and according to the characteristics of the destination.

Finally, this research could serve as a basis for future research that wishes to know the competitiveness models of the most representative tourist destinations to date and empirical research that expands the analysis of competitiveness, taking into account the determinants of the models separately for a better understanding.

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The Implementation of the Circular Economy R-Principles and Strategies: The Portuguese Hotel Industry Perspective

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Abstract: Circular Economy (CE) is a concept that has been gaining increasing importance in business circles and advocated by European Union, and by several governments worldwide. It is acknowledged that it has the potential to optimise resource efficiency, minimise production and consumption of greenhouse gas emissions, while simultaneously granting competitive advantage business prospects. Although it has been gaining momentum among academia, politicians, and practitioners, it is apparent some struggling when it comes to the design of a framework explaining how companies can embrace circularity and on how to adapt their business model to this new economic system. Despite its importance and applicability by the travel and tourism sector in general and the hotel industry in particular, it is insufficiently studied and examined. This empirical study investigates this concept on the Portuguese hotel industry perspective concerning the adoption of CE practices and CE R-principles through a survey instrument disseminated across the Portuguese hotel industry, with 78 valid responses. This article also introduces a new set of R-principles to the already existing ones, and contributes to the scientific research on the travel and tourism industry, and mainly to the one linked with the Portuguese hotel industry, which has been vaguely examined up to now. The results obtained indicate that these R-principles have been gaining importance, being adopted, and put into practice by the Portuguese hotel industry with special emphasis on the 3R-Principles (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) along with Repair. Findings also indicate that some initiatives that are in line with a Circular Economy paradigm, namely recycling, reducing water and energy consumption, and cleaning management policies, towel and bed linen programmes, staff and education programmes, green products, certifications, among others, are also being considered.

Keywords: Circular Economy, Portuguese Hotel Industry, R-Principles, Natural Resources

1. Introduction

The travel and tourism industry, a significant provider to global economic growth, faced a drastic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in substantial job losses and economic decline. The impact of COVID-19 highlighted the immense significance and positive role played by travel and tourism. In 2020, the sector witnessed a loss of 62 million jobs, resulting in a global employment figure of only 271 million. This substantial decline of 18.6% echoed throughout the entire industry, notably affecting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – constituting roughly 80% of all businesses in this sector – as well as women, youth, and minority groups. Simultaneously, the sector faced staggering losses amounting to nearly USD 4.9 trillion, leading to a drastic 50.4% year-on-year reduction in its global contribution to GDP. This decline starkly contrasted with the 3.3% drop experienced by the overall global economy during the same period (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2022). Although 2021 marked the recovery for this sector, progress was slower than anticipated. This deceleration derived partly from the impact of rigid and irregular border controls, and the absence of coordinated efforts among governments in addressing the pandemic. Despite these challenges, the travel and tourism sector managed to increase its contribution to GDP by USD 1 trillion, signifying a notable increase of 21.7%, reaching a total of USD 5.8 trillion. Additionally, the industry recovered 18.2 million jobs, representing a 6.7% increase. In 2021, there was a slow recovery, but challenges persisted due to border controls and governmental coordination issues. Despite improvements in 2022, international tourism remained below pre-pandemic levels. International tourism experienced a more robust comeback than initially anticipated, driven by significant restricted demand and the alleviating or removal of travel constraints across numerous nations. The year witnessed over 900 million tourists journeying internationally, marking a doubling compared to 2021 figures, yet still reflecting a 37% decrease from the pre-pandemic levels of 2019 (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2023). According UNWTO, in 2023, international tourist arrivals might attain between 80% to 95% of the pre-pandemic levels this year. In spite of offering socio-economic benefits, the tourism sector negatively impacts the environment and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.

In this regard, the concept of Circular Economy (CE) has gained attention as an alternative economic model to address resource scarcity, climate change, and environmental degradation. Unlike the prevailing linear economic model, CE aims to optimize natural resources, reduce emissions, and create competitive business opportunities. However, research on CE adoption within the travel and tourism industry, particularly the hotel sector, is scarce despite its predominantly linear economic model.

This study focus on the Portuguese hotel industry and aims to examine its perspective on adopting CE practices and principles. By surveying 78 questionnaires, the study seeks to introduce new principles to an existing CE framework and contribute to scientific research within the travel and tourism industry, especially concerning the Portuguese hotel sector, an area that has been minimally explored to date.

2. The Concept of Circular Economy

Presently humankind is dealing with several environmental risks and challenges that go from global biodiversity loss to pollution growth and climate change along with an increase in growth of income inequalities. Waste along with the overexploitation of natural resources by industries are also negatively impacting environment and contributing to this environmental, social, and economic emergency. Tackling these externalities and challenges is vital for companies, stakeholders, governments and ultimately for communities, as creating economic and environmental resilience is, as never before, of greatest importance.

The prevailing economic model is based on a linear paradigm (Rodriguez et al., 2020), in which resources are accounted for being abundant, consistently available, easily accessible, and cheap (European Commission, 2014), following the 'take, make, dispose' pattern (Ness, 2008) with natural resources being extracted and converted into goods and disposed of after consumers' utilisation as waste, replacing it by a 'make-use-reuse-remake-recycle' model.

This concept is based on a set of a miscellaneous collection of scientific and semi-scientific approaches, namely 'circular flow of income', cradle-to-cradle', 'industrial ecology', 'performance economy', 'biomimicry', 'eco-effectiveness and eco-efficiency', 'natural capitalism' (Costa et al., 2020), and was first introduced to the scientific community by Pearce and Turner (1990) as an attempt to address environmental constrains (Andersen, 2007; Yong, 2007). This concept distinguishes itself as a regenerative economic approach that minimises raw materials utilisation and waste as well as emissions, mitigates energy consumption by decelerating and closing energy loops (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017) and mimicking natural materials closed systems (Feng and Yan, 2007; Yang and Feng, 2008; Geng and Doberstein, 2008; Hu et al., 2011).

According to the EMF (2012) and the European Commission (EC) (2015), CE is an economic model that is 'restorative and regenerative by intention and design', where the value of products is maintained for extended periods of time, minimising the generation of waste, as the concept of 'end-of-life' is replaced by the restoration of products. The utilisation of energy from renewable sources as well as the mitigation of toxic substances use which impair the potential of recycling and reusing is also encouraged. These along with enhanced design of products and manufacturing techniques will certainly impact companies' performance, allowing them to attain sustainable development, which presupposes generating environmental quality standards so that the economic welfare and social equity of future generations are accomplished (Kirchherr et al., 2017).

Moreover, Circular Economy has been highlighted as a reliable economic model which allows companies to enhance their business through a more preventively and regenerative approach, by promoting a paradigm shift so that not only the negative externalities of the prevailing linear economic model are mitigated, but also to establish enduring adaptability and resilience and create opportunities for development while obtaining environmental and social advantages.

2.1 Circular Economy R-Principles

For the past few decades, academia and stakeholders have utilized various R-principles. However, pinpointing the exact origins of these classifications has proven challenging, lacking a specific article as a definitive starting point (Sihvonen and Ritola, 2015; Yan and Wu, 2011). Zhu et al. (2010a, 2010b) and Reh (2013) view these R-Principles as sequential stages within the framework of a Circular Economy, establishing them as the foundational principles of CE.

In literature, CE is often represented by the 3R-principles: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle (Ren, 2007; Feng and Yan, 2007; Sakai et al., 2011; Preston, 2012; Reh, 2013; Su et al., 2013; Lett, 2014). Over time, additional R-principles

gained attention. The European Union Waste Framework Directive (EC, 2008) introduced the Recover R-principle, expanding the initial 4R framework. Various academic contributions presented alternative R frameworks, such as the 6R (Sihvonen and Ritola, 2015), and even more extensive models like the 9R emerged (van Buren et al., 2016; Potting et al., 2017).

The diverse R-principles should be arranged hierarchically and prioritized based on their level of circularity (Kirchherr and Hekkert, 2017; Potting et al., 2017). They are viewed as strategies within circularity, enabling the reduction of natural resource and material consumption while minimizing waste generation. They are applied across different stages of the value chain. Within a CE framework, waste is regenerated, and these R-principles aid in continually cycling materials over time, reducing the need for raw materials by converting used ones into secondary raw materials. Figure 1 presents Potting's et al. (2017) interpretation of the 9R-principles, their prioritisation according to the circularity level.

In this ongoing study, we examined this classification; however, we expanded it by introducing the Redesign, Remine, and Return R-principles, forming a comprehensive set of 13R principles. Specifically, Re-educate and Redesign were included as R2 and R3, respectively, within the category labelled 'Smarter product use and manufacture.' Additionally, Remine and Return were designated as R12 and R13, respectively, falling under the category of 'Useful application of materials.' These newly introduced R-principles will be detailed in the subsequent sections as they were integral to the questionnaire distributed within the Portuguese hotel industry.

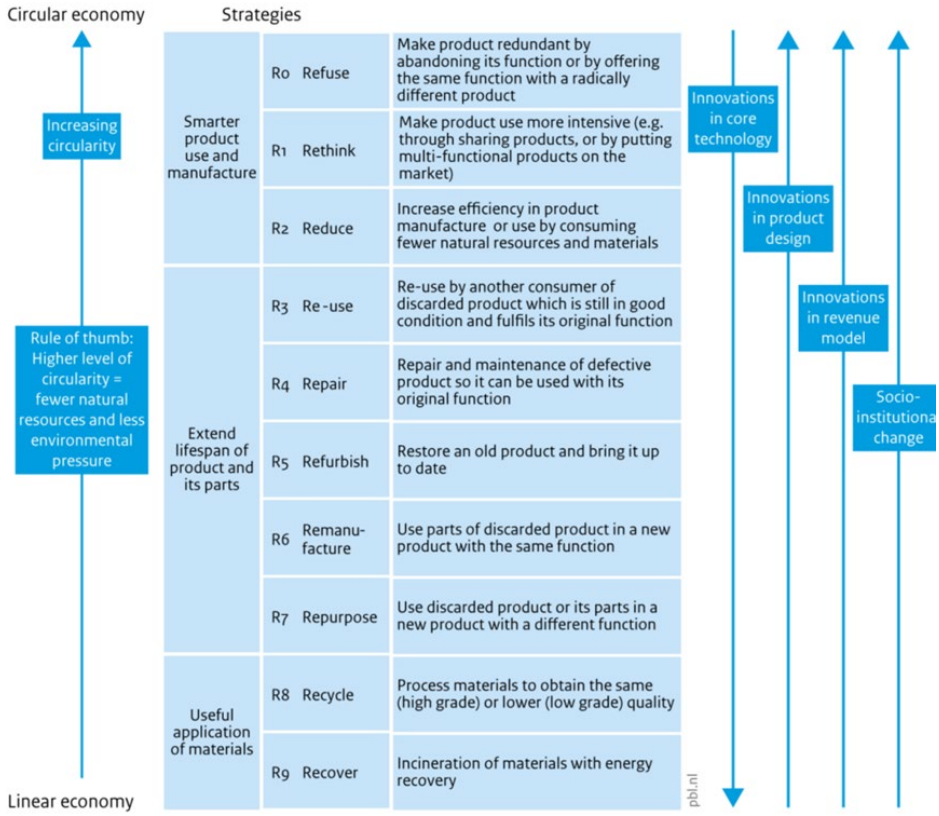

Figure 1: Potting's layering of CE R-principles (2017:5).

In Section 2.1.1, a study is conducted on R0-Refuse, R1-Rethink, R2-Re-educate, R3-Redesign, and R4-Reduce, showcasing their role in enhancing production and consumption methodologies. Moving to Section 2.1.2, the focus shifts to R5-Reuse, R6-Repair, R7-Refurbish, R8-Remanufacture, and R9-Repurpose. Section 2.1.3 explores R10-Recycle and R11-Recover. Lastly, Section 2.1.4 addresses the significance of R12-Remine and R13-Return.

2.1.1 R0-Refuse, R1-Rethink, R2- Re-educate, R3-Redesign, R4-Reduce

The concept of R0-Refuse is described from two distinct viewpoints: that of the consumer and the producer. From the consumer's standpoint, this concept relates to the opportunity consumers have to choose for reduced product quantities or diminish usage altogether (Miller and Spoolman, 2002; Black and Cherrier, 2010; Alwood

et al., 2011). It also encompasses rejecting packaging, bags, or containers when they contribute to waste (Clapp and Swanston, 2009; Kasidoni et al., 2015). Examining the producer's perspective, Bilitewski (2012) states that evaluating product design and lifespan is crucial. Designers possess the authority to refuse certain production strategies and processes that may lead to waste generation or the use of hazardous substances. R1-Rethink emerges as a design-oriented approach integrating ecological and environmental concerns into the design process to create "ecoeffective" products, aiming to dematerialize material flow systems. However, in the current economic model, even well-designed products are often discarded shortly after use. Some products are intentionally designed for short lifespans due to hygiene, cost, and convenience factors. This linear economic model has succeeded in providing mass-produced low-cost items but has also resulted in environmental externalities impacting the planet.

Within such an energy and resource-intensive economic system, the lack of product reuse represents a significant economic loss. Consequently, it becomes crucial to reconsider both production and consumption patterns, alongside design strategies, to transform how products are manufactured, used, and reintroduced into the system.

Contemporary consumers are increasingly aware of waste-related issues and display a heightened willingness to embrace reusing, recycling, and opting for durable products. They actively seek to support companies and organizations that adopt circular strategies, while simultaneously integrating circular approaches into their own practices. However, despite this inclination, they may encounter challenges in executing these circular practices. One major obstacle could be the lack of information or education on how to effectively implement circular approaches, preventing their active participation in circular practices.

Companies should prioritize adopting the R2-Re-educate principle and actively invest in establishing a solid institutional framework that fosters a circular mindset. This involves providing comprehensive information, cultivating awareness on CE, and shaping consumers' mindsets towards circular practices.

When considering the R3-Redesign principle within the CE model, it becomes crucial to recognize the shift from a 'cradle-to-grave' strategy to a 'cradle-to-cradle' design approach. This approach optimizes product life cycles to prevent premature disposal in landfills, ensuring that products fully utilize the opportunities offered by various R-principles.

Under a 'cradle-to-cradle' framework, products are designed and manufactured with a focus on longevity and produced through waste-free industrial processes (McDonough and Braungart, 2002; Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). In this context, CE emerges not only as a preventive model aimed at reducing natural resource depletion but also as a paradigm that respects the interconnectedness between industry and the natural environment (Cooper, 1999; Nakajima, 2000; McDonough and Braungart, 2002). This construct extends beyond mere sustainability; it accentuates efficiency through design and service provision, resulting in reduced inputs, diminished resource utilization, and a detachment from economic development paradigms.

The R4-Reduce principle, coupled with other R-principles, plays a pivotal role in alleviating the pressure and impact of the linear economic model on global resource reserves. Its primary objective is to minimize the consumption of non-renewable raw materials, favouring those that are renewable, biodegradable, or recyclable in production processes (Yong, 2007; Tse et al., 2015, 2016). This approach preserves natural resources while concurrently aiming to diminish energy usage during production and consumption phases, thereby reducing overall waste generation by enhancing process efficiency. Implementing this principle involves adopting more efficient packaging methods, resorting to modern technologies, and designing lighter and more compact products (Jun and Xiang, 2011). Ghisellini et al. (2016) emphasize that 'Reduce' signifies a reduction in resource consumption per product manufactured or substituting toxic substances with less hazardous alternatives. Furthermore, consumers can play a role by moderating their purchasing behaviours and reconsidering consumption patterns. Companies can actively contribute by lessening their reliance on raw materials and considering product design that emphasizes durability, repairability, and recyclability. Consequently, the R4-Reduce principle holds significant importance within waste management strategies.

2.1.2 R5-Reuse, R6-Repair, R7-Refurbish, R8-Remanufacture, R9-Repurpose

Continual reuse and redistribution of products and materials in their original or slightly modified form to new users are essential (EMF, 2019). In an intentionally restorative economic system, the focus is on prioritizing R5-Reuse of products rather than discarding them prematurely before their full value is realized (Wijkman and Skânberg, 2015; Waste Resource Action Programme, 2016).

R6-Repair involves extending a product's lifespan (King et al., 2006) by repairing its components and parts (Stahel, 2010) or making necessary alterations (Thierrry et al., 1995).

According to Lacy and Rutqvist (2015), prioritizing the R7 principles—Refurbish, long-lasting design, reuse, recycle, and remanufacture—in a CE model will bring significant economic benefits. These principles enable products to maintain their highest utility and value for extended periods, thereby enhancing the environment's natural regenerative capacity (Bastein et al., 2013; EMF, 2013).

Reike et al. (2018) describe R7-Refurbish as the process through which products, materials, or their components undergo upgrades. This involves replacing parts or components with a different structure, thus extending the lifespan of a specific product (Brito and Dekker, 2003; Fernández and Kekale, 2005). R8-Remanufacture, on the other hand, involves the upgrading of a product through repair. This process typically begins with a comprehensive inspection, followed by disassembly, cleaning, and repair using industrial processes conducted in supervised environments such as factories or workshops (Gehin et al., 2008; Lieder and Rashid, 2016). As for R9-Repurpose, it focuses on utilizing discontinued or obsolete components or parts of products for new purposes or functions, preventing their disposal in landfills. This approach allows these discarded goods to re-enter production processes, initiating a new life cycle with a different or modified function from their original design (Stahel, 2010; Yan and Feng, 2014; Reike et al., 2018).

2.1.3 R10-Recycle and R11-Recover

CE encompasses a spectrum of operations and actions focused on the reduction, reuse, and recycling of materials, following the R-principles. Recycling poses challenges due to certain substances present in products, complicating or rendering the recycling process nearly impossible. In an economic system lacking of equilibrium between matter costs and energy, the waste generated does not match the resources consumed—a disparity absent in a closed economic system where waste equals resource usage (Andersen, 2007).

R10-Recycle is notably less sustainable in addressing environmental challenges compared to other R-principles in terms of profitability and resource efficiency (Stahel, 2013, 2019). Certain industrial waste poses limitations to recycling, with some materials having only limited recyclability or being entirely unrecyclable (for instance, fibers can be recycled 4-6 times, certain metals pose recycling difficulties, and some plastics contain impurities hindering certain recycling processes) (Reh, 2013; Prendiville et al., 2014).

R11-Recover involves the "retrieval of materials after the landfilling phase" (Yan and Feng, 2014; Reike et al., 2018), which is a practice predominantly observed in developing countries.

2.1.4 R12-Remine and R13-Return

When operationalizing CE strategies, the R12-Remine and R13-Return principles often receive minimal attention. R12-Remine involves the retrieval of valuable materials from discarded items just before they reach the landfill phase. This process selects and reuses components for the production or remanufacture of new products or parts (García-Rodríguez et al., 2013; Reike et al., 2018). Meanwhile, R13-Return refers to environmentally controlled and non-toxic disposal of product components or parts, sometimes involving appropriate treatment or containment measures.

Circular Economy emerges as a strong framework for sustainability and development. However, critical examination, analysis, and ongoing research into its principles and implementation are essential. Table 1 displays the various R-principles considered and examined above.

Table 1: CE R-principles considered for this study.

STRATEGIES	R-PRINCIPLES	DESCRIPTION
Better production and consumption approaches	***R0-Refuse***	the refusal to approve packaging, bags or containers whenever they constitute waste; to accept or approve certain production processes; choose to purchase limited quantities of products or reduce its use
	R1-Rethink	a new and design oriented technique known as 'eco-effectiveness', so as to minimize and dematerialize the material flow system; promote an intensive use of products for longer periods of time
	R2-Re-educate	train and educate consumers to change their behaviour towards consumption

STRATEGIES	R-PRINCIPLES	DESCRIPTION
	R3-Redesign	products design and manufacture with a new purpose and with 'long-lasting' design through waste-free industrial processes
	R4-Reduce	minimise the amount of waste produced; decrease energy consumption in production processes; reduce the use of unnecessary packaging, and avoid disposable items
Circularity higher degree	***R5-Reuse***	use items and products as many times as possible
	R6-Repair	extend the lifetime of a product by replacing broken or damaged parts
	R7-Refurbish	it corresponds to the process that products undergo when upgraded, i.e. parts and components of a bigger framework have to be replaced so that the life cycle of the product is extended
	R8-Remanufacture	repairing a product, starting with an inspection, followed by the product disassembly, cleaning, and repairing, through industrial processes in monitored atmospheres
	R9-Repurpose	utilizing discontinued or obsolete parts or components and providing them with a new purpose or another function, enabling these discarded equipments to re-enter a new life cycle
Advantageous utilisation of materials	***R10-Recycle***	products are recycled by disassembling components and separating parts
	R11-Recover	retrieval of materials after landfilling phase
	R12-Remine	recuperation of materials before the landfilling phase
	R13-Return	the throw back of products or component in an environmentally innocuous way, which may include appropriate treatment and handling or even containment

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection Procedures

This research utilized a quantitative approach through an online questionnaire within Portugal's hotel industry to explore its perspective on CE practices and R-principles. The study focused on 1407 hotels across various regions of Portugal and collected responses from April 16 to July 7 2021, primarily via emails from the visitportugal.com site and social media channels. Despite attempts to reach hoteliers during a national lockdown, only 78 usable questionnaires were obtained. The study concentrated on CE R-principles and practices, using Likert scales and various types of questions across 20 questions divided into eight sections. The research aimed to investigate which R-principles and CE strategies were being implemented by the Portuguese hotel industry. Specifically, it aimed to answer two research questions: 1. Which R-principles are implemented by Portuguese hotels? 2. What CE strategies are already in place within the Portuguese hotel industry?

3.2 Data Analysis

The study employed descriptive statistics to analyse response variability and detect missing data in the questionnaires. To evaluate the internal consistency of survey items, Cronbach's alpha (α) was used, with a value above 0.7 generally considered acceptable, though some researchers accept values above 0.6. For the overall survey, a recommended Cronbach's alpha is at least 0.9. Additionally, the average inter-item correlation (AIIC) was utilized to assess correlation among items within a composite, with a range of 0.15 to 0.5 considered standard. Both Cronbach's alpha and AIIC were applied across five constructs to confirm if respondents consistently answered items within each construct. The findings indicated high internal consistency, suggesting the questionnaire's overall reliability.

3.3 Results and Discussion

This section addresses the research questions outlined above and presents a discussion of the primary findings derived from the quantitative approach analysis.

3.3.1 Respondents' Profile

The survey respondents in the hotel industry consisted of various roles such as managers, CEOs, directors, and owners. The distribution of questionnaires across different regions showed that 3.9% of hotels were from the Azores, 5.8% from Madeira, 8.7% from the Algarve, 9.7% from Alentejo, 16.5% from Porto and the North region, 25.2% from the Lisbon region, and 30.1% from the Centre of Portugal. In terms of star ratings, 1.1% were one-

star hotels, 11.5% were two-star hotels, 29.9% were three-star hotels, 51.7% were four-star hotels, and 5.7% were five-star hotels. Ownership structure revealed that 96.7% of hotels were national companies, with 3.3% being international. Additionally, 66.3% of accommodations were independent, while 33.7% were part of a hotel chain.

3.3.2 CE R-Principles Adoption by the Portuguese Hotels

The survey participants, including hotel managers and CEOs, assessed the implementation of various R-principles in their companies using a Likert scale. The survey results indicated strong implementation of Repair (100%), Recycle (98.65%), Reduce (97.30%), and Reuse (90.50%) practices, while Remanufacture, Return, Refuse, Redesign, Rethink, and Refurbish were identified as the least implemented R-Principles.

The study emphasized the significance of the 3R-principle (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) along with Repair in preserving the environment and shifting from a linear to a CE model. The application of these principles aims to extend product lifespans, emphasizing clean manufacturing and green supply chains.

The survey revealed that respondents primarily focused on enhancing energy, water, and waste efficiency in line with the 3R strategy commonly used in the travel and tourism industry. Recycling, water, and energy management were the most prominent measures adopted by companies, while renewable energies, product design, refurbishment, and reuse received less priority.

Implementing measures such as recycling, managing water and energy consumption, and minimizing waste not only reduces operational costs but also aligns with environmental objectives like achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Initiatives focusing on cleaning management and reusing towels and bed linens cater to the growing preference for sustainable alternatives among visitors.

The survey respondents reported implementing water and energy management policies and waste management strategies in their companies. However, a lower percentage considered procurement of products designed according to CE principles, indicating potential areas for improvement in embracing its practices.

Overall, companies actively employed strategies such as recycling, water, and energy management, aligning with existing literature. These initiatives have the potential to reduce consumption, emissions, and operational costs while simultaneously reducing environmental impact, corroborating previous research findings.

4. Conclusions

This study contributes to the existing literature on Circular Economy implementation in the hotel industry, offering country-specific data for potential cross-country comparisons. However, the response rate from the questionnaire might restrict generalizing findings to the broader Portuguese hotel industry.

Existing literature emphasizes CE's potential to optimize resource use, reduce emissions, and create business opportunities. However, there's limited research on CE implementation in the Portuguese hotel industry.

Findings reveal that participant companies prioritize CE R-principles, especially the 3R-principles (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) and Repair, forming the foundation of their environmental strategy. Companies focus on environmentally responsible materials, waste, energy, and water management, recycling, employee education on sustainability, and towel/bed linen programs.

The study highlights companies' emphasis on the Reuse principle, extending product lifespans and reducing ecological footprints.

This research aims to promote, understand, and highlight strategies for enhancing CE implementation within the hotel industry. Understanding current CE concepts can help companies differentiate strategies and gain competitive advantages. Insights on companies' awareness and attitudes can drive successful CE initiatives.

While achieving its goals, the study's response rate may limit broader generalization. Future research could involve a larger pool of companies and explore customer satisfaction with CE practices for a more comprehensive analysis.

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COVID-19 Disruptions Driving Sustainable Tourism: A Case of the Hawaiian Tourism Industry

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Abstract: This study inquires about the COVID-19-generated momentum and how it resulted in transformative opportunities for the hard-hit tourism industry in Hawai'i. A single embedded case study has been selected to explore the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic-generated momentum for the risk-prevalent industry and identify sustainability-based management strategies within the tourism industry in Hawai'i's small island economy. Documentation and archival records analysis paired with direct observations performed during the 2022 Hawai'i Tourism Conference exposed the pivot taken by the Hawai'i Tourism Authority and the four island counties, toward rebuilding, redefining, and resetting the tourism industry in accelerating the timeline for sustainable and regenerative tourism. Findings indicate that actors from the tourism industry in Hawai'i perceived the COVID-19 pandemic as a *huliau*, or a point of transformation, to reflect and reevaluate the tourism industry's responsibility and shift toward a recovery focused on sustainability. This research confirms that the pandemic-driven momentum accelerated opportunities for changing and transforming traditional business models and indicators of progress within the tourism industry in Hawai'i and it revealed that the Hawai'i Tourism Authority and the four island counties adopted new management and collaborative approaches and measures of success to rebuild, redefine, and reset the directions of tourism. Further research may explore additional Pacific Island countries to gain a deeper understanding of the problem within the region's context.

Keywords*:* COVID-19 Pandemic, Green Economy, Hawai'i, Resilience, Shared Value, Sustainable Tourism.

1. Introduction

The global pandemic has been a supreme transformer; it has severely disrupted socio-economic systems worldwide and could mark a turning point for a transition and a transformation toward a green, resilient, and sustainable future (Bodenheimer and Leidenberger 2020). The tourism industry represents one of these industries where the calls for action and transformation of traditional business models have been echoed and widely discussed. There is an extensive range of literature on sustainable tourism and the nexus between sustainable tourism and the COVID-19 pandemic (Gössling et al. 2020; Haywood 2020; Sigala 2020). However, there is limited research on the recovery strategies available for the industry post-pandemic (Prideaux et al. 2020) or on the long-term impacts of the pandemic on tourism in the Pacific Islands (Bright and Abbott 2021; Shen 2020) and more specifically in Hawai'i (Yong et al. 2021). The purpose of this exploratory embedded case study is (a) to discover how the COVID-19 pandemic has generated momentum to rethink and transform traditional business models within the risk-prevalent tourism industry in Hawai'i and (b) to identify sustainability-based recovery strategies for navigating the uncertainty within the tourism industry in Hawai'i's small island economy. The results of this study may contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the business opportunities that emerged from the momentum and transition to a resilient, sustainable, and green economy.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Michael Porter and Mark Kramer's (2011) shared value model and presents the potential applicability of the shared value model in the global and post-pandemic crises in the Hawaiian tourism industry. The shared value model focuses on transforming the capitalist economic system and revisiting the role of corporate actors in society. Porter and Kramer (2011) argued that shared value could result from (a) reconceiving customer needs, products, and markets, (b) redefining productivity in the value chain, and (c) enabling local cluster development (p. 5). The COVID-19-generated forced pause in the tourism industry accentuated the mixed feelings about the industry and its impacts on local communities' ways of life and well-being, inclusive of and beyond economic development (Riley et al. 2021; Wianecki n.d.). Many actors realized the necessity of putting communities first (Haywood 2020) and shifting from traditional business models towards new economic and business models that would meet the needs of society with products and services that respond to social and environmental issues (Riley et al. 2021). Shared value-based tourism models have the potential to achieve this shift and present an opportunity to review how the tourism industry, and DMOs especially, should focus on cluster-based managerial approaches (Haywood 2020).

2. Literature Review

2.1 The COVID-19 Pandemic-Driven Momentum

The global pandemic and the forced pause imposed by a slower pace of economic and social activities have also generated a window of opportunity to change direction, shift away from traditional business models, create a new sustainable normal, and prevent future crises (Bodenheimer and Leidenberger 2020). For many (IMF n.d.; OECD 2021), the new *sustainable normal* translates into a green recovery as a preamble to a green economy. Unlike traditional pro-growth normalized economic models, the green economy emphasizes integrating social and environmental considerations into our economic system to measure progress and reduce risks (Cigu et al. 2020). While some critics are questioning whether the pandemic will generate short-lived changes or global and long-term course corrections for the industry (Hall et al. 2020). The literature suggests that many scholars (Gössling et al. 2020; Prideaux et al. 2020; Rowen 2020) support the latter. Many travelers now look for products and experiences that align with their social values and lifestyles (Sigala 2020). While on the supply side, DMOs and the travel industry understand the need to align their focus on sustainable and responsible tourism options (Rowen 2020).

2.2 Tourism Industry in Small Island Economies and Hawai'i

A significant proportion of small island economies highly depends on the tourism industry's contribution to the GDP, local economy, and employment (Armstrong and Read 2021). The Hawaiian archipelago is no exception. The archipelago is known for being among the top sought-after destinations in the USA (Yong et al. 2021), and tourism is an essential economic driver in Hawai'i, representing approximately 25% of the local economy (Wianecki n.d.) and 17% of its GDP (HTA 2020b). Tourism revenues are the primary source of private capital for the state's economy (HTA, 2019b), where visitors' spending accounted for $17.84 billion and directly supported 216 000 jobs in 2019 (HTA 2019a). The archipelago of 1,441,553 population (Hawaii 2021a) welcomed over 10.3 million visitors in 2019 (HTA 2019a).

2.3 The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Hawaiian Tourism Industry

Tourism has been among the most impacted industries by the COVID-19 pandemic in Hawai'i and elsewhere. The following travel restrictions, successive lockdowns, and quarantine requirements have virtually halted almost all tourist activities worldwide. According to the World Travel Tourism Council (2020), the travel restrictions have resulted in a net reduction of 197 million jobs worldwide in the industry. While the overall long-term impacts on the industry remain unclear, it can be asserted that the previously sustained Hawaiian tourism growth has been halted drastically and is expected to stay low for 2021 and 2022 despite some rebound (HTA 2021). In the first ten months of 2020, tourists visiting Hawai'i have declined by 73.4% compared to the year before (HTA 2020a). The Hawaii Department of Business Economic Development and Tourism (2021b) estimated that unemployment in Hawai'i increased tenfold due to the global pandemic, from 2% to 10%, representing one of the highest in the USA in 2020 compared to the previous year. The Economic Research Organization at the University of Hawai'i (2020) highlighted that due to Hawai'i's heavy reliance on tourism, which Nevada only surpasses, the state performed poorly in economic performance during the pandemic.

3. Method

Based on its revelatory nature, a single embedded case study has been chosen to conduct this research (Rowley 2002; Yin 2018). As suggested by Yin (2018), this research method is adequate for understanding topics using *how* and *why* questions when the researchers have little or no control over the events and when the approach focuses on contemporary events. Additionally, the case study design is appropriate for researchers seeking to perform a study involving a limited number of organizations (Rowley 2002) while looking for a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation and a thick interpretation of the topic (Tracy 2010). The state-funded organization mandated to oversee tourism management in Hawai'i has been selected for this study. The Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) was established in 1998 and acts as the destination management organization (DMO) for the state (HTA 2023b); its role is to sustainably manage tourism activities while reconciling the values, needs, and goals of all stakeholders involved. The embedded units under study are the four island counties (a) Kaua'i; (b) Maui Nui; (c) Island of Hawai'i; and (d) O'ahu (sub-units) and the business strategies developed in partnership with the HTA (main unit) following the global pandemic.

3.1 Population and Sample

A purposeful sampling method has been selected for identifying and selecting data sources for this case study. Consequently, 69 official documents from the Hawai'i Tourism Authority spanning three years and published from January 2019 to December 2021 have been selected for their potential to describe the DMO's approach to tourism both before and during the global pandemic. Additionally, 15.5 hours of direct observations were performed during the first in-person 2-day annual conference at the 2022 Hawai'i Tourism Conference in Honolulu to increase the representativeness of the population under study and the sources of evidence used (Rowley 2022). The data collection process was performed until no new evidence challenged the description of the phenomenon or potential learnings related to the research questions (Polkinghorne 2005). An additional 19 documents were analysed to ensure sufficient information had been collected before and after the start of the pandemic to reach saturation.

3.2 Materials /Instrumentation

A case study protocol has been developed to standardize, centralize, and support the data collection process. A case study protocol also helps bring focus to the topic under study and increase the reliability of the case study (Yin 2018) and external validity (Rowley 2002). As part of the case study protocol, an observation protocol has been developed to guide and record the observation process. Direct observations have been selected for this study to allow for the appreciation of the phenomenon as it unfolds in its natural setting (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] 2018; Creswell 2018), resulting in a rich interpretation of the phenomenon (Kumar 1996). A combined approach has been selected to perform the observations using both a structured and unstructured method to optimize the observation of elements that have been anticipated and those that have not (Cottage Health n.d.).

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection has been performed in examining Hawai'i Tourism Authority's actions before and after the global pandemic. It has also analysed if the latter has influenced the general business directions taken by the HTA and its partners. Multiple sources of evidence have supported the analysis; document and archival records analysis (Creswell 2018; Yin 2018) and direct observations (Kumar 1996; Morgan et al. 2017) have played an essential role in developing this case study. Firstly, the document analysis of official and publicly available files and archival records spanning over three years have been collected. HTA's board and committees' meetings' minutes, annual reports, special resolutions, memorandums, strategic plans, action plans, budgets, survey data, and service records have provided insights into organizations under study to relate the data and the findings to the proper unit of analysis or the organization (Gray 2014). Key constructs related to the phenomenon under study, the conceptual framework, and the research questions have been selected to structure the content analysis process. Documents and archival records have been manually analysed and scanned for keywords related to *competitiveness*, *corporate social responsibility, social responsibility, green economy*, *green recovery*, *innovation*, *resilience, responsible tourism, sustainability*, *sustainable tourism, and transformation*. Secondly, opportunities for direct observations have been leveraged during the 2022 Hawai'i Tourism Conference in Honolulu at the Hawai'i Conference Centre on December 8 and 9, 2022.

3.4 Ethical Assurance

Reflective comments have been listed and examined during the study process to allow for enhanced internal validity and reliability (Creswell 2018; Shenton 2004). The case study and observation protocols have also been used to standardize the data collection process and mitigate the possibility of researcher bias and its influence on the data collection process. Finally, permissions were granted before the Conference and during the event to perform research, take notes, and take pictures of the event and participants.

4. Findings and Results

Actors from the tourism industry perceived the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to reflect and reevaluate the tourism industry's responsibility and shift toward a recovery focused on sustainability. The Hawaiian term *huliau* meaning a point of transformation or a time of change has been used by several actors from the industry both in documents and archival records analysed and during the annual Conference to describe the role of the pandemic in generating momentum to transform business models within the tourism industry. The latter has been seen as accelerating the timeline and discussions related to the pivot of the tourism industry in a more

sustainable direction rather than instigating these discussions. To illustrate the role of the pandemic in accelerating sustainability-based discussions and initiatives, a keyword analysis has been performed. Across the 18 documents scanned from 2019, 45 keywords related to the phenomenon under study, the conceptual framework, and the research questions have been identified, compared to 132 keywords noted within the 21 documents reviewed from 2020 and 506 keywords recorded from the 30 documents from 2021, as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Content Analysis Results

Year	Number of Documents	Keywords Identified	Keywords Average
2019	18 documents	45 related keywords	2.5
2020	21 documents	132 related keywords	6.29
2021	30 documents	506 related keywords	16.87

4.1 Sustainability-Based Recovery Strategies to Navigate Uncertainty

Building on existing initiatives, several recovery strategies suggest developing and collecting extra-financial metrics and data to report and disclose on existing marketing or sustainability-based programs, including the Aloha + Challenge, the annual resident sentiment survey, or local buying programs such as the Kaua'i Made program. A second category describes sustainability, and resilience-based recovery strategies is the *Mālama Hawai'i* Program and its focus on *regenerative tourism.* The Hawaiian word *Mālama* signifies to give back, it has been introduced within the *RESOLUTION 2021-2-1 RE: Realignment and Reorganization of HTA Strategic Plan and Operations* and marked a milestone in the adoption of sustainability and resilience-based recovery strategies (HTA 2021c).

The third sustainability and resilience-based category includes the Destination Management Plans (DMAPs) and their focus on the four interacting pillars of HTA's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan: Natural Resources, Hawaiian Culture, Community, and Brand Marketing. The DMAPs were created during a collaborative and multi-stakeholder consultation process that included tourism actors and partners, local communities, academics, local and national governments and tailored specifically for each of the four counties, including Kaua'i, Maui Nui (Maui, Moloka'i, and Lāna'i), O'ahu and Hawai'i Island.

Lastly, the need for creating collaborative initiatives and engaging the entire tourism ecosystem has been repeatedly discussed and is perceived as critical for sustainability and resilience-based recovery strategies. This could be done by building and expanding communities of practices and networks to share success stories and best practices around regenerative tourism and enable collaborative actions between actors from the industry. Such collaboration and discussions should include academics, outreach types of research, public-private partnerships, as well as local communities and residents.

5. Evaluation of the Findings

5.1 Reconceiving Customer Needs, Products, and Markets

The document and archival records analysis and direct observations suggest that the global COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of new tourism management approaches for the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) and the four island counties. The Mālama Hawai'i Program and the concept of regenerative tourism have been introduced in 2021. It marked a milestone in adopting new products and services that consider the needs of visitors, the local community, and other stakeholders. For instance, local stewardship programs support visitors' safety and awareness of the local culture. At the same time, park reservation management systems for non-residents alleviate the pressure on natural areas and reduce traffic in residential areas while increasing ease of access to popular tourist areas for Hawaiian residents. Furthermore, visitors' and residents' satisfaction are key performance indicators (KPIs) adopted to measure progress in the HTA's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.

5.2 Redefining Productivity in the Value Chain

The findings indicate that the HTA executed several measures related to the realignment of its budget, operations, communications, and strategic plan that influenced components of its value chain such as

procurement policies and procedures, organizational structure, and employee training and development. This strategic realignment was perceived as necessary to adapt to the disruptions generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to operate in a changing business environment (HTA 2021c). Furthermore, HTA's adoption of an updated Strategic Communications Plan in 2021 indicated the desire to proactively deliver messages to key stakeholders from the tourism industry and inform them about the recovery strategies (HTA 2021a). Lastly, direct observations highlighted the desire to amplify partnerships with local colleges and universities to support technology and knowledge development, recovery strategies, and new business approaches for the tourism industry.

5.3 Enabling Local Cluster Development

The data analysis stipulates that the Hawai'i Tourism Authority carried out several initiatives to improve the tourism industry's business environment. Among others, the HTA provided various funding to local organizations to support tourism initiatives or strengthen tourism actors' sustainability skills, namely, the Community Enrichment Program and the Certification Program. Furthermore, adopting and implementing the four Destination Management Plans (DMAPs) in collaboration with multiple stakeholders such as residents, representatives from the local communities, the business sector, and nonprofit organizations demonstrated the aspiration to co-create supporting initiatives conducive to collaboration between interconnected actors from the industry.

6. Limitations of the Study

The case focused on the archipelago of Hawai'i as a destination-specific case study, therefore, the applicability of this research to other regions or industries may be limited. Other potential directions could include a broader research scope as part of a multiple-case studies design requiring extensive resources and time (Yin 2018) or longitudinal research (Gray 2014). This research could be extended by exploring the perspectives of additional actors in the tourism ecosystems, such as academic researchers, city councillors, services providers, tourists, travel agents, etc., about the impacts of the pandemic and the adoption of different recovery strategies. Finally, this study is not exhaustive in terms of implications and strategies used or valued across the tourism industry's stakeholders, and it does not represent the perspectives of the industry uniformly as a group.

7. Conclusion

This study confirmed previous research that suggested the COVID-19-driven opportunities provided a time to reflect on the industry's vulnerabilities, innovate, and transform (Gössling et al. 2020; Haywood 2020; Prideaux et al. 2020; Rowen 2020; Sigala 2020). Additionally, this crisis and post-crisis situated research provided an occasion to revisit the shared value model, reinforce its applicability in the context of a changing reality, and validate the transformative potential of integrating social and environmental considerations into business strategies (Porter 2011). Finally, this research contributed to filling a gap in the academic literature on destination-specific, sustainable, and responsible tourism (Mathew and Thankachan 2019) and the role of the tourism ecosystem in generating positive impacts on the destination (Moscardo 2021). It would be interesting to explore other Pacific Island nations' recovery strategies to understand better the pandemic's impacts on the region's tourism industry. It is challenging to predict when global crises will happen. However, the ongoing turbulence of the worldwide context suggests that DMOs can prepare, anticipate, and mitigate the impacts of such events by adapting their business models and strategies toward proactive and resilient-based ones that can generate successful outcomes for all stakeholders.

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Gender Perspectives on the Service Quality of Low-Cost Hotels

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Abstract: Service sector has recently become quite important to the global economy. The Nigerian government and numerous public sector investors are developing infrastructure and implementing sound business plans to take advantage of the hospitality industry's enormous potential in the service sector. However, due to the intense competition in the marketplace and the hospitality sector's rapid development, many businesses have felt pressure to distinguish themselves from rivals through superior customer service. Despite the level of competition among the low-cost hotels, most of the low-cost hotels in Nigeria still lack marketing concepts to attract guests. Previous studies on SERVPERF (service performance) model focused on other classes of hotels, neglecting low-cost hotels. Thus, this study analysed the SERVPERF dimensions regarding guests' satisfaction in low-cost hotels, from the demographic perspective (gender). Five undergraduate students received authorization from low-cost hotels to collect research data with the assistance of hotel employees. Each of the five survey teams consisted of a hotel employee who speaks and understands Hausa language (local language) as well as an undergraduate student from Federal University Gusau, Zamfara state, Nigeria. Data were collected from 300 guests at low-cost hotels and analysed through structural equation modelling (SEM). Composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha and average variance extracted were used to test the reliability and validity of the instrument. It was revealed that assurance positively influenced male guests' satisfaction, while reliability positively influenced female guests' satisfaction in low-cost hotels. Furthermore, assurance negatively influenced female guests' satisfaction. Male guests in low-cost hotels cherish the staff's expertise and civility, as well as their capacity to instil trust and confidence. They want the hotel employees to make them feel comfortable while the services are being provided. The study's practical implications are elucidated in this paper.

Keywords: SERVPERF, Guest Satisfaction, Low-Cost Hotels, Gender, SEM

1. Introduction

According to statistics, the service sector—especially the hospitality sector—plays a significant role in Africa, regarding poverty reduction and jobs' creation (Christie et al., 2017). The gross domestic product (GDP) generated by the service sector in Nigeria has been on a steady increase (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2019). According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, (2019), the hotel business in Nigeria grew by 20% in 2018 and is projected to develop at a compound annual growth rate of 12% over the next five years. Evidently, the Nigerian government and numerous public sector investors are developing infrastructure and implementing sound business plans to take advantage of the hospitality industry's enormous potential (Adedipe & Adeleke, 2016; Ezeh et al., 2021). The success of hotel industry depends on guests' satisfaction. Therefore, in order to strengthen the hotel industry, hotel employees should choose possible guests through market segmentation, pinpoint their needs, and increase service quality (Ali et al., 2021; Ezeh, 2018).

For hotel employees to satisfy their customers, it is important to comprehend the needs and preferences of various market segments (Anabila et al., 2022; Ezeh, 2018; Ezeh et al., 2021; Liat et al., 2017; Zhang & Cole, 2016), even across gender. For instance, Ezeuduji *et al.*, (2014) discovered that a strong brand that addresses customers' needs will satisfy and attract customers' repeat purchase. Thus, delivering high quality service is essential to satisfy consumers and ensure the sustainability of the hotel. Due to the marketplace's intense competition and the hospitality sector's rapid development, many businesses have felt pressure to distinguish themselves from rivals in the market through superior customer service. Despite the increase in research in the area of service quality in the hospitality industry (Babić-Hodović et al., 2019; Ezeh et al., 2021; Shyju et al., 2023; Susanti, 2019), no study was found to have looked at the low-cost hotels and how they can be influenced by SERVPERF (service performance) dimensions, from gender perspective. It is still debatable if low-cost hotel guests seek for service quality. However, it has been argued that the concept of expectation is a common foundation of service quality (Paudyal et al., 2022). This rings true, as every hotel guest visits a hotel with some given expectations, for both luxury and low-cost hotels.

In order to evaluate a provider's service perception and performance, researchers created the SERVQUAL (service quality) model (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Zeithaml et al., 2018). Thus, SERVQUAL became a great

technique for assessing the services quality offered by businesses. However, Brown *et al.*, (1993) noted that SERVQUAL paradigm received harsh criticism. Therefore, many scholars evaluate customers' service quality with different models (Zeithaml et al., 1996, 2014). LODGSERV (Knutson et al., 1990), LODGQUAL (Getty & Thompson, 1994, 1995), and SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) are few examples. In order to ensure customer satisfaction, it is important to assure that actual service performance matches the level of quality the guest perceive (Parasuraman et al., 1988), not minding the class of the hotel. This is a big problem because it is hard to prove a connection between customer satisfaction and company's offerings. SERVQUAL and SERVPERF have been shown to be acceptable and reliable scales for assessing service quality (Carrillat et al., 2007); in addition, (Carvalho & Medeiros, 2021) merged the two models to investigate airline services; and (Rodrigues et al., 2011) on high education services. This led to the adoption of SERVPERF, a performance-based paradigm for this study that only analyse service quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994). Additionally, it has been said that SERVPERF is preferable over SERVQUAL because it is a more dependable, trustworthy, and user-friendly measuring tool (Yilmaz, 2009). This paper noted that the influence of service quality on customers' satisfaction across gender, particularly at low-cost hotels, is understudied.

It is common knowledge among marketing experts that location and cultural differences have impacts on how consumers evaluate the quality of a service, hence, results from other nations or different hotel types cannot be generalized (Hsieh & Tsai, 2009; Malik et al., 2020; Tsaur et al., 2005). Furthermore, it has been claimed that it is still unclear if the SERVPERF scale's dimensions can be generalized (Karatepe & Avci, 2002). No scholar has recognized the significance of assessing the impact of SERVPERF on guests' satisfaction in low-cost hotels in a developing nation. Most of the low-cost hotels in Nigeria still lack marketing concepts despite the intense rivalry among them. Thus, the following research question is developed: what are the SERVPERF dimensions that influence guest satisfaction, across gender, in low-cost hotels? Accordingly, this study examines the effects of service quality and SERVPERF dimensions; and their relationships, across gender. The literature review is presented next, followed by the methodology, and finally the findings and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

In today's economy, which is characterized by extreme competition, service quality (SQ) has become essential for business survival (Ezeh et al., 2021; Ezeuduji et al., 2014; Kandampully et al., 2011). Service quality has become a recurrent theme in modern literature and business practice. Service quality has been connected to a number of advantages, including customer satisfaction and retention, positive word-of-mouth, increased productivity, increased market share, improved employee morale, and higher profitability (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Shyju et al., 2023). Many studies in the hospitality industry have revealed a substantial correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction (Anabila et al., 2022). Thus, increasing customer satisfaction is the only way hotels can prosper. According to Parasuraman *et al.*, (1991), customer satisfaction is the guest's evaluation of their service expectations based on the actual execution of the service both before and after they receive it. According to several studies, guests who are satisfied with the hotel's services are more inclined to repeat purchase (H.-H. (Sunny) Hu et al., 2009; Kandampully et al., 2015; Kandampully & Hu, 2007; Wai Lai, 2019). Practitioners and academics concur that customer satisfaction and service quality are necessary for repeat purchase (Chatterjee et al., 2023).

SERVQUAL scales for assessing service quality was developed by (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988). SERVQUAL has a broad applicability across disciplines and contexts, which gives birth to its main claim of adaptability (Ali et al., 2021; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Despite its benefits, Cronin and Taylor, (1994) caution that the SERVQUAL's original formulation may not sufficiently account for contextual variables, necessitating some context-specific modifications to increase its contribution. In line with this, academics frequently accept the five scale of SERVQUAL, and modify the variables to account for the unique characteristics of the scenario. The hospitality sector has seen the establishment of many sector-specific frameworks, including LODSERV (Knutson et al., 1990), LODGQUAL (Getty & Thompson, 1994, 1995), and SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Thus, SERVQUAL (service quality) and SERVPERF (service performance) have been the most widely used scales for service quality assessment in the services marketing literature (Anabila et al., 2022).

Visitors' expectations were therefore not considered while evaluating the quality of the services; only aspects of consumer perceptions are employed for this study. A number of academics have underlined that it is challenging and useless to examine expectations when evaluating service quality (Yilmaz, 2009). Therefore, SERVPERF is used to explain customers' satisfaction in low-cost hotels as well as the moderating role of gender. The elements SERVPERF were condensed to five (assurance, empathy, reliability, tangibles, and responsiveness) in order to increase the psychometric robustness of the test (Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Yilmaz, 2009).

Tangibles refers to cues that guests physically notice at the service centre, such as contemporary equipment, tidy and professional look of employees, the presence of aesthetically appealing items linked with the service. *Reliability* refers to consumers' faith in workers to deliver services in line with the promise made; offer services correctly the first time and on schedule. *Responsiveness* refers to the willingness and promptness with which a service provider provides service and assistance to consumers. *Assurance* refers to staff's expertise and civility, as well as their capacity to instil trust and confidence in clients. *Empathy* refers to the personalized attention that the service centre provides to its consumers. It involves staff's personal contacts with customers, with the customer's best interests in mind. All these SERVPERF dimensions above were explained by (Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Despite several attempts to measure and explain the factors that affect customer satisfaction in hospitality industry, scholars do not seem to agree (Ahmad et al., 2019; Ezeh et al., 2021). Moreover, every hotel types make every effort to satisfy their guests because it is more expensive to acquire new customers than to retain existing ones (Kotler et al., 2022).

Hotel key drivers differ significantly depending on the context or the class of the hotel. Thus, adventure, thrills, excitement, solitude, social interaction, culture, relaxation, and fulfilment are some of the frequently reported motivation dimensions that may moderate the factors that influence customers satisfaction (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Park et al., 2023). Also, according to Shyju *et al.*, (2023), demographic traits affect customers' perceptions of businesses and their choices to buy particular services. Thus, this study examined the moderating effects of gender on the relationship between satisfaction and SERVPERF dimensions in low-cost hotels. Thus, we hypothesized as follows.

H1: The relationship between tangibility and low-cost hotel guests' satisfaction differs across gender.

H2: The relationship between reliability and low-cost hotel guests' satisfaction differs across gender.

H3: The relationship between responsiveness and low-cost hotel guests' satisfaction differs across gender.

H4: The relationship between assurance and low-cost hotel guests' satisfaction differs across gender.

H5: The relationship between empathy and low-cost hotel guests' satisfaction differs across gender.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

Customers of low-cost hotels in northwest Nigeria, were the target population. Hotels with rooms' rates ranging from eight thousand naira (₦8000.00) to three thousand naira (₦3000.00), that is $19 to $7 per night, are considered low-cost hotels in this study. Over the period of four months, a self-administered questionnaire was used to collect information from 300 hotel guests. Five undergraduate students received authorization from hotels in advance to collect data with the assistance of hotel employees. Each of the five survey teams consisted of a hotel employee who speaks and understands Hausa language, the local language, as well as an undergraduate student from Federal University Gusau, Zamfara state. Those who can speak Hausa were included in the team, in case of guests that do not understand English language. Hotel visitors were conveniently requested to complete questionnaires upon checking out.

3.2 Variables and Measurement

SERVPERF scale was adapted from several authors (Babić-Hodović et al., 2019; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Nasir & Adil, 2020), while customer satisfaction and customer loyalty variables came from (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). The data were gathered using a structured questionnaire, graded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The questionnaire items were assessed by three academics with expertise in hospitality marketing, and seven hotel workers before a pretest with hotel guests to ensure content validity. Thereafter, a full-scale study was conducted.

4. Results

4.1 Reliability and Validity Analyses

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were conducted to assess the measurement validity and reliability of the model. EFA was conducted using maximum likelihood analysis with Promax rotation, KMO was 0.867 ($p < 0.001$), which was more than the indicated value (Field, 2013; Pallant,

2020). Thus, all elements are sufficient for the factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019). All the indices indicated that the variables showed significant internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019; Pallant, 2020). As shown in Table 1, CFA was used to assess the items' validity and reliability. The six factors were retained and their individual loadings are more than 0.70, which is appropriate (Hair et al., 2014). Additionally, because the initial models did not meet the model fit criteria, model improvement using modification indices was carried out. Thus, factors with high modification indices were removed (Collier, 2020). Following model improvement, the following model indices demonstrate that the model's fit criteria have been satisfied: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.947, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.948, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.936, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.079 (Collier, 2020; L. Hu & Bentler, 1999). Furthermore, the entire model fit produced a chi-square of 422.458 with 155 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.001$). The relative/normed Chi-Square ratio is 2.726. Thus, the proper range is met (Hair et al., 2019; Hair Jr et al., 2010). Additionally, discriminant validity testing was done on the structural model. As shown in Table 1, the average variance extracted (AVE) of each measurement varied from 0.653 to 0.914, exceeding 50% of variance (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Also, Cronbach's alphas for reliability for the six components were above the stipulated level of 0.70 (Field, 2013; Hair et al., 2019). The fact that the AVE for each construct was greater than the squared correlation coefficients for the linked inter-constructs demonstrates sufficient discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1:

Confirmatory factor Analysis

Items		Estimate	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Responsiveness	RESP6	0.977	0.977	0.914	0.977
	RESP5	0.990			
	RESP1	0.960			
	RESP4	0.895			
Empathy	EMPA4	0.942	0.878	0.708	0.868
	EMPA2	0.853			
	EMPA5	0.713			
Tangibility	TANG2	0.869	0.903	0.653	0.900
	TANG4	0.827			
	TANG3	0.891			
	TANG1	0.796			
	TANG6	0.632			
Assurance	ASSU1	0.775	0.870	0.691	0.867
	ASSU4	0.879			
	ASSU3	0.838			
Reliability	RELI3	0.792	0.889	0.728	0.878
	RELI4	0.922			
	RELI1	0.842			
Satisfaction	SATI3	0.860	0.924	0.859	0.919
	SATI4	0.989			

Table 2:

Fornell and locker criterion of discriminants validity

Items	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	RESP	EMPA	TANG	ASSU	RELI	SATI
RESP	0.977	0.914	0.280	0.989	**0.956**					
EMPA	0.878	0.708	0.258	0.921	0.323	**0.842**				
TANG	0.903	0.653	0.367	0.920	0.303	0.508	**0.808**			

Items	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	RESP	EMPA	TANG	ASSU	RELI	SATI
ASSU	0.870	0.691	0.367	0.879	0.497	0.460	0.606	**0.832**		
RELI	0.889	0.728	0.297	0.907	0.529	0.385	0.447	0.532	**0.853**	
SATI	0.924	0.859	0.297	0.979	0.397	0.300	0.281	0.357	0.545	**0.927**

4.2 Structural Equation Model (SEM) Path Analysis

The influence of SERVPER dimensions on satisfaction across gender are investigated using SEM. Table 3 shows that assurance ($\beta = 0.494$, $p < 0.00$) has significant influence on male guests' satisfaction, while responsiveness, empathy, reliability and tangibility have no significant influence on male guests' satisfaction. Table 4 shows that reliability ($\beta = 0.602$, $p < 0.00$) has significant influence on female guests' satisfaction; and assurance ($\beta = -0.274$, $p < 0.05$) has negative and significant influence on female guests' satisfaction.

Table 3:

Male Path Coefficient

Paths			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Remark
SATI	<---	RESP	0.051	0.067	0.585	0.558	Not Supported
SATI	<---	EMPA	0.132	0.054	1.538	0.124	Not Supported
SATI	<---	TANG	-0.033	0.078	-0.356	0.722	Not Supported
SATI	<---	ASSU	0.494	0.128	3.79	***	**Supported**
SATI	<---	RELI	0.127	0.076	1.209	0.227	Not Supported

Table 4:

Female Path Coefficient

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
SATI	<---	RESP	0.084	0.080	0.794	0.427	Not Supported
SATI	<---	EMPA	0.060	0.098	0.603	0.546	Not Supported
SATI	<---	TANG	0.106	0.143	0.800	0.424	Not Supported
SATI	<---	ASSU	-0.274	0.145	-2.216	0.027	**Supported**
SATI	<---	RELI	0.602	0.129	4.758	***	**Supported**

5. Discussion

SERVPERF was used to evaluate guests' satisfaction across gender in low-cost hotels. It was revealed that assurance influences male guests' satisfaction, while reliability influences female guests' satisfaction in low-cost hotels. Furthermore, assurance negatively influences female guests' satisfaction. Male guests in low-cost hotels cherish the staff's expertise and civility, as well as their capacity to instil trust and confidence. They want the hotel employees to make them feel comfortable while the services are being provided. This study is in tandem with other scholars' finding (Meesala & Paul, 2018; Namin, 2017), although they studied all hotel types' guests. It shows that guests are satisfied with low-cost hotels that deliver on service promised. Agreeably, there is no significant relationship between tangibility and guests' satisfaction for both male and female guests. Thus, low-cost hotels' guests do not care much about the low-cost hotels' physical environment. This study is in line with other scholars' finding that tangibility does not significantly influence satisfaction (Meesala & Paul, 2018; Mey et al., 2006). The focus of this present study is on low-cost hotels that may not care much about professionalism, and that might be the reason for that conflicting finding between males and females. Notably, empathy, tangibility, and responsiveness do not influence guests' satisfaction. No scholar was found to have divested low-cost hotels' service quality into dimensions, to test them across gender, as this study has done.

5.1 Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to predict the influence of SERVPERF dimensions on low-cost hotels' guest satisfaction across gender (male and female guests). The study's findings suggest some implications for hotel

management. The result shows that low-cost hotel staff should emphasize more on assurance to male guests, and reliability to female guests to satisfy guests and make them to repeat purchase. Low-cost hotels are mostly one-man owned businesses and may not have enough capital to beautify and professionalize some of the services delivered by these hotels. The SERVPERF scale clearly provides hotel management with critical data for designing quality improvement initiatives and gaining competitive advantage.

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An Importance–Performance Analysis Approach to a Tourism Destination: the Case of Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Portugal

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Abstract: Pull factors, the attributes of a specific location, matter in tourism. These factors encompass the distinctive characteristics and alluring features that attract tourists to a destination, their importance and performance influencing the decision-making process and overall experience. A clear comprehension of this concept is crucial for destinations' economic vitality as they compete for tourists and strive for economic expansion and employment prospects. Indeed, an in-depth knowledge of these factors' importance and performance underscores the need for regions to adjust their approach to evolving tourist preferences. This adaptation is crucial to fostering responsible and sustainable tourism practices that safeguard cultural and natural resources. However, besides learning about the factors considered critical by tourists to visit a location, it is paramount to analyse how they evaluate the performance of each of these factors while staying there.

This study focuses on the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA), Portugal, and the findings will provide essential insights into destination competitiveness, sustainable tourism development, and the creation of unique travel experiences. As a destination that gained popularity, attracting tourists from all over the world, it is necessary to comprehend the specific factors that contribute to this vibrant region's allure and how it performs regarding them. The research will use the Importance-Performance Analysis to make data interpretation accessible and suggest relevant measures to improve competitiveness based on optimising the allocation of resources among the various factors/attributes analysed. The research incorporates numerous criteria categories, including historical significance, urban appeal, natural scenery, culinary experiences, cultural heritage, and aspects like streets' cleanliness, transport availability, or health emergency infrastructures.

The study's conclusions will impact Lisbon region's (LMA) tourism and destination management. By understanding what factors are more important for tourists that visit the area and their evaluation of the performance of each of these factors, stakeholders can improve marketing, infrastructure, and the visitors' experience to promote sustainable development and maintain Lisbon's standing as a top tourist destination for rewarding and enlightening experiences. Relevant data is also provided to inform future tourism initiatives. This study adds to the academic discussion of location competitiveness and unique travel experiences.

Keywords - Tourism, Destination Pull Factors, Importance Performance Analysis, Destination Competitiveness, Tourist Satisfaction.

1. Introduction

With its increasing economic importance, tourism has gained relevance in academic research (Leask, 2016), with substantial gains in scientific knowledge and decision-making support tools. With the growth of world tourism and the growing rivalry amongst destinations, achieving destination competitiveness is a central feature of tourism policy and academic debate. The knowledge about a destination's competitive position, including its weaker and stronger attributes, is vital to governments and market players (Dwyer, Forsyth and Rao, 2000) since it is critical for its success (Dwyer and Kim, 2003; Mangion, Durbarry and Sinclair, 2005).

Considering the tourist locations' competitiveness research, several methods have been applied (Morgan, Lugosi and Ritchie, 2010; Pearce and Benckendorff, 2006), with the Importance/Performance Analysis (IPA) model (Martilla and James, 1977) being applied to assess the competitiveness of tourism destinations based on tourist feedback. Despite some criticism (Busacca and Arbore, 2011), the model allows a rigorous competitive analysis of a tourist destination widely applied to tourism (Lai and Hitchcock, 2015). The IPA analysis has been used in

tourism, enabling destinations to improve their performance and formulate strategies for enhancing their offer (Bi et al., 2019).

This article presents an application of the IPA model to one of Europe's fastest-growing destinations, the Lisbon region. The research aims to obtain insights about the relevance of the pull factors (attributes) influencing Lisbon region tourism competitiveness and the region's performance on these attributes based on the tourist's feedback. While there is already an IPA study considering the tourists' feedback about Portugal (Padma, 2016), and an IPA study considering the stakeholders (not tourists) feedback about Lisbon city (Rosário et al., 2022), to the best of our knowledge, this is the first research regarding the tourists' perspective on the Lisbon region.

The study of the Lisbon region's competitive attributes will be based on the perspective of winter tourists. This study contributes both to academia and practice. On the one hand, this study reveals the relevance of the tourists' feedback approach to identifying a destination's competitiveness attributes. On the other hand, the study offers Lisbon's region destination managers and other stakeholders' information regarding the pull factors contributing to evaluating and choosing the region as a tourist destination and their respective performance. The results can also help regional tourism market stakeholders make investment allocation decisions.

2. Importance-Performance Analysis in Tourism

The importance-performance analysis (IPA) was developed by Martilla and James (1977) and used in marketing with the first application to the vehicle industry. The IPA model is a business research technique to help managers' decision-making based on the concepts of choice models of multiple attributes. It is intended to assist in investment allocation decision-making and to maintain and improve consumer satisfaction (Martilla and James, 1977). The objective of the IPA model is to make data interpretation accessible and to suggest relevant measures to enhance competitiveness based on the optimisation of the allocation of resources among the various attributes analysed (Abalo, Varela and Manzano, 2007).

In the traditional IPA technique, data from customer satisfaction surveys or service quality surveys (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) are used to construct a two-dimensional matrix, where the x-axis depicts the attribute importance and the y-axis represents the attribute performance (satisfaction or service quality). The mean of performance and importance divide the matrix into four quadrants, identifying areas of high or low attribute performance combined with high or low attribute importance. The matrix provides managers with information on the aspects that (i) are performing well but need continued investment; (ii) aspects that require additional investment as they are underperforming; (iii) aspects that are of low priority and require little investment; and (iv) aspects that are at risk of overinvestment as they are of minor importance to customers (Coghlan, 2012). Azzopardi and Nash (2013) presented the IPA interpretation in tourism research (Figure 1).

Other authors considered additionally using a diagonal line over the IPA matrix with all points above an upward-sloping 45° line where importance exceeds performance, being high priorities for improvement or *market opportunities*. Below this line are presented the *satiated needs*. All attributes over the line have the same importance and performance results and, therefore, the same priority for improvement (Hawes and Rao, 1985). Wu and Jimurathis (2019) combined the diagonal line and quadrant models with the scale-centred axes and crosshairs at 4 out of 5.

While some IPA research uses well-established attributes derived from previous studies (Tonge and Moore, 2007), it is crucial to note that the validity of the study can be seriously compromised if the importance measurement fails to reflect the specific characteristics of the research target (Azzopardi and Nash, 2013). To address this, Lai and Hitchcock (2015) recommend that researchers develop unique attributes tailored to their specific study. As earlier research has shown (Tonge and Moore, 2007), it is crucial to select the correct attributes for the IPA model to make effective management decisions (Oh, 2001).

This research technique has been applied to all kinds of tourism locations covering several subjects of interest, with some of the more recent being about destination competitiveness of six top island destinations in Southeast Asia (Mustafa, Omar and Mukhiar, 2020), performance and customer evaluation of green hotel attributes (Quan, Kim and Han, 2022), local people's view of sustainable tourism principles (Akinci and Ökzüz, 2022) and the quality gaps in tourism for people with disabilities (Skalskaa, 2023).

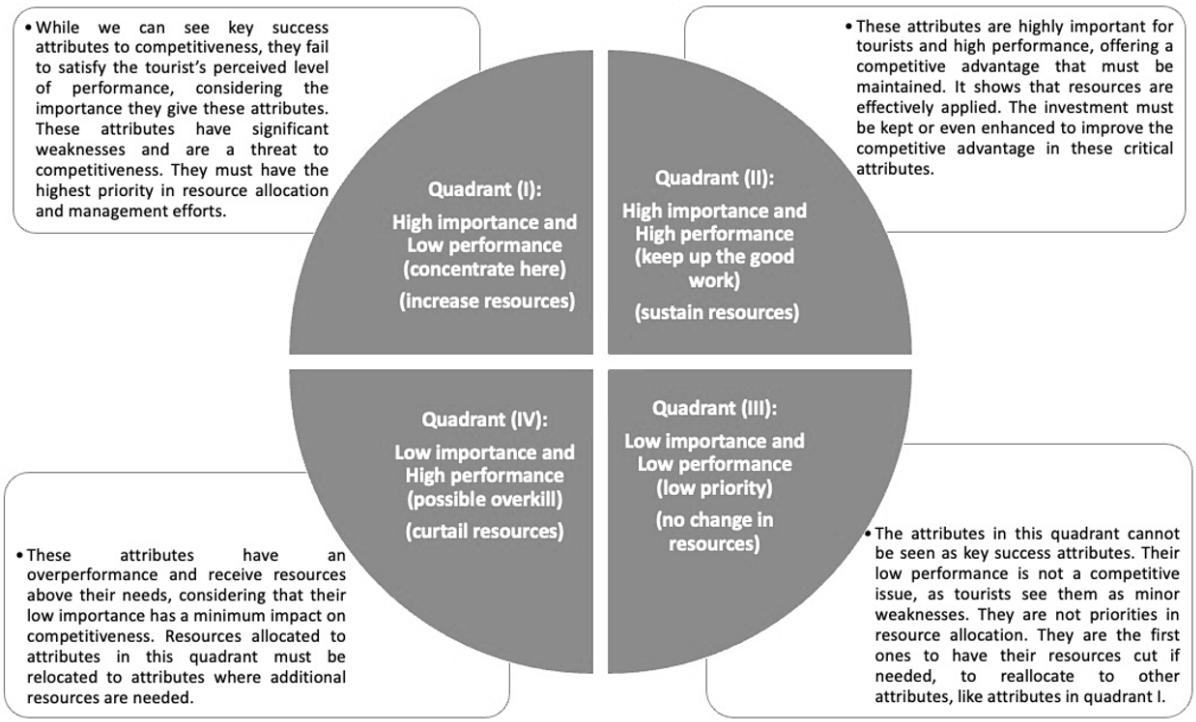

Figure 1: The IPA grid: application to tourism research (Azzopardi and Nash, 2013)

3. The Importance-Performance Analysis Applied to the Lisbon Metropolitan Area

The LMA is centred around the capital city of Lisbon and comprises 18 counties, including the city of Lisbon. In 2021, the population reached 2.869 million (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2022), with 509,614 residents living in the town. With 3015 square km, the region accounts for 3.3% of Portugal's total territory. With an active population of more than 1.4 million individuals (29% of Portugal's active population), the LMA represents 36% of the country's GDP.

While the pull factors might entice travellers to choose a particular destination like LMA, it is equally important to understand how these factors measure up during the tourists' stay. The pull factors performance measures their level of satisfaction. If the reality falls short of their expectations, it can lead to disappointment and negatively impact their experience of the destination. Tourists who have a great experience are more likely to return, encourage others to visit, and become ambassadors for the location (Goo et al., 2022), causing a direct economic impact on the destination (Rita, Brochado and Dimova, 2019). Satisfied tourists are more likely to spend money on the destination, fuelling the local economy and creating job opportunities, while analysing tourists' feedback allows destination management organisations, businesses, and local authorities to make informed strategic decisions about resource allocation, enabling the destination to adapt and improve continually.

Pull factors of a destination can vary across destinations and change over time, influenced by various aspects, including demographic changes, technology, infrastructure, political stability, and evolving consumer preferences (Lee, Chung and Koo, 2023). Using other methods than IPA research has been undertaken to examine the pull factors of the Lisbon region (Correia, Kozak, and Ferradeira, 2013; Sarra and Cappucci, 2015; Pestana, Parreira and Moutinho, 2020). All these studies were done before the pandemic, so conducting a fresh analysis of the factors that currently attract and retain importance for tourists in the Lisbon region is crucial.

4. Method

4.1 Data Collection and Instruments

A comprehensive procedure was applied to ascertain the contemporary and appropriate attributes of the Lisbon region (Lee, Chung and Koo, 2023; Zainuddin, Radzi and Zahari, 2015). The initial phase entailed an exhaustive

review of relevant literature to discern the most current contributions to the field that identify tourist destination attributes (Rita, Brochado and Dimova, 2019). Subsequently, a questionnaire was formulated during the second phase, encompassing all the attributes pinpointed in the literature review. This questionnaire was administered to a convenience sample of tourists who chose the most symbolic characteristic of the Lisbon region. Additionally, the participants could add more attributes to the original list according to their perceptions or previous image of the area (Lai and Hitchcock, 2015; Tonge and Moore, 2007; (Zainuddin et al., 2018). In the third phase, four experts on tourism merged and consolidated the attributes into distinct categories to create a specific set of characteristics of this region as a tourist destination (Chen, Lee and Tsai, 2016; Zainuddin et al., 2018). A reduced list of attributes was a goal since the study's target population were tourists.

The final questionnaire was developed, comprehending a list of ten attributes fitted to the destination of the study. Thirteen sampling points were identified to cover the region as best as possible, and the data was collected in November 2023. An importance-performance analysis model based on a 7-point Likert scale (1-lower importance or performance; 7-higher importance or performance) was applied to assess the competitiveness of the Lisbon region as a tourist destination.

4.2 Sample Profile

The convenience sample comprises 388 observations, providing a comprehensive snapshot of its diverse composition. This characterisation emphasises the predominant features of the sample, highlighting the age group, gender, education, employment, income, and nationality.

The age distribution reflects a broad spectrum, with a more significant percentage falling within the 26 to 35 years bracket, constituting 41% of the sample. Noteworthy is the 18 to 25 years group, comprising 18% of the sample, and the 36 to 45 years group, accounting for 17%. The gender distribution reveals a predominance of women, constituting 62% of the sample. Men represent 37.6%, with a minority identifying as non-binary, two individuals.

A substantial 78.3% of respondents indicated possessing "Tertiary education". A smaller proportion holds a "Degree" (2.3%), while nine individuals have pursued post-graduate studies; the rest fall under secondary or primary education.

Among the respondents, 52% are employed full-time, with 39 working part-time. Entrepreneurs constitute 14.7%, while retirees and full-time students account for 11.3% and 9.8%, respectively. Many respondents (41%) report an annual gross income between 20 000 and 40 000 euros. Those earning less than 20 000 euros or between 40 001 and 50 000 euros represent 20.9% and 24%, respectively. Respondents originate from a diverse range of 45 countries, with Brazil (13.4%), Spain (11.6%), and the USA (11.1%) emerging as the most represented.

4.3 Importance/Performance Analysis method

The method considers the IPA Analysis's four quadrants, scale-centred and data-centred, combined with the diagonal line and gap analysis (difference between performance and importance for each attribute).

5. Results Discussion

5.1 Importance-Performance Analysis

Considering the studied attributes, the Importance median scores range from 4 to 7, with mean scores between 4.15 and 6.64 (Table 1). At the same time, the Performance median scores also vary from 4 to 7 but with higher mean scores between 4.72 and 6.68 (Table 2).

When evaluating the importance of the ten attributes in the Lisbon region, the Wilcoxon test showed that only "Nightlife" and "Events and Festivals" did not have a median higher than four in a statistically significant way. Similarly, the t-test showed that only "Events and Festivals" did not have a mean higher than four on a 7-Likert scale. This result indicates that these attributes were not considered as important as others when choosing a travel destination.

When examining the ten attributes' performance, the Wilcoxon test and the t-test showed that the median and mean scores were higher than four on a 7-Likert scale for all attributes, suggesting that the attributes, besides having good performance evaluation, were important results considering their respective importance scores.

Table 1: Importance Attributes Statistical Results

	Importance			
Attributes	**Median**	**Mean**	**SD**	**p-value**
CHAH - Culture, History and Architectural Heritage	7	5.92	1.52	< .001
G – Gastronomy	7	6.34	1.19	< .001
SCL - Scenic Views and Landscapes	7	6.22	1.35	< .001
CW - Climate and Weather	7	5.88	1.43	< .001
SS - Safety and Security	7	6.64	0.97	< .001
N – Nightlife	5	4.23	2.18	0.02
LA - Language accessibility (English-speaking locals)	7	6.11	1.29	< .001
HFL - Hospitality and Friendliness of the Locals	6	6.08	1.13	< .001
A – Authenticity	6	5.72	1.47	< .001
EF - Events and Festivals	4	4.15	1.95	0.07

5.1.1 Attributes Importance for Lisbon's Region Attractiveness

Table 1 shows the evaluation of the importance of the considered attributes by the sample of tourists. "Safety and Security" was the attribute carrying the highest Importance score (median of seven) and a mean of 6.64, followed by "Gastronomy" (median of seven) and a mean of 6.34. Other specific attributes also significantly influence their travel decisions: "Language accessibility (English-speaking locals)" (median seven and mean 6.11), "Scenic Views and Landscapes" (median seven and mean 6.22), and "Hospitality and Friendliness of the Locals" (median six and mean 6.08) all have a mean greater than six. "Authenticity," "Climate and Weather" (an attribute beyond the control of authorities and other stakeholders), and "Culture, History, and Architectural Heritage" are attributes with means below six but with values near it and medians respectively of 6, 7 and 7, showing the relevance of these attributes for the visitors.

As shown, "Nightlife" and "Events and Festivals" are the less important attributes in travel choices.

Table 2: Performance Attributes Statistical Results

	Performance			
Attributes	**Median**	**Mean**	**SD**	**p-value**
CHAH - Culture, History and Architectural Heritage	7	6.63	0.78	< .001
G - Gastronomy	7	6.48	0.85	< .001
SCL - Scenic Views and Landscapes	7	6.68	0.7	< .001
CW - Climate and Weather	7	6.08	1.23	< .001
SS - Safety and Security	6	6.10	0.96	< .001
N – Nightlife	5	5.04	1.18	< .001
LA - Language accessibility (English-speaking locals)	7	6.43	0.84	< .001
HFL - Hospitality and Friendliness of the Locals	6	5.96	1.06	< .001
A – Authenticity	6	5.69	1.11	< .001
EF - Events and Festivals	4	4.72	1.16	< .001

5.1.2 Attributes Performance for Lisbon's Region Attractiveness

The tourist sample provides additional feedback, offering their evaluation of the performance of the attributes in the Lisbon region, considering the importance of these attributes for their travel choices (Table 2).

Although all performance variables have a median and mean higher than four in a statistically significant way (p-values of median Wilcoxon test and mean t-test with p-value lower than 0,01), the attributes with better performance are "Scenic Views and Landscapes", "Culture, History, and Architectural Heritage", "Gastronomy",

"Language accessibility (English-speaking locals)", "Climate and Weather" with a median of seven and a mean of respectively 6.68, 6.63, 6.48, 6.43, and 6.08. "Safe and Security", while having a mean above six (6.1), has a lower median (six).

The worst performing attributes are "Nightlife" and "Events and Festivals" (median of five and four and mean of 5.04 and 4.72). Still, since they also have low importance for this sample of tourists, it is impossible to know if this evaluation is due to less good experiences or low to no experience at all.

5.2 Importance-Performance Analysis Grid

All attributes' importance and performance scores were applied to an IPA grid, considering both scale-centred and data-centred techniques (Bacon, 2003) with the diagonal model line in both grids (Hawes and Rao, 1985).

In the scale-centred analysis (Figure 2), all attributes are in quadrant II ("Keep up the good work") and near the top-right corner, showing the attributes' good performance and comparing with the high importance that tourists gave to many of them. Considering the more demanding diagonal line, it's possible to see that "Safety and Security", "Hospitality and Friendliness of the Locals", and "Authenticity" are attributes that can be improved, being market opportunities, even if they reach high scores around six in the 7-Likert scale. On the other hand, the attributes "Events and Festivals" and "Nightlife" are near the "Possible Overkill" quadrant for the research sample, which does not mean that they are not important for the locals.

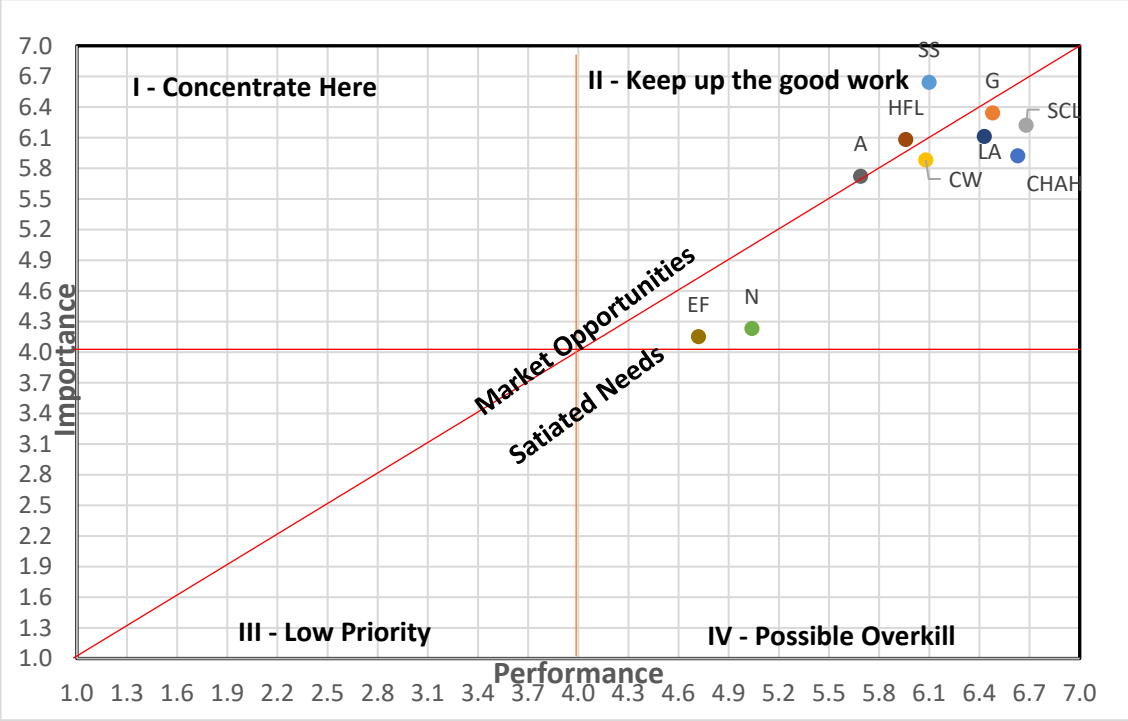

Figure 2: Importance-performance grid – (scale-centred and diagonal line)

For the more demanding data-centred grid of the attributes (Figure 3), the Importance mean is 5.7, and the Performance mean is six, which are considered for the definition of the four quadrants.

In this grid, the "Events and Festivals" and "Nightlife" entered into the III Quadrant of "Low Priority" because the importance given by the tourists is relatively low (median of 4 and 5, mean 4,15 and 4,23 respectively) while attributes "Hospitality and Friendliness of the Locals" and "Authenticity" enter in the quadrant "Concentrate Here" because of their performance below the average performance of attributes, showing the need for measures to try to improve its performance, a difficult task for the responsible stakeholders due to the characteristics of these attributes. The "Safety and Security" has a position in the Keep Up with the Good Work quadrant because it still has a performance evaluation above the attributes' mean, being an attribute of very high importance for the tourist.

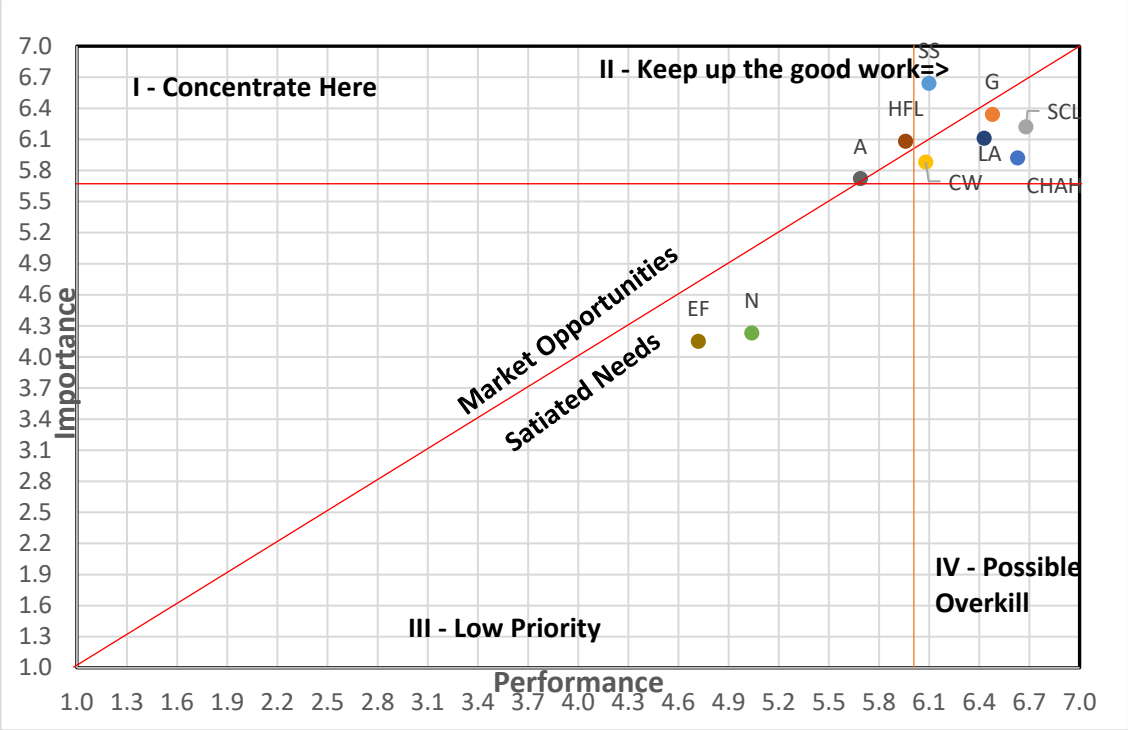

Figure 3: Importance-performance grid – (data-centred and diagonal line)

5.3 Gap Analysis

Gap analysis concerns the difference between Performance and Importance means (Bacon, 2003). A negative value shows that the performance of an attribute is lower than the importance given to it, presenting a potential situation to improve their performance, a market opportunity (Table 3).

Table 3: Gap Analysis Statistical Results

	Gap Analysis		
Attributes	**Diff. Mean**	**SD**	**p-value**
CHAH - Culture, History and Architectural Heritage	0.71	1.24	< .001
G – Gastronomy	0.14	1.25	0.02
SCL - Scenic Views and Landscapes	0.45	1.26	< .001
CW - Climate and Weather	0.2	1.52	0.007
SS - Safety and Security	-0.55	1.27	1.00
N – Nightlife	0.81	1.69	< .001
LA - Language accessibility (English-speaking locals)	0.32	1.23	< .001
HFL - Hospitality and Friendliness of the Locals	-0.12	1.41	0.94
A – Authenticity	-0.03	1.49	0.63
EF - Events and Festivals	0.57	1.64	< .001

Considering each of the ten attributes' performance, not all attributes have a statistically significant mean difference higher than zero, meaning their performance is evaluated as lower than their importance for some attributes. "Safety and Security", "Hospitality and Friendliness of the Locals", and "Authenticity" have a statistically significant negative difference of means (p-value higher than 0.05) even if small in dimension, respectively -0.55, -.012, -.003. While these results showed that performance was slightly below the importance that tourist gave them, it is possible to consider their performance evaluation as very positive (mean respectively of 6.10, 5.96, and 5.69).

These findings can be compared to Portugal's seventh position in the Global Peace Index 2023. The negative results regarding "Hospitality and Friendliness of the Locals" and "Authenticity" may be influenced by the changing demographics in the main touristic cities or the closure of traditional shops favouring larger multinational chains or generic souvenir stores in downtown areas. These factors could potentially contribute to the observed results.

6. Conclusions

In a post-pandemic world, the importance of exploring touristic destinations and assessing their performance has taken on new significance. The pull factors of cultural richness, natural beauty, culinary delights, warm hospitality, and vibrant art scenes remain as appealing as ever. Still, travelers seek familiar attractions and experiences and value destinations that have adapted to the changing circumstances, ensuring their safety and enjoyment. As the world reopens to tourism, tourists discover that their favorite destinations, enriched by the pandemic's lessons, are ready to be explored once more and have been evaluating their performance with new eyes.

This research aims to assess the tourism attractiveness of the Lisbon region using the importance-performance analysis (IPA) based on visitors' responses in several dimensions of the destination. The study comprised two phases. In the first one, visitors to the Lisbon region identified its main pull factors. Based on the literature review and according to experts on tourism, the pull factors specified by the visitor sample were classified into: "Culture, History and Architectural Heritage", "Gastronomy", "Scenic Views and Landscapes", "Climate and Weather", "Safety and Security", "Nightlife", "Language accessibility (English-speaking locals)", "Hospitality and Friendliness of the Locals", "Authenticity", and "Events and Festivals". In the study's second phase, these ten dimensions were used as the basis for the IPA model. Through a second questionnaire, visitors of the Lisbon region rated the importance of each pull factor and, simultaneously, its performance according to their current experience in the region.

The results revealed that, on a seven-point Likert scale, all the attributes rated importance above the middle of the scale. The most important attributes for visitors were "Gastronomy", "Scenic Views and Landscapes", "Safety and Security", and "Language accessibility", with a mean above six and a median of seven. In terms of visitors' perceptions of the performance of the region's attributes, "Culture", "History and Architectural Heritage", "Gastronomy", "Scenic Views and Landscapes", "Climate and Weather", and "Language Accessibility" received the highest ratings, with a mean above six and a median of seven. "Events and Festivals" received the lowest rating, with a mean of 4.72 and a median of four. Regarding gap analysis (the difference between performance and importance), seven attributes have performance evaluations better than the given importance, with only three showing performance lower than the importance: "Safety and Security", "Hospitality and Friendliness of the Locals", and "Authenticity", despite all having high-performance rates.

In conclusion, as a tourist destination, the Lisbon area is very well evaluated by its visitors concerning the identified pull factors. Notwithstanding, there are practical and theoretical implications of these results. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the field's literature and provide valuable insights for tourism in the area by 1) identifying contemporary pull factors, 2) characterising the performance of the tourism sector, and 3) highlighting the gaps between the perception of the attributes that initially draw the tourist to Lisbon and their actual performance. For practitioners, the findings help inform public policies for destination managers and the city council of Lisbon and the decision-making of all regional tourism operators. From an academic standpoint, this paper fills a gap in the tourism literature by applying the model to tourist data, demonstrating the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach to identifying a destination's attributes for competitiveness.

Further research should complement these results with the perception of tourism operators regarding the identified attributes. This approach would allow for investigating potential differences in the importance and perception of performance between tourism operators and tourists. Moreover, because tourists from different geographical areas have different needs and demands, exploring additional attributes or expanding the set used in this study is critical. Further statistical analysis, such as multiple regression, could help determine which attributes predict tourists' overall opinion of the Lisbon region as a destination. Benchmarking analysis, comparing other European destination cities, could also be an interesting line of research.

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Accessible and Inclusive Tourism: the Hotel Industry in Porto – The InterContinental Porto, Palácio das Cardosas

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Abstract: Porto is internationally renowned for its hospitality. A city that knows how to welcome, a tourist destination that excels in hospitality, according to the opinion of millions of tourists who visit us every year.

Tourism, on its side, has become increasingly specialised to respond to a growing demand for unique, sustainable and accessible experiences for everyone. In recent years we have been faced with the demands of different and new markets.

According to a study by Booking.com, 54% of travellers in 2023 will choose to travel as a family, with the aim of reuniting the various members. This multi-generational market is very challenging as it includes different age groups in the same group with different motivations and needs, needs that can be special. In addition, physical and mental disabilities are increasingly present, such as limited or reduced mobility, visual and/or hearing impairments, learning difficulties caused by long-term illnesses, in a general way, target public with specific needs to which the tourist offer must be adapted.

These new demand requirements should therefore be considered a central point in the discussion of accessible and inclusive tourism. As the hotel industry is a fundamental pillar of tourism, there is an increasing need to rethink its approach in terms of offer.In this article we will present the Intercontinental Porto - Palácio das Cardosas Hotel as an example of this new way of looking at tourist services, making a significant contribution to affirming Porto as an accessible and inclusive destination.

Keywords: Accessible Tourism, Inclusive Tourism, Hospitality, Porto, Special Needs

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors today, largely since it is becoming increasingly democratized and economically accessible.

In fact, this democratization is largely due to the integration of people with disabilities and other needs into the tourism offer, who make up a significant portion of the global tourism market.

Implementing solutions to expand the network of accessible destinations that aim to respond to the 2016 UN proposal to promote "Tourism for All" is now a social and economic imperative, given that the world of people with disabilities and other needs, seniors and families with young children are a significant part of the global tourism market.

However, even though tourists with disabilities and other specific needs have gained the respect of the sector, they are still not always seen as customers, and there are still many barriers that prevent, limit or mark their tourist experience.

It is therefore important to realize that this type of tourism requires quality and adjustment to tourists' expectations, particularly in terms of hospitality.

Empowering those involved in a tourist experience and breaking down attitudinal barriers related to universal accessibility is the opportunity to transform an existing offer into a differentiated tourist offer, across the board for all those involved in providing tourist and complementary services.

In this context, hospitality presupposes respect and dignity in access to services; information services accessible to all; identification, recognition, and satisfaction of specific needs; adapted transport; reduction and elimination of all physical barriers both in hotel units and in all spaces used for tourist enjoyment and adoption of international accessibility standards.

Porto is a tourist city par excellence, having won many awards in recent decades as Best European Destination, so its offer will have to respond to these growing needs of an increasingly diverse and challenging tourist demand, thus affirming itself as an accessible and inclusive destination. Accommodation plays a central role in a destination's tourism offer, conditioning the experience offered to tourists.

This paper aims to outline how inclusive hospitality promotes competitiveness by making the destination more accessible and so able to receive any tourist.

This reflection outlines why inclusive hospitality should be a priority for Porto as a prior destination, to think strategically about tourism from different perspectives.

This study presents the InterContinental Porto Palácio das Cardosas as a positive response to the challenge of inclusion and accessibility, by adapting equipment and services to make hospitality available for all.

The InterContinental Porto Palácio das Cardosas is presented, revealing a hotel that is open to the world and attentive to changes in tourists' profiles.

2. Accessible tourism vs Inclusive Tourism

Over the last 50 years, there has been a great evolution in the access of ordinary people to tourism and in the extent and diversity of the tourist offer - tourism is no longer an activity for the elite, but for everyone. At the same time, thanks to the evolution of society, we have seen an improvement in the conditions of access for people with disabilities. The convergent evolution of these two realities has led to the concept of accessible tourism for people with disabilities and, as a result of the expansion of this universe, to other audiences with similar needs, affirming the concept of accessible tourism for people with special needs.

2.1 Accessible Tourism

While academic interest in tourism is recent, since it only emerged in the 1960s (Jafari, 2001), the issue of accessible tourism emerged in the 1980s (Lee et al, 2012), mainly associated with the concept of Design for All, originally conceived for the design of architectural and urban spaces. According to this concept, spatial functionality must be catered for in the different stages of people's growth, from children to the elderly, but also in a circumstantial and conditioned way. Smith (1987) was a pioneer in analysing accessibility according to the universal design approach in the field of tourism. He is considered the first academic author to use the term accessibility (Rubio-Escuderos, García-Andreu, & Ullán de la Rosa, 2020) and, in his study, he analysed the impact of a destination's architectural barriers on disabled visitors, and how these physical barriers could reduce satisfaction levels.

Although the lines of research into accessible tourism were initially focussed on people with disabilities, recently this topic has involved other market niches, such as the elderly and pregnant women who, in addition to their social significance, increase the economic value of this type of tourism.

In fact, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has highlighted the growth of the world's disabled population, estimating that around 235 million people have some kind of disability (Pisoni et al, 2021) and European countries have been increasing their senior population (Losada, Alén, Domínguez, & Nicolau, 2016). The World Health Bank organisation (2019) pointed out that 15% of the world's population (1 billion) has some kind of disability, prevalent in developed countries.

Accessible tourism is thus gaining a decisive expression, largely due to the value of the market and its consumers.

According to Darcy & Buhalis (2011, p. 10-11) accessible tourism is a form of tourism that involves collaborative processes between stakeholders that enable people with access requirements, including mobility, sight, hearing, and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services, and environment'. Thus, we will have to consider its implications for the built environment, products, information and communication, customer services and all others that involve interaction with tourists, in the experiences to be carried out.

Accessible tourism thus creates new opportunities for development in the tourism industry by facilitating accessibility for its direct beneficiaries: the elderly, families with children, pregnant women, and people with temporary or permanent disabilities (Vila, González & Darcy, 2019).

The International Standard on Accessible Tourism, ISO 21902, published on 12 July 2021, aimed to establish accessible tourism requirements and recommendations for a destination's tourism industry,

making it an important certification and quality assurance tool for a destination's accessible tourism. The existence of destinations with territorial management based on accessible tourism can be considered a market opportunity and a differentiating or highlighting factor (Vila, Darcy & Gonzalez, 2015), transforming the tourism industry into an inclusive activity, facilitating consumers physically, informally, financially, and emotionally. Accessible tourism becomes socially rewarding, creating a diverse community that is fairer in terms of citizenship and social rights (Buhalis, 2022).

2.2 Inclusive Tourism

The concern with making societies more inclusive has been debated for several years but gaining increased relevance in 1990, when the United Nations World Organization signed a resolution that defends an equal society for all. Currently, inclusion is a broad term and societies face enormous challenges, with the emergence of new realities and profound changes in the behaviour and profiles of individuals. In respect to tourism, it is needed to think tourism strategically to promote inclusive and accessible tourism for all (Small & Darcy, 2010).

The concept of inclusive tourism is defined by Biddulph & Scheyvens (2018, 584) as "Transformative tourism in which marginalized groups are engaged in ethical production or consumption of tourism and the sharing of its benefits".

We believe that inclusive tourism should be seen as a response to the trends of social, economic, and spatial exclusion in tourism.

It's important to note that the term inclusive has, to date, been mostly used in discussions about accessible tourism, in most cases associating the two terms because accessibility in tourism is a condition for it to be inclusive.

Although it is a right enshrined in law, we believe it is a priority to make Porto a competitive destination that is increasingly inclusive and accessible. By making our industry/offer more accessible, we can welcome any tourist, from the elderly and families with children, to people with disabilities, among others.

Our aim is to highlight how inclusive the Intercontinental Porto is as an example of luxury hospitality in Porto.

3. The "new" Tourist Demand: Characteristics-limitations-conditions of the Visitor/Tourist

Increasingly aware that visitor/tourist limitations are not only related to disability, but also arise from situations related to the ageing process or other situations of limited or restricted mobility, such as pregnancy, parents with toddlers, obesity, gigantism, dwarfism, ... or even certain respiratory, cardiac, neurological pathologies, ... the tourist industry must assess the impact of these characteristics of its public on the requirements of the tourist services provided, particularly in accommodation and catering services.

In fact, the situations that cause disabilities (congenital or acquired diseases; domestic, road, work, leisure and sports accidents, etc.), thanks to the pace of modern life and increased longevity, are tending to increase, and the improvement in the conditions of education, vocational training, access to employment and the standard of living of people with disabilities is tending to increase their economic capacity, awareness of their rights and a greater willingness and ability to travel, like any other citizen.

At the same time, we have seen an evolution in the demands of people in specific situations where their mobility is limited or restricted (pregnancy, parents with toddlers, obesity, etc.) and of people with limitations resulting from various pathologies (respiratory, cardiac, neurological, etc.),

obesity, etc.) and people with limitations resulting from the sequelae of various pathologies (respiratory, cardiac, neurological, etc.).

These special needs arising from the aforementioned limitations, when in the context of enjoying tourist services, materialise in specific access needs (places, spaces, equipment and activities), but also in specific service needs (interpersonal communication, information, guidance, support). In order for the tourist offer to be able to adequately meet these special needs, it has to fulfil various requirements that allow

for a holistic approach to the provision of services. When it comes to accommodation services, it is essential to guarantee the accessibility of infrastructures and service delivery skills.

4. Accessible Hotels

Bearing in mind this new approach to tourism, it is easy to realise that, although the target audience for accessible tourism is very diverse, in general terms the tourism industry will have to be qualified to meet the specific needs of these customers, not only in terms of equipment but also in terms of training human resources, since in addition to the technical and linguistic knowledge required, there are also specific attitudes and knowledge to respond to and adapt to the general needs of people with visual, hearing, motor or other disabilities and/or limitations.

Indeed, change management studies generally focus on understanding organisational change at different levels, including individuals, teams and organisations (Jacobs, van Witteloostuijin, & Christe-Zeyse, 2013).

Although the main function of any hotel is to provide accommodation for those outside their area of residence for a fee, this accommodation is now not limited to the possibility of resting, but also includes a whole range of services that convey a sense of welcome.

Most of the studies on organisation-level change emphasised organisational environments and populations, specifically the norms, roles, values and interaction amongst employees (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Fløvik, Knardahl, & Christensen, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2013).

In fact, according to Luiza (2010), tourists with disabilities value products adapted to their needs. However, research in the field of tourism involving hospitality and the segment of people with disabilities is relatively uncoordinated and fragmented (Loi & Kong, 2017)

As the customer is the centrepiece of the hotel industry, accommodation will have to adapt to the new realities of tourists, improving their services and communication with the public, regardless of their limitations, to put real "Tourism for All" into practice.

According to the UNWTO (2013, p.10), "accommodation establishments should have a reasonable number of rooms that are fully accessible without the need for assistance. Wherever possible, adapted rooms should be located so as to facilitate evacuation measures and routes to emergency exits."

In addition to having an infrastructure adapted to welcome people with reduced mobility or hearing and visual impairments, accessible hotels must also have staff who are properly prepared to deal with "any type of temporary disability resulting from an accident or illness, or the needs of those with small children or the elderly, women in an advanced state of pregnancy, overweight people, among other situations" (Turismo de Portugal, 2012).

Bearing this in mind, Turismo de Portugal (2021) supported the publication of a practical guide on Accessibility in Tourist Accommodation, which lists the “variables to be considered in a hotel unit that wants to be accessible and inclusive, of which we highlight:

- Infrastructuring the entire tourist accommodation space in accordance with International Accessibility Standards and National Legislation.
- Qualifying the care and service provided to customers with specific needs.
- Promoting teamwork among all employees, considering the social responsibility and image of the tourist facility.
- Hiring employees with disabilities in whom tourists with functional diversity can see themselves in the tourist resources and destinations they seek.
- Networking with partners from other areas of the tourist destination to provide an accessible and integrated tourist offer.

This type of concern will allow customers with specific needs to use the available equipment autonomously and move around the space comfortably” (Turismo de Portugal, 2021, 24-25) .

Understanding that the tourist experience is a whole that begins on arrival at the hotel, it is crucial that the adaptation of services and equipment is considered from that moment on, considering the existence of car parking spaces duly prepared to accommodate people with reduced mobility.

The space(s) must be reserved, duly identified, and signposted with vertical and horizontal signs. The surface of these car parks must be even, stable, and flat, as must the route from the parking space to the entrance of the building/reception. If this is done via a ramp, it must have as slight a slope as possible, have interspersed rest stops and the surface must be even and slip resistant.

At reception, the service should be provided at a lowered counter so that wheelchairs can approach. In the absence of this type of counter, a table should be used for seated, face-to-face customer service.

In terms of the hotel's interior physical space, care must be taken with lighting and the removal of physical obstacles, as well as the signposting of routes. Attention should also be paid to the width of doors, level access and even floors.

Regarding accommodation, the differences between an adapted room and a standard room are the interior areas, door widths and bathrooms. These adaptations are not limited to the equipment installed or available, but also to the design and other functionalities and services.

However, the more discreet the accessibility solutions in the adapted room(s), the less negative impact (visual and psychological) they have on the customer; the less customers without specific needs will be reluctant to occupy that room; and more guests can take advantage of these adaptations (elderly people with poor balance, someone with a temporary disability, everyone if the floor is non-slip, etc.).

As far as the catering areas are concerned, the same guidelines apply as for the other communal areas, adding that for customers of short stature or in wheelchairs, it is recommended that the self-service counter(s) and buffet tables offer the possibility of wheelchair access to the products.

In addition to these aspects relating to accessible equipment/furniture, we would once again emphasise the importance of care and service in the case of guests with specific needs, namely sensitivity to anticipating common needs and making procedures more flexible.

5. Research Methodology

Inclusion as a growing matter in today's society is increasingly a concern in tourism, which is intended to be available to all. Promoting accessible and inclusive tourism is now a socio-economic imperative that determines the orientation of the offer in tourist destinations.

Therefore, this study is based on a qualitative and descriptive literature review, carried out from the survey of theoretical references through which the characterisation of accessible and inclusive tourism was sought, in particular in order to ascertain the needs to which this tourist segment must respond. Focussing only on the luxury hotel offer, this literature review was restricted to the adaptations needed to hotel equipment in order to respond adequately to the needs of demand.

To be able to analyse these implications in practical terms, we carried out a qualitative study based on a survey, followed by a guided interview with two members of the Human Resources department at the Hotel Intercontinental Porto-Palácio das Cardosas. In this way we were able to evaluate the hotel's offer in terms of services and equipment and estimate how it contributes to accessible and inclusive tourism in the city of Porto.

The questionnaire had as its fundamental objectives to evaluate the hotel's range of services and equipment as an example of luxury hospitality and to estimate how this could contribute to the affirmation of inclusive tourism in the city of Porto. It was structured in six parts. The first allows us to characterise access to the hotel, the second looks at customer service and the remaining parts highlight the physical characteristics of the hotel's various spaces, from the common areas to the rooms.

The results allowed us not only to make a very approximate estimate of the structural and human implications to these new tourism proposals in Porto, but also to analyse the importance of these proposals in redefining the city's tourism offer and its diversity.

6. Inclusive Tourism in Hospitality: the Example of the InterContinental Porto

The Intercontinental Porto Hotel is in Porto's central business district, in connection with its historic centre, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1996, a privileged location in the city at the crossroads of

all land connections. The hotel is a 2-minute walk from the central train station (S. Bento station), bus stops and the metro station that connects it directly to Porto airport, a journey of around 45 minutes.

This hotel occupies the former Palácio das Cardosas, an 18th century building, and since 2011 has become a luxurious 5-star hotel, the second in this category in the city centre.

The hotel is currently part of the IHG group (InterContinental Hotels Group) and aims to be a benchmark in the city, not only for the luxury service it offers its guests, but also for its concern to welcome an increasingly demanding and differentiated public.

Aimed at all types of clients who want a high-quality service, this hotel in particular, but in a transversal vision to the entire group which has the luxury collection brand, has been investing in adapting its services, infrastructures and equipment to the differentiated needs of its clients.

In fact, the hotel has established itself as an important centre of attraction for luxury tourism, aimed at both business and leisure clients, with Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, the rest of Europe, Brazil, and the United States as its main markets. Its values include "doing the right thing", "celebrating the difference", "showing that we care" and "striving to excel". In this sense, the purpose of every activity at the hotel is to provide a service for everyone, not only to meet their needs and expectations, but also by focussing its internal activities on training and encouraging all employees to offer what they understand to be True Hospitality, which they define as an exceptional experience.

In order to assess the hotel's ability to respond to the demands of an increasingly differentiated and demanding public, often with special conditions, we were able to ascertain in an interview with the human resources department and through a questionnaire that we implemented, that the main access to the hotel is via an entrance without a gap and a door greater than or equal to 77 cm and the reception desk has a height adapted for wheelchair users. In the interior circulation areas, these users find it only partially easy to get around, particularly in terms of the lighting in these spaces, which have appropriate signs with contrasting coloured text.

As the hotel has several floors, the lifts are medium-sized and have audio and visual information, and the buttons are embossed and placed at the right height for wheelchair users. If you choose to take the stairs, although they have more than 3 steps, they do have handrails.

The hotel has 2 adapted rooms. The access doors are 77cm or wider and the interior area is large enough to allow the customer to move around easily inside, with manoeuvring space equal to or greater than 150cm of rotation. There is side access to the bed and access to the bathroom is without unevenness and through a door similar in width to the access to the room, opening outwards and with space to transfer to the toilet. The toilet is located next to the shower, and the seat is a standard size, but has support bars on both sides and can be folded down. The bath and washbasin have single-lever taps. The bath and shower have an approach space of 80cm or more, with a transfer board and grab rails. In the case of the bath, the shower is adjustable and has a single-lever tap, but in the case of the shower, although the shower is adjustable, it does not have a single-lever tap. The shower chair has a fixed seat.

The room number is in Braille and, to meet the needs of guests with hearing impairments, the door has an eyepiece and a light indicator, which is also considered on the telephone for incoming calls. Information about services is available in written form in the rooms and emergency signs are translated into visual icons.

In the case of restaurants, there is no counter height for wheelchair users, and table service is favoured. Menus are not adapted with enlarged characters or contrasting colour or Braille, but there are options for people with food allergies or intolerances. The tables are accessible and child seats are available.

Access to the toilets in the communal areas is not uneven and the doors are 77cm or more, opening outwards, with 150cm or more of interior space for manoeuvring, allowing lateral transfer to the toilet on both sides and with folding support bars on both sides. The washbasin has a single lever tap.

As for the services and equipment, the hotel's floor plan is displayed near the entrance in a contrasting colour, but it doesn't provide enough information about the hotel's accessibility.

The documentation with additional information is available at the entrance; it can be easily read, and it is accessible to manual wheelchairs. The front-office staff have specialised training to support people

with special needs, and there are spaces and rooms in the hotel adapted for customers with hearing, visual, motor, or other difficulties, and the furniture allows wheelchair users to approach the hotel.

The hotel has a car park reserved for People with Reduced Mobility, but it is not close to the hotel as it does not belong to it. This space has no unevenness, is of an appropriate size and is well signposted.

In addition, the pedestrian walkway outside is free of obstacles and the pavement is even and slip resistant.

7. Final Considerations

Accessible tourism was born out of the need to cater for a growing population of people with special characteristics.

As a new trend in tourism, this segment is, above all, a proposal for innovative solutions that allow tourist activities to be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of their physical condition, age, or other individual circumstances. In this sense, we can say that accessible tourism can be a fundamental tool for making life easier for visitors to a destination, responding to the needs and expectations of any potential consumer (Polat & Hermans, 2016).

The quality of accessible spaces, products, services, information, and communication provides well-being for everyone, boosting inclusion and socialisation between visitors and residents, which allows us to say that accessible tourism is part of inclusive tourism, and is a source of impetus and reinforcement of the quality of a destination's tourism.

If trends show that accessible tourism can be an asset for a destination, as it raises the quality of tourist experiences and is thus a fundamental tool for innovation and competitiveness in the management of that destination, this study makes it possible to understand the role of hotel services in this experience, especially when it comes to luxury hotels.

The Hotel Intercontinental Porto - Palácio das Cardosas, a luxury hotel in the city of Porto, is one of the city's tourist developments that promotes inclusive tourism, as it has two rooms that are properly equipped and large enough to meet the needs of different audiences, from those with hearing, sound, or motor difficulties to families with children or senior citizens. It was possible to see that the hotel's common areas, from the hotel's main entrance to the outside pavements or car park spaces, have no physical barriers or unevenness, which promotes accessibility for wheelchairs or babies, as well as making it easier for people with special conditions to get around. The same is true of the hotel's interior communal spaces, including the service desk, restaurant, and lounges, which have adapted dimensions and equipment. We would also like to emphasise the concern for the services provided, with information available throughout the hotel in adapted, wheelchair-accessible language and the staff duly trained to provide differentiated service.

This study was initiated with the aim of exploring how hospitality develops tourism inclusion and identifying the challenges in implementing inclusive strategies in hospitality. In addition, this study provides practical implications by showing how inclusion can be driven by hospitality as part of change initiatives for the development of accessible tourism in Porto.

Although there are studies on guests with special needs, most of these studies focus only on the physical environment of the hotel, practically ignoring areas such as restaurants, bars, swimming pools and other common areas, as well as the interaction between these guests and hotel staff.

It is therefore necessary to explore this topic more and more, based on the experiences of people with disabilities in hotels (Poria et al., 2011), particularly in the case of luxury hotels.

In addition, since this study has only analysed the supply side, it would be important to carry out further studies looking at the opinion of customers and analysing their expectations of the destination as a whole in terms of its inclusive offer.

Studying the motivations and needs of disabled tourists is essential, by identifying tourist patterns and understanding their preferences, expectations and requirements, it is possible to develop tourism products and services that meet their expectations (Buhalis et al., 2005).

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A Western Cape Food Tour: Examining Indigenous Foods in Eateries Through the Lived Experience Model

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Abstract: Drawing attention to indigenous foods is economically advantageous for local communities growing plants to sell to the food industry, to promote food tourism and establishing alternative food systems characterised by lower costs, lessened environmental impact, and local availability. There is evidence that indigenous land stewardship could reinforce indigenous food sovereignty by recovering indigenous foods that could disappear.

Although South African cuisine is not globally recognised as an ethnic cuisine, interest in it is growing, as its recent 52nd ranking (out of 100) on the TasteAtlas.com global cuisine rankings for 2023/2024 shows. Increasing understanding, availability, and celebration of indigenous foods in commercial eateries is therefore critical, along with an understanding of their sociocultural contextuality.

Lived experience was the predominant guiding methodological model for this research. The researchers used qualitative phenomenological reporting to present their first-hand lived experiences, along with knowledge gained through meaning making of indigenous and heritage foods. Although this model has been criticised for methodology slurring, attention to academic rigour (in line with Husserl and Heidegger's applied philosophical viewpoints) ensured that the knowledge gained was grounded in the researchers' own experiences. The researchers report key insights and meaning making from their eating experiences and indigenous foods found during a food tour from 17 to 22 September 2023, along a predetermined road route within the Western Cape province of South Africa.

This research contributes to the unique application of lived experience within the hospitality and tourism environments, and particularly the application of IPA (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis) to assess participants' ways of making meaning of indigenous food offerings found in eateries in detail.

Keywords Indigenous Foods, Food Tourism, South African Cuisine, Lived Experience, IPA (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis)

1. Background and Problem

A systematic review of indigenous food plants by Nxusani et al. (2023) details the importance of promoting indigenous foods through policies, developing better and advanced capabilities and skills, more in-depth research, and extensive investigations into the composition of indigenous foods. Kapoor et al. (2022) shows how recognition of indigenous foods can improve food security, while simultaneously enhancing biodiversity and preserving ancestral knowledge. Extensive evidence of the positive health claims of foods produced from indigenous ingredients which could contribute positively to alleviate nutrition and food security concerns (Kunyanga et al. 2013) also exist.

This research aimed to provide evidence of commercially available indigenous foods, which may include unconventional food plants (UFPs) (Milião et al. 2022). The purpose was to present evidence to researchers, environmentalists, tourism and food industry players, and others that indigenous foods are being used in commercial hospitality eateries. Increased awareness and knowledge of the potential added value of indigenous foods could benefit broader society, and increased knowledge of the advantages of indigenous foods within the culinary and hospitality industries, aligned with the four pillars of cuisine (ingredients, flavourings, preparation methods and social aspects) can enhance our culinary heritage. Currently, little information is available regarding the preparation of South African indigenous foods, how they are seasoned and flavoured, and their contextual roles in food heritage. Although South Africa is considered a food secure country, it is nutritionally insecure, and research has demonstrated the superior nutrient-richness and lessened environmental impact of indigenous foods. Increased awareness of indigenous foods and their nutritional value would benefit future food systems and food tourism. The research question is therefore: What "meaning making" is to be found of indigenous food applications in eateries available during a predetermined Western Cape food tour?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Indigenous Foods

Academic literature provides various interpretations for the concept "indigenous foods". Frequently the term implies indigenous ingredients, wild foods or indigenous plants spontaneously growing in natural ecosystems (Kapoor et al. 2022), mostly context or geographically specific, or obtained locally (Joseph and Turner 2020). In these instances, indigenous foods refer to edible plant and animal food products or ingredients forming part of a traditional diet (Asogwa et al. 2017). Some researchers consider indigenous foods to be "naturally existing" and/or "produced in specific locations" (Rampa et al. 2020). Indigenous foods may also include unconventional food plants (UFPs), underutilised plant species that can be used as human food. Despite spontaneous growth, they generally have low market value and are often sold only on a small scale (Cobus et al. 2023).

Indigenous production and/or processing techniques associated with traditional knowledge (Asogwa et al. 2017) are also considered indigenous foods. These heritage or traditional foods represent a culture (Mihiranie et al. 2020) and are also referred to as ancestral or original foods. Heritage foods are defined as traditional local foods that are inherited, prepared and practiced daily, rooted in a mixture of various cultures, religious practices and beliefs (Omar et al. 2015). Members of a culture often act as guardians of knowledge about the use of such unconventional foods (Andreoli et al. 2022). The authenticity of heritage foods is measured against aspects such as origin, preparation, ingredients, recipes, and the specific context pertaining to the serving and presentation of the food (Assiouras et al. 2015).

Most ingredients require preparation or processing before eating. The evolution of indigenous foods requires in-depth understanding of local flora and fauna, and the preparations and conversion methods representing a society's culinary heritage (Mihiranie et al. 2020). In this research the term "indigenous foods" refers to both the actual indigenous ingredient (and its traditional or non-traditional use) as well as any culturally specific South African food dishes.

In countries like Australia, where indigenous ingredients (also called bush food) have long been used, wild foods have become part of the repertoire of modern-derived cuisine. Often (but not exclusively so) these ingredients feature on "fine dining" menus, promoting the use of bush foods (Bannerman 2006). Australia has seen increasing popularity of native flora and fauna ingredients, and "an increasing range of products, restaurant dishes and home-cooked meals" (Craw 2008) featuring such ingredients. Even in multicultural societies such as the US, menus celebrating regional distinctions and dishes designed to showcase indigenous ingredients are found. Cookbook author and chef Freddie Bitsoie develops menus incorporating sacred indigenous foodways (Bitsoie and Fraioli 2021), similar to another Native American recipe book fusing traditional with the modern (George 2013).

This research explores present-day contemporary cuisine incorporating cultural ingredients, authentic flavours, and traditional preparation methods (Yamamoto 2017).

2.2 Food Tours

Food tourism generates considerable global revenue, employment, and academic research. The concept describes tourists' exploration of a destination through local food and beverage experiences (Carvalho et al. 2023). Food tours are defined as "thematic experiences that combine history and traditions with gastronomy and allow tourists to get in-depth knowledge of a destination and its features (local ingredients and dishes representative of local culture) as well as of culinary techniques and eating habits, in a personal and interactive way" (Carvalho et al. 2023). Food tours allow tourists to immerse themselves in local culture, interacting with communities and experiencing the typical regional gastronomy. Knowledgeable and experienced locals often guide tourists to typical local eateries with noticeable cultural features (Kaushal and Yadav 2021).

The researchers undertook a food tour by car, as a potential gastronomy tourist would, and documented their "lived experience" to collect data showing the use of indigenous foods in commercial eateries. Framing the research in a hermeneutic view, the researchers avoided merely describing the tour experience, aiming to prioritise making meaning of the contexts in which indigenous foods are used (Heotis 2020). The research could be classified as a field trip, where researchers travel to a location to speak directly with local stakeholders, immerse themselves in an environment to gain first-hand experiences (Eden et al. 2019) and gather data regarding the offering of indigenous foods.

2.3 Lived Experience

Although the qualitative phenomenological methodology of lived experience is often used in medical fields (Davén et al. 2022), it has been used in hospitality and tourism research (Tucker and Deale 2018) and in the specific example of music festival-goers (Jackson et al. 2018).

Lived experience refers to the knowledge of everyday events people gain through direct or first-hand experiences, participation, or involvement. This contrasts with other types of knowledge obtaining which is done through representations by second-hand or mediated sources. Researchers often hope to gain thorough understanding of the essence or essential "truths" through the lived experience (Byrne 2001).

The two foremost phenomenological philosophies of lived experience are Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology (McConnell-Henry et al. 2009). Husserl introduced the concept of lived experience or experiences within the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) (Koch 1995). His pre-reflective approach of examining the world advocates the idea of epoché or "bracketing" – to reveal the true essence of the lived experience, all preconceived ideas should be set aside (Stumpf and Fieser 2007). Heidegger encouraged interpretation rather than description, wanting to derive meaning from being, and saw the researcher as a legitimate part of the research; the researcher is in fact "in" the participant's world (McConnell-Henry et al. 2009).

Although these two epistemological positions differ, they both explore the lived experience. Critics of Heidegger's philosophy have suggested that the researchers' involvement could influence or corrupt the data. Heidegger believed that humans are naturally interpretive, and it would be impossible to "bracket" themselves from a phenomenon. To conduct a hermeneutic inquiry, the researcher should have some prior knowledge or fore-structure (McConnell-Henry et al. 2009) so that only the pertinent data is collected (Thompson 1990). The researchers in this study were able to use their hospitality background knowledge to inform their experiences.

In the case of this research, the mood of the lived experience (for example, the types of restaurants and contexts where indigenous foods were found) played an important role (McConnell-Henry et al. 2009) and enhanced the participants' descriptions and meaning making of indigenous food examples found in eateries (Goolaup and Solér 2018).

3. Methodology

This research explored and attempted to make meaning of indigenous foods in eateries along a pre-determined route. Reid et al. (2005) proposes that expert participants should tell their own stories in as much detail as possible.

Even though Heidegger's philosophy was never intended to be used as a research method, it led to the development of interpretive phenomenological research and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which facilitates explication and understanding of the lived experience (Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016).

Data was collected through the observational method of photographic evidence, which was analysed and grouped together under the central theme of indigenous foods, and indigenous food words found on menus of eateries and retail products (Heotis 2020). Meaning was consequently elicited, constructed from the experience itself and guided by South African food culture. The core component of indigenous food offerings in eateries was therefore drawn out, analysed, interpreted, and revealed in the results.

A "less is more" approach was followed for the number of participants; two expert participants were deemed suitable (Reid et al. 2005). The two researchers cumulatively have around 80 years local and international experience in the arenas of hospitality, tourism, and indigenous foods.

3.1 The Study Area

The six-day road trip (Figure 1), followed a route in the Western Cape province of the Republic of South Africa. The study area was selected in accordance with Du Rand (2007), who regards the Western Cape as the province with the most potential to develop and implement food tourism in terms of resources, stakeholders, and current initiatives.

Details regarding the researchers' lived experience food tour can be found in Table 1, starting and ending in the town of Strand. Specific dates, the towns that the researchers travelled through to reach their destinations, road numbers and specific food establishments visited along the route, are detailed.

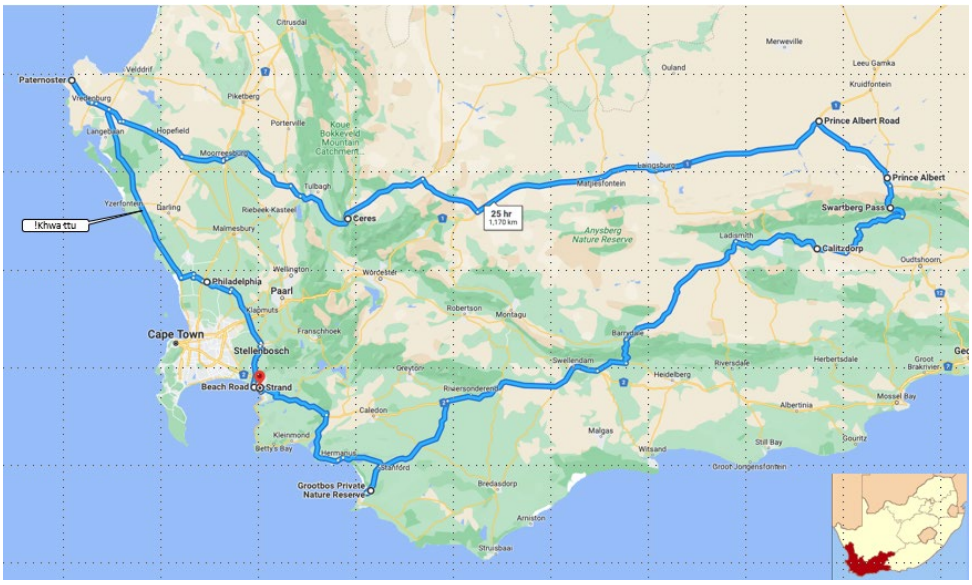

Figure 1: Six-day road trip route (map generated with GoogleMaps (2023))

Table 1: Details of Six-day road trip

Leg	Date	Town	Route	Food establishment visited
1	17 Sept	Strand to Paternoster via Philadelphia	R44, N7 and R399	Wolfgat restaurant
2	18 Sept	Paternoster		Dispens eatery, !Khwa ttu centre
3	19 Sept	Paternoster to Prince Albert via Matjiesfontein	R399, R45, R311, R46, N1 and R407	African Relish Cookery School and restaurant
4	20 Sept	Prince Albert		Lazy Lizard, Karoo Kombuis
5	21 Sept	Prince Albert to Grootbos and Strand via Barrydale and Buffeljagsrivier	R328, R62, R324, N2, R326, R43, R44	Grootbos Private Nature Reserve dining room
6	22 Sept	Strand to Stellenbosch	R44	Sustainability Institute, Spier

4. Results

Although there is no right way to conduct analysis within the IPA framework (Miller et al. 2018), the intent is to identify patterns in experiences to make meaning of such experiences in social and theoretical contexts (Larkin and Thompson 2011).

Results are presented for each leg of the journey (1 – 6) (Table 1).

Leg 1: The researchers departed from Strand for Paternoster, where chef and cookbook author Kobus van der Merwe's award-winning Wolfgat restaurant is located (Van der Merwe and De Villiers 2014). Wolfgat specialises in Westcoast dune produce.

During the visit, Kobus van der Merwe collaborated with Jan-Hendrik van der Westhuizen, chef-patron of a Michelin-starred restaurant named JAN, in Nice, France, where he celebrates South African cultural food in a fine dining environment. The meal began with a bread course of roosterbrood (flat pieces of yeast dough grilled on an open fire) served with melted butter, Kalahari raisins (*Grewia retinervis*) and crumbled bokkoms, a regional speciality of salted, dried mullet to dunk bread in.

Several small bites followed, including finely chopped klipmossel (limpets) cooked in white wine; a witmossel parfait; a choux bun filled with sweet-potato, cinnamon, and snoek (*Thyrsites atun* – snake mackerel, often smoked); and a savoury lamington – buttered white bread squares coated in biltong powder, sprinkled with dried mopani worm dust (see Figure 2). Scrubbed wooden tables overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, using seashells as crockery items and specifically designed cutlery (see the wooden dessert cutlery set in Figure 4) contributed to the West Coast aesthetic of the meal.

Figure 3 illustrates abalone with creamy pap (maize porridge), brakslaai (savoury crispy dune lettuce), Boerenkaas and pap wafers served in an abalone shell. The wafers resembled a sought-after delicacy in most South African households, the dry, crisp, caramelised bottom layer of pap that develops when maizemeal is cooked slowly.

Four dishes followed: yellowtail fish with grapefruit, nasturtium and kruipvygie (*Jordaaniella cuprea* L.Bolus); a cheese course of frilly Tête de Moine cheese, apple and Saldanha Bay mussels; a Cape Bream and waterblommetjie (*Aponogeton distachyos*) dish (Figure 15); and the first of two dessert courses – a pear poached in Rooibos tea with smoked amasi (a fermented milk product) and a mabele crumble. Ting ya Mabele is a traditional fermented sorghum porridge eaten by Tswana people throughout South Africa and Botswana. The final dessert (Figure 4) reflected South Africans' penchant for canned guavas, served under a meringue dome with a sago pudding made with evaporated milk, garnished with edible flowers. Petit Fours were bars of fried fig and seeds. The meal was paired with local South African wines.

Figure 2: Quartet of starters served after the bread course

Figure 3: Abalone, mieliepap and brakslaai

Figure 4: Guava and evaporated milk second dessert

Please note that the researchers own copyright of Figures 2 to 19

Leg 2: Dispens, a small eatery and shop in Paternoster, derives its name from the Afrikaans words for pantry (die spens) but also a dispensary or pharmacy, and sold pickled waterblommetjies in jars. Waterblommetjie or Cape-pondweed (*Aponogeton distachyos*) is a native aquatic plant used to make a stew, typically with lamb or chicken, served with steamed rice. A pickled version is an innovative adaptation of a product with established cultural food heritage. Other products included snoek-flavoured salt (see Leg 1); dried Heerenbone (*Phaseolus lunatus*),

a lima bean variety with a distinct black 'navel' marking. Dispens also offered seaweed scones served with bokkom butter and klipkombers (seaweed) relish; angelfish and dune spinach quiches; and mabele rusks (see Leg 1).

The! Khwa ttu (the San culture and education centre 70 km north of Cape Town) restaurant menu features a distinct San culture style and gave extensive information on indigenous ingredients such as wild sage (*Salvia africana–lutea*), Kei apples (*Dovyalis caffra*), sour fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*) and veldkool (*Trachyandra falcata*). The menu showcased an innovative reinterpretation of pap, like Italian Gnocchi Romana – spread out, cooled and cut into "chip" fingers, deep-fried, and served with a wild garlic mayonnaise (Figure 5). Askoek (similar to roosterkoek, but dough is laid directly in hot coals) was served with kaiings (greaves or brownsels from which fat has been rendered (DSAE 2023)) and Sandveld honey butter. San cooking methods could be viewed in the indigenous gardens, where slivers of Springbok (*Antidorcas marsupialis*) hooked on hand-held metal wires were cooked directly over smouldering embers and passed through a little vinaigrette with Kriedoring berries (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Modern interpretation of Yellow Maize Fries with Wild Garlic Mayonnaise

Figure 6: Hook braaied (barbequed) meat as it would have been done in days gone by

Leg 3: The route from Paternoster to Prince Albert took us via Ceres and Matjiesfontein. We participated in an educational experience at the African Relish Cookery School in Prince Albert and enjoyed dinner at their onsite restaurant. The school introduced olives, dried figs, and wine from various producers/farmers in the area, while an expert provided traditional preserves made from indigenous edibles such as Veld Agurkie (*Stapelia engleriana*) pickle (Figure 7) and *Hoodia gordonii* (Bitterghaap) preserve (Figure 8). At dinner, dessert consisted of Malva pudding served with ice cream made from spekboom (*Portulacaria afra*). This indigenous plant, high in basic nutrients and said to help remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, has considerable underutilised application potential.

Figure 7: Cheese and bread platter with a selection of indigenous preserves and spreads

Figure 8: *Hoodia gordonii* (Bitterghaap) preserve

Leg 4: The day was spent in Prince Albert. A veld tour by indigenous veld experts introduced us to the flora of this specific area of the Karoo and we sampled many indigenous edibles, such as the tart red berries of the Kriedoring (*Lycium cinereum*) (Figure 9) and Soutslaai or the Common ice plant (*Mesembryanthemum crystallinum*) (Figure 10).

Dinner was Afrikaner heritage food eaten at the Karoo Kombuis, a restaurant in Prince Albert housed in a small period house of which the front rooms have been converted into a dining room. It offers a distinctly homely feel of Afrikaner culture.

Figure 9: *Lycium cinereum* (Kriedoring)

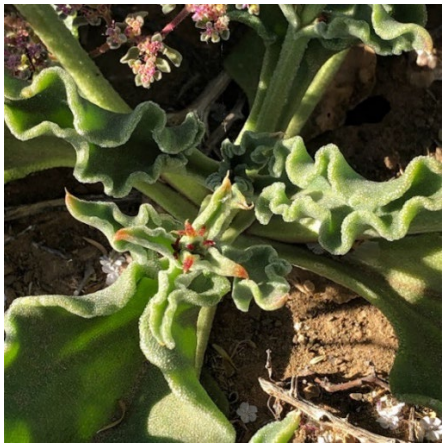

Figure 10: *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* (commonly known as Common Ice Plant or Soutslaai)

Leg 5: A booked lunch at Grootbos Private Nature Reserve showcased many innovative uses of indigenous ingredients and heritage foods. The first course included sea pumpkin (*Prenia vanrensburgii* L.Bolus) and kolstert (blacktail) tartare, an espuma of dune spinach and a puffed sago wafer flavoured with buchu, served with Cape Malay pickled fish (Figure 11). The small soup course consisted of a marrow cappuccino with beef tartare on the side and black garlic mayonnaise; the cappuccino was lightly flavoured with Cape Snowbush (*Eriocephalus africanus*). Two courses thereafter featured local elements such as Mountain Sage (*Salvia chamelaeagnea*) with sous vide asparagus, garlic foam and confit yolk, as well as charred trout served with linguine and seaweed caviar. Main course was a braised oxtail kataifi with home-made ketchup and a coastal aniseed buchu (*Agathosma cerefolium*) foam (Figure 12). The dessert was a red chocolate sphere (resembling a planet), filled with canned guavas, a very traditional South African food heritage favourite (Figure 13), revealed when a hot nutmeg pelargonium (*Pelargonium fragrans*) custard was poured over.

Figure 11: Coastal Canapé: cured Kolstert with sea pumpkin tartare; oyster with dune spinach espuma and lemon pearls; Cape Malay pickled fish, buchu sago and curry oil

Figure 12: braised oxtail Kataifi with mushrooms, home-made ketchup and buchu foam

Figure 13: a chocolate sphere with poached guava and a nutmeg pelargonium custard

Leg 6: The Sustainability Institute outside Stellenbosch was our last destination. Their canteen, The Green Café, offers an indigenous salad featuring wild rosemary, wild sage, sunrose (*Aptenia cordifolia*) and spekboom (Figure 14). The kitchen gardens of Spier Wine Farm supplies produce like waterblommetjies (Figure 15) to various eateries on the estate.

Figure 14: Canteen wall advertisement for an indigenous salad at the Sustainability Institute

Figure 15: Waterblommetjies at Spier kitchen gardens

5. Discussion

The researchers followed the Heideggerian phenomenological research framework of a lived experience to highlight indigenous foods in eateries along a predetermined route. In context of the researchers' understanding of indigenous foods in relation to the hermeneutic circle (where it is not so much about acquiring new knowledge, but rather the world which has already been understood (Koch 1995)), the research proposed one cohesive experience synthesising different eating elements into one, paying particular attention to the cultural significance. By identifying examples of indigenous foods, we aimed to explore and examine their current availability and utilisation in eateries. Our experiences and the meaning-making that they informed are presented and discussed in the different Legs (see Table 1) of the route followed:

Leg 1: The way that restaurants approached indigenous food offerings during this leg of the tour illustrated several benefits for the restaurant, immediate society, broader society, and humanity. It was evident that eateries can situate themselves globally (Wolfgat previously won the best global destination restaurant award, and collaborated with a Michelin-starred chef, Jan-Hendrik van der Westhuizen). Local people benefit through employment, skills development, and by drawing attention to area-specific West Coast dune-sourced produce. Humanity benefits from increased awareness of the advantages indigenous foods can bring to the food production cycle.

Leg 2: The San centre's eatery demonstrated that the innovative application of indigenous foods is not the exclusive preserve of high-end restaurants. Visitors experience the use and meaning of indigenous foods in a culturally specific environment, that of the San people. Even at a road-side stall selling Bokkom sticks, the meaning of such a product in the immediate surrounding culture was evident. Bokkoms are a traditional West Coast product; a celebrity chef recently referred to bokkoms as 'the Parmesan of the West Coast'.

Leg 3: The African Relish Cookery School in Prince Albert is firmly rooted in the community and paid homage to traditional applications as well as innovative adaptions of indigenous foods, such as spekboom ice cream.

Leg 4: Eateries in the town of Prince Albert and surrounds appear to have a strong sense of the value and meaning of indigenous foods and cultural food for their visitors. This may be because the town has become a noted destination for visitors and people relocating from large cities. This could mean that the utilisation of indigenous foods is economically driven rather than for purely authentic cultural food experiences. Whatever

the reason, the town folk appear to have a deep understanding of the meaning of their fauna and flora in context of their specific regional food culture.

Leg 5: The meaning of applying indigenous foods may not be equally well understood at eateries across the industry. In the case of the Wolfgat/Klein JAN collaboration (see Leg 1), the innovative use of indigenous foods attracts diners seeking high end culinary experiences. However, a roosterkoek stall en route missed the opportunity to showcase South African indigenous foods in their fillings. Grootbos, a game reserve with accommodation and a restaurant, is ideally situated to use indigenous foods to cater for a broader audience who may not purposefully seek out foods that could challenge their taste buds. Although indigenous foods at Grootbos may be used differently from Wolfgat/Klein JAN, the same reasoning – to introduce eaters to a South African food culture and the use of indigenous foods – seems to apply.

Leg 6: The meaning of inclusion of indigenous foods at the Sustainability Institute is clear. The Institute's mandate is to promote sustainability by growing and using local plants, and although an attempt was made to include indigenous foods on the menu this is a working organisation's canteen, and the menu must meet the needs of employees and visitors. This poses some limitations and indigenous foods are therefore less pronounced on the menu. The meaning of indigenous foods is however clear, even though their availability may be limited for practical reasons.

Throughout the food tour many examples of indigenous foods unique to the area, such as the West Coast, the Karoo or coastal fynbos, were identified. Many common examples, such as the types of produce used or the dishes offered, were identified. In some instances, indigenous foods were not available in everyday eateries, for example the limited number of fillings at the roosterkoek stall. The use of indigenous foods appears restricted to specific eateries, and while this paucity of indigenous foods did not pose a problem during our food tour, it could mean less exposure and potential utilisation of indigenous foods in South Africa.

6. Conclusion and Further Research

This research shows that some eateries include indigenous foods on their menus, but in selected ways and mostly because they are known for using indigenous foods. The use of indigenous foods in the broader hospitality context appears limited. Our society needs a better understanding and endorsement of food nationalism as a concept, encouraging all food producers to adopt a different approach to promoting indigenous foods and crops, and building on traditional knowledge and technologies to produce a "local food plate" (Rampa et al. 2020). We need to create a positive attitude and secure environment within the hospitality industry to stimulate the inclusion, preparation, and service of indigenous foods in local eateries.

The following items should be highlighted. Some indigenous ingredients may only be **available** in certain areas, such as West Coast plants sourced through dune foraging at Wolfgat restaurant. Such area-specific ingredients cannot be used where they do not occur, and although they may be "free", they are seasonal. In contrast, a heritage food such as *askoek* with an indigenous food filling could be produced throughout the country and be an excellent vehicle to introduce unfamiliar indigenous ingredients in an affordable manner. **Affordability** is a critical consideration – although indigenous foraged ingredients may be inexpensive or even free, eateries using them innovatively may be expensive and out of the average consumer's reach. Their application as street food could make them much more widely utilised and consumed.

To address consumers' **unfamiliarity** with certain indigenous ingredients and foods, local consumers and food tourists should be exposed and educated about such foods in an affordable manner, perhaps by using indigenous foods as ingredients in street food. In terms of **sustainability**, ready availability is important for such foods to become mainstream, whether through improved agricultural practices or changes to food supply chains, research, education, and others.

Future research could include in-depth interviews with menu planners/designers, chefs, food retailers, farmers, food producers and others to determine their willingness to include indigenous foods, but also to address limitations and obstacles preventing increased use of indigenous foods. This could include advantages and disadvantages, for instance seasonal ingredients that require foraging, as well as how they believe offering indigenous foods could benefit the environment, food heritage, and food nationalism. Much like spekboom (see Leg 3 in the results section), a trendy ingredient used in soups, salads, stews, as a pickle and even smoothies (du Toit et al. 2023, Mahlanza et al. 2023), many other indigenous ingredients are still under-researched and could benefit from further culinary innovation. Further research on the palatability of indigenous foods is required, for

example Kriedoring (see Leg 4), a veld food eaten by locals from the Vanwyksvlei area despite the berries being bitter-tasting and not always considered edible (Van Wyk and De Beer 2022).

6.1 Ethics Approval

Ethics approval was obtained from NAS Ethics Committee, reference number NAS 134/2019.

6.2 Limitations

Despite the researchers' considerable understanding of broader South African food culture, both researchers are of the same cultural identity which could be considered a limitation. The "lived experience" aspect of the research would be strengthened by including participants from other South African cultures. Limited time and resources meant that the researchers were unable to conduct in-depth interviews, creating an opportunity for further research to be combined with research of additional historical documents on 'veldkos', to triangulate the data collected in this research. This research project concentrated on brick-and-mortar eateries and limited attention was given to street-food vendors, which also warrants further research.

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The Socio-Economic Impact of a Major Cultural Event in Cape Town During and Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract: This study sought to consider the socio-economic impacts of the Cape Town Carnival, given the significant impacts impinged on the event's exponential socio-economic potential in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the period 2020 and 2021, the event was suspended as the world grappled with mobility-restricting and other pandemic-related regulations, which grounded almost all social and economic activities. Through strategic planning and innovative efforts by the event's organisers to curtail the pandemic's impact, a reimagined format was conceptualised in 2022, while a post-pandemic version returned in 2023, explorations of which form the focus for the current study. Relying on CTC pre-pandemic socio-economic impact studies, pandemic, and post-pandemic era empirical investigations of 800 spectators provided data for socioeconomic impact exploration. SPSS version 29 software was utilised in the analysis and exploration of variable relationships in the collected data. The findings of the study suggest that spectators displayed positive perceptions of the socio-economic benefits of the CTC relating to job creation, tourism revenue generation, and community empowerment. The negative impact of the pandemic on the CTC's ability to deliver these benefits was acknowledged. The study highlights the importance of mitigating the negative effects that come with unprecedented events such as COVID-19 through the development of resilience strategies including adaptation, diversification of revenue streams, development of new partnerships, and investment in community engagement opportunities. The study recommends the need for a qualitative inquiry exploring stakeholder insights with key stakeholder groups to assimilate socio-economic objectives for the event for comparative purposes. Additionally, a deeper investigation into specific sectors, such as accommodation, catering, and local businesses is recommended for a more holistic view on the socio-economic impacts while a participant survey is suggested to determine the aspects of job creation and innovation, as envisioned by the objectives of the CTC.

Keywords: Cape Town Carnival, Socio-Economic Impacts, Cultural Event, Event Tourism, During-And Post-Pandemic

1. Introduction and Background

The Cape Town Carnival (CTC) is among the most sought-after and attended annual cultural festivals that celebrate the transformative power of celebratory creativity and the African identity in South Africa (CTC, 2019a). The event draws thousands of participants annually and is acknowledged for its positive socio-economic impacts on job creation, tourism revenue generation, social cohesion, community development and empowerment (Bob et al., 2019; Doe et al., 2022; Drummond & Snowball, 2019; Machisa et al., 2018; Muresherwa et al., 2023). Despite the event's exponential growth over the years, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the CTC, both in terms of its scale and its socio-economic impact. During the years 2020 and 2021, the event was suspended given the mobility restrictions and other pandemic-related regulations, which brought social and economic activities to a standstill globally (Hemmonsbey, 2023). However, through the event organisers' strategic planning and efforts towards curtailing the pandemic's impact on the event, a reimagined event format was conceptualised in 2022 while a post-pandemic version returned in 2023.

The current study explores the perspectives of spectators on the socio-economic impacts of the CTC during COVID-19 with the reimagined format, and post-pandemic version in 2023. The study re-emphasises the importance of events for socio-economic benefits for the host community by determining specific aspects linked to the social and economic behaviour of event spectators. The paper starts by presenting relevant literature that could give a theoretical and conceptual basis for understanding event impacts. This literature review provides an

overview of key studies that have explored the socio-economic implications of cultural events, with a specific focus on assessing a major cultural event in Cape Town.

2. Literature Review

The socio-economic impact of cultural events has been a subject of considerable scholarly interest for decades (Bob et al., 2019; Kim & Uysal, 2003; Muresherwa et al., 2023). Globally, increasing attention is acknowledged from several destinations in organising different types and scales of events (Kourkouridis et al., 2023). Destinations have noted the socio-economic potential presented by events, and as such have seen the importance of supporting bidding (in the case of the large-scale ones) and hosting, resulting in the formulation of targeted event development strategies such as stimulation of economic growth, enhancing social vibrancy and fostering community development (Aburumman, 2020; Mair & Weber, 2019). The nexus between cultural events and tourism is a central theme in the literature, with Getz (2014) and Getz (2022) discussing the role of cultural events in contributing to the tourism experience, emphasising the potential of cultural events to position places as desirable destinations for both domestic and international tourists.

Cultural events and socio-economic impact

Numerous studies highlight the potential of cultural events to stimulate economic growth in host cities (Muresherwa et al., 2023; Sadd & Musikavanhu, 2018; Ukwayi et al., 2012). Such studies emphasised the value of cultural spectacles including contributing to increased local spending, job creation, and business development. The findings in the above studies underscore the economic opportunities associated with hosting major cultural events. The social impact of cultural events on local communities has been a recurring theme in research. The role of community engagement in cultural events, emphasizing how participatory approaches can enhance social cohesion and foster a sense of local identity has also been examined (Brennan, 2020; Brownett, 2018; Tanrıkul, 2023). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for evaluating the broader societal implications of hosting cultural events. For instance, annually, the CTC seeks to provide opportunities for community participation, solidifying networks, enhance social cohesion, and promote tourism, and job creation (CTC, 2019a).

From its inception in 2010, the CTC has witnessed increased growth in attendance- from 11,000 to more than 55,000 spectators (CTC, 2019b). The event has loyal repeat visitors and continues to appeal to first-time attendees. The economic impact of the 2017, 2018, and 2019 CTC on the economy of Cape Town reflected a growth from R41.14 million, R58.85 million, and R70.18 million respectively, excluding local sponsorship (CTC, 2018, 2019b). The 'Net spend' by visitors to the event for the years 2017 and 2018 showed a sharp rise from R13.8 million to R38.5 million, thus demonstrating the event's positive impact on the City's economy (CTC, 2018, 2019b). Opportunities for visitors to interact with several local suppliers (vendors, restaurants, tour operators, accommodation) continue to be created with each hosting of the CTC. The event's positive impact on the community is also showcased by opportunities for locals to participate in arts and culture, creating jobs, nurturing skills, building networks, and giving voice and visibility to a variety of communities (CTC, 2018).

2.1 Theoretical Underpinning

The current study was guided by the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) as it serves as an inclusive and holistic model of community capitals (tangible and intangible) and helps understand the relationships across capitals (Kline et al., 2019). This framework also works as an invaluable lens well suited to assess community-based tourism projects, especially in their early stages (Rossetti & Quinn, 2021). Flora and Flora (2013) see this theory as useful when assessing and understanding the various forms of capital communities, which also serve as event hubs. The framework identifies various types of capital that contribute to the well-being and sustainability of communities, which include, natural, cultural, human, social, financial, physical, and environmental (Flora & Flora, 2013; Flora et al., 2005). These seven capitals are further described by Thompson and Barrera (2019:1159) as follows:

(i) Natural – it examines the impact of cultural events on the natural environment by considering how events affect local biodiversity, and the environmental sustainability of the community. This can also be termed environmental capital.
(ii) Cultural – It puts focus on the impact of cultural events on the cultural identity and heritage of the community. Aspects around the preservation and promotion of local traditions, arts, and cultural expressions through events are examined.

(iii) Human – these deal with the development of skills, knowledge, and education within the community resulting from participation in or exposure to cultural events (e.g., educational programs associated with the event).
(iv) Social - it examines how a cultural event can foster social cohesion and community engagement by measuring local participation through volunteering and attending the event.
(v) Financial – assessment of the economic impact of a cultural event by measuring direct revenue generated through ticket sales, merchandise sales, and tourism spending, employment opportunities, and income distribution from the event.
(vi) Physical – evaluation of the impact of a cultural event on infrastructure development by examining the construction of new public spaces, transportation improvements, and cultural facilities.
(vii) Political– It considers how cultural events may influence community governance, policy development, and decision-making processes.

The CCF can be applied to studies on event spectators, and it can provide a comprehensive lens to understand the impacts of cultural events on the community, including those attending the events. By applying the CCF to the analysis of cultural events, researchers and policymakers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impacts of these events on communities. They can identify the specific forms of capital that are most affected by cultural events, assess the positive and negative impacts, and develop strategies to maximize the benefits and mitigate the potential drawbacks. The knowledge gained through the application of this CCF could be better utilised to inform decision-making, especially concerning community development initiatives including the planning, hosting and management of cultural events.

The presented literature has shown that cultural events are widely recognized as having significant economic and socio-cultural impacts on the host society and destination (Aideed, 2021; Amalu et al., 2021; Liu, 2014). These events are renowned for generating income, employment, tourism, and cultural diversity, as well as enhancing the quality of life, social inclusion, and intercultural dialogue of the local communities (Doe et al., 2022; Hassan & Quader, 2022; Mohanty & Samal, 2023). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges and disruptions to the cultural sector, affecting the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural events. The pandemic has also exposed and exacerbated the existing inequalities, vulnerabilities, and discriminations that affect the cultural actors and audiences, especially the marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

3. Methodology

A positivist paradigm is adopted by this study, which favours quantitative research methods and statistical analysis that are often employed to identify patterns and relationships. According to Park et al., (2020), the positivist paradigm explores a social reality that assumes human behaviour can be understood by using objective and observable facts. This quantitative study has thus adopted survey questionnaires as the basis for collecting empirical data from event spectators at the 2022 and 2023 CTC to elicit responses to specific questions to understand specific phenomena. A case study research design is subsequently adopted as the study focused on collecting data in a single event context (Zainal, 2007).

The 2022 re-imagined version of the CTC was hosted in five different venue hubs. Each venue hub had a capacity ranging between 2500 and 4500 people. The maximum number of people that these hubs accommodated was between 10,000 and 22,500 people in total. Using the sample size calculator, which includes the 95% confidence level, a representative sample size should be n=400 (Raosoft, Inc., 2004). The study has however achieved 400 usable surveys from the data collected. The 2023 version of the event, being the street parade, saw approximately 25,000 event attendees. Using the same sample size indicator, the sample size was n=400. Thus, the study's participants totalled (n=800). A non-probability sampling technique was appropriate with a convenience sampling approach applied as advocated by Charmaz (2014) so that participants are selected based on their easy accessibility to the researcher. Convenience sampling is limited as it does not represent the entire population and can therefore not be generalised to a broader population (Emerson, 2021), however, the study did not seek generalisation, but rather specific information into a unique case study- i.e., the CTC.

3.1 Data collection and analysis

A structured, face-to-face survey instrument was used for data collection to elicit results on the socio-economic impacts of the CTC amongst event spectators during the 2022 and 2023 versions of the event. This was deemed the most appropriate instrument as it allowed the fieldworkers to verify the informed consent and the

confidentiality of the respondents, to explain and clarify the meanings of certain questions, as well as to explain the overall study's importance (Plowright, 2011). Closed-ended questions were asked for respondents to indicate their demographic and socio-economic status. While the questions in the survey were centred around the study's aims and objectives, the survey was piloted before both events as advocated by Boparai et al., (2018). This was to validate the instrument and to ensure all questions were easily understood amongst the participants.

Quantitative data analysis involves the interpretation of numerical data using statistical methods, which includes, inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modelling the data to highlight useful information, suggest conclusions, and support decision-making (Pandey & Pandey, 2021; Welman et al., 2005). This quantitative study used a software package (i.e., the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) (Version 29), to conclude this stage of the analysis. This software permitted the researchers to interpret the data by analysing the results in the context of the research question. It also summarised the data through visual presentation, such as frequency tables, and other graphic presentations, which are presented in the subsequent section.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology prior to data collection. All ethical protocols, such as confidentiality and the protection of the participant's identity, were observed during the data collection phase. The event spectators were made aware of such protocols and informed consent was derived from the agreement to participate in the study.

4. Findings and Discussions

A profile of the CTC event spectators

Results on the spectator profiles from the CTC event, both during and post-pandemic do not show critical distinctions, which indicates that the event is consistent in its appeal and its audiences. Comparative demographic data in Table 1 illustrate a young adult audience, with a 'professional' occupation, with an average age of between 21- and 40 years old. There is, however, a growing, more mature audience looming of between 41- and 50- years old, which may be leveraged as a valuable market through the CTC. The demographic results further reveal an almost equal number of male and female attendance for both years, albeit the post-pandemic data reveal a slight increase in female attendance. Indicating the diversity of the Western Cape, and the broader South Africa. The racial classifications of the spectators show that, the 'coloured' demographic represents the majority of spectators, with 'black/African' second, and 'white' being the third largest representation at the event. Geographically, the event naturally showed a large local spectator following of the 'Western Cape Province' being (75.5%) in 2022 and slightly less, yet significant in 2023, by (70.5%). While 'Gauteng' was featured as the second most representing province in South Africa at the event, the data displays an increase from 2022 (6.5%) to 2023 (10.4%). The Eastern Cape remains the third most represented province featuring 4.3% and 3.8% for 2022 and 2023 respectively.

Table 1: Demographic information of respondents (n=800)

2022 [n=400]	*Variables*	2023 [n=400]
	Age	
9.0%	18-20 years	4.0%
20.8%	21-30 years	36.3%
31.8%	31-40 years	28.5%
21.0%	41-50 years	18.0%
13.0%	51-60 years	9.5%
3.5%	61-70 years	2.5%
1.0%	> 70 years Specify	1.3%
	Gender	
48.0%	Female	57.3%
52.0%	Male	42.8%
		Historical racial category
26.0%	Black/African	23.2%

2022 [n=400]	*Variables*	2023 [n=400]
	Age	
48.5%	Coloured	54.1%
3.2%	Foreigner	2.9%
2.5%	Indian	3.6%
19.8%	White	16.2%
	Place of origin	
4.3%	Eastern Cape	3.8%
2.3%	Free State	2.5%
6.5%	Gauteng	10.4%
2.3%	KwaZulu-Natal	3.5%
2.0%	Limpopo	1.8%
1.8%	Mpumalanga	1.5%
0.3%	North West	2.0%
2.0%	Northern Cape	1.0%
3.0%	Outside SA	3.0%
75.5%	Western Cape	70.5%
	Occupation	
2.0%	Artisan/Technician	2.0%
8.3%	Businessperson	10.5%
1.0%	Home Executive	1.0%
-	Other	2.8%
28.7%	Professional	25.5%
5.0%	Retired	5.3%
6.0%	Sales/Marketing	5.5%
14.2%	Self-employed	13.3%
9.5%	Skilled	10.8%
19.0%	Student/Learner	14.8%
5.5%	Unemployed	8.5%
0.8%	Unskilled	0.3%

Source: Survey data (2022 & 2023)

4.1 Main reasons for attending the CTC

Event spectators were asked what the main reasons for attending the CTC event were as each year presented unique expectations for spectators. For 2022, it was the reimagined event in its unique enclosed hosting venue space, while observing COVID-19 safety measures. In 2023, it was the resumption of the known street parade format post-COVID-19. From the backdrop of Bianco and White (2019) who suggest that cultural events should augment community engagement while emphasising enhanced social cohesion and fostering a sense of local identity, the results from both years during and post-pandemic strongly reinforce these social aspects of the CTC for the local community. As such, Figure 1 shows that 'fun to experience' was the lead motivation for attendance, with an almost equal number indicating 2022 (28.0%) and 2023 (32.9%). Closely following the main reasons for attendance, and reflecting group socialisation through the event, are owing to 'invitations by friends and family', with results showing, 28.9% in 2022 and 22.1% in 2023. Notably, the 'cultural experiences' that are boasted through the CTC, especially post-pandemic with (24.9%) demonstrate key motives of developing cultural identity and heritage as posited by Thompson and Barrera (2019).

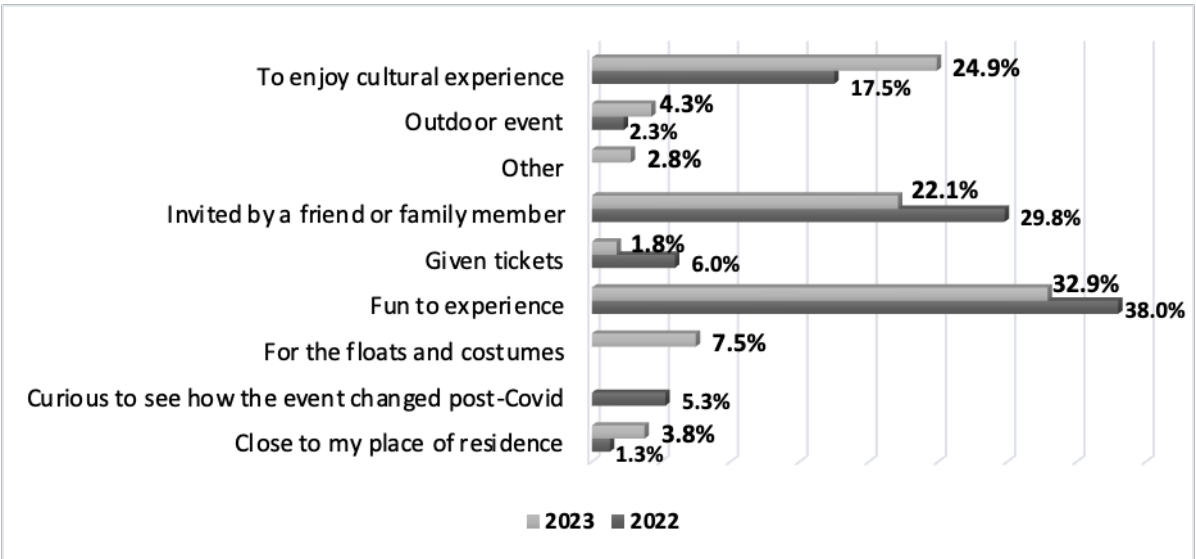

Figure 1: Primary reason for attending the CTC (n=800)

Source: Survey data (2022 & 2023)

4.2 Event Satisfaction and Loyalty

Figure 2 illustrates there is a significant number of repeat visitations to the event. Of the repeat visitors, close to 50.0% of the spectators indicated visiting at least 2-3 times in 2023, a sharp increase from the previous year (2022), where almost 30% had been at the event 2-3 times. This finding suggests visitor satisfaction with the event as well as a degree of loyalty to the event. Importantly, despite the alternate event hosting and first-time paid ticketing during 2022, these results show that even though people are prepared to pay a small fee for a ticketed event, making the event free would allow a wider audience access. Kruger, Saayman and Ellis (2010) are however of the view that, although repeat visitors are loyal and will stay longer in the host destinations as well as spend more money on the event production, first-time visitor groups are equally important for the long-term sustainability of the festival. Concerning first-time spectator attendance, the 2022 results indicate a significant number of spectators indicating first-time attendance (18.6%). This could be attributed to the curiosity regarding the re-imagined CTC during the pandemic or perhaps alluded to people having missed socially interacting at events due to COVID-19 restrictions. Post-pandemic results show first-time visitation to the CTC at (11.5%). While this result is moderate compared to 2022, it is important to note these (new) audiences, to augment socio-economic impacts and entice future and return visitation.

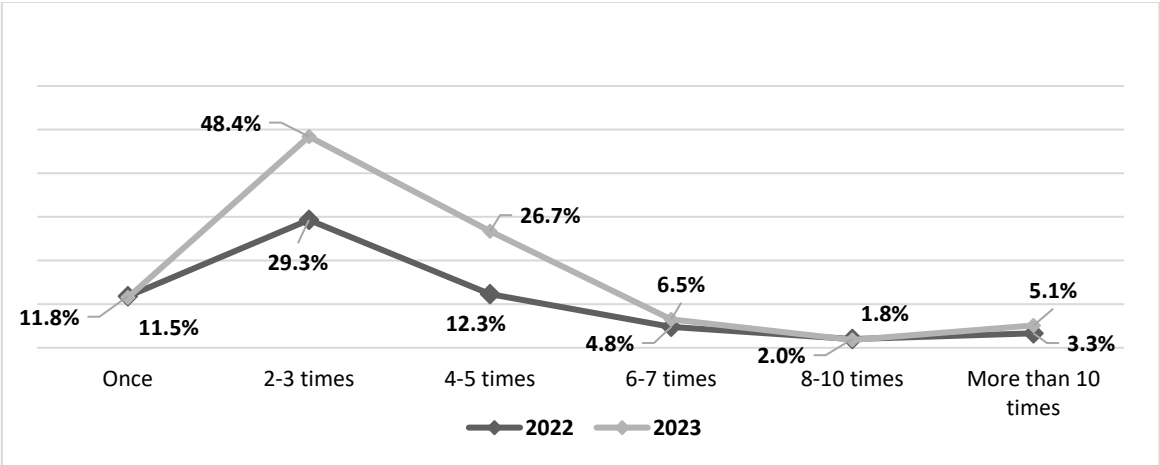

Figure 2: Repeat visitations to CTC (n=800)

Source: Survey data (2022 & 2023)

4.3 Socio-cultural Impact of the 2022 and 2023 CTC Event

In determining the socio-economic impact of the CTC, the study participants were requested to indicate their level of agreement with several aspects of the event, particularly the socio-cultural impacts. The statements were formulated based on relevant literature (See e.g., Bob et al., 2019; Doe et al., 2022; Fredline & Faulkner, 2002; Kim & Uysal, 2003; Machisa et al., 2018) and adapted to suit the study purpose. The degree of agreement or disagreement to predetermined statements was measured on a five-point Lickert scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree (SD) to 5=Strongly Agree (SA), with a 3=Neutral (N) for those who neither agreed nor disagreed. Table 2 shows the mean score and standard deviation (Std. Dev) results for the statements.

Table 2: Level of agreement with aspects of the events (n=800)

The event and impact statements	2022		2023	
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev
I will recommend visiting the CTC to my friends and family	4.65	.628	4.79	.573
The performances of the Carnival were exciting and fun	4.53	.718	4.74	.571
The event provides opportunities for tourism	4.53	.682	4.77	.559
The event provides an opportunity to meet new people (i.e., someone that you would not ordinarily have met)	4.43	.694	4.56	.778
The event increases entertainment opportunities	4.38	.730	4.75	.572
The event increases the visibility of the diverse communities of Cape Town	4.33	.773	4.68	.626
The diversity of South Africa is well represented at the event	4.28	.829	4.62	.736
The event increases the visibility of Cape Town through media	4.36	.708	4.66	.689
The event made you feel a sense of belonging to a community/ social group	4.21	.888	4.51	.850
The set-up of the performances in different hubs was well-designed/planned	4.29	.889	*Street parade*	
Key: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree				

Source: Survey data (2022 & 2023)

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all of the statements, indicating that the CTC is a popular and well-regarded event. The statement with the highest level of agreement was "I will recommend visiting the CTC to my friends and family" (mean = 4.65 in 2022 and 4.79 in 2023). This suggests that the CTC is a positive experience that people are eager to share with others. Despite the higher agreement scores, there is always room for improvement in terms of the organization and diversity of the event, as well as its ability to foster a sense of community belonging. However, it is important to note that these statements still received a mean rating of over 4, indicating that almost all the respondents were generally satisfied with the various aspects of the event.

4.4 The Economic Impact of the 2022 and 2023 CTC Event

Table 3 shows the percentages of participants who spent on accommodation, food and beverages (F&B), at local restaurants and local businesses around the CTC hubs and street procession. Regarding accommodation, the results show that in 2022, and 2023, only 26.5% and 20.0% of respondents booked accommodation respectively. The average duration of stay was 3.8 nights in 2022 and 3.98 nights in 2023. In 2022 the results showed a larger number of respondents (82.3%) spending on F&B, than in 2023 where there was a slight decline of visitors who spend money on the F&B (74.1%). Local restaurants around CTC hubs saw 65.0% of respondents spending in them (2022) whereas in the following year, 61.6% of the respondent's spent money in restaurants. The study results for 2022 also reveal that local businesses in the event locations had 58.8% of respondents spending in them whereas the 2023 data had 38.8% of respondents spending money in local businesses. Overall, the results suggest that the CTC has a positive economic impact on the local economy, a reinforcement of earlier studies (See e.g., Muresherwa et al., 2017; Machisa et al., 2018; Hemmonsbey, 2023).

Table 3: Economic impact (n=800)

2022	Variables	2023
	Booked accommodation	
26.5%	Yes	20.0%
73.5%	No	80.0%
2022 - Range for stays: 1 – 21 nights; Average duration of stays (nights): 3.8 nights *2023 - Rangle for stays: 1 – 14 days: Average duration of stays (nights): 3.98 nights*		
	Spent money on food & beverages	
82.3%	Yes	74.1%
17.8%	No	25.8%
	Local restaurants around CTC hubs	
65.0%	Yes	61.6%
35.0%	No	38.4%
	Spent money in local businesses	
58.8%	Yes	38.8%
41.3%	No	61.2%

Source: Survey data (2022 & 2023)

The decline in the percentage of respondents who booked accommodation during both years could be because the primary spectator audience resides in the Western Cape Province and therefore travelled to the event. Their travelling could also contribute to the local economy. The decline in other spending such as F&B and local businesses, post-pandemic, compared to during, may be contributing to the rising cost of living or the global economic slowdown. However, the average duration of stays increased slightly in 2023, suggesting that visitors are still interested in staying in Cape Town for multiple days to enjoy other secondary attractions, which according to Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa (2018) are key imperatives for promoting destination/ tourism brand exposure.

5. Implications and Conclusions

Cultural events and their socio-economic impacts have formed a bedrock for academic inquiry for a considerable period. The outcomes of the study on the CTC highlighted that events of this nature have the potential to engender positive socio-economic spinoffs for the host destination (Machisa et al., 2018). Consistent with current literature, the CTC promotes social elements of 'fun,' shared experiences with family and friends, and relatedly promoting a sense of community/belonging (social cohesion). Moreover, the event advances diversity and diverse experiences. Both the 2022 and 2023 versions of the CTC positively attracted new and returning visitors, which not only expresses visitor satisfaction and loyalty- through repeat visits but also presents the event organisers with opportunities for leveraging the event's product to appeal to new audiences. Essentially, this leads to event feasibility and sustainability, as posited by Kruger et al., (2010). The results of visitor spending imply notable economic impacts for the event and host destination. Moreover, the lengthening of visitor stays suggests a further injection into the destination's products and services. City brand stakeholders can therefore strategically use the event as a key pull factor for tourism beyond the event hosting phase. However, careful consideration should be given to the current cost of living when appealing to spectators. Overall, the socio-economic impacts did not reflect major differences during the pandemic and post-pandemic phases.

6. Recommendations

The current study investigated the socio-economic impacts of an annual festival in Cape Town. This was achieved through a quantitative inquiry to elicit the perspectives of event spectators during the 2022 and 2023 CTC. While the study's results illustrate direct impacts for the event and host destination, it is limited to these quantitative results. Therefore, exploring stakeholder insights through qualitative research with key stakeholder groups to assimilate socio-economic objectives for the event and thus compare current data is recommended. In this regard, a deeper investigation into specific sectors, i.e., accommodation, catering, and local businesses is needed for a more holistic view of economic impacts through the CTC. Moreover, a participant survey is useful to determine the aspects of job creation and innovation, which is envisioned by the objectives of the CTC.

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Wildlife Volunteer Tourism: Scientific and Educational Contributions in South Africa

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Abstract: Wildlife volunteer tourism has evolved into a popular form of sustainable tourism in South Africa. This form of tourism can exhibit both positive and negative impacts on a host destination. However, limited research has examined the potential contributions of wildlife volunteer tourism in South Africa. This paper focuses on filling this theoretical gap by investigating the scientific and educational contributions of wildlife volunteer tourism in South Africa. An exploratory qualitative approach was followed, where seven managers of volunteer tourism organisations were interviewed in August and September 2022. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. From the results, it is clear that wildlife volunteer tourism makes significant scientific and educational contributions. However, funding remains a challenge. The results provided an increased understanding of wildlife volunteer tourism in South Africa, and is valuable to managers, and contributes to the current discourse on volunteer tourism as an emerging market segment.

Key words: Wildlife Volunteer Tourism, Scientific Contributions, Educational Contributions, Funding

1. Introduction

According to McGehee (2014), an estimated 1.6 million people participate in volunteer tourism (VT) projects annually. VT, is a type of travel that combines traditional tourism with volunteer work (Wearing, 2001). Volunteer tourism offers people the opportunity to contribute their time, skills, and efforts to various projects or initiatives aimed at addressing social, environmental, or community needs (McGehee, 2014; Wearing, 2001). Wildlife volunteer tourism (WVT) allows one to travel to a destination and volunteer in activities related to wildlife conservation, such as education and research, to name a few (Ong, Lockstone-Binney, King & Smith, 2014; Knollenberg, McGehee, Boley & Clemmons, 2014; Wearing & McGehee, 2013). These activities are possible through collaboration and support from various stakeholders (Benali & Ren, 2019; Grimm and Needham, 2012). According to the International Unions for Conservation of Nature (2023), an estimate of 42 000 species are currently threatened with extinction. This has led to more people becoming environmentally conscious and starting to participate in WVT (Apps, Dimmock & Huveneers, 2018). Additionally, this has also result in more WVT projects that focus on conservation, education and science (Brightsmith, 2008).

South Africa is a popular destination for WVT due to the diverse culture, unique biodiversity, diverse ecosystems, and extensive conservation efforts. South Africa offers various programs that enable volunteers to contribute to local communities and participate in conservation efforts, making a positive impact on both people and the environment (Volunteerworld.com, 2023; Lucrezi, Cilliers & Van Der Merwe, 2022; Alexander, 2012a). Increased research into the realm of VT has been conducted focussing on a variety of elements, such as the profile, expectations, motivations, satisfaction, and attitude of volunteers, and the business model canvas, challenges, and impact of VT, to name a few (Cilliers & Hermann, 2023; Lucrezi & Cilliers, 2022; Lucrezi et al., 2022; Boluk, Kline & Stroobach, 2017; Van Tonder, Hoogendoorn & Block, 2017; Alexander, 2012a; Akintola, 2011; Benson & Seibert, 2009; Sin, 2009; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004). These studies provide essential theoretical background on VT as such promote the discourse on the topic. With that said, however, limited research has been conducted on the contributions of WVT, specifically examining the scientific and educational contributions in South Africa (Cilliers, Lucrezi & Van Der Merwe, 2022; Rogerson & Slater, 2014; Alexander, 2012a; Alexander, 2012b). This study's goal is to investigate the scientific and educational contributions of WVT in South Africa. This research is guided by the following research question: How does WVT organisations contribute to science and education in South Africa? Following on this introduction, the paper will present the literature review. Afterwards, the research methodology that were used to collect and analyse the data will be indicated. The results and discussion will then be presented, and finally the study will be concluded.

2. Literature Review

WVT plays host to a variety of potential benefits, for the volunteers, local community, science and conservation management, to name a few (Cilliers et al., 2022; Bernstein & Woosnam, 2019). It is however important to note that the benefits of WVT can vary depending on the quality and sustainability of the programs, the involvement

and empowerment of local communities, and the responsible practices employed by the WVT organisations (Pompurová, Marčeková, Šebová, Sokolová & Žofaj, 2018). It is crucial to approach WVT with a critical mindset, ensuring that the projects and organisations chosen prioritise the well-being of local communities and the environment, promote sustainability, and create long-term positive impacts (Pompurová et al., 2018).

2.1 Scientific Contributions

WVT may contribute to scientific research and discovery by providing participants the opportunity to assist scientists and researchers in collecting data and information (Mostafanezhad, 2013; Wearing & McGehee, 2013). It is known that volunteers are motivated to participate in scientific activities, such as data collection, sample gathering, surveying, monitoring, or even assisting with laboratory work (Keese, 2011; Goffredo, Pensa, Neri, Orlandi, Gagliardi, Velardi, Piccinetti & Zaccanti, 2010). There is also an increase in the number of people who contribute to conservation through participating in citizen science or donating funds towards conservation and research activities (Cerrano, Milanese & Ponti, 2017; Bear, 2016). WVT organisations engaged in scientific research can contribute to the completion of studies, publication of articles, and the creation of research databases (Roques, Jacobson and McCleery, 2018; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Brightsmith, Stronza & Holle, 2008). Scientific research conducted by WVT organisations has the potential to open doors for collaboration and partnerships with various institutions and organisations (Rees, Rodwell, Attrill, Austen & Mangi, 2010). This can impact conservation management policies, which can contribute to conservation, protection and management of wildlife and the environment (Roques et al., 2018; Schmeller, Henry, Julliard, Gruber, Clobert, Dziock, Lengyel, Nowicki, Dári, Budrys, Kull ,Tali, Bauch, Settele, Van Swaay, Kobler, Babij, Papastergiadou & Henle, 2008).

2.2 Educational Contributions

WVT activities have the potential to increase education and understanding of conservation and the environment through various means, including social media, personal interaction, and personal experiences (Cilliers & Hermann, 2023; Roques et al., 2018). These efforts empower individuals to become informed advocates for sustainable practices, and environmental stewardship in their communities and beyond (Roques et al., 2018; Gray, Meeker, Ravensbergen, Kipp and Faulkner, 2017). The aforementioned may result in local communities becoming stewards and taking ownership of their natural environment, and an increase of people participating in conservation (Roques et al., 2018; Khoshkam & Marzuki, 2011). WVT enhances the local community and the volunteers' education and skills, and positively change their attitude and behaviour towards conservation (Apps et al., 2018; Goldberg, Birtles, Marshall, Curnock, Case & Beeden, 2018; Wearing, 2001). This results in them being motivated to contribute and support conservation and the protection of wildlife and ecosystems, enhance their education, increase the education of others, and continue to participate in scientific activities (Apps et al., 2018; Goldberg et al., 2018; Anderson, Chapman, Escontrela & Gough, 2017; Lück, 2016.

2.3 Funding as a Challenge

Cilliers and Hermann (2023) found that limited funding is received by WVT organisations from public sector institutions. WVT organisations are thus dependant on self-generated funding such as the funds received from the volunteers, and alternative sources, such as social media and fundraising (Cilliers and Hermann, 2023; Lyons, Hanley, Wearing and Neil, 2012). These funds are primarily used to cover the projects and operating expenses (Bath-Rosenfeld, 2014). Solutions to overcome the funding issue may be to charge higher prices, being transparent with the funding, and indicating how the funds are used towards protection and conservation of wildlife and the environment (Bath-Rosenfeld, 2014; Coren & Gray, 2012). Additionally, WVT organisations can ensure that the volunteers are satisfied, which can lead to return and new volunteers, and positive word of mouth (Chua, Meng, Ryu & Han, 2021; Sharma & Sahni, 2017; Ding & Tseng, 2015). WVT organisations can also continue to contribute to science and education, creating partnership with institutions and organisations, which can result in enhanced financial support (Trave, Brunnschweiler, Sheaves, Diedrich & Barnett, 2017; Zeppel & Muloin, 2008; Zeppel, 2008).

3. Methodology

An exploratory qualitative approach was used to explore the scientific and educational contributions of WVT in South Africa. Expert judgemental sampling was used to interview managers at seven different WVT organisations in South Africa in August and September 2022 (when saturation was achieved). Data on the demographic profile, and the scientific and educational contributions were collected through semi-structured interviews (developed

based on previous research; Cilliers, 2022; Alexander, Kim & Kim, 2015; Rattan, Eagles & Mair, 2012). A consent form accompanied the interview schedule, and the participants had to give consent before they could participate in the study. The interviews were in English, 30 minutes on average and were recorded for transcription purposes. The demographic data were analysed using Microsoft Excel, and the contributions were analysed using thematic analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The recordings were transcribed verbatim and entered into Atlas.ti for analysis. Meaningful analytic units were applied through inductive open coding and in vivo coding. The codes that shared commonality were grouped into themes. The results were interpreted and reported with quotes from the participants.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile of Participants

From the results, it can be seen that WVT has essential scientific and educational contributions. However, funding remains a challenge that these WVT organisations are facing. This section provides a discussion on the demographic profile, and scientific and educational contributions of WVT.

Table 1: Demographic profile of participants

Wildlife volunteer organisation	WVO1	WVO2	WVO3	WVO4	WVO5	WVO6	WVO7
Age of WVT project	18	20	4	17	1	24	13
Years worked at organisation	3	4	6	5	6	4	7
Method of employment	Appointed	Volunteered	Founder	Appointed	Founder	Volunteered	Appointed
Previous VT experience	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country of origin	South Africa	Australia	South Africa	South Africa	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	South Africa
Age of participant	39	28	67	29	70	49	33
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female
Education	Diploma / Degree	High School	Diploma / Degree	Diploma / Degree	High School	Postgraduate	Diploma / Degree

From Table 1, it can be seen that the WVT projects included in the sample have been in existence for an average of 14 years, with the youngest being one and the oldest being 24 years old. The managers had been working at the WVT organisations for an average of five years, were appointed and did not previously participated in VT themselves. The majority of the managers originated from South Africa and had a university qualifications. There were similar proportion of male to female managers, and their aged ranged between late twenties to seventies.

WVT organisations have the ability to contribute to science through creation of partnership and enhancing knowledge, and contributing to education through educating students in schools, the general public and the volunteers. However, funding remains a challenge for these WVT organisations

4.2 Scientific Contributions

WVT organisations can create partnership through research and data collection, which can result in collaboration opportunities with a variety of organisations and institutions across the globe. This is confirmed in previous research (Hammerton, Dimmock, Hahn, Dalton & Smith, 2012; Rees et al., 2010). Collaboration can allow WVT organisations to participate in joint research projects, share their data with others, participate in publications, and obtain funding (Rees et al., 2010; Cater and Cater, 2007; Pattengill-Semmens & Semmens, 2003). It allows volunteers to have an opportunity to practice what they learnt in class, and enhance their own research skills and experience. Previous research has found that WVT organisations that contribute to science, enhances learning opportunities, allows volunteers to share their experiences, and increase network building (Rees et al., 2010; Cater and Cater, 2007; Pattengill-Semmens & Semmens, 2003). WVT can identify issues and new trends with wildlife and in the environment, which can be used to improve the WVT programme, educate the public and contribute to policies and procedures. This is confirmed in previous research (Roques et al., 2018; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Brightsmith et al., 2008). The scientific research conducted by the WVT organisations

can impact management, legislation and codes of conduct (Roques et al., 2018; Jansujwicz, Calhoun & Lilieholm, 2013). The following quotes were captured by the participants pertaining to this contribution:

"We on the ground in the field can carry out the research and [the researchers] can analyse it for us" (WVO4).

"[Researchers] will come through and do the studies, they will do the write ups and we manly facilitate the research" (WVO1).

"[We] collate and collect a lot of information that can be useful for a variety of things" (WVO2).

"[Research allows us to] better inform people and improve the programme" (WVO5).

4.3 Educational Contributions

WVT organisations has the opportunity to educate students in schools about wildlife, environment and conservation. This will allow them to learn from a young age to preserve wildlife and the environment. WVT organisations can also educate the general public through interacting with them, talking at a variety of events, and through social media. Previous research has found that WVT organisations can educate people on wildlife conservation through increasing their understanding, motivating them to protect and conserve, and raising awareness of conservation related issues (Roques et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2017; Branchini, Meschini, Covi, Piccinetti, Zaccanti & Goffredo, 2015). The volunteers participating in the WVT programmes also enhance their knowledge about wildlife conservation. This is confirmed in previous research, (Johnson, Hannah, Acton, Popovici, Karanth & Weinthal, 2014; Jansujwicz et al., 2013), and can lead to volunteers becoming wildlife and conservation ambassadors (Johnson et al., 2014; Jansujwicz et al., 2013). Resulting in them sharing the information with their friends and family, and educating their peers on conservation related matters. According to Dillette, Douglas, Martin and O'Neil (2017) and Weaver (2015), volunteers can promote responsible behaviour, inspire positive change in others, and share their knowledge with others. This has the potential to enhance wildlife preservation. The following quotes were captured by the participants pertaining to this contribution:

Wildlife conservation should be a subject in school… to teach them to care for our wildlife and make sure they know what wildlife is, because a lot of them have no clue" (WVO5).

"[Educate the public from] both from a pest perspective that these animals are not necessarily pests, but also a pet perspective" (WVO2).

"[We use social media to] show them first-hand what happens and what is the best way to go about it" (WVO4).

"[Giving the volunteers hands on experience] allows you to get more people involved and educating them in a more efficient way" (WVO2).

4.4 Funding as a Challenge

On the other hand, funding is one of the biggest challenges that WVT organisations face. WVT organisations need funding to continue with their daily tasks, conserve wildlife and the environment, and contribute to science and educations. This is confirmed in previous research (Bath-Rosenfeld, 2014; Lyons et al., 2012). WVT organisations can overcome this challenge by explaining what the funds are used for, ensuring volunteer are satisfied, and continue to contribute to science and education (Chua et al., 2021; Trave et al., 2017; Bath-Rosenfeld, 2014; Coren & Gray, 2012). The following quotes were captured by the participants pertaining to this contribution:

"There isn't a lot of government funding available, unless you're dealing specifically with endangered animals" (WVO2).

"When there are only seasonal volunteers or no volunteers, it is very difficult to maintain [your wildlife volunteer organisation], and there is no funding for which you can apply for, apart from donations or donors" (WVO3).

5. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

From the results (see Figure 1), it is evident that wildlife volunteer tourism organisations in South Africa can have essential scientific and educational contributions. This is done through creation of partnership and generating new knowledge. As well as educating students at schools, the general public through a variety of platforms, and the volunteers by including them in a variety of project activities. However, wildlife volunteer tourism organisations in South Africa are challenged with obtaining the necessary funding. It is therefore essential that WVT organisations continue to incorporate science into their projects, and collaborate with organisations and institutions from across the globe. This will ensure that they recruit appropriate human resources to assist with research where funding is not available, and continue to enhance their knowledge. WVT can also continue to educate people in schools, general public and the volunteers. This will raise awareness, increase the knowledge and skills of people, and potentially enhance the preservation of wildlife. WVT organisations should be honest and transparent about their funds, and ensure that the volunteers are satisfied. This will motivate more volunteers to donate funding, return and volunteer again, spread positive word of mouth, and encourage others to volunteer. These aspects can potentially result in increased funding for the WVT organisations, which can lead to the sustainable development of WVT in South Africa.

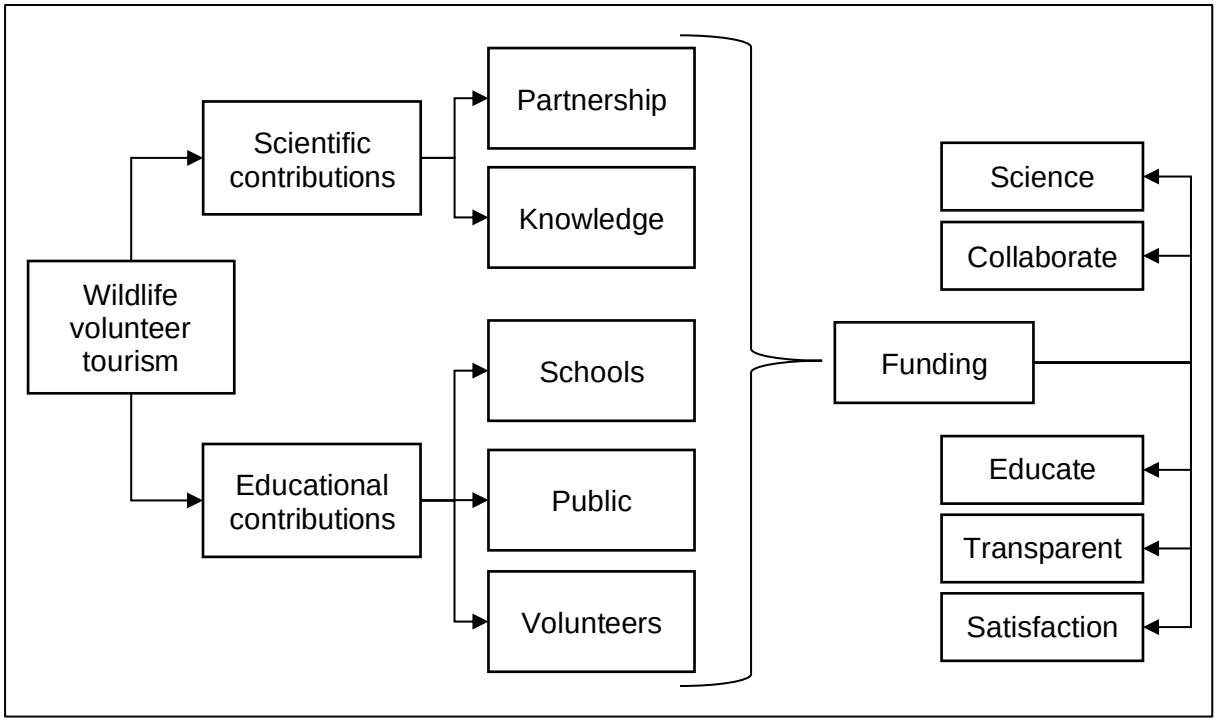

Figure 1: Contributions of wildlife volunteer tourism in South Africa

6. Conclusions

This study investigated the scientific and educational contributions of WVT organisations in South Africa. From the results it can be seen that WVT organisations can make significant scientific and educational contributions, but funding is a major challenge. Science, collaboration, education, transparency and satisfaction are ways to overcome the funding challenge. The results can be used by academics and practitioners to improve the WVT projects, and ensure that there is an increase in scientific and educational contributions. Additional research on WVT can increase the knowledge of WVT and the contributions that it makes. The following contributions are made by this study. This study fills the gap in literature with identifying and discussing the scientific and educational contributions that WVT organisations in South Africa are making. The study includes opinions from WVT organisation managers at different WVT organisations in South Africa. Essential recommendations are made for management and future research regarding the sustainable development of WVT. The following limitations were faced during the research. Although data saturation was achieved, data were only collected from seven WVT organisations. Additional data may have strengthened the data collected. The researchers were only able to collect data through Microsoft Teams and not face to face. Face to face data collection could have

enhanced the quality of the data. The subjectivity of the researchers may have affected the way that the final data were analysed and interpreted.

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Sustainability Practices in the Hospitality Industry: Evidence from Chain Hotels in Kandy

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Abstract: The tourism and hospitality industry has typically been at the forefront of integrating sustainability practices in its overall operations globally. Nonetheless, there has been a continued paucity in the tourism and hospitality academia, with limited research being conducted on adopting sustainable practices and their impacts on developing tourism destinations. Therefore, this research primarily focuses on exploring the current context of sustainability practice adoption and its implications from the perspective of a developing tourism destination through a case study research based in Kandy, Sri Lanka. This research initially builds on the works of Mihalič, Žabkar, & Cvelbar (2012), where their Hotel Sustainable Business Model is used as a benchmark in exploring the sustainability practices within Kandy, Sri Lanka. This study employed a qualitative research methodology, where semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven senior managerial employees representing 11 chain hotels in Kandy, Sri Lanka, selected through a purposive sampling. The interview findings were further validated using participant observation facilitated through individual field visits across all chosen establishments in the sample. The key results of the research suggested that hotels in Kandy, Sri Lanka, had already adopted a wide array of sustainability practices, especially across the environmental and socio-cultural bottom lines of their operation. The findings further suggested that despite all hotels emphasizing their economic progression, most practitioners had a limited understanding of how economic indicators related to their sustainability commitments. The overall findings also indicated that hotels belonging to larger hotel chains had a greater tendency to implement sustainable practices, while hotels belonging to smaller ones showcased significant inconsistencies in their overall sustainability practice adoption. Furthermore, this research provided theoretical and practical implications for future researchers and local hospitality practitioners by providing a comprehensive overview of the current context of sustainability practice adoption in Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Sustainability, Sustainable Practices, Sustainable Tourism, Sri Lanka Tourism

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, sustainability has progressed phenomenally, with the concept now being a mandatory strategic concern in almost every industry (Hoffman, 2018). Even in the global hospitality industry, sustainability has become a growing consideration, resulting in industry practitioners integrating sustainability practices into their mainstream operations (Jones et al., 2014). However, sustainability continues to face the longstanding issue of ambiguity, with no clear standards stipulating what constitutes sustainability practices (Arowoshegbe et al., 2016). This apprehension is further evident in developing tourism destinations such as Sri Lanka, both from an academic and practical perspective, as there has been a paucity of research and industry involvement in implementing and monitoring sustainable practices within the hospitality industry.

Following several setbacks in the form of COVID-19 and a prolonged economic crisis, Sri Lanka's tourism industry is currently witnessing a resurgence in the sector (Perera et al., 2023). Moreover, the local tourism industry has started to gravitate towards creating a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable tourism sector, given the prominence the concept is garnering worldwide (World Bank, 2022). Despite this phenomenal focus on sustainability from a policy standpoint, the operationalization of the concept within the local tourism sector remains challenging due to the haziness around identifying, implementing, and monitoring sustainability initiatives within the destination. Hence, this paper attempts to address this longstanding practical knowledge and population gaps connected with adopting sustainability practices in the hospitality industry in Sri Lanka by undertaking a comprehensive case study of Chain Hotels in Kandy District, Sri Lanka (Miles, 2017). Thereby this study hopes to shed light on academia by contextualizing the present situation of sustainable tourism adaptation capability of developing tourism destinations through a case study perspective.

The present study aims to identify the current context of sustainability practices employed by the hospitality practitioners in Kandy, Sri Lanka, about existing sustainability practices in the contemporary tourism academia. Secondly, the paper also attempts to explore the reasonings behind local hoteliers' adoption or non-adoption of sustainability practices by critically evaluating their sentiments towards adoption across all three pillars of the Triple Bottom Line.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Measuring Sustainability

Sustainability as a standalone concept makes zero sense without having valid indicators and measuring tools to measure its progression (McCool et al., 2001). One of the earliest attempts at streamlining the operationalization of sustainability concepts was first evidenced through the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach proposed by Elkington in 1997 (Stoddard et al., 2012). In its simplest sense, TBL is a framework that measures business performance and organizational success by explicitly integrating the economic, social, and environmental bottom lines (Elkington, 1998; Alhaddi, 2015). Given the balanced conception of all three facets of sustainability, the TBL concept has been applauded by academics and leveraged by industry practitioners in several settings to formally measure and report the sustainability commitments of their respective businesses (Sanchez-Chaparro et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the TBL concept has faced criticism from several academics, primarily due to its inability to measure an organization's social and environmental performance in a meaningful, consistent, and comparable way (Pava, 2007). Moreover, TBL is a generic theory that applies to any industry at a macro level. Therefore, over the years, many tourism and hospitality academics have developed frameworks to identify and measure sustainability from a tourism and hospitality industry perspective.

2.2 Sustainability Frameworks in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Given the industry's highly fragmented and diverse nature, sustainable tourism has often been riddled with identification and measurement-related challenges (Budeanu et al., 2016). Nonetheless, leading academics in the tourism sphere have proposed multiple frameworks and methodologies to systematically engage and measure the sustainability commitments of tourism and hospitality firms over the years. For instance, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) was the first to take the initiative in proposing Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations; where in 2004 the organization presented a sustainable tourism framework comprising 29 strategic directions covering all three facets of the TBL (Stukalo et al., 2018). Following the foundation laid by UNWTO, a plethora of tourism and hospitality academics proposed a wide array of frameworks for sustainability measurement. Torres-Delgado & Saarinen (2014), in their review of sustainable tourism indicator sets, identified seven frameworks that present a variety of sustainable practices, while Punzo et. al. (2022) in their recent paper aimed at developing composite indicators for the tourism industry, identified ten former sustainable tourism-related frameworks proposed by previous authors. Interestingly, regardless of minor discrepancies, almost all proposed sustainable frameworks within the tourism academia have gained some form of inspiration from the TBL concept, with the vast majority of frameworks using the three underlying pillars of TBL as the foundation to develop their proposed frameworks. Nonetheless, Punzo (et al., 2022) further argued that despite the prelevance of many sustainable tourism frameworks, most of them remain as theoretical conceptualizations with marginal empirical implementation. This conundrum is further evidenced in the case of the hospitality sector, where there is a scarcity of indicator sets proposing practically feasible sustainability practices that hoteliers can implement to achieve sustainability.

2.3 Sustainability Practices in Sri Lankan Hotels

Over the past decade, Sri Lanka's hospitality sector has witnessed a positive movement towards sustainability, with many established hotels incorporating sustainable practices into their operations (Wijesundara, 2017). Nonetheless, from an academic perspective, it is evident that sustainability-related studies have not received the attention they deserve compared to the industry's prominence on the concept (Wickramasinghe, 2016). Despite the existence of a notable amount of studies about sustainable practice adoption in the local hospitality industry, most papers in the Sri Lankan context either focus on one pillar of the TBL or provide a deep dive on one particular sustainability initiative as opposed to holistically assessing the overall sustainability practices adopted by local hotels (Ratnayake & Miththapala, 2011; Arachchi, Yajid, & Khatibi, 2015; Pathirana, Herath, Scott, & Gardiner, 2020).

2.4 Hotel Sustainability Business Model (HSBM)

Hotel Sustainability Business Model (HSBM) proposed by Mihalič, Žabkar, & Cvelbar (2012) is an innovative framework that has been developed, combining the criteria of UNWTO's sustainable tourism model (UNWTO, 2004) with the TBL model to measure sustainability orientation in the hospitality sector. As the TBL and UNWTO models were generic and focused on either the macro or destination level, Mihalič, Žabkar, & Cvelbar (2012)

developed one combined model to measure sustainability practices that are inherently specific to the hospitality sector. In HSBM, the standard three dimensions of TBL (Economic, Environmental, and socio-cultural) were expanded to incorporate another three additional requirements, i.e., customer satisfaction, environmental education, and power to change participation. HSBM introduces 36 indicators under eight sub-categories. The marketing and profitability dimensions are integrated into the economic business bottom line, and categories such as biodiversity, resources, and environmental education are incorporated under the environmental pillar. Lastly, the social business line is broken down into human capital, cultural capital, and power to change participation.

HSBM provides an ideal platform for this research to explore the sustainability commitments of chain hotels in Kandy for many reasons. Firstly, HSBM is a highly context-specific model that has been precisely curated to identify and measure sustainability practices within the hospitality industry. Secondly, the model has been empirically validated in the context of the Slovenian Hotel Industry with sequencing studies conducted by (Cvelbar & Dwyer, 2013; Wickham, French, & Wong, 2020; Tegegne & Singh, 2021) acknowledging or validating the model's merits in their respective studies. Finally, given the lack of research conducted in Kandy about sustainable tourism, the HSBM provides a solid base by identifying sustainability practices-related themes that could be used to assess Kandy's current sustainability commitments.

Mihalič, Žabkar, & Cvelbar's (2012) initial study was an empirical and quantitative research that intended to recognize how essential each of their proposed indicators was for the hoteliers in Slovenia. However, given the primitive nature of sustainability practice identification-related research in Sri Lanka and the assumption that the respondents in the chosen sample may not be able to comprehend and provide valid feedback on their sustainability efforts due to discrepancies between their sustainability practices and the ones presented in a structured survey, this paper builds on a qualitative approach where the HSBM's indicators were used as a guideline in discovering the sustainable practices adopted in the chosen destination. Hence, the proposed 36 indicators of HSBM were narrowed down to 28 to suit the context of this study. *Profitability of Assets, Profitability of Capital, Profit margin, Economic Value Added, and Total Revenue per Employee* under the finance sub-line (Economic) and *Employee Salaries* under the Human Capital sub-line (Social) were excluded from this study due to the inherent confidential nature of such financial indices. Two other indicators under the marketing sub-line (Economic), i.e., *guests who evaluate quality as very high* and *guests who evaluate quality vs. price ratio as very high*, were also excluded from the indicator list given the supply-side nature of the research. The consolidated 28-indicator framework used in the case of this research is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: HSBM with indicators

Business Bottom Line	Business Sub line	No.	Basic Indicators & Code
Economic	**Financial**	**1**	Average Room Rate (ARR)
		2	Average Occupancy Rate (AOR)
	Marketing	**3**	Share of Highly Satisfied Guests (HSG)
		4	Share of returning guests – At least 3 times (SRG)
		5	Share of guests who would recommend the hotel (SGR)

Business Bottom Line	Business Sub line	No.	Basic Indicators & Code
Environment	**Resources**	**6**	Energy Consumption (ECP)
		7	Renewable energy usage (CRS)
		8	Water Consumption (WCP)
		9	Water Recycling (WRC)
		10	Quantity of solid waste (QSW)
		11	Recycling Waste (RCW)
		12	Direct CO2 emissions (COE)
	Biodiversity	**13**	Selecting Plants that are adapted to a particular environment (SPE)

Business Bottom Line	Business Sub line	No.	Basic Indicators & Code
		14	Planting at least a tree per year (PTT)
	Environmental education	15	Environmental activities for the employees (EAE)
		16	Environmental activities for guests (EAG)
Social	Human Capital	17	Employee satisfaction (EMS)
		18	Training of employees (TRE)
	Cultural Capital	19	Number of local cultural events in the hotel (CEH)
		20	The proportion of local dishes on offer (LDO)
	Power to change Participation	21	Cooperation with municipality (CMU)
		22	Cooperation with local residents (CLR)
		23	Satisfaction of local residents with tourism (SLR)
		24	Cooperation with NGO's (CNG)
		25	Participation in sustainable tourism development of destination (OSD)
		26	Monitoring the implementation of hotel's sustainability strategy (MSD)
		27	Environmental quality standards (EQS)
		28	Number of other ecological quality labels (EQL)

3. Methodology

3.1 Geographic Location

Acclaimed as one of Sri Lanka's most prominent tourism destinations, Kandy is a UNESCO World Heritage city renowned for its unique religious, cultural, and natural offerings (Welagedara, 2016). As the provincial capital of the Central Province, Kandy's incredible tourism product is supplemented with all auxiliary services and amenities to support the tourism industry (Sivesan, 2019). Moreover, as per (SLTDA, 2023) records, Kandy currently has a total room inventory of 3,786 rooms, accounting for 7.5% of the entire room inventory in the country, making the city a prominent destination from a hospitality perspective as well.

3.2 Research Design

This research employed an exploratory, qualitative approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various sustainability practices currently employed within chain hotels in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as the primary data collection method to gain a comprehensive overview of each hotel's sustainability practices (Brounéus, 2011). The researcher directed a set of core questions to each respondent, inquiring them on the various sustainability practices employed by their hotel across each of the three pillars of HSBM (*Example: What are the environmental sustainability practices adopted by your hotel?*). The core questions of the research were followed up with several clarifying probes based on the 28-indicator framework developed using HSBM (Table 1), allowing respondents to self-disclose any sustainability practices they may have missed out on when answering the core questions (Robinson, 2023). Moreover, participant observation was used as a supplementary data collection method to validate the respondent's claims about sustainability practices employed at their respective hotels, especially under the environmental sustainability bottom line (Ciesielska et al., 2018).

The in-depth interviews were conducted among 11 senior managerial hotel employees of 11 chain hotels in Kandy, Sri Lanka, selected through purposive sampling (n = 11). Only chain hotels (*A chain hotel was categorized as any property that belonged to a hospitality organization that operated at least two hotels under the same brand name or the same management team in Sri Lanka*) were included in this research under the assumption that they are more likely to implement sustainability practices in their operations in comparison to standalone hotels as disclosed in previous research (El Dief & Xavier, 2010; Nicholls & Kang, 2012; Van Rheede & Blomme, 2012). The data collection process took place across three days in August 2023, where the researchers personally visited all 11 hotels to conduct the interviews and engage in participant observation. The collected data was then

carefully coded and analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover recurring themes about the destination's current sustainability practices while observing all relevant ethical procedures (Clarke et al., 2015).

4. Findings

4.1 Overview

This chapter is broken down into three main sub-topics, where the research findings are explained in detail across the three main Business bottom lines of HSBM. Each sub-section in this chapter provides a detailed table showcasing the sustainability practices adopted by each hotel within the sample about the indicator set proposed in the literature review. The tables are then followed with an analysis of significant sentiments shared by the respondents relating to their commitment toward each of the bottom lines and their respective indicators.

4.2 Economic Business Bottom-line

Table 2: Economic Sustainability Practices Analysis

No.	Indicator Code	Hotel Code											Achieved (%)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Financial Sub Line													
i1	ARR	X	√	X	√	√	x	√	√	√	√	X	64%
i2	AOR	√	x	X	√	√	√	x	x	√	√	X	55%
Marketing Sub Line													
i3	HSG	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	100%
i4	SRG	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	100%
i5	SGR	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	91%
Achieved (%)		80%	80%	40%	100%	100%	80%	80%	80%	100%	100%	60%	82%

The study results indicated that the selected hospitality firms had a significant focus on achieving the economic bottom line, with an overall achievement rate of 82% across all indicators. However, the respondents had mixed opinions about the financial sub-line.

The respondent from Hotel 9 shared his sentiment on financial sustainability as below:

"In recent times, our country has been struggling with a dollar crisis. As an organization, we help the country to generate dollars through tourism."

A key finding of this research was that despite all hotels significantly emphasizing the economic bottom line, most practitioners were unfamiliar with how the achievement of several indicators, especially relating to the finance sub-line, connected with their overall sustainability commitments. Hence, several hotels failed to make a connection between achieving higher room revenue and higher occupancy rates with the overall sustainability of the hotel, with most respondents opening up about the subject matter upon detailed probing.

Moreover, the respondent from Hotel 4 stated:

"All departments of our hotel make sure our every guest is leaving with a good memory. When the guests are happy, they come again and again. Most importantly, the positive word of mouth spread to the community, and they know our facilities and how well we treat our guests."

Interestingly, this sentiment was shared by all respondents with all hotels in the sample focusing on the delivery and measurement of customer satisfaction (i3) and the share of returning guests (i4), while 91% of hotels also measured the amount of bookings they received through customer referrals (i5) as well.

4.3 Environmental Business Bottom-line

Table 3: Environmental Sustainability Practices Analysis

No.	Indicator Code	Hotel Code											Achieved (%)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Resources Sub Line													
i6	ECP	√	√	X	√	√	√	x	√	√	x	√	73%
i7	CRS	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	x	x	√	73%
i8	WCP	√	√	X	√	√	√	x	√	x	√	x	64%
i9	WRC	√	√	X	√	√	√	x	√	√	x	√	73%
i10	QSW	√	x	X	x	√	X	x	√	x	√	x	36%
i11	RCW	X	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	82%
i12	COE	√	x	X	√	√	X	√	√	√	x	x	55%
Biodiversity Sub Line													
i13	SPE	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	√	√	√	x	73%
i14	PTT	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	√	√	√	√	91%
Environmental Education Sub Line													
i15	EAE	√	√	X	√	√	√	x	x	√	√	x	64%
i16	EAG	√	√	X	√	√	X	X	√	x	√	x	55%
Achieved (%)		91%	82%	27%	91%	91%	55%	36%	91%	64%	64%	45%	67%

The study showcased mixed results on adopting environmentally sustainable practices in Kandy. For instance, Hoteliers in Kandy resonated with most practices identified under the resources sub-line, with several hotels using solar panels and biomass boilers for renewable energy generation (i6), with nearly all the same hotels possessing effective water management practices spearheaded by the presence of in-house Sewage Treatment Plants to recycle and reuse the wastewater generated in their hotels (i7). Nonetheless, the sector had a lackluster commitment towards waste management (36%) and mitigating CO2 emission (55%), perhaps due to the significant investment requirement in implementing waste management strategies and energy-efficient technologies in the Sri Lankan context. Furthermore, firms failed to acknowledge their contribution to increased CO_2 emissions, as highlighted by the below statement made by the respondent from Hotel 6:

"We don't need to implement additional measures here, as our available resources do not significantly contribute to CO2 emissions."

The higher percentages obtained under the biodiversity sub-line demonstrate the hotel's strong commitment towards sustainable landscaping, carrying out regular tree planting programs while minimizing the firm's environmental footprint.

However, compared to the above two sub-lines, hoteliers have viewed environmental education-related sustainability practices as less critical. When the respondents were inquired about the environmental education activities for guests and employees, most reported that there were no ongoing initiatives in place. However, fostering awareness among employees and guests regarding the sustainable initiatives the hotels have implemented and the goals they aim to achieve through these efforts could enhance environmental performance in the long run (Bohdanowicz et al., 2011). Moreover, proper environmental education programs are increasingly likely to have a knock-on effect on the positive progression of other sustainable initiatives of the hotels as well.

The research also discovered that most hoteliers associate the entire sustainability concept with simply catering to the "planet" pillar under the TBL. When the respondent from Hotel 4 was questioned on his generic perceptions of sustainability, he stated that;

"Mainly the green practices that we've commenced […] we have started documentation to assess potential areas where we can reduce our electricity consumption, with the conversion of the LED, installing water saving devices, implementing waste separation and Recycling practices, Reducing, Reusing when possible."

This statement highlights a common misinterpretation among local hoteliers, who perceive sustainability as synonymous with environmental practices that minimize the negative environmental impacts. Even though

environmental sustainability is a crucial component of sustainability, this misinterpretation can lead to neglecting vital focus areas in attaining broader social and economic sustainability.

4.4 Social Business Bottom-line

Table 4: Social Sustainability Practices Analysis

No.	Indicator Code	Hotel Code											Achieved (%)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Human Capital Sub Line													
i17	EMS	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	91%
i18	TRE	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	100%
Cultural Capital Sub Line													
i19	CEH	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	√	√	√	√	91%
i20	LDO	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	100%
Power to Change Participation Sub Line													
i21	CMU	√	x	X	x	X	x	x	√	√	x	√	36%
i22	CLR	x	x	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	73%
i23	SLR	x	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	82%
i24	CNG	√	x	X	√	√	x	x	X	x	x	X	27%
i25	OSD	√	√	X	√	√	√	x	√	√	√	X	73%
i26	MSD	√	x	X	√	√	√	x	√	√	√	√	73%
i27	EQS	√	√	X	√	√	x	x	√	√	x	√	64%
i28	EQL	x	√	X	√	X	x	x	X	√	x	X	27%
Achieved (%)		75%	67%	33%	92%	83%	67%	42%	83%	92%	67%	67%	70%

The Social Business bottom line results showcased mixed results similar to the environmental pillar. Firstly, the findings suggested that the respondents perceived sustainability practices on both Human Capital and Cultural capital as crucial to their overall sustainability operationalization. Most of the firms (95%) focused on human capital development by investing in enhancing employee's knowledge, skills, and competencies (i17, i18). These investments were primarily made towards conducting both on and off-the-job training initiatives.

The respondent from Hotel 6 commented on employee development and satisfaction as follows:

"As I mentioned before, we are receiving repeat arrivals. So, we make a good revenue. Therefore, the personal income of the employees also increases. We ensure our employees a good working environment here. It's a hassle-free working environment. Our employees have good opportunities for training and career development. The reputation, experience, and skills they receive from here provide many opportunities when they leave."

Furthermore, these firms prioritized enhancing employee satisfaction, with many hotels adopting open policy frameworks that foster transparency and accessibility within their organizational culture. Most hoteliers across the sample were able to support their human capital development initiatives with stable pieces of evidence on the actions taken within their establishments to prioritize employee development.

Moreover, the respondent from Hotel 9 stated the following about their hotel's orientation toward the cultural capital:

"Yes, when we have festivals like Sinhala and Tamil New Year, Deepawali, and Christmas, we incorporate these cultural things into our hotel operations; for example, we decorate our hotel, buffet, and all. We are promoting our culture in that manner."

In line with the above statement, the research discovered that the orientation towards the cultural capital among all respondents was significantly high (95%), perhaps inadvertently given the rich cultural heritage of Kandy that boasts a range of cultural events, including the iconic annual Kandy Procession supplemented by indulging local cuisines.

Additionally, significant contrasts were visible among the practices under the power to change participation sub-line. The findings revealed a distinct lack of collaboration between the hotels and both municipality and non-governmental organizations (i21, i24). In the interviewing process, when the questions about partnerships with the municipality and non-governmental organizations were raised, it was proved that the hoteliers do not provide much consideration to collaborating with the municipality or non-governmental organizations in achieving sustainability, and many hoteliers responded that they are not collaborating with any type of external organization. This lack of cooperation could tarnish the hotels' capacity to actively engage in sustainable efforts that foster the community's overall welfare in the long run.

However, the findings showcased that most hotels had taken significant steps towards working with and satisfying the local communities surrounding their hotels, as evidenced in the below statement made by the respondent in Hotel 10:

"The people around (less than 30km) are being hired as staff, and we also do local purchases, including food items and daily essentials from the village. We hire daily workers from this area as well."

A vast majority of the hotels paid significant attention to local hiring and local sourcing as a part of their commitment to the local community, leading towards a higher degree of local resident satisfaction, primarily due to the inherent economic benefits provided to the community through the hotels.

The research also uncovered that hoteliers in Kandy have implemented several environmentally sustainable practices to mitigate environmental damage instead of addressing the root cause of an underlying sustainability problem. For example, while most hotels focused on the amount of waste that can be recycled to reduce waste dumped in landfills, only a smaller proportion of hoteliers kept track of the total volume of waste they produced. The research further revealed that some hotels lacked quantifiable evidence to measure their sustainability performance, which is typically obtained through quality labels (i28), as evidenced in the below statement made by the respondent from Hotel 6:

"At the moment, we don't have received any certificates regarding sustainability or the environment. But we are planning to get certificates like ISO. But anyhow, we maintain the quality standards according to the government rules and guidelines."

It was broadly understood that most hotels in Kandy did not perceive obtaining an Eco-quality label as an important sustainability commitment primarily due to the lack of awareness and the perceived value placed on such labels from an organizational and client perspective.

5. Conclusive Discussion

The broader results of this study resonated with Mihalič, Žabkar, & Cvelbar's (2012) study with Hoteliers in Kandy also conducting sustainability practices under all three proposed pillars of HSBM as evidenced in Figure 1 below**:**

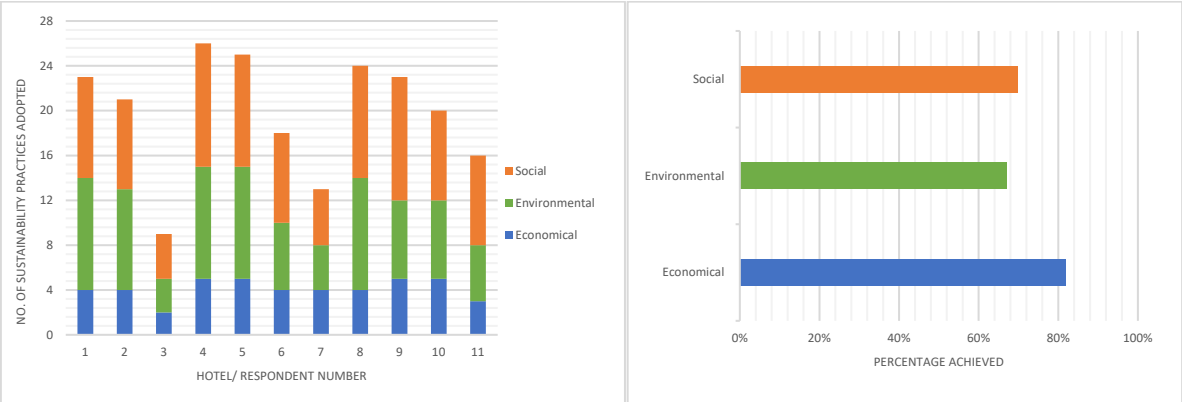

Figure 1: Overall Sustainability Practices Analysis

It was evident that even in the Sri Lankan context, the economic pillar remained the most relevant for hoteliers, given the direct tangible benefits received by the hotel through economic progression (Bader, 2005). The study also showcased that the hoteliers gave a marginally higher focus on social sustainability over environmental sustainability initiatives, perhaps due to most hotels in the sample being located closer to the center of an urbanized city, making it easier to implement social sustainability initiatives (Rodríguez-Antón et al., 2012).

Moreover, the perception of sustainability practices being expensive to implement was also evident among Kandy Hoteliers, especially in introducing environmentally sustainable practices (Fukey & Issac, 2014). It was also worth noting that none of the hotels in the sample followed all 28 sustainability practices proposed in the HSBM, showcasing clear room for improvement for all hotels in the study. It is also important to note that despite the overall picture of the research showcasing a relatively sub-par performance across some sustainable initiatives, there were contrasting differences between the sustainability practice adoption between individual hotels within the sample, with hotels typically affiliated with larger hotel chains having a greater tendency to implement sustainable practices (Weerathunga et al., 2020), while smaller hotel chains showcased inconsistencies in adopting sustainable practices. The findings suggest that resource disparities, lack of awareness about sustainability, and their varied economic stability are the leading causes for the underperformance of smaller-scale chain hotels.

This paper contributes to existing academic knowledge by providing a holistic overview of the current sustainability commitment capabilities of Sri Lankan chain hotels. The findings of this novel study could be used as a stepping stone in uncovering and critiquing sustainable practices in the hospitality industry in varied settings; especially in the contexts of developing countries. This empirical study however poses several limitations. Firstly, this paper purely focused on 28 sustainability initiatives based on HSBM, and future researchers could explore any additional sustainability practices that developing destinations may be undertaking that are unique to their respective destinations. Secondly, the sample of this paper represented a fraction of the overall Sri Lankan tourism industry, and future research could look at exploring the sustainability practices of the destination with a more representative sample and by employing a quantitative research approach.

Moreover, several recommendations also emerged for local hospitality practitioners through this research. Firstly, the study identified the unprecedented importance of inculcating sustainability training and awareness programs across all tiers of staff to ensure that sustainability is taken as a responsibility at an organizational level. The study also identified the importance of hospitality practitioners providing a balanced commitment towards all pillars under TBL when incorporating sustainability practices into the hotel's mainstream operations. Finally, this paper also provided hospitality practitioners with a fundamental framework within which they could categorize and operationalize their sustainability practices methodically and coherently.

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Regulatory Performance of Tourist Hunting and Legal Game Meat Trade in Tanzania

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Abstract: Recently, the government of Tanzania has legalized the sale of game meat under special rules namely the Wildlife Conservation (Game Meat Selling) Regulations of 2020 as an effort to curb illegal hunting. The regulations mention tourist hunting as one of the sources of commercial game meat. Other sources include resident hunting; wildlife farms/ranches/zoos; and culling, cropping, and control of problem animals. In this paper we examine the performance of tourist hunting, legal game meat in the country, and its regulatory framework from the perspectives of key stakeholders, including both public and private or non-state stakeholders. We use a variant of Likert's methods of summated ratings and the cumulative ordinal regression model to analyse and compare the opinions of stakeholders. We found that there are still challenges, especially related to sources of wild animals. Operators of game meat facilities find it difficult to source game meat from tourist hunting companies and the latter are not willing to offer the meat to licensed operators of game meat shops. Our results support the hypothesis that authorization of the game meat trade can serve as one of the boldest conservation tools to mitigate illegal poaching if well-planned and regulated. The results of the cumulative ordinal regression model predict an improvement of 42% in the performance of regulatory framework per unit improvement in the procedures for application and registration of game meat selling facilities ($p = 0.010$). The paper recommends leveraging stakeholders' active engagement and strengthening cooperation between game meat value chain actors and law-enforcement authorities. An innovative participatory model for enforcing game meat sanitary and safety regulations is also recommended to avoid potential health risks to consumers. It underscores the importance of institutional capacity building, awareness creation, and adequate funding in the fight against illegal hunting and game meat trade. In order for the country to be able to achieve sustainable game meat trade in the country, the challenge of limited wild animal sources has to be addressed, possibly by supporting the establishment of privately owned wild animal farms, ranches, and zoos, this also has its own challenges that need to be addressed too.

Keywords: Tourist hunting, Game meat trade, Regulatory framework, Poaching, Hunting legislations

1. Introduction

Many countries that are endowed with wildlife are struggling to combat the problem of poaching. Still, the demand for wildlife products and the use of sophisticated poaching methods continue to threaten the security, economy, and biodiversity in these countries (USAID, 2023). In fact, poaching and selling of illegal wildlife products not only targets local demands but transcends regional boundaries to meet demands in other countries and continents (Chaber et al., 2010). This makes the problem of poaching even more complex, especially in countries where the tourism industry depends heavily on wildlife and protected areas. In East Africa, for example, the available information indicates that before the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourist industry brought over $6 billion to the region each year (USAID, 2023). This has attracted many governments to review their wildlife policies and regulatory framework to address the problem of wildlife poaching. This has generally taken two main pathways. The first requires the adoption of more stringent regulations, including the imposition of bans and moratoria in wildlife trade. The second advocates the use of market-based instruments, such as the authorization of trade in game meat, to mitigate poaching and achieve efficiency and equity in the utilisation and management of wildlife resources.

The role of market-based instruments in achieving efficiency and equity in managing natural resources is widely discussed in the literature (see Kaine et al., 2017 for details). Most important in the context of game meat trade is perhaps the argument that command and control approaches, such as; the banning of game meat trade in this case, can also be problematic and can produce adverse conservation outcomes (Biggs et al., 2013). It can discourage sustainable harvesting, and it can also exacerbate poaching or lead to food insecurities and economic shocks (Booth et al., 2021). As such, some countries, notably Tanzania and many scholars have subscribed to the authorisation of game meat trade as a means to mitigate poaching and help redistribute the benefits accruing from wildlife management (Fukushima et al., 2021; Koh et al., 2021; Chaves et al., 2018). Some scholars have even gone further and argued that when hunting is banned; poaching drastically increases (Naidoo et al., 2016).

Despite significant research on poaching and sale of illegal wildlife products undertaken so far, empirical evidence to support the use of market-based instruments to control poaching is lacking, at least in the context

of the game meat trade. This research gap limits our understanding of how tourist hunting, combined together with the authorisation of game meat trade can optimise wildlife conservation efforts. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill this gap by examining the performance of the recently instituted game meat regulatory framework in Tanzania using the opinions gathered from different stakeholders, including both public and private or non-state stakeholders. The paper is motivated by the fact that of recent, the regulatory framework that governs wildlife conservation in the country has substantially changed from being more restrictive and exclusive in the early 1960s through the mid-1970s to being less restraining and increasingly welcoming private participation and community-based initiatives in the late 1970s to early 2020s. Substantial reforms have occurred in early 2020 when the establishment of game meat selling facilities and the sale of game meat was officially authorised by the government under special rules stipulated in the Wildlife Conservation (Game Meat Selling) Regulations 2020 (URT, 2020). This came as part of an effort to combat poaching.

This research was deemed important because the prevalence of poaching and illicit game meat trade is a problem of growing concern among conservation agencies in many countries. Despite the effort to curb it through market-based regulatory approaches, there are indications that many challenges still remain. Thus, the problem this paper addresses is the lack of a thorough understanding of the nature of the problem and the very factors that influence the performance of the new market-based wildlife regulatory frameworks. We understand the veracity that having legislation in place is one thing but guaranteeing its performance can be something else. Thus, the overall objective of the study was to investigate the question of whether the new game meat legislation in Tanzania has worked as expected. The specific objectives were to evaluate whether a) the new legislation has reduced poaching or not, b) the hunting of wild animals for game meat in areas designated for hunting continued as expected or not, c) the operationalization of game meat butcheries continued well or not, and d) the actors in the game meat value chain complied with the conditions and requirement specified in the new regulatory framework or not. State differently, the author wanted to investigate what has worked and what has not worked during the initial implementation of the new legal framework for the game meat trade in the country. The lessons generated from this study are useful in informing future policy and regulatory reforms not only in Tanzania but also in other countries with similar contexts and challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Legal Game Meat Trade or Bans?

Overall, the literature on wildlife utilization and management is quite polarized, especially regarding the debate on whether imposing stringent controls and regulations against illegal hunting and bushmeat trade would be a better approach to control poaching or not. On the one hand, there are viewpoints that wildlife management authorities should impose strict bans and moratoria for several reasons. First, poaching leads to the overexploitation of some wild animal species and drastically affects ecosystem health, diversity, and stability. Secondly, poaching and bushmeat trade can quickly spread diseases and pathogens and cause serious health issues (He and Li, 2021; Subramanian, 2012). Examples of health-related issues include incidences of swine fever, as well as HIV transmitted to humans through hunting and slaughtering of bushmeat. According to Worobey (2021), COVID-19, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, is believed to have originated from (potentially illegal) wildlife trade. Thirdly, poaching also directly affects tourism, making the bushmeat trade a financial threat to many protected areas, especially national parks (OCTA, 2011). Governments may lose revenues due to illegal wildlife trade, hence burdening the socio-economic development of a country because the loss from taxes cannot be invested in public services (ibid).

On the other hand, there are viewpoints that regulations and bans are not only insufficient, but they are also problematic (Koh et al., 2021; Veríssimo and Wan, 2019). They are expensive to impose and enforce, and thus, ensuring the quality of these instruments is challenging. Many scholars have already acknowledged that achieving regulatory quality is becoming difficult and one of the major obstacles to sustainable management and utilization of wildlife resources (Coad et al., 2021; Ingram et al., 2021; Fukushima et al., 2021). This latter viewpoint believes that poaching can be controlled through market mechanisms such as the commodification of game meat trade in Namibia (MITSMED, 2019) and Tanzania (URT, 2020).

2.2 Legal Game Meat Trade in Tanzania

As already mentioned, the year 2020 has realized substantial wildlife management reforms in Tanzania notably the establishment of game meat selling facilities and the sale of game meat. This was officially allowed by the

government under special rules stipulated in the Wildlife Conservation (Game Meat Selling) Regulations 2020 as part of the effort to curb poaching (URT, 2020). By this new legislation, the Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism in Tanzania is given the mandate to designate certain areas in the country or vehicles to be used as game meat selling facilities (URT, 2020). In addition, the Tanzania Wildlife Management Authority (TAWA) is mandated to provide support to help people begin their private wild animal farms, zoos, and ranches. TAWA for example is required to supply these people with heifers and young animals so that they can later harvest wild animals for commercial purposes (URT, 2020).

3. Research Approach and Methodology

3.1 Sampling Procedure and Data Collection

This paper is based on a game meat survey that was conducted in early to mid-2022 to evaluate the opinions of key stakeholders regarding the new regulatory framework for the game meat trade in the country and its performance. Depending on the characteristics of the actor populations, both the "probability" and "non-probability" sampling methods were used to select the respondents. Specifically, purposive sampling" and snowball sampling were used as "non-probability" sampling methods. Few participants were initially selected, keeping in mind the purpose of our study (Glen, 2015). Purposive sampling was preferred because it is somewhat less costly, more readily accessible, and more convenient, and selects only those relevant to the research design (Cambell et al., 2020). The study districts were selected using the purposive sampling procedure based on a criterion of whether wild animal hunting and selling of game meat were practiced in the districts. This was followed by a "stratified random sampling" to classify or separate stakeholders into strata as summarized in Figure 1. The representatives of animal hunters, owners of game meat butcheries, wild animal farms, zoos, and ranches, as well as, the sellers of game meat were randomly selected from the registers of key actors and members of the Tanzania Wildlife Farmers and Game Meat Suppliers Association (TAWIFAGAMSA) which were obtained from the leaders of the Association and the District Game Offices; and from the registers of customers kept by operators of game meat selling facilities or game meat shops, respectively. Our sample also included the representatives of communities residing close to hunting areas or blocks. These representatives were selected from the village registers using the systematic random sampling method. In total, 145 stakeholders from 40 districts within 17 regions in Tanzania were selected and interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire.

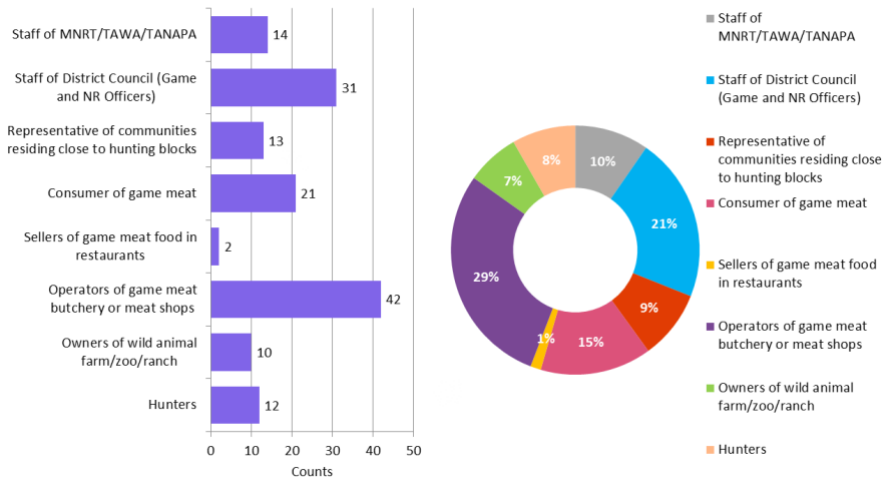

Figure 1: Sample size and proportions of interviewees by stakeholder categories

3.2 Data Analysis

The analysis of stakeholders' perceptions used a standard scaling technique notably the variant of summative construction of the Likert scale (Likert, 1932) dubbed by Krosnick et al. (2005) as the "Likert's method of summated ratings." The technique uses a standard scaling procedure or method that attributes numerical values to responses (Clason and Dormody, 1994). Individual statements about game meat trade in Tanzania were extracted from the recent Wildlife Conservation (Game Meat Selling) Regulations 2020 (URT, 2020). These were grouped into the following three sets of statements or indicators:

a. The performance of regulatory framework governing game meat trade in the country (PERFORM);

b. The appropriateness of procedures for application and registration of game meat selling facilities (PARGMF); and

c. The appropriateness of the management and operation of game meat selling facilities as well as the fairness of offenses and penalties for the person to whom the certificate is issued when convicted of an offense under the Act or contravenes any of the terms or conditions under which the certificate was issued (MOGMSOP) - as required by Regulation 13(1) of the Wildlife Conservation (Game Meat Selling) Regulations (URT, 2020).

Specifically, the interviewees were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the individual statements in the three sets provided and indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed (Table 1). A five-point Likert scale was used based on the following response alternatives: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). In addition, a "cumulative ordinal model", sometimes dubbed the "graded response model" (Samejima, 1997), was used to assess the determinant of the performance of the regulatory framework governing game meat trade in the country using the three sets of individual statements or indicators (PERFORM, PARGMF, and MOGMSOP).

Table 1: The variables and indicators used in the perception survey

Variables	Code	Statement
PERFORM	QN-B1-1	Authorisation of the sale of game meat has reduced poaching and encroachment in wildlife-protected areas.
	QN-B1-2	Allowing individuals to own wildlife farms will not decrease the demand for beef, goat, and sheep meat.
	QN-B1-3	The operationalization of game meat butcheries has continued well.
	QN-B1-4	The hunting of wild animals for game meat has continued as expected.
	QN-B1-5	The number of customers of raw and grilled game meat has increased.
	QN-B1-6	Registered places for slaughtering wild animals and selling game meat were regularly inspected.
	QN-B1-7	Operators who did not have certificates of ivory possession surrendered it.
	QN-B1-8	Operators slaughtered animals in approved slaughterhouses/slabs.
PARGMF	QN-B2-1	Procedures for application and registration of game meat selling facilities were appropriate.
	QN-B2-2	Qualifications required for registration of facilities were appropriate.
	QN-B2-3	Duration for making decisions on the applications was appropriate.
	QN-B2-4	The conditions for operating game meat facilities are appropriate.
MOGMSOP	QN-B2-5	Condition to apply for trophy dealer's license is appropriate.
	QN-B2-6	Legislation for revoking, cancelling, or suspending certificate of legislation is appropriate.
	QN-B2-7	Implementation of the M&E system of game meat selling facilities was appropriate.
	QN-B2-8	Penalty for contraveners of provisions of these Regulations was appropriate

4. Study Findings

The study findings suggested that legal hunting and sale of game meat could be one of the strongest conservation approaches to mitigate poaching and bushmeat trade in the country. Many of the respondents (Appendices 1 to 3) felt that the authorization of the game meat trade has helped reduce poaching and encroachment in protected areas and that, the customers of raw and grilled game meat were increasing day by day. However, it should be noted that the authorization of the game meat trade has also not completely solved the problem of poaching in Tanzania. The problem still persists. As Twining-Ward and Chapman, (2020) argue "controlling poaching and game meat trade is immensely challenging…" It is argued further that the extent to which a legally controlled game meat trade can contribute to reducing poaching will depend on the complexity of the limiting factors, including the capacity to supply sustainably harvested wild animals and domesticated wild animals (UNEP, 2017). It will also depend on the level of law enforcement efforts and the ability to create awareness among value chain actors (Subramanian, 2012).

In Tanzania, the Government Notes (GN) 84 of the Wildlife Conservation Act (CAP. 283), published on 7th February 2020, recognizes four sources of game meat: resident hunting, tourist hunting, wildlife farms/ranches/zoos, as well as, culling/cropping, and control of problem animals (Regulation 4, 2020). However, one of the key issues that have emerged from the survey is the inadequate supply of wild animals for butchering. Many stakeholders perceived that the resident hunting blocks allocated for commercial game meat supply were having fewer animals than the ones allocated to tourist hunting. It should be noted here that the government diversified the modalities of allocating hunting blocks since October 2017 by adopting an electronic (e)-auction system (TAWA, 2018). This was partly due to the general perspective about e-auctions that they are not only enhancing good governance but also optimizing the socio-economic potential of the country's hunting industry, and responding to market forces in a more transparent manner (TAWA, 2018). As such, e-auctions are becoming very popular across the world and are considered more transparent than the conventional approaches because of the advantages they offer, especially that of allowing global participation or attracting a large audience from around the globe (Medius, 2019).

However, e-auctions have their own drawbacks too (Barnier and Velasquez, 2022). Under imperfect market conditions, competitive advantage may tend to shift to those who have a relative advantage, in terms of their capacity to bid (Barnier and Velasquez, 2022). Thus, monopolistic or oligopolistic behaviour is likely to occur, and barriers to entry can be high as weaker players are driven out of the bid (Barnier and Velasquez, 2022). The informal discussions with resident hunters in the study districts indicated that there were already concerns amongst the stakeholders regarding equity issues due to the inability of local outfitters and hunting companies to compete with foreign bidders. The award of e-auction is based solely on the ranking of bids, such that the hunting block is allocated to the highest bidder (TAWA, 2018). The highest bidder is then billed and required to pay 25% of his/her bid price within twelve working hours following the conclusion of the auction (TAWA, 2018). The remaining money (75%) had to be paid within fourteen days from the date of auction closure and failure would lead to the cancellation of the offer and a penalty of 25% of the fee paid (TAWA, 2018).

More than half of both the government officials (51%) and non-state stakeholders (54.3%) were undecided about whether the operators of game meat butcheries who did not have certificates of possession of ivory were surrendering the ivory products to the government as required by the regulations or not. Quite a lot of respondents (35.3% and 34.0% of the government officials and non-state stakeholders respectively) were also uncertain whether operators of game meat butcheries were slaughtering wild animals in approved slaughterhouses or slabs. This sends an alarm that this piece of the new legislation requires much attention on the side of law enforcers to address these issues. However, one of the key lessons that are learned from the Tanzanian case and from many other previous studies, such as the studies by Ariffi (2015), and Challender and MacMillan (2014) is that law enforcement by itself cannot address the problem of poaching. Policymakers have to think out of the box and effectively engage the different stakeholders to win their support (Challender and MacMillan, 2014). It is argued elsewhere in the literature that, the formalization of the game meat trade, without ensuring effective control mechanisms and law enforcement, will simply legitimize the present poaching activities, and unsustainable game meat trade (Andimile, et al., 2021). In essence, authorizing the game meat trade is generally multifarious and must be understood in light of its complexity (ibid).

It was also interesting to observe a polarised standpoint between government officials and non-state stakeholders about the role of the procedures for the application and registration of game meat selling facilities (PARGMF) on the performance of the new regulatory framework (PERFORM). From the viewpoint of the government officials, PARGMF was a non-significant driver of performance (PERFORM) (p = 0.648) while the

non-state stakeholders perceived it to be significantly influencing PERFORM (p = 0.005). This is worth noting because cumbersome business pre-approval procedures, which create rent-seeking opportunities, are not only unique to the game meat industry. It is a common phenomenon in many other industries of the economy of the country, including the health, mining, construction, transportation, and logistics sectors (URT, 2017). The most important lesson from these contradicting perspectives is perhaps that, the development of an effective regulatory framework would require active engagement of a broad range of stakeholders and ideas. Without listening to different stakes, the process can be too disappointing. Governments should be able to listen and answer questions from those who are regulated, especially regarding the scope and effectiveness of their regulatory policy, and how they measure its success (OECD, 2010).

Another important area of focus would be compliance with regulations that aim to avoid potential health risks to consumers. Quite a lot of respondents were uncertain whether licensed and registered places or amenities for slaughtering wild animals and selling game meat were regularly inspected by the responsible Ministry Committee of experts or not (43.1% versus 35.1% for government officials and non-state stakeholders respectively). The fact that both the government officials and non-state stakeholders were also almost equally undecided (35.3% and 34.0% respectively) about whether operators of game meat butcheries were slaughtering wild animals in approved slaughterhouses or slabs, needs attention too. One would generally argue that there is limited knowledge and awareness about the potential health risks of selling and consuming uninspected game meat. A recent study by Foya et al. (2023) found that more than half (57%) of the people residing adjacent to Western Nyerere National Park in Tanzania were not aware of the potential health risks of consuming illegal bushmeat. In Sierra Leone, the study by Subramanian (2012), who investigated hunting practices and awareness of zoonotic disease risk associated with bushmeat trade, found that only 24% had knowledge of disease transmission from animals to humans.

5. Conclusion

This paper is based on a stakeholder's perception survey conducted in Tanzania to investigate their opinions about the performance of the country's recently instituted regulatory framework for the game meat trade. Albeit its focus on one country, the study provides some important insights that other countries with similar challenges could learn from. In a nutshell, the following four key conclusions are made. Firstly, the problem of poaching and encroachment in protected areas seems to decline with the implementation of the new game meat regulations. Secondly, the hunting of wild animals for game meat in areas designated for hunting is not continuing as expected due to inadequate supply of wild animals for butchering. The resident hunting blocks have comparably fewer animals than the tourist hunting blocks. At the same time, local outfitters and hunting companies lack the capacity to compete with foreign bidders in the e-auction system. Thirdly, there are still issues of weak law enforcement on the side of regulators that need to be addressed. For example, regulators should ensure that all the operators of game meat butcheries slaughter their wild animals in approved slaughterhouses and slabs. They should also ensure that all operators of game meat butcheries who do not have certificates of possession of ivory surrender the ivory products to the government as required by the law. Lastly, but not least, the licensed and registered places or amenities for slaughtering wild animals and selling of game meat should regularly be inspected by the responsible experts.

All these not withholding, the evidence from the study supports the assertion that the authorisation of game meat trade can be one of the boldest conservation tools to mitigate poaching if well-planned and governed. It can have severe impacts on potential earnings from tourist hunting, the creation of jobs, and the production of game meat. However, the paper acknowledges the complexity and heterogeneity of game meat value chains and trade. These should be well-thought-out to ensure that a governance system that is geographically and politically relevant to the national specificities and agenda of the country in question is recommended. Prior to the actual implementation of new regulatory frameworks, it is important to adopt a multidisciplinary and participatory approach to collate and scrutinise the opinions of different stakeholders together as part of a long-term engagement for sustainable governance of the game meat industry. Accordingly, the following recommendations are drawn:

a. Leveraging of active engagement of key stakeholders in the governance of the game meat trade. In the Tanzania context, this requires developing a participatory model for enforcing game meat sanitary and safety requirements to avoid potential health risks to consumers;

b. Exploring the need for, the added value of, and the feasibility of new legislative and policy initiatives to ensure that government actions against poaching remain sufficiently strong and proportionate. This

should go hand in hand with the improvement of policies, regulations, an enabling environment for game meat trade, and awareness campaigns;

c. Building institutional capacities of both public and private stakeholders with a view to making proportionate game meat trade and discouraging poaching; and

d. Instituting an equitable e-auction model to ensure that both local (resident) hunters, as well as tourist and professional hunters, have equal access to vacant hunting blocks available for auction.

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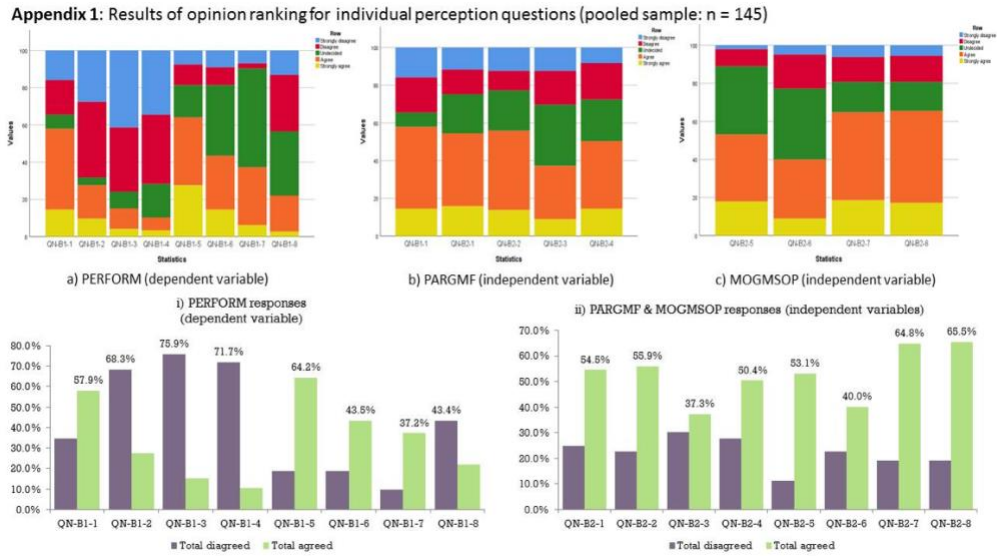
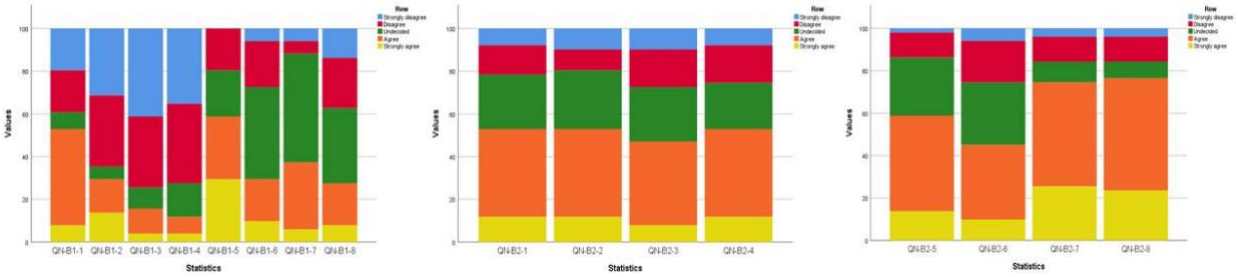
Appendix 1: Results of opinion ranking for individual perception questions (pooled sample: n = 145)

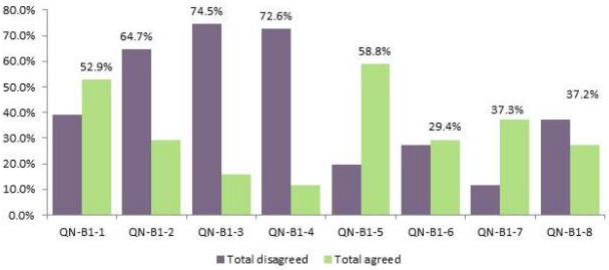


Appendix 2: Results of opinion ranking for individual perception questions (government officials n = 51)

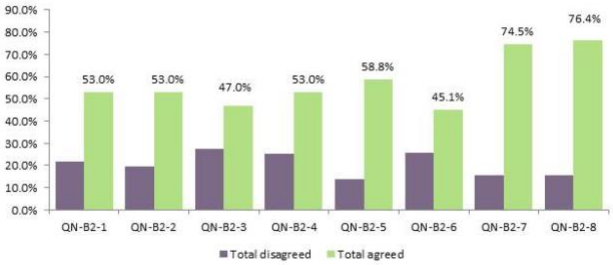


a) PERFORM (dependent variable) b) PARGMF (independent variable) c) MOGMSOP (independent variable)

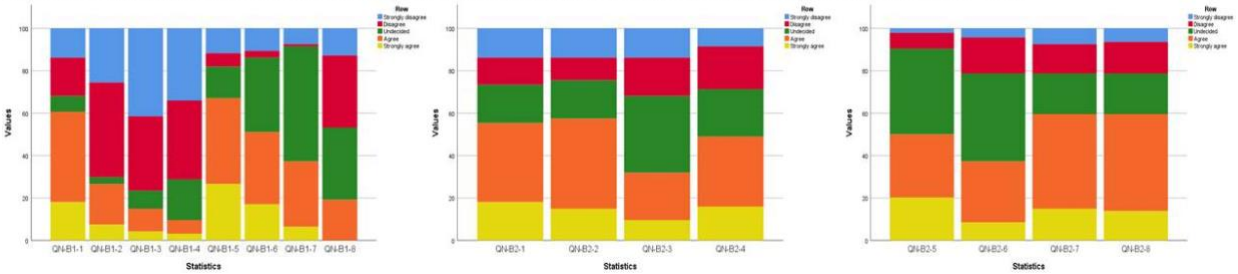
i) PERFORM responses (dependent variable)



ii) PARGMF & MOGMSOP responses (independent variables)

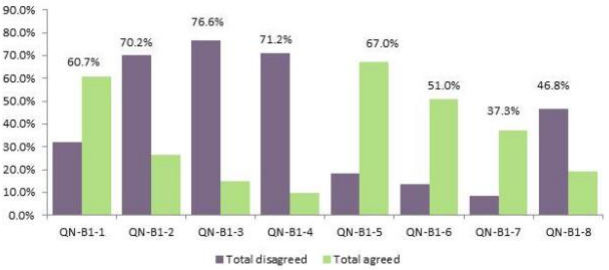


Appendix 3: Results of opinion ranking for individual perception questions (non-state stakeholders: n = 94)

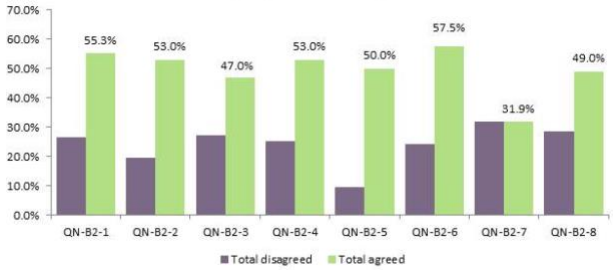


a) PERFORM (dependent variable) b) PARGMF (independent variable) c) MOGMSOP (independent variable)

i) PERFORM responses (dependent variable)



ii) PARGMF & MOGMSOP responses (independent variables)



Nation-branding Opportunities Through Sport Mega-events: Tourism Impact from FIFA World Cup in South Africa 2010 and Qatar 2022

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Abstract: Sport mega-events can be powerful agents in the imaging, re-imaging and branding of places, especially for emerging mega-event host nations. South Africa was the first African country to host the FIFA World Cup in 2010 and is a good case of how nation-branding opportunities were leveraged to showcase its global engagement, re-emergence post-apartheid, and its competence as a tourism and mega-event host. Similarly, Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup is a region-first for the Middle East. Hosting the World Cup is aligned to Qatar's strategic leveraging of sport to build a new image, acquire global recognition as a world-class venue for major events, sport sponsorships, and state-of-the-art stadiums. Yet Qatar, like South Africa, was confronted with significant detractors and negative media coverage in the lead-up to its hosting. This paper compares nation-brand perceptions collected from international visitors to the respective mega-events. The studies aimed to identify any changes to these brand perceptions because of their visit to these nations. It utilises the same instrument and method; with the survey instrument for 2010 adapted for Qatar to increase its relevance. A total of 561 (South Africa) and 421 (Qatar) international visitors were interviewed at event and tourist locations, using a spatially based, purposive sampling approach. The findings reveal how visitor perceptions changed in both instances. It reveals nuances in profiling mega-event sport tourists and contrasts expected nation-branding legacies for host nations, especially in emerging nation contexts.

Keywords: Nation-Branding; FIFA World Cup; Qatar; South Africa

1. Introduction

Large-scale and sport mega-events (SMEs), such as Olympic Games and FIFA World Cups, have been more frequently hosted in emerging nations (Knott & Tinaz, 2021), largely been driven by the assumption that their legacy provides solutions to economic, social, cultural, or political challenges. SMEs can be powerful agents in the imaging, re-imaging, and branding of countries, which can be leveraged for both diplomacy and trade and tourism benefits. There has been a growing awareness of the potentially significant brand-related impacts that hosting sport mega-events can have for a country. Anholt (2007) first referred to 'nation branding' and confirmed sport mega-events as providing an opportunity to create or promote a host nation's image and re-brand a nation. Sport mega-events have become even an object of public policy or 'soft power' strategy in many emerging nations, perhaps viewed as 'a fast-track to world recognition and reputation enhancement' (Heslop et al, 2013, pp. 13).

South Africa was the first among the African countries to host the FIFA World Cup in 2010. Although South Africa had its share of publicised problems, such as rising crime rates, high unemployment, a lack of access to basic services such as housing and education, and a high HIV infection rate (Donaldson & Ferreira, 2009; Bob, Cornelissen, & Swart, 2010), the hosting of the World Cup symbolised hope for the country and a chance to prove that this developing nation could host an event of this magnitude as efficiently as the developed economies who had hosted the previous editions of the event, such as Germany in 2006 and Korea and Japan in 2002. Heightened media attention on the nation in the lead up to the mega-event had focused on many negative aspects such as inflation, crime, xenophobic riots (Tomlinson, Bass, & Pillay, 2009), casting doubt over the country's ability to host the event successfully and safely.

Yet, several papers have indicated that the development of a positive and distinct South African nation brand was accelerated through the effective hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup (e.g., Allen, Knott & Swart, 2013; Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2017). The South African case provides one of the best examples of how nation branding opportunities were strategically created and leveraged to showcase its global engagement and re-emergence

from the isolation of the apartheid era as well as its competence and capability as a tourism and mega-event host (Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2017).

Qatar, much like other Gulf states, has made significant investments in sport as a means of economic diversification, and to accomplish its geopolitical goals through 'soft power' recognition (Nye, 2021) and nation branding opportunities that come with hosting major sport events (Al Thani, 2021; Amara, 2005; Dorsey, 2014; Reiche, 2015). By leveraging sport mega-events, host countries like Qatar aim to attract worldwide attention and present a positive image of themselves. This is consistent with the nation's strategic leveraging of sport to build a new image for the country. Bidding for and hosting various sport mega-events, including the FIFA World Cup, has helped Qatar to acquire recognition globally as a world class sporting venue with major events, sport sponsorships and state of the art stadiums (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015; Reiche, 2015). Creating a brand identity using sport diplomacy is one of Qatar's aims to position itself globally (ISSEC Sports Chair, 2014; Al-Tamimi, Amin & Zarrinabadi, 2023). Some have perceived this also as an attempt to change Qatar's image as a terror-sponsoring state (Samuel-Azran et al, 2016).

The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, the first mega-event in the Arab world, was aligned to achieving Qatar's National Vision 2030 objectives of addressing economic, social, environmental, and human development and improving its regional positioning (Scharfenort, 2012). The hosting of this mega-event was viewed as an opportunity to diversify Qatar's long-term revenue sources and achieve its vision of becoming a regional and international sports hub (Foley, McGillivray & McPherson, 2012; Reiche, 2015; Brannagan & Reiche, 2022). The event was also seen as an opportunity to address negative stereotypes associated with Muslim countries and showcase Arab hospitality (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015; Swart & Hussain, 2023; Ishac & Swart, 2022).

Like South Africa 2010, Qatar 2022 faced immense challenges, especially in relation to negative media coverage by the western media from the very beginning. In 2010, Qatar won the bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup amidst significant controversy over corruption scandals. In the years that followed, the country faced continuous scrutiny for its human rights records, particularly regarding migrant workers (Ganji, 2016). Although sport mega-events have been utilised for soft power gains, they can carry significant reputational risks for host countries, which can result in soft disempowerment (Branngan & Giulianotti, 2015). This is particularly acute for countries like Qatar that receive pervasive negative media coverage, especially in Western media outlets (Elbasri & Torman, 2022). Like many developing nations that face potentially incorrect or stereotypical associations, Qatar's government was accused of allowing the abuse of migrant workers (Almaskati, 2014). In response, FIFA pressured the government to comply with international labor laws to ensure that the stadiums and facilities for the 2022 World Cup would not be built on the backs of abused and exploited workers.

Given that both these editions of the World Cup were hosted in emerging countries, this paper therefore critically reviews the findings from the same study methodology utilised by the authors in these two contexts.

2. Literature Review

The application of branding techniques to nations is growing in frequency while Dinnie (2003) notes that there are increasingly more reasons why nations must manage and control their branding, such as the need to attract tourists, factories, companies, and talented people, and to find markets for their exports. In the struggle for competitive advantage, national reputation is becoming more and more significant as countries compete for the attention, respect and trust of investors, tourists, consumers, donors, immigrants, media, and governments (Anholt, 2007).

A nation's brand image can be defined as the sum of all beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a nation (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kotler et al, 2003; Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal, 2007; Govers & Go, 2009). Brand image is therefore a 'subjective interpretation of reality' made by the tourist (Govers & Go, 2009, pp. 18). Kotler and Gertner (2002) explain that most country images are in fact stereotypes, extreme simplifications of the reality that are not necessarily accurate. They might be dated, based on exceptions rather than on patterns, on impressions rather than on facts, but are nonetheless pervasive.

Sport can be a powerful agent in the imaging, re-imaging and branding of countries, especially through the hosting of sport mega-events (Getz, 2003; Higham & Hinch, 2009). Several studies have concluded that there were strong influences on perceptions of the nation under study because of its hosting a sport mega-event (e.g., Gibson, Qi & Zhang, 2008; Kim & Morrison, 2003). Rein and Shields (2006) explain how sports stimulate an emotional heat between the participants and the audiences that can symbolise the energy, vigour, and strength of an emerging nation in ways that other branding efforts simply cannot do. Sport events offer the potential to

build strong associations between specific people (participants and spectators) and particular places (Higham & Hinch, 2009). Higham and Hinch (2009, pp. 242) note the growing prominence of sport in terms of place identity and the potential for sports to offer 'authentic cultural experiences of place'. Mendes, Oom Do Valle, and Guerreiro (2011, pp. 371) also refer to the experiential nature of events, explaining that an event provides a chance for visitors to 'carry out a gratifying experience with access to the local cultural scene'.

The high media profile of mega-events can be harnessed to increase the awareness, prominence and standing of places as well as serve as an agent of change in terms of imagery and place meaning (Florek & Insch, 2011; Chalip & Costa, 2005; Higham & Hinch, 2009). Events constitute an important stimulus factor in the image formation process of a destination (Mendes et al, 2011). Florek and Insch (2011) assert that the potential to build and enhance the image of a destination through a mega-event is unlimited. For example, the Olympic Games have long been used to serve the imaging or re-imaging of places (Higham & Hinch, 2009).

However, a sport mega-event is no guarantee of a positive brand outcome for the host nation. Some state's image may suffer. This was the case with recent events hosted by non-Western countries with a problematic image in Western media, namely China and Russia. Samuel-Azran et al, (2016, pp. 3) proposes that these countries damaged their international image further by 'inadvertently directing the world's attention to their (mis)deeds' during the preparation and hosting of the events. For example, China's hosting of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games suffered from a media focus on human rights violations and pollution, while Russia's hosting of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games and the 2018 FIFA World Cup encountered fierce media opposition to its stance on gay rights.

Therefore, despite several academic studies indicating positive branding outcomes for host nations of mega-events, including the case of South Africa in 2010 (e.g. Swart & Martin-Gonzalez, 2021), the case of Qatar and the 2022 FIFA World Cup presented an opportunity for further exploration of this topic, especially due its non-Western setting and the largely negative Western media sentiment surrounding the preparations for the event.

3. Methodology

This paper draws on comparisons of two primary investigations designed to assess the nation-branding perceptions impact from hosting FIFA World Cups in two emerging nations, namely South Africa and Qatar. The studies both aimed to identify perceptions of international visitors to the mega-events, regarding the respective nations, and determining any changes to these brand perceptions because of their visit during the event. The studies compared in this paper are similar in their design in terms of a focus on international visitors to the event at a point in time (during the mega-event).

The two studies utilised the same questionnaire, which was adapted from 2010 with minor variations to increase its relevance for visitors to Qatar in 2022. The original questionnaire design was based on Anholt's (2007) nation brand hexagon, Kersting's (2007) conceptualisation of national identity, and Gibson et al.'s (2008) Beijing Olympic Games perception analysis. The conceptual model on which the study is premised is based on Knott, Fyall and Jones (2017), which sets out the characteristics of sport mega-events that create opportunities for nation-branding.

The questionnaire design was structured, using closed-ended questions and Likert-type scales, although open-ended questions were also used to test prior and current perceptions of the brand. Face-to-face, intercept questionnaire interviews were used to gather perceptions of the international sport tourists in South Africa and Qatar. Respondents were interviewed at the official fan parks, stadium precincts and tourist locations in host cities during the event periods.

A total of 561 (South Africa) and 421 (Qatar) international visitors, using a spatially based, purposive sampling approach, were interviewed. The computer software Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS for windows) was used to capture and analyse the data.

4. Results

The number of tourists surveyed at both events was similar (n = 561 and 421 respectively for South Africa and Qatar). The gender profile for both populations was identical (77% male), while the age profile was slightly older for the Qatar study, with a mean age of 37 years, compared to 32 years in South Africa. However, the country-of-origin profile of these respondents differed dramatically.

For South Africa, most visitors came from the country's traditional tourist source markets in Western Europe (United Kingdom 27%; Netherlands 11%; and Germany 10%) and North America (USA 15%). Fewer visitors came from the host's non-traditional tourist markets such as Central and South America (8%), Asia/ Australasia (8%) and other African nations (7%). For Qatar, nearly 36% of respondents came from North Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Egypt). Neighbouring Saudi Arabia accounted for 5,9%, with other nearby countries such as Iran and India (3,3% each). South Americans (Argentina and Brazil) accounted for 9,5%, followed by the USA (3,6%), and UK (3,3%).

For both studies, most respondents (75% for South Africa and 77% for Qatar) were first-time visitors. While the World Cup was the primary reason for travel in both cases, it was more so for the Qatar sample (51% and 74% respectively). Far fewer of the Qatar sample (14%) had attended a previous World Cup than for South Africa (37%).

First-time visitors were asked for their unprompted, open-ended perceptions of the host country before they visited. In both cases, the prior perceptions were more stereotyped (see Table 1). For South Africa, this revealed traditional tourist strengths such as: the natural beauty; abundance of wildlife; and diversity of cultures and people. However, the top prior perception of the nation was negative ("crime/ safety and security"). For Qatar, there was also a mix of positive or neutral perceptions (e.g., wealthy; desert; hot climate; conservative, Islamic) and negative perceptions (e.g., expensive; human rights issues).

Table 1: Brand perceptions (unprompted)

South Africa 2010 (n=561)	Qatar 2022 (n=421)
Perceptions of host changed due to the event 67%	44%
Top unprompted perceptions prior to visiting host nation: • Natural beauty; • Crime/ security concerns; • Segregated society	• Wealthy; • Expensive; • Desert; • Hot climate; • Conservative; • Islamic; • Human rights issues
New associations related to: • Safe to travel; • Friendly, welcoming people; • Competent, capable event host; • Modern, developed cities; • Travel/ tourism infrastructure; • Diversity of culture and people.	• Beautiful; • Hospitable; • Welcoming; • Amazing; • Modern infrastructure; • Developed

New, prompted, perceptions of the brand among all visitors (see Table 2) were gauged using a Likert-type scale to indicate respondents' level of agreement with a set of different question endings. For South Africa, the highest levels of agreement were for: "beautiful scenery and natural attractions" (98%); "many friendly, welcoming people" (95%); and "a world-class tourism destination" (94%). For Qatar, the top three were: "a safe place to visit" (94%); and "a competent host of the football World Cup" (91%) and "many friendly, welcoming people" (90%).

Table 2: Nation brand perceptions (prompted: Agree/ Strongly Agree)

"Do you believe that South Africa has/is… ?" (in %, n=561)		**"Do you believe that Qatar has/is… ?"** (in %, n=421)	
beautiful scenery and natural attractions	98	beautiful scenery and natural attractions	68
many friendly, welcoming people	95	many friendly, welcoming people	90
a good climate for tourism and sport	92	a good climate for tourism and sport	67
many diverse cultures	92	many diverse cultures	85
a competent host of the football World Cup	92	a competent host of the football World Cup	91
a world-class tourism destination	94	a world-class tourism destination	85

"Do you believe that South Africa has/is… ?" (in %, n=561)		**"Do you believe that Qatar has/is… ?"** (in %, n=421)	
an excellent destination to host future sport mega-events	85	an excellent destination to host future sport mega-events	89
world-class sport facilities	85	world-class sport facilities	86
several successful sports teams and participants	69	several successful sports teams and participants	69
a desirable country to live in	62	a desirable country to live in	84
a safe place to visit	66	a safe place to visit	94
a segregated (divided) social society	53	a segregated (divided) social society	72
many business or investment opportunities	44	many business or investment opportunities	80
a stable democratic government	26	an Islamic country ruled by an absolute monarchy	72
well-respected political leaders	38	well-respected political leaders	84
		a technologically innovative country	89
		a respectful and tolerant society	87

The researchers added two additional dimensions for the Qatar study, as these were found to be important to the nation brand. These factors also received high levels of agreement, namely: a technologically innovative country (89%); and "a respectful and tolerant society" (87%). A further item relating to political governance was tweaked to reflect the inherently different 2022 host nation. While there was very little agreement for South Africa being perceived as "a stable democratic government" (26%), Qatar was perceived as "an Islamic country ruled by an absolute monarchy" (72%).

There were many perceived similarities between both nations, mostly relating to their competence as event hosts, sporting facilities and achievements, and level of tourism development. Larger differences appeared for the following items, with South Africa more closely perceived as having: "beautiful scenery and natural attractions"; "a good climate for tourism and sport". Contrastingly, compared to the South Africa perceptions, Qatar was more strongly perceived as: "a safe place to visit"; "a desirable country to live in"; having "well-respected political leaders"; and offering "many business or investment opportunities", although also featuring a "segregated (divided) social society".

5. Discussion

From the profile of the respondents, it appears that the sport tourists continue to have a different profile from regular visitors to a destination. In both instances, the sport tourists tended to be relatively young (although slightly older in the case of Qatar) and predominantly male. Gender has been a neglected area of sport tourism (Achu, 2018). Historically, football has been regarded as a male-dominated sport (Bama & Tichaawa, 2015). This study indicates that for the FIFA World Cup, the gender profile of sport tourists has remained consistently more male-oriented, supporting other mega-event and football event studies (e.g., Achu, 2018; Getz, 2003; Turco, Riley & Swart, 2002).

It appears that the FIFA World Cup is effective in attracting first-time visitors to a host nation, who will travel primarily for the event, as opposed to repeat visitors. In South Africa's case, a third of visitors had attended a previous World Cup, but for Qatar this number was halved (14%). It is not clear if Qatar's results could be considered a trend of diminishing serial mega-event tourists, however. It is likely related to the previous FIFA World Cups being held in Russia and Brazil, whereas Qatar 2022 was more accessible to those from North-African and Middle East countries.

Regarding the role of sport mega-events in nation-brand development, the perceptions of sport tourists were extremely positive in both cases, further supporting the notion that mega-events can be effectively used as nation-branding opportunities (supporting the likes of: Essex & Chalkley, 1998; Rein & Shields, 2006; Gibson et al, 2008; Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2017).

Regarding the perceptions of the South African brand, it was interesting to note that respondents held very few clear perceptions of the brand prior to travelling. While most of these perceptions related to positive aspects such as "natural beauty" and "wildlife" (the more common associations with African nations), there were also negative perceptions, most notably those that related to "crime / safety and security fears", as well as with the nation's oppressive "Apartheid" past.

Similarly for Qatar, there was a mixture of positive (e.g., wealthy), neutral (e.g., desert; hot climate; conservative, Islamic) and negative perceptions (e.g., expensive; human rights issues) that emerged as unprompted perceptions. Of interest here is the larger contribution of neutral associations to the Qatar perceptions. However, both studies indicate a superficial level of perceptions for respondents prior to visiting the country. This is perhaps to be expected, given that both are considered emerging nations.

The prompted nation-brand perceptions scoring most highly were those that have been traditional brand strengths for both nations, and those that are more experiential in nature for short-term visitors (i.e., factors related to people, culture, climate, attractions and facilities). The top perceptions of Qatar were: "a safe place to visit"; "a competent host of the football World Cup" "a world-class tourism destination"; and "many friendly, welcoming people".

The factors that scored less highly in the case of South Africa, were those related to aspects of politics/ leadership; residence/ relocation; and business/ investment opportunities. The responses for these perceptions of Qatar were notably higher, especially for Qatar as "a desirable country to live in" and having "many business or investment opportunities". The strong associations with Qatar as being "an excellent destination to host future sport mega-events" and "a respectful and tolerant society", supports one of the top perceptions of Qatar as having "many friendly, welcoming people", as noted previously. These latter perceptions may be of even greater importance to the nation brand, given the international media portrayal of human rights issues in the nation.

It is important to note a limitation of this study before discussing the conclusions. The most important limitation to the surveys is that it can be difficult for respondents to determine their prior perceptions once they are travelling in the country. However, given the challenge of identifying visitors prior to their arrival, this methodology being used consistently across events can still illustrate perception changes or trends. Additionally, it would have been useful to compare the nation-brand impact of the event on non-travelling fans (spectators).

6. Conclusion

Sport mega-events have received much criticism over the past decade, especially considering the much-publicised FIFA scandals (Knott and Swart 2018), with Qatar's bid for the 2022 FIFA World Cup a central story within the accusations (Swart and Mammadov 2022). This paper demonstrates that despite this, a sport mega-event presents a significant opportunity to change or influence nation brand perceptions, most significantly among event visitors (sport tourists).

With both events studied in this paper being emerging nations, the findings provide further evidence for the ability of sport mega-events to provide an extraordinary opportunity for nation brand-building among emerging nations, or lesser-known nation brands. This paper proposes that a mega-event specifically creates an opportunity to counter certain negative aspects of a nation brand that may be experienced differently by visitors compared to what is portrayed in global media. This was certainly the case in South Africa, where tourists experienced a safe and developed tourism destination. For Qatar, visitors associated the nation with welcoming people and a tolerant society – perceptions not related to the media portrayal of an intolerant society.

The findings suggest that sport mega-events may promote certain aspects of the nation brand more than others. For example, the attributes such as "people", "culture and heritage" and "tourism" appear to be most influenced, with lesser impact on perceptions of "government", "investment" and "exports". This may be a result of the experiential nature of sport tourism and perhaps represents a lack of knowledge of other aspects of a nation's society or activities.

The case of South Africa and the 2010 FIFA World Cup is one of the successful long-term legacy cases relating to nation branding through a sport mega-event (Swart et al. 2019). Tichaawa and Bob (2015) investigated a broader legacy for the African continent from the 2010 mega-event, and there should be similar broader, and longitudinal studies conducted for Qatar and the neighbouring Middle East region.

Furthermore, South Africa has not continued to host mega-events near the scale of the 2010 mega-event in over a decade since then. Qatar is different in that it hosts a large portfolio of annual large-scale events. It is also committed to promoting the nation through high profile sport events, teams, and leagues in other nations. This supports the groundswell of opinion within the literature that advocates a portfolio of events (with mega-events supported by smaller-scale or homegrown events) rather than a strategy purely focused on a once-off, mega event (Knott and Swart 2018). The consistent policy of using sport as a driver for nation branding by Qatar deserves further interrogation and a longitudinal approach to the assessment of legacy.

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Film Tourism, Creative Process, and Territorial Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: Recognition of the potential of film tourism was manifested by deepening knowledge of this market, given the cultural and tourist dynamics developed, but also through the creation of new tourism products specific to this sector. Film tourism, that is, the tourist activity associated with cinema and television, has been of increasing interest for the promotion of territories. In contemporary times, the interconnections between tourism, space, and media have generated interest, recognizing the occurrence of a distinct type of behaviour, activity, and tourist experience associated with this tourist segment that, through creativity, is manifested in academic entrepreneurship. The parameters of film tourism are multidimensional, generating territorial impacts, but also opportunities and challenges associated with the management and marketing of tourist destinations. Film tourism must be looked at, not only from a demand perspective but also from a supply perspective. This is because cinematographic tourism developed from opportunities generated by cinema understood in this study as an agent that induces travel to cultural and tourist destinations. In this study, carried out geographically in the centre of Portugal, the aim is to present a case study related to cinematographic tourism through the mapping of filming and scenarios where film scenes were recorded in heritage resources, in their relationship with the enhancement of cultural and tourist experience. The main objectives of this study include an approach to film tourism as a factor of entrepreneurship in the territory and verifying the importance of film scenarios in heritage resources as factors of attractiveness and cultural and tourist enjoyment. To achieve both objectives, a quantitative analysis was carried out on residents of a territory where film scenes were recorded. The conclusions identify that the recording of filmic scenes encourages interest in heritage and cultural spaces, with a greater dynamization of these spaces for tourist appropriation and, in turn, the incentive to the creative process and territorial entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Film Tourism, Territory, Cultural Attractiveness, Creative Process, Entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

The cinematographic tourism sector is related to all the dynamics of tourist activity associated with cinema television and promotional videos, which is the main reason for travelers to travel (Graça, Banha & Banha, 2022), leading to a growing interest in greater knowledge on this topic.

It is understood that film tourism is the tourist activity induced by the visualization of a moving image, (Hudson & Ritchie 2006), and the visualization can occur in a growing variety of environments, likely to be measurable. For example, the so-called "movie tourists" (Busby & Klug 2001) are characterized through quantitative and qualitative approaches, to be able to synthesize their profile.

In fact, studies on the profile of cinema tourists already exist (Kim, Agrusa, Lee & Chon 2007), with emphasis on education, an age group referred to as middle-aged and with financial power. It means that the film tourist has specific motivations, which highlights the tendency to visit film locations, also focusing on the social and cultural characteristics of the place visited (Riley, Baker & Van Doren, 1998). Film tourism is growing in importance as a destination marketing medium. As such, it can create challenging problems for destination management, as it brings some negative impacts to the territory, related to the overload of tourists in the same space, congestion at various levels that affect the mobility of residents as well as increased insecurity. Another more directly linked to cultural heritage could affect the enjoyment of the cultural resource by increasing its level of degradation. In this sense, it is understood that film tourism may contribute to the attractiveness of heritage resources, but on the other hand, it creates challenging destination management issues, with the need to increase the level of attention to destination planning and management processes and strategies for tourists.

Film tourism typifies a traditional boom-and-bust approach to the development of tourist destinations that encompasses, in some cases, a lack of planning, the need to deal with the sudden influx of special interest

tourists, and the consequent need for a strategic response. on the supply side (Thelen, Kim & Scherer, 2020). That is residents at the destination, managers, and tourism companies (Hahm & Wang, 2011).

Since films in terms of motivation are one of the main factors that influence tourists in choosing a destination (Domínguez-Azcue, Almeida-García, Pérez-Tapia & Cestino-González, 2021), this issue of destination planning becomes essential.

With this dynamic, and following this line of perception about film tourism, this study sought to respond to the fundamental objective of understanding the importance of film sets in heritage resources as factors of attractiveness and cultural and tourist enjoyment.

2. Territorial Entrepreneurship

According to Hisrich et al. (2009), Simões et al. (2012), and Pacheco et al. (2021a), the concept of entrepreneur emerged over time, as the global economic structure changed and became more complex. Since its inception in the Middle Ages, when it was used to refer to specific occupations, the notion of entrepreneur has been refined and expanded to include concepts related to the person (individual) rather than their occupation. Risk, innovation, and wealth creation are examples of the criteria developed as the study of new business creation evolved. In this sense, within the analysis context of this study on film tourism, entrepreneurship is understood as a process of creating something of value, dedicating the necessary time and effort, assuming the corresponding financial, psychological, and social risks, and receiving the rewards resulting from satisfaction and personal and economic independence.

In fact, entrepreneurial activity will be a dynamic process that is directly linked to the prosperity of regions, a process through which it can generate wealth capable of causing profound social, political, cultural, and economic transformations (Farah et al., 2008; Loureiro et al., 2021). In this context, approaching the concept of territorial entrepreneurship becomes the dynamics of cinematographic tourism and represents creating value for destinations where filming allows residents and tourists to participate. This relevance gains greater prominence when we approach a country, such as Portugal, which has high rates of entrepreneurship and at the same time a significant number of companies, which close their activities in periods of less than 3 years (Simões et al., 2014 and Pacheco, 2021b).

As Aidar (2007) mentions, having the idea of a new business is relatively simple, it is difficult to turn it into a business opportunity. But between having the idea and developing it, there is a business development process, known as the entrepreneurial process, which after its development will increase the possibility of success, this if it includes, mainly, the development of a business plan, which analyzes the reason and the region where the same business will be developed (territorial entrepreneurship). Thus, the external environment of the organization is extremely important, for its analysis, by the entrepreneur, because changes are constant, and the organization must have the ability to adapt. Failure to adapt to environmental changes can lead to the failure of the enterprise.

It will be relevant, for this research article, which addresses the creative process of film recordings in tourist destinations as territorial entrepreneurship, to also analyze the concept of intra-entrepreneur, given that the entrepreneur can already be a member of an organization/company already existing, and therefore called intrapreneurship (Dornelas, 2003 and Simões et al., 2014).

In this research work, this concept was considered relevant, given that there will be businesses, with their respective employees and employers, who may face new opportunities, and arise with new challenges. More specifically, if, on the one hand, intrapreneurship opens a new perspective for the entrepreneurial employee to justify his/her stay in the company, on the other hand, it can become an effective mechanism for better use of the company's human resources through talent retention. and transforming innovative ideas into new businesses. Intrapreneurship thus points to a promising path for organizations/companies in their arduous journey, aiming at greater agility and flexibility and in short, greater competitiveness (Aidar, 2007; Loureiro et al., 2021).

Thus, the territory, being an individual entrepreneur or intra entrepreneur, will have relevance for the development of the entrepreneurial process. It should be noted that it is not uniform, that is, it is unlikely that the dissemination of knowledge and its implementation in innovation, an entrepreneurial process, will follow a homogeneous pattern in space, namely on a national scale.

This spatial logic of functional disjunction will be based on the fact that the main urban centers (Lisbon, Porto, and other cities with a large population size) appear, on the one hand, as centers of human capital and creativity (determinants for the search for new technological solutions, organizational, financial and customer communication); on the other hand, as consumption centers, whose large size will make it possible to assess receptivity to a new product/service in a short period of time, either because of their high population density (which facilitates contact with potential customers) or because of the ease in hiring agencies specialized for carrying out market studies (Graça et al., 2019 and Loureiro et al., 2021).

This summary helps reinforce the innovative capacity of companies and respond quickly to recent trends in the market in which they operate, improving their competitive position in the regional, national, and global markets. These facts thus demonstrate the potentiating effect that a territory can develop and possess, notably that it, its composition, and size, can lead to the emergence of different organizations/companies and entrepreneurial activities (Simões et al., 2014 and Pacheco, 2021b).

Lastly, with regard to territorial entrepreneurship and with a view to boosting it, it will be relevant to establish strategic partnerships with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), new or existing, places whose know-how can boost process innovations (of an incremental nature), in addition to providing a reduction in operating costs, resorting to the outsourcing of services/activities considered non-essential in its main business, in its development. The territory and the companies located there will be able, in this way, to achieve efficiency gains, based on this vertical disintegration, as well as have more vital financial resources for the development/growth of innovation support activities.

The territory, with the various elements that make it up, will be extremely important for the development of the entrepreneurial process, in the case of new/current businesses, being entrepreneurs or intrapreneurs. Thus, the entrepreneurial process will be influenced by the surrounding territory, given the existing companies/organizations and the proximity economies, and, therefore, the entrepreneurial process will be renewed, through permanent local collective learning, giving it the nature of an innovative medium. It is understood that the spatial planning process should include the development of competitive and sustainable tourism products, as well as management and planning (Lopes et al., 2022). This dynamic could be favorable to territories whose creative processes emerge from the growing interest in film tourism.

3. Creative Processes in Film Tourism Applied to Territorial Practice

Film tourism benefits from attracting tourists inspired by the landscapes shown in films, the plot, and stories (Vieira, Araújo & Sousa, 2022). In this context, the film "Fatima" was chosen for its cultural and religious dimension, having the particularity of showing how Fatima grew as a "Holy Land" visited annually by thousands of pilgrims. The recording of this film took place in a central region of Portugal, about 50 km from Fátima – Sanctuary of Fátima.

The film "Fátima" lasts 120 minutes and portrays the story of a miracle in the middle of the First World War. What happened in Portugal, more precisely in Cova da Iria (Fátima), when three children named Jacinta, Francisco Marto, and Lúcia witnessed six visions of the Virgin Mary between May 13 and October 13, 1917 (Cunha & Ribas, 2011).

After witnessing these visions, the children were discredited by the most skeptical, and only later and after much suffering were the children taken seriously. Finally, the Roman Catholic Church validates the children's vision by transforming the city of Fátima into a place of great worship and one of the main places of pilgrimage. The cast stars Harvey Keitel, Sonia Braga, and Goran Visnjic, under the direction of Marco Pontecorvo. The distributor is Diamond Films, which has been classified for 12 Years.

In the film, the whole story of the apparition of "Our Lady of Fatima", the people identified, and the problems that arise, among other things, are true. However, the apparition of "Our Lady" remains a mystery for "non-believers" and a certainty for believers. As such, "the film can renew interest among believers and spark interest in those who are not as firm in the Catholic faith" (Conley, 2020, p.130).

The story of Fátima is permanently associated with the existence of three children: Lúcia and her cousins, Francisco, and Jacinta Marto, who on May 13, 1917, guarded the flock in the shade of the holm oaks in a place called Cova da Iria and saw a light, the apparition of a "Lady dressed in white", where the Chapel of Apparitions is now located. Appearing at a time when civilization was being punished by war and bloody violence, "Our Lady" promised that Heaven would give peace to the whole world if her requests for prayer, reparation, and consecration were heard and obeyed. "Our Lady of Fatima" explained to the children that war is a punishment

for sin and warned that God would continue to punish the world for its disobedience to His Will through war, famine, and the persecution of the Church, the Holy Father, and the Catholic faithful. The Virgin asked them to pray a lot for the good of the world and announced that she would return during the next few months, every day of the 13th.

“Our Lady's Message” to the World is based on what has come to be called the "secret" that she entrusted to the three child seers in July 1917. The secret really consists of three parts. The first part of the secret was a horrible vision of hell "where the souls of poor sinners go". The second part of the secret specifically prophesied the onset of World War II. The last part of the secret (often called the "Third Secret", was written by Lúcia dos Santos, in 1944 and has been in the possession of the Holy See since 1957. Years later, Sr. Lúcia also tells that between April and October 1916, an Angel had appeared to the three seers three times, twice at Loca do Cabeço and another by the well in the backyard of Lucia's house, inviting them to prayer and penance. wooden arch with a cross. The small tree gradually disappeared and was taken away by pilgrims. On August 6, 1918, with alms from the faithful, construction began on a small chapel in honor of “Our Lady”, made of stone and whitewash covered with tile measuring 3.30 meters long, 2.80 meters wide, and 2.85 meters high. It was the first construction of the current prayer enclosure (Dantas, 2021; Marújo, 2018).

3.1 Film "Fátima" and its Relationship with Heritage Resources

The presence of heritage resources identified in the film “Fatima”, helps to recreate for the viewer what that time was like in terms of constructions, and customs, among others. The film, on the other hand, adds value to the heritage resource by highlighting events that occurred in the heritage resource itself.

Before the recordings took place, it is possible to observe that in Praça da República there were esplanades of different establishments, tourists, residents, or even visitors who explored the city center (for example Church of São João Baptista, the statue of Gualdim Pais, etc.). During the recordings, a nucleus of constraints is created for residents, establishment managers, visitors, and tourists. These constraints result from the closure of roads, streets, establishments, and some restrictions on the movement of residents within the city itself (Figure 1).

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Figure 1: Filming of the film “Fatima” in the heritage resources of the historic center

Source: Adapted mediotejo.net

In this study, it was possible to point out some fewer positive impacts for the tourist destination when the film “Fatima” was made. The most observed and highlighted are 1) changes in traffic; 2) esplanades of cafes in the historic center of the city were removed; 3) commercial establishments did not work during the recordings; 4) traffic was prohibited so that the recordings could take place; 5) various street restrictions for filming; 6) increased noise; 7) pollution and 8) vandalism. It seems that some solutions could have been implemented with the aim of mitigating the less positive impacts observed. Such as: 1) creating circulation strategies so that residents in the historic center of the city and neighboring towns can continue to frequent commercial establishments and, 2) opting for the use of different heritage resources that are more relocated from the historic center. In the same sense Mendes et al. (2017), indicate, in their study, that although the positive impacts are widely recognized by residents, there are negative impacts, however, they are recognized as temporary.

Therefore, although Fátima has developed as a tourist destination since the apparitions of the three shepherd children (Heitor & Duarte, 2020), it still lacks a better strategy to mitigate the negative impacts and maximize the positive ones.

4. Methodology

A brief questionnaire survey was developed to collect the opinion of residents of a city in central Portugal who observed the filming of the film "Fátima" in the city. The sample of this exploratory study was applied to owners of commercial establishments close to the historic center of the city, being validated by the city's merchant network.

The questionnaire was carried out in person with traders from commercial establishments. As this is an experimental and future study, the sample is limited in terms of validation, requiring a more representative sample. Even so, the study achieved the objective that had initially been conceived through the elaboration of a questionnaire with quantitative analysis methodology (n=61, from April 27th to August 31st, 2023), applied during the filming of the film "Fátima".

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 21.0). It should be noted that the objective of this small sample is to analyze the importance of film tourism for the territory, through observation of the filming of the film "Fátima" in relation to the valorization of the cultural and tourist experience.

The main objective was to be able, through this brief sample, to outline future lines of perception and delve deeper into this theme for the residents who observed the filming. These lines are related to the understanding of film tourism as a factor of entrepreneurship in the territory and with the understanding of the importance of film sets in heritage resources as factors of attractiveness and cultural and tourist enjoyment.

Based on these objectives, the questionnaire presents questions related to visiting the city prior to the filming of the film "Fatima". If they recognized the heritage resources where the scenes of the films unfolded and if they had already visited them. Other questions are related to obtaining knowledge about the shooting/filming of the film "Fatima" in the territory and whether they considered the existence of an impact of filming the film in the city at an economic, environmental, and patrimonial level or whether they also considered that the shooting of the film production had increased the attractiveness of the territory.

5. Analysis and Discussion of Results

The main results are a) female [62.3%] and male [36.1%] respondents; b) the age range is between 20-30 years old, corresponding to [42.6%] and between 18 and 20 years old [41%], (Graph 1); c) the professional level presents a reflective majority in university students [68.9%], and the remaining respondents regarding professional activity are divided between teachers, students, pastry chef, meat cutter and operational assistant.

The study concludes that d) most respondents are residents of the city where the filming of the film "Fatima" took place, [26.7%]. The rest are divided into the towns of Arrifes, Azores São Miguel, Coimbra, Fogueteiro, Leiria, Meia Via, Nordeste São Miguel, Santo António, and Sesimbra.

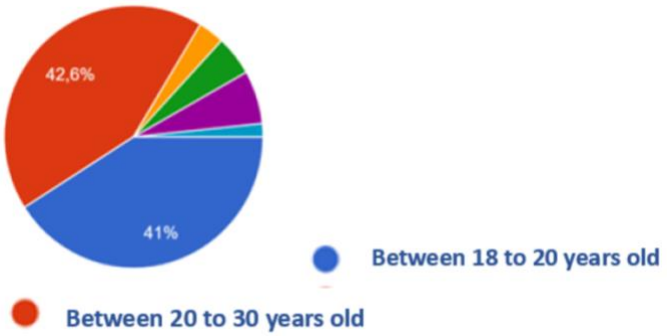

Figure 2

Source: Authors

Of the respondents who answered that they had already visited the city, it can be observed that e) they visited the Convent of Christ [84%], the Castle [80%], and the Mouchão Park [70%]. They visited the National Forest of Sete Montes [68%], visited the Synagogue [40%]. With reduced expression they answered that they visited the Grinding and Electric Power Station [2%] and, finally, they mentioned that they had never visited any heritage resource of the city [2%], (Graph 2).

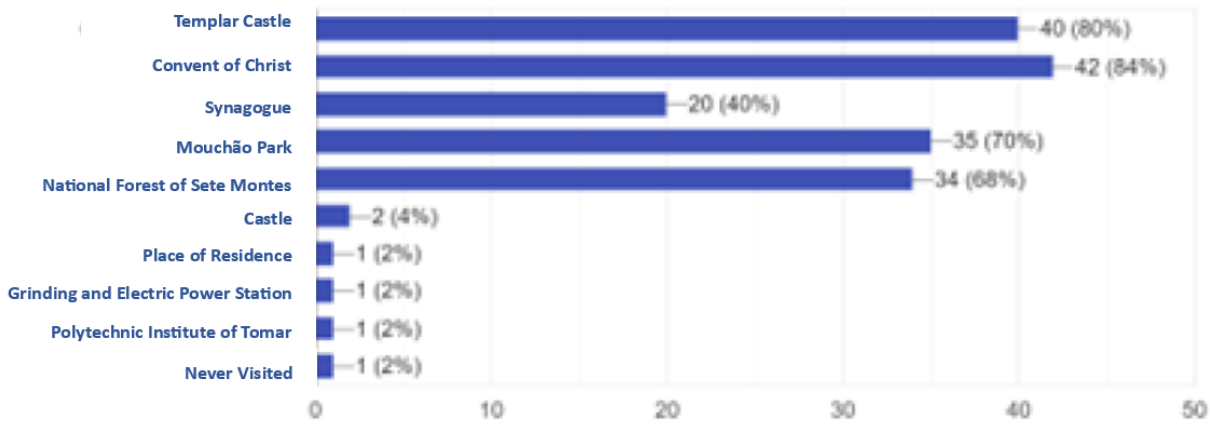

Figure 3

Source: Authors

It can also be observed that f) most respondents had no knowledge about film shooting [54.1%], while others claimed to have had knowledge [45.9%].

With regard to the understanding of the benefits and impacts implied for the city, g) [88.5%], responded that shooting the film brought more people and benefits to the location while [11.5%], responded that it did not.

Also in this regard, responses such as: - “Increased visitation”; - “Economic impact is a positive impact”; - "I do not think so"; - "Very likely"; - “Yes, it had a positive impact”; - “Yes, he showed the city to several people so that he could awaken their interest in visiting the city”; - “Yes, because it brought a large number of people to the city due to the production of the film”; - “brought some fame to the city”; - “It had a positive equity impact”; - “Yes, because it will increase future tourists to come and see the place in person, and even to stay overnight if necessary. It will also invest in the local economy, either through gastronomy and visits to historic spaces”; - “As the city is not very well known, I think these productions make the public more interested in the place”; - “Yes, tourist and heritage development”; - "Yes.

On an economic level, it may have had a positive impact, as it was a way of getting to know the city. In terms of assets, I think it had a negative impact, as I learned, through a report, that damage was caused during the production of the film “The Man Who Killed Don Quixote” at the Convent of Christ”; - “Yes in the tourist attraction and at an economic level due to the expenses incurred by the cast and directors”; - “Yes in terms of tourism and the environment”. In fact, the open questions answered by the participants reinforce the role of film tourism for the territory in its relationship with the enhancement of the cultural and tourist experience.

In some studies, the impacts perceived by the local tourism business community are referred to as a reason for concern, since most of the time there is no consultation with the interested parties, causing constraints and less favorable situations for the destination. Other events highlight the sudden increase in tourist demand for film tourism in a short period of time (Connell, 2005), which reinforces the importance of territorial entrepreneurship in supporting the tourist planning of destinations.

It is understood that attention should be given, in the first instance, to the image of the region/tourist destination (Croy, 2010; Heitmann, 2010), allied to the creative process and the strategic management of the destination (example: infrastructure, commercial establishments, circulation of traffic, etc.). In fact, contemporary society involves actions aimed at protecting, conserving, interpreting, and disseminating the heritage and cultural diversity of each region, constituting an important challenge for the sustainable development of the territory (Lopes & Fernandes, 2022), and, consequently, to the tourist destination.

6. Conclusions

As it was considered, the main objectives of this study go through the approach to film tourism as a factor of entrepreneurship in the territory. To implement this perception, a quantitative analysis was carried out on residents of a territory where film scenes were recorded.

As can be seen, the conclusions of this study present several responses that refer to the impacts of film tourism on the historic center of the city.

To better understand these responses, which in some ways are quite representative of these impacts, we can explain and summarize some of them, relating them to the size of the city. This is a region of Portugal (area of 12,204 km2), rich in history and with a cultural heritage of great importance. It is located on the West Coast of Europe and is the westernmost border of the European continent, which gives it a privileged geostrategic location.

The city is essentially characterized by a highly renowned heritage site, gaining prominence due to the recognition granted in 1983 by UNESCO as a world heritage site. It is concluded that the filming of the film "Fátima" in the heritage resources of the historic center contributed to increasing tourist visitation to this destination, and at an economic level it ended up contributing to the city's economy, especially in terms of hotels and restoration of the city.

The conclusions identify that the recording of filmic scenes encourages interest in heritage and cultural spaces, with a greater dynamization of these spaces for tourist appropriation and, in turn, the incentive to the creative process and territorial entrepreneurship. However, fewer positive impacts were observed and recorded, which means that planning is crucial to increase positive impacts.

In fact, film tourism may have an effective implication in the management of tourist destinations that are subject to film tourism or where there is a strong marketing drive to promote film tourism as a niche product, market, and experience.

The conclusions of the study present a complex picture of the impacts of cinematographic tourism in the historic center of the city, demonstrating some aspects less favorable to the dynamics of the shooting/filming of the film "Fatima". The biggest negative indicator relates to the consultation of interested parties, especially residents and commercial establishments. Reinforcing the importance of integrated planning of the tourist destination.

The study concludes that the perceptions (positive and negative) formed by both residents and managers of commercial establishments are the most relevant, conditioning or not the impacts of film tourism in the historic center of the city. However, this study concludes that it is these perceptions that outline strategic lines for future improvements because they allow continuing the study in this line of investigation of future deepening the impacts of film tourism.

What is understood to be of paramount importance since these are large-scale projects/investments, as is the example of this case study presented in this work. It must, therefore, form part of a long-term development approach corresponding to the heritage resources and capabilities of the destinations where filming takes place.

It is concluded that this study, on the one hand, despite the limitation regarding the reduced sample reached through the application of the questionnaire, is an important contribution to achieving future stadiums with greater positive observation in the destination from cinematographic tourism.

On the other hand, this study through the approach to cinematographic tourism as a factor of entrepreneurship in the territory, allowed to start an analysis of observation with an interest to deepen in the future on the importance of cinematographic scenarios in heritage resources as factors of attractiveness and cultural and tourist enjoyment.

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Social Sustainability: Challenges to the Restaurant Sector

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Abstract: The guarantee of sustainable development has been a growing concern in various economic sectors, particularly from the economic and environmental perspective. In a post-pandemic scenario, the restaurant industry was one of the most affected worldwide and had to undergo abrupt changes to remain operational. Thus, this study primarily focuses on addressing the challenges faced by Human Resources Management (HRM) in attracting and retaining employees in the restaurant sector. This research aims to understand the challenges faced in retaining and attracting talent to restaurants and to explore the strategies that should be adopted to ensure the restaurant's social.

It used a qualitative methodology, with 10 (5 female and 5 male, with a mean age of 35 years old) semi-structured interviews with professionals who chose to leave this profession, to ensure a concerted view of the current state of the sector in the north of Portugal.

Through thematic analysis of the interviews, the results identified the current difficulties in attracting and retaining employees in the sector, as well as some HRM strategies that can address these challenges. These findings emerged from the themes 'Special Features of the Restaurant Sector' and 'Attraction and Retention Strategies.' The first theme contextualizes and characterizes the sector's reality, arising from four categories: activity context, company type, the COVID-19 pandemic, and turnover factors. Meanwhile, the second theme presents the attraction and retention strategies that HRM in restaurant companies should implement, while also exploring some challenges faced in designing and implementing these strategies in practice. Specifically, recruitment and selection, compensation and benefits, onboarding, integration and socialization, and career management.

In conclusion, social sustainability still has little prominence in the restaurant sector. To become more attractive, the restaurant sector needs to invest in better non-monetary benefits, such as flexible working hours, health insurance, professional recognition, training investment, and career advancement opportunities. This study intends to help companies take measures to improve employee satisfaction and also increase talent retention and new employees' attraction.

Keywords: Social Sustainability, Human Resources Management, Attraction, Retention, Restaurant Sector

1. Introduction

In the food services industry, a certain unpredictability has taken hold, making it difficult to discern patterns or trends. Competition is fierce, and entrepreneurs and managers are under constant pressure to offer products or services that are exceptional, distinctive, and aligned with their organization's goals, all while keeping an eye on internal changes. As consumer demand grows and restaurants fight for survival, they must be able to adapt to the current market. The restaurant industry has unique characteristics that set it apart from other tourism-related activities. For this reason, human resources play a pivotal role in ensuring a restaurant's success. During the current crisis, it's become increasingly important to make the sector more attractive to potential employees and retain current ones. After all, work and well-being are crucial components of social sustainability. For some individuals, work can feel like a daunting task as they strive to provide for their families, yet their income may not always suffice. For others, work is a source of personal satisfaction and fulfilment. It is crucial to find a balance between personal and professional life that allows all employees to work in an area they are genuinely passionate about (Alsulami *et al*. 2023). Social sustainability refers to the balance between work life, well-being, health, and safety for both employees and organizations (Blake-Beard *et al*. 2010). In recent times, work flexibility has become a top priority for many governments, academics, and employers in pursuit of social sustainability (Alsulami *et al*. 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a shift towards remote work and increased digitalization, resulting in unprecedented effects on office work concerning social sustainability, workplace, organizational innovation capabilities, and the well-being and performance of office workers (Babapour Chafi *et al*. 2022). The study aims to identify the perspective of employees on the process of attraction and retention in restaurant companies, and, to this end, we will answer the following research question, from which we intend to obtain answers and relevant information for the study: What is the perspective of employees regarding the strategies used by restaurants to attract and retain them? By obtaining relevant and insightful information, this study aims to improve the sector's ability to attract new employees and ensure their

satisfaction and fulfilment in their roles, ultimately leading to better retention rates. Additionally, the insights gained from this study can inform recruitment and selection processes, rewards management, career management, and training programs.

2. Literature Review

Businesses must showcase their ability to gather, restructure, renew and exploit resources to establish strengths that can be utilized to adapt to changes in the business environment. Armstrong (2009) suggests that organizations need to integrate various conditions valued by employees, such as salary, location, working conditions, training, and opportunities for career growth, to attract top talent in the market. The importance of HR in companies has become more apparent as managers have realized competitive advantages through providing services with higher quality, as well as due to the increasing costs of labour and the scarcity of personnel in some sectors of the hospitality industry (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2012). According to Camara (2016), company missions, visions, and values communicated through various channels are futile if employees don't feel and integrate them into their daily actions. To overcome this issue, HRM's role is to work with the company's cultural development strategies.

The workforce is demanding more opportunities for career growth and development, which can be attributed to their highly qualified skill sets (Almeida and Almeida, 2021). Due to the current job market's fluctuating dynamics, individuals are increasingly choosing to leave their current positions in search of more favourable opportunities that align with their professional goals. This constant uncertainty has led to changes in the "psychological contracts" between organizations and their employees, as organizations must navigate an environment of technological advancements, market fluctuations, and global economic, financial, social, and political turbulence (Cunha *et al.,* 2012). When employees feel that their organization has not fulfilled its contractual obligations, they perceive a violation of their psychological contract (Aggarwal and Bhargava, 2010). As a result, people's loyalty is primarily to their career development, followed by their profession and employer. The hospitality and tourism sector has seen significant growth in recent years, but the pandemic has exacerbated the shortage of qualified employees due to the sector's low attractiveness among young people. As the workforce continues to face numerous challenges, salary increases alone are no longer sufficient to attract and retain qualified talent. Also known as the "Gen Z" generation, they have revolutionized the labour system by prioritizing different variables and factors. The current work culture and management have led to issues such as insecurity, precariousness, uncertainty, limited control over wages, and restricted social/legal rights for workers (Yildirim *et al*., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with ongoing conflicts, has resulted in an economic and social environment that is impossible to sustain financially. Companies are struggling with debt and facing increased costs of energy, fuel, and raw materials (AHRESP, 2020). Restaurants are also faced with the added difficulty of sudden rent hikes, creating a worrying and challenging situation.

The restaurant industry, being one of the most competitive and dynamic sectors in the economy, faces several challenges in terms of human resources. These challenges include a shortage of qualified workers (AHRESP, 2022), high turnover rates (Gomes *et al*., 2022), seasonality (Chiriko, 2021), lack of training and dignity of the profession (Baum, 2002), work-life balance (Jang *et al*., 2015; Ayachit and Chitta, 2022), and insufficient salaries (Mckay *et al*., 2012. To overcome these difficulties and promote social sustainability in organizations, it is imperative to know how to better attract and retain employees. Talent attraction is the process of identifying individuals with certain skills for a position that can add value to the organization (Camara, 2016). The recruitment and selection process is the best way to develop strategic actions aimed at attracting and adding talent to the organization to provide it with the skills necessary for success (Chiavenato, 2014). Talent retention, on the other hand, refers to the practices and strategies used by companies to retain their most talented employees and control their abandonment of organizations. These strategies include reception and integration processes (Byford *et al*., 2017), management of rewards (Cunha *et al*., 2012; Camara, 2016; Mahl and Silva, 2018), career management (Giley *et al.,* 2002), and training and development management (Buckley and Caple, 2009; Chiavenato, 2014). According to Ibrahim and Daniel (2018), talent retention is crucial for long-term organizational success, as it allows the company to maintain its strategic human capital and achieve a competitive advantage.

3. Method

This study utilizes a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews with former restaurant employees who possess a minimum of five years of work experience and have voluntarily left the industry. By

doing so, we aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current reality of the sector in Portugal. Our main objective is to characterize the attraction and retention processes within restaurant companies from the perspective of those who have worked in the sector and to identify the reasons that led to their departure. In the data collection phase, we relied on primary data, which is essential for this type of research. Qualitative research provides a deep understanding of the human aspect of an issue, by focusing on a smaller sample than quantitative research. It is characterized by its objectivity, which allows for the discovery of solutions to the problem at hand by exposing the participants' viewpoints on the topic under analysis (Barnham, 2015).

The interview guide was carefully crafted based on a thorough literature review. It not only gathered sociodemographic and professional information about the interviewees but also delved into their perspectives on attraction and retention strategies they had encountered in their past restaurant experiences. The interviews themselves consisted of twenty-eight open-ended questions, all related to the main themes being analyzed. The guide was developed and refined throughout April and May 2023, and a test interview was conducted at the end of May to validate its effectiveness.

The sampling technique used in this study was theoretical sampling. The process of idealizing the interviewees' profiles focused on being able to bring together individuals with different sociodemographic characteristics that would confer heterogeneity to the sample. We obtained a positive response from ten individuals, who ended up being considered participants in the final sample (Table 1). The interviews were carried out remotely, via Zoom and WhatsApp, to speed up the process, subject to the availability of the interviewees, in the first two weeks of June 2023, with an average duration of 30 to 45 minutes.

In a series of interviews, individuals from diverse backgrounds were profiled based on their age, gender, academic qualifications, residence, restaurant positions, industry experience, and current jobs. The first interviewee was a 25-year-old female with a master's degree, residing in Vila Nova de Gaia. She had five years of industry experience as a waitress and bartender and is currently working as a secretary. The second interviewee was a 26-year-old male from Castelo Branco, holding a bachelor's degree. He had worked as a chef for five years but is currently unemployed. The third interviewee was a 37-year-old female from Maia, also with a bachelor's degree, having eight years of industry experience in various restaurant roles such as kitchen assistant, dishwasher, waitress, and restaurant supervisor. Her current job is as a lawyer. The fourth interviewee was a 46-year-old female from Vila Nova de Gaia, who completed a professional/technical course. She had 25 years of industry experience and served as a waitress and restaurant manager and worked as a board assistant. The fifth interviewee was a 46-year-old male from Viseu with a Middle School education, having five years of experience as a waiter, restaurant manager, and owner. Nowadays he is a tailor. The sixth interviewee was a 35-year-old female from Águeda, holding a bachelor's degree and having six years of experience as a waitress. Her current job is as a production technician. The seventh interviewee was a 27-year-old male from Matosinhos, with a Middle School education, who had ten years of experience as a waiter and bartender in the food service sector and now works as a shipping assistant. The eighth interviewee was a 42-year-old female from Porto with a bachelor's degree, possessing 23 years of experience in roles such as a waitress, bartender, and restaurant manager, while is currently employed as a pharmacy technician. The ninth interviewee was a 25-year-old male from Porto with a master's degree, having ten years of experience as a waiter and bartender and currently working as a financial controller. Finally, the tenth interviewee was a 39-year-old male from Barreiro with a bachelor's degree, holding 14 years of industry experience, having assumed positions as a waiter, bartender, and restaurant manager. Today he is an entrepreneur.

To conduct the qualitative data analysis, a thematic analysis approach was employed. This involved identifying and examining patterns, or themes, within the qualitative data sets (Braun and Clarke, 2019). The aim was to synthesize the content of the interviews while also interpreting the main characteristics of the data as it pertains to the research question (Clarke and Braun, 2017). The results were then subjected to empirical saturation, which is the point at which no new themes or codes emerge from the analysis. Theoretical saturation, on the other hand, refers to the point at which additional data produces little or no change in the codebook (Guest *et al*., 2006, p.65). With these considerations in mind, the qualitative study results were analyzed and interpreted.

4. Results

Two dimensions of analysis were identified: Special Features of the Restaurant Sector and Attraction and Retention Strategies. By examining the intersection of these dimensions, we have uncovered subcategories that provide a more focused view of the participants' viewpoints. The "Special Features of the Restaurant Sector" theme encompasses all aspects that define and challenge the current state of the industry in Portugal, based on

insights from former professionals in the field who participated in our study. We will also delve into the impact that these challenges have had on employees. This theme serves as a foundation for the next section and offers a comprehensive understanding of the industry from those who know it best. We have identified four categories that fall under this theme: activity context, company type, the COVID-19 pandemic, and reasons for employee turnover (Table 1). The "Contextualization of the Activity" category presents the restaurant sector through the eyes of former employees. This introductory section provides insight into their viewpoint regarding their past experiences. It includes five subcategories: exhausting work, ease of employment, passion for the job, immigration, and perception of the experience. "Company Typology" is a category that examines the differences in complexity, intensity, and work pace that affect the attraction and retention of employees in catering companies. The "COVID-19 Pandemic" category focuses on the pandemic's impact on the sector, with subcategories including the effects on the industry, insecurity, and adaptation. The "Abandonment Factors" category emerged as a prevalent theme in interviews, with seven subcategories, including workload, insufficient remuneration, lack of working conditions, lack of career opportunities, lack of recognition, lack of personal time, and demotivation. Based on the interviews, these factors contribute to HR abandonment in restaurant companies in Portugal. Moreover, it is known that the pandemic and company type significantly impact this category. The pandemic caused instability, insecurity, and forced layoffs, leading many to abandon the sector. Many interviewees echoed this sentiment, citing the pandemic as a catalyst for change in the restaurant industry.

Table 1: Theme, categories and subcategories of the "Special Features of the Restaurant Sector" analysis dimension

Theme	Categories	Subcategories
1. Special Features of the Restaurant Sector	1.1. Activity context	a) Exhausting
		b) Easy employment
		c) Passion
		d) Immigration
		e) Perception of the experience
	1.2. Company Type	f) Differences in complexity
		g) Intensity and work pace
	1.3. COVID-19 pandemic	h) Impact generated
		i) Insecurity
		j) Reinvention
	1.4. Turnover factors	k) Working hours
		l) Insufficient remuneration
		m) Lack of working conditions
		n) Lack of career opportunities
		o) Lack of recognition
		p) Lack of personal time
		q) Demotivation

The second theme explores attraction and retention strategies for restaurant companies from the perspective of former employees. It offers suggestions for HRM implementation and highlights challenges faced in practice. The theme is organized into five categories: recruitment and selection, compensation and benefits, reception, integration and socialization, and career management and challenges (Table 2). Some of these strategies are already in use by certain companies, while others are potential areas for improvement in the sector. The category of "Recruitment and Selection" encompasses the primary methods that companies use to hire new talent, as perceived from the perspective of job applicants. This category includes two subcategories, namely personal contacts and social networks. Similarly, the "Compensation and Benefits" category stems from several subcategories aimed at providing attractive compensation packages and other benefits to potential employees, while simultaneously retaining top talent. Five subcategories were identified in this dimension, including salary, schedules, days off, overtime payment, and health insurance. The "Welcome, Integration, and Socialization" category focuses on the practices used by restaurants to welcome and integrate new employees and promote a positive work environment. The "Career Management" category is comprised of two subcategories, investment

in employee development and career progression. This category provides a comprehensive overview of the personal and professional growth opportunities offered by restaurant companies. Lastly, the "Challenges" category highlights the difficulties that companies face when it comes to attracting and retaining employees, as reported by former employees. This category includes three subcategories, specifically rethinking recruitment and selection, lack of qualified labour, and lack of strategic planning.

Table 2: Theme, categories and subcategories of the "Attraction and Retention Strategies" analysis dimension

Theme	Categories	Subcategories
2. Attraction and Retention Strategies	2.1. Recruitment and selection	r) Personal contacts
		s) Social networks
	2.2. Compensation and benefits	t) Salary
		u) Schedules
		v) Days off
		w) Overtime payment
		x) Health insurance
	2.3. Reception, integration and socialization	y) Welcome into the company
		z) Socialization
	2.4. Career management	aa) Investment in employee development
		bb) Career progression
	2.5. Challenges	cc) Rethinking recruitment and selection
		dd) Lack of qualified labour
		ee) Lack of strategic planning

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Our study focused on the attraction and retention processes within restaurant companies. Participants expressed that there seemed to be a lack of structured and thoughtful processes in place if any at all. When it comes to recruitment and selection, our findings suggest that social networks and personal contacts are best for publicizing vacancies. Currently, recruitment seems ineffective in capturing a sufficient number of people to meet process needs (Almeida, 2014), and former employees feel that these processes are practically non-existent. Welcome and integration practices are crucial in creating a positive impact of the company on newly arrived employees, as argued by Byford *et al.* (2017), and in promoting satisfaction and retention (Robbins and Judge, 2021). In terms of rewards, former employees discussed the inclusion of attraction and retention strategies through more direct hours, rotating days off, and health insurance as the most important factors. We agree with Armstrong's (2009) understanding that the remuneration variable is extremely important for workers, as our results support this notion. The decision to stay within a company is no longer solely determined by monthly remuneration or monetary compensation. Rather, relational benefits that promote professional and personal balance and, consequently, a better quality of life are increasingly valued by employees. To retain their talent, companies must prioritize the development and progression of their employees' skills and individual qualities, as well as invest in their training. As such, it is HRM's responsibility to understand the needs and desires of their employees to provide a middle ground in which both sides can benefit. This involves developing strategies that increase the satisfaction of their employees, while also creating a healthy culture and environment that guarantees a sense of belonging, loyalty, and commitment to the company. While the restaurant industry presents unique challenges that may directly influence a company's ability to attract and retain talent, effective strategic planning can mitigate these particularities and make the sector more attractive to potential employees. Companies must recognize the importance of strategic planning and invest in it to overcome the barriers imposed by the characteristics of the sector. Our research highlights the organizational role in this industry and shows that the lack of strategic planning exacerbates the challenges that companies face. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the need for effective strategies to retain talent in the sector. Companies must recognize these challenges and implement effective strategies to ensure the stability and quality of their workforce. In summary, companies must prioritize their employees' needs and invest in their development and progression to ensure social sustainability and a stable workforce.

The findings of this study offer valuable insights that can help companies in the restaurant sector improve their HR practices and significantly impact practice. Adopting the best practices identified in this study can help companies distinguish themselves as preferred employers in the sector. By taking into account employee perspectives on attraction and retention processes, companies can adjust their approaches based on feedback and meet employee expectations and needs. HRM can take proactive steps to reduce turnover by recognizing the challenges companies face in attracting and retaining employees. This may include creating clear career development plans, providing opportunities for growth and development, and creating a work environment that values employees and increases their satisfaction. While our study had some limitations, such as difficulty finding former employees who met specific requirements, future studies could expand the participant pool to other regions, types of companies, and international contexts. It could also be beneficial to include current professionals in the sector and compare their perceptions to those of former employees. Additionally, extending the research to other sectors like the hotel industry can provide insights into whether the reality portrayed in restaurants is similar in other fields and the impact on more established companies.

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Cooking Up a Sustainable Future: insights of Circular Economy in Restaurants

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Abstract: Restaurants increasingly prioritize promoting sustainability within their kitchen's operations, focusing their offers on valuing raw materials as a central point of gastronomy, thus highlighting the importance of local, responsible consumption and respect for nature and the environment. The Circular Economy (CE) emerges as a new sustainability paradigm, uncovering valuable opportunities for organizations and customers, in harmony with the environment. This study aims to characterize good sustainable and circular practices in the restaurant sector, understanding how endogenous products can enhance food waste reduction. Through a qualitative methodology, nine semi-structured exploratory interviews were carried out with restaurant experts, to gain in-depth knowledge into sustainable and CE practices used in restaurants. By conducting a thematic analysis, three main themes emerged 'Positioning and Branding,' 'Circular Economy,' and 'Product and Food Waste'. 'Positioning and Branding' covers the evolution of an eco-conscious mindset in organizations, from the inception of sustainable thinking to the imperative for change. It emerges from the categories: ´Organization, actions, and partnerships', 'Challenges and success factors', and 'Awareness'. The theme 'Circular Economy,' presents circular practices within daily restaurant operations, their understanding of circular concepts, and the progress made in adopting these behaviors. It arises from three categories: 'Circularity', 'Resource Management' and 'Transition'. The 'Product and Food Waste' theme addresses concerns related to product and food waste, including supplier selection, innovative gastronomic offerings, and food waste minimization strategies. It is based on the categories: 'Suppliers and Raw Materials', 'Food Waste Minimization", and 'Gastronomic Offer'.

The findings reveal a growing awareness of the need for sustainability and circular practices in the restaurant sector. Organizations are actively seeking ways to reduce food waste, optimize sourcing, best operating procedures and offer more sustainable menus representing significant progress toward a more sustainable future in the restaurant business.

Keywords: Circular economy, Sustainability, Restaurant Sector, Portugal

1. Introduction

Economic challenges such as supply risk, problematic ownership structures and deregulated markets lead to increasingly frequent financial and economic instability for individual companies and entire economies. In this sense, new solutions may emerge within the scope of innovation, allowing greater active involvement on the part of organizations for future improvements (Bocken et al., 2016). A good alternative to the way cities develop and operate is provided by the circular economy. This idea manifests itself from the symbiosis of an environmental and ecological economy with environmentalist and sustainable industrial management in corporate terms (Bocken et al., 2016). Given the current trend towards a Circular Economy (CE), the business strategy of restaurant chains cannot be limited to their traditional services, which means that the implementation of a sustainable model in the restaurant chain must be attentive and respond to the needs changes of customers (Chou et al., 2016). At the same time, with an increasingly demanding consumer and a more competitive market, innovation in customer services not only reflects the development of new products, but also all innovative activities, small or large, that can revitalize and improve existing services and delivery systems (Alt and Zimmermann, 2019). The development of a sustainable service provides a series of innovative service methods, which in addition to improving "green life", can change the entire operating model of the

industry, simplifying and reducing inherent operational costs (Bocken et al., 2016). Therefore, introducing a sustainable service innovation model through the circular economy can clarify information in the food supply chain and use an integrative mechanism of recycling and refining technology to promote food, with a main focus on fruits and vegetables, and increase the value of leftovers (Lugo et al., 2023). The development of sustainable models and service innovation is a goal that the current restaurant industry should strive to develop (Chou et al., 2016). By implementing a circular economy approach, restaurant chains can not only improve their services and reduce costs, but also contribute to a more sustainable future for the industry and society as a whole. This study aims to identify sustainable and circular practices in the restaurant sector that effectively reduce food waste by utilizing endogenous products. To achieve this, we conducted 9 interviews with key players in the industry who prioritize circular and sustainable practices in their businesses. Through these interviews, we gained insight into their perspectives on the topics under analysis and uncovered innovative practices that have not yet been documented in the literature.

2. Literature Review

The Circular Economy (CE) has emerged as a promising alternative to the traditional linear economic model of "take-make-dispose", as recognized by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2015). The CE model prioritizes environmental sustainability in economic activity, emphasizing the importance of preserving natural resources, managing finite stocks, and optimizing renewable resource flows (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015). By circulating products, components, and materials at their highest level of utility for extended periods in both technical and biological cycles, the CE approach promotes system efficiency and mitigates negative externalities. This paradigm shift in business mindset extends beyond energy and resource efficiency, prompting companies to consider the broader impacts of their operations (Leitão, 2015). Developing an ecological industry that prioritizes prevention and regeneration is critical for achieving balance among the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental (Ghisellini et al., 2016; Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). The CE model offers added value for organizations and customers alike, promoting harmony with the environment (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013). By drawing inspiration from the natural world, we can reevaluate our current economic practices and adopt a more integrative system that prioritizes ecological design considerations and a more sustainable use of resources (Kirchherr et al., 2023). The necessity of sustainability is particularly relevant in the restaurant industry, where large quantities of water, energy, and disposable products are consumed. Businesses must consider sustainable practices to improve their environmental performance and positively impact their brand image in the eyes of consumers. Consumers are increasingly aware of environmental issues, and their purchasing behavior reflects this (Schubert et al., 2010). By implementing sustainable CE strategies and principles, companies can not only contribute to the protection of the environment and social well-being but also gain a competitive advantage through reduced raw material consumption, better waste management, and innovation (Lakatos et al., 2021). Hence, it is vital to shift our thinking towards more sustainable solutions to mitigate waste and promote a healthier planet.

Food waste is generated throughout the entire lifecycle of food, including agriculture, production, industrialization, retail, and domestic consumption (Mirabella et al., 2014). Consumers' excessive or inappropriate acquisition, inadequate storage conditions, and excess preparation are the primary causes of food waste (Papargyropoulou et al., 2014). Proper waste management and reducing food waste can improve economic resources, enhance food security, and minimize the negative impacts of food waste on the environment (Thyberg and Tonjes, 2016). Various authors suggest that the CE can be an effective strategy to minimize food waste, as it is closely interconnected with this concept (Borrello et al., 2016; Vilariño et al., 2017; Dora, 2019). To achieve a sustainable transition, it is essential to tackle unwanted food surpluses, prevent overproduction, and reduce excess food supply (Papargyropoulou et al., 2014). This approach requires exploring endogenous resources, which play a critical role in providing integrative experiences that showcase their authenticity and genuineness (Rodrigues et al., 2022).

Educating the end consumer is crucial to effectively reduce food waste, as they are responsible for a significant portion of waste throughout the food chain. This reduction relies on clear and effective communication between consumers and other stakeholders, such as institutions and organizations (Richter and Bokelmann, 2016). By embracing all these elements, companies can analyze and streamline their production processes while also educating their consumers about the importance of sustainable food practices.

Higgins-Desbiolles et al (2019) argue that sustainable restaurants should be thinking more holistically. The SRA model was founded in 2009 in the United Kingdom and describes three main intervention areas: sourcing, society, and environment. Regarding sourcing, they encourage restaurants to support environmentally positive

farming, use local and seasonal food, source sustainable fish, use ethical meat and dairy, and engage with fairly traded products. The facet of society suggests good community engagement, treating people fairly (staff, suppliers, and customers), and promoting healthy eating. and engaging in responsible marketing. The environment refers to water-saving, workplace resources, supply chain practices, waste management, and energy efficiency (Higgins-Desbiolles et al, 2019).

In a systematic review of sustainability in the restaurant sector, Higgins-Desbiolles et al (2019) concluded that studies need to re-engage with the evolving conceptualisation of sustainability to ensure that they undertake best practice responses to changing requirements. The narrow focus on green dining and ecological aspects of sustainability featured in restaurants does not acknowledge the full meaning of sustainability and can compromise a more sustainable future. Moreover, Higgins-Desbiolles et al (2019) argue that researchers could move away from terminology such as “green dining” and “eco-friendly” focused on ecological aspects to an SRA model of sustainability.

Therefore, this study aims to characterize good sustainable, and circular practices in the restaurant sector. We start presenting the methodology, main results, and discussion and conclusions.

3. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach, through semi-structured interviews with key informants from the restaurant sector who stand out from their counterparts in applying good CE and sustainability practices. In doing so, we aim to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the current reality of the sector in Portugal. Our goal is to explore sustainable and circular practices within the restaurant industry while investigating the role of locally sourced products in reducing food waste. To gather data, we will be relying on primary sources, which are crucial for this type of research. As Hennick et al. (2020) note, qualitative research provides a broad approach that allows researchers to delve into people's experiences in detail through methods such as in-depth interviews. This approach enables us to gain insights from the perspective of study participants and to understand the various interpretations and meanings they assign to behaviour, events, or objects. By embracing and interpreting the contextual influences on research issues, qualitative research strives to achieve information depth rather than statistical representativeness by exploring each participant's experiences and views in depth (Hennick et al., 2020). Qualitative data analysis is interpretive, meaning that researchers aim to interpret the meanings that participants provide for their views and experiences (Barnham, 2015).

The interview script was meticulously crafted after conducting a thorough review of relevant literature. It not only gathered sociodemographic and professional information about the interviewees and their companies but also delved into their perspectives on various aspects of CE impact in the restaurant industry. The script was developed and fine-tuned throughout April 2023. The interviews themselves comprised fifteen open-ended questions, all about the five key themes under analysis, namely 1) suppliers and purchases, 2) menu and gastronomic offerings, 3) waste management, 4) renewable energy and water, and 5) education, awareness, and control. The sampling technique employed in this study was theoretical sampling. The process of conceptualizing the interviewee profile aimed to bring together individuals with diverse sociodemographic backgrounds, whose restaurant companies had varying structures and business models, gastronomic offerings, and target audiences, thus providing heterogeneity to the sample. We received a positive response from nine restaurant companies, which were ultimately considered as the participants in the final sample. The interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom, during May 2023, with an average duration of 60 minutes.

As previously stated, our sample is diverse, encompassing restaurants and municipal associations renowned for their commitment to sustainability. Out of the 9 companies interviewed, 2 are collective catering businesses, 1 is a quick service restaurant, 4 are casual service restaurants, and 2 are municipal business associations. Of the entire sample, 3 participating companies have been focused on CE and sustainability concerns for over 25 years, while 2 have been doing so for more than 10 years. The remaining 4 have been pursuing these goals for less than 5 years, and they happen to be smaller companies, specifically those classified as casual service restaurants. The interviewees' involvement in their respective organizations varies, with 4 of them serving as owners or partners of the companies. The sample also includes a Health, Safety, and Environment Director, an Impact and Communications Lead, a Biowaste Prevention Expert, a Project Manager, and an Operations Manager.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach. This involved identifying and examining patterns, or themes, in the qualitative data sets. According to Braun & Clarke (2019), this fundamental method for qualitative study provides systematic procedures for the formulation of subcategories, categories, and themes from the content extracted in data collection. Subcategories capture interesting characteristics of

potential data relevant to answering the research question and are the smallest units of analysis. Through these units, a central idea shared between them all, the themes, emerges and provides a structure for organizing and reporting the researcher's analytical observations. The objective was to synthesize the content of the interviews and interpret the main characteristics of the data concerning the research question (Clarke and Braun, 2017). The results were then subjected to empirical saturation to define the sample size. This concept of data saturation can also be known as redundant information or the point at which no new themes or codes emerge from the results, which is frequently referred to in thematic analysis. With these considerations in mind, the results of the qualitative study were analysed and interpreted.

4. Results

Three dimensions of analysis were identified: Positioning and Branding, Circular Economy, and Product and Food Waste. By examining the intersection of these dimensions, we have uncovered insightful subcategories that provide a more focused view of the participants' viewpoints. The theme of "Positioning and Branding" (table 1) dives deep into the image projected by the major players in their respective markets regarding circular economy and sustainability within their organizations. This theme evolved from a growing awareness of the ecological impact of companies and society's need for change, as well as the emergence of sustainable thinking and the challenges encountered on this path. The theme consists of the categories of the organization's role, actions, and partnerships developed, its active presence in raising awareness among third parties, and the challenges faced and success factors for the future. The "Organization, actions, and partnerships" category examines the path taken by the companies interviewed in this new sustainability paradigm and the adjustments made to their business concepts in search of a balance of economic, environmental, and social dimensions as stated by *"And so, last year we developed the "Zero Waste Heroes" project, which already has a Gaming program with the students and which is getting more involvement, and which was considered the project of the year by a magazine, which has awards in the field of collective food and catering, and was actually considered ... we were very proud to have it as the award for 2022"* (interview 1). This category includes three subcategories: circular economy and sustainability projects, introduction to sustainability, and business models. The "Challenges and Success Factors" category reflects on the critical points necessary for implementing a circular business and highlights future perspectives as stated by *"that's what I'm saying: if people didn't absorb this new Waste Not monitoring project, it's an obligation I have from the group, if people didn't get involved it wouldn't be me (or my team, there are twelve other people) who would be able to monitor 200 units every day. In the past, I would deploy my team in certain periods when I wanted to do studies and have data and I would put them there for a month, that's one thing, now what I have this year is that every day I know what waste is happening in the units. If it weren't for the teams involved, I'd never achieve this in my life"* (interview 5). This category includes three subcategories: implementation of good practices, opportunities and problem knowledge, networking, and impact assessment. Lastly, the "Awareness" category emphasises measures taken to promote circular economy and sustainability internally and externally as we can observe in the words " *It's total, because I'll say it again, there are 100 of us at a central level and I can say that we currently have 3400 employees in the field, which means that the awareness / proximity / relevance (which I hope I've managed to convey) of the people we have ..."* (interview 9). Similarly, to the other categories, three subcategories have emerged: the ability to influence, internal communication, and external communication.

Table 1: Theme, categories, and subcategories of the "Positioning and Branding" analysis dimension

Theme	Categories	Subcategories
1. Positioning and Branding	1.1. Organization, actions, and partnerships	a) Circular Economy and Sustainability Projects
		b) Introduction to sustainability
		c) Business models
	1.2. Challenges and success factors	d) Implementation of good practices
		e) Opportunities and problem knowledge
		f) Networking
		g) Impact assessment
	1.3. Awareness	h) Ability to influence
		i) Internal communication

Theme	Categories	Subcategories
		j) External communication

The theme "Circular Economy" (table2) refers to the circular practices that the participating companies already implement in their daily operations, as well as their understanding of the circular concept and the steps they have taken towards transitioning to this behaviour. Within the "Circular Economy" category, leading professionals in this field shared their thoughts on the concept and benefits associated with the circular economy, giving insight into the process as stated *"For me, the circular economy is about no unnecessary waste, .. "* (interview 3). The "Resource Management" category was a popular subject in the nine interviews conducted, with five subcategories focused on how resources such as water, energy, waste, and packaging are used and monitored in the restaurant's day-to-day operations, as we can observe by *"we continue to recycle our oils, we continue to valorize the oils and, therefore, the oil that we valorize and transform into biodiesel, we sell that biodiesel and donate the money from that biodiesel to the Foundation. We are talking about an average of €500-750,000 a year. It's the recovery of that waste that comes out of our kitchens, that oil is €750,000/year, it has been for more than ten years, but it hasn't always been €750,000, then it also has to do with the volume, which has been growing over the years and, on average last year, €750,000 was donated to the Foundation"* (interview 2). Lastly, the "Transition" category explored the shift from a linear economy to a circular economy, examining how companies are adapting and the impact on the environment and stakeholders as stated by "*Of course there are accidents, we're a volume restaurant and it's normal for there to be accidents, like spilling the glass, but we thought about it and we tested it in the early days, in the early days, a lot of mopping, a lot of spilled glasses because the customer will take the tray with the lid off and the glass will be full, plus the ice, but today our customer has got used to it and we've migrated: we've removed the lids from our glasses, so in our lounges the drinks no longer have glasses"* (interview 8). This category was divided into subcategories including the recentness of the concern, the change of mentalities, and the stakeholder involved.

Table 2: Theme, categories, and subcategories of the "Circular Economy" analysis dimension

Theme	Categories	Subcategories
2. Circular Economy	2.1. Circularity	k) Concept
		l) Benefits
	2.2. Resource management	m) Water management
		n) Energy management
		o) Waste Management
		p) Packaging and conditioning
	2.3. Transition	q) Recentness of the concern
		r) Process
		s) Change of mentalities
		t) Stakeholders

The theme of "Product and Food Waste" (table 3) exposes the participants' concerns regarding the reduction of waste in the food industry. This involves careful selection of suppliers, designing offers, and implementing waste minimization strategies in restaurant companies. The theme is divided into three categories: suppliers and raw materials, food waste minimization, and gastronomic offers. The "Suppliers and raw materials" category explores various aspects related to food resource supply in restaurants. They have been looking for suppliers that guarantee the highest quality of raw materials while adhering to sustainability practices **as stated by "***I think there's still a long way to go. I think we are lucky enough to work with excellent suppliers who meet all the requirements, but in this area, perhaps more specifically sustainability, I think there is still a long way to go for many potential suppliers***" (interview 6)**. The category has four subcategories, namely: quality, typology, products, and limitations. The primary goal of transitioning to a circular economy in a restaurant is to minimize food waste. When talking about food waste, we are not just talking about what is not consumed and goes to waste, but rather the entire associated process that led to this moment. This reduction can be carried out both upstream, on the production side, and the way the raw material is handled, and downstream, in the proper routing of food scraps. To this end, minimizing food waste involves controlling the waste process from production to disposal. The "Minimizing food waste" category arises from three subcategories: production and confection, food surplus, and monitoring **as referred by "***So we don't have plating like in a restaurant, where I*

add another spoonful of rice, one less spoonful of rice, serve very little, serve very little. What we have that I think is also very interesting and that people sometimes don't know about: we have the portions as they are: whether it's the normal menu, or the large menu, the portion is always the same, the weight is always the same, the amount of potatoes is always the same." **(interview 1).** The "Gastronomic Offer" category emerged from three subcategories: type of menu, food options, and nutritional balance. This category highlights the best practices designed by restaurants that promote conscious consumption and minimize food waste through innovative food solutions and menu options. Many companies are making strides toward promoting healthier eating habits by offering more balanced and diverse menus. This reflects their commitment to sustainability and prioritizing the health and well-being of their customers. These efforts include incorporating options with less fat and salt, as well as providing a wider range of nutritious choices. An example of this category is *"the balance. We have fruit and vegetables and carrots. We have, within our portfolio, mostly burgers and potatoes, but we also have less salad because I can't eat a burger every day and, therefore, our work in terms of that balance you were talking about or that care with the issue of food, which is also a very expensive subject for us, not least because we always live with the stigma of fast food and bad, unhealthy food, which is why I said we will never be a healthy food company, we will always be a restaurant of variety and balance, because it is possible to eat in a balanced way. The salad menu is accompanied by soup and I can swap my fries for soup and eat the menu and my burger, and I can order a natural burger without sauce. So the story that you can't eat healthy is no longer true."* (interview 1).

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Table 3: Theme, categories, and subcategories of the "Product and Food Waste" analysis dimension

Theme	Categories	Subcategories
3. Product and Food Waste	3.1. Suppliers and raw materials	u) Quality
		v) Typology
		w) Products
		x) Limitations
	3.2. Minimizing food waste	y) Production and preparation
		z) Food surplus
		aa) Monitoring
	3.3. Gastronomic Offer	bb) Type of menu
		cc) Food options
		dd) Nutritional balance

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Our study has identified good sustainable and circular practices that are currently being implemented in restaurants. Our participants highlighted the crucial role of a strong brand positioning for the development of these practices within organizations. Our research focuses on the concept of CE, which aims to operate without waste, saving resources, and acting in harmony with the biosphere. The CE concept involves closed material and energy circuits that encourage the use of resources in the economy, moving away from the traditional linear economic model. As Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013) defined CE is an economic system that transforms goods that have reached the end of their useful life into resources for other purposes, keeping these resources in the cycle for as long as possible, closing cycles in industrial ecosystems, minimizing waste, and optimizing the use of resources. Despite the benefits that a CE-based system can provide to organizations, the lack of familiarity and fear of the unknown has made it challenging for this term to gain traction in companies and administrations. However, we assure you that the long-term benefits of implementing circular practices outweigh the initial costs. Ministries, local authorities, associations, federations, fraternities, chefs, and higher education institutions play a pivotal role in encouraging the adoption of circular practices in the restaurant sector. Our study highlights the need for the development of systems that go beyond the traditional linear economic models, using closed material and energy circuits that encourage the use of resources in the economy. Although it may involve major structural changes throughout the entire supply chain and require high extra costs for training employees and implementing technological infrastructure, the benefits of adopting circular practices are significant.

In conclusion, adopting circular practices can help your organization move towards a more sustainable and circular economic model. By embracing the CE concept, we can minimize waste, optimize the use of resources, and operate in harmony with the biosphere. It is time to take the necessary steps towards a more sustainable and circular future.

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Covid-19 Impact on Future Study Choices: Will Students Consider a Tourism Qualification Post Pandemic?

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Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic devastated various industries, with the tourism sector suffering the most. The tourism industry, which relies mainly on the movement of people, was interrupted for several months as governments instituted restrictions and regulations to prevent further spread of the virus. These restrictions put the industry at a standstill, putting much strain on the economy. With businesses closing, many people became unemployed, and those who remained had their salaries and wages reduced. The high unemployment rate in the country, worsened by Covid-19 and other external forces, presented challenges to exit-level tourism students. The current study investigated the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the future of studying towards a tourism management qualification. A qualitative research approach was adopted where the exit-level tourism students at a university of technology were purposively selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. Thematic and constant comparative analysis methods were used to analyse the emerging themes and compare the responses from the participants. The study revealed mixed feelings about the tourism management course. While others regretted enrolling to the tourism program, some remained optimistic that the industry would reopen and recover and present better opportunities for them. Prospective tourism industry staff, particularly tourism management students, have become uncertain about the likelihood of getting job opportunities in the industry. This raises a question about how the pandemic has influenced the future of studying tourism management in higher learning institutions. The study contributes to the understudied phenomenon of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on influencing future enrolments in tourism courses.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic; Curriculum Development; Social Learning Theory; Qualification Choice

1. Introduction

The year 2019 was punctuated by the eruption of the stubborn and ferocious Covid-19 pandemic which to say the least, halted all travel and business operations into the year 2021 (Gossling et al., 2020; Makuzva & Mabaleka, 2021; Makuzva & Ntloko, 2022). All the industries in the world suffered the defeat from the notorious Covid-19, however, the tourism sector – a travel-reliant industry suffered the most from the pandemic and the travel restrictions that were instituted by various governments (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020, Fakir & Bharat, 2021). The travel restrictions such as national and international lockdowns were deemed to be the solution to curb the rapid spread of the pandemic (Fakir & Bharat, 2021), thus, in a way unintentionally destroying the once famous and ever-growing travel and tourism industry. In the South African context, many people were working in the tourism industry, however, with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, several tourism businesses closed down, multitudes of people became unemployed, and those who remained working had their salaries and wages massively reduced (Bama & Nyikana, 2021). Undoubtedly, exit-level students (those students in their final year and who were about to join the tourism industry from 2020) witnessed all these events unfolding. South Africa also already has a serious unemployment crisis (Anakpo & Kollamparambil, 2022), and with the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbating the situation by decimating the travel and tourism industry, one would ponder on how the tourism exit-level students viewed this conundrum. Given this background, the current study investigated the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the future of studying towards a tourism management qualification.

2. Literature Review

Despite a considerable amount of literature (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020; Abbas et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2022) on the impacts of Covid-19 on the tourism industry, its effect on the future studying towards a tourism qualification is highly overlooked (Tiwari et al., 2020). This could be reinforced by the fact that more focus is glued on the impacts affecting the industry alone (Ali et al., 2017) whenever a threatening external factor arises, thereby neglecting the fact that tourism is also a field of study that can be influenced by the external factors (Seraphin & Yallop, 2020). Some scholars (Ali et al., 2017; Camargo & Gretzel, 2017; Hales & Jennings, 2017) posit that the events taking place in the industry have resulted in the redesigning of the curriculum and new

pedagogic in tourism studies. Thus, Tiwari et al. (2020:1) attest that there is a mutual relationship between what is taking place in the industry and the education system. This reciprocal assimilation between the tourism industry and the studying of tourism at higher learning institutions such as the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) could be influenced by the events taking place in the tourism industry which in turn may shift the view of the industry from the students who are about to get in the crippled industry by the Covid-19 pandemic. From a learning perspective, Tiwari et al. (2021:4) submit that "tourism education provision follows the trend in the industry." Learning is defined as "a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning" (Ambrose et al., 2010:3). This school of thought (Ambrose et al., 2010) further argue that learning is not something done to students, but rather something students themselves do and it is the direct result of how students interpret and respond to their experiences. Bandura (1999) denotes that learning can happen through social interactions and in this case, the students could be interacting with friends and or relatives who could have their jobs interrupted or at most lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Therefore, it is fundamental to understand the trends that could influence the social learning of higher education students.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, undoubtedly, tourism had been one of the highest job-creating industries across the world, accounting for one in ten jobs globally (Meyer & Meyer, 2015). In the South African context and before the pandemic, of every twenty-two working people, one person is working in the tourism industry (StatsSA, 2018). This equally means the university students at institutes of higher learning could be directly linked to a relative or a family member who works in the tourism industry and, through the impact of the pandemic on massive job losses, could have influenced their views of this susceptible to external factors industry. To date, there is growing interest in the impacts of the pandemic on the economic and social elements and earlier studies (Ataguba, 2020; Lone & Ahmad, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; Verschuur et al., 2021; Muresherwa et al., 2022a) neglected the effects of the pandemic on the sustainability of studying tourism management during the pandemic era.

This could be a stimulating call for the redesigning of the tourism curriculum so that it blends with the current situation which is defined by the ramifications of the external forces such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Lee and Hallak (2018) support the view that the learning of tourism in higher education could propel the competitiveness of the industry, however, in a situation like the Covid-19 pandemic where students can socially learn from the practical consequences of the fragility of the industry at home, the sustainability of this program could have been impacted at higher learning institutions. Tiwari et al. (2020:5) reinstate that "tourism education must evolve at the same pace as the industry." This could be true considering the normal way of doing things, but, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a gap between the teachings at higher education and the practice taking place in the industry and students may opt to follow the practical ramifications of the pandemic thereby influencing negatively on the future enrolment of this course at institutes of higher learning. This gives this study the impetus to investigate the perspectives of exit-level students on studying tourism management based on the Covid-19 pandemic situation that has shrouded and marauded the tourism industry. The perspectives of the exit-level students could provide the department of tourism and events management at institutes of higher learning like CPUT with fundamental information which could assist in assessing the sustainability of this course. Hence, this study, therefore, seeks to close this understudied phenomenon.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Social Learning Theory (SLT) which was proposed by Bandura in 1971. The theory is rooted on the premise that the decisions individuals make are influenced by social behaviour (Bandura, 1971). Guided by the SLT, it can be predicted that just like any other industry affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, the perspectives of the exit-level students could have been shifted based on the social interaction with the people who are or were working in the industry and lost their jobs as well as the daily news about the Covid-19 pandemic and how it brought the tourism industry to a complete halt. Therefore, the SLT (further developed to Social Learning Cognitive Theory (SLCT) (Bandura, 1999) fits neatly in this study as it entails that learning occurs through social interactions which then result in imitating and modelling of the observed behaviour of others (Nabavi, 2012:5). Green and Peil (2009) argue that the SLT "provides a framework for understanding, predicting and changing human behaviour." This theory assists in providing the foundation into the understanding of the behaviour or attitude of students may have towards a certain qualification, is shaped by the experiences they directly or indirectly come across during the social interaction period. Therefore, the SLT was used as a guide to aid the understanding of the views of exit-level tourism management students in influencing future students to

study this course which could lead to the sustainability of this program at institutes of higher such as CPUT. The following section, therefore, presents the methodology that was deployed in this study.

3. Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative descriptive design (Kim et al., 2017) was conducted in this study as it provides candid descriptions of experiences as well as participants' perceptions (Sandelowski, 2010). The study on how the Covid-19 pandemic affected how a selected academic qualification is perceived by exit-level students has not been well researched, thus adopting a qualitative descriptive approach was considered practical especially that there is little known about the topic (McCombes, 2019; Doyle, 2020). In addition, the authors chose the descriptive design for its ability to acknowledge the subjective nature of the problem as well as recognise the diverse experiences of the participants (Bradshaw et al., 2017). In this study, the researchers were concerned with understanding individual students' experiences in the unique Covid-19 context.

3.1 Sampling Method

Most qualitative research adheres to the non-probability sampling methodology, and descriptive research is not an exception to this rule (Doyle, 2020). In most cases, purposive sampling is the main method of choice for descriptive research, and a variety of approaches for purposive sampling have been outlined (Palinkas et al., 2015). As a component of the sampling framework, many researchers make use of a variety of methods such as convenience, opportunistic, or snowball sampling (Doyle, 2020; Madziva & Chinouya, 2022; Muresherwa et al., 2022b). Exit-level students enrolled for the Advanced Diploma in Tourism Management qualification at a university of technology who were available and willing to participate in the study were virtually interviewed.

3.2 Research Instruments and Ethical Consideration

The participants in the interviews gave their informed consent before any of the interviews were carried out. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic and difficulty in getting students onto campus or to suitable venue(s) for a face-to-face interview, online platforms which included Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate Ultra were used to virtually connect with the study participants. The issues that were discovered through the literature study served as the basis for a list of questions that guided the semi-structured interviews. The protocol for the interview comprised of open-ended questions that provided the interviewer with the opportunity to probe, or clarify, and to examine the unique areas of knowledge or expertise of the study participants. The primary goal of the interview schedule was to gain a better understanding of how exit-level students enrolled on an Advanced Diploma qualification perceive studying towards a tourism qualification especially in the face of the Covid-19 crisis which devastated the global tourism industry. Each of the responses is denoted by the letter 'R,' as well as a specific number that serves to differentiate each individual respondent from the others. Using letters to identify or categorise the study participants was done to protect the respondents' confidentiality throughout the entirety of the research process. The study was approved by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology's Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development in July 2021.

3.3 Data Collection

Sandelowski (2000) notes that data collection methods in descriptive research are diverse and usually aim to determine what, who and where of phenomena under investigation. Although most semi-structured qualitative interviews are conducted in a face-to-face setting (Kim et al., 2017), the contemporary world has seen several tools and online applications developed to permit data collection from any part of the globe. Researchers are increasingly turning to telephone and online methods because of their increased adaptability, lower costs, and simplicity of use for both participants and researchers (Doyle, 2020). Additional advantages include maximising variety sampling and examining experiences from a national or worldwide perspective.

3.4 Data Analysis

Most qualitative studies rely on content and thematic analysis to make sense of the collected data. In the current study, the researchers used thematic analysis which provides a more purely qualitative account of the gathered data, which in most cases, is richer and more detailed (Doyle, 2020). The collected data were recorded, transcribed, and later loaded onto AtlasTI software to assist with the analysis. In trying to get more insights from the data, the researchers had to first sort the collected data (transcriptions) based on the level of detail provided from each question that the participants were asked. Some comments and reflections from the interviews were

inserted to assist in providing meaning to the data (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). Through consistent checking of the interview transcripts and comparisons of those transcripts to voice recordings and comments (notes) made during the interviews, every effort was made to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. The researchers went on to closely examine the data, identifying similar phrases, patterns, emerging themes, and associations of these themes (Howitt, 2019).

In interpreting the data, the researchers followed Sandeklwoski (2010)'s suggestion of carefully examining the 'un-interpreted' participant's quotations to help answer the study questions and achieve the objectives of the study. A thematic summary of the findings was reported together with the relevant interpretations. In order to accurately convey the information obtained from the source, direct quotations were utilised throughout the discussion. These direct quotations were cautiously selected based on several factors including that they represented the general consensus or common feeling and experience among the participants or highlighted a key theme or used to illustrate key examples as gathered from the data.

4. Results and Discussion

The sample consisted of twelve exit-level students studying towards an advanced diploma in tourism management at a university of technology in South Africa. The study participants' age ranged from 21 to 30 years with more females *(n*=10), and only two males. The average age of the participants was 24.3, which is an age group that is faced with high unemployment in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Table 1 shows the profiles of the study participants. The exit-level students who participated in the study came from four of the nine South African provinces and these were Western Cape (*n*=5), Eastern Cape (*n*=3), Northern Cape (*n*=3) and Free State (*n*=1).

Table 1: Study participant profile

#R	Gender	Age	PoO in SA	Was studying TM at CPUT your first choice?	If participant have a F/R/N who works in the tourism industry
R1	F	25	Western Cape	No	No
R2	M	23	Northern Cape	No	Yes - Friend retrenched
R3	F	22	Western Cape	No	Yes - Friend retrenched
R4	F	22	Eastern Cape	No	Yes - People lost jobs
R5	F	30	Northern Cape	No	Yes - Relative retrenched
R6	M	21	Eastern Cape	Yes	Yes - Friend retrenched
R7	F	26	Eastern Cape	No	Yes - Friend retrenched
R8	F	23	Western Cape	No	Yes - Friend retrenched
R9	F	22	Western Cape	No	Yes - Friend retrenched
R10	F	23	Western Cape	No	Yes - Friend contract not renewed
R11	F	30	Free State	No	Yes - People got retrenched
R12	F	25	Eastern Cape	No	Yes - Neighbour retrenched

Key: #*R=Respondent, M=Male, F=Female, PoO in SA=Province of origin in South Africa, CPUT=Cape Peninsula University of Technology, TM=Tourism Management, F/R/N=Friend, Relative or Neighbour,*
Source: Authors' construction

In trying to ascertain interest of pursuing a tourism qualification, the participants were first asked to indicate if studying towards a tourism qualification at CPUT was their first-choice study program. Nearly all the participants indicated that tourism was not their first-choice study program with only one (R6) who enrolled on the program since it was the one the student wanted to pursue. The first qualifications of choice which the participants had selected despite finally registering for a tourism course were: Education, Nursing, Dental Technology, Hospitality Management (R6 & R12, though it has linkages to tourism), Filming, Political Studies, and Public Administration. To find out if the participants had a better understanding of Covid-19 challenges on the tourism industry and its people, it was considered worthwhile to ascertain if they were associated with anyone working in the tourism industry (either a close friend or relative or even a neighbour). Association with someone whose industry had been shuttered by the effects of Covid-19 would thus bring more insights since the participants could have witnessed the impact closely through either stories or personal observations. Apart from (R1), all the study participants confirmed that they knew or had someone close to them who works in the tourism industry, a sector that was severely affected by the pandemic. This showed that the challenges brought by Covid-19 were

witnessed closely by most of the participants and could have influenced their attitude towards a tourism qualification and even their propensity to recommend it to any future applicants.

The researchers further enquired how these relatives, friends, family, and anyone known to participants were affected by Covid-19. The responses converged to loss of jobs through retrenchments, downsizing of companies, as well as some, getting their salaries reduced as companies' strategies to survive and recover from the devastation. The following are some of the excerpts which emanated from the interviews showing how different people known by participants were affected by the pandemic.

> *"… I do have a neighbour back at home who is a hotel manager was not retrenched but their salary was seriously cut."* ([R12] - 25-year-old female from the Eastern Cape)
>
> *"… I know a couple of people who were retrenched, and some their contracts were not renewed"* ([R11] - 30-year-old female from the Free State)
>
> *"… a friend was retrenched due to Covid because the company was downsizing"* ([R10] - 23-year-old female from the Western Cape)
>
> *"… some of my classmates got retrenched"* ([R2] - 23-year-old male from the Northern Cape)

Since the beginning of the lockdown (from March 2020 in South Africa) caused by Covid-19, many business owners were forced to make challenging choices in order to ensure their companies' continued existence. The strain placed on a company's financial resources tops the list of challenges that can be experienced by small and medium firms, as well as by large corporations. Several business owners considered retrenchment while others laid off staff since there was no travel taking place. These decisions left thousands of people without jobs especially those in the tourism sector, an industry that relies heavily on the movement of people and was considered to be one of the super-spreaders of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The researchers also wanted to understand how the situation in the tourism industry (caused by the Covid-19 pandemic) influenced the participant's learning towards a tourism qualification. The responses to this varied and was expressed emotionally with the students remaining 'hopeful' and 'optimistic' that this would come to pass. Those who took the 'optimistic stance' continued to support the tourism management qualification and taking advantage of the new learning modalities introduced to permit teaching and learning to continue. One participant (R1) who did not have any close associate working in the industry remarked, *"… the tourism industry has been heavily hit by the coronavirus, but despite this … my goal is still towards finishing my qualification via online learning/virtual sessions"* an indication and belief of the resilience nature of the tourism industry (Prayag, 2020; Ntounis et al., 2022). One participant felt 'discouraged' about the situation, and in her narration, one could see the frustration and an element of 'regret' as illustrated in the following quotation:

> *"… at first, it was very discouraging, especially at the beginning of the lockdown because the tourism industry was facing its worst stage because of the outbreak of Covid-19 … it seemed like you're studying for something that doesn't exist anymore … So, it feels like oh my goodness, why am I studying for this tourism course during this worst period. This did influence my learning and of course my attitude towards studying the tourism course. At this stage, I would ask myself, what is going to happen since people can't travel…"* ([R3] - 22-year-old female from the Western Cape)

Reflecting on the negative impact Covid-19 had on studying towards a tourism qualification, another student made the following remark:

> *"… the current situation is that Covid-19 has impacted the tourism industry a lot due to travel restrictions. Hotels, restaurants, travel agents, airlines and tour operators are closed due to Covid-19. For us tourism students we are regretting studying the tourism course because of the current situation"* ([R7] - 26-year-old female from the Eastern Cape)

While others got discouraged especially that they did not know when travel was going to resume, some were concerned with their studies. Adapting to online learning modality was a new thing to both instructors and students and presented several challenges which included the process of transitioning from face-to-face to online learning which required a lot of time and resources. More time needed to be devoted to quickly adapt as well as resource challenges (devices and data) to effectively continue with the teaching and learning journey. One participant (R8) found it difficult to change from the traditional teaching and learning modality the newly way that resulted from Covid-19 effects. Others found the 'new normal' bringing in opportunities and

entrepreneurial skills in people, mainly with the online way of operating. The following excerpts captured some of the participants' feelings were regarding the Covid-19 situation:

While one respondent shared the view that:

> *"… it was very hard to adapt to online learning, especially now that I am doing my fourth year, but I don't know most of my classmates. It's so sad what's going on in the industry and makes me think about my future in the tourism industry"* ([R8] - 23-year-old female from the Western Cape)

Another respondent echoed the same sentiment highlighting difficulties associated with virtual learning modality and the effects of the pandemic presented to the industry:

> *"… It is a bit challenging as the industry is currently dead, and you are still studying for something you not so sure about getting a job. Also, to concentrate while attending sessions online is a bit of a challenge compared to when it is face-to-face."* ([R12] - 25-year-old female from the Eastern Cape)

Meanwhile, one respondent saw the whole episode presented by the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity for creativity and innovation and stated that:

> *"… my main aim is not all about getting a job but learning how the industry is all about and the pandemic has also contributed in people to think outside the box as they are starting to open small businesses. So, towards learning it has been okay as I had to do things online"* ([R11] - 30-year-old female from the Free State)

The study revealed how the Covid-19 pandemic affected exit-level students and their perceptions about the tourism management qualification. From the study, it was apparent that some showed 'inability to cope' with the Covid-19 situation, resulting to a feeling of 'regret'. While there were also those who felt 'discouraged and hopeless', some displayed 'mixed views' about what was happening. There were those who remained 'hopeful and optimistic' and would encourage others to still consider enrolling towards a tourism qualification. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected not only the tourism industry but academic institutions particularly those offering tourism qualifications since the way these courses are viewed by students could have changed. It is important to note that when students learn, they usually learn from those closer to them, their social circles (Senior & Howard, 2014). As a result of this, the changes that happens in any environment have the power to influence perceptions regarding a phenomenon. In this light, when students witness how people have been affected by the impact of the pandemic, it influences how they would pursue the hard-hit industries and qualifications that prepares people for such industries. Consequently, the propensity to either recommend or not recommend would depend on how the phenomenon is perceived by the participant.

4.1 Limitations

The current qualitative research study relied on the experiences and perceptions of exit-level students pursuing a qualification in an area which has seen much devastation because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the findings in the present study are only applicable to the contexts where the study was undertaken, and the views and perceptions are those of the limited number of participants. Nevertheless, the findings of this study should not be generalised but serve to provide insights into the reality perceived by exit-level students as a result of the pandemic which affected the tourism and hospitality industry. It is thus advisable to expand on this study in different contexts and use different research methods which could improve understanding of the phenomenon.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The Covid-19 pandemic non-selectively affected several industries in many ways and the institutions of higher learning were also not spared. With the serious ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic noted in the tourism industry, its effects also spread to the way students perceive the benefits of pursuing a qualification in tourism management. As noted from the SLT and the study results, people acquire knowledge from their social circles and the same goes on for university students who study to secure job opportunities or run a business after their studies. Consequently, the events that take place in the industry environment have a direct influence on the way students view certain qualifications especially if the qualification sits in the industry like tourism which is susceptible to the external factors. Therefore, if the industry is more prone to external forces such as the Covid-19 pandemic, it negatively influences the propensity to recommend the qualification to anyone hence, affecting the sustainability of the course especially in developing countries where the effects of the pandemic were severe.

Despite the catastrophic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in the higher education sector, it is also noted that an opportunity to explore online learning as a teaching and learning modality emerged. The virtual teaching and learning modality have been embraced post the pandemic by institutes of higher learning. Higher education institutions continue to address the challenges related to this learning modality through providing students with data and devices that enable the learning process to continue.

The results of this study also imply that, instead of teaching the students to become job seekers, focus should also be on equipping students with entrepreneurial skills that enable them to own and run their businesses. Therefore, this calls for the redesign and alignment of the tourism course curriculum to allow a better transition into industry and business. Moreover, as this study was only conducted from a qualitative viewpoint, a quantitative study of this nature could be undertaken, and the results be compared with the qualitative outcomes. This could provide a holistic understanding of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on teaching and learning at institutions of higher learning. Lastly, as this study was only conducted in one department, a similar study could be undertaken in other academic departments to establish the extent of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on students' learning process post the pandemic.

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Developing and Managing Tourism in the Post Covid-19 Era: Perceptions from Hotel Industry Professionals in Cyprus

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Abstract: As in any other part of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on tourism in the south-eastern island of Cyprus. Indeed, in a turbulent environment with many challenges that Cyprus' tourism had to face, such as loss of competitiveness, monoculture of tourism, unplanned development, human resources management issues, etc., the pandemic was considered the most significant, that not only led to the halt of tourism activity – and hence, the partial collapse of the industry - for many months, but also brought into the surface several chronic structural problems of the island's hospitality business, in terms of management. This paper seeks to examine how the tourism sector and more specifically, hotel enterprises in Cyprus handled the crisis and its consequences. To collect the data, exploratory research was utilised through the form of document scanning as well as face-to-face in-depth interviews with representatives of five-star hotels in Cyprus. Findings revealed that the greatest challenge that hotels in Cyprus needed to face during the pandemic era, was the high degree of uncertainty. All respondents stressed the role of the government and its support and emphasized the cooperation between the public and private sectors on the island. The results of the study would be useful for hotel managers to reduce the immediate impact of the crisis and support the long-term recovery of their operations and expansion, of Cyprus tourism, in a sustainable manner.

Keywords: Cyprus Tourism, Crisis Management Strategies, Covid-19 Pandemic, Hotel Industry

1. Introduction

As in any other parts of the world, COVID19 pandemic had a huge impact on tourism in the South-Eastern Island of Cyprus. Indeed, in a turbulent environment with many challenges that Cyprus' tourism had to face, such as loss of competitiveness, monoculture of tourism, unplanned development, human resources management issues, etc., the pandemic was considered as the most significant, that not only led to the halt of tourism activity – and hence, the partial collapse of the industry for many months - but also brought into the surface several chronic structural problems of the island's hospitality business, in terms of management.

The pandemic crisis was a representative example of a (tourism) system's distraction, that necessitated the re-order and organization of the tourism sector of Cyprus and at the same time highlighted the chaotic characteristics and transformation of the complex tourism mechanisms (Boukas & Ziakas, 2014). That means that despite the current recovery of the Cypriot tourism sector and its pertinent industries such as hospitality and hotels, the shock and wounds of the tourism sector on the island are still evident, while the recent Russian-Ukrainian war and its consequences in European economic and social fabric, affected even more this situation. In this respect, there is a need for understanding how destinations, such as Cyprus, can deal with the consequences. To do so, it is imperative to examine how several industries of tourism, in this case hotels, perceived the crisis and is impacts and the ways that the latent have been addressed their (crises) consequences on their business activity.

This paper seeks to examine at how the tourism sector and more specifically, hotel enterprises in Cyprus handled the crisis and its consequences. For doing so, it assessed the impact of the pandemic on the overall operation of the island's hotel industry, as well as whether the general perception of the hotel managers/owners has changed due to the new circumstances created by the pandemic. The evaluation has been carried out at hotels in a number of cities in Cyprus. The findings would be useful for hotel managers in order to reduce the immediate impact of the crisis and support the long-term recovery.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Tourism and Crises

Tourism is a key component of development and growth in many countries. Nonetheless, despite its remarkable financial strength and apparent resilience, it is often vulnerable to various internal and external disturbances such as economic recessions, natural disasters, epidemics or international conflicts (Boukas & Ziakas, 2013;

Sönmez, et al, 1999). Tourists' decisions and the choice of a tourist destination are influenced by personal and shared perceptions of security, which are often fuelled by images and information in the media about the tourist destination. Health crises, such as epidemics, receive negative coverage and exposure graphic images in the media (Novelli et al, 2018). As such, crises may have a serious impact on the perceived image of the destination as safety plays an important role in the decision-making process of the tourist.

Indeed, according to the UNWTO, safety is a significant determinant for the quality of tourism. Therefore, to offer quality tourism experiences, tourism destinations must adopt practices and strategies that promote the safety and well-being of visitors (UNWTO, 2021). The safety of a tourist destination is affected by negative events such as various types of crises and their impacts (Som et al, 2015). In order, to address these crises effectively, there is a need for the proper definition of crises and crises management.

In these lines, the Institute for Crisis Management (ICM, 2021) defines a crisis as any issue, problem or disorder that may bring negative reactions of an organization's shareholders and which can affect its reputation, operation and financial condition organization. Crises can be any situation that may be threating for people and cause several disruptions in the proper business activity of organisations and destinations, affecting this way the working environment, and in this respect, cause negative publicity for the organisations/destinations. Pauchant & Mitroff (1992) claim that a crisis is a disturbance which naturally affects a system and its components and threatens its basic premises. In addition, Faulkner (2013) defines the crisis as some action or failure to act which interferes with an organisation’s function and thus, affecting the achievement of its goals and sustainability. It can also have detrimental effects on its stakeholders (employees, customers, management).

Crises include an important level of uncertainty and for this reason, their categorisation is not easy. For instance, according to Rosenthal and Kouzmin (1993), crises can be categorised as man-made or technological and natural catastrophes. In the same lines, Rike (2003) complements with another category, social crises. Further, Faulkner (2013) considers that the main distinction, between a situation that can be called a "crisis" and a situation that can called as "catastrophe", is the extent to which this situation can attributed to the organisation itself, or can be described as originating from abroad environment of the organisation. Thus a "crisis" describes a situation where the basic cause of an event is, to some extent, self-inflicted from within the organization. Problems such as inadequate management structures and practices or failure to fast adaptation to change, while a disaster can be defined as a situation where a business faces sudden unforeseeable disruptive changes for which it has little control (Miller & Ritchie, 2003). In any case, crises are important challenges that necessitate the direct response of management and tourism policy. Poor management of a crisis can further increase costs and make them worse problems faced by the organisation.

2.2 Crisis Management’s Necessity for Tourism

Crisis management is an important part of modern business. The knowledge and the preparedness of a company's management for a possible crisis plays a crucial role in the prevention and successful management of crises during and after the occurrence of a crisis (Bilić et al., 2017). Sonmez et al., (1999) emphasize that every tourist destination should include one crisis management plan in its planning, marketing and tourism management.

In terms of crisis management’s effectiveness, Tew et al. (2008) suggest that there are few reports specifically stating whether the strategic management will prevent or not a crisis. Despite this, there is general acceptance that the strategic management processes will help an organisation (or destination) to cope effectively to the changes that a crisis will cause. This is something imperative for tourism as, as mentioned, crises may affect the perceived image of the destination.

According to Bundy et al. (2016) there are the following three stages in crisis management:

a. The prevention stage before the crisis, which includes the preparedness of an organisation to face a crisis.
b. The crisis management stage, which includes the actions taken by organisation to deal with the crisis.
c. The post-crisis stage which includes the process learning from the crisis and what opportunities were created as well as the impact in the organization's external environment.

Ritchie (2004) proposed a more “holistic” strategic approach to crisis management, which you capture in three phases:

1. Proactive pre-crisis planning, that deals with the activities prior any crisis and is preventive in nature,
2. Implementation of the strategy during the actual crisis,
3. Rating and feedback, that concentrates on the activities after the crisis.

The authors suggest that every organisation should create a manual crisis management, with defined roles and tasks in the event of a crisis, which could act as a manual for dealing with a crisis. Rittichainuwat (2013) emphasized the importance of crisis management role in tourism marketing where a written crisis management plan is viewed positively as management's commitment to protects their guests (Zamoum & Gorpe, 2018).

Towards this direction, another determinant that can be considered as crucial in crisis management is the process of communication. The communication response of an organisation during a crisis can minimise and even improve damage to an organisation's reputation and image (Coombs, 2007). Crisis communication represents an important part of each crisis situation and gives the picture of crisis management, before, during and after the end of a crisis (Bilić et al, 2017).

2.3 The Crisis of Covid-19 for Tourism: the Case of Cyprus

The pandemic of Covid-19 is widely recognised as a global crisis, but it has also impacted the tourism industry in a variety of ways. It has had a devastating impact on people around the world, leading to political, economic and social shifts at the societal level and making everyday life more challenging (Baum & Hai, 2020). In terms of tourism, throughout the pandemic era, there have been closures of cultural centres and attractions in numerous locations, postponements or cancellations of sporting and artistic events, restrictions on access to beaches and national parks, and temporary closures of eateries, cafes, bars, and other entertainment/hospitality venues (Baum & Hai, 2020).

Travellers who had to cancel their vacation plans due to the limitations, quarantines, or social separation have attempted to recoup money related to such reservations. Most of these refund attempts have not gone well, and these unpleasant situations have been broadcasted on websites, social media platforms, and blogs, among other locations where a large audience saw them, creating this way negative publicity. Additionally, as more and more tourists were looking for alternative forms of tourism, such as virtual events, parties, festivals, events, food organisations, and visits, the demand for e-tourism on digital and virtual platforms has also grown (Sigala, 2020) challenging further the competition among destinations and tourist enterprises.

In terms of hotels, Demir et al, (2021) studied the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Turkish hotel industry and evaluated the views of hotel managers. The results revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic affected hotel businesses economically, socially and psychologically. Employees in the tourism sector may also have experienced personal repercussions from the pandemia. According to Kaushal and Srivastava (2020), the most prevalent negative consequences on employees include problems with their working lives, emotions of pessimism, anxiety relating to their jobs, demoralisation from uncertainty, and dread of disease. Hotel companies modified their human resources strategies during Covid-19. An unavoidable scenario has emerged for hotel enterprises as a result of implementation strategies like unpaid leave for staff, firing existing employees, and refraining from hiring new hires (Lai & Wong, 2020). To save costs and improve employee health, hotel companies have encouraged workers in some departments—such as reservations, accounting, and human resources—to work from home during the pandemic. It appears that this preference is still relevant in the wake of the pandemic (Hao, Xiao & Chon, 2020) and was met in various destinations, including Cyprus.

Regarding Cyprus tourism, since 2015, the tourism industry on the island has been growing at a fast and steady pace, in line with the international trends. Over the last five years, the tourism sector has seen unprecedented growth and re-establishment as a crucial component of the local economy, facilitated by large investments in tourism infrastructure and record-breaking annual visitor arrivals. From an economic perspective, the four million tourist visits in 2019 (mostly from the UK and Russia) generated direct revenue of €2.7 billion, or 12.2 percent of nominal GDP, according to the Cyprus Statistical Service (2022). Nearly 30,000 people were working in the sector at the busiest time of the year (PWC, 2020).

Tourist arrivals increased by 65,3% and reached 3.201.080 in 2022 compared to 1.936.931 in 2021. In 2020 tourist arrivals were estimated at 631.609 (Figure1).

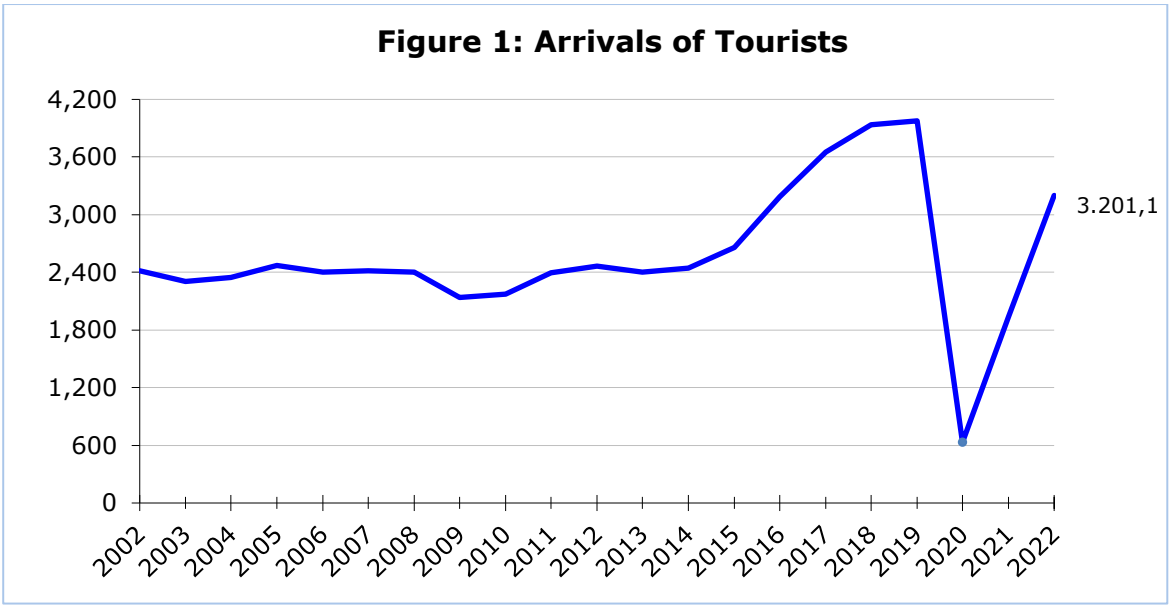

Figure 1: Arrivals of Tourists

Source: Cyprus Statistical Service (2022)

Due to its heavy reliance on tourism, the Cypriot economy is particularly susceptible to the effects of the pandemic shock. In 2019, the tourism industry contributed over 18% of Cyprus's overall export earnings (PWC, 2020). In 2019, the balance of tourism expenditures (outbound minus incoming) accounted for almost 8% of GDP (Cystat, 2022). Outside of hotels, the tourism industry has a significant impact on allied businesses, as well (food services, retail, transport, construction, and other services). These figures signify that Cyprus's economy is heavily dependent on the travel and tourism both in terms of growth as well as in terms of direct and indirect employment. In this respect, the crisis of Covid-19 left a huge footprint on the island's fragile economy which still tries to find its steps.

3. Methodology

The paper is part of a preliminary study that aims to explore the role of Covid-19 pandemic on Cyprus tourism and its industries. Specifically, the papers studying the perceptions of five-star hotel manager and owners tries to shed light to how the crisis affected hotels and tourism on the island underlying its consequences on their operations and responses. Finally, the paper aims to provide implications regarding the appropriate management strategies in order for Cypriot hotels to gain and improve their competitiveness in a turbulent and quite different environment prior the pandemic crisis. These findings would be useful for hotel managers in order to reduce the immediate impact of the crisis and support the long-term recovery of their operations and in expansion, Cyprus tourism, in a sustainable manner.

The main methodological approach for the specific study was exploratory research through scanning of various official documents as well as face-to-face, in-depth interviews with five representatives of five-star hotels in Cyprus. The interviews lasted on average between 1 hour to 1½ hours and were conducted in the offices of the interviewees. Five-star hotel managers/owners were considered for examination, as it is believed that the size and magnitude of this type of hotels may provide more holistic understanding on crisis management approaches in the hotel industry on the island.

An interview guide was prepared to facilitate the conduct of the interviews. The interviews were held in both English and Greek language according to the preferences of the respondents. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in the Greek and English language. Afterwards, the interviews in Greek were translated in English and analysed manually by each author independently. Data were analysed iteratively (Miles & Huberman, 1994) adopting a constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) aimed to discover inductively emerging themes and discern their relationships. Once theoretical saturation was reached, the authors compared their interpretations and coding themes in order to agree on a coding scheme that best fits with and describes the emerging data.

4. Findings

4.1 The Impacts of COVID-19 Crisis on Tourism and Hospitality Industry in Cyprus

All respondents agreed that the pandemic was one of the most serious crises ever hit Cypriot tourism, while some of its consequences are still evident in the tourism sector of the island. Nonetheless, respondents agree that the recovery of the tourism sector was quite quick (in comparison to other destinations) mainly because of the better coordination of activities, due to Cyprus' smaller (and thus, more manageable) size. In terms of how past crises (including Covid-19) affected the operation and performance of Cypriot hotels, respondents agreed that all types of crises, from health related, financial, geopolitical crises always affect the hotel industry in a scalable manner raging from total closure (as in the case of the pandemic) to major markets' loss (such as the Russian/Ukrainian market due to the recent war), creating critical situations.

For hotels specifically, one of the greatest hits on their operation was the cancellation of bookings and events. As Respondent 3 argued:

> 'The cancellation of bookings and events, along with the suspension of operations, resulted in a significant loss of revenue that reached the degree of more than the 50% drop in 2020, in comparison to 2019'.

Additionally, it was argued that high fixed costs and increased expenses in other expense categories (like health and safety) negatively impacted profitability of hotels' operation. Another problem that was highlighted due to Covid-19 and during the pandemic period was cash liquidity that was put under pressure as revenues fell sharply but at the same time, fixed costs persisted.

Nonetheless, all respondents indicated that the greatest challenge that hotels in Cyprus needed to face during the pandemic era, was the high degree of uncertainty. As indicated by Respondent 5: 'It's not so much the loss of revenues… mostly it was the uncertain environment that all businesses had to operate in. We couldn't schedule our operations and our plans' or as Respondent 4 claimed: 'We didn't know if we will have business activity during the summer. Everyone was longing for positive (health) figures in order to somehow schedule our work…'. The comments, come in line with the theory on crisis management that argues that any crisis is accompanied by high degree of uncertainty that does not leave many options to tourism management and policy other than the preparation for the next crisis (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1993). As Boukas and Ziakas (2013) argue, crises can occur all the time, simultaneously, without any linear order, and with tremendous long-term results. This creates a highly uncertain and unpredictable environment.

In terms of tourists' responses towards the measures, respondents indicated that tourists during the crises indicated a high level of frustration towards all these security controls and measures, lines at the airports, lockdowns and travel limitations. These facts obviously affected the operations of hotels and again underlined the insecurity occurred. As Respondent 4 argued: 'Even when social separation measures were loosened, job insecurity, concern about disposable income, and the possibility of infection discouraged people from scheduling new vacations. On top of this problematic situation, demands for refunds and cancellations from corporate clients such as tour operators, coupled with pressure on liquidity, created an even more challenging situation. As such, corporate clients failed to pay their contractual payments or resorted to 'force majeure' clauses to avoid contractual obligations towards holidaymakers and hoteliers. As Sigala (2020) claims in her work on tourism and Covid-19, both cancelations and loss of money paid for travel and tourism are among the most important consumer related impacts due to the pandemic.

In addition to the above situation, respondents indicated a series of other customer related impacts due to the pandemic such as the moving forward of bookings, the overall lower spending capacity of tourists (in comparison also to the higher transportation prices), and/or the short-term shift in customer behaviour away from hotels and tour packages and towards more alternative forms of accommodations such as holiday villas in an effort to reduce the risk of infection. The aforementioned elements were judged by the respondents to be the most important impacts on the tourism sector of Cyprus, due to Covid-19. In order to illustrate the reactions of the hotel industry towards the pandemic and its challenges, the study asked the respondents to indicated how they have planned their response.

4.2 Strategies During Covid 19 Period in Hotel Operations

In order to handle with the pandemic hotels indicated that they received a series of measure to deal with the situations. These measures were either radical or more structured. For instance, Respondent 2 indicated that as a direct respond of the hotel the respondent represents was the operation to be suspended or in part in order for the cost to be reduced. Another respondent (Respondent 1) indicated that a direct response was to lower the room rates in order for more tourists to visit during the non-lockdown periods. Furthermore, the majority of the hotel managers/owners indicated that a crucial measure was the postponement of non-essential planned capital expenditures, including hotel expansions and renovations. All respondents agreed, that the crisis made them completely changing their planning and visions that was scheduled prior the crisis. This indicates, the necessity of the existence of a back-up planning (crisis management plan) during the strategic management of tourist operations). As theory on crisis management in tourism indicates (Ioannides, 1992; Henderson and Ng, 2004), crises are unpredictable and dictate rapid decisions. According to the respondents, all the events necessitated the effective decision-making, to deal with each of their consequences independently, and all them together as a common problem, a noted strategy in tourism crisis management (Boukas & Ziakas, 2014).

All the respondents claimed that dismissing any staff from the hotels due to the lower rates was not among their strategies. In contrast, some hotels indicated that they proceeded to further train their personnel. As Respondent 5 argued: 'Not only we did not fire any people, but we also invested a great amount of funds for their training especially on matters related to hygiene'.

A series of actions taken by hotels considered the cost minimisation of the hotel's operations. These actions as claimed, were taken to safeguard the business during the crisis; as a respondent mentioned (Respondent 3):

> 'We were restricted to government-imposed actions, and these were followed to the letter but there was no point in changing any business plans or policies as the whole world was in the same situation'.

Respondents argued that specific practices were used that helped the hotels to reduce their cost. These practices included those contractual -online- bookings through travel agents and destination management companies, and/or incentive groups related to conferences and events. In regards to the direct bookings through telephone, email and websites, respondents indicated that they did and do have an impact on the decrease of the operational cost since this is the trend and this is how competition works; they agree that they have played an important role in the cost minimisation. Furthermore, interviewees indicated that the role of online travel agents was and is, during and post-Covid 19 very significant; '… they are important not only because this is the new trend but because customers pay attention to qualitative characteristics such as the online comments of previous guests' (Respondent 4).

In the same lines, respondents indicated several marketing related tactics such as the implementation of special offers or the flexibility with the reservation of customers, moving the bookings forwards without any extra charge to satisfy better the customers. Additionally, market differentiation and expansion appeared to be a common marketing strategy As Respondent 3 argued:

> 'In scenarios where we lost a major market such as Russia and Ukraine, sales and marketing efforts were diverted to other countries to acquire new business from other sources, and this included digital activities for our own websites and trips to new markets such as Armenia and Poland in order to establish new business streams'.

In terms of marketing communications, respondents highlighted their crucial role in their strategy not only during the crisis but also after it. As mentioned, (Respondent 1):

> 'We were committed to applying all the government instructions and made sure that we kept the safety of our staff and our customers when we had some at high levels by adhering to all hygiene and safety rules. The marketing message during Covid-19 and still to this day is that we are a safe hotel and adhere to all the government and WHO safety recommendations and procedures so that tourists would feel safe coming here. We try to communicate this in our marketing messages'.

Indeed, marketing communications, and more importantly public relations play an important role in crisis management. According to Fall (2004), public relations is an influential instrument for the revitalisation of the tourism sector, that as opposed to 'hard-sell' advertisements, can offer to future travellers a feeling of connectedness with a destination in the post-crisis period. Fall, suggests that the incorporation of softer

overtones of individual values for the important publics in targeted messages, and the reflexion and understanding of travellers' behaviours/tendencies can lead to effective communication. This is also important for crises because tourists may easily travel to competitive destinations.

Other strategies and tactics mentioned by the respondents were related to the product diversification of their operations. Some of them respondent that they diversified their operations towards alternative forms of tourist activities such as rural tourism or agricultural tourism offering excursion to agricultural destinations in rural areas of Cyprus. Respondents claimed that this diversification enhanced the tourist product service mix and provided an extra source of revenue. In the same lines, some respondents indicated the turn towards more Airbnb operations.

Lastly respondents highlighted the significance of training during and post the crisis. As mentioned, (Respondent 2): 'Training is conducted for all staff on legal crisis management such as fire and bomb threat evacuation, management and security personnel are trained in other types' or 'Training is very important and we need to be as proactive as we can for dealing with problems immediately and move one with proper solutions, approaches and decisions' (Respondent 3). In this respect, respondents indicated that training is important for any phase of the crisis (pre-, during, and post-crisis). Nevertheless, they suggested that proactive measures are of extreme important and thus training should incorporate in a large degree risk management practices.

4.3 Covid-19: Governmental Support

Almost for all responsive strategies, respondents indicated the role of the government and is support, and highlighted also the cooperation among all stakeholders (public and private) of tourism on the island. As a respondent indicated (Respondent 5):

> 'The cooperation of everyone on the island is crucial. Cyprus as a destination needs to recover quickly from all these recent crises. This cannot be done without the cooperation of everyone, the government, the hospitality industries, and local communities'.

According to the results, all five hotels agreed that they got government support during the Covid-19 pandemic. This support mainly had the form of financial support and incentives given mostly to the domestic market such as discounts for travelling within Cyprus during the pandemic.

In addition, the majority of the hotels indicated that they spend more money on health and safety, which suggests that some hotels were trying to save in this area before the pandemic laws and regulations came into effect. The hotels got government support, and this has caused a positive multiplier effect because of the government's spending on supporting the hotel business (and all its subsidiaries), and employees stayed in the workforce. All the hotels stayed open during the corona virus pandemic because they have other sources of revenue (e.g., tourist websites, restaurants on their hotels' premises). Other forms of governmental support included also the provision of consultation to the hospitality sector in regards to safety issues.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Most hotels are optimistic but they believe that Covid-19 will continue to affect the hotel business over the next years. In addition, other crises such as the Russian-Ukrainian war or the war in Gaza has also affected Cyprus tourism, and brought into the surface the need for proper crisis management in the hotels strategic planning. Most importantly, it was raised through the interviews that crises such as Covid-19 did not elevated new problems to the tourism sector of the island; they mostly raised important chronic structural challenges that the sector is traditionally facing, such as those of lost competitiveness ('We are not at the position as we were 20 years ago in terms of image and revenues' (Respondent 4), lack of proper workforce ('Hotels in Cyprus are striving to find proper personnel that would increase the overall quality of the services provided'(Respondent 2), or sustainability issues ('We need to look the future… and this should be more sustainable').

In this respect, the future orientation of the hotel industry in Cyprus should focus on dealing on its structural problems investing in innovative measures such as product and market diversification and utilisation of innovative marketing processes such as co-creation (Boukas & Ioannou, 2020; Edgar & Nisbet, 1996), emphasis on pre-crisis training and utilisation of marketing communications such as public relations (Fall, 2003; McKercher, 1999), and social media strategies' adaptation in several stages of the crisis management, such as environmental scanning at the mitigation stage, creation and exchange of training at the preparedness stage,

internal crisis communication management and collaboration with stakeholders at the response stage, and/or damage assessment and development of risk intelligence at the recovery stage (Sigala, 2011).

Findings derived the important role of various stakeholders in tourism for the proper formulation and implementation of crisis management strategies. Indeed, different sector participants, including hotel executives, financial institutions, consumers, mass media, and the government, need to work synergistically when crises are occurred as these (crises) affect the sector of tourism overall. The synergistic role of stakeholders is widely discussed in the literature of tourism (Boukas & Ziakas, 2014; Faulkner, 2000). For instance, stakeholders could work together on a sector-wide marketing campaign to keep Cyprus at the top of the list for tour operators and holidaymakers. This could be led by the Deputy Ministry of Tourism of the island.

Furthermore, it is critical for hotels to uphold and strengthen ties with major tour operators by maintaining direct communication at all levels (including Ministry). The same holds true for big airlines, who must make sure Cyprus is regularly scheduled into their flight schedules. Marketing incentives such as sales promotions through the offering of vouchers for cancelled vacations is another strategy that may be utilized to raise demand and boost confidence, especially during the crisis period. Hoteliers, airlines, and the government could also support this campaign.

Overall, the paper indicates that crises have happened and will continue to happen and affect all the industries including hospitality and tourist ones. In this respect hotels should be investing a great number of resources of being prepared and dealing with their consequences. Further research should also incorporate the views of other companies in the tourism system such as restaurants, attractions and/or transportation industries. Finally, the examination of the perceptions of other hotel categories such as three- and four-star hotels would develop a more holistic views on hotels' crisis management methods and techniques.

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Ethical and Medical Dilemmas of Extreme Tourism

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Abstract: Originally funded and experienced by millionaires and billionaires willing to spend hundreds of thousands or even millions for an extreme adventure where previously only explorers and scientists previously dared to go, extreme environment (i.e. polar, tundra, desert, space, space analog, deep ocean, mountaineering, nuclear meltdown sites etc.) tourism is becoming more common allowing more people to be exposed to increased dangers and risks that such tourists will be exposed to. Some of those risks might be relatively minor such as possibly minor motion sickness. Other risks, however, could include serious injury, such as in the case of the Titan submarine which imploded on a tour to the Titanic in June 2023, death. The disaster, caused primarily by cost cutting measures and disregard of the danger from the company running the tour, which caused all 5 people on board to be killed instantaneously. This presentation and paper will expand on previously published work on the medical and ethical dilemmas of space tourism as well as include an additional focus on tourism to other extreme environments including the neonate industry of space analog tourism where individuals pay to participate in a space analog mission at a hefty fee while potentially contributing or disrupting the legitimate scientific research going on such missions while still exposing themselves to additional risk which they might be unsuited for. Further, this will discuss a few of the lesser known risks and concerns that have come more recently to light as well as a discussion as to not only if adults should be able to ethically, morally, and legally consent for their children during these high risk activities but whether or not, given the human brain does not fully develop until a person is in their mid-20s, how old should a person be in order to adequately understand and appropriately balance the risks and requirements of an extremely dangerous environment and be able to fully consent to the tourism venture's risks.

1. Introduction

The extreme tourism sector is fraught with high costs, high danger, and variable safety precautions. Whether it is William Shatner flying to the edge of space on Blue Origin's New Shepard, or the unfortunate implosion of Oceangate's Titan submersible, extreme tourism is finding itself more and more in the news media, whether it be for better or for worse. For example, while Shatner's flight went well, Oceangate's Titan imploded in large part because the CEO, Stockton Rush, believed "safety was a 'pure waste'" (Smith-Schoenwalder, 2023). Perhaps Mr. Rush honestly believed that those bringing up concerns that it was not safe were incorrect (or insulting as he would claim) or perhaps he believed that by increasing the hull, it would take away some of the risks and thereby making the trip less desirable, either way, he put profits ahead of people's lives leading to his death as well as four other passengers. At the time of this writing, Oceangate has yet to be accused of breaking any law regarding passenger safety. The sudden publicity allows more and more legal and ethical questions to be raised.

For those unfamiliar with extreme tourism, it is a subtype of "adventure tourism" where individuals travel to unsafe areas or do activities which have some type of risk. Adventure tourism as a whole is itself one of the fast-growing niche tourism sectors and is divided into two overall types, soft adventure and hard adventure depending on how much risk there is to the participant (Janowski et al., 2021, Zaid et al., 2023). For example, "soft adventure tourism," consists of relatively low risk to the participants, such as snorkelling, hiking, camping, while "hard adventure tourism" includes locations and activities with higher risk and usually more skills, training, and fitness are needed such as rock climbing or polar exploration. There are several subtypes of adventure tourism which might be classified as soft or hard adventure tourism depending on the requirements of the specific activity, including disaster tourism, extreme tourism, ghetto tourism, or urban exploration which is the practice of visiting long abandoned buildings.

However, despite there being an increase in adventure tourism, the ethical and legal considerations of some of the riskier activities have not yet caught up. Extreme tourism, in which individuals go to the most high-risk locations (such as jungle tourism, space tourism, deep sea tourism) or do some of the riskiest activities such as climbing Mount Everest are more likely to be mentioned in the newspapers rather being studied academically. There is very little in the literature about extreme tourism itself, much less the ethical issues although there has been some work on ethical dilemmas regarding space tourism (Marsh, 2010, Marsh, 2006). While there has been some work on the ethics of space tourism, this work needs to be expanded to other related tourism areas.

2. Medical Emergencies

Depending on the specific type of extreme tourism one is attempting as well as the amount of time one is expected to be in the dangerous environment, from minutes and hours to weeks or months, it is important to be prepared for possible medical emergencies. In high-risk remote environments, Emergency Medical Services might not be able to get to the location quickly if at all making it important for there to be medical supplies and someone medically trained to use them.

That being said there are very few regulations about what medical supplies and medical training a member of the team must have before taking clients to a dangerous location. In fact, even regulations such as "Convention for the Unification of Certain Rules Relating to International Carriage by Air" which regulates commercial air travel and "Athens Convention relating to the Carriage of Passengers and their Luggage by Sea" which regulates sea travel simply state that the company is liable if someone is injured or dies aboard their craft, however they do not specify the minimum medical equipment that must be on board (Marsh, 2006). Similarly, one of the few pieces of regulation towards any form of extreme tourism, the 2004 Commercial Space Launch Amendments Act also does not specify any medical requirements at all and simply states the operator

> "must inform each space flight participant in writing about the risks of the launch and reentry, including the safety record of the launch or reentry vehicle type. An operator must present this information in a manner that can be readily understood by a space flight participant with no specialized education or training, and must disclose in writing—
>
> (1) For each mission, each known hazard and risk that could result in a serious injury, death, disability, or total or partial loss of physical and mental function;
>
> (2) That there are hazards that are not known; and
>
> (3) That participation in space flight may result in death, serious injury, or total or partial loss of physical or mental function.
>
> (b) An operator must inform each space flight participant that the United States Government has not certified the launch vehicle and any reentry vehicle as safe for carrying crew or space flight participants.
>
> (c) An operator must inform each space flight participant of the safety record of all launch or reentry vehicles that have carried one or more persons on board, including both U.S. government and private sector vehicles. This information must include—
>
> (1) The total number of people who have been on a suborbital or orbital space flight and the total number of people who have died or been seriously injured on these flights; and
>
> (2) The total number of launches and reentries conducted with people on board and the number of catastrophic failures of those launches and reentries.
>
> (d) An operator must describe the safety record of its vehicle to each space flight participant as follows:
>
> (1) For licenses issued under part 450 of this chapter, the operator's safety record must cover any event that meets any of paragraph (1), (4), (5), or (8) of the definition of "mishap" in § 401.7 that occurred during and after vehicle verification performed in accordance with § 460.17, and include:
>
> (i) The number of vehicle flights;
>
> (ii) The number of events that meet any of paragraph (1), (4), (5), or (8) of the definition of "mishap" in § 401.7 of this chapter; and
>
> (iii) Whether any corrective actions were taken to resolve these mishaps.
>
> (2) For licenses issued under part 415, 431, or 435 of this chapter, the operator's safety record must cover launch and reentry accidents and human space flight incidents as defined by § 401.5, that occurred during and after vehicle verification performed in accordance with § 460.17, and include:
>
> (i) The number of vehicle flights;
>
> (ii) The number of accidents and human space flight incidents as defined by § 401.5; and
>
> (iii) Whether any corrective actions were taken to resolve these accidents and human spaceflight incidents.

(e) An operator must inform a space flight participant that he or she may request additional information regarding any accidents and human space flight incidents reported.

(f) Before flight, an operator must provide each space flight participant an opportunity to ask questions orally to acquire a better understanding of the hazards and risks of the mission, and each space flight participant must then provide consent in writing to participate in a launch or reentry. The consent must—

(1) Identify the specific launch vehicle the consent covers;

(2) State that the space flight participant understands the risk, and his or her presence on board the launch vehicle is voluntary; and

(3) Be signed and dated by the space flight participant." (2020, 14 CFR 460.45).

For those in other forms of extreme tourism, such as Everest tourism or Jungle tourism or even Polar tourism, there is often not even that legal requirement for informed consent, much less medical supplies or training. Many Everest expeditions, each lasting several weeks to months, often an expedition physician on the team; however, the smaller teams might not (Kamler, 2000). Having a physician present was not a legally mandated requirement of the area and the medical providers are primarily at camp rather than along the route where the medical emergencies may take place. Further, as recently as 2018, one could solo Mount Everest without a partner much less a physician and only at this point did Nepal place restrictions on who might climb, namely no more blind or double amputee climbers will be allowed to summit due to safety (Hardingham-Gill, 2018). With the need to carry one's oxygen, food, tent, and other mountaineering equipment, the mountaineers in smaller teams simply might not have the room for even a basic first aid kit for injuries on route. In such cases, there might be very little that one can do for even small injuries and for larger injuries, such as what happened to Beck Weathers in 1996, the options such as simply leaving someone for dead might seem the most logical course of action (Weathers and Michaud, 2000). Similar could be said for polar and jungle tourism depending on the size of the group and how feasible it would be.

Given the differences in each type of extreme tourism destination, technological capacity such as if telehealth is an option, activity, and even length of time in the danger zone, it might be challenging to create a set of guidelines that can easily cover many if not all these situations. However, it would seem logical to, at least, encourage first aid and basic medical training. For example, in the United States, there is wilderness training that one can obtain such as the Wilderness First Responder (WFR, or, if one already has an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) license, they can become a Wilderness EMT. This training specifically teaches people how to work in austere, remote, and wilderness environments. While this might not be perfect for all forms of extreme tourism, this would be a good start.

3. Health Risks

Each form of extreme tourism has its own set of health risks. While hopefully proper preparation can mitigate some of those risks, a tourism agency or indeed anyone specializing in this form of tourism should, in writing, provide the risks associated with going forward simply to provide appropriate informed consent. The list of risks should be as detailed as possible and appropriate to the specific destination even if the law might not require such information in risk of exposure.

For example, a suborbital space flight lasting only a few minutes should be more appropriately concerned about things such as increased exposure to radiation (possibly increasing a risk of cancer), the possibility of becoming nauseous aka space sick, and the possibility of death seem to be most appropriate health risks to disclose of the many risks of spaceflight (Williams, 2003). For longer missions which might be days, weeks, or the eventual colonization of Mars, one needs to not only worry about radiation, nausea, and death, but also effects that only happen in longer duration missions such as loss of bone density, loss of muscle mass, decreased cardiovascular efficiency, increased kidney difficulties, and suppression of the immune system (Williams, 2003). This is to say nothing of the many possible problems if a woman were to become pregnant in the middle of a longer duration spaceflight or even what this might have on her eggs in the future (Marsh, 2006).

Another increasingly popular destination where radiation and other pollutants need to be disclosed as a health risk is Chernobyl, a nuclear reactor in Ukraine which had a meltdown in 1986 (Urbonavicius, 2021). The meltdown and dangers causing the government to create an exclusion zone of 30 km (19 miles) radius from the site where no one is permitted to live. While this area has been cleaned, it is still hazardous and it is ill-advised

to stay longer than is necessary, despite the cleanings, due to health risks. Women of childbearing age need to continue to be careful in this area. While tourists are allowed through special permission and with an official guide, many tourists have been able to cross into the exclusion zone thereby avoiding the warnings and strict safety precautions that would otherwise be required by official tourists (Yankovska and Hannam, 2014). These safety precautions would include being wary of venturing too close to abandoned buildings as well as warnings about the local wildlife.

Everest tourism, on top of the usual risks that it shares with rock climbing or any outdoor activity from blusters, to broken bones, to slipping and falling to one's death, there are additional health risks as pertain to the altitude as well as the extreme cold. High altitude pulmonary edema and cerebral edema, excessive fluid in the lungs and brain respectively, are both potentially life-threatening disorders and are not unique to Mount Everest, but possibly in any tall mountain (Sánchez et al., 2022, Xue et al., 2022). This is one reason why potential summiteers tend to spend quite some time at base camp to acclimatize, at least in part, to the altitude. Even at base camp, there is still risk of avalanches such as the 2015 avalanche which resulted in 15 deaths and 70 injuries (Moore et al., 2020). In addition, there are several different ways to die in what is called "the Death Zone" (approximately 8000 meters or 26000 feet) where there is so little oxygen that the cells will start to die. One could run out of oxygen, one could become disoriented and go in the incorrect direction, one could also be at higher risk of hypothermia. Given most people to Everest have experience in mountaineering, they are likely to already be aware of the risks. As we saw earlier, Nepal is starting to implement more safety standards and minimums to obtain permission to journey to Everest. Polar tourism shares many of the same risks, minus potentially the high-altitude illnesses depending on where one specifically is but they also have more and longer lasting snowstorms.

Submarines and submersibles are going in the opposite direction and while Everest has individuals who tend to be well trained, anyone with the money can go on a submersible. The submersibles keep their own oxygen, they maintain the appropriate pressure which minimizes other health risks. However, there are still risks. If someone suddenly becomes claustrophobic, this could be a health risk, plus of course the risk of death either from a sudden implosion like the Titan, but also the possibility of becoming stuck and being unable to get free leading to death if rescue is unsuccessful.

Something that isn't as often discussed is the developing concept of going to a space analogue, not as a crew member but as a tourist. Stardust Technologies in Ontario Canada is planning to open their new space analogue (tentatively called Serenity Station) to paying customers separate from the researchers within a few months of opening as a form of vacation retreat (Michaud, 2023). This will help fund the research being conducted and lead to expansion. There are no plans for either the researchers or the tourists to be able to pass a medical check, nor does he appear to be aware of the possible health risks within the station. Those health risks include isolation, problems caused by claustrophobia, illnesses caused by gas leaks (as this is how the lunar outpost will be drawing it's power), risks from the local wildlife attacking and breaking the lightweight portable station, snowstorms, attacks from the bees which are planning to be added, as well as any risks that might occur from the experiments being conducted. At the time of this writing, Stardust denies any possible health risk which needs to take priority given the location approximately seven hours away from a major metropolitan centre. This is to say nothing that these non-scientist extreme tourists may disrupt the scientific studies and experiments going on which could lead to progress being lost forever, not to mention needing to repeat the opportunities for grants.

4. Informed Consent Issues

Informed consent is the consent one provides to participate in an activity after knowing all the risks/benefits, sometimes it is also referred to as a release and waiver of liability. There are two generally accepted types of informed consent, expressed consent and implied consent. Expressed consent refers to obtaining the consent of an individual either orally or in writing. Generally, these are the types one would experience if one were in the hospital in order to obtain medical treatment such as scheduled surgery. Implied consent is based upon the actions of the person, for example, amusement park rides would generally rely on this as if one did not consent, they could easily leave the line. Generally, in the United States at least, it is considered preferrable to obtain a written statement for things which are particularly dangerous or have long-term health risks and not everyone is able to offer informed consent, usually this is dependent on age and intellectual competence although there are often exceptions to every rule. For those unable to consent for themselves, such as in the case of most minors, a parent or legal guardian is often able to consent on their behalf when necessary.

As discussed, there are a number of health risks associated with these various forms of extreme tourism and being able to provide informed consent after knowing all of the risks and benefits is absolutely vital. Any of these types of tourism are, by their very nature, risky with health risks which could come either quickly or may be delayed which as in the case of cancer caused by radiation exposure. Some of these tourists are not only consenting for themselves, but also consenting for their minor children who are accompanying them on the trip (Marsh, 2010). Do parents have the right to provide consent for their children who might not understand the true risks involve? What about if they themselves do not understand the risks?

The answer appears to be yes, especially in wake of the Covid19 pandemic which saw a significant amount of individuals, many of which were also parents, refuse to receive the Covid19 vaccine and withheld their consent and would not allow their children, some of whom wanted the vaccine, to become vaccinated (Rawlings et al., 2022). Part of this was due to misinformation or simply misunderstanding. Was it morally correct for those parents to put their children's lives in danger by not vaccinating? Is it morally correct for parents to consent to put their children's lives in danger? This can be a matter for some debate given the differences between cultures over the rights of children.

Louis P. Pojman, an applied ethicist, came up with ten moral principles, two of which are "respect other people's freedom" and "do not cause unnecessary suffering" are of interest here and both may come into conflict (Pojman, 2005). If a minor wishes to go to an extreme tourism destination and they have the money to do so, and the parents stop them, is that not being disrespectful of the child's freedom? And what about the opposite direction, what about if the parent wants to go and the child does not?

Ayn Rand claims humans have an "inalienable right to seek our own happiness and fulfilment, regardless of its effects on others" and she defines "rights as 'moral principles which define and protect man's freedom of actions" (Pojman, 2005). What happens if this conflicts with "do not cause unnecessary suffering?" All of these extreme tourism shots can lead to illness, injury, or death, and certainly all of which can be considered a type of suffering both to the born and to the unborn, especially in the case of excessive radiation (Marsh, 2010). Do adults have an obligation to consider the possibility of unnecessary suffering for unborn children if it interferes with their own happiness and desire? One can easily argue that it needs to be a consideration, however, this could lead to a slippery slope argument for things more common than extreme tourism.

Of course, there is also the other end of the spectrum. While originally discussing emergency reproductive health, minors have been increasingly able to make more and more medical decisions for themselves even in cases that are non-urgent (Barina and Bishop, 2013). Given Rand's statement about the freedom to pursue happiness, is it permissible to still prevent minors above a possible age to give their own consent? There is evidence that minors are able to make informed decisions at 14 or 16 at the very latest (Barina and Bishop, 2013, Sanci et al., 2004). Should this allow them to make their own decisions for this form of tourism assuming, of course, that they could afford it without their parents' approval?

And what about those who are family members of the extreme tourists? What happens to them if there is a disaster and their loved one dies or is injured? Do they have any rights to sue? Or even what about the companies which prevent their high-ranking officers to do dangerous activities? It would seem that perhaps the happiness of the individual may or may not always triumph.

5. Conclusion

Humans are seeking out more adventurous and dangerous recreational activities, some of which the legal regulations have yet to catch up to. While some forms of extreme tourism have regulations designed to help protect the health of the extreme tourists, many others do not. Companies would be well advised to consider their potential medical liabilities and do what they can to ensure their clients' safety. All tourists need to additionally be made aware of the true risky nature of the activities they are about to experience. For example, those on board the Titan submersible were likely unaware as to the true danger risk caused by the hull not being rated for the depth to which they paid the ultimate price. The ability of clients/tourists to understand what the risks and benefits and consent to them are the basics of what informed consent, regardless of what type, is built. Without accurate information, how can one rightfully consent not only for oneself, but other people.

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Leveraging Major Sport Events' Success Towards Positioning Qatar as a Sport Tourism Destination

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Abstract: Through substantial investments in the sports sector, Qatar has solidified its position as a prominent global sport events destination. Notably recognised for hosting the monumental 2006 Asian Games, this marked the inception of Qatar's evolution into a hub for sport tourism. Since then, Qatar has successfully hosted several large-scale international sporting events, culminating in the historic hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. This trajectory continues with Qatar securing bids for forthcoming events such as the 2027 FIBA Basketball Cup and the 2030 Asian Games. Despite earlier unsuccessful bids for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2016 and 2020, Qatar remains committed to upholding its exceptional hosting legacy. This study seeks to discern the critical dimensions contributing to successful hosting and their broader impact on the host country. Drawing insights from a critical review of past events, including comparative analyses with FIFA World Cups from 2022, 2018, and 2014, this research aims to identify common key indicators and their influence on local communities. By discerning these elements, the study endeavours to craft a roadmap for hosting major sporting events, addressing challenges, and leveraging supporting factors. The outcomes will offer prospective agendas and recommendations intended to bolster Qatar's strategic positioning as a competitive international sport tourism destination. For aspiring nations like Qatar, these large-scale sporting events serve as catalysts for sustainable impacts that transcend the event itself.

Keywords: Major Sport Events, Sport Tourism, Sustainable Development, Roadmap, Leveraging Legacy

1. Introduction

Qatar's transformative journey into the realm of sport has become emblematic of a nation harnessing the power of athletic prowess for economic diversification and global prominence. Over the past two decades, Qatar has strategically invested in sport, transcending its conventional notion as mere entertainment (Lo, 2023). This multifaceted commitment has metamorphosed Qatar into a global sporting hub. The landmark 2006 Asian Games served as a watershed moment, not just for Qatar but for the entire Middle East (Amara and Bouandel, 2022). This major event, spanning diverse sporting disciplines, was more than a spectacle; it was a strategic pivot, marking the initiation of Qatar's ambitious foray into sport tourism (Revindo, 2023). The success of these Games propelled Qatar into the international limelight, laying the foundation for a trajectory that would redefine the nation's identity and role on the global stage. Building on this foundation, Qatar has consistently demonstrated its hosting prowess across a spectrum of major and mega sporting events. The subsequent hosting of the 2011 AFC Asian Cup reinforced Qatar's commitment to elevating its sports profile. The 2014 FINA World Swimming Championships showcased the nation's ability to organise world-class aquatic events. In 2015, Qatar hosted the World Handball Championships and the Men's World Boxing Championships. These events not only expanded Qatar's sports portfolio but also underscored its versatility in organising diverse sporting spectacles (MDPS, 2017). The subsequent bid victories for the 2019 World Athletic Championships and the 2019 World Beach Games marked Qatar's ascent as a preferred destination for global sporting competitions. The pinnacle of Qatar's hosting journey materialised in 2022 with the FIFA (Men's) World Cup[1] (FWC), an event that transcended sports, becoming a cultural and diplomatic milestone (Næss, 2023). As the first Arab nation to host the FWC Qatar's successful execution of this global spectacle solidified its position as a premier host, capable of managing the world's most-watched sporting event with finesse. Table 1 lists some large-scale sporting events awarded to Qatar (utilising Müller's (2015) event classification).

Looking forward, Qatar's commitment to sport remains unwavering, with an impressive lineup of future events: the 2023 AFC Asian Cup, the 2024 World Aquatics Championships, and the much-anticipated 2030 Asian Games showcase Qatar's sustained momentum in hosting various sporting events. The inclusion of Qatar in the F1

[1] Note: All subseuqnet reference to the FWC refers to the men's edition

Grand Prix[2] and the FIA World Endurance Championship (from 2024) calendars underline Qatar's diversification not only across sports but also within the realm of motorsports. Additionally, in 2023, the country was successful in its bid for the 2027 FIBA Basketball World Cup, reinforcing its ability to attract and organise wide-ranging sport events (FIBA, 2023). The inclusion of this basketball spectacle in Qatar's future lineup further diversifies its sport tourism appeal.

Table 1: Major sporting events awarded and hosted in Qatar

Year	Event	Scale	Year	Event	Scale
2006	Asian Games	Mega	2021	Ongoing: Formula One (F1) Grand Prix	Mega
2015	Men's World Boxing Championships	Major	2022	FWC	Giga
2019	World Athletic Championships	Major	2023	AFC Asian Cup	Major
2019	World Beach Games	Major	2024	World Aquatics Championships	Major
2019	FIFA Club World Cup	Major	2024	FIA World Endurance Championship	Major
2020	FIFA Club World Cup	Major	2027	FIBA Basketball World Cup	Major
2021	FIFA Arab Cup	Major	2030	Asian Games	Mega

This study aims to dissect the multifaceted dimensions of Qatar's hosting accomplishments, exploring the contextualisation of success factors, sustainability impact beyond the events, and the overarching roadmap for future events. The analysis, rooted in a critical examination of the three prior FWCs (Qatar 2022, Russia 2018, and Brazil 2014), aims to distill key success factors and challenges, offering a roadmap for Qatar's sustained leadership in the global sport landscape.

2. Contextualising Hosting Success

The economic impact and global perception of hosting large-scale sport events have been extensively explored. Studies emphasise the potential economic benefits derived from increased tourism, infrastructural development, and heightened international visibility. Baade and Matheson (2004) and Ferris et al (2022) underscore their limited economic impact and potential long-term costs. In contrast, Scheu et al (2021) and Reis' (2023) examination of the Olympic Games suggests that, despite challenges, host cities often experience positive economic legacies. Furthermore, Kobierecki and Strożek's (2021) study on the long-term economic effects provide valuable insights into the sustained impact beyond the event itself. Understanding these economic dimensions is crucial for evaluating Qatar's approach to hosting and its broader economic diversification strategy. Previous studies have identified key success dimensions crucial for hosting major sports events. Bason and Grix (2023) examined success factors for Olympic Games, emphasising effective planning, stakeholder engagement and post-event legacy considerations. Similarly, Parent and Ruetsch's (2020) provide a broader perspective applicable to the management of various sport events.; whereas Johnston et al (2023) highlight the social and community dimensions of hosting and the associated legacies. Understanding these success factors is imperative for contextualising Qatar's hosting achievements and providing a foundation for the subsequent analysis of its hosting strategy.

According to Statista (2023), Qatar's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita from 2006 to 2030 (depicted in Figure 1), with red star-dots reflecting the events' years, presents a compelling narrative of sustained economic growth and prosperity. With an average GDP per capita of USD 79408.54 over this period (actual and projected), Qatar positions itself among economically affluent nations. The trend analysis underscores a consistent upward trajectory, showcasing the success of its economic strategies and targeted investments. While no specific thresholds were defined, the absence of significant fluctuations above the current global average (USD 13453) indicates a level of economic stability (International Monetary Fund, 2023). Examining yearly percentage changes highlights notable spikes in 2011 and 2022, corresponding to global oil market dynamics and the successful hosting of the FWC, respectively. The maximum value in 2023, USD 88731.45, aligns with the FWC's positive economic impact, while the 2020 dip reflects the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A relatively low standard deviation suggests economic stability, emphasising Qatar's resilience in navigating challenges and leveraging opportunities for sustained growth on the global stage.

[2] Hosted in 2021 and from 2022 awarded a 10-year contract.

In examining the strategic endeavors behind hosting major sport events, a comparative lens presents itself through the recent FWC versions held in Qatar, Russia, and Brazil. These global spectacles not only celebrated sporting excellence but also served as pivotal platforms shaping economic, social, and cultural narratives within their respective host nations.

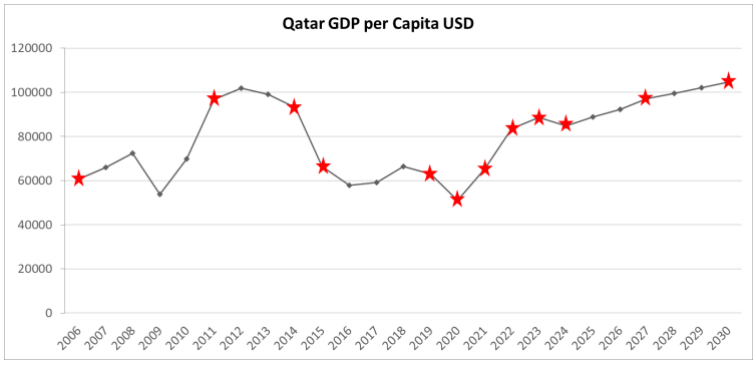

Figure 1: GDP per Capita trend and projection in Qatar with events' years

Delving into the contrasting trajectories of these events offers a unique opportunity to discern the nuanced strategies adopted by host countries, illuminating the divergent impacts on economic stability, societal integration, and sustainable legacies. By scrutinising the outcomes and approaches of these tournaments, a comprehensive understanding emerges, paving the way for informed discussions on sustainable impact beyond the events and forging a foundational roadmap to guide future hosts. This examination not only underscores the immediate successes but also prompts an exploration into enduring legacies, thereby laying the groundwork for a holistic analysis of the transformative power of major sport events. The factors influencing success in hosting major sport events are discussed next.

2.1 Economic Prosperity as a Catalyst

According to Statista (2023), the examination of GDP per capita data for Russia, Brazil, and Qatar from 2006 to 2023 reveals distinctive economic trajectories, each holding implications for their capacity to host major sport events. Russia experienced consistent growth until 2013, followed by a notable dip in 2014 attributed to geopolitical factors. Brazil, in contrast, displayed economic oscillations, with peaks in 2011 and 2014, intertwined with periods of recession. Qatar stands out with a continuous and substantial upward trajectory, showcasing robust economic growth. Notably, Qatar's consistently high GDP per capita reflects a stable economic foundation, a crucial factor for hosting major sport events successfully. In contrast, Russia and Brazil, despite hosting events like the FWC, faced economic challenges that may have influenced their hosting dynamics. This analysis underscores the correlation between economic stability, reflected in GDP per capita trends, and a nation's capacity to invest in sport infrastructure, ultimately impacting the successful hosting of major sport events. Qatar's sustained economic growth positions it favorably in this context. Figure 2 illustrates the GDP per capita trends in Russia and Brazil from 2006 to 2023 in U.S. dollars.

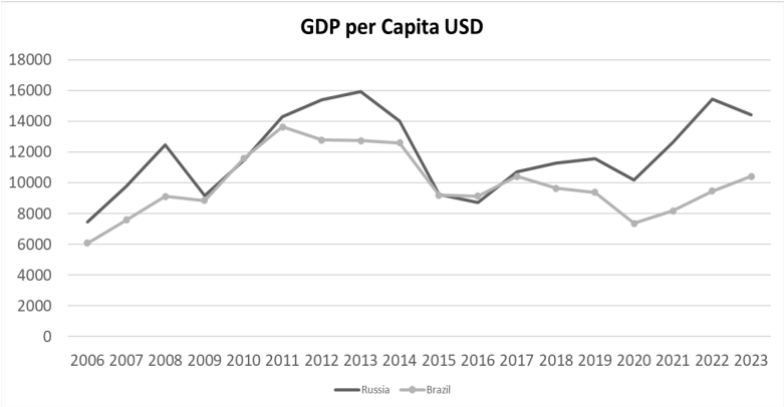

Figure 2: GDP per Capita trends in Russia and Brazil (2006-2023)

2.2 Diversification and Investment in Sport

The Global Economic Development Index (EDI) offers a comprehensive lens through which to assess the diversification efforts of countries (EDI, 2023). The yearly average EDI of Russia, Qatar, and Brazil reveals intriguing patterns in their economic development strategies. Russia, despite its natural resource abundance, displays consistent EDI scores, indicating a stable but resource-centric economic structure. Qatar, with a notably high initial EDI, showcases a steady increase, reflecting concerted efforts in diversification with strategic emphasis on sport-related investments. The country has successfully broadened its economic base, evidenced by its ascending EDI scores. In contrast, Brazil demonstrates a relatively stable EDI trajectory, with minor fluctuations. This suggests a nuanced approach to economic diversification, balancing reliance on natural resources with other sectors. The EDI trends emphasise the importance of diversification for sustainable economic development, positioning Qatar as a notable success story. Figure 3 illustrates the average EDI scores for these countries for the period 2000-2021. Qatar's consistently higher average EDI reflects its strategic emphasis on sport-related investments as a pivotal element in economic diversification, distinguishing it from Russia and Brazil.

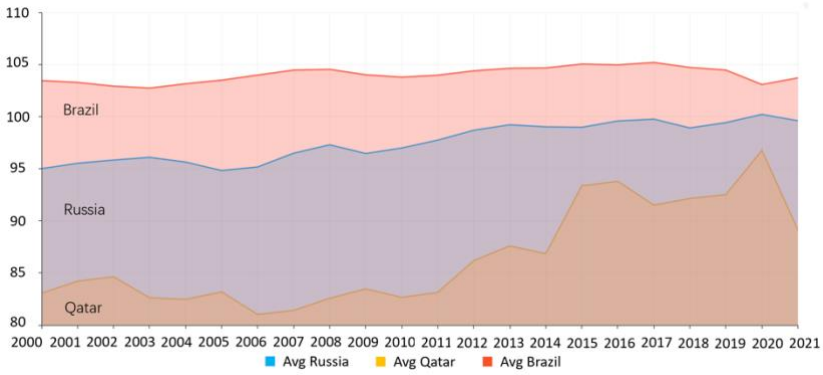

Figure 3: Average Economic Development Index (EDI) comparison (2000-2021)

2.3 Global Recognition and Investment Magnet

The convergence of Qatar's rising GDP per capita and its consistently high EDI serves as a compelling narrative in its positioning. The significant upward trajectory in GDP per capita shows not only economic prosperity but also a strengthened capacity for global investments. As Qatar continues to distinguish itself with an average EDI higher than both Russia and Brazil, it reinforces the nation's commitment to diversification and sustainable economic development. This strategic focus, coupled with the successful hosting of major sport events, contributes to Qatar's enhanced global recognition, making it an attractive destination for international investments. The symbiotic relationship between economic indicators, diversification efforts, and the hosting of major events solidifies Qatar's status as a magnet for global recognition and investments on the world stage.

2.4 Cultural and Diplomatic Milestones

Hosting major and mega sport events, like the FWC, marks significant cultural and diplomatic milestones for Qatar, strategically positioning the nation on the global stage. The emphasis on using sport as a tool for international diplomacy aligns with the nation's broader soft power strategy (Grix et al, 2019). Qatar's successful hosting of the FWC serves as a unique case in the diplomatic impact of major sport events. The ability to execute such events with precision and grandeur not only enhances Qatar's cultural reputation but also elevates its diplomatic influence on the international arena. This is evident in the positive global image cultivated through successful event execution and the fostering of diplomatic relations with participating nations and global stakeholders. In comparison to Russia and Brazil, Qatar's deliberate investment in sport diplomacy has yielded distinctive results, contributing to the nation's cultural and diplomatic ascendancy. This strategic approach underscores the multifaceted impact of hosting major sport events, shaping a nation's cultural narrative and diplomatic influence on the global stage (World Economic Forum (WEF), 2023). Contrastingly, Russia and Brazil, despite hosting significant events, might not have encountered a comparable degree of diplomatic influence as witnessed in Qatar's case.

2.5 Infrastructure Development and Job Creation

Major and mega sport events have the potential to serve as catalysts for significant infrastructure development and job creation. In Qatar, substantial investments, estimated over $200 billion for the 2022 FWC, have been directed towards state-of-the-art facilities and infrastructure. This aligns seamlessly with the visionary Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030, ensuring not only the successful hosting of events but also leaving a meaningful legacy for sustained economic growth and development (QNV, 2023). Similarly, in Russia, hosting the 2018 FWC prompted substantial infrastructure investments, totaling about $40 billion. Despite concerns about the long-term utilisation of some facilities, the event stimulated economic activity and job creation during the preparation and hosting phases (WEF, 2023). Likewise, Brazil invested around $20 billion in event-related infrastructure for the 2014 FWC. The event brought about short-term economic benefits and job creation, showcasing the potential of major sport events in enhancing infrastructure and boosting employment. These global events underscore the universal impact of sport in fostering infrastructure development and job creation, contributing positively to the economic landscape of host nations (Fett, 2020).

2.6 Tourism Surge and Service Sector Impact

Hosting international sport events, notably the FWC, has proven to be a catalyst for tourism surges and a consequential positive impact on the service sectors of Qatar, Russia, and Brazil (UNWTO, 2023). Qatar's strategic focus on positioning itself as a global sports hub has translated into an influx of tourists, stimulating economic activities in the hospitality and service sectors. Qatar’s successful hosting of events has consistently correlated with increased spending, contributing to a significant boost in GDP per capita. Comparatively, Russia and Brazil, while experiencing notable tourism spikes, may not have achieved the same sustained impact on their service sectors and GDP per capita as observed in Qatar mainly due to the geographical scale. Factors such as infrastructure readiness, marketing strategies, and post-event engagement have played pivotal roles in shaping the varying degrees of impact on the service sectors in these host countries (Subathra, 2022).

2.7 Long-term Vision and Sustainability

While Qatar has made commendable strides toward sustainability, the nation faces unique challenges that puts it at a potentially greater risk of maintaining long-term sustainability compared to countries with larger populations like Russia and Brazil. Qatar's emphasis on large-scale sport events as a driver for economic growth and sustainability is clear from its 2030 vision. However, the relatively small population of Qatar compared to the vast infrastructure developments and economic investments necessitated by these events poses a distinct challenge. Maintaining the momentum of economic growth, especially in per capita terms, demands a continuous influx of large-scale events to ensure that the economic benefits derived from these investments are sustained. The risk lies in the need for a delicate balance between economic growth and the potential strain on resources, particularly with a smaller local population to support such endeavors. While the commitment to sustainability is evident, the sheer scale of Qatar's ambitions requires a careful examination of the long-term feasibility, considering demographic factors and resource management (Hugaerts, 2023). In contrast, Russia and Brazil, with their larger populations, may have a broader domestic base to absorb the economic impacts of these events as illustrated by the economic fluctuations observed post-event. Qatar's strategic approach to hosting these events, while commendable, necessitates a cautious assessment of its sustainability trajectory, given its unique demographic challenges. Thus, a nuanced evaluation, recognising that each nation's context and population size contribute to the complexity of sustaining economic benefits derived from hosting is underscored. Table 2 summarises the key factors influencing the success of hosting major sport events utilising the last three hosting countries for the FWC. Each country exhibits unique strengths and challenges across economic, diplomatic, infrastructure, and sustainability dimensions, shaping their distinct trajectories in hosting major sport events.

Table 2: Key factors (Fac) comparison: Qatar, Russia, and Brazil as FWC hosts

Fac	Qatar 2022	Russia 2018	Brazil 2014
Fac1	Continuous growth	Fluctuating trends	Consistent growth
Fac2	High EDI increase	Steady EDI	Relatively stable EDI
Fac3	Elevated GDP per capita and EDI	Moderate GDP per capita and EDI	Moderate GDP per capita and EDI
Fac4	Diplomatic prowess	Moderate impact	Limited influence

Fac	Qatar 2022	Russia 2018	Brazil 2014
Fac5	Substantial investments $200B	Substantial investments, $40B	Significant investments, $20B
Fac6	Tourism surge	Moderate impact	Tourism fluctuations
Fac7	Challenges due to smaller population	Less strain due to larger population	Less strain due to larger population

3. Sustainable Impact Beyond Events

Large-scale sport events have increasingly become a catalyst for sustainable impact, transcending the confines of the event's timeline and location. They serve as pivotal platforms for implementing sustainable practices and for leaving enduring legacies (Mair et al, 2023). Host countries are leveraging these occasions to drive positive change across the triple bottomline (Wolfe et al, 2023). Environmental efforts often entail developing eco-friendly stadiums, implementing renewable energy sources, and adopting waste management strategies, aiming to reduce the event's carbon footprint and promote long-term sustainability practices (Pourpakdelfekr and Oboudi, 2022). Additionally, community engagement programs, including sport development initiatives, educational campaigns, and social projects, leave a lasting impact on local populations (Gillett and Tennent, 2022). Infrastructural developments, such as upgraded transportation networks and urban improvements, are not only beneficial during the event but also contribute to the long-term growth and development of host regions. This evolving approach underscores a paradigm shift where these events are seen not only as entertainment extravagansas but also as vehicles for driving positive socio-economic and environmental change, creating sustained legacies for host nations and regions. In the pursuit of these events, nations embark on ambitious endeavors that promise both immediate impact and lasting legacies. However, amidst their grandeur lie multifaceted challenges that extend beyond the celebratory moments. Assessing and addressing these challenges is pivotal, as they encompass critical factors impacting long-term sustainability, social harmony, and economic resilience. The inherent risks associated with infrastructure, societal disruptions, decision-making inclusivity, short-term focus, and policy coherence, are explored further to shed light on the complex landscape that shapes sustainable impact beyond the euphoria of the event.

3.1 Infrastructure Viability

Ensuring the sustainability of infrastructure post-event poses a significant challenge. Often, grand stadiums, transportation systems, and accommodation facilities constructed for major sporting events become underutilised or face challenges with sustainable use post-event. This raises concerns about the viability of these structures. The necessity for strategic planning to repurpose infrastructure for continued utility, such as converting stadiums into multi-purpose community spaces, to avoid financial burdens on host cities is underscored (Lopes et al, 2022). Without such strategies, the financial and environmental sustainability of these structures remain questionable.

3.2 Societal Disruptions

Hosting major sport events often entails substantial urban development and regeneration. However, such initiatives might lead to societal disruptions like community displacement or exacerbation of income inequalities. Fitzgerald and Maharaj (2023) highlight the risk of gentrification and social segregation. Displaced communities may struggle to benefit from post-event legacies, creating a potential divide between the event's benefits and local communities. Ensuring inclusive urban development policies and addressing concerns prior to hosting is crucial to mitigate these disruptions. Addressing these concerns in the pre-event phase is critical to avoid widening the gap between event benefits and local communities.

3.3 Inclusive Decision-making

Involving local communities in decision-making processes is crucial for ensuring the legitimacy and sustainability of major and mega-event planning. However, achieving meaningful participation can be challenging due to power imbalances and unequal representation. Weaver et al (2022) emphasise the importance of moving beyond tokenism in community engagement, advocating for genuine collaborative approaches that incorporate community voices in decision-making processes, thereby fostering greater social cohesion and acceptance of the event.

3.4 Short-termism

The pressure to deliver successful events often leads to a focus on short-term gains over long-term sustainability. The necessity of balancing immediate economic impacts with enduring benefits is emphasised (Ferris et al, 2022). Striking this balance requires meticulous planning and comprehensive strategies to ensure that the event's legacy extends beyond short-term financial gains to encompass lasting triple bottomline benefits.

3.5 Policy Integration

Coordinating national policies with post-event sustainable initiatives poses a challenge due to the diverse interests and priorities of stakeholders involved. Miragaia et al (2022) underscore the importance of aligning national policies towards sustainable urban planning and economic development post-event. It requires cohesive policy frameworks, effective governance, and collaboration between governments, private sectors, and civil society to ensure that post-event initiatives are integrated into broader national development strategies. In evaluating the risks inherent in post-event sustainability, Table 3 provides a comprehensive summary of challenges and their associated severity levels.

Table 3: Summary of challenges and severity levels in post-event sustainability

Challenge	Brief Description	Severity Level
Infrastructure Viability	Long-term maintenance challenges for event infrastructure	High Risk
Societal Disruptions	Potential community displacement and post-event economic uncertainties.	Moderate to High Risk
Inclusive Decision-making	Local community involvement impacts post-event relations.	Moderate Risk
Short-termism	Immediate success may hinder long-term event impact.	Moderate Risk
Policy Integration	National policies may obstruct sustainable post-event strategies	High Risk

4. Roadmap for Future Events

In the modern era, major sport events transcend their primary purpose of showcasing athletic prowess; they serve as pivotal platforms shaping economic, social, and cultural landscapes. Qatar, alongside other nations, stands at the threshold of global recognition as a host for major and mega sporting events. Yet, the significance lies not solely in executing these events with grandeur but in leveraging them as transformative instruments for sustainable development and strategic positioning. This section illuminates a comprehensive roadmap meticulously tailored not just for Qatar but designed as a structured framework with broader applicability, guiding host nations worldwide in harnessing major sport events to establish themselves as premier destinations for sport tourism. The proposed roadmap presented here encompasses nuanced strategies and considerations, addressing the manifold challenges and opportunities inherent in the hosting process. Rooted in sustainable development principles, it endeavors to fashion enduring legacies that transcend the temporal moments of these events. Figure 4 illustrates a roadmap step for leveraging major sports events towards successful hosting. This strategic seven-step roadmap is designed to highlight the key components in hosting major sport events, emphasising sustainable development goals and long-term legacy.

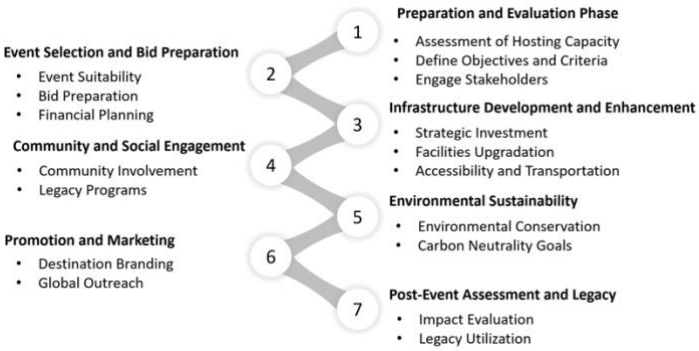

Figure 4: Roadmap toward successful hosting of major sporting events

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to detail this roadmap fully, it is important to underscore that this roadmap demands a visionary approach that transcends conventional hosting strategies. It necessitates a harmonious convergence of multifaceted elements—robust infrastructure, inclusive community engagement, financial prudence, and environmental consciousness. Aligning with the earlier discussions, this roadmap recognises that the success of hosting major events lies not just in their execution but in the lasting impact they leave. It is about setting visionary minimum standards across various dimensions, ensuring that these events not only promote sport tourism but also foster long-term sustainable development. By strategically integrating these visionary prerequisites across the roadmap's steps, from initial feasibility studies to post-event legacy assessments, Table 4 encapsulates the summary of these challenges and offers best practices to navigate through them. This analytical framework aims not merely to host events but to propel nations into becoming global benchmarks for sustainable sport event management and strategic positioning.

Table 4: Challenges and best practices in leveraging major sport events for sustainable strategic positioning

Steps	Challenges	Best Practices
Step 1	Limited infrastructure, financial constraints, uncertain stakeholder engagement	Conduct thorough feasibility studies, seek partnerships for investment, engage stakeholders early for buy-in
Step 2	Intense competition, stringent bid requirements, financial commitments	Highlight unique selling propositions, focus on sustainable legacies, develop comprehensive sustainable bid strategies
Step 3	Budget limitations, time constraints, potential environmental impact	Prioritise legacy infrastructure, employ sustainable construction, seek public-private partnerships for funding
Step 4	Community resistance, lack of inclusivity, varying interests	Conduct regular dialogues, offer community benefits, ensure transparency, create shared ownership of event success
Step 5	Balancing event needs with sustainability goals, mitigating ecological impact	Set clear sustainability targets, adopt eco-friendly practices, promote green initiatives, engage in offsetting measures
Step 6	Competing in a crowded market, limited budgets, reaching diverse audiences	Craft unique branding, leverage digital marketing, establish strategic partnerships, focus on target audience segments
Step 7	Maintaining momentum post-event, sustaining legacies, measuring long-term impact	Develop transition plans, create legacy programs in advance, measure impact comprehensively, ensure continued community engagement

5. Conclusion

Qatar's journey in hosting major sport events reflects a dynamic fusion of strategic planning, economic foresight, and a commitment to leveraging sport beyond mere entertainment. The nation's trajectory, from the landmark 2006 Asian Games to the groundbreaking FWC in 2022, epitomises a strategic pivot towards sport tourism, cultural diplomacy, and economic diversification. Through meticulous examination, this work unveils Qatar's economic prowess, diplomatic milestones, and sustained growth, positioning it as a global recognition and investment hub. Beyond the allure of these events, the analysis emphasises the pivotal role of sustainable practices, inclusive decision-making, and legacy-building, underscoring the imperative for host nations to transcend event spectacle and focus on fostering enduring legacies that propel sustainable development and positive societal impacts. The roadmap presented offers a comprehensive framework, not just for Qatar but as a blueprint for host nations worldwide, elucidating the intricate nuances and visionary prerequisites essential for orchestrating major sport events, steering them towards lasting economic, social, and environmental legacies. Qatar's story transcends sports; it's an illustration of strategic vision, transformative hosting, and the catalytic potential of major sport events in shaping a nation's global identity and impact. However, while this roadmap offers a comprehensive structure, it remains foundational in nature and warrants further empirical studies and practical validations. A limitation lies in its generic nature, designed to accommodate diverse contexts and events. Tailoring these strategies to fit Qatar's specific socio-economic landscape and cultural intricacies demands further nuanced analyses and empirical validations. Additionally, the roadmap operates on a premise of ideal conditions, often diverging from the complex realities and unforeseen challenges encountered during event execution. Empirical studies and real-time evaluations become imperative to gauge the roadmap's adaptability, efficacy, and resilience in diverse geopolitical and socio-economic scenarios.

Recommendations entail an interdisciplinary approach, fostering collaboration between academia, policymakers, and industry stakeholders. This collaboration should pave the way for empirical research endeavors that validate the roadmap's efficacy in real-world event hosting scenarios. Engaging in systematic case studies and longitudinal analyses of Qatar's ongoing and future events becomes instrumental in refining,

validating, and customising this roadmap to Qatar's unique context. Additionally, investing in capacity-building measures, training programs, and knowledge-sharing initiatives empowers local stakeholders, ensuring effective implementation of the roadmap's principles. Moreover, the future agenda urges the integration of this roadmap into Qatar's national policy frameworks, aligning with QNV 2030. Incorporating these strategies into broader national development plans ensures sustained commitment and institutional support for the long-term success of major sporting events. Beyond hosting, this agenda recommends leveraging these events as catalysts for socio-economic development, community empowerment, and global diplomacy, fostering enduring legacies that extend far beyond the event's timeline.

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The Limited Hospitality Career Knowledge of Learners in Township High Schools, Cape Town

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Abstract: The hospitality sector contributes positively towards the SDG's by addressing youth employment and economic challenges, specifically in South Africa. Therefore, awareness and knowledge regarding careers and opportunities that are available within the hospitality industry are vital. As a result, high schools are encouraged to incorporate the relevant knowledge about careers within the curriculum. Hence, this paper reports on the level of hospitality knowledge of high school learners in Cape Town townships. This was a cross-sectional study that followed a quantitative approach, whereby data was collected using questionnaires. Respondents were 720 pre-matric (Grade 11) learners who attended school in townships. Data were analysed using the Number Cruncher Statistical System (NCSS) 9. Thirty-seven per cent (37,2%) of the learners indicated that they received information about the hospitality industry through various platforms . The findings above are substantiated by the results that indicate that most learners (67.2%) know nothing about the hospitality industry. Furthermore, a few learners (28,5%) indicated to know about the industry. To support this statement, 8,8% mentioned available careers to be within the medical field. The present findings showcase the knowledge gaps that exist at the high school level, and this has a negative effect on the career choice and employment opportunities the hospitality industry offers. This calls for an intervention from higher education and industry to address identified gaps. The findings of the study share valuable insights regarding limited access to hospitality careers. This is a challenge because it hinders knowledge of career and employment opportunities.

Keywords: Hospitality Industry Knowledge, High School Learners, Cape Town Townships

1. Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry are one of the economic drivers globally. Aksoy (2022) highlights that the tourism sector has made a significant contribution to the creation of jobs and the provision of employment opportunities. Quinn and Buzzetto-Holywood (2019) confirm the significance of the tourism and hospitality industry to have a vital role in economic development and job creation globally, stating that the tourism and hospitality industry contributes "2.5 trillion dollars to the global economy, which is 10,4% of global GDP'. In 2020, the tourism and hospitality industry was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; however, its contribution to the economy halted for a short period. Currently, the tourism and hospitality industry are still the critical sector that is boosting the global economy (Aksoy, 2022). Sisa Ntshona (who was the South African Tourism CEO) commended the tourism sector for its contribution towards employment in March 2018 at the International Trade Show in Germany, stating that "the tourism sector is vitally important and should be nurtured for sustained and inclusive growth and inclusivity" as it contributes greatly to the economy of South Africa (StatsSA, 2018). The contribution towards employment was further alluded to by StatsSA (2023), stating that the tourism sector employed 492 561 people in 2021, and Nyambuya et al (2022) recorded that the hospitality industry of South Africa employs 5% of the working-age workforce. Van der Merwe et al (2019) and Sucheran (2021:115) stated that the hospitality industry is consistently expanding and contributing towards job creation which encourages "underprivileged development, economic growth and employment generation", which substantiates the above statements.

Although the literature shows tourism and hospitality's contribution towards employment in South Africa, the hospitality industry requires a wide range of skills to meet the needs of the industry, so one needs to possess these to access employment opportunities (Van der Merwe et al ,2019). Potential employees are required to have certain knowledge and skills for the hospitality industry. Nyathela et al (2021) mention that the tourism industry offers employment opportunities to a range of people, including the youth. The tourism industry accounted for 3.4% of jobs in 2021 of the total labour force, which shows that the industry absorbs a large workforce (StatsSA;2023). Therefore, the tourism and hospitality industry could assist in alleviating the youth unemployment rate in South Africa, which is relatively high, at 32.9%; furthermore, "youth aged 15-24 and 25-34 years recorded the highest unemployment rates of 62.1% and 40.7% respectively" (StatsSA;2023). Further, adding to this, "approximately 3.7 million (36.1%) out of 10.2 million young people aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education, or training".

Olowoyo et al (2021) refer to Maumbe and van Wyk (2011), Saayman (2013), and Olowoyo and Maile; (2019) who highlight that there is a skills shortage problem and a lack of knowledge about the hospitality industry in South Africa and other countries. It is then essential for learners to know about this industry at high school level; as Booyens (2020:825) clearly states, "tourism is routinely promoted as a strategic labour absorbing sector with low entry barriers." This will enable learners to make informed decisions before embarking on a career in this field, as this industry also alleviates the issue of unemployment in the country (Young, 2023). The economic and employment contribution presented above suggests that skilled employees are required for continued economic growth and to remedy unemployment challenges, especially among youth. To fix the career knowledge gap that exists regarding hospitality and other careers, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa introduced subjects such as Hospitality Studies, Tourism, and Consumer Studies at the high school level in 2006 (Umalusi, 2014) and the subject Life Orientation (LO) was also introduced by the DBE in 2006 (Fatoba et al, 2022) which has a career guidance component in it to inform learners about all the careers. However, to date, learners still have limited knowledge of careers, therefore, it is important to investigate the knowledge level of learners (youth) regarding the careers available. Hence the purpose of this study is to ascertain the township school learners' knowledge level about the hospitality industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Importance of Education about the Hospitality Industry

Conradie (2012) elaborates on hospitality education as having a 'close and strong link with the industry and enables the students to be educated and keep abreast with the current industry trends' and states that the hospitality industry suffers from a shortage of skills and specialised labour. This definition corroborates Booyens' (2020) observation, saying that the hospitality industry requires a wide range of skills, and not having the relevant skills, knowledge, and formal qualifications for the hospitality industry contributes to the shortage of quality employees (Olowoyo et al, 2021). Cesario et al (2022) add that the tourism and hospitality industry plays a vital role in economic activity, outlining the staff shortage and limited supply of labour.

The skills and knowledge acquired through education are essential as they elevate the standard of service, which by default leads to the success of the organisation, hence Olowoyo et al (2021) emphasise that education should attend to the needs of the hospitality industry since the world is constantly evolving, noting the importance of attracting young people into the tourism and hospitality sector and training them to bridge the skills gap that exists (Cesario et al, 2022).

2.2 Addressing the Knowledge Gap and Shortage of Skills Within the Hospitality Industry

Olowoyo et al (2021) and Cesario et al (2022) highlighted the hospitality industry's lack of skills, knowledge and qualification. To remedy this, Quinn and Buzzetto-Holywood (2019) recommend that institutions work closely with the industry to produce skills desired by the hospitality industry and bridge the existing gap (Francis et al, 2019).

In South Africa, specific interventions were introduced to bring awareness and remedy the skills gap within the hospitality industry. As previously mentioned the Department of Basic Education (DBE) introduced subjects such as Hospitality Studies, Tourism, and Consumer Studies at the high school level (Umalusi, 2014). Some schools already had the subject of Home Economics, which made the introduction of Hospitality Studies easy. In 2013, Umalusi (2014) records that 389 schools offered this subject to Grade 12 learners. Although these interventions were introduced, other challenges emerged such as lack of infrastructure, as the school needed stoves, fridges, to name a few (Gumede, 2010). The lack of infrastructure resonate with the challenge of limited resource in townships (Gala, 2017). The purpose of introducing Hospitality Studies was to equip learners with knowledge and skills about the "food and Beverage industry" (DOE,2003:9). Judging from the purpose of introducing Hospitality Studies as a subject, this will then benefit the learner who ends up not going to further their education to at least know what the hospitality industry is about and what it can offer. Chili (2014) details the objectives of including Tourism as a subject, stating that it addressed the skills shortage suffered by the industry and "fight unemployment and alleviate poverty among the poorest of the poor". Concerning the subject LO, Adewumi and Adendorff (2014) detail that LO aimed to equip learners to "solve problems, make informed decisions and choices" and be responsible citizens. The intervention by the DBE clearly shows the significance of the hospitality industry and what it has to offer in terms of employment opportunities.

Booyens (2020) records that the number of schools that offered hospitality as a subject in 2015 was 339, which decreased from 387 in 2011. This is a concern as it means that fewer schools are offering knowledge about the hospitality industry.

2.3 Career Guidance Implementation Challenges

Underprivileged schools face challenges in "financial resources, guidance and counselling knowledge, information technology and staff shortage" (Mahlangu, 2011; Rungqu, 2019). Furthermore, Rungqu (2019) adds that these schools cannot afford to hire qualified professionals to assist with career guidance, supporting the above mentioned statement. This then puts the learners at a disadvantage as their chances of getting knowledge about the hospitality industry or any industry are limited. Albien and Naidoo (2018) highlight the challenges faced by township high schools, pointing out "overcrowded classrooms, broken equipment, lack of computer facilities and limited teachers - student interaction". All these challenges have a direct impact on career guidance.

Turok et al (2021) comment on the difference in the education systems between black and white schools, highlighting that white schools' education system is far superior to black schools, adding that white schools have teachers who are well equipped, with smaller classes and an advanced curriculum. On the other hand, LO teachers must be equipped with sufficient knowledge to conduct career guidance (Modiba and Sefotho, 2019). Mokodutlo et al (2019) stated that LO is usually allocated to an unqualified teacher who does not have adequate knowledge or is not up to date with the trends in the labour market (Modiba and Sefotho 2019).

Mokodutlo et al (2019) note that the time allocated for LO, specifically in township schools, is insufficient to cover the relevant information. This mindset about this subject already puts it at a disadvantage as some critical aspects may be missed due to time limitations.

Township high schools are experiencing low-quality education regardless of the many interventions implemented. The same applies to LO, which seems to be neglected yet could assist and usher learners into their future careers. Van Zyl et al. (2021) highlight the significance of LO by pointing out that this subject covers a variety of topics which require resources for implementation, noting that the unequal distribution of resources in fee-paying and non-fee-paying schools does hinder the successful implementation of LO, which has a direct impact on learners as they are less exposed to information that is of benefit to their lives. This is a concern as it means that the learners make career decisions without adequate knowledge about careers, which impacts tertiary institutions. These students deregister from courses as they suddenly realise a mismatch between the course and what they want.

3. Research Methodology

This section outlines the method used to conduct the research study, discussing the population, sample, and how data was collected and analysed. The research method section discusses the research paradigm adopted for the study, further detailing the quantitative research approach, the population and sampling, and the education districts chosen and their relevance. Furthermore, this section narrates how data was collected and analysed.

3.1 Methods

The research paradigm adopted for this study is the positivist approach, described as an approach that seeks an understanding of the social world, often producing numerical data, which is the case for this study (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016). The empirical research design was adopted for this research using the quantitative research approach detailed to analyse data using numbers and statistics to prove whether a theory is true or false (Abawi, 2008) and measuring quantity (Goundar, 2012). Therefore, this approach was regarded as appropriate for this study as it sought to establish how much knowledge the learners have about the hospitality industry, and that was translated into numerical terms. This method is also appropriate because the population was relatively large, and a quantitative approach is more appropriate in such instances.

3.2 Population

The Western Cape Department of Education (WCDE) has eight education districts, namely the Cape Winelands, Eden and Central Karoo, Metro Central, Metro East, Metro North, Metro South, Overberg, and West Coast, categorised into urban and rural districts. Metropolitan districts were chosen for this study as the focus is in

Cape Town, namely Metro East, Metro Central and Metro South. The townships chosen were Gugulethu, Khayelitsha and Langa. Grade 11 learners were chosen for the study as they are in a better position to know their career path, with 720 learners.

3.3 Sample

This study adopted a probability sampling approach, which is an approach where each person in the population has an equal chance of being selected for the study, with the sampling classification being cluster sampling (Acharya et al, 2013). Acharya et al (2013) explain cluster sampling as "a two-step process in which the entire population is divided into clusters or groups, usually geographic areas or districts like villages, schools, wards, blocks, etc". In relation to this study, eight high schools from Khayelitsha, Langa, and Gugulethu townships participated in the study, with Grade 11 learners chosen for the study.

3.4 Data Collection

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional Ethics committee before data collection. Permission was granted for the study; then, the WCED was approached to grant permission to conduct research in the high schools, specifying the districts selected, followed by asking permission from the high school principals in the chosen districts, which was also granted. Primary data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire. Ajayi (2023) explains primary data is data collected for the first time by the researcher for a particular study. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and a few open-ended questions to get more information from the learners, especially with the open-ended questions covering career knowledge and known career opportunities. The questionnaire was in English and also translated into Xhosa to eliminate the language barrier.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data was captured on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and analysed using the Number Cruncher Statistical System 9 (NCSS 9). After that, the data was presented using descriptive statistics in the form of graphs and tables.

4. Results and Discussion

The respondents in this study were Grade 11 learners from Cape Town's township high schools. Booyens (2020) reports on the education level of employees in the hospitality industry, stating that 56% of the employees have Grade 11 to a diploma, which highlights that Grade 11 learners are in a position to occupy employment as the tourism industry has" low entry barriers". A total of 720 learners from high schools participated in the study. The results and discussion section covers the background information about gender, career guidance and hospitality career knowledge.

4.1 Background Information

Table 1 shows gender distribution, with more females than males participating in this study.

Relating to career decidedness, most (71,25%) learners had decided on their career path, which is the expectation in Grade 11. The learners were asked to specify the chosen careers, different careers chosen. As much as 71,25% had confirmed to have chosen a career path, only 30,13% specified their career of choice. Law was famous amongst the learners as most (6,8%) of them chose it as a career path out of the 9-career paths presented in Table 1. Hospitality (3.33%) as a career was among the least popular, one level higher than tourism (2.64%) which is related to hospitality.

Table 1: Background information

Gender		
Variable	**N**	**%**
Female	424	58.8
Male	255	35.7
No response	41	5.6
Total	720	100

Career decidedness		
Variable	**N**	**%**
Yes	513	71.25
No	190	26.39
No response	17	2.36
Total	720	100
Learner career choices		
Career	N	%
Accounting	25	3.47
Business Management	26	3.61
Education	12	1.67
Hospitality	24	3.33
Information Technology	14	1.94
Law	49	6.80
Medicine	21	2.91
Social Work	27	3.75
Tourism	19	2.63
Total	217	30.13
No Response	503	69.86
Total	720	100

4.2 Knowledge about the Hospitality Industry

Table 2 presents results on knowledge about the hospitality industry, with learners (37.2 %) confirming they have received information about the hospitality industry. In comparison, 56% noted that they did not receive information about this industry. Furthermore, learners (67,2%) confirmed they did not know about the industry, while 28.47% confirmed they understood what the industry is about. Other learners did not respond to this question (4.3%). Learners were asked if they knew of any career opportunities within the hospitality industry, and 70.6% of the learners confirmed they did not know of them. A few learners (25,6%) confirmed they knew of the opportunities in this industry.

Table 2: Hospitality career guidance

Confirmation of receiving career guidance in hospitality		
Variable	**N**	**%**
Yes	267	37,2
No	403	56
No response	50	7
Total	720	100
Knowledge about the hospitality industry		
Variable		
Yes	205	28.47
No	484	67.22
No response	31	4.31
Total	720	100
Knowledge about hospitality career opportunities		
Variable		
Yes	185	25.69
No	509	70.69
No response	26	3.61
Total	720	100

4.3 Known Careers in the Hospitality Industry

The learners who indicated to know the career opportunities in the hospitality industry were further asked to list the opportunities they know of in the hospitality industry, with 11.8% relating the sector to being a Chef, bartender, or waiter with 0.42 % relating it to tourism and interestingly 8.75 % related the industry to the medical field which could be that the learners related the word “hospitality” to “hospital” in line with Venturini and

Terrier (2021) who stated that hospitality and hospitals are close concepts which both refer to care and attention with the end goal of meeting guest or patient's needs. Figure 1 presents the results.

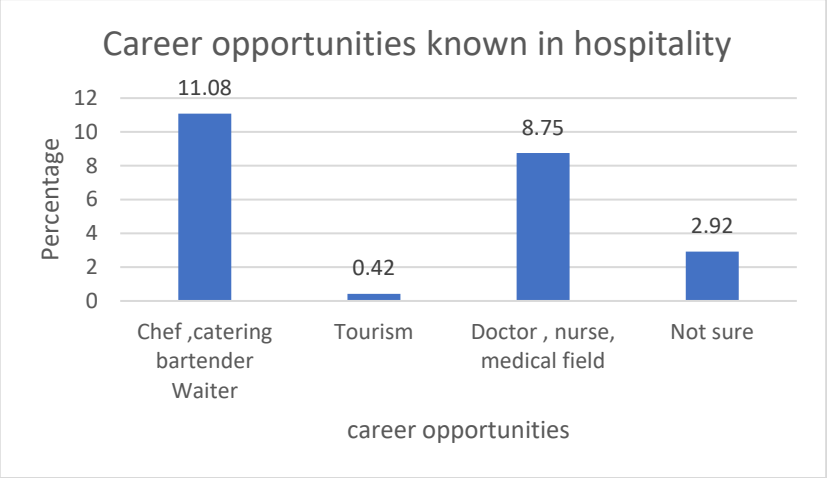

Figure 1: Known careers in hospitality

4.4 Resources Used to Provide Knowledge About the Hospitality Industry

The learners were asked which resources were used to access knowledge about the hospitality industry. Learners mentioned that most (31.39%) got information from books, and some said that guest lecturers (13.75%) from the hospitality industry came to give them information. Some learners (16.67%) said that they were not aware of these resources.

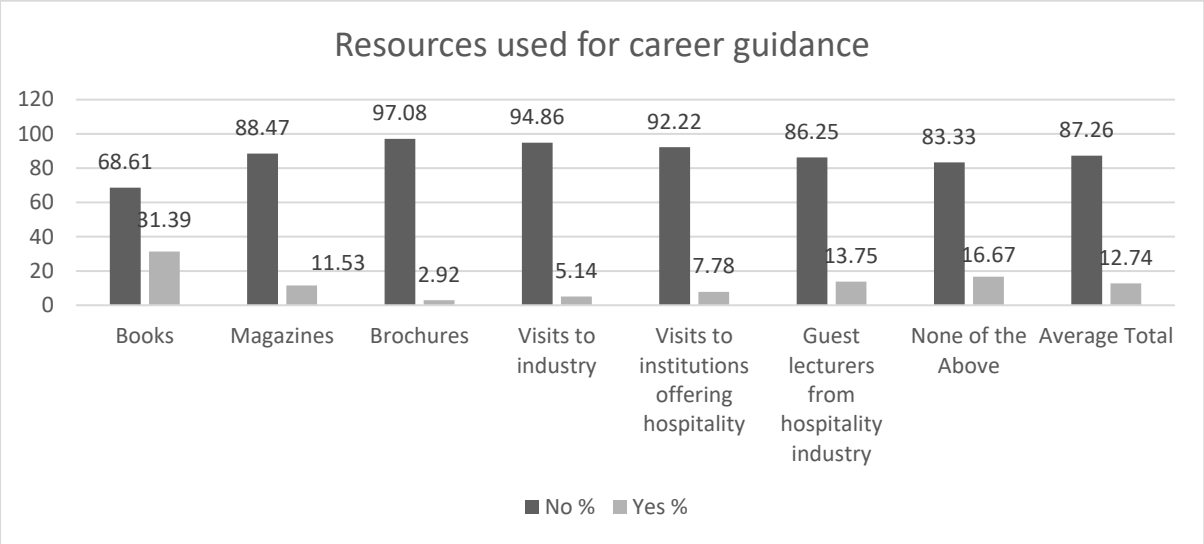

Figure 2: Resources used for career guidance

5. Discussion

Background information showed that there were more female respondents than males, similar to a study conducted by Miles and Naidoo (2016), who reported that two-thirds of the sample were females compared to males. Minimal career knowledge (28.47%) was observed in this study, specifically regarding hospitality career knowledge. These findings were corroborated by Van Niekerk and Saayman (2013), whereby few learners knew about the tourism industry trends. And also, Chinyamurindi et al (2021) note that learners in South Africa encounter several frustrations, one being the lack of knowledge about careers, which is a result of a lack of preparation concerning careers.

Learners confirmed several resources utilised for career knowledge in hospitality, highlighting books at 31.39%, followed by guest lecturers at 13,75. Blomerus (2016) highlights that limited resources hinder career knowledge,

supporting the findings mentioned above. Apart from the inadequate resources, the study also found minimal engagement with the external stakeholders as only 13,75% of the students indicated that they had guest lecturers visiting the school, visits to institutions at 7.78% and visits to the industry at 5.14%. Nweze and Okolie (2014) highlighted inadequate resources, a negative attitude from both teachers and learners, lack of engagement from stakeholders and insufficient training for teachers, which proves to be the case in this study in relation to stakeholder engagements with minimal industry and school engagements.

Blomerus (2016) noted that learners made unrealistic career choices, for example, being a "doctor or engineer" without knowing that their decisions on subjects had an impact on their future already. The above-mentioned could be the reason why only 3.33% of the learners considered hospitality as a career path, and the rest chose traditional career paths. More than 50% of the learners indicated not to have received career guidance in hospitality. Nwenze and Okolie (2014) found that there were no structured career services to assist learners with career decision-making making, which may support the findings of the study mentioned above.

6. Conclusions

This study highlights the knowledge gap amongst high school learners in townships concerning career opportunities and knowledge about the hospitality industry. Furthermore, the results on the careers chosen by learners may imply that there is not much emphasis on the significance of the hospitality industry and the career opportunities it offers, only on traditional careers.

Although this study focused on hospitality career knowledge in townships, the literature identified several factors that contribute to the inadequate knowledge: LO teachers lack knowledge about the subject matter (Modiba and Sefotho 2019), do not have the relevant qualification (Mokodutlo, 2019) and the schools cannot afford to hire qualified career counsellors (Rungqu, 2019). These factors hinder learners' access to knowledge (Shumba and Naong, 2012), which results in a realisation of career misfit and restricts access to employment and tertiary-level opportunities. With these gaps highlighted, an opportunity arises for interventions to be considered that could bridge the existing gaps. This calls for the Department of Basic Education and the institutions of higher learning to develop hospitality career knowledge materials, offer more career expos in townships and collaborate in community engagement activities. The lack of literature suggests that more studies should be conducted by enhancing the limited literature on this crucial research phenomenon.

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A Cybersecurity Collaborative Model: Best Practices Sharing Among South African Tourism and Hospitality Businesses

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Abstract: In an increasingly interconnected digital landscape, cybersecurity has emerged as a paramount concern for South African tourism and hospitality businesses, especially those mostly serving international travellers who depend on online services for bookings and payments. This abstract introduces a comprehensive research study that centres on developing a collaborative cybersecurity model. The primary objective of this model is to facilitate the exchange of best practices among South African tourism establishments, thereby fortifying their collective defences against evolving cyber threats.

This research study is based on a systematic literature review that encompasses a diverse array of tourism and hospitality businesses, including hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators. The study delves into existing collaborative initiatives, explores the perceived advantages of information sharing, and examines the challenges that may hinder the effective implementation of collaborative cybersecurity practices.

The literature highlighted numerous cybersecurity risks associated with these types of businesses but also revealed a common shortage of dedicated cybersecurity resources and expertise. Collaborative models are regarded as a promising avenue to address these deficits. Businesses actively participating in collaborative networks report tangible benefits, including improved threat intelligence, cost-effective cybersecurity solutions, and enhanced capabilities for incident response.

The outcomes of this research endeavour aspire to offer practical insights and actionable recommendations for South African tourism and hospitality businesses, policymakers, and industry associations seeking to cultivate a culture of cybersecurity collaboration. Ultimately, the collaborative model advocated herein contributes to the creation of a more secure online environment for local and international tourists visiting South Africa. This, in turn, safeguards the reputation and long-term sustainability of the tourism and hospitality sector in the country.

Key Words: Security Best Practices, Cybersecurity, Tourism and Hospitality, Collaborative Models, Cyber Threats

1. Introduction

The digitisation of the tourism sector has ushered in unparalleled convenience for international travellers. From selecting accommodations to arranging tours, the reliance on online platforms is ubiquitous (Zhang, 2023). However, this very digital interconnectedness has unveiled a pressing need for robust cybersecurity measures (Box and Pottas, 2014). The security of online transactions and the protection of sensitive information have become pivotal considerations in sustaining the trust of the modern traveller (Ahmed and Khan, 2023).

With universal Internet access, widespread use of social networks, and increased reliance on digital services, the threat of cybercrime has become more complex (Gundu, 2023). Cybercrime has emerged as a negative consequence of the Internet age, depending on computer networks and modern technology (Mmango and Gundu, 2023). In Africa, the impact of cybercrime is particularly more significant due to the lack of cohesive cybersecurity policies and inadequate IT infrastructure (Gundu and Modiba, 2020). The drivers of cybercrime are identified as the increasing potential gains from cyberattacks, especially with the growing use of the internet for various transactions.

This paper sets the stage for a comprehensive research study that pivots around developing a collaborative cybersecurity model, aiming to address the evolving cyber threats faced by South African tourism and hospitality businesses.

The primary objective of the proposed model is to establish a framework facilitating the exchange of best practices among these tourism establishments. This collaborative approach aims to fortify their collective defences against an ever-changing and increasingly sophisticated array of cyber threats. The significance of such a model becomes evident in the context of the vulnerabilities exposed by the dependence on online platforms in the tourism sector (De Bruijn and Janssen, 2017).

The foundation of this research study rests on an systematic literature review that spans a diverse spectrum of tourism and hospitality businesses, ranging from hotels and travel agencies to tour operators. Within this scope,

the study delves into existing collaborative initiatives, investigating the perceived advantages of information sharing, while also critically examining the challenges that may impede the effective implementation of collaborative cybersecurity practices.

If these businesses would actively engage in collaborative networks, they will have tangible benefits, ranging from improved threat intelligence to cost-effective cybersecurity solutions and enhanced incident response capabilities. This forms the basis for advocating the implementation of a collaborative cybersecurity model as a strategic approach for the South African tourism sector.

The subsequent sections of this paper are structured as follows: an initial exploration into related literature will precede an elucidation of the research methodology employed for this study. Following this, a comprehensive discussion will ensue, expounding upon the intricacies of the proposed collaborative model. Subsequently, a more detailed discussion of the model will be presented, ultimately concluding with a concise summary. The document will conclude with an exhaustive list of references, serving as a comprehensive repository of sourced materials underpinning this research endeavour.

2. Related Literature

As local and international travel increasingly relies on seamless online services for bookings and payments, the spectre of cyber threats looms large over the industry (Allioui and Mourdi, 2023) . In response to this paramount concern, this research endeavours to illuminate a path forward a collaborative model that unites diverse stakeholders to fortify the cyber defences of South African tourism establishments.

The term "collaborative initiatives" within the context of South African tourism and hospitality cybersecurity encapsulates a dynamic approach where diverse stakeholders, including hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators, unite in a collective effort to enhance their cyber defences (Badsha, Vakilinia and Sengupta, 2019). Unveiling this collaborative tapestry involves dissecting its elements, understanding its nuances, and appreciating the strategic impact it can wield within the digital landscape. The remainder of this section will discuss dissected elements of collaborative cybersecurity in nine points.

2.1 Collective Wisdom through Information Exchange

Collaborative initiatives fundamentally revolve around the exchange of best practices and insights. This exchange forms a reservoir of collective wisdom where various entities within the South African tourism and hospitality sector contribute their knowledge and experiences to fortify the cybersecurity posture of the entire industry. It is a symbiotic relationship where each participant becomes both a contributor and a beneficiary (Happa, Glencross and Steed, 2019).

2.2 Enhancing Cyber Resilience

The primary objective of these initiatives is to fortify the collective defences against the ever-evolving spectrum of cyber threats. By pooling resources, knowledge, and strategies, collaborative initiatives aim to create a more resilient cybersecurity framework (Rajivan and Cooke, 2017). This resilience is not just a defensive mechanism but a proactive strategy to stay ahead of the dynamic cyber landscape.

2.3 Diverse Stakeholders, Unified Front

Hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators, despite their unique operational landscapes, converge in these collaborative initiatives. The unity lies in recognising that the challenges posed by cyber threats transcend individual entities. By forming a unified front, these stakeholders acknowledge that their shared vulnerabilities demand a collective response (Solansky and Beck, 2021).

2.4 Overcoming Resource Deficits

There is a common challenge which is a shortage of dedicated cybersecurity resources and expertise among South African tourism and hospitality businesses. Collaborative initiatives act as a remedy, enabling entities to pool their resources effectively (Solansky and Beck, 2021). This collaborative approach helps overcome individual deficits and creates a more robust defence mechanism.

2.5 Improved Threat Intelligence

One of the tangible benefits reported by actively participating businesses is the improvement in threat intelligence. Collaborative initiatives facilitate the sharing of real-time information about emerging threats, enabling entities to stay informed and adapt their cybersecurity strategies accordingly. This collective intelligence becomes a proactive shield against potential cyberattacks (Solansky and Beck, 2021).

2.6 Cost-Effective Solutions

Cybersecurity solutions, often resource-intensive, become more cost-effective within the collaborative framework. Shared tools, technologies, and strategies result in efficient resource utilization (Wu *et al.*, 2022). This economic advantage ensures that even smaller entities within the tourism sector can access and implement robust cybersecurity measures.

2.7 Enhanced Incident Response Capabilities

Rapid and effective incident response is a crucial aspect of cybersecurity. Collaborative initiatives contribute to the enhancement of incident response capabilities by fostering a culture of shared responsibility and swift information exchange (Amini and Bozorgasl, 2023). This collective approach ensures a united front against cyber threats, minimizing the impact of potential incidents.

2.8 Cultivating a Culture of Cybersecurity Collaboration

Beyond the technical aspects, collaborative initiatives aspire to instill a cultural shift within the South African tourism sector. The aim is to cultivate a proactive and collaborative mindset towards cybersecurity (Brilingaitė *et al.*, 2022). This cultural transformation involves not only addressing current deficits but also preparing the industry for future challenges in the ever-evolving digital landscape.

2.9 Contributing to a Secure Online Environment

Ultimately, the collaborative model advocated herein aims to contribute to the creation of a secure online environment for international tourists visiting South Africa. This involves not only securing individual entities but actively participating in shaping a collective defence strategy that safeguards the entire tourism sector's reputation and long-term sustainability (Tagarev, 2020).

3. Methodology

This research endeavours to construct a robust foundation by adopting a dual-methodological approach, amalgamating the Design Science Research Methodology (DSRM) with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The DSRM will guide the design, development, and evaluation of a collaborative cybersecurity model tailored to the specific needs of South African tourism and hospitality businesses. This methodological framework emphasizes the creation of innovative solutions to address real-world problems. Simultaneously, the study will employ a systematic literature review to comprehensively explore existing knowledge, drawing insights from peer-reviewed articles, reports, theses, and conference proceedings. This combination of DSRM and SLR aims to not only develop a practical and effective collaborative cybersecurity model but also ensure that the model is grounded in a thorough understanding of the current state of literature and best practices. The iterative nature of DSRM aligns with the systematic approach of the literature review, fostering a synergistic integration that enhances the overall rigor and applicability of the research findings.

3.1 Systematic Literature Review

3.1.1 Sources of Papers

In the pursuit of a systematic literature review for this research, a comprehensive exploration of diverse sources was undertaken. To access peer-reviewed articles, researchers extensively utilized reputable academic databases, such as PubMed, IEEE Xplore, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, and others. Leveraging the resources of university and institutional libraries, the study accessed a wide range of academic journals and publications through their catalogues. Inclusive of various materials beyond traditional journal articles, the review also incorporated grey literature, encompassing relevant reports, theses, and conference proceedings. This

meticulous approach aimed to ensure that the research was informed by a thorough examination of literature from multiple channels, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

3.1.2 Search Phrases

This study adopted a strategic approach to construct search queries. By employing a combination of keywords, phrases, and Boolean operators, the study ensured a nuanced exploration of relevant literature. The chosen terms encompassed critical aspects such as "cybersecurity," "tourism and hospitality businesses," "collaborative models," and "South Africa." Through iterative searches, the research team refined the search strategy based on initial results and ongoing feedback. This iterative process allowed for a dynamic adjustment of the search parameters, ensuring that the literature review remained focused and aligned with the evolving needs of the study.

3.1.3 Inclusion and Exclusion of Papers

In the initial phase of the literature review, a comprehensive search process yielded a total of 98 papers, forming the broad compilation that marked the starting point for the research team. This extensive collection underwent a meticulous screening process, where titles and abstracts were systematically assessed against predefined inclusion criteria. Through rigorous evaluation and refinement, papers were systematically excluded based on reasons such as lack of relevance to the research objectives, methodological limitations, geographic misalignment, and publication date criteria. Following this discerning selection process, only 23 papers emerged as directly aligned with the study's objectives, meeting stringent criteria for inclusion in the final review. This careful curation ensured that the literature review was constructed upon a focused and high-quality foundation, incorporating the most pertinent and impactful sources in the exploration of collaborative cybersecurity practices in the South African tourism and hospitality sector.

3.2 Design Science Research Methodology

Design Science Methodology encourages an iterative approach (Dresch, Lacerda and Antunes, 2015). As the collaborative cybersecurity model is implemented and evaluated, any shortcomings or areas for improvement will be addressed through iterative refinement. Feedback from actively participating businesses, policymakers, and industry associations will be crucial in this phase. The design Science Methodology used in this study is summarised by Figure 1.

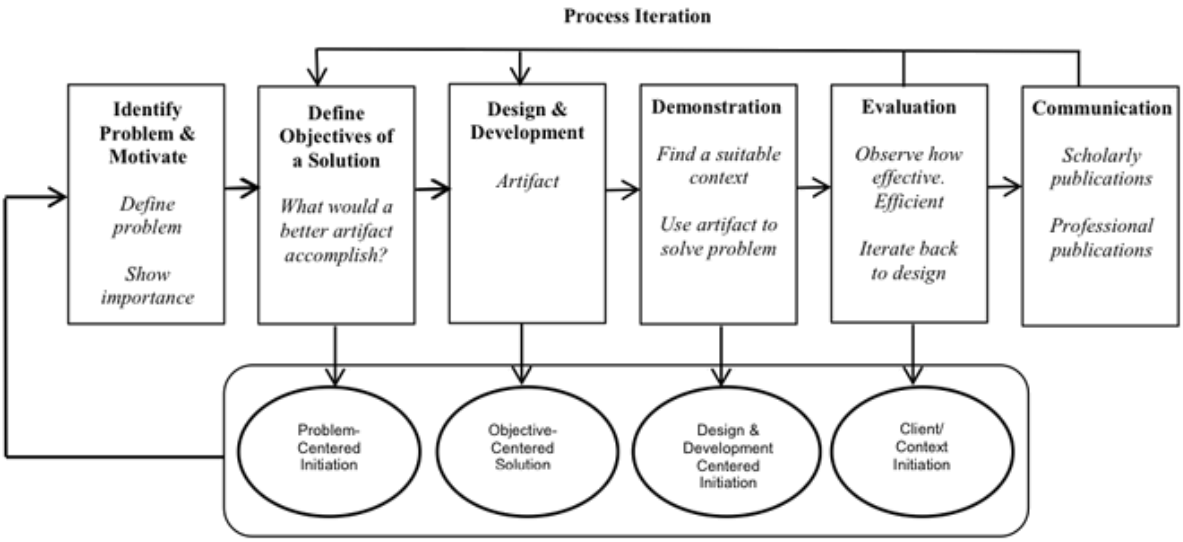

Figure 1: DSR Methodology (Rossi, 2014)

3.3 Problem Identification

The initial phase involved a systematic literature review to identify key challenges and opportunities in cybersecurity for South African tourism and hospitality businesses. The interconnected digital landscape and the reliance on online services for bookings and payments were identified as critical areas requiring attention. The

literature review also pinpointed cybersecurity risks and the common shortage of dedicated resources and expertise in these businesses (Gong and Schroeder, 2022).

3.4 Objectives

The overarching objectives of this methodology are to:

a. Identify key cybersecurity challenges and opportunities faced by South African tourism and hospitality businesses.

b. Develop a collaborative cybersecurity model that fosters information sharing and collective defence against cyber threats.

c. Implement and evaluate the model to assess its effectiveness and relevance within the industry.

3.5 Design and Development

Building on the findings of the literature review, the design and development phase focused on crafting the collaborative cybersecurity model. The model is specifically designed to facilitate the exchange of best practices among diverse tourism establishments. Drawing inspiration from existing collaborative initiatives, the model aims to fortify the collective defences of these businesses against evolving cyber threats.

3.6 Demonstration/Implementation

The implementation phase involves outlining the practical steps for deploying the collaborative cybersecurity model within South African tourism and hospitality businesses. This includes strategies for fostering collaboration, establishing knowledge exchange hubs, and overcoming potential challenges identified in the literature review.

3.7 Evaluation and Validation

The evaluation of the collaborative cybersecurity model is an integral aspect of the methodology. This involves assessing the model's effectiveness in enhancing threat intelligence, providing cost-effective cybersecurity solutions, and improving incident response capabilities. Evaluation criteria are established based on the desired outcomes outlined in the literature review.

Validation of the collaborative cybersecurity model is enhanced through expert reviews. Two Tourism and Hospitality experts and three Cybersecurity experts will be engaged to provide critical assessments. The Tourism and Hospitality experts will evaluate the model's alignment with industry practices and its potential impact on businesses within the sector. Simultaneously, Cybersecurity experts will assess the model's technical soundness, its ability to address identified threats, and its compatibility with established cybersecurity principles.

3.8 Communication

The final phase of Design Science Methodology involves effective communication of the collaborative cybersecurity model's outcomes. This includes disseminating research findings, model documentation, and practical recommendations to key stakeholders, such as South African tourism and hospitality businesses, policymakers, industry associations, and the broader academic community. Communication strategies will encompass presenting at conferences and writing journal papers, ensuring that insights and recommendations are widely shared, contributing to knowledge dissemination and potential adoption within the industry. Effective communication serves as a crucial bridge to translate research outcomes into practical applications for various stakeholders.

4. Introducing the Cybersecurity Collaborative Model

4.1 Foundation in the Literature Review

The inception of the collaborative cybersecurity model is grounded in a meticulous exploration of the existing literature, tracing the digital footprints of South African tourism and hospitality businesses across an expansive canvas that encompasses hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators. This foundational journey serves as the

bedrock upon which the aspirations for a fortified cyber defence system are laid as represented in the proposed model in figure 2.

4.2 Cybersecurity as the Pivotal Axis

As the digital landscape expands and intertwines with the fabric of the tourism industry, cybersecurity emerges as the pivotal axis of concern. The literature review acts as a compass, guiding through a vast and intricate terrain of research, reports, and scholarly insights. It illuminates the contours of this paramount challenge, especially for those businesses predominantly serving travellers reliant on online services for their journey's planning.

4.3 Collaboration as the Catalyst

Within the vast expanse of the literature, a prevailing theme emerges the power of collaboration. Existing collaborative initiatives, often scattered like constellations across the South African tourism sky, form the starting point. Literature meticulously dissects these initiatives, unravelling the threads that bind them together in the pursuit of enhanced cybersecurity.

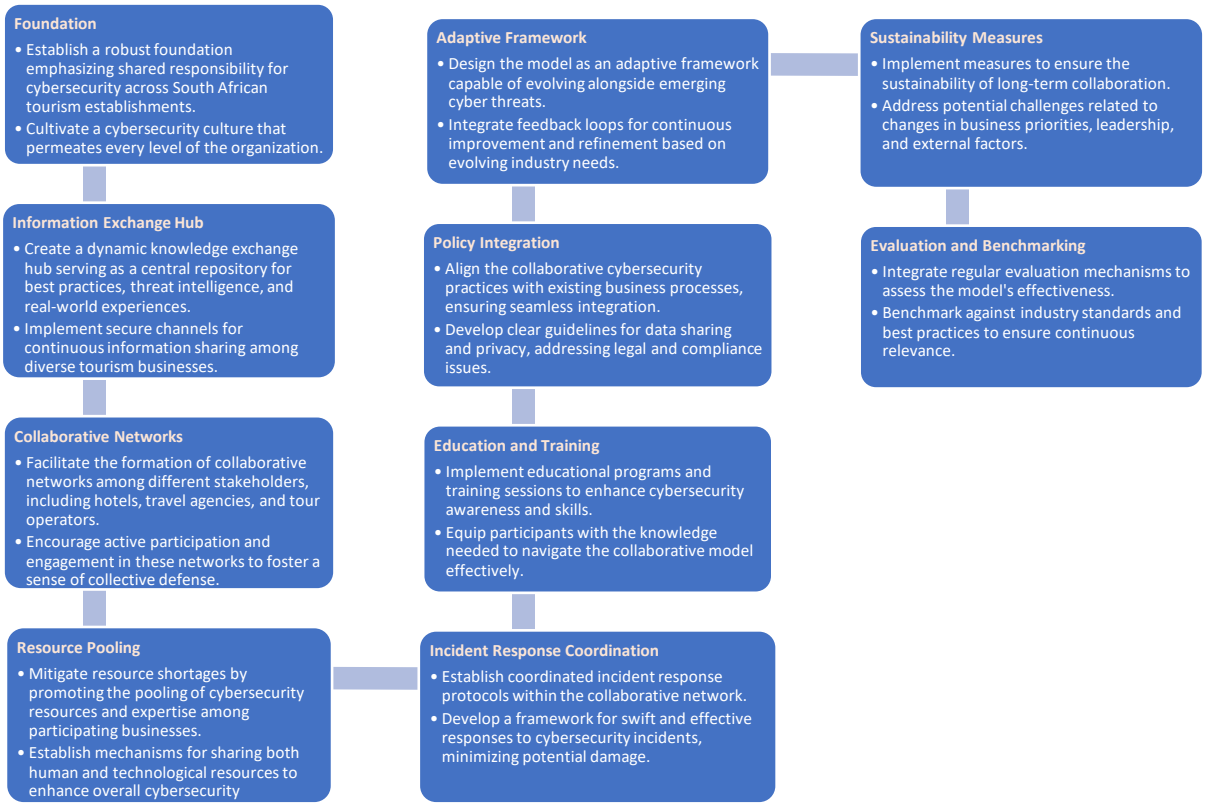

Figure 2: Cybersecurity Collaborative Model

5. Discussion

This study extends beyond academic inquiry, it becomes a beacon guiding towards practical wisdom. Its insights and revelations are poised to offer not just theoretical knowledge but actionable recommendations for South African tourism and hospitality businesses, policymakers, and industry associations.

Ultimately, the collaborative model advocated in this research, nurtured by the literature review, aspires to contribute to the creation of secure horizons for tourists exploring South Africa. Collaborative initiatives enhance the collective understanding of emerging cyber threats, providing participants with improved threat intelligence. This allows businesses to stay ahead of potential risks and vulnerabilities. The collaborative model enables shared resources, tools, and expertise, resulting in more cost-effective cybersecurity solutions. This is particularly beneficial for smaller businesses that may have limited individual budgets for comprehensive cybersecurity measures.

Active participation in collaborative networks enhances incident response capabilities. The collective and coordinated approach ensures a swift and effective response to cybersecurity incidents, minimizing potential damages. The collaborative model aims to instil a culture of proactive cybersecurity within South African tourism and hospitality businesses. This cultural shift fosters a mindset of shared responsibility, awareness, and readiness to address cybersecurity challenges collectively.

Ultimately the goal of the collaborative model is to contribute to the creation of a secure online environment for international tourists visiting South Africa. This ensures the safety of online transactions, bookings, and payments, enhancing the overall experience for travellers.

5.1 Aspiring Outcome: Nurturing Resilience in South African Tourism through Collaborative Cybersecurity

As the research study unfolds its narrative in the interconnected realm of South African tourism, the envisaged outcome embodies a multifaceted transformation aimed at fortifying businesses, inspiring collaboration, and securing the digital landscape. This collaborative cybersecurity model aspires to be a catalyst for change, with several key outcomes envisaged as discussed in this section.

The collaborative cybersecurity model aims to instil a robust cybersecurity culture within South African tourism establishments, envisioning a cultural shift that goes beyond the adoption of best practices. This transformation involves the internalization of a shared responsibility for cybersecurity, fostering a proactive and resilient ethos among businesses (Agboola and Tunay, 2023) .

Integral to the collaborative cybersecurity model is the establishment of a dynamic knowledge exchange hub. Functioning as a living repository of best practices, insights, and real-world experiences (Deljoo *et al.*, 2019), this hub fosters continuous learning and adaptation within the South African tourism sector.

Acknowledging the common shortage of dedicated cybersecurity resources and expertise, the collaborative model seeks to mitigate these challenges through collective action. By pooling resources and expertise, businesses can overcome individual limitations, ensuring a more comprehensive defence against cyber threats (Yoon and Chang, 2021).

Active participation in the collaborative cybersecurity model is anticipated to yield tangible benefits for businesses, including improved threat intelligence, cost-effective cybersecurity solutions, and enhanced incident response capabilities (Handman and Albert, 2017). The model aims to transform theoretical advantages into practical outcomes that positively impact the day-to-day operations of businesses.

Aligned with the collaborative cybersecurity model, the aim is to provide policy insights and actionable recommendations for South African tourism and hospitality businesses, policymakers, and industry associations. These insights translate into tangible guidelines, facilitating the effective implementation of cybersecurity practices at both organizational and policy levels (Kosseff, 2018).

The collaborative model endeavours to enhance trust in the online tourism experience for local and international travellers. By fortifying the online environment through improved cybersecurity measures, the model contributes to creating a secure and reliable digital space for bookings, payments, and interactions.

Ultimately, the collaborative cybersecurity model envisions the long-term safeguarding of the reputation and sustainability of the South African tourism sector. A secure digital environment is positioned as a cornerstone for sustained success and global competitiveness in the evolving digital landscape.

In essence, the collaborative cybersecurity model presents a transformed South African tourism sector one that not only navigates the challenges of the digital age but emerges stronger, more resilient, and trusted in the eyes of travellers. This model becomes a pivotal force in shaping this outcome, offering a blueprint for sustained success in the dynamic and interconnected world of digital tourism.

5.2 Anticipated Challenges of Implementing the Cybersecurity Collaborative Model

Implementing a collaborative cybersecurity model in the South African tourism and hospitality sector presents both advantages and challenges. One significant challenge lies in the resistance to information sharing among businesses, driven by concerns about potential risks and competitive disadvantages. Overcoming this reluctance necessitates the establishment of trust and a focus on the collective benefits of sharing sensitive information (Happa, Glencross and Steed, 2019). Additionally, coordinating efforts and maintaining effective communication

within a collaborative network proves challenging, particularly when dealing with businesses of varying sizes and operational complexities. Ensuring a seamless flow of information becomes imperative (Motloung, 2022).

Integrating collaborative cybersecurity practices into existing business processes is another challenge, requiring careful planning and implementation as businesses may need to adapt their workflows to accommodate the collaborative model (Gundu, Maronga and Boucher, 2019). The varied levels of cybersecurity maturity among participants in collaborative networks add complexity, demanding tailored approaches to align businesses with differing levels of expertise and resources (Happa, Glencross and Steed, 2019).

The sustainability of collaboration poses a challenge due to changes in business priorities, leadership, or external factors, emphasizing the need for continuous commitment from participants. Legal and compliance issues related to data sharing and privacy may also hinder collaborative initiatives, making it crucial to establish clear guidelines and ensure compliance with relevant regulations (Kosseff, 2018). Addressing technological disparities within the collaborative network requires strategic planning and investment to bridge the gaps in infrastructures and capabilities (Sharkov, 2016). Navigating these challenges is essential for the successful implementation of the collaborative cybersecurity model, contributing to a more resilient and secure environment for South African tourism and hospitality businesses.

6. Conclusion

In the rapidly evolving landscape of South African tourism and hospitality, this research embarked on a comprehensive journey to address the escalating concerns surrounding cybersecurity. Focused on the development of a collaborative cybersecurity model, rooted in the Design Science Methodology (DSM), the study sought to fortify the resilience of businesses catering to international travellers reliant on online services for bookings and payments.

The systematic literature review uncovered the intricate challenges faced by the sector, ranging from the risks associated with the digital landscape to a common scarcity of dedicated cybersecurity resources. Leveraging the insights gleaned, the collaborative cybersecurity model was meticulously designed and developed. This model not only emphasized the exchange of best practices among diverse tourism establishments but also aimed to create a collective defence against dynamic and persistent cyber threats.

The implementation and evaluation phases underscored the practicality and effectiveness of the collaborative cybersecurity model. Through iterative refinement and expert reviews, the model demonstrated its potential to enhance threat intelligence, offer cost-effective cybersecurity solutions, and elevate incident response capabilities. The engagement of Tourism and Hospitality experts and Cybersecurity experts provided valuable perspectives, ensuring the model's alignment with industry practices and technical soundness.

The communication phase, a pivotal component of DSM, facilitated the dissemination of research outcomes to key stakeholders. Presenting at conferences and contributing to journal papers ensured widespread accessibility of insights and recommendations. This strategic communication approach aimed to bridge the gap between research findings and practical applications, fostering knowledge dissemination and potential adoption within the industry.

In conclusion, this study presents a significant contribution to the discourse on cybersecurity in South African tourism and hospitality. The collaborative cybersecurity model, born out of rigorous research and the DSM framework, stands as a beacon for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and academia. Beyond theoretical constructs, the model offers a tangible solution to fortify the online environment for both local and international tourists, safeguarding the reputation and long-term sustainability of the South African tourism and hospitality sector. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the collaborative cybersecurity model emerges as a resilient and adaptable framework, poised to shape the future of cybersecurity practices in the dynamic realm of tourism.

Future work for this study might be exploring the scalability of the model to accommodate businesses of varying sizes and resource capacities would contribute to its broader applicability. Further investigations into the specific cyber threats faced by different types of tourism establishments, such as hotels, travel agencies, or tour operators, could provide targeted insights for tailored cybersecurity measures.

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Unlocking the Potential of Hybrid Learning: Tourism Student Voices in South African Universities of Technology

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Abstract: This article examines the impacts the pandemic learning environment had on student learning and wellness, and how rethinking higher education (HE) design could bolster the improved student well-being. In the wake of Covid-19, academia is searching for some "normalcy" which requires a critical review of the suitability of current structures, as policy design struggles with the possibilities of a hybrid approach to pedagogic delivery. The body of knowledge on blended/hybrid learning design requires the student voice, in cold face experiences of pandemic-induced academic evolution, to get closer to discovering a model that benefits both teaching and learning. The unearthing of possible unrealised disruptions to the learning environment, affecting social, personal and cognitive presence. A sequential explanatory study that included the collection of quantitative survey data, and qualitative focus group interviews was conducted. The census enquiry of tourism management students at three universities of technology in South Africa was concluded online, as per remote learning requirements at the height of the pandemic. Study results indicate that remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic impacted negatively on student learning and mental health at universities of technology (UOTs) in South Africa. Student data indicated that even through strict pandemic regulations, the university campus life morphed, and did not die. Students gravitated towards parts of the campus considered soothing, with proper internet access, arguing for a holistic, sustainable university architecture that bolsters learning and student support. HE institutions need to further consider the role and design of university architecture for hybrid/blended learning, with a user-focused perspective.

Keywords: Covid-19, Hybrid Learning, Student Well-Being, Sustainable University Architecture, Tourism Management

1. Introduction

The term environment is defined as "the total surroundings and conditions in which something or someone lives or functions" (Aheto and Cronje, 2018). In an educational context, the learning environment defines the boundaries, resources, conditions, and practices within which students have opportunities to enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Aheto and Cronje, 2018). This includes complex issues of widening access for students in higher education (HE), as it regards internal and external factors to the university systems. The policy-driven mandate of HE in South Africa has been to help widen access (Council on Higher Education, 2010; Mzangwa, 2019). Traditionally, South African HE relied on face-to-face, contact based learning models (ReadLab, 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic, however, disrupted this landscape, compelling institutions to embrace online learning during the academic year 2020/2021 when academic programs worldwide came to a standstill. Institutions of higher learning implemented online learning to continue the academic programme (DHET, 2020). This rendered hybrid/blended learning a critical consideration in situations of crisis management.

As a result, the learning environment for HE students was then delineated within two categories: first, the academic environment which consists of university buildings and spaces in which to socialise and learn. The second, the home environment, which is considered as the support basis for learning outside of the confines of the university space, the brick-and-mortar definitions (Xaba, 2021).

The education transformation agenda in South Africa has looked at curriculum reform (Council on Higher Education, 2010) with some successes in access to HE and support mechanisms in addressing issues of inequality in the HE spaces (DHET, 2020). The rapid acceleration of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by the pandemic has raised questions about the impact on the transformation agenda within universities. The disruption caused by the pandemic has led to considerations about whether the adoption of blended/hybrid learning could potentially reverse the progress achieved in the transformation agenda (Naidoo and Cartwright, 2020; McCain and Evans, 2022). Holistic studies that examine dynamic interactions and processes within the classroom setting, particularly during disruptive times like the pandemic, are essential (Closs et al., 2022). This study aimed to elucidate various complexities and opportunities associated with the learning environment that have an impact on student well-being, providing valuable insights for educators and UoTs offering tourism studies.

2. Suitability of Learning Environments for Effective Student Engagement

Bond et al, (2020) explain student engagement as the "energy and effort" students employ within their learning community, for attaining knowledge. They further state that:

> "It is shaped by a range of structural and internal influences, including the complex interplay of relationships, learning activities and the learning environment. The more students are engaged and empowered within their learning community, the more likely they are to channel that energy back into their learning, leading to a range of short- and long-term outcomes, that can likewise further fuel engagement" (Bond et al, 2020).

Three dimensions of student engagement, namely behavioural, emotional, and cognitive (Bond et al, 2020), highlight the link of student engagement in all aspects to student success. The environment where this engagement takes place becomes paramount. In an online community of inquiry, the structure and dynamics differ significantly from those of a traditional learning community (Closs et al., 2022). The social presence aspect of the Community of Inquiry framework acknowledges that active engagement is essential for students to feel connected and involved in the learning process (The Community of Inquiry, n.d.). This active engagement not only promotes a sense of community but also contributes to student well-being. When students are actively engaged and have a strong social presence, they feel connected to their peers and instructors, leading to a positive learning experience (Garrison & Akol, 2013).

2.1 Mental Well-Being as a Focus for Student Academic Success

An increasingly critical discussion in the HE space has been the matter of student mental well-being (Warwick et al, 2008; McBride, 2019). Discourse on mental well-being has over the years focused on varying key areas, including natural space for improved well-being (Lau and Yang, 2009), physical classroom design impacts on well-being (Asino and Pulay, 2019) and a sense of community (Fiock, 2020) for enhanced learning. More recently, the emotional demands that remote learning has placed on university students (Naidoo and Cartwright, 2020; McCain and Evans, 2022) have been receiving attention. Certain initiatives within educational institutions such as purposefully including natural spaces for human mental health have become critical (Warwick et al., 2008). Where

2.2 The Community of Inquiry (COI) Framework

The initiatives for academic success can be achieved through the implementation of support mechanisms that foster increased interactions amongst peers (Hrastinski, 2019), that allow students to have a safe space to get emotional and mental support. These connections are guided by concepts of the COI framework, which supports connection and collaboration among students (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008), and promotes reflection for learning (The Community of Inquiry, n.d.). In evaluating theories which have been applied in blended learning research (Garrison and Akol, 2013; Graham, 2013, Fiock, 2020), the COI framework is most often used. Three key elements of the COI framework include (The Community of Inquiry, n.d.; Garrison and Vaughan, 2008):

- Social presence – the ability of students to foster relations with the community, and how well individual students can project their personalities within the environment, thus offering opportunities for peer collaboration.
- Teaching presence – providing structure, facilitation and direction on the educational experience is critical, making the role of the lecturer critical for blended/hybrid classes.
- Cognitive presence – the progression of a collaborative learning process which is framed by following the process from problem identification, exploration of the problem, and integrations of ideas, to a resolution. That is the continuous process of information exchange, and testing concepts, leading to knowledge creation (Vaughan, 2010; Bryan and Volchenkova, 2016).

The elements of the COI framework impact student well-being when they are disrupted. For instance, when there is limited social presence in the online learning environment, students may feel isolated and disconnected from their peers and instructors (Closs et al., 2022). Where there is a lack of teacher presence, students may struggle to receive necessary guidance and support, which can lead to increased stress and anxiety. Similarly the the challenges related to the learning environment including limited cognitive presence can hinder students' ability to process and understand course material effectively, impacting their overall well-being (Celestino & Yamamoto, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted negatively on learning environments, forcing the closure of physical spaces of most industries and services, which were considered as spaces that offered student interactions (South Africa, DoH, 2022). The most effective approach for this study was to gauge individuals' perceptions of their learning experiences. This method was chosen to address the overarching question of whether alterations in learning environments and the fundamental elements shaping these environments had significant impacts on student well-being (South Africa, DoH, 2022). The learning environment is considered a critical factor in this article, and there is a need to understand if the support mechanisms put in place to assist with academic support were effective (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012).

3. Study Methodology

The Covid-19 pandemic had an adverse effect on the services industry, including tourism. The closure of the industry impacted institutions of learning where tourism studies are offered, thus impacting quality of learning. The study followed the sequential explanatory design, considered a mixed-method approach (QAUNT-qual) to collect data pertaining to aspects around students' experiences of their learning environment. Quantitative data was collected and analysed, followed by a qualitative enquiry, probing further on data collected from the first phase of data collection (Creswell, 2014), to provide depth of data collected (Wakelin-Theron et al, 2019).

A census enquiry of undergraduate tourism programmes student cohorts was applied. An online questionnaire was sent to specific academics at the participating UoTs to assist in distributing the link to students. The *quantitative research – self-administered online survey* included open-ended and closed-ended questions. The online survey tool used a Lime survey for the study. The survey was sectioned into different sections for focus areas. The flexibility and functionality of the survey instrument made it a tool of choice for the study for remote feedback based on a long survey. Analysis of the quantitative data from the questionnaires was conducted with the SPSS 28 analysis software. Qualitative data was analysed using the Atlas.ti 22 programme. Data was triangulated, and the findings are presented in the following discussion.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of N=260 responses were received from tourism management students, with, 52.7% reponses from from UoT1 (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, CPUT), 30.4% from UoT3 (Tshwane University of Technology, TUT), and 16.7% from UoT2 (Central University of Technology, CUT). Surveys, conducted remotely during complete Covid-19 lockdown periods, revealed instances of partially completed surveys. A missing value analysis, following the guidelines of Manly and Wells (2015), confirmed that the missingness was completely at random. Consequently, the data has been reported accordingly. The gender distribution of participants indicated a large difference in the number of participants, with 186 (71%) female and 75 (29%) male participants. The category 21 to 25 years was the largest with 138 (53%) responses, followed by the 18 to 20 year-group with 95 (37%) participants. Category 26 to 30 had only 21 (8%) respondents, and <18, as well as >30 categories were made up of 3 (1%) participants respectively. In this study, another question focused on access students had to learning, and the most prevalent source (84.7%) of academic support was The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

4.1 Perceptions and Preferences of the Online Learning Environment

UoT students' learning environment in this study was delineated as the campus/classroom and home (place of residence during the study) environments as data was collected during the height of the pandemic. The enquiry revealed that on average 90 per cent (CPUT= 96.3%; CUT=93.2%; TUT =88.6%) of students preferred to live close to their university, even when attendance was purely online classes, due to lockdowns. In contrast to this finding, although students lived closer to their university of study, there was a strong preference for students to study at home, and not on campus (54.5% agree and 27.3% strongly agree). Therefore, assumptions could be made that either students did not have suitable options for access to online learning from their learning environments, thus the need to migrate to the metros even for online learning was critical. This builds a picture that social presence although a critical element for learning, will require to be curated by students, for interactions to be effective.

Further enquiries about the learning environment were linked to students' opinions of what they considered to be a suitable learning environment. Results in this aspect revealed that accessibility of online and campus-based resources and facilities was a critical element. Students indicated having received great support from the participating UoTs in this regard but lamented the availability of facilities at critical times. "*…The wifi, it depends*

on what place (sic) *you at like what section of the campus you are at. So, it's also a fine (sic) and then sometimes you find good* (sic). *You have to go to the* (sic) *is to attend the class or write an online test. Then the library is closed. Like, how is it closed when students are still like learning that the semester is not even finished, but the library is closed"* (5:31 ¶ 114 in TUT Focus group interview). A critical point, noting that in a developing countries access to learning resources, is still an immense challenges.

On the issue of online learning, the ability to access learning was based on the availability of online resources. In the South African context, challenges with connectivity are not only limited to internet connectivity facilities but also the availability of electricity. Access to internet fibre connectivity is not widespread in the country, thus students are limited to expensive options like cell phone data. Results in Table 1 represent the dire situation of challenges with access to university-sponsored online connectivity facilities like virtual private networks (VPN). In 2020, UoTs and HE in collaboration with cellular network providers in South Africa, zero-rated academic institutions' websites to assist students gain access to universities' websites for free. Data in Table 1 below suggests that the initiative did not yield the desired results. As per the foundations of the COI framework, the continuous process of information exchange, and testing concepts, leads to knowledge creation (Vaughan, 2010; Bryan and Volchenkova, 2016). Where this process is disrupted, challenges could occur.

Table 1: Frequency of availability of resources for online learning and connectivity (N=145)

Frequency distribution	N/A	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Electricity (when not load shedding)	2.8	5.5	2.1	33.8	24.8	31
Fibre network	12.4	10.3	8.3	30.3	18.6	20
Personal cell phone data	0.7	4.8	9.7	35.2	24.1	25.5
University provided data	0	5.5	0	12.4	26.9	55.2
VPN	26.2	37.2	7.6	18.6	4.1	6.2

As a result of connectivity challenges, students missed online sessions. On the question of interactions with peers, a small number of students pointed to preferring to speak to classmates, to find out from them what was done in class in situations where they missed online sessions (27.8% = CUT; 17.8% = TUT; 8.5% = CPUT). In contrast, students preferred listening to or watching class recordings of missed sessions.

4.2 Student Support and the Physical Learning Environment

Regarding support services of facilities available to students during remote learning, responses here were also articulated as a combination of perceptions and experiences regarding remote services and on-campus facilities. This pointed to a general use of physical campus facilities during remote learning and the perceptions of students on the user-friendliness of campuses. Students used a variety of services at their disposal as multiple on-campus facilities as well as remote support services. Students maintained they used services online or on-campus during the remote learning period, with on-campus services including the library, general campus grounds, computer laboratories and the calm surroundings for a quiet time. One respondent said:

> *"I have this other section that I really like the most …which is the dam, the dam side. It's very peaceful. So there's this side where I usually sit with (sic) a bench. And like, you can actually kind of think of everything"* (5:45 ¶ 143 in TUT Focus group interview)

This was a profound statement taking into consideration that remote learning could have exacerbated the situation of isolation for those in university residences (Mthethwa & Luthuli, 2021) and that the home and campus environments are not necessarily built to reduce or mitigate issues of mental health. Another critical element essential for meaningful learning is teacher presence.

Two of the respondents from each participating UoT were student mentors. One student mentor respondent indicated how she used online counselling facilities, after a traumatic experience:

> *"For me, it's the flip side of the coin because I provide some of these services. I am a departmental tutor and mentor. I tutor first-, second-, and third-year students and also provide mentoring. My services*

> *include online extra classes and career guidance, to name a few. However, last year I used an online counselling service, which was extremely beneficial because I needed support. I would rate that service an 8 because I received all of the assistance I required, the specialist was quite professional and had everything organised for each session, it felt safe to share, and I was able to recover from the trauma I experienced" (5 p 1 in Abe_CPUT)*
>
> *"I actually use the library tool, but not, not most often I use the library and since I'm actually part of the, student mentors,* (sic) *I usually use the computer labs in building Six of which by not basically I'm using them (sic), but I actually help students who have access to them"* (5:40 ¶ 127 in TUT Focus group interview)

This was important to note that student support in addition to suitable learning spaces requires attention in design and ease of access as they play a role in the learning process (Celestino & Yamamoto, 2020). The results also point a critical picture of academic and student mentors and their mental well-being. Student mentors, given the pressure of offering academic assistance services to departments, while being students themselves must be strongly considered. Mental health is an issue that has been recorded in academic papers (Council on Higher Education, 2010; Henning et al., 2019) for which innovative solutions are required in HE (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2020). As South African HE was traditionally, designed more as contact focused (ReadLab, 2022), the physical resources play as much a role in students' learning process as the teacher presence.

4.3 Sustainable Online Spaces for Mental Well-Being

The discussions on student mental well-being in the HE space have been a matter of academic investigation for some time (Warwick et al, 2008; McBride, 2019). More recently, research has shifted its focus to the emotional challenges students face as a result of remote learning (Naidoo and Cartwright, 2020; McCain and Evans, 2022). This study further evaluated issues of learning and access, and mainly evaluated students' learning preferences based on their reflective experiences. As per the definitions of the COI framework, a strong social presence allows students to feel connected to their peers and instructors, leading to a positive learning experience. In the constantly changing HE environment, societal needs, and technological advancements, effectiveness will be evaluated based on systems that offer the best support for students and their developmental processes. The element of teaching presence in the community of inquiry means that instructors play a crucial role in facilitating student engagement, providing guidance, and creating a supportive learning environment.

Forms of synchronous and asynchronous tools that were used for academic activities during remote learning were evaluated to determine which offered the best outcomes. The results in Table 2 highlighted a preference for formal, or synchronous forms of communication during remote learning. Preferences for communication to be sent via the Learner Management System (LMS) scored the highest with 42.5% preferred and 30.8% strongly preferred responses. This was followed by the preference for communication to be done through the class WhatsApp group (38.4% = preferred and 17.1% = most preferred), with direct e-mail with the lecturer scoring the highest with 30.1% preferred and 19.9% most preferred responses. Interestingly, preference for information and contacting the lecturer directly on WhatsApp scored lower with students, which is in line with Martin and Bolliger's (2018) findings, as well as research by Saidi et al, (2021), indicating that regarding formal tuition, students were inclined to lean towards formal structures of communication like the LMS and emails from the lecturer, than asynchronous platforms, where group coordinating activities were more effective on these platforms (Mpungose, 2019).

Table 2. Learning style preferences related to remote learning (%, N=145)

Preferred forms of communication during remote learning						
	N/A	Least preferred	Less preferred	Neutral	Preferred	Most preferred
Prefer info from LMS	2.1	3.4	4.1	17.1	42.5	30.8
Prefer info in class WhatsApp group	3.4	11.6	19.9	28.8	28.1	8.2
Prefer to contact lecturer on WhatsApp	6.2	15.8	15.1	25.3	26.7	11.0
Prefer class WhatsApp	0.0	9.6	8.9	26.0	38.4	17.1
Prefer direct lecturer-mail	3.4	6.2	12.3	28.1	30.1	19.9

As Mshayisa (2022) also found, the more informal platforms in blended lessons were preferred for group collaborative work, while the more formal platforms were preferred for instruction and communication from lecturers.

5. Conclusion

Challenges experienced during remote learning were linked to limited usage of university facilities, issues of connectivity for access to learning, and lack of social interaction, leading to negative impacts on students' well-being. Transforming education is a key element of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). In this agenda, education plays a unique role in the improvement of knowledge and skills, in addressing environmental issues, sustainability, and human well-being (Bauer et al, 2021). Interdisciplinary approaches are required for this process to succeed (Cilliers, 2019). A holistic approach to learning and student support goes beyond what has been provided regarding academic performance and student well-being. UoTs would need to further consider the role and design of university architecture for hybrid/blended learning. The study results emphasised the importance of remote WIFI access and the value students place on connected spaces for remote learning. University connectivity is limited to areas which have been considered high traffic such as boardrooms and classrooms, while lacking in outdoor spaces, where students require the resource, creating a challenge with the learning process. A critical element of the well-being of those appointed in tutoring and mentor positions is not given attention, as they work in high demand environments. The results of the study, highghlit serious gaps in support planning of the learning environment at UoTs. In conclusion, this paper makes a noteworthy contribution to the literature on blended and hybrid learning models. In support of recommendations by McGhie (2012) made an argument for universities to consider functional sustainable spaces that offer well-being support for students. In the post-pandemic university space, this argument is even stronger. The architecture of university physical and online spaces must be critically evaluated for the academic success and mental well-being of students, especially in developing economies like South African where university architecture for hybrid and blended learning is not fully developed.

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The integration of Graduate Attributes Within the Hospitality Management Curriculum at Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: South African institutions of higher learning are responsible for producing graduates who are well-prepared for the demands of the world of work. To meet this imperative, universities have adopted the use of graduate attributes (GAs) to develop and showcase their graduates' skills and competencies. Furthermore, the current economic landscape places pressure on universities to produce highly skilled and employable graduates. Despite the recognised significance of GAs, lecturers often encounter difficulties when attempting to integrate them into the curriculum. The problem (gap), however, is that lecturers find it difficult to integrate these GAs for various reasons, including a lack of comprehensive understanding, effective teaching methods, and reliable assessment strategies of GAs. Moreover, the absence of structured training programs for lecturers on how to integrate GAs into the curriculum is a hindrance to the GAs' successful implementation. This paper aims to determine the extent to which the GAs have been implemented within the hospitality curriculum in South Africa. A desktop review study was conducted and analysed according to identified themes. The findings propose developing the framework, a guiding tool, that will enable academic institutions to integrate GAs into their curriculum.

Keywords: Graduate Attributes, Hospitality Curriculum, Higher Education Institutions

1. Introduction and Background

The higher education landscape is shifting under neoliberal forces that are increasingly aligning the goals of business, government, and education (Giroux, 2010; Ingleby, 2015; Olssen and Peters, 2005). This shift is engendering debate around the world about the role of higher education institutions in producing employable graduates to feed national prosperity in the emerging knowledge economy (with respect to geography see Arrowsmith, Bagoly-Simó, Finchum, Oda, and Pawson, 2011; Erickson, 2012; Hennemann and Liefner, 2010; Kong, 2007; Li, Kong, and Peng, 2007). As this evolution continues, we need to consider how we enhance generic graduate capabilities as well as the disciplinary expertise of our undergraduate students.

To avoid deferring to market forces and the consequent commodification of teaching and learning (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013), we can make conscious decisions about our curriculum content and co-curricular activities, pedagogies and the nature and use of learning spaces. Our graduates should possess the knowledge, skills, and values to enable them to cope with dynamic employment opportunities, but they must also understand, through the benefits and constraints of their disciplinary perspectives, who they are and how they might contribute positively to the heterogeneity they will encounter in their local, regional, and global communities (Barnett, 2004).

While such studies reveal some consensus, integrating university curricula with teaching delivery and graduate attributes attainment rarely seems to align as expected (Barrie, 2007; Drummond et al, 1998). This led Green et al (2009) to question "Why is it so hard to develop graduate attributes (hereafter GAs)?" Their answers included a lack of common understanding of GAs, the challenge of relating GAs to different disciplinary backgrounds and the pressures on academic staff faced with rising student numbers to develop the necessary aligned pedagogies and assessment strategies. To help overcome the latter, the authors suggested that institutions should offer professional development to academic staff, and such staff should subsequently receive appropriate rewards and recognition.

Not so long ago, De la Harpe and David (2012) examined the role of academic staff specifically in integrating graduate attributes across curricula and concluded that academics may hold an idealised conception about the importance of GAs, but this is not always translated into a working conception. The gap between idealised and realised conceptions was linked most strongly to staff willingness and confidence to teach and assess GAs, and these dispositions were, in turn, related positively to gender (being female), teaching qualification and industry experience. These findings have implications for institutional policies concerning staff recruitment, reward, and professional development, not least that they must be appropriately prioritised, properly resourced, and

adequately integrated with one another. There is certainly a need to consider strengthening the relationships between academic and professional staff and offering staff industry placements or mentoring.

Vast research has been done on GAs and their integration into the curriculum to ascertain the preparedness of graduates in the industry. However, to date, graduates' unpreparedness is still a problem in the hospitality industry (Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron, 2023). As far as can be ascertained, there is limited research on GAs within the hospitality curriculum in a developing world context. Given the number of students enrolled in hospitality programs in South Africa and the booming hospitality job market in South Africa, research within this context is necessary. The theoretical contribution relates to critically articulating GAs within the hospitality curriculum from a developing context, where such findings could mirror similarities and differences and inform higher education institutions of academic implications that could be useful for curriculum design and development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Graduate Attributes' (GAs) Implementation in Curriculum

Global and local studies on the importance of GAs have led to their prioritisation in higher education (HE) curricula. In South Africa, Mtawa et al (2021) assert that employers seek graduates with social and human values, including critical thinking, communication skills, teamwork, and affiliation, to address societal challenges. Fongwa (2018) concurs, stating that higher education institutions are responsible not only for imparting knowledge but also for fostering the development of GAs. Irish researchers Crowley and Jeske (2021) underscore the significance of GAs for recruiters, who expect graduates to possess resilience and a commitment to continuous learning.

Barrie (2007) outlines four understandings of GAs as outcomes, ranging from separate generic courses to integration into specific courses. Jones (2013) argues that GAs cannot be standalone attributes and must be integrated into each course's curriculum to be effective. GAs have to be integrated into the hospitality management curriculum by the lecturers through learning, teaching, and student assessments. This is despite the fact that there has been criticism of the hospitality education curriculum being channelled only to serve the industry (Jiang, 2019). Hospitality curriculum designers should be mindful of the frequent changes that affect the industry and ensure that their systems allow for their absorption when the need arises. Current literature emphasises the need for the hospitality curriculum to strengthen its content in finance/Accounting and technological aspects to be in line with the fourth industrial revolution, which is bringing major changes to the way the industry is working currently (Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron, 2023). However, such changes would not yield results if the integration of GAs is in disarray.

Hughes and Barrie (2010) are of the view that lecturers struggle to work with GAs and integrate them into the curriculum. The authors suggest that some of the reasons behind these difficulties are time constraints and lack of resources available to lecturers. Barrie (2004) and Wong et al (2022) also suggest that staff may lack the self-confidence to begin a new process or change which is involved in GAs integration into the curriculum. Furthermore, the idea of GAs and their integration into the curriculum is often viewed as a "top-down" project by management. Lecturers may, therefore, not want to engage as they feel that the project does not represent their interests and issues (Wong et al., 2022). The challenge goes further as to how lecturers would teach and assess these GAs (Karunanayaka and Naidu, 2021) since there is often no training provided for them on these processes and how GAs are to be mapped into the curriculum. Lecturers' assumptions and interpretation of the curriculum mapping process of GAs were cited as needing urgent attention (Winberg et al, 2018). The idea of concepts that are "beyond disciplinary knowledge content" is challenging for lecturers to teach and assess despite them being important attributes in the workplace (Kensington-Miller et al, 2018).

Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron (2023) argue that as long as graduates who are the stakeholders of the GAs are not involved in the GAs integration process, then the desired outcome will not be accomplished. They call on the higher institutions of learning to ensure that the GAs' integration into the curriculum is a continuous process that involves everyone involved (staff, society, students, and management), rather than a one-off or occasional discussion. Maxwell and Armellini (2018) second the student-centeredness approach in the GA integration process. The question, though, is how that will benefit the GAs integration process.

2.2 Graduate Attributes on Graduates' Employability

Wald and Harland (2019) assert that GAs are crucial for improving graduates' employability and should be an integral part of the curriculum. Bridgstock (2009) raises questions about the concept of GAs, challenging what constitutes employability and which attributes are essential for fostering it in tertiary students. GAs, according to Wong et al (2022), serve as a means for universities to communicate their aspirations to prospective employers regarding the attributes their graduates possess. GAs are defined as the "qualities, skills, and knowledge" imparted by HE institutions during tertiary education, which is meant to assist the graduates beyond the classroom (Kensington-Miller et al, 2018). The beyond classroom refers to when the graduates are at work and need to use the attributes acquired from tertiary education. This is the period when graduates display the relevant attributes to solve work-related problems. Failure by graduates to do that reflects on the existing gaps between classroom education and the world of work. The GAs integration challenges include the fact that GAs are not only skills; therefore, they are not easy to teach or access. According to Bowden et al (2000), GAs are skills agreed upon by the university stakeholders for students to learn and practice during the tertiary period as preparation for their future and at the same time, GAs give a brand name to the higher learning institution. The Institutions of higher learning tend to group GAs, which should not be the case because different disciplines require different attributes specific to their requirements (Kensington-Miller et al, 2018). Such poses a challenge to lecturers when integrating attributes like 'being initiative' and 'lifelong learning' into the hospitality curriculum.

According to Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron (2023), the hospitality industry requires graduates that have the following attributes: Information technology system, social media, good communication skills, positive attitude, and time management (to mention a few). Being creative and being able to solve guests' problems are other employability attributes for graduates. This is supported by Lategan (2022), who alludes that problem-solving skills, accountability, time management, team player and confidence are important GAs in the hospitality industry.

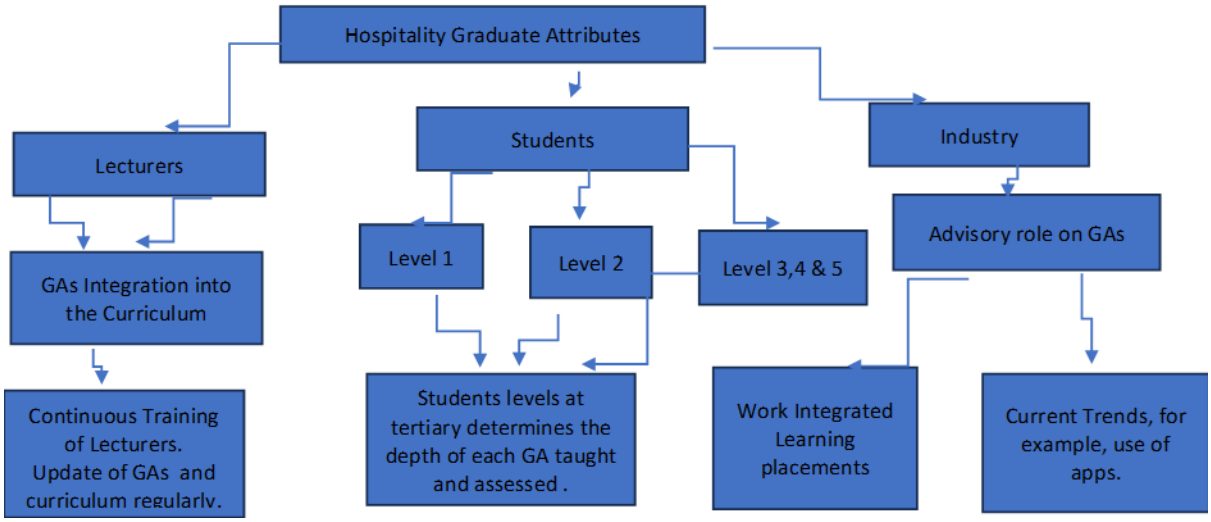

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Source: Author's creation)

The idea of a conceptual framework is that all the stakeholders should have an equal contribution towards hospitality GAs and their integration (Wiliamson et al, 2020). Such an act would allow all parties to play their part in achieving the process of GAs integration. It should be noted that this framework is student-centred. Therefore, students who are at tertiary entry level will be allocated GAs that suit their understanding. This is seconded by Staunton et al. (2021), who indicate that students are the 'changemakers' (refer to Table 2). Part of the framework is adapted from the (Ipperciel1 & ElAtia1, 2014) Criteria-based model. If students become familiar with GA learning, teaching, and assessments as early as the first year, they will be able to grow and adapt to different depths of GAs levels.

The hospitality industry should be utilised by higher learning institutions as such partnerships would give students an opportunity to do their work-integrated learning in those establishments, thereby increasing chances of applying the learned GAs. The hospitality industry is a very dynamic industry; therefore, industry

partnerships would assist with the current trends, thereby enabling the regular update of GAs. The institution's management should prioritise engaging with lecturers for GAs integration into the curriculum and curriculum coordinators to engage with all stakeholders on curriculum matters.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Halibas et al (2020) outline that attributes associated with employability skills are "teamwork, time-management, stress-management, emotional intelligence, common skills, problem-solving and strategy innovation." (Belwal et al, 2017) is of the view that hospitality graduates' generic skills are identical to employability skills because they give room to career readiness for graduates.

Various GAs research by different scholars were identified. Most of them had researchers come up with a framework to assist with either interpreting or integrating these into the curriculum. This paper focuses on the GAs' integration into the hospitality curriculum. Therefore, there was a need to see the frameworks and studies that have been done in that area. It is encouraging to note that South Africa has done its part in researching hospitality GAs, although the numbers could be better. Different countries are embarking on the research, although most research is on general GAs and is not specific to the hospitality industry. Table 1 below shows the selected sources to be used for the proposed framework of this paper.

Table 1: Identified and consulted (Sources: Authors' Creation)

Author/s, Year and Country	Research Design and Sample	Purpose of the Study	Findings of the Study	Gaps Identified on GAs Integration
Ipperciel1 and ElAtia1, 2014, Canada.	Criteria-based method.	To develop a criteria-based model that will be used for GAs teaching and assessment.	Various GAs were plotted successfully for different levels of students.	The model is still to be tested for reliability and validity.
Belwal et al 2017, Oman	Principles of hypotheticodeductive logic and inferential analysis using both focus group and survey approach	Explore the most common GAs that apply to graduates' employability in Onam	Students perceive Computing skills, Teamwork, and English language expertise. Industry and Higher Education relations boost the employability of graduates.	Oman is restricted to basic generic skills in developing GAs
Winberg et al, 2018, South Africa	Mixed Method Study-Questionnaire & Case Study used.	To comprehend how various forms of knowledge contribute to acquiring desirable GAs using selected flagship programs (Hospitality included) within South Africa's University of Technology sector.	Research findings indicate that desirable graduate attributes are achieved through academic staff ownership, collaboration with external groups, a strong sense of purpose, innovation, forward-looking attitudes, appropriate curricular interventions, and knowledge of students.	Density lacked a clear pattern, but shifts towards entrepreneurship were noted, particularly in fashion programs. Temporal positions varied, with innovation common. Semantics emphasised practical orientation. Experiential learning and specialisation played roles, influencing the emergence of graduate attributes.
Maxwell and Armellini, 2018, UK.	An iterative process of co-design and co-development was employed to produce both the framework and the associated learning outcomes toolkit.	To present an evidence-based, transferable framework of graduate attributes and a university toolkit. The goal is to facilitate the formulation of level-appropriate learning outcomes, aligning with the university's mission to Transform Lives and Inspire Change.	Adopting an integrated framework yields tangible benefits, fostering students' development of personal literacy and graduate identity. The toolkit empowers staff to craft assessable learning outcomes, promoting student	Authors are of the opinion that opportunities arise during the design stage to address any gaps and guide students through co-curricular activities. No identified gaps, though.

Author/s, Year and Country	Research Design and Sample	Purpose of the Study	Findings of the Study	Gaps Identified on GAs Integration
			progression and facilitating the attainment of framework objectives.	
Kensington-Miller et al, 2018, New Zealand.	A mixed method approach was used.	Identify GAs that are commonly viewed as 'invisible' and construct a framework for observing, analysing, and reporting these attributes. furthermore, it empowers lecturers to integrate these 'invisible' GAs into the course design.	The study introduces the SEEN framework, emphasising the importance of both certified and "invisible" attributes in university education. SEEN stands for Specify, Explain, Embed and Nudge.	The study implies that future studies will address certain aspects, such as identifying teaching strategies, comparing pedagogical approaches, and assessing the transferability of attributes across disciplines. This suggests potential gaps in the mentioned areas.
Adeyinka et al, 2020, Malaysia	Content analysis	To identify key digital literacy and employability skills to match the changing digital landscape of the hospitality and tourism industry	Industry practitioner perspectives, employability skills and disruptive digital innovations are used to develop a framework that will benefit the industry.	No record of digital literacy skills in the curriculum
Halibas et al. 2020, Oman	Thematic Analysis	To describe approaches used by an institution in developing an assessment framework to measure GAs achievement and learning outcomes.	69% of higher learning institutions are failing to embed GAs into their assessments and learning outcomes	Potential gaps on higher education on current trends and practices of GAs assessment and learning outcomes
Staunton et al, 2021, Ireland.	Qualitative approach: Focus group & quantitative using questionnaires in framework development.	Developing a GAs Framework for higher education to enhance graduates' employability.	Developing a GAs Framework for higher education to enhance graduates' employability.	Stakeholders are different individuals with differing opinions and specialities. Therefore, the way they view GAs differs. Consulting them would bring up varying responses.
Williamson et al, 2021, Australia. (Hospitality)	Survey using Professional Capability Framework. ANOVA test identified gaps	To explore the roles of educators' industry and students in transforming the Work Integrated Learning curriculum and learning experiences	Multiple stakeholders make it difficult to create a curriculum. Students need to be consulted, otherwise, gaps in unpreparedness will persist	Lack of student consultations in curriculum development.
Marneros et al, 2022, Cyprus. (Hospitality)	Systematic classification process, use of literature.	Developing Hospitality Management Core Competencies Framework.	A framework consisting of seven competencies was proposed.	No gaps were identified.
Wong et al, 2022, UK.	Qualitative research on 37 Universities using literature.	To contribute to a gap in the UK literature by presenting what we believe is the first systematic mapping of the graduate attributes as publicised by the UK.	Universities define diverse graduate attributes, emphasising self-awareness, employability, global citizenship, and academic literacy, with implementation challenges.	The gaps identified include the lack of systematic and consistent development of graduate attributes driven by senior management or marketing rather than educational theories. Additionally, there's a need for more inclusive discussions involving staff and students to shape the 'ideal graduate.' Challenges include generic application across disciplines and unclear embedding in curricula.

Author/s, Year and Country	Research Design and Sample	Purpose of the Study	Findings of the Study	Gaps Identified on GAs Integration
Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron, 2023, South Africa (Hospitality)	Qualitative using semi-structured interviews.	To determine the employability attributes of hospitality management students from private Higher education institutions.	The study identifies knowledge and skill sub-domains required by hotel managers, emphasizing competencies in both soft and hard skills. These skills are considered crucial, as they impact graduates' ability to cope, contribute effectively, and sustain employment in the hotel industry.	The study suggests a mismatch between the attributes sought by hotel managers and those possessed by graduates from Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs), highlighting concerns about graduates' work-readiness in the hotel labour market. Industry to be involved with GAs integration into the curriculum.

3. Research Methodology

This paper uses the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) to identify, choose and find available literature to be used in coming up with a proposed framework that will be used to integrate GAs into the hospitality curriculum. The reason for using Prisma is that it allows "accurate and transparent" reporting of the study reviews as compared to Bibliometric and Thematic analysis (Page et al, 2020). Research sources from online databases such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Academic Search Premier (EBSCOhost), and Emerald Insight for the year 2014 -2023 were used to source literature. Grey literature with relevant data that addressed the objectives of the paper as characterised by the search phrases was used from Research Gate. Since this paper focuses on the integration of GAs into the hospitality curriculum, a search of top-tier hospitality journals was done using Google Scholar, and the top twenty journals were used. This literature search exercise was done between 15 December 2023 and 2 January 2024. To get the information needed, phrases used included "Hospitality management graduate attributes", "graduate attributes integration into hospitality curriculum", and "graduate attributes framework".

The eligibility criteria used included all peer-reviewed published sources, and the focus was on the aim of the paper, the findings, identified gaps and developed frameworks on graduate attributes and their integration into the curriculum. Data was collected and recorded under the different phrases used for each database. Refer to figure 2 below.

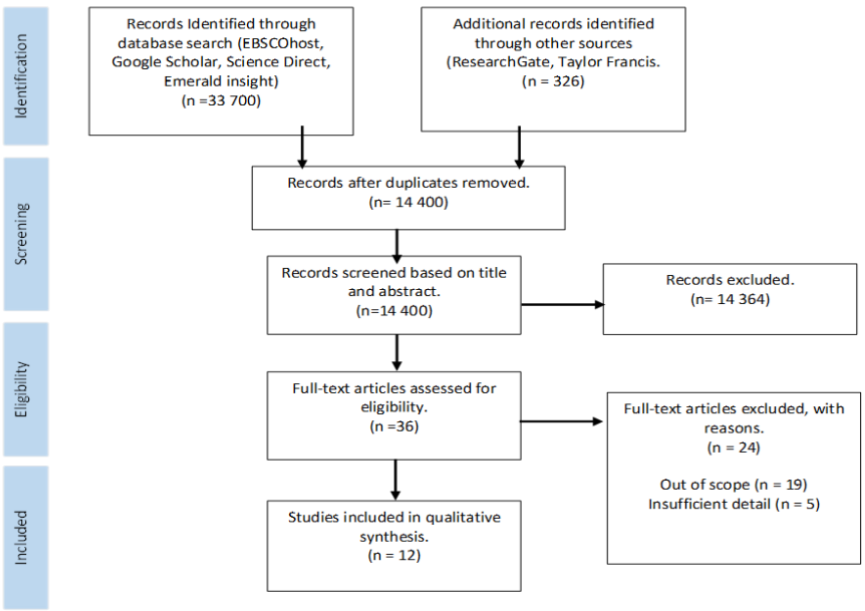

Figure 2: PRISMA Diagram (Pegg et al, 2012)

4. Findings

This paper found that a lot of research has been done on GAs. However, limited information focuses on integrating GAs into various subjects' curricula (Wong et al, 2022). Of the literature researched, there were international and South African studies on the topic, and no studies on the topic were found from other African countries. The results from the 12 global and national literature sources show that the integration of GAs in a curriculum is a problem, as reflected by the number of researchers developing frameworks and even models to assist with the integration of varying GAs. In Table 1, Kensington-Miller et al (2018) suggest that there are potential gaps in the transferability of attributes across disciplines, and Ipperciel & El Atial (2014) developed a model for GAs teaching and assessment. Adeyinka et al (2020), on the other hand, found that graduates lack digital literacy skills. This is a problem since new hospitality trends are technologically inclined. 6990 higher learning institutions are failing to embed GAs into their curriculum (Halibas et al. 2020)-Staunton et al. 2021) outline the difficulty of dealing with various higher learning stakeholders, which could be confusing due to varying responses on GAs. According to (Williamson et al 2021), a lack of student consultations on GAs results in graduates' unpreparedness. Furthermore, Wong et al (2022), reciprocate the need for students' involvement in GAs if an 'ideal graduate' is to be shaped. Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron (2023) feel that there is a mismatch of GAs taught versus the ones required in the industry.

Belwal et al (2017) believe that GAs are employment skills, and on the other hand, Winberg et al (2018) emphasise the importance of WIL in influencing GAs emergency. Furthermore, out of the 12 journal articles identified, only three sources were identified reporting on GAs in hospitality. These support the earlier statements about the limited studies regarding integrating GAs into the curriculum globally. The paper aims to report on the extent of the incorporation of GAs within the hospitality curriculum by finding relevant literature sources. Of the 12 sources identified, six focused on the development of GAs frameworks to assist with curriculum development and learning; Europe studies (Maxwell and Armellini, 2018; Staunton et al, 2021) developed a framework to assist with GAs development and learning outcomes; In Asia, Adeyinka et al (2020) developed a framework to assist the Hospitality and Tourism with digital literacy and employability skills integration into the curriculum.

In the Middle East, Halibas et al (2020) developed a GAs assessment framework to measure GAs achievements and learning outcomes. In Canada, Ipperciell and Eiatial (2014) developed a model for use in GAs teaching, and assessment. The other three studies focused on the perception of GAs, whereby Belwal et al.'s (2017) study conducted in Oman explored students' views on GAs that apply to graduates' employability. In Africa, specifically South Africa, Ngoepe and Walkelin-Theron (2023) determined managers' perceptions of hospitality students' employability attributes. Williamson et al. (2022) in Australia developed a work-integrated learning curriculum using a professional capability framework.

5. Practical implications

This paper presents gaps found in hospitality literature on GAs' integration into the hospitality curriculum and the challenges faced with developing effective ways of teaching, assessing, and implementing GAs to hospitality graduates for employability purposes.

6. Conclusion

This paper has addressed a significant challenge faced by universities in many parts of the world: assessing the graduate attributes they intend their students to develop because of the university experience. To those engaged with this task, its complexity and challenge to traditional assessment practices will have come as no surprise. Previous discussions of the difficulty of assessing graduate attributes have focussed on assessment issues in relative isolation from other systemic issues of university practice. This paper has drawn on a national study of how South African universities achieve graduate attributes to argue that assessments while challenging enough on their own, are inextricably connected with seven other critical systemic factors that influence an institution's efforts to achieve graduate attributes. In discussing how these other factors can influence the assessment of graduate attributes, the study proposes that changing assessment practice without appropriate consideration of these other factors is unlikely to have a significant or sustained impact.

Effective assessment is intrinsically intertwined with other elements of institutional systems, which may present obstacles that daunt and discourage the efforts of all but those with a solid commitment to change. Though individual academics continue to engage successfully with the challenge of assessing graduate attributes, this

paper has raised issues concerning the impact of a range of systemic factors over which individuals have little or no influence, which, until institutions address them, will continue to limit the effectiveness of graduate attribute assessment. The renewed focus on the assessment of graduate attributes and outcomes evident in projects in many parts of the world promises a forum for international collaboration in addressing these issues and for overcoming many of the limitations evident in current practice.

7. Limitations of the Study

The researchers acknowledge the limited literature on the study's primary objective. Furthermore, there are very few studies on hospitality, which limited the findings to only 12 data sources, with only 3 addressing the paper's focus.

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Challenges and Opportunities Facing Ecotourism in Sub-Saharan Africa from Climate Change Desertification

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Abstract: This study explores one aspect of the macro-atmospheric phenomenon of amplified climate change that is causing significant micro manifestation challenges in one of the most fragile ecosystems on earth, sub-Saharan Africa. The micro manifestation of desertification impacts humans, flora, and fauna all of whom already struggle to survive in these areas. Desertification in turn effects ecotourism. Desertification is a type of land degradation in which biological productivity is reduced and where fertile areas become arid. Desertification causes the loss of vegetation and food for livestock and humans and a decrease in drinking water reserves.

Our examination researches the extents of desertification in the area and the effect it is having on ecotourism. We explore the strategies for proper ecotourism management and planning that are being utilized to offset these effects and explore how these strategies can and are being utilized to offset these effects and even supply numerous economic resources for government, private sector, and local groups to help improve living conditions and quality of life.

Ecotourism in these unique ecosystems that are impacted by climatic changes provide a meaningful opportunity to enhance the lives of host communities and protect the environment. During a recent visit to Namibia, I found residents who are utilizing innovative strategies such as solar energy, rainwater collection and other innovations to protect the ecosystem, wildlife and environment and allow them to continue to continue to host ecotourists and provide services.

Resources for ecotourism in deserts are made of the mutual effect of topography, climate, water, wildlife, plant type and density. Previous studies have shown that if ecotourism is properly managed and planned, it has the potential for numerous economic resources for the local community. We examine the extent of desertification in these semi-arid deserts, the planning and management of ecotourism activities, and the role that education of these ecosystems could provide for additional economic resources and ecological protection.

Key Words: Sustainability, Ecotourism, Climate Change, Desertification

1. Desertification – Causes and Impacts of This Manifestation of Climate Change

There have been multiple definitions of desertification over the decades, each mentioning the reduction of biological productivity and the resulting transformation of the land and impact on human activities in the area. The widely agreed-upon definition used by the United Nations Convention to combat desertification provides that this phenomenon involves: "land degradation in arid, semiarid, and subarid areas, resulting from various factors including climatic variations and human activities" (Becerril-Piña and Mastachi-Loza, 2021, p. 1). Desertification is a type of land degradation, examined by the "persistent or irreversible reduction in the capacity of ecosystems to supply ecosystem services for several decades (soil, vegetation, and water) in drylands…due to a variety of factors, particularly climatic variations, and human activities" (Becerril-Piña and Mastachi-Loza, 2021, p. 1).

The United Nations reviewed the economic and environmental impacts of desertification and land degradation concluding a resulting loss of 12 million hectares of arable land every year creating international interest over these changed ecosystems as they have a meaningful role in both food production and the social aspect in communities (Rivera-Marin et al., 2022, p.1). A study conducted by Rivera-Marin et al. (2022) found that desertification is composed of a multitude of factors, including land use, land cover, changes to vegetation distribution (both climate and human induced), socioeconomic structures, and changes in public policies on the area's agriculture including irrigation system decisions.

The drylands of Africa, found in northern and southwestern Africa, are suffering from high levels of degradation. The multiple-decades-long process of desertification is driven by both human activities and climate changes. Reductions in fresh water, harvests in wood and other natural materials, and fertile soils have been recorded, as well as the decrease in the region's scenic attractions and cultural values (Becerril-Piña and Mastachi-Loza, 2021, pp. 1-2). A nexus has been identified between the socioeconomic status of an area and desertification, linking poverty to decreasing environmental resources. The residents of the drylands are impoverished, leaving them more vulnerable to natural disasters than others. While people inhabiting the drylands have been able to adapt to decreasing resources, the reality of climate change has posed a problem of increasing stresses, with the potential of outpacing their adaptation (Becerril-Piña and Mastachi-Loza, 2021, p.2).

Drylands are typically defined by their "ratio of annual precipitation…to annual potential evapotranspiration…" (Becerril-Piña and Mastachi-Loza, 2021, p 3). They are also one of the largest biomes and have a great percentage of global livestock producing nearly half of the global crops. The very name "drylands" makes clear the scarcity of water in the areas. The soils have a large range of functions, including growing crops in the fertile soils, being natural land for carbon storage, and being the origin of "sources of genetic material for the development of drought-resistant varieties" of major food crops (Becerril-Piña and Mastachi-Loza, 2021, p. 3).

Virtually all studies of desertification recognize climate change and human activity as separate causes in desertification intertwined with factors of varying speeds. Climate variability increases land surface temperatures and decreases precipitation. Human activities include the expansion of croplands and growth of population. Combined, the results are decreased vegetation productivity, increased dust storms, increased salinization, increased soil erosion, and a decline in carbon storage in the soil (Mirzabaev et al., 2019, p.251).

As the climate changes, so do the interactions within the region such as land use, water use, land management, grazing patterns, and urbanization. Planning policies should be considered based on the population, available resources, level of poverty, and utilization and development of adjacent lands. Poor policy planning to countermeasure desertification can lead to overpopulation and trigger urbanization, which leads to more poverty, flooding, land use changes, overexploitation of the land, and even greater climate changes (Becerril-Piña and Mastachi-Loza, 2021, pp. 8-11).

Factors such as vegetation overgrazing have major consequences. A loss of vegetation results in increased erosion and soil run-off. Without vegetation, there is an increased rate of water evaporation increasing aridity which increases the occurrences of forest fires and economic losses for farmers. The loss of the biodiversity allows for secondary vegetation to be established, changing vegetation and soil composition. The consequences of crop irrigation and the over-usage of water include increased erosion by water, increased potential for salinization, reduction of water sources, poorer water quality, over-exploitation of groundwater, and greater threat of migration due to the scarcity of water resources (Rivera-Marin et al., 2022, pp. 1-2).

Sub-Saharan Africa is comprised of forty-seven countries, all of which depend heavily on soil resources. Desertification occurrence in sub-Saharan Africa poses a great threat to agriculture productivity, economic development, and soil protection. Crop productions have decreased over the years while poverty has increased (Usman et al., 2017). The drylands in sub-Saharan Africa have very low vegetation coverage, leading to many soil problems, including erosion, landslide, diminished nutrients and surface soils, and water contamination. These issues are exacerbated by a lack of environmental policies, inadequate soil management, and socio-cultural events.

Desertification in sub-Saharan Africa has been a long-standing concern. In the 1970s and 1980s, the United Nations discussed desertification in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, to consider: "soil, vegetation, forest, water, animal, wildlife, agriculture, and human's cultural and social lifestyles" (Usman et al., 2017, p. 4). The 50% reduction of the sub-Saharan agricultural land productivity's attributes desertification and land/soil degradation as its cause (Usman et al., 2017, p .5).

Changes in the climate resulting in higher temperatures exacerbate the challenges in the sub-Saharan region. Heatwaves, dust storms, low crop, and grain yields, decreased livestock populations and productivity, and declining population health are patterns seen (Mirzabaev et al., 2019, p.274). The climate and environment were large factors in the urbanization in the region. One study performed by Barrios, Bertinelli, and Strobl (2006, pp. 17-18) reporting "each 1% reduction in rainfall was associated with a 0.45% increase in urbanization. This migration favored more industrially diverse urban areas in Sub-Saharan Africa…because they offer more diverse employment opportunities and higher wages" (Mirzabaev et al., 2019, p. 285).

As a policy response, a transition to more renewable energy sources in the area is recognized as a countermeasure to desertification. Sub-Saharan Africa was reported as having the highest dependence on traditional biomass for their energy sources, such as fuelwood, crop straws, and manure from livestock. By lowering the reliance on biomass sources, benefits include better socioeconomic trends and increased health trends (Mirzabaev et al., 2019, p. 288).

Another policy response to combat desertification is an investment into irrigation systems. The sub-Saharan region in Africa was recorded as having irrigation covering only six percent of the cultivated areas. When combating droughts, tackling the entire region of sub-Saharan Africa rather than by individual countries was found to be more cost-effective. Increased communication and effective use of drought relief funding helped at

the time of the drought and strengthened the development of further policies (Mirzabaev et al., 2019, pp. 289-290).

Migrations of citizens due to desertification as well as herder-farmer conflicts (Lenshie, N.E., et al., 2021) are occurring in the area. As pastures and natural water sources dry up, herders are forced to find areas that can provide for the basic needs of their livestock. The encroachment of herders onto the lands of others have fueled many violent interactions. Herder-farmer conflicts have amounted to nearly 4000 deaths as of 2018, further stating "desertification is a major but often neglected driver of cyclical attacks between the two groups" (Lenshie, N.E., et al., 2021, p. 2).

Climate change fuels desertification with variability in temperature, rainfall, wind, and the strength of solar radiation (Gonzalez, 2001, p.217). Ecosystems are changing, vegetation coverage is declining, soil erosion has increased, carbon sequestration is threatened, and human lives are endangered.

2. Impacts of Ecotourism on Sub-Saharan Africa

All throughout sub-Saharan Africa, there are a plethora of activities and beautiful sights to see. Ecotourism is a significant revenue source throughout Africa because of the "Big Five" – the African elephant, rhinoceros, lion, leopard, and African buffalo (Scholte, Kamgang and Sabuhoro, 2023, p.443). Protected areas and parks and diversity in landscapes and ecosystems contribute greatly to the wide spectrum of attractions in sub-Saharan Africa (Eyster, Naidoo and Chan, 2022, p.428).

Ecotourism is centered on conservation, education, sustainable business practices, and travel to natural areas. The four most popular destinations in Tanzania for example include the Serengeti, Lake Manyara, Kilimanjaro, and the Ngorongoro Crater. The Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania offers attractions of several day safaris, archaeological sites, visitations to the Maasai villages to view the huts built with cow dung and sticks, and opportunities to see the Maasai warriors in their cultural clothes perform traditional dances (Obour, Ankomah and Larson, 2017, p.266).

Visitors show preferences of species and landscapes, providing case studies and research ample data to best determine methods for conservation. By seeing which species of mammals or preference of birds for birdwatching, protected parks can use that higher income to their advantage and use one method of conservation and economic development, as opposed to another protected park that might require an alternative method due to a significant difference of incoming funds (Eyster, Naidoo and Chan, 2022, pp.428-433). Research done by Eyster, Naidoo and Chan (2022) about ecotourists and preferences found that species and landscapes were primarily how ecotourists planned visits. These analyses aid in current and future conservation methods.

Many factors contribute to ecotourism success. Ecotourism governance is a vital element. The United Nations Development Program states "governance relates to the modus operandi by which societies manage socio-economic, political, and environmental affairs, drawing from systems of values, policies and institutions" (Forje, Awazi and Kimengsi, 2021, p. 2). When there is poor governance in ecotourism, stakeholders and donors stop funding projects and efforts, resulting the failure of these projects. Rural communities host these projects, but with poor governance, there is often a presence of ineffective management, little or no participation from the local communities, and the "imposition of formal…institutions on communities with functional traditional institutions" (Forje, Awazi and Kimengsi, 2021, p. 2). The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) established principles and criteria that can be adopted to set governance standards in relation to a system of protected areas: legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability, and fairness/rights (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2013, p.90). For their research, Forje, Awazi and Kimengsi (2021) have researched seven principles: efficiency, equity, accountability, transparency, effectiveness, conflict management, and participation. Many of these principles overlap, emphasizing the importance of accountability, participation, equity, and transparency. Furthermore, the principles overlap in some ways, such as strong transparency among stakeholders leading to more effective conflict management and increased participation (Forje, Awazi and Kimengsi, 2021). Forje, Awazi and Kimengsi's (2021) seven principles researched in the sub-Saharan African region show a significant concentration on local community participation. Throughout the studies in the Southern Africa region where there is an absence of local community participation, the result was a generalized lack of trust in the government "for the development of proper (eco)tourism in South Africa and Zimbabwe" (Forje, Awazi and Kimengsi, 2021, p. 7). Throughout East Africa, lack of participation from the local population was claimed to be from a "lack of empowerment and limited capacity, lack of marketing and promotion skills, low community organization initiatives, poor networking and communication skills and above all absence of

effective collaboration with other ecotourism stakeholders" (Wondirad, 2017, p. 11-12). West Africa's lack of participation was cited for different reasons, being low educational levels and limited resources for entrepreneurship. Central Africa named factors of inequity of management and exclusivity of local population stakeholders, misleading ecotourism development policies, and limited benefit sharing (Forje, Awazi and Kimengsi, 2021). Being aware of the causes that result in the lack of such a vital principle, plans can be made to counteract the effects, leading to a strong economy and increased conservation.

Learning and experiencing the local culture is also a large part of ecotourism. Education about the local populations in an area include how some products are made, preserve local culture, and how each gender contributes to the community through various roles. With access to multiple and diverse employment opportunities, women in the sub-Saharan African region have had opportunities to break into new roles and empowerment (Umuziranenge, 2019, pp. 77-78). Ecotourism cannot be successful without environmental justice, which "seeks for better conservation outcomes by involving all people and treating them fairly in all activities regarding the environment" (Umuziranenge, 2019, p. 78). A study conducted by Umuziranenge (2019) focused on women in Rwanda and how improvements in conservation policies and practices affects them. Rwanda's ecotourism and tourism is a large contributor to the country's gross domestic product. The Kitabi Women Handcraft Cooperative began in 2011 with 28 females and 2 males. The cooperative is mostly composed of women whose husbands had used resources in the Nyungwe area to create different products before it was established as a national park. The cooperative's objective is to raise awareness for environmental protection in the surrounding areas of the national park, in the Kitabi sector, and the Nyamagabe District (Umuziranenge, 2019, p.77).

The Rwanda Development Board uses donor support and income from tourism to assist the cooperative in numerous community programs. In addition to employment opportunities and other financial and cultural programs, children from the surrounding areas create clubs to teach tourists traditional dancing (Umuziranenge, 2019, p.82).

The Republic of Cameroon is located within sub-Saharan Africa. Forest, woodlands, and tropical moist forests comprise over half of the 47.5 million hectares of land making up the country. Of all the African countries, Cameroon hosts one of the highest amounts of forest-dwelling primates and is ranked as one of the top five countries with the largest diversity of plant species (Sama and Molua, 2019, p.207). Many of the large mammals inhabiting the country are listed as rare, endangered, or threatened with extinction under the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (Sama and Molua, 2019, p.208). The Republic of Cameroon's fastest developing section in its gross domestic product is the services trade. Tourism and travel-related services contribute greatly to this sector (Sama and Molua, 2019, p.203).

Despite reports from the World Travel and Tourism Council demonstrating the increased overall employment, both directly and indirectly related to the tourism industry, the potential of the industry is still not being met (Sama and Molua, 2019, p. 205). Cameroon boasts natural attractions like mountains, forests, rivers, and diverse climates. The cultural attractions are amazing and unique, with various folklore, festivals, multiple kingdoms, and nearly 250 ethnic groups. Difficulties with governance, poor travel accommodation management, inadequate training, antiquated equipment, high costs of some methods of transport, lack of promotion and information on available activities, and deficient infrastructure make the full potential of ecotourism in Cameroon difficult to be reached (Sama and Molua, 2019, p.205).

The rich diversity of flora and fauna, the culture, and the climates attract many people to places throughout the sub-Saharan African region. However, there are more factors beyond just these that create a solid foundation for ecotourist. Sama and Molua (2019) extended their research of ecotourism in Cameroon beyond the number of ecotourist arrivals, considering other influences on the industry such as political stability, and social conflict.

By knowing the determinants of ecotourism, policy makers could create more efficient and strategic approaches to the industry, with allocations of funds potentially being altered to boost the socio-economic statuses of locations throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

3. Impact of Desertification on Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a huge industry in Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, alongside the attraction of the region's beautiful beaches. Tourists visiting the area have high expectations to see a wide variety of wildlife and partake in a variety of activities including animal watching, wildlife tours, hunting, fishing, and habitat-specific tours (Chardonnet and Le Bel, 2012).

Protected areas throughout sub-Saharan Africa are the 'backbone of the industry' (Chardonnet and Le Bel, 2012, p.43). While ecotourism would not be possible without the protected areas, the protected areas rely on ecotourism just as heavily. The money generated by the ecotourism is used for national parks, hunting areas, communal conservancies, and game ranches. Due to how intertwined they are, any threat to one in turn endangers the other (Chardonnet and Le Bel, 2012, p. 43). Conservation of the ecosystems and protection of the biodiversity are fundamental to ecotourism which boosts the economy with additional tangential benefits.

The threats faced by the protected areas, in turn impacting ecotourism, are both direct and indirect. The indirect threats of habitat degradation and habitat conversion are responsible for the destruction of the habitats, making the area uninhabitable for the wildlife (Chardonnet and Le Bel, 2012, p.43). One form of habitat degradation is pastoral encroachment. Pastoral encroachment, the broadening of pastures used by livestock into natural ecosystems, is responsible for a tremendous amount of ecological degradation. Habitat conversion, such as agricultural encroachment, "transforms wild landscapes into domesticated landscapes" (Chardonnet and Le Bel, 2012, p. 30). This degradation in conjunction with desertification threaten protected areas, ecosystems, wildlife, and ultimately ecotourism.

The research done by Chardonnet and Le Bel (2012) stresses the importance of attracting tourists to fund their management costs associated with conservation goals. There is great emphasis on the range of benefits of the areas, stemming from the very basis of the habitat. Wildlife-viewing, one of the most profitable forms of ecotourism, require "a high level of security, easy access, an efficient infrastructure, professional services and at least one outstanding feature, such as a spectacular landscape and/or species" (Chardonnet and Le Bel, 2012, p. 23).

A case study conducted by Seely, Klintenberg and Shikongo (2006) in Namibia focused on a policy to combat desertification. One of the elements of the policy required the government to "create a favorable macro-economic policy environment" and correct any inherent structural imbalances by "redirecting and strengthening essential services and facilities to the communal areas, where their socio-economic impact is likely to be greatest" (Seely, Klintenberg and Shikongo, 2006, p. 107). This resulted in the planning and management to respond to droughts and agricultural production failure, reducing the effects caused by climate variability. The creation of plans such as these recognized the water scarcity and land degradation.

During a recent 2023 expedition in Namibia, I discovered that the impacts of desertification were evident. Desertification had exacerbated land degradation and caused a loss of vegetation and food for livestock and humans and a decrease in drinking water reserves due to the loss of aquifers. I visited Portsmut Farm in the Namib desert where desertification is palpable. The family farm owners I met have learned to coexist with the changing climate. They increased their grazing patterns from 1 cow to 12 hectares to 1 cow to 20 hectares. Additionally, they incorporated solar energy, rainwater collection and other innovative strategies to protect the beautiful African wildlife and allow them to continue their ecotourism programs and host some of the most wonderful farm to table meals.

Intertwined in the desertification policies include the National Resettlement Policy, the National Water Policy, and the National Land Policy. Furthermore, the Wildlife Management, Utilization and Tourism in Communal Areas Policy which assists with conservancies with the objective of conservation and wildlife sustainability allow for landowners to participate in roles and responsibilities, such as harvesting, trophy hunting, and other tourism attractions. By combining resources together for conservation, landowners have gained financial opportunities boosting the economy. With a financial stake in the land, residents are more willing to strive to reduce the effects of climate change and desertification. The effect of this increase in participation is an effective long-term tactic for the policy's objective of combating desertification (Seely, Klintenberg and Shikongo, 2006, pp. 107-114).

Human activities attribute to desertification. Expanding croplands is a major cause of desertification, the land not able to handle the excess pressure put on it. Unsustainable land use and management practices accelerate the land becoming usable and limit the land from adapting with the changing climate. By diminishing the land, the population is diminishing their available resources to invest in for better economic gains (Mirzabaev et al., 2019, p.251). Ecotourism is an active section of tourism that assists in sustainable developments, diminishing these harmful that include multiple causes of desertification.

A study conducted by Uduji and Okolo-Obasi (2023) on the relationship between the role of corporate social responsibility of oil companies in Nigeria and youth participation in the ecotourism development in the same area. The research found that 85% of young people live in developing countries, where the main source of income

is from ecotourism, making it "vital that young people are connected with ecotourism development" (Uduji and Okolo-Obasi, 2023, p. 3).

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria is considered the world's third largest wetland (Uduji and Okolo-Obasi, 2023, p.3). The conservation and protection of the Niger Delta "is closely linked to the protection of the economic wellbeing" of its residents (Uduji and Okolo-Obasi, 2023, p. 6). By having confirmed oil reserves and hosting several wildlife reserves and diverse ecosystems, Nigeria makes certain to create and foster a relationship between environmental protection and the multinational oil companies. Under this concept, everyone involved can work together to protect the communities, ecosystems, and natural resources.

Uduji and Okolo-Obasi's (2023) research sampled nearly 800 households in the region, concluding in multiple findings, one of which is an interest of youths that are interested in participating in the ecotourism sector, where roles of employment are available, regardless of a lack of education or skills. An example would be cleaners or housekeepers at nature reserve housing accommodations (Uduji and Okolo-Obasi, 2023, pp. 21-22).

Ecotourism thriving is a gain for the oil companies, making community participation vital. By investing in multiple sustainable development methods, the oil companies include youth participation in infrastructure, entrepreneurship training in ecotourism, the building of tourism centers, advocacy to the government, organization, and promotion of tourism, and more (Uduji and Okolo-Obasi, 2023, pp. 30-31).

The impacts of planning and management for ecotourism requires review and renovations. Different management programs have been successful in initial periods of time, with subsequent years showing diminished results. There were several successful ecotourism stories all throughout Zimbabwe, but due to the political climate and economic collapse that was occurring simultaneously, wildlife conservation was given a negative perception, leading to loss of donors and policy makers withdrawing their support (Mudzengi et al., 2020, p.3029).

Programs under the Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) are trying to change these negative perceptions by adapting to the changing world and offering new solutions (Mudzengi et al., 2020, p. 3029). By using a previous ecotourism venture that took place in Mahenye, Zimbabwe, from 1982 to 2020, Mudzengi et al. (2020) were able to conduct a new study centered around a management framework that intervenes in the changing environment. The changing environment of the area includes population increase, international hunting bans, climate change, exclusion of women and children, and decreasing numbers of international visitors. The research done by Mudzengi et al., (2020) included the pressures of the ecotourism industry developing from the epidemic coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The negative effects on the ecotourism industry were directly analyzed, comprising of "wildlife resources, amenities, attraction, accessibility, management system, marketing, beneficiaries, and linkages" (Mudzengi et al., 2020, p. 3028).

The resulting interventions for these issues reiterate much of previous suggested solutions, such as the promotion of a strong united community, encouragement of multiple sources of income, development of and carrying out self-funding programs, creating targeted educational programs, planning ahead for larger capacities, upgraded marketing for domestic and international ecotourism visits, securing stakeholders' trust, lobbying for the lifting of hunting bans, and endorsing of 'climate smart' ecotourism (Mudzengi et al., 2020, p. 3028).

CBNRM is changing the typical script of a top-down approach, presenting a management framework with a bottom-up approach. This approach requires a greater support from local communities, boosting their involvement. Strong community cohesion is necessary for the regulation of local natural resources which can hold up to periods of low amounts of visitors, and concentrates socioeconomic benefits in the area, including the poorer areas (Mudzengi et al., 2020, p. pp. 3029-3030).

4. Conclusion

Desertification, a micro-manifestation of climate change, continues to present challenges to the environment and ecotourism, and subsequently, the economic health of sub-Saharan Africa. Interrelated factors including political instability, overpopulation, withdrawal of support, and pandemic diseases, compound these challenges. By recognizing that one threatened factor causes more vulnerability to the others, it is imperative that the planning and development of any viable solutions are set into action. We examined several planning and management programs including revamping land management frameworks and instilling new environmental policies, as wells as self-funding programs, educational programs and enhancing stakeholder engagement to address the ongoing challenges. The sub-Saharan African region has undergone multiple changes; however,

further action is required to adapt to the negative consequences of desertification and other micro-manifestations of the macro-atmospheric phenomenon of amplified global climate change.

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Sustainable Tourism Practices in the Post-Covid Era: Lessons from Southern Africa

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Abstract: For several decades, the southern African region, with its diverse natural and cultural attractions, has been an uninterrupted prime destination for sustainable tourism. However, a devastating Covid-19 pandemic presented severe challenges to the global tourism industry, crippling several businesses. The effect was more pronounced especially in the global south, including southern Africa which is confronted by a multitude of challenges. Meanwhile, this crisis presented opportunities for the adoption of sustainable tourism practices in the post-Covid era. This paper provides insights into sustainable tourism practices in the post-Covid era, drawing lessons on how the southern African region survived the crisis. The paper discusses the concept of sustainable tourism and its importance in the post- Covid era. Furthermore, it explores the impact of the pandemic on the tourism industry in southern Africa and the need for sustainable tourism practices. Sustainable tourism practices that have been adopted in the region, such as community-based tourism, eco-tourism, and responsible tourism are discussed. This paper highlights the lessons that can be learned from sustainable tourism practices in southern Africa in the post- Covid era. These lessons can be applied globally to promote sustainable tourism and ensure the resilience of the tourism industry in the face of future crises.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Post-Covid-19, Pandemic Recovery Strategies, Eco-Tourism, Community-Based Tourism, Tourism Development.

1. Introduction and Background

For several decades, the southern African region, with its diverse natural and cultural attractions, has been an uninterrupted prime destination for sustainable tourism (Wondirad et al, 2020). However, a devastating Covid-19 pandemic presented severe challenges to the global tourism industry, crippling several businesses (Dube, 2021; Dube et al, 2023; Muresherwa et al, 2022). The effect of this pandemic was more pronounced especially in the global south (Lone & Ahmad, 2020), including southern Africa which is confronted by a multitude of challenges (Stone et al, 2022). These challenges include high unemployment, governance and corruption related issues, HIV/AIDS and healthcare challenges, poverty and inequality, regional conflicts, political instability among others (Musavengane et al, 2022; Saarinen, 2020; Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020). Meanwhile, the emergence of the devastating Covid crisis presented opportunities such as the adoption of sustainable tourism practices which could be applicable in the post-pandemic era.

Tourism remains an important industry in southern Africa, and it plays a vital role in the economies of the region. The tourism industry in southern Africa has been growing steadily in recent years, and it is expected to continue to grow in the future. Several factors have contributed to the growth of tourism in this region, and this has been attributed to the increasing popularity of Africa as a tourist destination, improvement of infrastructure, introduction of new visa regimes making it easier for tourists to visit the region, and the growing awareness of the natural beauty and cultural diversity of this region (Musavengane et al, 2022; Snyman, 2021; Toerien, 2020). However, more is still expected for the region to fully benefit from the vast opportunities available.

The growth of tourism in southern Africa has had a number of positive impacts on the region. It has created jobs, generated income, and helped to develop local communities (Adeniyi et al, 2023; Toerien, 2020). However, it is important to note that tourism can also have negative triple bottom line impacts, such as environmental damage, undesirable economic consequences, and socio-cultural erosion (Hambira et al, 2022). It is thus important to ensure that tourism in southern Africa is developed in a sustainable way that benefits both the local communities and the environment.

The current paper provides insights into sustainable tourism practices in the post-Covid era, drawing lessons on how the southern African region survived the crisis. The chapter begins by discussing the concept of sustainable tourism and its importance in the post- Covid era. Furthermore, it discusses the impact of the pandemic on the tourism industry in southern Africa, emphasizing the need for sustainable tourism practices. The sustainable tourism practices that have been adopted in the region, such as community-based tourism, eco-tourism, and responsible tourism are described in the current study. The challenges faced in implementing sustainable tourism practices in southern Africa are also discussed with some suggestions for possible solutions. The paper underscores the importance of promoting sustainable tourism practices by highlighting the role of multi-stakeholders (government, the private sector, and local communities) collaboration especially in managing crisis. This paper emphasizes the lessons that can be learned from sustainable tourism practices in southern Africa in the post-Covid era. These lessons can be applied globally to promote sustainable tourism and ensure the resilience of the tourism industry in the face of future crises.

The current study addresses a critical gap in the literature by investigating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on southern Africa's tourism industry and elucidating the sustainable practices adopted for recovery. The findings contribute valuable insights that can inform academia, policymakers, and industry stakeholders globally, supporting the development of resilient and sustainable tourism practices in the post-Covid era and beyond.

Several justifications underscore the importance of this research study. Global Significance of Tourism Industry. Firstly, it is vital to note that tourism is an important industry for the global economy and contributes substantially to GDP, employment, and cultural exchange. Since the pandemic decimated the industry's performance, severely impacting it in many fronts, it becomes imperative to investigate and understand how regions, particularly those in the global south like southern Africa, cope with and recover from such crises. Secondly, noting that the southern Africa is the microcosm for the challenges faced by the region, an understanding of the specific challenges posed by the pandemic and how sustainable tourism practices have been implemented to navigate these challenges enables better comprehension of them. Thirdly, the study sheds light into resilience and recovery revealing valuable lessons from southern Africa's experience particularly in adopting sustainable tourism practices during the post-Covid era. These lessons are not only applicable locally but also offer a blueprint for global application, contributing to the resilience and recovery of the tourism industry on a broader scale.

2. A Methodological Note

This conceptual paper was created through a review and analysis of relevant scholarly literature. The sources included both published and unpublished texts that was in alignment with the phenomenon being investigated. The key concepts drawn from an analysis of literature were utilised to provide insights on sustainable tourism practices taking lessons from southern Africa. The overview of tourism in the southern African region was firstly presented. This was followed by a discussion on how the region commits to sustainable tourism. Moreso, a brief discussion of the challenges and solutions that relates to sustainable tourism practices was presented in the current paper. The paper further highlights the Covid-19 pandemic and details the role of sustainable tourism practices in reviving the tourism industry. The Covid-19 survival strategies implemented by the southern African region are also reviewed. The above themes are presented provide insights into how other regions in the world can also adopt sustainable tourism practices.

3. Overview and Background of Tourism in Southern Africa

The southern African region consists of a collection of twelve countries extending from Tanzania to South Africa (Sanusi et al, 2022). This region is sandwiched between the Atlantic and Indian oceans, composed of a massive landmass spanning 6.8 million square kilometres (Australian Parliament House, n.d). With a total population exceeding 151 million people (Sanusi et al, 2022), the southern African region presents a large market capable to participate in global economic activities.

The history of this region reflects a fascinating journey of evolving trends challenges and accomplishments. The beginning of the southern African region is predominantly marked by two eras, the colonial and post-colonial eras. In the colonial era, Europeans were the major tourist groups, mainly attracted to the region by the abundant natural resources and wildlife. This however, mostly led to exploitation and unsustainable practices (Chiutsi & Mudzengi, 2012). The post-colonial era, which was the time after gaining independence, many countries' foci was on the development of responsible tourism models centred around benefiting local communities and protecting the environment (Rasdi et al, 2019). With proper management of tourism, mainly

due to enactment of focused policies, the late 20th century saw a surge in tourism. Improved tourism infrastructure, political stability in most countries and the unique offerings including cultural experiences and safaris also contributed to tourism growth in the region. Despite this growth, political instability (e.g., violence, terrorism etc) in some countries and environmental concerns (climate change) continue to threaten this growth.

The southern African region is renowned for its diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and abundant wildlife. This makes this region a popular destination for tourists especially those seeking a wide range of experiences. The travel and tourism industry in southern Africa play a significant role in the economies of the countries in the region. Most tourism activities in this region are nature-based and supported by the vast natural attractions in the different countries (Spenceley, 2008). Several renowned national parks and game reserves are found in southern Africa, providing opportunities to view the 'Big Five' (buffalo, elephant, leopard, lion, and rhinoceros) and other unique animal species (Mushawemhuka et al, 2021). A spectacular waterfall in the world, Victoria Falls between Zimbabwe and Zambia draws thousands of visitors each year. In addition to the natural attractions, the region is endowed with cultural and historical heritage sites. It is also home to several diverse ethnic groups which allow visitors to explore cultural heritage through traditional ceremonies, dance, music, and local crafts. Several UNESCO heritage sites are found in different countries in this region, also provide opportunities for cultural tourism. Those seeking sun, sea, and relaxation, are catered for at the various beaches and coastal areas in South Africa, Mozambique, and Namibia.

Tourism in southern Africa has the potential to contribute significantly to economic development, job creation, and conservation efforts. The region's commitment to sustainable tourism practices is increasingly important to balance the economic benefits with environmental and cultural preservation. Having experienced the severity of Covid-19 from early 2020 to mid-2022, the southern African region was presented with invaluable lessons which would see it prepared for future uncertain times.

4. Southern Africa's Commitment to Sustainable Tourism

Southern Africa recognizes the immense value of its natural beauty and vibrant cultures, but also the importance of preserving them for future generations. Among the vast ways the region can highlight its commitment to sustainable tourism include action towards conversation efforts, ecotourism initiatives, policy and regulation enactment and ensuring community beneficiation. These practices are further discussed below:

4.1 Conservation Efforts

The region boasts numerous national parks, game reserves, and marine protected areas, safeguarding biodiversity and iconic landscapes. The Kruger National Park in South Africa, Chobe National Park in Botswana, Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe, Namib-Naukluft National Park in Namibia, and Nyika National Park in Malawi are just five examples. A strong emphasis on wildlife conservation has been noticed in the region which help protect wildlife. Most southern African countries are seen collaborating on initiatives to protect endangered species, combat poaching, and preserve natural habitats for example Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, and South Africa's anti-poaching units share resources and expertise to assist in protecting wildlife (Africa Community Conservation Foundation, n.d.; Duffy, 1999; Mkono et al, 2023).

4.2 Ecotourism Initiatives

Tourism operators and accommodations in the region are seen increasingly adopting responsible and sustainable practices. This includes eco-friendly construction, waste reduction, energy efficiency, and water conservation measures to minimize the environmental impact of tourism. Most of these efforts put local communities at the centre, particularly through their involvement and ensuring that that they experience quality living, free from negative aspects. Certifications such as Green Tourism and Fair Trade in South Africa have been established to guide responsible choices. These certifications also help consumers identify businesses that prioritize social, economic, and environmental responsibility.

4.3 Policy and Regulations

Governments in the region continue to work on the development and implementation of policies and regulations that support sustainable tourism. This includes guidelines for land use planning, environmental impact assessments, and measures to control visitor numbers in sensitive areas. Moreso, regional collaboration

through organisations such as the southern African Development Community (SADC) play a critical role in promoting regional cooperation and knowledge sharing on sustainable tourism.

4.4 Community Beneficiation

In trying to ensure that communities see value in tourism and eventually support tourism development initiatives, it is crucial to maximise local benefits. This could be better achieved through enhancing and empowering community members by engaging them in key tourism development decisions. Local participation could be advanced through involvement in tourism planning and management, ensuring that benefits such as jobs are created, and the culture is preserved (Dube & Muresherwa, 2019). Moreso, partnerships could be fostered between local community members and various stakeholders which could lead to successful wildlife conservation efforts since a sense of ownership and responsibility is fostered in this way (Thetsane, 2019). Many southern African countries such as Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa have adopted community-based tourism models that involve local communities in decision-making processes, benefit-sharing, and the development of tourism initiatives. This helps ensure that communities benefit economically and socially from tourism activities.

The journey towards sustainable tourism in southern Africa is ongoing, but these efforts highlight the region's commitment to balancing economic growth with environmental and social responsibility. By embracing sustainable practices, southern Africa can ensure its precious natural heritage and vibrant cultures are enjoyed by generations to come. It is however important to note that each country in southern African region has its own unique initiatives and challenges related to sustainable tourism.

5. Sustainable Tourism Practices: Challenges and Solutions

Implementing sustainable tourism practices in southern Africa faces challenges such as limited financial resources for conservation, inadequate infrastructure, and economic pressures which prioritizes the short-term gains (Eyisi et al, 2021; Murima & Shereni, 2023; Musavengane et al, 2022). Additionally, there is an inherent lack of awareness among tourists and local communities about the importance of sustainable tourism practices (Gohori & van der Merwe, 2021; Saarinen et al, 2020). Policy and regulatory gaps (Arica, 2023) also weigh in contributing to inconsistencies especially in the promotion of responsible tourism, thus limiting its widespread adoption. Overcoming these challenges requires fostering public-private partnerships for funding and implementation (Murima & Shereni, 2023), providing incentives for sustainable initiatives (Dladla, 2022), launching comprehensive education campaigns (Musavengane et al, 2022), and addressing policy reforms to strengthen regulations (Murima & Shereni, 2023). Successfully navigating these obstacles will enable southern Africa to ensure the long-term viability of its tourism industry while promoting environmental conservation and community well-being.

6. The Impact of Covid-19 on Global and Regional Tourism

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on global and southern African tourism. Travel restrictions, lockdowns, and safety concerns led to a severe decline in international and domestic travel. Globally, the tourism industry faced unprecedented challenges, with disruptions to air travel, closures of attractions, and economic setbacks for businesses reliant on tourism (Dube, 2021; Dube et al, 2023; Muresherwa et al, 2022; Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020).

In southern Africa, renowned for its wildlife, natural wonders, and cultural experiences, the Covid-19 pandemic dealt a significant blow to the tourism-dependent economies. National parks and game reserves, vital for the region's safari tourism, experienced a sharp decline in visitors. The loss of income affected local communities, conservation efforts, and tourism businesses. The pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of southern Africa's tourism sector to external shocks, emphasizing the need for diversification and sustainable practices.

As recovery efforts and vaccination campaigns progressed, the region implemented measures to revive tourism, including health protocols, marketing campaigns, and initiatives to rebuild traveller confidence. The experience underscored the importance of resilience and adaptability in the face of global crises for both the global and southern African tourism sectors.

7. The Role of Sustainable Practices in Reviving the Industry

Sustainable practices play a crucial role in reviving the tourism industry by addressing environmental, socio-economic challenges. In the aftermath of events like the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a growing recognition that a resilient and responsible approach is essential for the industry's recovery. The pandemic underscored resilience and adaptability as crucial in surviving uncertain occurrences (Bryce et al, 2022; Monternel et al, 2023). Sustainable practices such as adaptability thus enhance the tourism industry's resilience by promoting diversified revenue streams and reducing dependence on vulnerable sectors (Bassett et al, 2022). This adaptability is vital in the face of global uncertainties, such as health crises or environmental changes. In addition, community engagement and empowerment emanated as critical in the face of disasters. Considering this, sustainable tourism would involve local communities in decision-making processes, ensuring that they share in the benefits of tourism. This not only supports economic development but also fosters a sense of ownership and pride among community members (Dube & Muresherwa, 2019).

It is also important to note that tourism usually relies on natural attractions, making environmental conservation integral to the industry's sustainability. Therefore, sustainable practices could focus more on minimizing the environmental impact of tourism activities, preserving ecosystems, and combating climate change impact (Murphy & Price, 2012; Pan et al, 2018). Another important aspect in ensuring sustainable tourism growth is enhanced cultural preservation, which entails respecting and preserving local cultures, sustainable tourism contributes to the authenticity and uniqueness of destinations (Kim et al, 2018). This, result in attracting responsible visitors interested in authentic experiences, promoting cultural understanding and appreciation (Buonincontri et al, 2017).

Sustainable practices have been seen as instrumental in contributing to the long-term viability of the tourism industry. By balancing economic gains with environmental and social responsibility, destinations can attract a more conscientious and loyal customer base, ensuring continued success over time. Research has shown that incorporating sustainable practices in the tourism industry not only mitigates negative impacts but also positions destinations for long-term success by fostering resilience, community engagement, and environmental stewardship (Brown et al, 2017; Tompkins & Adger, 2003). This approach aligns with evolving consumer preferences for responsible travel, contributing to a more sustainable and ethical global tourism landscape.

8. How the Southern African Region Survived the Covid-19 Crisis

The southern African region navigated the challenges of the Covid-19 crisis through a combination of collaborative and adaptive measures. In responding to the devastating pandemic, several governments in the region implemented immediate and focused public health measures, that included closure of ports of entry, travel restrictions and national lockdowns, extensive testing, and vaccination campaigns (Bryce et al, 2022; Dube, 2021; Haider et al, 2020). These measures were aimed to contain the spread of the virus, protect public health, and curtail the impact of the virus on the economy (Elbany & Elhenawy, 2021).

The impact of the pandemic on the region was almost similar, and mainly affecting the tourism economies, with a sharp decline in travel (domestic and international). To survive this destructive crisis, the region focused on diversifying its economic base, exploring alternative revenue streams, and promoting domestic tourism (Karunarathne et al, 2021; Spenceley et al, 2021). Governments and tourism stakeholders in the region also engaged in marketing campaigns intended to boost traveller confidence, and emphasised safety protocols and the region's unique attractions (Spenceley et al, 2021). In addition, community engagement played a pivotal role in the survival strategy, with a focus on supporting local businesses and involving communities in decision-making processes (Dube, 2021). Sustainable tourism practices gained prominence (Bhatia et al, 2022; Polukhina et al, 2021), and these mainly aligned with the global trend of responsible travel. Efforts were also made to preserve biodiversity, protect cultural heritage, and ensure that tourism benefits reached local community members (Dube et al, 2023).

During the Covid-19 era, international collaboration and regional partnerships was underscored, particularly the sharing of information, coordination of responses, to address the common challenges (Kimura et al, 2020). As vaccination efforts gained momentum, several countries in the region began a gradual reopening of the economy whereby international travel was permitted, however with the implementation of health and safety protocols (e.g., face masking, sanitising, social distancing, temperature checks, negative PCR tests certification etc) aimed to instil visitor confidence (Arefi & Poursadeqiyan, 2020; Blišťanová et al, 2021; Dube et al, 2023). In all these efforts, the region demonstrated resilience by taking a multifaceted approach combining public health

measures, economic diversification, community involvement, and a commitment to sustainable practices, which helped to navigate the complex terrain of the Covid-19 crisis.

9. Conclusion

Drawing lessons from southern Africa's experience, the paper extrapolates insights that have global applicability in promoting sustainable tourism. By examining the successes and challenges faced by the region, the paper delineates a roadmap for the global tourism industry to navigate the complexities of the post-Covid era. It emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts between governments, businesses, and local communities to ensure the longevity of sustainable tourism initiatives.

Addressing the identified issues requires a multi-pronged approach that involve muti-stakeholder groups including governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, and international partners. Through concerted efforts, southern Africa can overcome these hurdles and build a brighter future for its people (Saunders et al, 2012). It is important to note that despite these challenges, southern Africa holds immense potential for growth and development. Its rich natural resources, diverse cultures, and resilient people can be the driving force for positive change. By investing in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and good governance, southern Africa can unlock its potential and create a more prosperous and equitable future for all.

In conclusion, this conceptual paper underscores the transformative potential of sustainable tourism in the aftermath of a crisis. Southern Africa's journey through the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic serves as a testament to the resilience and adaptability inherent in sustainable tourism practices. As the world charts a course towards recovery, the lessons gleaned from this region offer invaluable insights for shaping a more sustainable and resilient global tourism industry.

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eSports Events, the Good, the Bad and the Ugly, from a Parent's Perspective

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Abstract: eSports events in the form of tournaments are a relatively new occurrence in South Africa. Therefore, it is vital to understand this form of entertainment, the events hosted, and the perspectives of participants and spectators. A pilot qualitative study was undertaken at a local school that hosted an interschool eSports tournament event. The study focused on the parents of minor eSports participants to gauge their perspective of the eSports events hosted, the advantages and disadvantages of participating in these events, and their actual experience of the hosted event. Out of a population of 20 parents who attended the event, six parents consented to be interviewed. Findings have been made on topics such as the addiction of minors to eSports gaming, why minors participate in eSports, the advantages and disadvantages of eSports gaming, and what parents want from eSports events. The findings of this study will direct eSports stakeholders on how to improve on offered eSports events, and inform them of the views of stakeholders. The tourism industry should take note of this newly emerging type of event, which could be a catalyst for South African events as the hub for Africa eSports events.

Keywords: eSports Events, Parents, Perceptions, Motivations, South Africa

1 Background

Jenny, Keiper, Taylor, Williams and Gawrysiak (2018) and Neus (2019) describe eSports events as a global phenomenon with competitions currently hosted worldwide, especially in the United States, Europe and Asia. According to Jenny *et al.* (2018), eSports is classified as a non-traditional form of sports that utilises technology and removes the participant from the direct action. The recent advances in information technologies, internet networks that have improved and expanded, and more people having access to a computer or smartphone, have accelerated the transition from traditional games to digital media (Çavuş, 2020). Pu, Xiao and Kota (2022) mention that eSports is hailed as the "21st-century spectator sport" with a massive global fan base, and as an event type, is developing rapidly to be more professional and commercialised. Jenny *et al.* (2018) mention that most venues where eSports events are currently held were originally constructed to host other events, sports or entertainment. With the challenging times the events industry has faced in recent years, especially due to COVID-19, event facilities are challenged to host and attract popular financially beneficial events (Jenny *et al.* 2018). Leon, Hinojosa-Ramos, León-Lopez, Belli, López-Raventós and Florez (2022) describe eSports as an alternative for tourism and as a diversified event offering that can be facilitated at destinations.

Spectators form the backbone of an event by, creating the atmosphere, rooting for participants and supporting exhibitors during the course of the event. Therefore, an understanding of spectators' views of an event is vital to ensure that their needs are met and their motivations are catered for. eSports gaming is highly prevalent among the younger generation (Chung, Sum, Chan, Lai & Cheng, 2019), which then brings in the role of parents as the caregivers of minors who participate in eSports events.

2 Introduction

2.1 eSports

eSports, which can also be described as organised competitive video gaming, is on a growing curve, with an increasing need for spectators to view these events either online or in person (Jenny *et al.* 2018). The tourism industry, and especially the South African tourism industry, has started to give eSports events some attention due to the unique opportunities to be found in this sector. There has been a steady growth in eSports events in South Africa over the past few years. This is supported by developments such as the most prominent eSports arena of its kind being built at a high school in Johannesburg (Centennial Schools 2023), a total of R750 000 in eSports scholarships being made available to students (Meikie 2023) and a famous media house (Broad Media)

growing its editorial team by opening up a position for an online gaming journalist (MyBroadband 2022). Clearly, people are shifting their focus to this type of event and it is therefore necessary to understand the participants and spectators better to capitalise on this untapped market.

It is expected that the number of eSports enthusiasts worldwide will exceed 318 million by 2025 –, a massive increase from the 2022 figure of 261.2 million (Statista 2022). Pannekeet (2019) confirms that the eSports market is on a fast track, which consists of continual growth in the years to come due to both its ability to be innovative and the interest from especially sponsors and broadcasters for investment. When looking at financial figures, Gilbert (2023) listed 2020 eSports revenues of US$947.1 million for global annual eSports events, with the 2021 global eSports income passing US$1 billion, a year-on-year growth of 15.7%. Worldwide, eSports had 474 million people watch eSports games in 2021 (Pannekeet 2019; Pilipović 2022).

Illustrating the growing popularity of these events, Pu *et al.* (2022) mention that the 2018 League of Legends World Championship, which took place at the World Cup Stadium in Seoul, was sold out with 40 000 attendees at the tournament. eSports events, like any other events, have a definite economic impact on other industries such as wholesale, retail trade and food and beverage services at tourism destinations (Hlee & Lee 2023; Thompson, Taheri & Scheuring 2022). Mahlangu and Naudé-Potgieter (2022) identified some vital features that are required to make an eSports event successful, such as mega venues, which are equipped with fast internet speed, set up with complete computer stations of the best designs, big TV screens for the spectators' pleasure, streaming services, and food and beverage services. Due to the technological nature of these events, the challenge with eSports events is that they are continually changing and updating in terms of games, software and hardware required (Jenny *et al.* 2018). Pu *et al.* (2022) explain that eSports events create an opportunity for physical and virtual spectating to happen simultaneously. South Africa is at the forefront of embracing eSports events in Africa and therefore has the opportunity to be the leader in Africa by hosting events. Such proactive behaviour would create a massive opportunity for international events to be hosted on South African soil and a positive economic spin-off for the events industry in South Africa.

2.2 eSports in South Africa

South Africa is still in the early stages of fully embracing eSports as a new form of sport and event in the tourism industry. Thus, it is essential to obtain a better understanding of the participants, their legal guardians, and spectators. If one could identify what motivates these parties to spend money and attend an event on site, organisers could ensure that those needs are met, and the results would show in the attendee figures. Yu, Beres, Robinson, Klwarkowski and Mirza-Babaei (2022) describe these factors as spectator motivations that would result in engaged spectators.

Kim and Kim (2020) studied spectators' subjective well-being when watching live-streaming eSports events. It was found that achievement, friendship and social dimensions greatly influenced their subjective well-being (Kim & Kim 2020). Thompson, Taheri and Scheuring (2022) wanted to know what motivates spectators to attend an eSports event physically, with antecedents such as star players, loyalty towards the team and flow experiences that contributed to this motivation. A study by Neus (2019) compared on-site attendance to virtual event attendance, with social aspects motivating spectators to attend the event live, while the online spectators were more interested in the details of the game as it was played. Jenny *et al.* (2018) remind us that spectators are what drives the revenue for sports facilities (2018) and challenged facilities to be open-minded and see how they could adapt their offering to be able to cater for eSports events.

On the flip side of the coin, there are possible negative consequences of eSports participation, such as possible health issues in the forms of psychosocial, physical, cognitive, and conceivable mental health issues such as gaming addiction, burnout, or cyberbullying (Yin, Zi, Zhuang, Gao, Tong, Song & Liu, 2020). An awareness of the negative consequences of eSports participation could guide stakeholders on the improvements that should be made in the eSports event facilitation.

This study focused on the perspectives of the parents of minors participating in a high-school eSports tournament hosted at a top-of-the-range high school with a dedicated eSports facility. The parent's views about gaming addiction, advantages and disadvantages of eSport gaming, and the overall rating of the attended event were gauged. This is supported by Pu, Ciao and Kota (2022), who concluded that more information is currently needed on the reasons why spectators attend eSports events. Jenny *et al.* (2018) and Neus (2020) commented that research into eSports developments will always be a fruitful area to focus on with future research projects.

2.3 Event spectators

Pu *et al.* (2022) highlight in their study that motivation is an important topic that should be considered when looking at sport consumer behaviour. Motivation is the driving force that energises a person towards goal-orientated behaviour and influences the event's design, the gaming experience, and all the steps involved in the process of making the decision to attend a specific event (Pu *et al.* 2022).

3 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine parent's perception of a hosted eSports event. Based on this purpose, the following aims were identified for the study:

- To explore parents' attitudes towards, beliefs about, and understanding of their children's involvement in eSports.
- To identify the advantages and disadvantages of minors participating in eSports events.
- To analyse parents' discernment of the risk of addiction among eSports players.
- To determine the expectations and actual experience of parents at an on-site eSports event.

4 Methodology

This preliminary study was conducted as an explanatory study following a qualitative research method. The researchers conducted qualitative interviews with six parents who attended an eSports event at a school in May 2023. A total population of about 20 parents attended the event, but only six parents agreed to be interviewed in the course of the morning. Interviews were conducted in a space at the school that was the choice of the parent, and the interviewers recorded the interviews. The interviews were subsequently transcribed, and the researchers who had conducted the interviews did thematic analysis. Afterwards, the researchers shared the transcriptions and the second researcher conducted a second round of thematic analysis.

5 Results

The parents of minor eSports players have definite perceptions about eSports as entertainment for their children. The following preliminary conclusions can be made about eSports and the hosted eSport event from the perspective of parents who attended it.

5.1 Addiction to Gaming

The WHO (2018) defines gaming disorder as a pattern of persisting or recurrent gaming behaviour that might be paired with impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming even if it takes precedence over other life interests, and even the continuation of gaming despite the negative consequences. This gaming disorder or addiction could have definite impacts on the gamers' private, family, social, scholastic, or other important life areas (WHO, 2018). Potenza (2012) concluded that young adults and adolescents have higher addiction rates than children and older adults. The parents who were interviewed responded that they were fully aware of the risks of their children possibly forming an unhealthy relationship in the form of addiction with eSports gaming. It was evident that such unhealthy relationship had not yet been formed, and the parent and participant duo intended managing it carefully. In reaction to this possible risk, parents were constantly vigilant by a) proactively looking out for signs of addiction, b) managing the amount of time the minors spend on eSports games by setting clear time limits on eSports practising hours, c) having regular open conversations with their children about this topic, and d) balancing it with schoolwork and/or physical participation in a sport. Evidently, the parents were fully informed about this bad habit that might form and had decided to engage proactively regarding this risk. As one parent commented, "*it is a fact, gaming is addictive*." Another parent added that, "*they are playing in a team, and to be part of team you need to be involved regularly. They have to train, know how the team works. So, I wouldn't call it addictive, because they can stop when they need to stop*." The study conducted by Chung *et al.* (2019) concluded that eSports gaming definitely contained a significant public health concern, as gamers could develop problematic gaming behaviour that could lead to gaming disorders and hazardous gaming. A suggestion would be to have training sessions available for parents on how to identify this form of addiction and to inform them of techniques for managing such behaviour.

5.2 Reasons for Playing eSports

Parents were questioned about why their children preferred playing eSports, with insightful findings made. Some of the reasons were "*to occupy herself as she is an only child*", "*to interact with friends, even internationally*", "*it is like an online play date, but safe in my own house and I do not have to take her anywhere*", "*he has tried many sports; this is the one he is most skilled at*", "*for the novelty of the game*", "*it is nice for me to sit and see how they are doing, how they are coping with this type of environment*", *"the excitement of being part of something, a team", "he get's to do something he enjoys", "because he is good in it, he feels like he is accomplishing something"* and "*it makes him happy*". Evident from these responses are the social aspect of the game as well as the elements of the game that test their skills and capabilities. The findings listed agree with the study by García-Lanzo and Chamarro (2018), who found that participants played eSports because it satisfied basic psychological needs such as the need for competition, social needs and a need to explore. This is supported by Cho Tsaasan *et al.* (2019), who mention that eSports games are often cooperative and social. They serve as an opportunity for teenagers to socialise and to form friendships.

5.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Playing eSports

The parents were requested to list the advantages and disadvantages this form of sport had for their children. The advantages of playing eSports were listed as: "*They get the opportunity to interact with other children, as she is very shy*" and "*While playing, they grow maturity, building their EQ, learning about teamwork, learning life lessons and how to deal with conflict in general*", *"during these games they learn how teams function, how to communicate with each other, not to be selfish, to think outside the box and how to apply creativity and strategy", "I believe it exposes them to different languages and cultures, teaches them how to collaborate and learning skills for the future in technology."* Participants therefore learnt life lessons about teamwork, conflict management and communication by participating in eSports. These advantages are closely linked to the suggestions made by García-Lanzo Chamarro (2018), who suggest that eSports players should be developed in the teamwork and interpersonal and communication skills – all skills that would assist the gamers, should they decide to take up professional careers in eSports. Baltezarević and Baltezarević (2019) made similar findings regarding players' motivations to play eSports, such as advancing their knowledge of sports, improving their cognitive skills for competitions, for the socialisation aspect, and, finally, just to feel good. Leung and Chu (2023) agree with the listed advantages and add psychological benefits such as stereotype breaking, a sense of recognition, improved mood, and support from family and friends.

The disadvantages of minors playing eSports were listed as "*the risk of her becoming a recluse and not having any physical human contact with friends*"; "*the risk of not spending enough time on schoolwork*", *"not developing his motor skills"* and *"always continuously wanting to play"*. Again, the management of the risk of playing eSports came into play here. Another parent also noted that even though their child had improved in terms of their ability to communicate, they struggled to separate "*real-world*" communication from communicating with teammates while playing. These disadvantages need to be managed from a risk perspective so that the participants can enjoy the benefits of playing eSports. Leung and Chu (2023) found disadvantages such as adverse health effects due to the games' psychological intensity, frustration, obsession with winning, and sleep disturbances.

5.4 eSports and eSports Events in South Africa

All parents agreed that eSports and eSports events were not yet supported well in South Africa, but noted that they were gaining traction, as eSports is a relatively new form of entertainment in South Africa, even though national and international bodies have been established (Funk, Pizzo *et al*. 2018). *"I am not aware of any marketing or advertising regarding these events and sport. We need more marketing and information regarding these events."* Another parent painted a bleak picture by describing, *"rural schools do not have access to any of these facilities, they don't even have basic computers. A lot of groundwork to be done. It would be nice to work esports into the syllabus or curriculum, or the school's offering. A lot of work needs to be done to make everybody more aware and informed about eSports and so get more funding and support. At the moment the sport is only for a selected few. Kids with disabilities would also find benefit in this sport and actually be able to participate."* Martinelli (2019) describes the challenges eSports in South Africa is experiencing, with numerous organisations claiming to govern this industry, but with a total lack of cohesion and/or focusing on just one aspect of the sport. Therefore, Martinelli (2019) called for a single regulatory body that would be responsible for overseeing the eSports industry.

5.5 Experience and General Rating of Hosted eSports Event

In general, parents admired the event hosted by the school. It was well organised, and praise streamed in for the beautiful venue that was equipped with the latest technology for eSports. One parent commented how her child must sometimes "*play eSports in the art class*", compared to this state-of-the-art facility. Other comments included that the events were well organised because the school was geared for events of this type. These findings concur with the study by Leon *et al.* (2022), who found event facilities and the quality of the services offered to be critical factors to attract spectators and participants to the event. Pu *et al.* (2022) further concur with this finding in that the physical space of an event critically impacts the overall experience a fan has at a spectating event. It immerses spectators while entertaining all attendees by, for instance, having an impressive venue such as the one where this study was conducted or high-quality and professionally produced broadcasting of the games played. Another parent made a suggestion, *"possibly consider cameras for streaming the event and then the rest of the family can watch it from home as well, but this was a good start for these types of an event."*

Many of the parents commented that they did not know or understand how the eSports games worked, but they enjoyed the socialising part of the event where they could meet other parents and socialise with them. This statement is supported by the findings of Neus (2020) and Pu *et al.* (2022), who found that on-site attendees of eSports events were motivated by the social aspects of the events, whereas online attendees were more focused on gaining knowledge, and were interested in the intricacies of the game. Regarding knowledge of the games, this finding is further consistent with the study by Pu *et al.* (2022), who found the need to expand one's knowledge of the eSports games as an additional motivator. This social need is not just to be around people with the same interests, but also for the spectators, or, in this case, parents who come to support certain players and so create a connectedness. This is especially relevant to this study on parents who supported their children during an event. Pu *et al.* (2022) describe it as creating a physical offline space where people could gather at the event, something that would not be able to happen online. Neus (2020) further suggests that online tournaments should enhance the social experience of online events to cater to social needs by creating chat rooms or more interactive features that would assist participants and spectators to feel socially connected during an online event. Pu *et al.* (2022) make similar suggestions, such as a social zone, an offline get-together party or socialising apps through which spectators could connect during and after the event. What also further assisted the parents was seeing the game being played on the big screen and thus being able to immerse themselves in the game their children were playing. The issue of security was also raised, *"the groups are small and manageable and therefore I am not worried about security issues regarding my child."*

One of the parents highly commended the hosts of the event and specially mentioned the helpfulness of the host students who assisted in facilitating the event. Leon *et al.* (2022) received similar responses in their study, where event staff were highlighted as playing a vital role in the hosting of the event. Additional factors that attendees listed as being essential to eSports events were the event atmosphere, the hospitality of the hosts, and general good feelings about the event (Leon *et al.* 2022). There was similar feedback from the parents during the current study. The parents' general praise and positive feedback about the event were overwhelming, with no negative feedback received.

6 Conclusions

Conclusions that can be drawn from this study are that parents of the hosted eSports event are fully informed about the risk of their children possibly becoming addicted to eSports gaming. The parents are realistic about this hazard and are taking proactive steps to try minimising the chances of this happening to their children. It can be recommended that the parents of children who participate in eSports should be educated about addiction to gaming by experts and that they should be given practical guidelines on how to limit this risk and how to react when they notice it happening.

When the parents were asked why their children participated in eSports, mention was made of the social aspect of the game and of the development of their personal capabilities and skills. Due to the importance of social interaction being highlighted by the respondents, it would be advisable to host more group tournaments instead of single-player games and to develop the gamers themselves in terms of the social and gaming skills that could be utilised during a game.

The advantages and disadvantages of participation in eSports events were highlighted, with the advantages being specifically developmental, as gamers could develop their interpersonal skills. From these findings it seems evident that these gamers enjoy learning and developing, albeit in a different way than other learners, namely

through playing games. In terms of the disadvantages, it was clear that the gamers did not come out of their rooms, lost contact with the real world, and that their interpersonal communication was limited. The suggestion here would surely be for teambuilding sessions for eSports gaming teams where they have to leave their homes, meet other people, and work on their interpersonal skills and being able to communicate in person.

It was clear that the government and governing bodies should provide more support to South African eSports. The request would therefore be for the government to be proactive and get involved in this growing event industry. If the correct leadership were in place to guide the development of this event type, it would be highly beneficial to the industry.

Finally, the parents were requested to rate their experience of attending the event. Their feedback was that they were happy, and some were even overwhelmed, by the successful event the school had hosted. They explained that they supported the event because of its socialisation aspect, but also because it taught them more about the way eSports gaming work. The researcher was not surprised by the positive rating of this event, as the state-of-the-art equipment in the venue had recently been installed and was of a high quality.

7 Future Research for this Study

This preliminary study has merely uncovered the tip of the iceberg in terms of exploring, discovering and learning about eSports events, the motivations behind attending these events, and how they are performing in the events industry. Future studies are planned to focus on the different stakeholders involved in eSports events, with the focus envisaged to be on spectators, event organisers, participants and eSports facilitators. The industry seems to be keen to participate in research for the advancement of this entertainment type and is, therefore, more than willing to engage in future research projects.

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Experiential Marketing and Purchase Intention of Ecotourism Experiences: Z-Generation Case

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Abstract: Consumers are more willing to invest in experiences with relaxation and stress reduction. Tourism, a pivotal driver of the economy, and its associated activities hold significant potential for experiential marketing. It is particularly evident in the growing interest of tourists in natural settings and experiences related to nature, fostering an environment conducive to the expansion of ecotourism. Consequently, an exploratory study was conducted with the following research question: How does experiential marketing relate to consumer satisfaction, loyalty, word-of-mouth, and intention to purchase ecotourism experiences, explicitly focusing on Generation Z? - The results indicate positive correlations between experiential marketing and satisfaction constructs, consequently establishing a link between satisfaction, loyalty, word-of-mouth promotion, and purchase intention. Thus, the findings provide valuable insights into the behaviors of ecotourism consumers and how experiential marketing can facilitate the development of more effective marketing strategies to enhance tourist satisfaction.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Experiential Marketing, Genz, Loyalty, Purchase Intention, Satisfaction, Word-of-Mouth.

1. Introduction

Consumers have become more discerning regarding destination conditions increasingly mindful of the impact of their choices on the environment (Soshkin and Calderwood, 2022). Consequently, new trends in tourism sector demand include ecotourism, outdoor activities, and rural tourism (WTO, 2022). As a result, most companies are under pressure to invest in certified products and services while providing clear, transparent information (Quynh, Hoai, and Loi, 2021). Ecotourism segment has experienced significant growth both in domestic and international markets. Nevertheless, there is a need for more statistical data. This study, therefore, examines the correlation of experiential marketing with satisfaction, subsequently exploring its impact on loyalty, word-of-mouth, and purchase intentions related to ecotourism experiences from the perspective of Generation Z consumers. Given the scarcity of research on the relationship between experiential marketing and ecotourism (Quynh, Hoai, and Loi, 2021), this study aims to provide a theoretical contribution to the existing literature. It seeks to offer a practical contribution that will enable marketing managers in ecotourism-oriented companies to comprehend better the effectiveness of strategies employed within this domain.

The central research question is: How does experiential marketing correlate with consumers' satisfaction, loyalty, word-of-mouth, and intention to purchase ecotourism experiences? To address this, we have formulated the following research questions: (1) do sensory experiences (SENSE) positively correlate with satisfaction with ecotourism experiences? (2) do affective experiences (FEEL) positively correlate with satisfaction with ecotourism experiences?; (3) do cognitive experiences (THINK) positively correlate with satisfaction with ecotourism experiences; (4) do physical experiences (ACT) positively correlate with satisfaction with ecotourism experiences?; (5) do relational experiences (RELATE) positively correlate with satisfaction with ecotourism experiences?; (6) does tourist satisfaction with ecotourism experiences positively correlates with loyalty; (7) does tourist satisfaction with ecotourism experiences positively correlates with word-of-mouth (WOM); and (8) does tourist satisfaction with ecotourism experiences positively correlates with purchase intention.

Section 2 presents the literature review, and section 3 discusses the methodology. Section 4 presents the results that are then discussed in Section 5. This section also includes some practical insights for marketing managers in ecotourism. The final section offers the paper's conclusions, limitations, and opportunities for further research.

2. Literature Review

Existing literature on the relationship between experiential marketing and ecotourism, especially concerning Generation Z, requires further exploration (Quynh, Hoai, and Loi, 2021). Generation Z, encompassing individuals born between 1995 and 2012, shows a preference for global travel, low tolerance for delay, seeks immediate responses, and values peer opinions over conventional advertising campaigns. This generation is deeply accustomed to the internet and technological advancements. They are skeptical toward traditional marketing methodologies, favoring platforms like Instagram and YouTube, and are discerning regarding products and services endorsed by influencers. Thus, exploring the behavior of this growing generation (in domestic and international markets) concerning ecotourism is interesting.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as responsible travel within natural areas dedicated to preserving the environment and prioritizing the local population's well-being (TIES, 2015). Consequently, ecotourism involves the adoption of the following guiding principles: (a) reduction of negative impacts on the environment; (b) conservation of destinations; (c) cooperation with local authorities and people; (d) visitors planning and management; (e) long-term monitoring programs; and (f) creation of infrastructures that consider harmonization with the environment, minimizing the use of fossil fuels and conserving indigenous plants and wildlife (Wood, 2002). Ecotourism facilitates the reduction of the ecological footprint, enhances social impact within destinations (Soshkin and Calderwood, 2022), and contributes to preserving natural areas designated for ecotourism attractions. Moreover, it generates economic benefits for the local community and authorities engaged in ecotourism management (Clarkin and Kähler, 2023).

The ecotourism market is dynamic, continually evolving to align with tourists' preferences and motivations. It emerges as a support system for companies dedicated to promoting experiences, fostering the local environment, and generating social value. Operators are encouraged to augment the value of their products by prioritizing the maximization of tourists' satisfaction and needs (Roseta, Sousa, and Roseta, 2020). The experience offered becomes integral to visitors' lives, evoking profound inner emotions. Beyond merely providing a service, the customers' sense of expertise is significantly heightened (Lin et al*.,* 2009).

The evolution of consumer trends has significantly influenced the shift in the marketing paradigm (Batat, 2019). Consumer emotional engagement enhances sales and fosters loyalty, strengthening a brand's image and positioning (Batat, 2019). In this context, experiential marketing emerges as an essential tool, creating effective and personalized marketing strategies capable of positively impacting consumers while nurturing stronger relationships between consumers and companies (Dieguez, 2020).

Portugal ranked 16th (down from 12th place in 2019) and stands among the most competitive and appealing destinations for global tourism investment (Soshkin and Calderwood, 2022). Within ecotourism, experiential marketing is tailored to engage tourists and local communities by offering unique value-based experiences that encourage repeat consumer engagement (Quynh, Hoai, and Loi, 2021). Consequently, experiential marketing is a strategy that cultivates consumer loyalty and leads to personal recommendations. Companies must explore alternative emotional connections with consumers (Medina, Riesco, and Tejero, 2021).

The theoretical Strategic Experience Module (SEM) of experiential marketing comprises sensory experiences ("SENSE"), affective experiences ("FEEL"), cognitive experiences ("THINK"), physical experiences ("ACT"), and relational experiences ("RELATE"), initially proposed by Schmitt (1999), was tailored to suit ecotourism experiences. The impact of these constructs concerning satisfaction, loyalty, word-of-mouth, and purchase intention was examined. In other words, experiential marketing aims to cultivate comprehensive, integrated experiences that encompass these characteristics, allowing consumers to engage through their senses, emotions, thoughts, actions, and relationships. The SENSE construct specifically targets consumers' senses to create sensory experiences via touch, sight, taste, hearing, and smell. This strategy is frequently employed by the tourism and hospitality industry (Köse and Akyol, 2019). The FEEL construct focuses on evoking consumers' feelings and emotions to create affective experiences, ranging from mild positive perceptions of a brand to intense emotions of joy and pride. The THINK construct targets consumers' intellect, aiming to generate cognitive and problem-solving experiences that creatively engage customers, appealing to both their convergent and divergent thinking through surprise (Schmitt, 1999). Cognitive experiences can be elucidated in tourism through tourists' curiosity (Köse and Akyol, 2019). The ACT construct, another construct outlined by Schmitt (1999), involves physical experiences that introduce alternative ways of doing things, alternative lifestyles, and interactive encounters. The RELATE construct focuses on experiences that involve the interaction between individuals, placing them within a social context (Schmitt, 1999). It's important to note that a negative perception

of the experience leads to dissatisfaction, causing tourists to lose interest in revisiting the destination and negatively influencing the experience's recommendations (Köse and Akyol, 2019).

Satisfaction is closely linked to repeated purchases and positive recommendations to others, which are primary loyalty indicators (Köse and Akyol, 2019). Satisfied consumers tend to continue their purchases and are highly inclined to spread positive word-of-mouth. Within tourism marketing, these recommendations hold significant weight as they are considered highly reliable and among the most critical sources of information sought by potential tourists (Chi and Qu, 2008; Oppermann, 2000). Purchase intention represents the likelihood of consumers being willing to buy a product. It is a tool to gauge consumer demand for future products and assess how marketing strategies will impact sales (Morwitz, 2014).

3. Methodology

This exploratory research involves studying a specific situation at a particular time to elucidate the connections between the variables (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornill, 2019). The objective is to explore the relationships between variables associated with experiential marketing and satisfaction concerning ecotourism experiences. Additionally, it aims to explore the correlation between this satisfaction and factors like loyalty, purchase intention, and WOM.

An adapted scale from Lin et al. (2009) and Köse and Akyol (2019) was adopted to assess experiential marketing within ecotourism experiences. The study focused on Schmitt's (1999) five strategic modules: sensory experiences (SENSE), affective experiences (FEEL), cognitive experiences (THINK), physical experiences (ACT), and relational experiences (RELATE). To evaluate ecotourists' perceptions regarding experiential marketing strategies in ecotourism, a scale comprising 25 items was created composed of five items for the SENSE and FEEL modules, three items for the THINK module, five items for the ACT module, and seven items for the RELATE module. Table 1 provides a summary of the scales used to measure the constructs. A 5-point Likert Scale was consistently applied (1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree) to gather responses.

Table 1: Scales used for the constructs of the conceptual model

Construct	Items	References
SENSE	S1. The landscapes are very beautiful.	Adapted from Lin et al. (2009)
	S2. Ecotourism destinations are very attractive.	
	S3. The ecotourism surrounding environment is wonderful.	
	S4. The food at local restaurants is delicious with fresh ingredients.	
	S5. The surrounding sounds (animals, waterfalls) are striking.	
FEEL	F1. The whole atmosphere of ecotourism destinations makes me feel happy.	Adapted from Lin et al (2009); Köse and Akyol (2019)
	F2. Ecotourism experiences allow me to escape the pressures of everyday life.	
	F3. The atmosphere of ecotourism destinations makes me feel comfortable.	
	F4. Overall, ecotourism experiences give me positive feelings.	
	F5. The activities promoted in ecotourism destinations are fun.	
THINK	T1. Ecotourism experiences inspire me to reflect.	Adapted from Lin et al. (2009)
	T2. Ecotourism experiences stimulate my curiosity (e.g., discovering ecotourism destinations learn about fauna and flora).	
	T3. Ecotourism experiences make me think about my lifestyle (e.g., being more environmentally conscious).	
ACT	A1. I shared my ecotourism experiences with family and friends.	Adapted from Lin et al. (2009)
	A2. The activities promoted by ecotourism destinations attract me.	
	A3. I would like to continue exploring other ecotourism activities.	
	A4. Ecotourism experiences make me want to change my lifestyle.	
	A5. Ecotourism experiences improve my social life with others (friends, family).	
RELATE	R1. The scenery of ecotourism destinations (landscapes, animals, architecture, attractions) makes me want to take photos for future memory.	Adapted from Lin et al

Construct	Items	References
	R2. I want to buy some souvenirs related to ecotourism destinations.	(2009); Köse and Akyol (2019)
	R3. Participating in activities promoted by ecotourism destinations represents my enthusiasm about ecotourism.	
	R4. Participating in activities promoted by ecotourism destinations allows me to exchange experiences with other people with common interests.	
	R5. The choice of ecotourism destinations reflects my personal taste.	
	R6. Ecotourism experiences bring me closer to my family members or friends.	
	R7. Ecotourism experiences remind me of the importance of cultural diversity.	
SATISFACTION	ST1. I made the right choice by opting for an ecotourism experience.	Adapted from Bruner (2019)
	ST2. To what extent did the ecotourism experiences meet your expectations	
	ST3. Considering your ecotourism experiences so far, how satisfied are you?	
LOYALTY	L1. I will say positive things about ecotourism experiences to other people.	Adapted from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996)
	L2. I will recommend ecotourism experiences to anyone who asks me.	
	L3. I will encourage friends and family to purchase ecotourism experiences.	
	L4. I consider ecotourism experiences as my first choice.	
	L5. I intend to return to an ecotourism destination in the coming years.	
WORD-OF-MOUTH	W1. I will recommend ecotourism experiences to my friends.	Adapted from Bruner (2019); Quynh, Hoai and Loi (2021)
	W2. I'm going to convince my family to buy ecotourism experiences.	
	W3. I posted photos of ecotourism experiences on social media.	
	W4. I will say positive things about ecotourism experiences online and/or to anyone who asks me.	
PURCHASE INTENTION	I1. I would like to purchase ecotourism experiences.	Adapted from Chen et al. (2016)
	I2. I am considering purchasing an ecotourism experience.	
	I3. I hope to purchase ecotourism experiences.	
	I4. I plan to purchase an ecotourism experience.	

The population of this study includes a total population of 540 students from the 2nd and 3rd year at Portuguese Universities with management and tourism degrees, national ecotourism consumers from Generation Z. Convenience sampling was used to select the individuals, mainly due to the impossibility of identifying all the individuals in the larger population. A sample of 104 valid questionnaires was obtained in person. This approach is appropriate when obtaining a random or representative sample is difficult due to time constraints and financial or logistical issues.

A quantitative methodology was employed, using a survey questionnaire for data collection. The participants responded based on their personal ecotourism experiences. The questionnaire was disseminated in person from June to September 2023. In the initial section, respondents were asked to assess the significance of factors related to experiential marketing, satisfaction, loyalty, WOM, and purchase intention following the scales presented in Table 1. A 5-point Likert scale was used (1 – Not important at all to 5 – Very Important). The subsequent section focused on profiling each respondent (gender, age, marital status, type of place of residence (rural or urban), county of residence, and academic qualifications.

The conceptual model is thus introduced, stemming from the core question: "How does experiential marketing influence consumers' intention to purchase ecotourism experiences?". This model is based on Schmitt's (1999), and eight research hypotheses were formulated (as depicted in Figure 1). These hypotheses aim to provide

insights into the correlations of experiential marketing on satisfaction with ecotourism experiences and its influence on loyalty, WOM, and purchase intention.

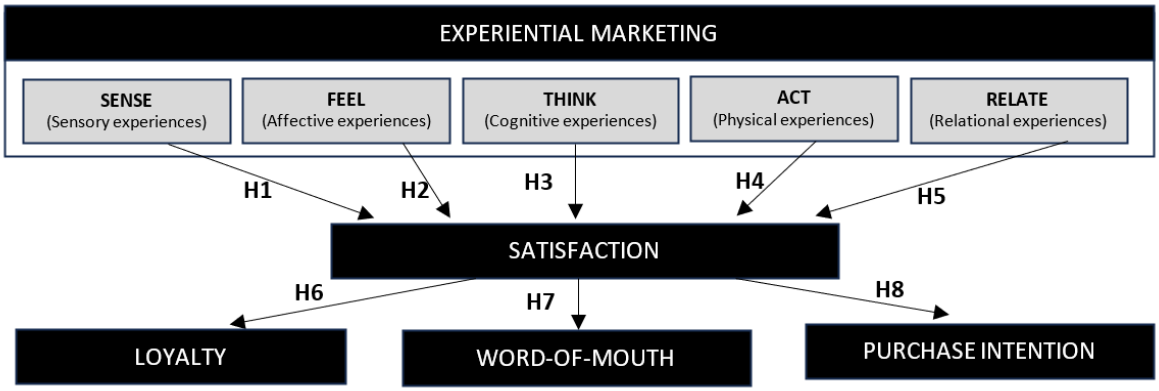

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

This study aims to test whether there is a positive relationship between each strategic experiential marketing module and tourist satisfaction with ecotourism experiences, formulating the following hypotheses:

H1: Sensory experiences (SENSE) positively correlate with satisfaction with ecotourism experiences;

H2: Affective experiences (FEEL) positively correlate with satisfaction with ecotourism experiences;

H3: Cognitive experiences (THINK) positively correlate with satisfaction with ecotourism experiences;

H4: Physical experiences (ACT) positively correlate with satisfaction with ecotourism experiences;

H5: Relational experiences (RELATE) positively correlate with satisfaction with ecotourism experiences.

A satisfied customer often demonstrates an intention to revisit the destination and tends to recommend it to others, ultimately contributing to loyalty. As noted in the study by Wu and Tseng (2015), greater customer satisfaction typically leads to greater customer loyalty. In other words, their findings confirm that customer satisfaction is positively correlated with loyalty, and this correlation is relatively strong (Wu and Tseng, 2015). Additionally, recommendations from other individuals have emerged as a significant source of information for potential consumers. A contented consumer tends to influence WOM positively; they are more likely to share their experience with others through discussions with friends and family or by posting positive comments online (Quynh, Hoai, and Loi, 2021). Considering the nature of the data (numerical data such as range and ratio) and the necessity for a normal distribution within the sample data, parametric tests are deemed appropriate. Considering this, three more hypotheses were developed:

H6: Satisfaction positively correlates with loyalty in ecotourism experiences;

H7: Satisfaction positively correlate with word-of-mouth in ecotourism experiences; and

H8: Satisfaction positively correlates with purchase intention in ecotourism experiences.

Non-parametric tests were also used to analyze categorical data since the sample data deviates from a normal distribution (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornill, 2019). To ensure the adequacy of these statistical analyses, the sample data's normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The internal consistency of the scales was verified through Cronbach's Alpha (α). The formulated hypotheses were tested using Spearman's correlation coefficient (Field, 2009).

4. Results

The sample comprised 104 respondents, with a majority of 76% being female and 24% male. The average age of the respondents was 21 years, and the majority were predominantly single (90.5%). Geographically, most participants resided in rural areas in the northern region of Portugal, with approximately 37.2% from the district of Viana do Castelo, 31% from the district of Braga, and 9.3% from Porto. Regarding academic qualifications, the respondents were primarily individuals pursuing degree programs. Descriptive statistics summarize the main findings in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Construct	Items	μ	σ	Total μ
SENSE	S1	4.69	.464	4.3673
	S2	4.45	.621	
	S3	4.20	.768	
	S4	3.92	.856	
	S5	4.57	.650	
FEEL	F1	4.37	.738	4.3635
	F2	4.55	.695	
	F3	4.30	.749	
	F4	4.52	.653	
	F5	4.09	.739	
THINK	T1	4.19	.751	4.0865
	T2	3.98	.776	
	T3	4.09	.826	
ACT	A1	4.35	.620	3.9404
	A2	3.78	.859	
	A3	4.30	.695	
	A4	3.56	.954	
	A5	3.72	.864	
RELATE (Relational exp.)	R1	4.47	.710	3.8393
	R2	3.43	1.121	
	R3	3.52	.892	
	R4	3.69	.837	
	R5	4.07	.686	
	R6	3.75	1.012	
	R7	3.94	.868	

Construct	Items	μ	σ	Total μ
SATISFACTION	ST1	4.52	.539	4.2051
	ST2	3.65	.679	
	ST3	4.44	.537	
LOYALTY	L1	4.43	.571	4.1288
	L2	4.32	.672	
	L3	4.18	.721	
	L4	3.40	.981	
	L5	4.31	.624	
WORD-OF-MOUTH	W1	4.18	.693	3.8918
	W2	3.75	.890	
	W3	3.62	1.192	
	W4	4.01	.806	
PURCHASE INTENTION	I1	3.81	.777	3.7837
	I2	3.80	.874	
	I3	3.87	.837	

μ-mean

σ-standard deviation

Sensory experiences (SENSE) have an average score of 4.3673, which indicates that ecotourism consumers hold a positive perception of the sensory experiences offered by ecotourism. Notably, items such as S1 (beautiful landscapes), with a score of 4.69, and S5 ("The surrounding sounds are striking"), with a score of 4.57, have the highest averages among the sensory experience-related statements.

The average score for affective experiences (FEEL) is 4.3635, indicating that ecotourism experiences evoke positive feelings among the sampled consumers. The items that obtained the highest averages within this domain were F2 ("Ecotourism experiences allow me to escape the pressures of everyday life") with a score of 4.55, and F4 ("Overall, ecotourism experiences give me positive feelings") with a score of 4.52.

Cognitive experiences (THINK) obtained a global average score of 4.0865. The items T1 ("Ecotourism experiences inspire me to reflect") scored an average of 4.19, and T3 ("Ecotourism experiences make me think about my lifestyle") received an average of 4.09. These items achieved the highest averages.

Physical experiences (ACT) present an overall average score of 3.9404. The items with a higher average score are A1 ("I shared my ecotourism experiences with family and friends") with 4.35, and A3 ("I would like to continue exploring other ecotourism activities") with 4.30.

Finally, relational experiences obtained an average score of 3.8393, with the items with higher averages being R1 ("The scenery of ecotourism destinations makes me want to take photos for future memory") with 4.47, and R5 ("The choice of ecotourism destinations reflects my personal taste") with 4.07. Regarding the other constructs, the satisfaction construct presents an average of 4.2051, the loyalty construct presents a mean score

of 4.1288, the WOM construct achieves an average of 3.8918, and the purchase intention construct attains an average of 3.7837.

Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the scale's reliability. It ranges between 0 and 1, considering 0.6 as the cutoff point for acceptability (Field, 2009). As observed in Table 3, all constructs exhibit Cronbach's Alpha values higher than 0.6, indicating an acceptable level of reliability.

Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha (α)			
SENSE	0.683	Satisfaction	0.666
FEEL	0.878	Loyalty	0.799
THINK	0.680	WOM	0.741
ACT	0.693	Purchase intention	0.919
RELATE	0.725		

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Table 4) was employed to assess the normality of the data distribution, considering a sample size exceeding 50 elements. The significance levels (sig) of each variable were examined. If the sig value was more than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H0) stating that "the data follows a normal distribution" was rejected (the sample did not follow a normal distribution). The sample data did not follow a normal distribution based on the test results.

Table 4: Normality Test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]	
	Statistic	Sig.
SENSE	.127	<.001
FEEL	.139	<.001
THINK	.175	<.001
ACT	.178	<.001
RELATE	.119	.001
Satisfaction	.171	<.001
Loyalty	.113	.002
Word-of-mouth	.111	.003
Purchase Intention	.208	<.001

As the aim is to analyze the relationship between two variables, Spearman's correlation coefficient was used (Field, 2009), as depicted in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Correlation coefficients experiential marketing and satisfaction

			Satisfaction	
Spearman's Rho	SENSE	Rho	.581**	Sig. 0.000
	FEEL	Rho	.498**	Sig. 0.000
	THINK	Rho	.409**	Sig. 0.000
	ACT	Rho	.518**	Sig. 0.000
	RELATE	Rho	.400**	Sig. 0.000

**. Significative correlation up to 0.01. N=104.

Table 6: Correlations with satisfaction

			Loyalty	WOM	Purchase Intention
Spearman's Rho	Satisfaction	correlation coefficient	.650**	.479**	.463**
		Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000

**. Significative correlation up to 0.01. N=104

Considering the results, the formulated hypotheses can be accepted: SENSE positively correlates with satisfaction (H1), FEEL has a positive moderated correlation with satisfaction (H2), THINK has a positive moderated correlation with satisfaction (H3), ACT positively correlates with satisfaction (H4), and RELATE has a positive moderated correlation with satisfaction (H5). Furthermore, the results suggest that tourist satisfaction with ecotourism experiences positively influences loyalty (H6), has a moderate positive effect on word-of-mouth (H7), and has a moderate positive impact on purchase intention.

5. Discussion

The findings confirmed Smith's (1999) study, demonstrating that Schmitt's (1999) experience constructs influence the satisfaction derived from ecotourism experiences.

In this way, the proposed conceptual model, through the descriptive analysis of these constructs, allowed us to conclude that the sensory (4.3673), the affective (4.3635), and the cognitive (4.0865) experiences emerged with the highest average ratings. On the other hand, the less favorable emphasis was on relational experiences (3.8393) and physical experiences (3.904), aligning with similar conclusions presented in the study by Wu and Tseng (2015).

The results support all eight hypotheses within the model. Specifically, (H1) sensory experiences indeed correlate positively with satisfaction within ecotourism experiences. This corroborates findings from (Köse and Akyol, 2019) that emphasize how ecotourism senses influence tourists, including visual observations of landscapes and architecture, local cuisine tasting, and nature's sounds.

The SENSE construct specifically targets consumers' senses to create sensory experiences via touch, sight, taste, hearing, and smell. This strategy is frequently employed by the tourism and hospitality industry (Köse and Akyol, 2019). The findings also underscore that affective experiences positively correlate with satisfaction within ecotourism experiences (H2), indicating that ecotourism experiences generally evoke positive feelings among the sampled consumers. This suggests that an ecotourism destination's overall atmosphere influences consumers' feelings and emotions, subsequently impacting their satisfaction. Therefore, managers of ecotourism destinations should emphasize ensuring consumers' comfort, delight, and entertainment through the activities and experiences offered.

The findings further demonstrate that cognitive experiences positively correlate with ecotourism experience satisfaction (H3). This emphasizes that consumers are notably influenced by how these experiences engage their thoughts, stimulating their curiosity regarding the lifestyles and cultural aspects of the ecotourism destination.

Likewise, the construct of physical experiences shows a positive correlation with satisfaction within ecotourism experiences (H4), suggesting that the activities in which consumers engage within the ecotourism experience and their interactions with their family and friends affect their satisfaction levels. This indicates that physical experiences associated with ecotourism may encourage participation and engage consumers. Consequently, managers of ecotourism destinations should create activities that attract tourists and actively encourage their participation, fostering a sense of involvement and enjoyment. Finally, the correlation between the relational experiences and satisfaction with ecotourism experiences (H5) is positive, which underlines the importance of enhancing the relationship between tourists and the local cultures.

Satisfaction, an extensively studied concept in marketing, exhibited a positive correlation with loyalty, WOM, and purchase intention, thus playing a pivotal role in the performance and success of any tourist product or service. As reported in other studies (Wu and Tseng, 2015), if a tourist positively perceives ecotourism experiences after the experiential phase, this leads to greater tourist satisfaction (H6). This reinforces that a positive experience during ecotourism significantly contributes to overall satisfaction, influencing their likelihood of returning and engaging in future ecotourism activities. Within ecotourism, experiential marketing

is tailored to entertain tourists and local communities by offering unique value-based experiences that encourage repeat consumer engagement (Quynh, Hoai, and Loi, 2021).

As also found in previous studies (Quynh, Hoai, and Loi, 2021; Wardi, Abror, and Trinanda, 2018), the current investigation highlights that respondents often engage in ecotourism experiences based on recommendations from family and friends. This emphasizes the influence of tourist satisfaction with ecotourism experiences on positively influencing WOM (H7).

The greater the satisfaction, the greater the intention to purchase and engage in ecotourism experiences in the future, thus revealing a positive relationship between satisfaction and purchase intention (H8), as reported in other studies (Chi and Qu, 2008)

Consumer emotional engagement fosters loyalty (Batat, 2019), and marketing strategies can positively impact consumers and create stronger relationships between consumers and companies (Dieguez, 2020).

6. Conclusion

Ecotourism comprises products, services, and experiences where consumption creates memories and unique encounters (Quynh, Hoai, and Loi, 2021). These experiences are sold based on the sensations, emotions, and cognitive benefits they promise to provide (Batat, 2019). Tourism managers must recognize that the value of ecotourism offerings encompasses the entire lifestyle associated with the ecotourism experience. Implementing experiential marketing practices is an advantageous mechanism for promoting and enhancing this ecotourism segment.

Following experiential consumption in ecotourism, the outcomes of this experience significantly influence tourists' subsequent behavior, determined by the positive or negative perceptions they have acquired. A positive perception steers tourists toward satisfaction, revisiting the destination, engaging in positive recommendations (WOM), and exhibiting loyal behaviors. A satisfied customer frequently leads to repeated purchases and favorable recommendations, critical indicators for tourist business managers and destination authorities.

The proposed conceptual model allowed us to conclude that sensory, affective, cognitive, physical, and relational experiences positively influence tourist satisfaction with ecotourism experiences. Moreover, it was supposed that satisfaction with ecotourism experiences has a positive influence on loyalty, satisfaction with ecotourism experiences has a positive impact on WOM, and satisfaction with ecotourism experiences has a positive influence on purchase intention.

This study offers a significant theoretical contribution to the existing literature and provides practical insights that may benefit marketing managers in ecotourism. The findings suggest a deeper understanding of the most effective strategies that align with consumer preferences, potentially fostering an increased demand for ecotourism experiences and reinforcing competitiveness within the industry. Nonetheless, several limitations may be identified. The scarcity of information and data on ecotourism in Portugal hinders the depth of the analysis, as this topic remains relatively underexplored. Additionally, time constraints restricted the expansion of the sample size. As an exploratory study, these limitations need addressing and present opportunities for further research developments.

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Religious pilgrimages in South Africa: A Catalyst for Sustainable Tourism and Local Economic Development

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Abstract: Sustainable tourism and local economic development as a mechanism for religious pilgrimages in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). This is particularly pertinent for religious pilgrimages in KZN province which boosts historical landmarks and pilgrimage destinations. Pilgrimage tourism and several other forms of tourism related to it have significant affinities to the tenets of sustainable development. The purpose of this paper is to examine the complications that could arise from religious pilgrimages' potential as a form of travel that, once implemented, would be beneficial for sustainable tourism and local economic development (LED). This paper further intends to assess the pilgrimage destinations to be viewed as a mechanism for local economic development. A quantitative research design was employed, as the nature of this research necessitates the use of numerical data and descriptive statistics to draw conclusions. A standardised questionnaire was used to collect data from 410 respondents selected using a convenience sampling technique from different pilgrimage destinations in KZN, South Africa. Descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were conducted using IBM's SPSS version 28 software. The pilgrims and local communities' perceptions of socio-economic contribution indicate that the availability of tourism facilities might be perceived as a socio-economic contributor to pilgrimage destinations. The findings further reveal that African religious pilgrimages can be sustainable and be a local economic development catalyst in KwaZulu-Natal. The study recommends that the South African National Christian Forum (SANCF), in collaboration with the South African government (national and provincial), develop an operational plan to provide business education, entrepreneurial skills, and relevant support to local communities surrounding religious pilgrimages or religious destinations, to empower them to contribute to the development of the local economy. This will assist to reduce South Africa's high unemployment rate, particularly in less developed regions.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Sustainable Development, Religious Pilgrimages, Pilgrimages, Community, Pilgrimage Destinations

1. Introduction

Religious pilgrims frequently take vacations for sightseeing, which is primarily a tourist activity (Terzidou, Scarles & Saunders, 2018). Tourism-driven development should benefit both local communities and the environment in the future. African religious pilgrimages have the potential for tourism growth because these pilgrimage destinations are visited annually by tourists and pilgrims, which could boost the country's gross domestic product (GDP). These pilgrimage destinations have the potential to expand in popularity because of increased business activity and travel demand measured not merely in terms of desire but also in terms of the ability to participate in tourism activities (Chilembwe, 2020; Ron & Timothy, 2018). Tourism appeal as a vehicle for supporting provincial and regional socio-economic development has been obvious since its growth in the global socio-economy (Aslam et al. 2016; Sudarmo, 2005). Local municipalities in proximity of African religious pilgrimages must prepare a tourism development strategy to develop these pilgrimage destinations. The study has to fill in the gaps by investigating and expanding on religious tourism as another type of tourism that could help in the local socio-economic development of the study area.

Depending on whether pilgrimage destinations have a positive or negative influence, sustainable development may be a viable alternative for ensuring that the places are accessible, well-maintained, and beneficial to both communities and tourists/pilgrims. The construction of pilgrimage sites' facilities may be sustainable, and everyone would desire to visit these places of pilgrimage. According to Jamal and Camago (2014) it is critical to develop approaches to enhance the quality of service in tourism. The study depends on the premise that by developing tourism, African religious pilgrimages will be able to contribute to the sustainability of pilgrimage destinations. By doing so, everyone who participates in religious pilgrimages may be urged to handle themselves precisely when visiting pilgrimage destinations. Sustainable facilities in the study area can benefit pilgrimage destinations, pilgrims, stakeholders, and local communities.

2. Literature Review

Surveys such as that conducted by Olya (2020) have shown that the sustainability of tourism development depends on the support of local communities and their residents. Pilgrimage tourism, as advocated in this study,

requires the assistance of local communities to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism. Despite substantial studies, addressing the complexities of local communities' attitudes toward tourism necessitates more imaginative approach in the application of theories and approaches (Olya, 2020; Hudaefi & Heryani, 2019; Khambule, 2018). Studies show that visitors to religious sites or events are not solely concerned about religious issues; they also consider cultural, traditional, spiritual, and landscape variables whenever selecting whether or not to travel (Amaro, Antunes & Henriques, 2018; Kaewumpai, 2018; Kim & Kim, 2018; Terzidou et al., 2018; Wang, Chen & Huang, 2016; Drule et al., 2015; Abbate & Nuovo, 2013; Hughes, Bond & Ballantyne, 2013; Olsen, 2013). By implementing severe environmental initiatives in social, economic, and cultural settings, tourism development can help enhance sustainability (Pan et al. 2018; Larson & Poudyal, 2012). Pilgrims and local communities could increase hospitality in the study area, which could have a multiplier effect on the economy and infrastructure (Dayoub et al. 2020; Jaelani, 2017; Kapoor & Chauhan, 2017).

The religious pilgrimages and structures visited have grown sacred throughout time and are now recognised as key heritage sites and destinations (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Religious tourism has a negative impact on culture, the environment, and the economy (Terzidou et al., 2008; Olsen & Timothy, 2006). There are numerous challenges in the developing world that complicate sustainable development and tourism management. This involves the local communities' engagement in decision-making, sharing the advantages of tourism development, empowerment, ownership of historical sites and artifacts, a lack of monetary resources and skills, and forced displacement to accommodate growth (Hampton, 2005; Mattsson, 2005). Religious tourism has an influence on the economic and cultural development of destinations possessing a religious component (UNWTO, 2017). Pilgrimages can contribute to local socio-economic development if district municipalities promote religious pilgrimages and tourism development (Wiltshier & Griffiths, 2016; Rogerson, 2015; Saayman, Saayman & Rossouw, 2013). Pilgrimage destinations and other nodes along the pilgrimage route require effective management in order to benefit from tourism and foster sustainable tourism (Trono & Olsen, 2018).

Religious travellers, among others, influenced the development of commercial hotels in the past, and hotels are even included in contemporary hymns (O'Gorman, 2009). According to Melian, Prats and Coromina (2016), restorative shrines are at the intersection of accessible and religious tourism. The purpose of this paper is to examine the complications that could arise from religious pilgrimages' potential as a form of travel that, once implemented, would be beneficial for sustainable tourism and local economic development (LED). This paper further highlights the significance of local communities and stakeholders being aware of tourism opportunities related to religious pilgrimages in their areas. It could also develop an approach to integrate pilgrimage tourism with sustainable livelihoods in pilgrimage destinations' local communities. If pilgrimage destinations are created in a sustainable manner that can provide tourists with security, communities to grow awareness of these sites (Nicolaides, 2016; 2015). The pilgrimage destinations should be kept in good condition so that they can provide authenticity and spiritual growth to everyone who utilises them. Religious pilgrimages, spiritual places and pilgrimage destinations are frequently transformed into visitor attractions for the purpose of providing the pilgrims with a spiritual journey that has socio-economic benefits for local communities while simultaneously generating funds for the preservation and restoration of cultural heritage (Trono, 2016; Raj & Griffin, 2015). Religious pilgrimages can be promoted, resulting in an increase in demand for an array of tourism-related commodities (Henderson, 2011).

Pilgrimage tourism ought to be prioritised for the purpose to develop sustainable opportunities for a greater segment of society while also increasing interest (Meyer, 2004). Tourism provides major socio-economic advantages to the natural resources and pilgrimage destinations for the study area (Mammadov, 2013). This necessitates the development of innovative, highly effective, and measurable marketing plans to increase tourism numbers for the purpose of keeping local communities active, retaining local assets, benefiting from the natural environment, and pilgrimage destinations (Risteskia, Kocevskia & Arnaudov, 2012).

3. Methodology

The study used a sequential exploratory mixed-method research design. The study used a sequential exploratory mixed-method research design. Phase I, which included qualitative interviews with 30 municipal officials, resulted in a better understanding of the potential of religious pilgrimages, which was then later used to generate a survey instrument. In Phase II, 310 pilgrims and local communities from various municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal participated in surveys as part of a wider population. However, this paper reports. This study employs a quantitative approach to draw a conclusion. The design generates the necessary data pertaining to the following topics: "awareness of local people at the pilgrimage destinations" versus "tourism development", "tourism facilities and products that are packaged for tourists and pilgrims", "perception of local communities towards the

potential of pilgrimages in enhancing socio-economic development", "the district municipalities with pilgrimage destinations", and "theoretical framework for tourism development of pilgrimage". 450 respondents were selected using a convenience sampling method, which is a non-probability sampling approach from different pilgrimage destinations in KZN, South Africa. This sample size is considered large enough to address the research objectives and draw conclusions (Taherdoost, 2017). A structured survey questionnaire was used for data collection. Questions on the instrument were set as categorical variables (responds profile) and the ordinal variables on a 5-point Likert scale questions (ranging from 1 Strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 strongly disagree, and 5 disagree). IBM's SPSS version 28 was employed for data analysis. Descriptive analysis. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarise information on the research sample in this study (Kim, Lee & Kim, 2017). For the purposes of data analysis, Mann-Whitney U tests were performed to check for correlations between variables (Bolboacă *et al.,* 2011). Mann-Whitney U test is a popular test for comparing two independent samples (Salkind, 2012). Variables such as respondents' age and gender were re-recoded into two categories.

4. Findings and Discussion

This paper presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from the respondents by means of survey questionnaires. Quantitative data was analysed by means of SPSS which enabled the researcher to generate frequency tables that were used to present statistical analysis. Table 1 shows that more females (54%) than males (46%) responded to the questionnaire. More than half of respondents were between the age of 18-35 (59%), while 36 and above were recorded at (41%). This could be due to the fact that women made up a significant proportion of pilgrims. According to Shuo et al., (2009) and Nugraha and Widyaningsih (2021) women outnumber males when it comes to religious pilgrimage. **Table 1** shows a list of these characteristics.

Table 1: Respondents' profile (N=410)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	46
	Female	54
Age	18-35	59
	36 and above	41
Level of education	No Western Education	15
	Primary	8
	Secondary	15
	Tertiary education (Diploma)	17
	Tertiary education (Degree)	46
Employment status	Unemployed – Retired	48
	Self-employed – employed	52
Occupation	Unskilled	28
	Semi-skilled	25
	Skilled	19
	Professional	29

According to the findings, youths outnumbered adults in terms of study participation. Gärtner and Hennig (2022) postulate that youths visit religious pilgrimages more frequently than other age groups given that they constitute the majority of the country's population and are actively involved in any local development that happens to be taking place within the study area.

Given that it is widely acknowledged that education creates awareness and understanding between individuals and their environments, the educational backgrounds of the respondents were evaluated as a major variable in this study (Kousar *et al.,* 2022). According to the findings, 17% of respondents had tertiary degrees, 46% had post-secondary education, including degrees, implying people with post-secondary education constitute the majority. 15% of those polled had a secondary education, while 5% had no formal education whatsoever. Only about 8% of the preceding group of respondents had completed elementary school. This could be due to the fact that the majority of respondents were younger people who had finished matriculation but had not yet had the opportunity to continue their studies at a higher educational institution.

The employment level of the respondents was crucial because the purpose of the survey was to gain insight into how respondents reflected on the potential of pilgrimages to influence the socio-economic growth of the study area. According to the findings, 48% of the unemployed were retired people. It's worth noting that the majority of respondents (about 52%) had jobs and a consistent source of income. This is an encouraging result for the study because it implies that some of the employed respondents worked for the pilgrimage destinations in the study area. The findings revealed that, whereas 29% of all respondents were professionals, 28% of employed respondents lacked technical skills. The sample was made up of 25% semi-skilled respondents and 19% skilled

respondents. Despite the fact that there were less skilled respondents (19%) than unskilled respondents, this is still a favourable finding for the study. This means that the more qualified and/or professional responses possess a better probability of being hired at pilgrimage destinations.

There are numerous questions to ascertain the need for and comprehension of socio-economic development within the communities surrounding pilgrimage destinations. The study sought to ascertain respondents' perceptions on the potential of pilgrimage destinations to enhance economic development in the study area. The respondents were presented with statements in which they could convey their level of agreement and/or disagreement with the potential of pilgrimage destinations for enhancing socio-economic development in the study area.

Table 2: Enhancement of socio-economic development (N=410)

Statements	SA	A	N	SD	D
There is need for developing pilgrimage destinations in the study area.	29%	62%	7%	0%	2%
The development of pilgrimage destinations might enhance the socio-economic status of the study area.	25%	64%	7%	3%	0%
Pilgrimage destinations have a potential for enhancing the socio-economy of the study area.	26%	65%	7%	1%	1%
Tourism facilities in the study area could enhance the socio-economic development.	15%	72%	7%	2%	4%
Religious pilgrimages can be seen as socio-economic enhancement.	17%	22%	14%	18%	29%
Involvement of local people might enhance socio-economy of the study area.	22%	66%	7%	4%	1%
Availability of infrastructure could increase the socio-economy enhancement of the study area.	24%	61%	8%	2%	5%

According to the above table (Table 2) almost 91% of respondents agreed that building pilgrimage destinations in the study area is essential, whereas 2% opposed while approximately 7% were neutral. Those who agreed that the development of pilgrimage destinations could enhance the socioeconomic condition of the study area accounted for 89%, while those who disagreed accounted for 4%, and roughly 7% claimed they were neutral. A significant percentage (87%) agreed that tourism amenities in the study area could enhance socio-economic development, with only roughly 6% opposing. Those who were neutral accounted for 7% of the total respondents. The percentage of respondents who agreed that religious pilgrimages could improve socio-economic status was approximately 39%, with roughly 47 percent opposing. Only 14% of those respondents were neutral. Around 88% agreed with the assertion that including local people may improve the socio-economic condition of the study area, while 5% disagreed and 7% were neutral. This distribution could be explained by respondents' perceptions of the potential for pilgrimage destinations. A substantial number of respondents (about 85%) agreed that the existence of infrastructure could enhance the study area's socio-economic profile. Only 4% of the total respondents disagreed with the statement, whereas 11% were neutral. Based on these responses, the study deems that pilgrimage destinations have the potential to strengthen the study area socio-economic status. As a result, the data support Sołjan and Liro (2022) assertion that tourism activities, including religious pilgrimages, are widely seen as techniques to improve the socio-economic profiles of diverse places.

4.1 Enhancement of Socio-Economic Development

The Mann-Whitney U bivariate test was employed in this study to compare differences between independent variables (respondents' profile), which were recoded to be nominal (2 groups), and dependent variables (enhancement and contribution of socio-economic development statements), which were ordinal (Likert-scale). The results in Table 3 reveal that some respondents' profiles differ in terms of the enhancement and contribution of socio-economic development assertions.

Table 3: Reliability test and comparing respondents' perceptions on enhancement of socio-economic development compared with respondents' socio-demographic variables – 'age and gender'

		Significant Results	
No.	**Statements**	**Actual Results**	**Explanation**
1	There is need to develop pilgrimage destinations in the study area	N.S.	N.S.
2	The development of pilgrimage destinations could enhance the socio-economic status of the study area	N.S.	N.S.
3	Pilgrimage destinations have a potential for enhancing socio-economic status for the study area	N.S.	N.S.
4	Tourism facilities in the study area could enhance the socio-economic development	Z = -2.064 P value = .039	*Age group 18 to 35 significantly agree more than Age group 36 and above.
5	Religious pilgrimages can be seen as socio-economic enhancement	Z = -2.648 P value = .008	**Age group 18 to 35 significantly agree more than Age group 36 and above.
6	Involvement of local people might enhance socio-economy of the study area	N.S.	N.S.
7	Availability of infrastructure could increase the socio-economy enhancement of the study area	Z = -2.513 P value = .012	*Females significantly agree more than males.

Note: [a] Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree.

[b] Mann-Whitney U test significance: N.S, no significant results; *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$.

No socio-demographic influence regarding 'age' and 'gender'.

Pilgrims and community members were asked about their perceptions of 'the enhancement of socio-economic development' in the study area, and these variables were compared to the respondents' demographics (age and gender). While compared to the respondents' profile, pilgrims' and local communities' perceptions of the enhancement of socio-economic development attributes show no significant relationships with the following statements: 'there is a need to develop pilgrimage destinations in the study area,' 'the development of pilgrimage destinations could enhance the socio-economic status of the study area,' and 'pilgrimage destinations have the potential to enhance socio-economic status for the study area.' However, individuals aged 18 to 35 agree substantially more than those aged 36 and up: Z = -2.064, P value =.039, with the following statements: 'tourist facilities in the research area could boost socio-economic development'. Again, individuals aged 18 to 35 significantly agree more than those aged 36 and up: Z = -2.648, P value =.008, with the statement religious pilgrimages can be considered as socio-economic betterment'. The findings also show that females substantially agree more than males with the statement 'availability of infrastructure could promote the socio-economic enhancement of the research area': Z = -2.513, P value =.012. Surprisingly, this study reveals that pilgrims' and local populations' perspectives of 'the increase of socio-economic growth' is related with the demographics of the responders (age and gender). Sati (2018) study findings corroborated with these conclusions.

5. Conclusion

In the context of the study, this development of a strategy would be used to ensure that the services required to satisfy the identified needs of the tourists and/or pilgrims as revealed by the respondents in the findings that are made available within the pilgrimage destinations. A proposed strategy would be an addition to the tourism development strategies that are already in existence with a focus on pilgrimage destinations. In conclusion the new strategy would, therefore, serve as an effective tool by which pilgrimage destinations can promote and

implement tourism development activities. As the proposed strategy will depict, tourism development is central to the realisation and fulfilment of a number of socio-economic development opportunities for the interrelated entities that are the tourism stakeholders and/or local communities. The strategy will be necessary and significant to close the gap that was identified by the researcher that the existing tourism strategies do not include the strategy for tourism development at pilgrimage destinations. In this regard, the contribution of this study may be that these pilgrimage destinations should assist everyone interested in participating in religious pilgrimages. The construction of facilities can be sustainable for pilgrimage destinations and everyone would be eager to undertake these religious pilgrimages.

The local development of pilgrimage destinations for sustainable and responsible social-cultural activities must be approached with caution to avoid the commoditisation of pilgrimage destinations through the over commercialisation of souvenirs and basic hospitality services (Dasgupta *et al.,* 2014). If tourism development occurs in these African religious pilgrimages, the infrastructure and experiences will improve. Everyone who participates in religious trips should be keen to participate responsibly in the pilgrimage destinations in order to sustain the tourism facilities so that whoever visits religious pilgrimages can have a great experience. Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future (Tsaur & Wang, 2007; Liu, 2003). The development of pilgrimage destinations can contribute towards the enhancement of sustainable forms of tourism which include strict environmental activities, and promotion of tourism in order to alleviate the standard of living and employment opportunities (Aslam *et al.,* 2018).

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Women Tourism Entrepreneurs in KwaZulu–Natal, South Africa: Capabilities and Challenges?

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Abstract: This study conducted in the context of South Africa, aims to explore gender nuances in the performances of tourism-related businesses in the Durban Central Business District, KwaZulu-Natal, with emphases on traditional societal perceptions and access to capital. Questionnaire survey, a quantitative research method, was used to collect data from 150 tourism-related business owners and managers using purposive sampling method. Data was analysed using IBM's SPSS version 25 software. Descriptive (frequency, mean), bivariate (Spearman's Rank Correlation (two-tailed) test, Pearson's Chi-Square test, Mann-Whitney U test) and multivariate (Reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha) data analyses were applied in this study. Results shows that entrepreneurial performance is influenced by the belief system of the society, marketing capabilities, and the entrepreneur background. Hence, there may be the influence of African traditional societal perceptions on African women entrepreneurs to be more contented than men with the small size of their businesses (because society expects them not to manage large businesses). This study did not make a conclusive finding that gender plays a strong role in differentiating business success or performance. However, the study found that it is somewhat easier for female entrepreneurs to find business start-up capital. Based on this study results, authors recommend that entrepreneurial training and mentorship programmes should emphasise that gender has no role in determining entrepreneurial success. Better optimisation of marketing capability and increased awareness of entrepreneurs regarding sources of business funding, are crucial for business start-ups and success.

Keywords: Gender Nuances, Business Operations, Business Performance, Traditional Societal Perception, Sub-Saharan Africa.

1. Introduction

KwaZulu-Natal is one of South Africa's most visited provinces in South Africa. According to the Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (2019), tourism contributes significantly to the KwaZulu-Natal local economy and was expected to expand from a R9 billion contribution to the provincial gross domestic product in 2014 to more than R10 billion by 2018. KwaZulu- Natal province is well-known for its historical and cultural experiences (Ezeuduji and Nkosi, 2017). Tourists come to this province mostly for the pleasant weather, natural, cultural, and beach experiences available in both its coastal and inland regions. Tourism in KwaZulu-Natal thrives on visitor volume and quality visitor experience. To service both domestic and international tourists, tourism-related entrepreneurship is required in this province.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Women's Report (2012), Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest growth rates for female entrepreneurs. In contrast, the GEM Report (2014) emphasises the high failure rate of women-owned businesses. According to these reports, a significant number of women start businesses successfully, but some fail to sustain their businesses. Women's entrepreneurial participation remain low. This is due to the high failure rate of female-owned businesses. The South African government and other nongovernmental organisations established several programmes that support and promote women entrepreneurship in the tourism industry (Mkhize & Cele, 2017). However, Tshabalala and Ezeuduji (2016) mentioned that women are mostly playing the supporting role (such as housekeeping and receptionist) in tourism- related businesses. Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), 2005 indicates that women-owned businesses are mostly microenterprises and are mainly in the informal sector. Research on women entrepreneurship shows that there are many challenges (such as negative traditional societal perceptions, lack of managerial capabilities, inadequate financial capital, weak entrepreneurial networking) faced by women entrepreneurs in South Africa (Tshabalala & Ezeuduji, 2016).

Quite several gender-based entrepreneurship studies (such as Mkhize & Cele, 2017; Kimbu, Ngoasong, Adeola & Afenyo-Agbe, 2019) focused on women entrepreneurship as means to achieve social development, gender equality and poverty reduction. These studies did not delve into gender-induced differences or perceptions, particularly from the African perspective. The aim of this study is to explore gender nuanced perceptions on the influences that access to financial capital and traditional societal perception may have on tourism-related

business operations; and seek if gender identity has influence on business performance, using the case of Durban Central District in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

2. Overview of Literature

Business management has been associated largely with qualities necessary for the success of a specific entrepreneurial venture (Ezeuduji & Ntshangase, 2017a; 2017b). However, literature indicate that success and/or failure in business management can be determined by the nature of the demographic attributes of an individual entrepreneur (Nsengimana, Iwu & Tengeh, 2017; Ghiat, 2018). In most societies, there is a strong division between male and female roles (Duflo, 2012). However, Ghiat (2018) posits that there is a little effect of the local environment in terms of gender roles and impact of culture on women entrepreneurs in Western countries. Vázquez-Carrasco, López- Pérez and Centeno (2012) found that there is no significant difference between male and female business managers. Masculine features such as dominance, aggressiveness, independence, low need of support, and high risk-taking propensity, are perceived as those that are socially expected from someone who wants to engage him/herself in a business (Chasserio *et al*., 2014; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2019). Whereas women's traditional identity is associated with dependence, submissiveness, and obedience (Basargekar, 2007). Women are then perceived as unfit for starting and managing businesses. Likewise, within the entrepreneurial sector, Tshabalala and Ezeuduji (2016) found that there are certain types of businesses that are perceived as unfitting for women to engage in. The authors further posit that this perception has led to many women playing supporting roles in businesses that are perceived as suitable for male entrepreneurs.

In Africa, besides traditional societal perceptions, access to financial capital is also one of the most common challenges facing entrepreneurs (Daniyan-Bagudu, Khan & Roslan 2016; Jha, Makkad & Mittal, 2018). De Vita, Mari and Poggesi (2014) posit that financial institutions prefer to grant funding to women because they are more community-oriented than men. Also, banks in India have come up with schemes that support women entrepreneurs, which are more relaxed in terms of collateral security and interest rate (Rani, 2015). The Indian government initiated over 27 schemes to support women (Arun & Unnipulan, 2017; Jha et al. 2018). Mersha and Sriram (2019) and Chirwa (2008) reveal that women entrepreneurs benefitted more than men from government funding and other community-based programmes. Notably, women in India may have more financial opportunities than men since the researchers did not find literature indicating that there is financial support specifically created for male entrepreneurs. Awareness of financial opportunities, availability of collateral, and willingness to apply for loans (and repay) may then be the real issues regarding access to financial capital for women entrepreneurs. In contrast to the research evidence earlier stated, Sattar, Dewri and Ananna (2016) mention that studies reveal that women entrepreneurs in developing countries have lower access to financial service. Timmis (2017) posits that 85% of South African start-ups are self-funded. According to Chimucheka and Mandipaka (2015), commercial banks have no confidence in funding small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) due to the lack of managerial skills, and this may affect a lot of women entrepreneurs who fall under this category. However, Moses *et al.* (2016) and Mersha and Sriram (2019) aver that applying for a loan is usually a challenge for women because they usually have no assets or property to show as collateral (Rao, 2018). According to Tshabalala and Ezeuduji (2016), many women do not know how to source got business funding and they are not aware of the available financial supports (Ahmed, 2018). Previous studies have found that the levels of access to capital are very low for women (Meunier, Krylova & Ramalho, 2017), so also the utilisation of financial support (Khoase, Derera, McArthur & Ndayizigamiye, 2019). Having access to financial capital is one of the key challenges affecting business performance (Daniyan-Bagudu *et al*., 2016). This study argues that the poor performance of women-owned business may arise from women's inability to accrue appropriate levels of entrepreneurial capital (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). Having discussed relevant secondary data (previous literature), the next section of this paper discusses the research design and methods used to collect primary data for this study.

3. Research Methodology

The nature of this study required a questionnaire survey to address the study objectives (see Veal, 2011; Ezeuduji & Mbane, 2017). Structured questionnaires were distributed using non-probability purposive sampling. The study respondents were selected based on their precise knowledge in tourism entrepreneurship and willingness to participate. 150 respondents (75 male and 75 female entrepreneurs) were surveyed in their tourism establishments in Durban Central Business District under Ethekwini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Collected data were analysed using IBM‟s Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 25. Descriptive statistics (mean scores of responses and percentage frequencies), bivariate analyses (Mann-Whitney U, Spearman's rank correlation tests and Pearson's Chi square) and multivariate analysis (Reliability tests using Cronbach's Alpha) were further employed. Data analysis showed non-normal population distributions of the ordinal variables used in assessing business operation statements (perceptions); hence this study employed Mann-Whitney U tests by comparing means of responses from two independent groups (demographic variables) to check if these are significantly different from one another. We employed Spearman's correlation (two-tailed) test to checked for relationships between ranked or ordinal variables, to find out if there are negative or positive correlations between the variables (Veal, 2011). Mann-Whitney U tests was conducted based on the prescribed criteria that the dependent variables have ordinal scale, the independent variables have only two groups, and normality of distribution and homogeneity of variance did not prove true in a t-test (Veal, 2011). Pearson's chi square test was used to check for relationships between categorical/nominal data, where some previous variables measured in an ordinal scale were recoded to support this analysis.

Multivariate analysis (reliability tests) was employed by this study to check for the level of internal consistencies of variables used to describe factors influencing business operations (traditional societal perceptions, access to financial capital). Researchers suggest that a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of between 0.5 and 0.7 is acceptable in social science research, to denote adequate consistency of variables used in measuring a factor or dimension (Chawla & Sondhi, 2011). Nonetheless, Tavakol and Dennick (2011) posit that a low Cronbach's alpha score may occur if there is a weak interrelationship between the variables used in the analysis, or if few variables are being used to depict a particular dimension or factor. From the reliability tests conducted on the two business operation dimensions, the "access to financial capital" dimension did not achieve up to 0.5 Cronbach alpha coefficient, hence this study finds the variables contained in this dimension not internally consistent and treated them as individual variables for results' interpretation. Variables that explain the business operation dimension of "traditional societal perception" were found to be internally consistent or related. We present the results and discussion of findings in the next section.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondents' Profile

The results presented in Table 1 show that the study respondents are mostly South Africans and the majority have business experience of not more than six years. According to Mersha and Sriram (2019), in most African countries, entrepreneurs are pushed into business by socio-economic factors (such as lack of job opportunities). This study however, found that majority of respondents in this study are "opportunity entrepreneurs". The results also show that the majority of respondents perceive themselves as either successful or very successful (57%).

Table 1: Respondent's profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
South African	Yes	88.7
	No	11.3
Gender	Male	50
	Female	50
Ethnic group	Black	52.7
	White	18.0
	Indian	22.0
	Coloured	7.3
Age group	Less than 40 years	61.3
	40 years and above	38.7
Business owner	Yes	63.3
	No	36.7
Business manager	Yes	58.7
	No	41.3
Motivation to start tourism business	Took opportunity	54.4
	Means of survival	45.6
Level of Education	Up to Secondary School (Matric)	44.0
	Tertiary Education	56.0
Type of Business	Accommodation	16.0
	Food and Beverage	26.7
	Events Management	10.0
	Tour Operation	3.3

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
	Travel Agency	4.7
	Tour Guide	2.7
	Car Rentals	7.3
	Resorts	2.0
	Consultancy	2.7
	Souvenir Shop	24.7
Number of years in business	Up to 6 years	60.7
	7years and above	39.3
Self-classification as an entrepreneur	Very successful	13.4
	Successful	43.6
	Surviving	32.2
	Struggling	9.4
	Unsuccessful	1.4

4.2 Business Operation Dimensions

Results in Table 2 show that respondents were more in disagreement than in agreement towards the statement: male business managers perform better than female business managers, as about 61% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. This result suggests that the entrepreneurs believe that the performance of entrepreneurs is not necessarily determined by their gender. Also, about 62% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the gender of the business manager influences the level of service(s) delivered to customers. The result of this study which show that many of the respondents (about 45%) agreed or strongly agreed to the statement: international tourists patronise mostly white businesses. It can therefore be said that there is still racial segregation within the tourism industry in this study area. About 60% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the belief system of the society influences the performance of the business. This result continues to throw light on the stronghold of the African belief system in its economic operations.

Results in this study support that sourcing financial capital is difficult for the entrepreneurs, as about 78% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that 'It is easy to find start-up capital to start a tourism business'. However, about 43% of the respondents believe that it is possible to start a business without external support. Some entrepreneurs have own financial capital to start their businesses. Research by Sattar et al. (2016) found that women in developing countries (like South Africa) are less privileged to get access to financial resources than men. However, results in this study reveal that majority (about 67%) of the respondents disagreed that men have better access to financial resources. Some entrepreneurs, especially women are reported to lack information on how to source financial capital and not aware of the available financial support (Ahmed, 2018). Results in this study support this notion as half of the respondents (50%) strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement: 'I am aware of the available sources of capital that cater for tourism businesses', although about 60% of the respondents reported that their 'business financial capital is inadequate'.

Table 2: Business Operations Statements

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Traditional Societal Perception					
Male business managers perform better than female business managers	12.7	13.3	12.7	38.0	23.3
The performance of the business is influenced by the belief systems of the society	24.7	35.3	10.0	28.0	2.0
The performance of entrepreneur is determined by their home background	20.7	43.3	10.7	21.3	4.0
The gender of the business manager influences the level of service(s) delivered to customers	8.0	16.7	18.0	44.0	18.3
International tourists patronise mostly white businesses	24.0	21.3	21.3	26.0	7.3
*Reliability statistics (**Traditional Societal Perception**): Cronbach's Alpha = .601, N of items = 5, Valid cases = 150 (100%), Excluded cases = 0 (0.0%), Total =150*					
Access to Financial Capital					
It is easy to find start-up capital to start a tourism business	6.0	4.0	11.3	32.7	46.0

Access to Financial Capital					
It is impossible to start a tourism business without external financial support	24.7	16.0	16.7	34.0	8.7
Male business owners / managers have better access to business capital than female business owners / managers	5.3	7.3	20.0	49.3	18.0
I am aware of the available sources of capital that cater for tourism businesses	6.7	30.0	13.3	41.3	8.7
My business financial capital is inadequate	27.0	33.1	27.0	12.2	0.7
*Reliability statistics (**Access to Financial Capital**): Cronbach's Alpha = .272, N of items = 5, Valid cases = 148 (98.7%), Excluded cases = 2 (1.3%), Total =150*					

4.3 Perception of Entrepreneurial Success Level Versus Business Operation Statements

Respondents were asked to classify their perceived business success level (responses ranging from very successful to unsuccessful). A correlation test was done between their responses on entrepreneurial success level and their responses on business operation statements. Results in Table 3 show strong positive correlations between perceived business success levels and some access to financial capital statements (it is easy to find start-up capital to start a tourism business; I am aware of the available sources of capital that cater for tourism businesses; my business financial capital is inadequate). This means that respondents who perceive themselves as successful agree more to these statements regarding 'access to financial capital'. They are aware of available sources of capital and could easily find start-up capital, however they posit that their financial capital is inadequate. Knowing and having the means of accessing financial capital equip the organisation to access required equipment (fixed capital) and running cost to support business operations. The inability to access financial capital was reported as a major challenge to the success of business operations (Tshabalala & Ezeuduji, 2016). There is also no indication from these results that being male or female relates to entrepreneurial success level; hence business success is gender neutral.

Table 3: Correlating perception of entrepreneurial success level versus business operation / performance statements

Statements[a]	Correlated with perception of entrepreneurial success level[b]
Traditional Societal Perception	
Male business managers perform better than female business managers	N.S
The performance of the business is influenced by the belief systems of the society	N.S
The performance of entrepreneur is determined by their home background	N.S
The gender of the business manager influences the level of service(s) delivered to customers	N.S
International tourists patronise mostly white businesses	N.S
Access to Financial Capital	
It is easy to find start-up capital to start a tourism business	**
It is impossible to start a tourism business without external financial support	N.S
Male business owners / managers have better access to business capital than female business owners / managers	N.S
I am aware of the available sources of capital that cater for tourism businesses	**
My business financial capital is inadequate	**

[a]Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale (business operation/performance statements): 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree.

Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale (perceptions of entrepreneurial success level): 1, Very successful; 2, Succesful; 3, Surviving; 4, Struggling; 5, Unsuccessful.

[b]Spearman's Rank correlation (two-tailed) test significance: *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$; N.S., no significant results.

4.4 Comparing Demographic Variables with Business Start-Up Motivation and Perceptions of Entrepreneurial Success Level

In this study, the demographic variables were further compared with business start-up motivation and perceptions of entrepreneurial success level (using Pearson's Chi-Square test). Results in Table 4 show that there is no significant influence of 'gender', 'age group', and 'number of years in business' on business start-up motivation. Nationality was identified as the demographic variable in this study that has a significant relationship on motivation to start a tourism-related business. Results indicate that South Africans are more 'opportunity entrepreneurs' whereas non-South Africans are more 'survival entrepreneurs'. According to Mersha and Sriram (2019), majority of entrepreneurs in Africa are forced to start a business as means of survival due to socio-economic challenges. In this case, non-South African entrepreneurs may struggle to find long-term resident permit in South Africa and may be discriminated against in the labour market. They may therefore end up starting a business to survive in South Africa. Owing to the focus of this study, the results did not show that male or female entrepreneurs are more 'opportunity' or 'survival' orientated, in terms of business start-up motivation.

Table 4: Comparing demographic variables with business start-up motivation and perceptions of entrepreneurial success level

[a]Questionnaire was itemised categorically: 1, Took opportunity; 2, Means of survival

Statements		Evidence from analysis	Compared with respondents' demographic variables [c]
Motivation to start tourism business [a, c]			
		Cross-tabulation results	
Nationality	South Africans	Expected count for opportunity entrepreneurs = 71.8; Actual count = 79	** South Africans are more 'opportunity entrepreneurs', while Non South Africans are more 'survival' entrepreneurs
	Non South Africans	Expected count for survival entrepreneurs = 7.6; Actual count = 15	
Gender	Male		N.S.
	Female		
Age group	Less than 40 years		N.S
	40 years and above		
Number of years in business	Up to 6 years		N.S.
	7years and above		
Perceptions of entrepreneurial success level [b, c]			
		Mean scores	
Nationality	South Africans	2.42	N.S.
	Non South Africans	2.41	
Gender	Male	2.49	N.S.
	Female	2.35	
Age group	Less than 40 years	2.34	N.S.
	40 years and above	2.53	
No. of years in business	Up to 6 years	2.39	N.S.
	7years and above	2.46	

[b]Questionnaire were recoded into 3 categories (perceptions of entrepreneurial success level): 1, Very successful and 2, Successful, were recoded to mean "Successful". 3, Surviving; to mean "Surviving". 4, Struggling and 5, Unsuccessful, to mean "Unsuccessful".

[c]Pearson's Chi-Square test significance: *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$; N.S., no significant results.

4.5 Comparing Gender Identity with Business Operation Statements

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement towards variables in the business operations' dimensions: 'traditional and societal perception' and 'access to financial capital'. These variables were then compared with respondents' gender (employing Mann-Whitney U test) to check for significant relationships.

Results in Table 5 show that there are significant differences between male and female mean scores and some of the variables used to explain business operations' dimensions. Female respondents agree more than male respondents to these statements: 'I am aware of the available sources of capital', 'it is easy to find start-up capital', and 'gender of a business manager determines the level of service delivered to customers'. Also in Table 5, more male than female respondents agree to the statements: 'international tourists patronise mostly white businesses', and 'my business financial capital is inadequate'.

Table 5: Comparing gender identity with business operation statements

Statements[a]	Mean score (Males)	Mean score (Females)	Compared with gender[b]
Traditional Societal Perception			
Male business managers perform better than female business managers	3.29	3.63	N.S.
The performance of the business is influenced by the belief systems of the society	2.32	2.63	N.S.
The performance of entrepreneur is determined by their home background	2.60	2.29	N.S.
The gender of the business manager influences the level of service(s) delivered to customers	3.60	3.16	* Females agree more
International tourists patronise mostly white businesses	2.41	3.01	** Males agree more
Access to Financial Capital			
It is easy to find start-up capital to start a tourism business	4.23	3.95	* Females agree more
It is impossible to start a tourism business without external financial support	2.76	2.96	N.S.
Male business owners / managers have better access to business capital than female business owners / managers	3.76	3.59	N.S.
I am aware of the available sources of capital that cater for tourism businesses	3.35	2.96	* Females agree more
My business financial capital is inadequate	2.09	2.43	* Males agree more

[a]Questionnaires were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale (business operation statements): 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree.

[b]Mann-Whitney U test significance: *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$; N.S., no significant results.

5. Conclusions

This study did not make conclusive findings that gender or any other demographic characteristics play a very strong role in differentiating business success or performance, as mostly perceived. The capability of the business manager (regarding operations, marketing, general management) must then be the differentiating factor determining business success. This study however found pointers that imply that female entrepreneurs in this study area have a more favourable access to start-up capital. This result, however, has no direct link to business performance. A significant number of respondents agree that the belief system of the society and the

home background of an entrepreneur determine entrepreneurial performance. Hence, there may be the influence of African traditional societal perceptions on African women entrepreneurs to be more contented than men with the small size of their businesses. This study recommends that entrepreneurial training and mentorship programmes in South Africa and the sub-Saharan African region should emphasise that gender has no role in differentiating successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs. These programmes should also increase the general awareness level of entrepreneurs regarding sourcing of start-up or business operating capital.

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The Disruption of the Pandemic in the use of Hospitality Establishments and Services in South Africa

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Abstract: The tourism and hospitality sectors were among the most negatively impacted industries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many studies have reflected on the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism and hospitality industry; however, more needs to be written about the effect on the customers.

Therefore, this paper aims to report if COVID-19 has affected the use of hospitality establishments and service customers during and after the lockdown in South Africa.

This was a cross-sectional quantitative study. Google Forms were used for data collection using snowball and convenience sampling techniques. Seven hospitality establishment categories (Bed and breakfast, guesthouses, hotels, Airbnb, sit-down restaurants, fast food outlets, and wine farms) and two hospitality services (Catering services and delivery services) participated in the study. Data were analysed using SPSS version 26 and presented using descriptive statistics. Demographic data was introduced to give an overview of all the respondents. Most respondents were female (64%) and Africans (69%). Most respondents were employees (49%), earning salaries ranging between R5000 and R50 000. Most customers indicated that they continued to use these establishments and services during the lockdown and were willing to continue doing so post-lockdown. In terms of salaries versus the categories of establishments, customers who earned less visited establishments the most. However, it was observed that customers who visited restaurants were from all salary ranges (brackets). This indicates that customers always continue visiting hospitality establishments and utilising hospitality services. This affirms the importance of the hospitality industry in the social and economic space.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lockdown, Hospitality Establishment, Customer Perception

1. Introduction

The dawn of the global pandemic, COVID-19, brought about universal challenges. The terrifying pandemic's economic and social implications have been distressing and are yet to be fully measured and grasped (Dube, 2021). With the spread of coronavirus, the global hospitality sector has been highly impacted and devastatingly affected the hospitality sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the worldwide hospitality industry, reshaping how people use hospitality establishments and services. The sector, encompassing hotels, restaurants, travel, and tourism, has faced unprecedented challenges due to the stringent public health measures implemented to curb the spread of the virus. When the WHO announced COVID-19 to be a pandemic, countries had to adopt strict measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (Sucheran, 2022).

The consequences of lockdown have the potential to be vast, and the global economy will experience an overall economic shock as it affects all business sectors, including supply chains, personal protective equipment available for health workers, food supply, and job security. South Africa is one of the countries that has been affected because of lockdown restrictions (Naidu, 2020). The hospitality industry serves as a catalyst for economic growth and employment, which are influenced by customers' use (Bhoola, 2022). Hence, it is important to establish the effect of COVID-19 on the use of hospitality establishments. Therefore, this paper focuses on determining the COVID-19 disruption in the use of hospitality services in South Africa.

2. Literature Review

COVID-19 has disturbed every facet of human life, economically and socially, across the biosphere. These ranged from delaying and rescheduling many social and cultural events, meetings, games and sporting events to closing down institutions and centers of learning and shutting down internal and international borders (Biwota, 2020). The global economy was instantaneously impacted, with many industries suffering the effects of the coronavirus

outbreak. Strategies such as lockdowns, restricted travel and social distancing were implemented to manage and reduce the rate of infections, which impacted the hospitality and tourism industry significantly (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Sucheran, 2021). According to Dube (2021), the tourism and hospitality sector was among the most negatively impacted industries, even receiving blame and backlash for spreading the disease. Approximately 60-80% of total tourism activity was reduced in 2020 (Crespí-Cladera et al., 2021), impacting the entire hospitality and tourism value chain (Ntounis et al., 2022).

The coronavirus outbreak affected not only the tourism and hospitality industry but also the way its consumers spend their time, and this shift could be lasting (Rahimizhian & Irani, 2020). The hesitancy of hospitality consumers to travel during and after COVID-19 is because of the elevated health risks it presents (Shin & Kang, 2020). Natural disasters affect the behavioural change of consumers, resulting in disrupted consumption. This was observed during COVID-19 as buying evolved from improvising, low demand for non-essentials, digital technologies adoption, hybrid shopping, unusual shopping times, virtual social gatherings, and the discovery of new talents, such as cooking (Sheth, 2020). Economic growth globally is driven by consumer spending, and a drop in income reduces overall spending. COVID-19 has not just resulted in a household income decrease but has also changed consumers' spending patterns. As a result, a decline in spending on tourism and hospitality services was observed. (Sucheran, 2021) Shifts in consumer behaviour are impacted by stressful life events such as the COVID-19 pandemic; notable changes such as changes in spending patterns occur to manage this stress. This also affected the change in consumption patterns (Zwanka & Buff, 2021). Additionally, Lee and Deale (2021), various types and levels of stress and anxiety have been observed in consumers in relation to the risks associated with the coronavirus, which affects consumers' risk sensitivity about shared accommodation. Due to the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic along with increased consumer risk perception, the pandemic could influence "cocooning" behaviour in consumers, which refers to individuals protecting themselves by staying indoors in their homes to reduce the threat (Hu et al., 2021).

In addition to risk sensitivity, further changes observed in consumer behaviour include shopping patterns. Consumers are more cautious regarding environmental effects and, therefore, have been observed to shop more "cost-conscious" during the coronavirus pandemic (Kim et al., 2022). The spending patterns of hospitality consumers shifted towards consuming more meals prepared at home instead of meals bought from restaurants due to safety and the recession (Mendez-Carbajo, 2021). The state of the economy due to the pandemic decreased the demand for both goods and services, which consequently led to a decrease in travel and the need for hospitality establishments. Further changes observed in shopping patterns include an increased interest in shopping for goods locally; these changes suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic has shifted consumer buying patterns towards a more socially responsible culture, which has not been observed in pandemics which occurred in the past (Kim et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

The study followed a quantitative approach using a descriptive cross-sectional design. Customers using accommodation and food and beverage establishments participated in the study in 2020-2021 and were selected using convenience and snowball. Data collection was conducted online using Google Forms. The questionnaires were structured to respond to the objectives of the study. Section A consisted of information about the customers to determine the background of the participants, and section B assessed the impact of COVID-19. The questionnaire was sent using various online platforms such as email, WhatsApp, and Facebook.

Data were analysed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 and summarised employing tables using frequency and percentiles. Data was rechecked for duplication and errors to ensure validity and reliability. Ethical clearance was obtained from a university, and informed consent was obtained from the respondents. The consent information explaining the purpose of the study and the ethical aspects to be considered to ensure the protection of the respondents was included in the questionnaires.

4. Results

The result of this study covers the demographic information, which presents gender, population group, employment status and income. Furthermore, the study focuses on the effect of COVID-19 on the use of hospitality services in South Africa.

4.1 Demographic Information

Inclusive gender representation was observed in this study whereby female, male, non-binary and prefer not to say were reported in Table 4.1.1 below. Of these categories, females (64.21%) were mostly represented, followed by males (34.67%). Da Costa et al., (2021) also observed female dominance at 60,7% compared to 39,3 % and Genov et al (2022) at 61.5% compared to 38.5%, respectively. Contrary to this finding, in Istanbul, men were the most participants (50.2 %), whereas 49.8 % were women (Dedeoğlu and Boğan. 2021). Further supported by Foroudi et al., (2021), with 57.1% males compared to 42.9% females. The findings about 2.3% who preferred not to state their gender are congruent with the National Department of Tourism (2022) study, which reported that 2.3% of the respondents preferred not to disclose. Byrd et al., (2021) further confirmed this, whereby 0.6% of the respondents preferred not to say. In terms of a population group, the Department of Tourism (2022) study showed that all South African ethnic groups participated. Furthermore, the respondents were predominantly Africans (33.8%). These findings concur with this study, with 69.89% of Africans being the most respondents. Various ethnic group representation is not unique to these two South African studies, as a study conducted in the United States reported the same, with Caucasians (77.1%) being the majority (Byrd et al., 2021) (Table 4.1.1).

Table 4.1.1: Gender and Population Group

Gender and Population		
Gender	**Count**	**Percentage**
Female	400	64.21%
Male	216	34.67%
Non-binary	1	0.16%
Prefer not to say	6	0.96%
Grand Total	623	100.00%
Population Group		
African	434	69.89%
Coloured	90	14.49%
Indian	27	4.35%
Mixed	6	0.97%
White	64	10.31%
Total	621	100.00%

Most of the respondents were employed (58.87%) at the time the data was collected, and of those employed, most (39.52%) were full-time, and the rest were either on contract or self-employed. On the other hand, 41.13% of the respondents were not employed. The National Department of Tourism (2022) shared similar results, with 74.5% of the respondents being employed. Of the employed, most (51.5%) were full-time, followed by self-employed (11.8%) and then contract (11.2%). These findings were further supported by Byrd et al., (2021), stating that 76.2% of the respondents were employed, with 64.4% being employed full-time and 11.8% part-time (Table 4.1.2).

These dynamics of employment versus non-employment were observed in the income reporting for both studies, whereby for this study, 50.97% reported the income they earned and 27.35% no income. For the National Department of Tourism (2022), 59.9% said the income they earn and 6.2% no income. Of those employed and willing to disclose their income, the income earned ranged from < R5000 to > R50 000. Most of the respondents (24,11%) earned < R10 000 and> R40 000. Different findings were reported by the National Department of Tourism (2022), whereby more than 10% of the respondents' salaries ranged between R5000 and R30 000. However, it also reported that the minority of the respondents earned a higher income of R40 000 and above. Dedeoğlu and Boğan (2021) reported the varying income categories, stating that 38.5 % of the participants earned between 5001 and 7500 TL, followed by 36.4% with an income of over 7500 TL, which relates to this study's findings. These findings were further observed in the US, whereby 41.8% earned $50,000-$99,999, followed by 22.0% earning $25,000-$49,999. And that the minority earned a higher income (Byrd et al., 2021).

Table 4.1.2: Employment Status and Income

Employment Status and Income		
Employment Status	**Count**	**Percentage**
Employed	365	58.87%
Employed – full-time (fixed salary per month)	245	39.52%
Employed – part-time (non-fixed salary per month)	55	8.87%
Contracted	1	0.16%
Self-employed	64	10.32%
Not employed	255	41.13%
Retired	5	0.81%
Retrenched	1	0.16%
Home Executive	2	0.32%
Part-time student	1	0.16%
Full-time students	138	22.26%
Stay-at-home mother	1	0.16%
Unemployed	106	17.10%
Volunteer	1	0.16%
Total	620	100.00%
Income		
R50 000 or more	15	2.43%
R40 000 to less than R50 000	16	2.59%
R30 000 to less than R40 000	35	5.66%
R20 000 to less than R30 000	48	7.77%
R10 000 to less than R20 000	52	8.41%
R5000 to less than R10 000	65	10.52%
Less than R5000	84	13.59%
Can't recall	13	2.10%
Declined to answer/confidential	121	19.58%
None	169	27.35%
Total	618	100.00%

4.2 Hospitality Establishments use Prior, During and After COVID-19

The pandemic affected the tourism market in South Africa, resulting in reduced demand. The consumer confidence index moved during 2020, negatively affecting tourism product purchases (Dube, 2021). Hence, tables 3, 4 and 5 below present the results to establish the use of hospitality establishments prior to the COVID-19 era, During lockdown and after lockdown. The hospitality establishments were categorised into accommodation and food and beverage establishments. Each category had sub-categories; for accommodation establishments, it was Bed and Breakfasts, Guesthouses, Hotels, and Air BnB.

4.2.1 Hospitality Establishments Use Prior to COVID-19

Positive responses were observed as respondents indicated they had used the establishments prior to COVID-19. Furthermore, food and beverage establishments were predominantly used, ranging between 80% and 90%. These results were congruent with da Costa et al., (2021), whereby 87,8% of the respondents indicated that they visited restaurants at least once a month prior to COVID-19 and confirmed by Dedeoğlu and Boğan (2021) who reported that most (49.6 %) of the participants visited the restaurant weekly and then biweekly (31.7 %). Furthermore, Foroudi et al., (2021) reported that respondents frequently visited restaurants monthly. Sucheran's (2022) study reported that all the respondents agreed that COVID-19 disrupted hotel operations. This supports the findings of this study as accommodation establishments were minimally used, and these findings are not unique as Biwota (2020) reported a decline in hotel bookings, which led to low occupancy (43%) (Table 4.2.1).

Table 4.2.1: Hospitality establishments used prior to COVID-19

	Last 5 years (2014-2018)		Once in the last year (2019)		Did not use		Total	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Accommodation								
BnB	77	15.78%	212	43.44%	199	40.78%	488	100.00%
Guesthouses	88	19.43%	160	35.32%	205	45.25%	453	100.00%
Hotels	102	20.40%	245	49.00%	153	30.60%	500	100.00%
Air BnB	53	11.88%	152	34.08%	241	54.04%	446	100.00%

	Last 5 years (2014-2018)		Once in the last year (2019)		Did not use		Total	
Food and Beverage								
Sit-down restaurant	44	7.86%	485	86.61%	31	5.54%	560	100.00%
Fast-food outlets	34	6.34%	478	89.18%	24	4.48%	536	100.00%
Wine farms	60	13.73%	141	32.27%	236	54.00%	437	100.00%
Catering services	84	19.13%	161	36.67%	194	44.19%	439	100.00%
Delivery Services	40	7.63%	421	80.34%	63	12.02%	524	100.00%

4.2.2 Hospitality Establishments use During and After Lockdown

Minimal (Ranging between 35% to 44%) use of accommodation establishments prior to COVID-19 were observed in Table 3 above, and in Table 4.2.2 below; during lockdown, a further decrease in the use of these establishments was observed after easing of levels ranging between 33% to 39%. These findings were in line with the status quo whereby COVID-19 caused the government and the industry to impose various measures, such as restrictions and closures to curb the spread of the virus (Hoang et al., 2021). Sucheran (2022) reported a decrease (48.1%) in income on accommodation during the lockdown, which supports the findings of this study regarding the minimal use mentioned above, no guests, and no revenue.

Also, as the easing of levels happened, consumers were still anxious and sensitive and mostly preferred staying at home than visiting accommodation establishments (Lee and Deale, 2021; Hu et al., 2021). The measures affected the operations negatively (Hoang et al., 2021), hence the findings mentioned above. However, it is important to note that the accommodation establishments were still in use during the lockdown and that the decrease observed was minimal when compared to prior COVID-19. Sucheran (2021) supports these findings, indicating that 9.2% of the hotels were partially operating during lockdown. Apart from the minimal use observed, it is great to see that most (ranging from 40-50%) of the respondents indicated that they would visit establishments after the lockdown, which aligns with the predictions by Krishnan et al., (2020) indicating that hotels will experience fast return after COVID-19.

Table 4.2.2: The use of accommodation establishments during and after lockdown

Accommodation Establishment							
`		During lockdown (Easing of levels)		Use after lockdown		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
BnB							
	Strongly Agree	77	19.15%	153	31.94%	230	26.11%
	Agree	60	14.93%	113	23.59%	173	19.64%
	Neutral	77	19.15%	145	30.27%	222	25.20%
	Disagree	111	27.61%	34	7.10%	145	16.46%
	Strongly Disagree	77	19.15%	34	7.10%	111	12.60%
	Total	402	100.00%	479	100.00%	881	100.00%
Guesthouses							
	Strongly Agree	77	19.25%	137	30.18%	214	25.06%
	Agree	59	14.75%	111	24.45%	170	19.91%
	Neutral	73	18.25%	137	30.18%	210	24.59%
	Disagree	119	29.75%	35	7.71%	154	18.03%
	Strongly Disagree	72	18.00%	34	7.49%	106	12.41%
	Total	400	100.00%	454	100.00%	854	100.00%
Hotels							
	Strongly Agree	96	23.36%	182	37.45%	278	30.99%
	Agree	67	16.30%	130	26.75%	197	21.96%
	Neutral	78	18.98%	114	23.46%	192	21.40%
	Disagree	94	22.87%	31	6.38%	125	13.94%
	Strongly Disagree	76	18.49%	29	5.97%	105	11.71%
	Total	411	100.00%	486	100.00%	897	100.00%
Air BnB							
	Strongly Agree	75	18.75%	122	27.73%	197	23.45%
	Agree	59	14.75%	111	25.23%	170	20.24%

Accommodation Establishment							
	Neutral	80	20.00%	131	29.77%	211	25.12%
	Disagree	106	26.50%	38	8.64%	144	17.14%
	Strongly Disagree	80	20.00%	38	8.64%	118	14.05%
	Total	400	100.00%	440	100.00%	840	100.00%

A decrease in the use of food and beverage establishments was also observed when comparing before COVID-19 and the lockdown period. These findings concurred with da Costa et al., (2021), indicating that customers either stopped or reduced visiting the restaurants during the lockdown and this affected restaurant sales (Panzone et al, 2021) and dining habits (Genov et al,, 2022).

Bhoola (2022), Genov et al (2022), and Dedeoğlu and Boğan (2021) mentioned that restaurants offer customers more than just a good meal but an opportunity to explore convenience and socialise to enjoy the environment, the ambience, and the service. Furthermore, unique experiences and a catalyst for consumers' well-being (Jaeger et al., 2017). Hence, more than 70% of the respondents of this study indicated that they visited these establishments during the lockdown, namely, sit-down restaurants (74.84%), fast-food outlets (85.82) and delivery services (82.50%), except for catering services and wine farms which were minimally visited. The continued use of restaurant services concurred with Cohen et al (2022) reporting that participants consumed at restaurants weekly during COVID-19. Furthermore, according to Genov et al., (2022), 61.5% of consumers reported an increase in the use of delivery services and preferred fast-food outlets, which resonates with the findings of this study.

These findings regarding catering services and wine farms corroborate government-implemented measures such as restrictions on alcohol sales, social gatherings and the curfew (Adebiyi & Mukumbang, 2022; Smith, 2021)- from total shutdown to easing lockdown levels from 4-1 (Nyathela-Sunday et al., 2022) which affected the business operation and then the use. The overall decrease in the use of other food and beverage services led to low demand, resulting in food wastage during COVID-19 (Njomane & Telukdarie, 2022).

Table 4.2.3: The use of food and beverage establishments

Food and beverage establishments							
		During lockdown (Easing of levels)		**Comfortable to use after lockdown**		**Grand Total**	
		n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Sit-down restaurant							
	Strongly Agree	230	48.22%	265	49.44%	495	48.86%
	Agree	127	26.62%	168	31.34%	295	29.12%
	Neutral	54	11.32%	67	12.50%	121	11.94%
	Disagree	34	7.13%	20	3.73%	54	5.33%
	Strongly Disagree	32	6.71%	16	2.99%	48	4.74%
	Total	477	100.00%	536	100.00%	1013	100.00%
Fast-food outlets							
	Strongly Agree	313	59.96%	253	49.13%	566	54.58%
	Agree	135	25.86%	171	33.20%	306	29.51%
	Neutral	42	8.05%	60	11.65%	102	9.84%
	Disagree	19	3.64%	17	3.30%	36	3.47%
	Strongly Disagree	13	2.49%	14	2.72%	27	2.60%
	Total	522	100.00%	515	100.00%	1037	100.00%
Delivery Services							
	Strongly Agree	328	63.08%	281	56.54%	609	59.88%
	Agree	101	19.42%	123	24.75%	224	22.03%
	Neutral	35	6.73%	69	13.88%	104	10.23%
	Disagree	31	5.96%	9	1.81%	40	3.93%
	Strongly Disagree	25	4.81%	15	3.02%	40	3.93%
	Total	520	100.00%	497	100.00%	1017	100.00%
Catering services							
	Strongly Agree	78	20.31%	145	33.56%	223	27.33%

Food and beverage establishments							
	Agree	66	17.19%	106	24.54%	172	21.08%
	Neutral	84	21.88%	122	28.24%	206	25.25%
	Disagree	85	22.14%	31	7.18%	116	14.22%
	Strongly Disagree	71	18.49%	28	6.48%	99	12.13%
	Total	384	100.00%	432	100.00%	816	100.00%
Wine farms							
	Strongly Agree	49	13.21%	130	30.30%	179	22.38%
	Agree	51	13.75%	97	22.61%	148	18.50%
	Neutral	83	22.37%	119	27.74%	202	25.25%
	Disagree	107	28.84%	41	9.56%	148	18.50%
	Strongly Disagree	81	21.83%	42	9.79%	123	15.38%
	Total	371	100.00%	429	100.00%	800	100.00%

4.2.3 Hospitality Establishments use Compared to Income During COVID-19

Income is a key influencing factor in the decision-making process when choosing to visit a tourism outlet (Djeri et al., 2014). In addition, consumers' income determines their spending power (Zhang, 2020). COVID-19 resulted in salary cuts and many consumers losing their jobs, which affected spending power. So, it's essential to determine the income versus the type of establishment being visited. Therefore, this section established the respondents' salaries against the use of the establishments. Most of the respondents who supported the accommodation establishments during the lockdown were willing to state their income and that they earned less as they belonged to the low-income and middle-income categories (World Health Organisation, 2023). Among these low-income earners, it is to be noted that most (52.3%) visited Air BnB establishments, which support the moral economy, promoting fairness and justice, as Air BnB is known for its affordable price (Ndaguba & van Zyl, 2023; Visser et al., 2017). Apart from this, respondents earning higher incomes (> 50,000) visited guest houses (61.5%) and hotels (60.0%). Overall, a higher percentage of the respondents of all income categories indicated that they would support the accommodation establishments after the lockdown.

In terms of food and beverage establishments, customers from all salary ranges, from low to middle-income levels (World Health Organisation, 2023) visited all the categories, and they indicated that they would continue to support after the lockdown. Contradicting findings were reported by Banerjee et al., (2023), who stated that low-income customers visited restaurants more than high-income customers during lockdown.

5. Conclusion

This empirical study determined the effect of COVID-19 on the use of hospitality establishments in South Africa, focusing on accommodation and food and beverage establishments. The findings show that there was continuous use of these establishments, which indicates that customers never stopped visiting the hospitality establishments and utilising hospitality services. This affirms the importance of the hospitality industry in the social and economic space and, therefore, adds value to the Sustainable Development Goals. Although positive findings were reported, a decrease in the use of this establishment and its services was observed, especially for accommodation establishments. Consumers from all salary ranges visited the establishments.

This paper showcases the importance of the hospitality industry, as COVID-19 did not really affect customer perceptions of using hospitality establishment services. Furthermore, it contributes scholarly to the limited literature, especially in African content. On the other hand, it gives the industry confidence for potential growth and sustainability and an opportunity to invest more in domestic tourism.

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Improving Environmental Sustainability in Hospitality and Tourism: the Key Strategies

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Abstract: The Hotel and Tourism Industry has experienced profound changes in recent years and has been one of the sectors most affected by COVID-19. With the return of tourist activity, many companies went back to their normal routines, but the sector has changed dramatically. Tourists have new expectations, needs, and priorities, and sustainability is the one that is most emphasised, particularly when it comes to excessive water consumption, misuse of energy, and poorly utilised waste. The industry has a unique opportunity to recognise the importance of sustainability and define strategies to guarantee customer satisfaction, in symbiosis with environmental concerns and the preservation of the planet for future generations.

This study aims to characterise the good strategies and practices for environmental sustainability in Hospitality and Tourism, namely in terms of energy, water, and waste. The purpose is to present the procedures and processes that lead to greater sustainability performance and to accomplish this a focus group was organised, with 2 hospitality stakeholders, 2 environmental groups stakeholders, and 2 VET (Vocational Education and Training) stakeholders, to discuss and identify the main factors directly related to the excessive use of water and energy and the poor treatment of waste and ranked by the participants. The meeting was done face-to-face, lasted 3 hours, and was based on their expertise and good practices. The Hospitality and Tourism Industry is conscious of its ecological footprint, namely in terms of energy efficiency, water conservation, and waste management. Considering energy, some examples were given such as electricity-saving practices, using LED bulbs, occupancy sensors, and automatic light controls. With respect to water, it is mandatory to install low-slip faucets and shower heads, reduce laundry and cleaning, and recycle water that can be reused for irrigation or toilet flushing, reducing the use of fresh water.

The research presented contributions to the growing Knowledge on this topic, and the findings propose a straightforward guide for managers in the Hospitality and Tourism industry. Further research is endorsed to reinforce the value of environmental sustainability and to involve a greater range of stakeholders with different profiles in the sector.

Keywords: Energy, Environment, Hospitality, Sustainability, Tourism, Waste, Water

1. Introduction

The economic growth of tourism and hospitality all around the globe has caused major monetary, social, and especially environmental problems. There is a growing need to develop a collective effort among the various Tourism companies and stakeholders and it is crucial to introduce and deepen new knowledge about the practice of new sustainable behaviours, through the understanding of the main barriers and respective acceptance of responsible behaviours (Kasim, 2006). The tourism and hospitality industries should be focused on environmental sustainability and consumer behaviour is crucial to protect the environment, which in the end helps society and all humanity. Through this focus, new benefits will arise considering that this is a highly competitive market, where sustainability occupies an attractive place in business evolution and development of tourist destinations (Nicolau, 2008). According to Lim (2016) there is a constant challenge that hospitality and tourism academics, policymakers, and industry practitioners are faced with when dealing with the dense problem of sustainability. To Aryal (2020) sustainable tourism should reflect on economic, social, and environmental limits that allow sustainable development.

Yearworth (2016) states that the United Nations' sustainable development goals, which are scheduled for completion by 2030, call for more aggressive strategies and swift action to address the global issues that contemporary civilization is currently facing.

These days, being socially and ecologically conscious reflects a competitive advantage. The company might increase its profitability and set itself apart from rivals. Thus, businesses and even the government are searching for sustainable projects more and more. It is a paradigm shift and those who do not see it will be left behind by social pressure, client demands, or cost-cutting. Even customers have shown an increased awareness and concern for environmental issues, which has led to an increase in demand for green goods and services. Most travelers believe that choosing a hotel with eco-friendly policies is crucial. There is pressure on many industries

to go green to become more ecologically friendly. To Sakshi et al (2019) a large body of research has demonstrated that visitors are interested in sustainable hotels.

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is Sustainability?

Sustainability, in its widest sense, is the capacity to sustain or continue a process over an extended period. In commercial and policy contexts aims to keep natural or physical resources from running out so they can be used for a long time to come. According to Kuhlman and Farrington (2010) the 1987 Brundtland Report is credited with originating the idea of sustainability as policy. The contradiction between humankind's hopes for a better life and the constraints placed on it by nature was the subject of that document. The idea has been reinterpreted over time to now include three dimensions: social, economic, and environmental. Development is a multidimensional undertaking to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Economic development, social development, and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development. A business must adopt what is known as "corporate sustainability" practices and policies to be considered socially and economically responsible. The objective is to promote steady growth that respects all sides of society and the environment, while also having minimal detrimental effects.

Lozano et al. (2015) assert that businesses and their executives have grown increasingly conscious of their duties and responsibilities toward the environment and society, for the benefit of present and future generations alike. As a result, a number of corporate voluntary tools and projects have been created to address sustainability, and industry and academia are collaborating more often to support the development of more sustainable societies.

The fundamental tenet of sustainability is that everything humans need for survival and well-being is reliant on the natural environment, either directly or indirectly, to support present and future generations. Creating and maintaining the environments necessary for humans and the natural world to live in harmonious productivity is essential, and it should motivate all businesses to work toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

2.2 Sustainability in Tourism and Hospitality

It is impossible to discuss sustainable development without mentioning tourism in its entirety. With its diverse range of applications, tourism is a multidimensional industry with notable emphasis on the environmental, sociocultural, and economic facets. This has the biggest flow of products, services, and people thinking about it globally (Lickorish and Jenkins, 2011). According to Sakshi et al (2019) in the tourism and hospitality sectors, sustainability has garnered special attention due to the industry's high energy, water, and non-durable product consumption as well as the possibility of hazardous emissions being released into the air, soil, and water from routine procedures. Since the visitor actively engages in the tourist industry by exploiting local resources and engaging with the location and destination, we believe it is essential to respond to visitor demand and raise visitor awareness of the inherent responsibilities of travel.

The creation of what is known as "social responsibility", which, according to Paskova and Zelenka (2019), entails the various aspects of tourism that are intrinsic at the local, regional, national, and international levels, is necessary for the building of a sustainable community. According to these writers, the tourism industry's implementation of social responsibility has given rise to a comprehensive and wide-ranging notion in terms of both its scope and content. The advancement of this social consciousness is emphasized by Paskova and Zelenka (2019), both on the supply and demand sides of tourism.

This is an issue that has long been present, as described by Webster (1975), a customer who practices social responsibility needs to be aware of every problem related to the sustainability paradigm, such as pollution. He should also be a person who, by acting morally, aspires to actively participate in the advancement of society and the wider globe. The article goes on to say that these people have outstanding educational backgrounds and solid financial foundations. Cheng and Wu (2015) examine environmental responsibility by examining how our understanding of environmental challenges and conservation efforts has evolved. According to these writers, one's degree of understanding of the subject encourages one to become more conscious of the preservation of nature. Furthermore, they hold that consciousness increases with attachment and empathy for a particular location. Su, Huang, and Jue (2018) examine the sustainability paradigm, which is founded on social responsibility and was created via cooperation between the various organizations that make up the tourism sector. This merger might lessen the adverse effects that this industry generates while it operates. As a result,

the diverse populations who inhabit the world may someday reap fresh benefits from this new collective mindset. According to Pulido, Andrades, and Sánchez (2015), the economic dimension ought to centre around sustainable development. Thus, it is believed that sustainability will be a key factor in the financial success of numerous tourist attractions. According to these writers, the green economy—which we refer to as economic sustainability—will be conceptualised over an extended period. The writers Aydin and Emeksiz (2018) argue that when it comes to the green economy, the ongoing backing of public institutions and governments is crucial in promoting the viability and flexibility of the many companies that are considering this industry. Additionally, it emphasizes the significance of a collaborative and strategically planned economy that depends on extensive technical and informational support from a variety of funding sources.

2.2.1 Sustainability in Tourism and Hospitality-good practices

Operating a hospitality or tourism business in a way that is in line with Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is known as sustainable hospitality and tourism. It involves considering not only the financial aspect of the business but also the effects that its operations have on society and the environment. According to Khatter (2023), the worldwide environment has been greatly impacted by the hospitality sector, and hotels and tourism companies that place a high priority on environmental standards not only support sustainability but also give their visitors a better overall experience. To Pereira et al (2021) consumers of hotels are beginning to understand the value of being environmentally conscious and anticipate that lodging establishments would use eco-friendly techniques. The hotel sector is known for using a lot of energy and natural resources to meet the demands of its customers. This industry is a major driver of the global economy and has a substantial impact on the environment and the economy. By implementing best practices aimed at reducing the industry's negative effects on the environment and society, the industry can take the lead in creating a more sustainable future. To Sloan, Legrand, and Chen (2022) the dynamic nature of the climate and the inherent uncertainty of future events make it difficult to assess the potential risks, viability, and financial repercussions of running a hospitality business. The hotel sector is nevertheless moving slowly when it comes to fully incorporating environmentally friendly practices into its day-to-day operations, even despite a wealth of advice and recommendations (Han, 2021) The hotel sector faces several obstacles in its efforts to implement ecologically responsible practices. For most sole proprietors and business owners in the hospitality sector, managing a small business daily can be a demanding undertaking. The consensus among operators is that quick fixes are preferable to long-term gains. Small business owners frequently voice concerns about their organisations' cash flow since it has a big impact on how they run their businesses. Many owners have the false impression that being green means spending more money. This phenomenon is typically explained by a breakdown in communication. Many operators require more time or are more eager to learn about this field because the observable results are not as readily apparent as they are for other problems they face. The main obstacles to attaining environmental sustainability include limitations related to time, money, and available resources. Financial gains, owners' interests, customer happiness, marketing advantages, and a dedication to environmental protection are the primary drivers of environmental sustainability (Khatter, White, Pyke, and McGrath, 2021).

2.3 How to Educate for Sustainability in Tourism and Hospitality

Dziubaniuk et al. (2023) claim that because schools train the future leaders of organisations—which are crucial players in bringing sustainability into society—they have a unique role to play in achieving sustainability development goals. The development of sustainable competencies should be the primary objective of sustainability education in schools, which calls for a more transformative approach.

The need to support growth that meets present needs without endangering those of future generations is growing. The current situation prevents schools from being viewed as nothing more than places where academic knowledge is dispersed and taken out of context. Adolescents must prioritise their development as whole citizens to equip them with the skills necessary to practice informed, accountable, and active citizenship when confronted with social concerns.

To ensure that they make informed decisions in their personal and professional lives, the younger generations need to prepare by acquiring core skills that align with sustainability. Education is without a doubt a vital instrument for attaining sustainable human growth. This compels the school to reorganise itself since it can no longer run its operations in the same manner as it has in the past if it is to prepare professionals who can meet the challenges of the future, if it wants to produce experts who can deal with both current and future problems.

Education systems ought to be ready for these developments, then. According to Tejedor et al. (2019), there are less than two crucial decades remaining to support the development of new methods for producing information and making decisions about sustainability, as well as to support educational frameworks for citizenry engagement and awareness. To meet the UN's sustainable development goals, schools have committed to, integrated, and implemented education for sustainable development into institutions, policies, and curricula. Nearly all international organisations focus on digital citizenship, digital competence, and digital skills. Therefore, teaching digital skills that will enable us to handle the demanding problems that organisations are confronted with in the market underpins the teaching of any subject, and sustainability is no exception. According to the DigCompEdu European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators Report (Redecker, 2017), which outlines the digital competencies of educators, any course design must ensure that students acquire digital skills and that teachers use appropriate digital tools. For students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities related to sustainability, they must have contact with the "real world". This method is gaining traction in classrooms and provides teachers and students with several benefits. Starting with a realistic and real-life situation instead of the traditional theoretical and abstract model that can help learners retain more information and may also present opportunities for them to develop sophisticated abilities like critical thinking, communication, and cooperation.

The goal of the courses should be to prepare students to deal with the challenges of sustainability in both personal and professional contexts and to become agents of sustainability.

3. Methodology

This qualitative and exploratory study aims to characterise the good strategies and practices for environmental sustainability in Hospitality and Tourism, namely in terms of energy, water, and waste. To achieve this objective, a semi-structured interview was used to conduct the focus group organised into three main domains: energy, water, and waste. The script had questions such as - How should energy efficiency be reported in your opinion? Should water consumption management be a priority for hotel management in the upcoming years?, Have you seen any good practices in water management being implemented? In what way were their impacts being measured? or How dependent is waste management on public or private waste management authorities?

The respondents for the focus group were chosen by Simple Random Sampling (SRS), and there were 6 participants, specifically two hospitality stakeholders, two environmental groups stakeholders, and two Vocational Education and Training stakeholders. All the participants were from Portuguese organisations.

The focus group met in a face-to-face environment and lasted three hours. The meeting was audiotaped and verbatim transcribed for the analysis. For data analysis, content analysis procedures were used (Bardin, 2001). All ethical procedures were considered during this study.

4. Results

Our results are organised into three main categories: **energy, water, and waste,** as presented below:

4.1 Energy

Regarding energy, our participants said that they control, on a daily basis, all the consumption of energy. The daily registration of energy consumption is made with the support of a technological tool, which identifies the consumption per equipment of the whole hotel, e.g., air conditioning, light bulbs, elevators, etc. This registration allows them to address four main issues:

- To know their energy efficiency potential, enabling them to set energy performance objectives/standards and implement appropriate measures.
- To draw up a set of measures to optimise energy efficiency in those components where there is significant energy consumption, to reduce the cost of the energy bill, and optimise consumer satisfaction.
- To act in a preventive way in terms of equipment maintenance, thus acting in a preventive manner, given that energy monitoring of all equipment daily will make it possible to detect any maintenance needs before a breakdown occurs and unnecessary energy costs are incurred.
- To detect any deviations in consumption, identify the causes more quickly, and correct the problem minimising energy costs.

Additionally, other strategies were mentioned, such as controlling the temperature in rooms, having light sensors in common spaces with less usage, etc.

The participants also consider important the renewal energy, it was mentioned that it is easier to adopt solutions in buildings built from scratch than in historic buildings (in Portugal there are some hotels installed in historic buildings). Nevertheless, they had already installed solar panels in the buildings where that was possible, and they have a project to build a photovoltaic power plant to supply energy to the group's hotels.

Finally, the hospitality managers highlight that being fully sustainable requires a big investment, and sometimes it is expensive, but if it is properly communicated it will bring huge benefits to the business since customers are becoming increasingly aware of sustainability and are already choosing hotels that they know adopt sustainability practices. In this way, the investment pays off by attracting more customers and ensuring their satisfaction.

According to VET stakeholders, they implement some measures related to energy consumption management, such as controlling the temperature of the rooms and water, and monitoring the energy consumption meters, among others. Moreover, they evidenced that the most important thing in their case is that trainees and trainers already have in their discourse the need to implement strategies to ration energy consumption, needs that are passed on to companies through the trainees when they enter the job market.

The Environmental Group participants showed their concern with energy consumption reduction for society and the role of each agent. They highlight initiatives implemented to promote sustainable habits, like the installation of several electric car chargers, and the construction of eco-roads that connect different cities.

According to VET, companies will constrain water consumption with water-saving policies, and access to water will be much more expensive and will have a beneficial effect with ways of recovering water for other purposes. Measures to prevent water consumption already exist, but according to VET these measures will become more common and more effective. As we have a very large coastline, desalination will have to be considered with rigor and quality, considering that we can get everything, especially water, from the sea.

4.2 Water

In the water category, the hospitality managers mentioned that municipal revenues needed to be tackled, for example, those who consume less should be rewarded, and good water consumption practices created. These measures include measuring consumption, measuring flows, reusing grey water, and using water from swimming pools for irrigation. The big issue is that all these measures require major investments, and structural work and are not always feasible. Moreover, it was referred that the management of drinking water is a priority and can already be used in many units. Daily readings are taken, and the values are recorded on internal maps. As for good practices, these include proper maintenance of equipment, devices, and installations to prevent water leaks and ensure their proper functioning. Hotels systematically record and analyse water consumption data, where possible through a centralized technical management system or based on water bills, to review and readjust, where applicable, the savings measures and targets to be achieved and to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of these measures. Most hotels carry out regular audits to identify improvement measures that will enable them to continually reduce water consumption and the energy associated with water use. The environmental group participants mentioned that there needs to be a commitment from all stakeholders. According to all participants, everyone's mentality and awareness must be modified, and the drought is mentally making people aware, and it often starts in families, e.g. brushing teeth while turning the tap off. The participants considered it is urgent to internalise these concepts and make them a routine.

4.3 Waste

Regarding the waste category, one hospitality manager said that they had full control of waste to see how much a person consumes. This is recorded daily in the hotel's internal system and uploaded to the portal monthly. The portal used is SILiAmb - Integrated Environmental Licensing System, which is a platform where citizens and companies can submit license applications and communicate data to the Portuguese Environment Association, fulfilling their obligations in the environmental area, namely submitting the waste registration map (https://apoiosiliamb.apambiente.pt/content/o-que-%C3%A9-o-siliamb?language=pt-pt). Moreover, the hotel says that they make tracking sheets to accompany all the waste. The other entity says that it does not use any database to record the waste produced. In both cases, the main objective is to reduce, as much as possible, the amount of waste produced.

The VET participants stated that they sort and collect waste and do not keep any records. In addition, and in line with the Tourism 2027 Strategy, all courses raise awareness of the need to reduce waste and treat it properly. The environmental group participants highlighted the policies and practices aimed at separating and reducing waste. They point out that, in this sector, the collection of cooking oil is very important. It is essential to treat food oil to extend its value chain and prevent clogging of the sewage system and water contamination and to preserve the health of aquatic ecosystems. As well as preventing contamination of water resources, recycling this waste can give rise to various other products, for example, detergents can be made from recycled oil. Recycling cooking oil also makes it possible to create biodiesel, a less harmful fuel for the environment, as well as soaps and aromatic candles, contributing to the circular economy.

The aim is to find out what is produced and how much so that appropriate measures can be implemented. It should be noted that those who produce more waste are charged higher rates.

5. Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusions

This study aimed to characterise the good strategies and practices for environmental sustainability in Hospitality and Tourism, namely in terms of energy, water, and waste according to the vision of hospitality stakeholders, VET stakeholders, and environmental group stakeholders. Our main results were related to practices implemented by these groups for energy, water, and waste consumption and reduction.

Therefore, our main results suggested that the goal is to offer some best practices that various kinds of accommodations can use to help achieve the SDGs. The best practices were divided into the following groups to streamline their presentation and make it easier for the reader to recall the material: Energy, Waste management, and Water. The overall energy consumption and carbon footprint of the hotel will be decreased by using energy-efficient appliances (such as freezers, ovens, washers, and dryers) and lighting (such as replacing lightbulbs with LED lights). Programs for demand-side management aim to lower energy usage during periods of high demand. Using smart thermostats is one example of such a program. Smart Thermostats can regulate a room's temperature according to its occupant count or by providing incentives for visitors to use less energy. Contemporary sensors offer a cost-effective way to lower the overall energy used in lodging. For example, sensors put in windows and door windows can prevent the air conditioning system from operating while the first is open, and motion sensors can be used to turn off the lights and other equipment in unoccupied areas. A substantial amount of a hotel's energy usage is attributed to its energy-efficient heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, which may be made better by replacing them with newer, more efficient models or by caulking any leaks. Making use of renewable energy sources, as roofs, terraces, and facades all offer enough room for solar panel installation, which will lower energy expenses and help motels become less dependent on the grid. Selecting an energy supplier depending on the energy mix the provider uses is another strategy, to lessen heat gain and loss, install insulation and energy-efficient windows as needed and Install motion sensors to turn on and off the lights.

Three principles should guide waste management within the sustainability framework: reduce, reuse, and recycle. This means that cutting waste generation should come first. The generated waste should next be recycled (if possible) or repurposed (if not). Recycling should be done in accordance with national and/or local policies. If none of the options work, the garbage should be disposed of. Among the best approaches are cutting waste right at the source. The hospitality sector should prioritise preventing waste from being produced. Reducing waste output can be achieved by adopting paperless transactions, minimizing single-use items, and using less packaging. Another approach should be to recycle food leftovers. Food wastes can be composted to lower methane emissions, a significant cause of climate change. Composting can be done on the hotel property or by hiring a nearby composting company. Reducing the waste could be done by giving away unwanted goods, such as unwanted clothes, furniture, appliances, linens, and other items to hospitals or charity helps the community and keeps the donated goods out of the trash. Recyclable items such as paper, plastic, metal, glass, and others should be gathered separately and delivered to different recycling facilities. Many insights into the lodge's operation can be gained by tracking and reporting waste output and reduction. Establishing targets for cutting waste output enables hotel management to monitor development regularly and make policy improvements.

Considering the water, saving fixtures can be installed as one of the effective water management strategies, and water usage is decreased by water-saving fixtures like low-flow toilets and faucets. Every leak should be addressed as water is wasted in large quantities due to leaks. Hotels should inspect their water system regularly for leaks and address them right away. Another good strategy is rainwater collection - which is a practical

strategy for cutting back on water use. Rainwater collection can be utilised for laundry and other non-potable purposes, such as irrigation. The sustainability leaders should encourage people to use reusable bottles and the use of tap water and employ filtering equipment as necessary.

Our study had some limitations related to the reduced number of participants from each one of the groups and between the groups there were significant differences related to the kind of organisation. Further studies should have more participants and the organisations should be more identical allowing for a better understanding of each group. The good practices analysed were related with energy, water, and waste consumption and reduction, but there are other environmental sustainability strategies that could be implemented in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry. According to Pereira et al (2021) environmental practices used in the hotel industry can include, among others, the purchase of environmentally friendly products and the use of environmentally friendly cleaning products.

In conclusion, this exploratory study highlighted some important issues that should be addressed in sustainability in the hospitality and tourism sector and the need to maintain this issue in the stakeholders' practices and the requirement of specific policies in this field.

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Entrepreneurship, Tourism, Local Fashion, and Curriculum Development: A South African study

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship stands as a pivotal force in our modern landscape, with an array of business opportunities beckoning young individuals. It is imperative that institutions, enterprises, and decision-makers recognize and harness the entrepreneurial potential of the youth. In an age defined by technological advancements and innovation, young people are uniquely equipped to seize these opportunities. Many of the emerging businesses in today's knowledge-driven society bear testament to this phenomenon, a fact underscored by the ongoing global crisis. In South Africa, the cultural and creative industry shines as a beacon of economic potential, ranking among the most vibrant sectors.

Given this backdrop, it is prudent to explore avenues for nurturing enterprises within the realm of culture, creativity, fashion, and tourism. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the roles of educational institutions in offering incentives and support for the initiatives of young entrepreneurs venturing into these domains. These institutions play a crucial role in dismantling the obstacles that often hinder the smooth establishment and development of such enterprises.

This paper significantly contributes to the existing body of knowledge by presenting empirical evidence that aligns with entrepreneurial motivation theory, albeit in a more specific context: the entrepreneurship of fashion clothing. Furthermore, it offers insights into the formulation of a fashion and clothing entrepreneurship curriculum, as perceived by university students specializing in clothing and textile studies. This research not only sheds light on the motivations of aspiring fashion entrepreneurs but also informs the design of educational programs that can better equip them to navigate this competitive landscape.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Motivation Theory, Youth, Support Local, Clothing and Fashion.

1. Introduction

In the vibrant tapestry of South Africa, the intersection of entrepreneurship, tourism, local fashion, and curriculum development unfolds as a captivating narrative, weaving together economic growth, cultural richness, and educational advancement (Rogerson, 2018; Musundwa & Rogerson, 2017). This study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of these interconnected realms, shedding light on their intricate dynamics and the profound impact they collectively wield on the socio-economic landscape of the nation.

South Africa, a country renowned for its diverse landscapes, multicultural heritage, and resilient spirit, stands at the crossroads of opportunity and challenge. Entrepreneurship, the engine of innovation and economic progress, holds the promise of empowerment and prosperity for South Africans. Against the backdrop of a burgeoning entrepreneurial ecosystem, this study delves into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by local entrepreneurs in the dynamic South African context.

Tourism, another pillar of South Africa's economic foundation, plays a pivotal role in shaping the national narrative. The country's natural wonders, cultural heritage, and diverse attractions draw visitors from across the globe. Within the tourism sector, opportunities for entrepreneurship emerge, fostering sustainable development and community empowerment.

A distinctive facet of South Africa's cultural tapestry is its vibrant and burgeoning local fashion industry. Rooted in a rich history and a fusion of diverse influences, South African fashion reflects the nation's unique identity. Entrepreneurs in the local fashion scene navigate a landscape where tradition meets innovation, creating a harmonious blend that resonates globally. In tandem with entrepreneurship and local fashion, curriculum development emerges as a cornerstone for nurturing the next generation of South African innovators. Education shapes the aspirations and capabilities of the youth, molding them into agents of change. By fostering a dynamic educational environment, South Africa can empower its youth to embrace entrepreneurship, cultivate a thriving local fashion industry, and contribute meaningfully to the tourism sector.

Through this journey the idea is to understand the intertwined realms of entrepreneurship, tourism, local fashion, and curriculum development in South Africa, to unravel the threads that bind these elements together. By doing so, the author aims to present a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities that lay the groundwork for sustainable development and inclusive growth.

2. Literature Review: The South African Entrepreneurial Landscape

The entrepreneurial landscape in South Africa is characterized by a complex interplay of historical legacies, socio-economic challenges, and dynamic opportunities. This literature review explores key themes and trends that define the South African entrepreneurial ecosystem, shedding light on the factors influencing entrepreneurship, the challenges faced by entrepreneurs, and the initiatives aimed at fostering a robust entrepreneurial culture.

Several drivers propel entrepreneurship in South Africa (Choguill, 2016). Economic necessity, driven by high unemployment rates, has forced many individuals to seek entrepreneurial opportunities as a means of livelihood. Additionally, a spirit of resilience and innovation pervades the entrepreneurial landscape, with individuals identifying gaps in the market and creating ventures that address local needs. Government initiatives, such as the National Development Plan (NDP) and the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), play a vital role in providing support and creating an enabling environment for entrepreneurs (Mthimunye, & Pooe, 2014).

3. Challenges Faced by Entrepreneurs:

Despite the entrepreneurial spirit, South African entrepreneurs encounter multifaceted challenges. Access to finance remains a critical impediment, particularly for those with limited collateral or credit history. The bureaucratic hurdles in registering and formalizing businesses often present obstacles, disproportionately affecting small and informal enterprises. Moreover, the persistently high levels of inequality and a skewed distribution of resources continue to pose challenges to aspiring entrepreneurs, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to level the playing field.

4. Informal Economy and Township Entrepreneurship:

A distinctive feature of the South African entrepreneurial landscape is the prevalence of the informal economy, particularly evident in township areas (Saayman & Saayman, 2006). Informal enterprises, ranging from street vendors to small-scale service providers, contribute significantly to employment and economic activity. However, these entrepreneurs operate on the fringes of the formal economy, facing issues related to limited access to markets, lack of legal recognition, and vulnerability to external shocks. Understanding and integrating informal sector dynamics is imperative for crafting inclusive entrepreneurial policies.

5. Innovation and Technology:

In recent years, South Africa has witnessed a surge in innovation and technology-driven entrepreneurship. Hubs and incubators, such as the Silicon Cape Initiative, have emerged as focal points for fostering a culture of innovation. The rise of fintech, agritech, and other technology-driven sectors demonstrates the potential for entrepreneurship to drive economic transformation. However, challenges such as digital infrastructure gaps and the need for specialized skills pose hurdles to the widespread adoption of technology in entrepreneurship.

The South African entrepreneurial landscape is a dynamic arena shaped by historical nuances, socio-economic challenges, and contemporary opportunities. While the entrepreneurial spirit is evident, addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by entrepreneurs, particularly those from marginalized communities, is crucial for fostering inclusive and sustainable economic development. As South Africa navigates its entrepreneurial journey, a nuanced understanding of the landscape is imperative, guiding policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders toward initiatives that empower entrepreneurs and contribute to the nation's overall economic resilience and growth (Mtapuri, 2018; Urban, 2018).

Tourism, local fashion, and economic development intertwine as integral components shaping South Africa's socio-economic landscape. Their synergistic relationship contributes not only to economic growth but also to the cultural vibrancy and global identity of the nation. Tourism stands as a linchpin in South Africa's economic strategy, harnessing the country's natural beauty, cultural diversity, and historical richness. With iconic landmarks such as Table Mountain, Kruger National Park, and Robben Island, South Africa entices travelers seeking diverse experiences. The tourism sector is a major employer, providing opportunities for entrepreneurship and community development. It stimulates local economies, creates jobs, and fosters a sense of pride in preserving cultural and natural heritage. By showcasing the country's unique attractions, tourism becomes a vehicle for fostering international understanding and appreciation of South Africa's rich tapestry (Mtapuri, 2018; Urban, 2018).

Local fashion emerges as a cultural ambassador, amplifying South Africa's distinct identity on the global stage. Rooted in a fusion of tradition and innovation, local designers contribute to a burgeoning fashion industry that goes beyond aesthetics. Entrepreneurship in the fashion sector empowers communities and artisans, creating economic opportunities while preserving and promoting indigenous craftsmanship. South African fashion reflects the nation's narrative, telling stories of resilience, diversity, and creativity. As the industry gains international acclaim, it opens avenues for economic growth through exports and collaborations, positioning South Africa as a dynamic player in the global fashion arena.

Economic development in South Africa is intricately linked to the success of its tourism and local fashion sectors. By strategically investing in these domains, the nation cultivates sustainable economic growth, job creation, and poverty alleviation. The government's commitment to infrastructure development, skills training, and supportive policies further catalyzes economic progress. The diversification of the economy through tourism and fashion provides a resilient foundation, insulating South Africa from overdependence on specific industries (Fourie, 2019).

In summary, the symbiotic relationship between tourism, local fashion, and economic development in South Africa exemplifies a holistic approach to nation-building. As these sectors flourish, they contribute not only to the GDP but also to the preservation of cultural heritage, the empowerment of local communities, and the projection of a dynamic and multifaceted national identity onto the global stage. Nurturing these pillars of economic activity is essential for creating a sustainable and inclusive future for South Africa, where the interplay of tourism and fashion becomes a catalyst for lasting socio-economic prosperity. Entrepreneurship leads to job creation and economic growth of the nation which eventually contributes to tourism and local fashion to employment. This has a good economic impact of entrepreneurship in these sectors. Entrepreneurship has cultural representation where it plays a role of local fashion in representing South African cultural tourism as an economic driver.

6. The Role of Education in Entrepreneurship in South Africa

Education stands as a cornerstone for the development and sustainability of entrepreneurship in South Africa, playing a pivotal role in fostering a culture of innovation, resilience, and economic empowerment. As the nation navigates its economic landscape, the intersection of education and entrepreneurship becomes imperative for shaping a dynamic and inclusive future.

One of the fundamental contributions of education to entrepreneurship lies in equipping individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge. Entrepreneurial education, whether formal or informal, cultivates a mindset of creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Through curricular initiatives, vocational training, and entrepreneurship-focused programs, educational institutions empower students with the tools to identify opportunities, manage risks, and navigate the complexities of starting and sustaining a business.

Access to education acts as a leveling force, breaking down barriers and providing equal opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs. In a country with a history of systemic inequalities, education becomes a catalyst for inclusivity, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate meaningfully in entrepreneurial endeavors. Initiatives aimed at improving educational access, especially in underserved communities, create a pipeline of talent that can drive innovation and economic development.

Entrepreneurial education also instills a sense of self-efficacy and confidence in individuals, encouraging them to take calculated risks and pursue their business aspirations (Moyo & Sagonda, 2016). By fostering an entrepreneurial mindset from an early age, education contributes to a cultural shift where risk-taking is embraced, failures are viewed as learning opportunities, and the stigma associated with entrepreneurship is dismantled. This cultural shift is essential for creating an environment where entrepreneurship is not only a viable career path but also a respected and valued endeavor.

Furthermore, educational institutions serve as hubs for networking, mentorship, and collaboration—essential elements for entrepreneurial success. Partnerships between academia and the business community create avenues for knowledge transfer, real-world application of skills, and exposure to industry insights. Incubators and entrepreneurship centers within educational institutions provide valuable resources, mentorship programs, and funding opportunities, nurturing the growth of startups and small businesses.

In conclusion, the role of education in entrepreneurship in South Africa is multi-faceted and indispensable. It acts as a catalyst for skill development, a mechanism for breaking down socio-economic barriers, a driver of cultural change, and a facilitator of collaboration and networking. By investing in entrepreneurial education, South Africa

not only prepares its workforce for the demands of a dynamic economy but also lays the foundation for a resilient and innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem that can contribute significantly to the nation's economic growth and development (Nkomo & Chipunza, 2018).

7. Strategies to Enhance Curricula in Entrepreneurship in South Africa

As South Africa seeks to foster a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem, enhancing curricula in entrepreneurship becomes a strategic imperative (Moyo & Sagonda, 2016; Mulaudzi & Dhurup, 2017). The integration of innovative and practical approaches into educational frameworks can play a pivotal role in equipping students with the skills, mindset, and knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship. Here are several strategies to enhance curricula in entrepreneurship in South Africa:

7.1 Real-World Experiences and Case Studies:

Infusing curricula with real-world experiences and case studies allowed students to bridge theory with practice. By examining successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurial ventures, students gain insights into the challenges and opportunities of the business landscape. Collaborations with local businesses and entrepreneurs provided students with hands-on experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of the practical aspects of entrepreneurship.

7.2 Interdisciplinary Learning:

Entrepreneurship is a multidimensional field that draws on various disciplines. Integrating entrepreneurship into diverse academic disciplines, such as engineering, technology, and social sciences, encourages interdisciplinary collaboration. This approach not only enriches the educational experience but also reflects the interconnected nature of entrepreneurial endeavors, preparing students to address complex challenges from a holistic perspective.

7.3 Practical Skill Development:

Beyond theoretical knowledge, curricula should emphasize the development of practical skills crucial for entrepreneurial success. This includes skills in business planning, financial management, marketing, and networking. Incorporating workshops, simulation exercises, and interactive projects allows students to apply theoretical concepts in a practical setting, honing their skills and building confidence.

7.4 Entrepreneurial Mindset Cultivation:

Education should focus on instilling an entrepreneurial mindset characterized by adaptability, resilience, and a willingness to take risks. Curricula can integrate activities that promote creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Encouraging students to embrace failure as a part of the learning process fosters a culture where resilience and perseverance are valued traits.

7.5 Mentorship Programs:

Establishing mentorship programs connects students with experienced entrepreneurs, providing valuable guidance and insights. Mentors can share practical knowledge, offer advice, and serve as role models. These programs create a bridge between academia and the entrepreneurial community, offering students a glimpse into the realities of the business world and helping them build valuable networks.

7.6 Global Perspective:

Given the interconnected nature of the global economy, curricula should incorporate a global perspective. Exposure to international business practices, market trends, and case studies from successful entrepreneurs worldwide broadens students' horizons and prepares them for a globalized entrepreneurial landscape. Collaborations with international institutions and virtual exchanges can facilitate this global perspective.

7.7 Incorporating Digital Literacy and Technology:

In the digital age, technological literacy is integral to entrepreneurial success. Curricula should include modules on digital marketing, e-commerce, and emerging technologies and training in utilizing digital tools for business

management, communication, and market research equips students to thrive in a technology-driven business environment.

7.8 Continuous Industry Engagement

Regularly updating curricula based on feedback from industry stakeholders, including entrepreneurs, investors, and business leaders, ensures relevance and responsiveness to evolving market trends. Establishing advisory boards comprised of industry professionals can provide valuable insights, ensuring that curricula align with the current needs and expectations of the entrepreneurial landscape.

In conclusion, enhancing curricula in entrepreneurship in South Africa requires a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach. By integrating practical experiences, interdisciplinary learning, skill development, mentorship, a global perspective, digital literacy, and ongoing industry engagement, educational institutions can cultivate a new generation of entrepreneurs equipped to drive innovation, economic growth, and sustainable development in the dynamic South African landscape.

8. Recommendations:

8.1 Integrated Policy Framework:

Develop an integrated national policy framework that acknowledges the interconnected nature of entrepreneurship, tourism, local fashion, and curriculum development. This framework should be collaborative, involving input from government agencies, educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and local communities. By aligning policies, South Africa can create a synergistic environment that maximizes the impact of each sector on the others.

8.2 Entrepreneurship Education at all Levels:

Implement entrepreneurship education at all levels of the education system, from primary schools to tertiary institutions. Introduce age-appropriate modules that instill an entrepreneurial mindset, emphasizing creativity, problem-solving, and risk-taking. Establish partnerships with local entrepreneurs and businesses to provide real-world insights and mentorship.

8.3 Inclusive Support Mechanisms:

Create inclusive support mechanisms to address the diverse needs of entrepreneurs across different sectors and demographics. This includes financial support, mentorship programs, and access to networks. Tailor interventions to uplift entrepreneurs in the informal sector, acknowledging their significant contributions to the economy.

8.4 Tourism and Entrepreneurial Synergy:

Foster synergy between the tourism sector and entrepreneurship by encouraging the development of tourism-related ventures. Establish initiatives that link local entrepreneurs with the tourism industry, facilitating partnerships for the creation of unique experiences, products, and services. This collaborative approach can enhance the overall tourism offering while providing economic opportunities for local businesses.

8.5 Cultural Heritage Preservation in Local Fashion:

Implement strategies to preserve and promote South Africa's cultural heritage within the local fashion industry. Support initiatives that integrate traditional craftsmanship and design into contemporary fashion. Encourage sustainable practices and ethical production methods within the local fashion sector, creating a distinct identity that resonates globally.

8.6 International Collaboration in Local Fashion:

Facilitate international collaboration and exposure for South African fashion designers. Create platforms for showcasing local talent on the global stage, fostering cross-cultural exchange and opening avenues for international market access. Support initiatives that connect South African fashion entrepreneurs with global industry events, trade shows, and collaborations.

8.7 Entrepreneurial Incubators and Hubs:

Expand the presence of entrepreneurial incubators and hubs across the country, particularly in underserved communities. These centers should provide not only physical spaces for collaboration but also resources such as mentorship, access to funding, and networking opportunities. Prioritize the development of incubators with a focus on tourism-related ventures and the local fashion industry.

8.8 Incorporating Technology in Curriculum Development:

Infuse technology-driven components into educational curricula, aligning them with the demands of the digital age. Introduce courses that emphasize digital literacy, e-commerce, and technology integration across entrepreneurship, tourism, and local fashion.

8.9 Continuous industry feedback in curriculum development:

Establish a mechanism for continuous industry feedback in curriculum development. Regularly review and update educational programs based on input from industry stakeholders, ensuring that curricula remain relevant and responsive to changing market dynamics. This iterative process should involve ongoing collaboration between educational institutions and the business community.

8.10 Public-Private partnerships for sustainable tourism:

Promote public-private partnerships to drive sustainable tourism initiatives. Encourage collaboration between government bodies, local communities, and private enterprises to ensure that tourism development aligns with environmental conservation and community well-being. Implement responsible tourism practices that prioritize the preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage.

9. Case Study on Entrepreneurship at a UoT

We visited "Bambanani for Social Development" in the rural areas of Nyanga township, Cape Town, where we encountered a group of skilled women proficient in sewing. Displaying our students' creations, we sought their input and were met with astonishment at the craftsmanship and the innovative approach to waste management, utilizing materials at zero cost. Of particular interest was the creative use of various fabric scraps, employing different pockets for patchwork with practical functionality. Conversations with the head of the Bambanani for Social Development community revealed their intent to empower community members through training, targeting those in need of financial support or currently unemployed but possessing skills. To meet this objective, we invited select community members for a session, demonstrating how to creatively combine fabrics of diverse origins, showcasing hand-braiding techniques, resulting in the design of a fabric handbag.

Simultaneously, we tasked final year clothing and textile engineering students with a project centered on utilizing waste materials, such as offcuts and fabric swatches provided by manufacturing and retail companies at no cost. Beginning with market research to gauge demand for sustainable products and environmental awareness, they devised questionnaire surveys distributed among community stakeholders. Using this feedback, they generated product ideas and prototypes. This initiative aimed to equip students with entrepreneurial skills, enabling them to produce goods without incurring raw material costs during crises. The students excelled in producing these items, which were showcased on websites and social media platforms to solicit feedback and gauge consumer preferences. They also developed business plans, demonstrating their comprehension of the concept and their capacity to manage a business effectively.

The overarching goal of this project was to assist unemployed individuals with skills in our industry and support small enterprise stakeholders by engaging community members to generate income. This emphasis on repurposing waste materials and fabric remnants represents an opportunity to uplift and bolster self-sustainability within communities during times of crisis, contributing to the advancement of the manufacturing sector in South Africa.

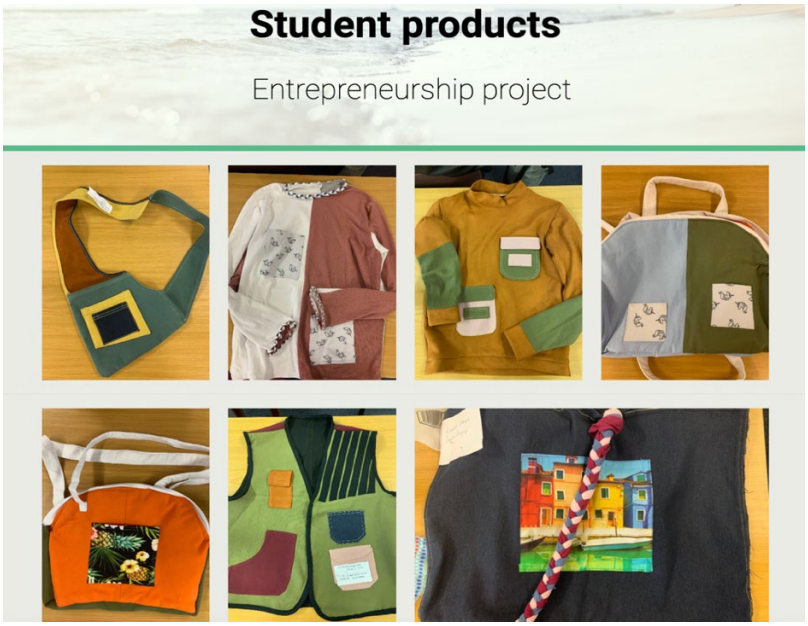

Figure 1

The screenshots displayed above showcase a selection of products crafted by our students earlier this year, now accessible on our website for community use. These images illustrate the incorporation of various types and colors of fabrics, resulting in meaningful outcomes. Additionally, we have provided instructional materials on the website, catering to entrepreneurs and learners alike, offering insights into the small-scale operations involved.

Given South Africa's status as a developing nation, compounded by challenges such as connectivity issues, network instability, power outages, and labor strikes—compounded further by the pandemic—livelihoods are significantly impacted, with financial constraints being among the most severe. To mitigate these challenges, we have optimized the website by offering low-tech, data-efficient image files and ensuring content is available in multiple regional languages beyond English, including Xitsonga, Zulu, IsiXhosa, and Afrikaans. This inclusive approach serves the diverse linguistic communities of the Rainbow Nation.

Through accompanying videos, our students endeavor to elucidate the rationale behind waste reduction and advocate for sustainable practices, promoting environmental consciousness and embracing a circular economy mindset, encouraging individuals to purchase mindfully and embrace eco-friendly alternatives.

10. Conclusions

In conclusion, the South African study examining the intersections of entrepreneurship, tourism, local fashion, and curriculum development reveals a landscape rich with opportunities and challenges. The recommendations outlined above aim to create a holistic and integrated approach to drive sustainable development, economic growth, and cultural preservation.

The interconnectedness of these sectors provides a unique opportunity for South Africa to leverage its cultural diversity, natural beauty, and entrepreneurial spirit. By fostering collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, industry players, and local communities, South Africa can create a dynamic ecosystem that benefits all stakeholders.

The emphasis on entrepreneurship education across all levels is foundational. Instilling an entrepreneurial mindset from an early age lays the groundwork for a future generation of innovators and problem-solvers. This, coupled with inclusive support mechanisms, can address the diverse needs of entrepreneurs, promoting inclusivity and equitable access to resources.

The synergy between the tourism sector and entrepreneurship, particularly in local fashion, is a key avenue for economic development. Encouraging partnerships and collaboration between these sectors can create unique and authentic experiences for tourists while empowering local businesses. The preservation of cultural heritage within the local fashion industry further adds depth and authenticity to South Africa's global identity.

The study underscores the importance of adapting educational curricula to the demands of the digital age. By incorporating technology-driven components and maintaining a feedback loop with industry stakeholders, educational institutions can ensure that graduates are well-equipped for the evolving entrepreneurial landscape.

Public-private partnerships emerge as a critical element, especially in the context of sustainable tourism. Balancing economic development with environmental conservation and community well-being is imperative for the long-term success of the tourism sector.

In essence, the recommendations and conclusions drawn from this South African study advocate for a holistic and collaborative approach to harness the full potential of entrepreneurship, tourism, local fashion, and curriculum development. Through strategic interventions and a shared commitment to fostering innovation and inclusivity, South Africa can position itself as a global leader in sustainable economic development and cultural expression.

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Tourism as a Catalyst for Supporting Sustainable SMME Development

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Abstract: Globally, entrepreneurship is evident in the tourism industry, primarily receiving policy support and donor-assisted funding in developing countries. The South African Minister of Tourism reported that foreign direct spend on tourism for the first quarter of 2023 was R 25.3 billion increasing by 143.9% from the same period the previous year. This highlights the amount of tourist footfall that happens in South Africa. This can be seen as a huge boost to entrepreneurs and support rising unemployment. While research in entrepreneurship education has been extensively explored, entrepreneurship within the fashion domain has been largely overlooked, with significantly less existing literature in South Africa. Nonetheless, understanding the role of entrepreneurship in tourism development remains limited in academic discussions. Tourism serves as a crucial source of revenue for any economy, contributing not only from tourism itself but also through various associated industries. This includes locally-made products that attract tourists seeking souvenirs as gifts after their travels. To remain competitive, overcome challenges, and avoid unattractive product offerings, the tourism sector must embrace innovation. This research, conducted using a qualitative approach with university students, engaged with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs) producing souvenirs for tourists, encouraging them to employ innovative and cost-effective methods in their product creation. The study's findings revealed five distinct categories of innovation, namely: product innovation, process innovation, managerial innovation, management innovation, and institutional innovation. Among these, process innovation and product innovation were the most frequently implemented innovations to promote locally-made products in the market.

Keywords: Tourism, Fashion Entrepreneurship, SMME, Sustainability, Community Engagement

1. Introduction

In an era characterized by globalization and interconnected economies, the role of Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) in fostering sustainable development has become increasingly significant. These enterprises, often representing the backbone of local economies, play a pivotal role in job creation, poverty alleviation, and community empowerment. Among the various sectors that can fuel the growth of SMMEs, tourism emerges as a potent catalyst, offering a unique synergy between economic development and environmental conservation.

Tourism has long been recognized as a powerful driver of economic growth, attracting visitors from around the globe to explore diverse cultures, natural landscapes, and historical sites. However, beyond its immediate economic impact, tourism holds immense potential for fostering sustainable SMME development. Small businesses operating in the tourism sector, such as local tour operators, handicraft producers, and boutique accommodations, contribute to the creation of vibrant, resilient communities while preserving the cultural and environmental assets that make a destination attractive.

This paper will refer to Cape Town, South Africa and its surrounding areas. Cape Town has been ranked as one of the leading tourist destinations viz. in 2023 The Telegraph, a UK based Newspaper announced Cape Town as the World's top Tourist destination by their Readers Choice Awards. (https://thetourisminternational.com/telegraph-travel-announces-the-highly-anticipated-results-of-the-2023-readers-choice-awards/). Most recently Time Out (https://www.timeout.com/things-to-do/best-cities-in-the-world) an international media and hospitality organization ranked Cape Town as the 2nd best city in the world to visit out of 50 for 2024. So, no doubt it has all the characteristics that make it attractive to a wide range of tourists, as noted from its natural beauty, historical sites as well as cultural and environmental diversity.

In a period of economic difficulty especially as experienced during Covid 19 and post covid, viz. runaway inflation, and high unemployment particularly amongst the youth in South Africa. Therefore it is important to consider successful economic sectors such as tourism and how the broader population could benefit from this sector when seeking economic recovery. Another important factor is that Cape Town also has a long history of being the fashion and clothing hub of South Africa with many large and small clothing manufacturers as well as the countries major retail headquarters found in this region. With the economic downturn many skilled sewing operators found themselves without work and had to consider self-employment as an option.

Therefore one of the key ways in which tourism supports sustainable SMME development is through the creation of employment opportunities. The industry is labour-intensive, offering a diverse array of jobs ranging from tour guides and hospitality staff to artisans and transportation providers. By engaging local communities in these tourism-related activities, SMMEs are empowered to thrive, and residents gain access to meaningful employment that enhances their quality of life. Furthermore, the cyclical nature of tourism spending ensures that a significant portion of the revenue generated circulates within the community, providing a multiplier effect that stimulates local economies.

Sustainable tourism practices also contribute to the longevity and success of SMMEs. As travellers increasingly select destinations that prioritize environmental and cultural conservation, businesses that adopt eco-friendly and socially responsible practices stand to gain a competitive edge. This shift in consumer preferences not only encourages SMMEs to embrace sustainable business models but also fosters a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards local resources and heritage.

In an era where the global tourism landscape is shifting towards experiences that are both authentic and sustainable, the fusion of fashion and tourism has given rise to a dynamic phenomenon – Clothing Tourism. This emerging trend encapsulates the exploration, appreciation, and acquisition of locally crafted clothing items as an integral part of the tourist experience. Beyond being a mere commercial transaction, this has evolved into a catalyst for supporting the sustainable development of Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) within the clothing industry.

Buchmanna et al (2021) notes "Tourism is broadly understood as a convergence of people, places and objects. People travel to places and interact with these objects and this activity is mediated by both an industry and broader resident community." There is nothing quite as disappointing to a tourist when they want to purchase an authentic product from one country only to find out it has been produced in another country.

The intersection of clothing and tourism creates a vibrant synergy that extends beyond the conventional boundaries of the fashion marketplace. Tourists, driven by a desire for unique, culturally rich experiences, are increasingly seeking opportunities to engage with local communities, artisans, and traditional craftsmanship. As they traverse diverse destinations, the allure of acquiring garments that tell a story, that bear the imprint of local heritage and skilled craftsmanship, has given rise to a burgeoning market for locally produced clothing items.

2. Economic Impact on SMMEs

At the heart of Clothing Tourism lies its potential to invigorate the economic landscape for SMMEs. Tourists, eager to move beyond mass-produced, generic apparel, are drawn to the authenticity embedded in locally crafted garments. This burgeoning demand presents SMMEs in the clothing sector with a unique opportunity for growth and economic sustainability. Through the creation and sale of distinct, culturally influenced clothing items, SMMEs can not only meet the preferences of conscious consumers but also contribute significantly to the economic development of the communities they operate in.

2.1 Preservation of Cultural Identity

Clothing Tourism acts as a preserver of cultural identity by providing a platform for the display and appreciation of traditional garments. As tourists immerse themselves in local markets and workshops, they become patrons of the rich tapestry of cultural heritage woven into each piece. This interaction not only sustains traditional crafts but also fosters a sense of pride within local communities. Research by Richards and Marques (2012) underlines the vital role of tourism in cultural exchange and highlights the potential for clothing tourism to revitalize and preserve traditional crafts, contributing to the broader cultural identity.

2.2 Sustainable Practices and Environmental Consciousness

In an era marked by heightened environmental consciousness, Clothing Tourism takes on a significant role in promoting sustainability within the SMME sector. The emphasis on ethically produced, locally sourced, and environmentally friendly clothing aligns with the values of the modern, eco-conscious consumer. Gössling and Hall (2019) stress the importance of adopting sustainable practices within the tourism sector, including clothing tourism, to minimize environmental impacts. SMMEs engaging in eco-friendly production methods are not only meeting market demands but also contributing to the global imperative of sustainable consumption.

2.3 Challenges and Policy Implications

While the potential benefits of Clothing Tourism are evident, it is essential to acknowledge and address challenges such as over tourism, cultural commodification, and the need for effective policy frameworks. Giousmpasoglou et al. (2020) shed light on the potential pitfalls of over tourism and commodification, emphasizing the importance of sustainable tourism management practices.

2.4 The Dynamic Intersection of Tourism and Fashion

Fashion, once confined to the runways of global metropolises, has transcended its traditional boundaries, becoming an integral part of the tourist experience. Travelers, driven by a desire for unique and authentic encounters, now seek more than just picturesque landscapes and cultural monuments; they seek to immerse themselves in the sartorial narratives woven into the local fabrics of their destinations. This evolving trend marks a paradigm shift in the tourism landscape, where the allure of sustainable clothing and fashion has become a pivotal motivator for travel. Fashion also has an element of usefulness beyond mere mementoes and trinkets and also becomes an object of display.

2.5 Economic Resilience and Local Entrepreneurship

At the heart of this paradigm shift lies the potential for economic resilience and local entrepreneurship within the SMME sector. Sustainable clothing and fashion SMMEs find themselves at the forefront of this transformation, offering tourists not merely garments, but stories of craftsmanship, cultural heritage, and ethical production. The economic impact is tangible, as tourists increasingly choose to support local businesses that align with their values of sustainability and authenticity. The growth of these SMMEs contributes not only to the economic well-being of local communities but also fosters a sense of pride in preserving traditional craftsmanship and is a means of connecting the tourist with the craftsman

2.6 Cultural Authenticity and Ethical Production

Tourism as a catalyst for sustainable clothing and fashion SMME development hinges on the preservation of cultural authenticity and the promotion of ethical production practices. In a global marketplace where mass production often overshadows traditional craftsmanship, tourists seeking genuine experiences are drawn to locally produced garments that encapsulate the essence of their destination. Research by Richards and Marques (2012) underscores the role of tourism in cultural exchange, emphasizing how the fashion industry becomes a canvas for preserving and showcasing cultural identity. Additionally, the ethical production of clothing aligns with the values of conscientious consumers, further propelling the growth of SMMEs committed to sustainable practices.

2.7 The Digital Revolution and Global Reach

The advent of the digital revolution has catalyzed a paradigm shift in the way fashion SMMEs engage with tourists. Digital platforms and online marketplaces provide these businesses with unprecedented global reach, extending beyond the geographical confines of tourist destinations. This interconnectedness not only democratizes access to unique fashion pieces but also enables SMMEs to transcend the limitations of tourist seasons. It connects the tourist beyond the visit to the SMME, especially if the Tourist wanted to make a repeat purchase.

2.8 Challenges and the Path to Sustainability

However, amidst the promises lie challenges that must be navigated to ensure the sustainability of this evolving relationship between tourism and sustainable fashion SMMEs. Issues of cultural commodification, over tourism, and the need for effective policy frameworks necessitate careful consideration. Giousmpasoglou et al. (2020) caution against the pitfalls of over tourism, urging a balance that respects local cultures and environments.

As we embark on this exploration of Tourism as a Catalyst for Supporting Sustainable Clothing and Fashion SMME Development, we delve into a realm where garments are not merely products but conduits of cultural narratives. Whereby SMMEs have an opportunity through their craft to tell stories of their past, their struggles and the hopes and dreams for the future. In this symbiotic dance between fashion and tourism, each purchase becomes a vote for sustainability, each piece a bridge between global travellers and local artisans. The unfolding narrative is one where economic prosperity, cultural preservation, and environmental consciousness converge, painting a

vivid picture of a future where the world of fashion is not just adorned but embraced as a custodian of sustainable development.

3. Literature Review

The convergence of clothing and tourism offers a unique lens through which to explore the potential for supporting sustainable Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) development. As consumers increasingly seek authentic and sustainable experiences, clothing tourism emerges as a dynamic intersection that holds promise for economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability within the SMME sector.

3.1 Economic Impact and Employment Generation

The economic impact of clothing tourism on SMMEs is a critical aspect, as tourists often seek locally produced clothing items as souvenirs. Research by Kim and Perdue (2013) on shopping tourism highlights the economic benefits derived from tourists' expenditures on local products, contributing directly to the growth of SMMEs. This economic impact is particularly significant in the clothing industry, where unique and culturally influenced garments attract tourists seeking distinctive items.

3.2 Cultural Exchange and Identity Preservation

Clothing tourism becomes a catalyst for preserving cultural identity as it intertwines with local craftsmanship and traditional garment production. Tourists, in search of authentic experiences, engage with local clothing markets and workshops, providing a platform for SMMEs to showcase their culturally significant products. This aligns with findings by Richards and Marques (2012), who argue that tourism fosters cultural exchange and can contribute to the revitalization of traditional crafts, including clothing production.

3.3 Sustainable Practices in Clothing Tourism

Sustainable tourism practices are crucial in the context of clothing tourism, emphasizing the responsible production and consumption of clothing items. The study by Gössling and Hall (2019) emphasizes the importance of adopting sustainable practices within the tourism sector, including clothing tourism, to minimize environmental impacts. SMMEs engaging in sustainable practices, such as using eco-friendly materials and ethical production methods, align with the growing demand for environmentally conscious products among tourists.

3.4 Local Collaborations and Community Empowerment

Clothing tourism encourages collaborations between SMMEs, local artisans, and communities. This collaboration is highlighted by Timothy and Ron (2013), who argue that partnerships between SMMEs and local communities contribute to the authenticity and uniqueness of the clothing products, fostering economic growth. Such collaborations empower local communities by preserving traditional skills and providing economic opportunities through tourism-driven demand for locally crafted clothing items.

3.5 Digital Platforms and Global Reach

The integration of digital platforms in clothing tourism enables SMMEs to reach a global audience. Online platforms for selling locally crafted clothing items extend the market reach beyond traditional tourist interactions. Research also emphasizes the role of digital platforms in connecting local artisans with global consumers, providing SMMEs in the clothing industry with an avenue for sustainable growth.

3.6 Challenges and Opportunities in Clothing Tourism

Acknowledging both challenges and opportunities is essential for understanding the dynamics of clothing tourism. Giousmpasoglou et al. (2020) highlight the potential for over tourism and cultural commodification as challenges within clothing tourism. On the other hand, these challenges present opportunities for implementing sustainable tourism management practices that balance economic benefits with cultural and environmental preservation.

3.7 Consumer Preferences and Trends

Understanding consumer preferences is vital for the sustainable development of SMMEs in clothing tourism. Aligning SMME offerings with these preferences ensures that the clothing tourism sector remains relevant and resonates with the values of conscious consumers. SMMEs may require assistance with identifying trends ensuring the use of sustainable materials in the products as will be highlight in the case study.

3.8 Policy Implications for Clothing Tourism

Policy frameworks play a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of clothing tourism. Governments and tourism authorities need to implement policies that support sustainable practices, empower local communities, and regulate the impact of clothing tourism on cultural heritage.

Understanding these dynamics not only provides a foundation for further academic inquiry but also offers valuable insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and local communities. Nurturing the sustainable growth of SMMEs in the clothing tourism sector requires a holistic approach that considers economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. The challenges inherent in this intersection also present opportunities for innovative solutions, ensuring that clothing tourism becomes a force for positive and sustainable development within the realm of SMMEs.

4. Methodology

The study's overarching objective is to explore and understand the role of tourism as a catalyst for supporting sustainable Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) development. The research commences with a thorough literature review to establish a theoretical foundation and identify gaps in existing knowledge. This step ensures that the study builds on the latest research findings and theoretical frameworks concerning tourism, sustainable development, and SMMEs. References such as Gössling et al. (2020), will inform the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

A case study was selected based on specific criteria, considering geographic diversity, tourism significance, and variations in SMME characteristics. The goal is to capture a comprehensive range of experiences and contexts. The project was supported by the Technology Station: Clothing and Textiles (TSCT) a Technology Transfer and community outreach unit based at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). Such a case study has been selected to analyse its impact towards tourism and buying preferences. The location of the project was in Grabouw, a small town about 65km from Cape Town in the Elgin Valley well known for its apples and pear orchard.

The Grabouw Sewing Project was a collaborative approach between the Technology Station: Clothing and Textiles (TSCT), and Grabouw Beautiful, Crafting Hope and Nordic Designers Aid. The training was focussed on products for tourists to be sold at the Elgin and similar markets in the Overberg region in the Western Cape Province. The expected project outcome was the development of community members and the establishment of a self-sustaining business which could lead to visitors attracted to buying their products. The initial turnout was eleven participants. The participants were trained on the basics of industrial clothing and textiles production. The first product the group was trained on were upmarket/ styled shopper bags. The training packs included technical drawings, patterns and construction details. The facilitator provided an in-depth explanation of the production processes in an industrial environment and explained all the annotations on the patterns as well as the importance of productivity, quality and health and safety. The session aimed to develop the creative and entrepreneurial skills of the members. The group started off as unskilled and primarily resold overrun and unsold clothing from Europe, donated by the Nordic Designers Aid. However, this practice of sending secondhand clothing from Europe into Africa, although good intentioned, has a had a negative impact on the economies of these receiving countries. As noted by Sumo et al (2023:14) although there are diverse views it does indicate “linking the rise of second-hand clothing to the decline of local textile industries in Africa. In addition, “resulting environmental degradation”, “massive amounts of unsellable or unusable textiles ending up in waterways and landfills”.

The TSCT interventions hence aimed at providing skills that would enable the participants to start manufacturing their own products aimed at the tourist market in Grabouw.

The TSCT staff focussed on building team confidence through product-specific training and completing each product within a short period. The success of producing their own products created great excitement and

enthusiasm. The team was then tasked with designing and experimenting during training intervals. Training intervals were a month apart and the sessions yielded wonderful results which were mainly in the form of training and product development.

Grabouw as a village is famous for its apple orchards and related apple processing industry and also being the location of a famous apple soft drink company. Therefore, following on the theme of apples the TSCT made a printing screen depicting and apple design (Figure 1) that could be printed on fabric. The participants were trained to do screen printing (Figure 2) whereby the printed these apple prints onto fabric (figure 3)and used their own initiative to develop various products that could be sold at the local craft market (Figure 4)frequented by visitors and tourist.

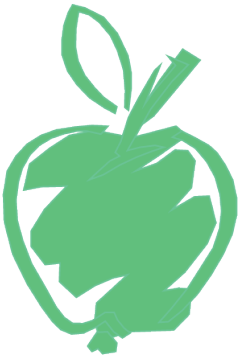

Figure 1: Artwork

Figure 2: Screen Printing training

Figure 3: Printed Fabric

Figure 4: Products at the market stall

The TSCT stipulated certain criteria and outcomes to be achieved in order for the project to be considered successful which were:

- The process had to ensure that the trained group be formalised by registering a cooperative.
- The group have access to a market and sell the products that they produce.
- The group had to take ownership of the cooperative; brainstorm product ideas; and marketing and sales.

So as is evident from the case above, one can deduce the importance of tourism to bring about a transformational development for smaller communities. Not only this but it also provides an opportunity to re-skill or up-skill oneself.

5. Recommendations

As the synergy between tourism and Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) gains recognition for fostering sustainable development, it is essential to outline practical recommendations that policymakers, industry stakeholders, and communities can implement. This section offers a set of recommendations, supported by relevant references, to leverage tourism as a catalyst for supporting sustainable SMME development.

5.1 Promote Access to Funding and Financial Incentives

Access to funding is crucial for the growth of SMMEs in the tourism sector. Policymakers should design financial mechanisms and incentives specifically tailored for SMMEs, facilitating their access to capital. Additionally, collaboration with financial institutions and development agencies can create avenues for targeted funding programs.

5.2 Capacity Building and Skills Development

Enhancing the skills and capabilities of SMME owners and employees is imperative for their long-term success. Training programs, workshops, and mentorship initiatives should focus on business management, customer service, and sustainable practices within the tourism context. The work of Duman et al. (2018) emphasizes the positive correlation between skills development programs and the improved performance of SMMEs in the tourism sector.

5.3 Integrate Sustainable Practices

Embracing sustainable business practices is essential for the long-term viability of SMMEs in tourism. Policymakers should encourage the adoption of environmental certifications and standards, promoting sustainable tourism practices. Hall and Lew (2009) argue that such certifications not only enhance the environmental performance of SMMEs but also contribute to their competitiveness in the global market.

5.4 Facilitate Technological Adoption

The integration of technology can significantly enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of SMMEs in tourism. Policymakers and industry stakeholders should promote the adoption of digital technologies, including online

booking systems, social media marketing, and digital payment solutions. The study by Buhalis and Foerste (2015) highlights the positive impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism businesses.

5.5 Promote Community Engagement and Collaboration

Community involvement is crucial for the sustainable development of tourism-dependent regions. Policymakers should facilitate platforms for collaboration between SMMEs, local communities, and larger tourism enterprises.

5.6 Diversify Tourism Offerings

Policymakers should encourage SMMEs to diversify their tourism offerings, providing unique and authentic experiences to attract a broader range of tourists. This diversification can include cultural events, culinary experiences, and ecotourism activities.

5.7 Implement Inclusive Policies

Inclusive policies are essential to ensure that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably among local communities and SMMEs. Policymakers should design and implement policies that promote inclusivity, considering the needs of marginalized groups and ensuring that the benefits of tourism reach all segments of the population.

5.8 Monitor and Evaluate Impact

Continuous monitoring and evaluation are crucial to assess the impact of tourism on SMMEs and local communities. Policymakers should establish robust monitoring mechanisms to track the economic, social, and environmental performance of SMMEs in the tourism sector. This data-driven approach, as suggested by Blake and Sinclair (2003), enables policymakers to make informed decisions and adjustments to support sustainable development.

Implementing these recommendations requires a collaborative effort from policymakers, industry stakeholders, and local communities. By aligning efforts towards supporting sustainable SMME development through tourism, we can create a resilient and inclusive framework that maximizes the positive impacts of tourism on local economies while preserving cultural and environmental assets. The references provided underscore the empirical evidence supporting these recommendations, emphasizing the potential for transformative change when implemented effectively.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The exploration of tourism as a catalyst for sustainable SMME development is not only an academic pursuit but also holds significant implications for policymakers, industry practitioners, and local communities. As tourism continues to evolve in a globalized world, understanding and harnessing its potential for fostering sustainable development becomes paramount.

The economic impact of tourism on SMMEs, as evidenced by job creation and poverty reduction, calls for targeted policies that facilitate access to funding and financial incentives. Initiatives supporting capacity building and skills development are crucial for enhancing the competitiveness and resilience of SMMEs in the tourism sector. Integrating sustainable practices into business operations should be encouraged through certification programs and awareness campaigns, aligning with the growing demand for responsible and eco-friendly tourism experiences.

The findings from the research can inform policymakers about the need for inclusive policies that consider the interests of diverse stakeholders, ensuring equitable distribution of the benefits of tourism. Moreover, fostering collaborations between SMMEs, local communities, and larger tourism enterprises can lead to innovative solutions that enhance the cultural authenticity of destinations while promoting economic growth.

From a technological standpoint, the study emphasizes the importance of embracing digitalization and information technologies to enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of SMMEs. Policies supporting the adoption of these technologies can position SMMEs for success in the digital era, contributing to their sustainability.

In conclusion, the symbiotic relationship between tourism and sustainable SMME development holds immense potential for fostering inclusive growth, preserving cultural heritage, and safeguarding the environment. As the global community grapples with the challenges of the 21st century, recognizing and harnessing the potential of tourism as a catalyst for small business development becomes essential in creating resilient and prosperous communities worldwide.

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Applying the Jobs-to-be-done Framework to understand Hoteliers' Needs on Accommodation Platforms

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Abstract: When building products, it is important to understand the target audience. User-centric design is the process of building products or services based on the wants, needs and challenges of users. Online accommodation platforms such as online travel agencies (OTAs) and accommodation price comparison platforms have hoteliers as users. Through hoteliers, hotel properties and prices are displayed on their platforms. These online accommodation platforms are important business partners for hoteliers and bring advantages such as increased exposure, higher occupancy rates and lower marketing costs. Understanding the needs of hoteliers is important to online accommodation platforms to inform their Business-to-Consumer (B2C) and Business-to-Business (B2B) products. These insights can help create tailored user experiences and solutions that cater to the distinct needs of independent hotels.

Increasingly, organisations are including UX research in their software design and development process. UX research is the systematic investigation of users and their requirements, to add context and insight into the process of designing the user experience. One framework to understand why people adopt products and services is the Jobs-to-be-done (JTBD) framework. It defines user needs and what they really seek to accomplish as a job in each circumstance.

This study presents the application of the JTBD framework for understanding independent hoteliers needs on accommodation comparison platforms in the context of creating visibility and generating bookings. The framework and its benefits are described, along with a variety of different industry cases where the JTBD framework has successfully been applied.

The focus of this study lays on the research methodology, process, challenges and impact of applying the JTBD framework in the B2B area in the online travel industry. A foundational research project was conducted from January to May 2023 where the research goal consisted of identifying a series of needs and pain points from hoteliers that represent business opportunities while also providing a benefit for travellers. Recruited hoteliers consisted of convenience and random sampling of customers and non-customers. To answer those questions, JTBD qualitative interviews with independent hoteliers were conducted to generate insights for creating a comprehensive JTBD Map. A JTBD Map is a visual depiction to clarify the job users are trying to get done in a specific context, including respective process steps, desired outcomes and pain points.

The JTBD framework helped the product development team, across different job profiles, to have a shared understanding of hoteliers' needs. The framework was applied on both B2C and B2B product development areas. The framework also helped to identify areas where deeper UX Research was needed. Stakeholders were able to assess the different jobs and conclude which ones to focus on.

The results of this study are specifically of value for practitioners and academia in the travel industry and have implications for Product, UX and Research practitioners.

Keywords: UX research, Travel, Hoteliers, Jobs-to-be-Done, User Centricity

1. Introduction

Effective product teams have one thing in common: a consistent focus on the user that allows them to paint a clear picture of the product vision for helping users achieve key outcomes, which are necessary to achieve business goals (Foster and Nerlikar, 2020). Foster and Nerlikar (2020) list a lack of UX Research as one of the top 10 dysfunctions of product management. Too often, research activities take place only on rare occasions. Product teams risk building products that no customer wants or needs (Foster and Nerlikar, 2020).

User needs are the specific requirements and expectations of users that a product or service should fulfill to provide value and enhance their experience. By identifying and addressing user needs, UX designers can create relevant, usable, and possible solutions for the target audience (UXPin, 2023). User needs help define the scope and direction of the product development process, influencing key decisions such as functionality, features, layout, and interaction design.

Pretorius and Penkert (2023) focused on a B2C case study on practice-based insights of methods used to increase the UX research maturity of an online accommodation comparison platform in the travel industry. One of the methods used included the JTBD framework. JTBD is a lens through which customer needs can be effectively

defined and communicated to a wider team. The customer's objective is the JTBD. To systematically uncover the jobs travellers need to get done when planning and going on a trip, Pretorius and Penkert (2023) refer to a diary study with 46 participants in the United States of America and Australia. A diary study is a research method used to understand long-term user behaviour and experiences (Salazar, 2015). Participants were asked to keep a diary and log specific information about activities being studied. Based on the analysis, the JTBD of travellers were derived (Pretorius and Penkert, 2023). The jobs, micro jobs, pain points and desired outcomes resulted in a JTBD map. The resulting JTBD map created a shared terminology, shared understanding and the ability for products team to exchange more efficiently on user's objectives. Additionally, all new staff joining the organisation received training on the JTBD framework to learn the terminology used to address users' needs.

The focus of this study is specific on applying the JTBD framework in a B2B setting, with hoteliers as the target users. The primary research objective discussed in this paper is the application of the JTBD framework: the research methodology, process, challenges and impact of applying JTBD in the B2B area of an online accommodation comparison platform in the travel industry. Online accommodation comparison platforms provide users with the ability to compare accommodation properties and prices, enabling travellers to minimise the cost of accommodation. Hoteliers (B2B users) in turn aim to obtain visibility and bookings. The value-add of this study is practice-based insights on applying the JTBD framework, focusing on the usage and outcomes of the utilised methods.

A theoretical background on the JTBD framework is provided in Section 2. Section 3 explains the research goal and Section 4 the core of our research: the methodology of the study. Finally, Section 5 lays out recommendations and results, concluding in Section 6 with a summary, limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

Jobs-to-be-done (JTBD) is a framework to understand why people adopt products and services and creates a mindset for customer-driven innovation (Kalbach, 2020). A job is defined by Christensen et al. (2016) as "*what an individual really seeks to accomplish in a given circumstance*" (p.6). The job types can be a) functional or b) emotional. Functional jobs define the "what" and can be subdivided into microjobs: specific tasks or steps that people might undertake. Emotional jobs reflect the "why" behind a functional job and addresses how humans want to feel. Additional key concept of the framework are desired outcomes and pain points. Desired outcomes are measures of success in relation to the job to assess how well did the job get done using a specific solution. During the execution of jobs, pain points can occur, which are obstacles or difficulties that get in the way of doing the job, or of meeting the desired outcomes.

Overall, when customers decide on a solution to use, such as buying a product or service, customers essentially hire it to get a job done (Christensen, 2010) successfully (meaning quicker and easier); reduce pain points; and not to interact with an organisation (Ulwick, 2017a). Additionally, jobs are solution-free and stable over time, even as technology changes.

2.1 JTBD Map

A JTBD Map is a visual depiction to clarify the job users are trying to get done in a specific context, with respective process steps, desired outcomes and pain points. Ulwick (2017a) lists several characteristics of an ideal JTBD map: a) It describes what the customer is trying to accomplish, not how they are accomplishing it (or the solution they are using); b) It represents the ideal flow for the job; and c) it is not a customer journey map. It doesn't describe the consumption of an offering: i.e., the purchase process, configuration, upgrading, maintaining, etc.

2.2 Benefits of Introducing JTBD Framework

Defining a JTBD Map helps to define vision and direction, discover opportunities and guide customers' needs gathering (Strategyn, 2022). Its implementation also contributes to increasing the UXR maturity of organisations by creating a shared terminology and understanding about users' needs within organisations (Pretorius and Penkert, 2023).

This framework has been adapted in various industries and their respective users (Pretorius and Penkert, 2023), such as understanding students' learning needs to guide digitization activities (Brenk, 2022), understanding consumer needs along the lifecycle of a TV (Hankammer et al., 2019) or developing circular saws (Ulwick, 2017b).

3. Research goal

The research goals of this study were two-fold:

1. The primary research goal is to illustrate how to apply the JTBD framework in a B2B online accommodation comparison platform: the research methodology, process, challenges and impact of applying JTBD.
2. To discover product opportunities for improvements or modifications to the existing organisational B2B products. The research questions of this section are shared below; however, the results of this section is for internal usage by the organisation and is beyond the scope of this paper.

3.1 Application of JTBD

To illustrate the application of JTBD in the B2B area, a foundational research project was selected as pilot project and serves as case study for this research. The project aimed to create a JTBD map to implement the framework in the B2B side of the product and promoting the experienced benefits beyond B2C product areas, such as a shared understanding of users' needs.

The strength of a case study method is its ability to examine, in-depth, a case within its real-life context (Yin, 2006). The case study method helps to make direct observations and collect data in natural settings, compared to relying on derived data. The case study was applied in January 2023 at an online accommodation comparison platform organisation located in Germany. The B2B product for hoteliers serves a travel meta comparison product available in over 50 languages, serving tenths of millions monthly users.

3.2 Discover Product Opportunities

The organisational goal of this study was to discover product opportunities for improvements or modifications to the existing organisational B2B products, in particular, establishing the needs and pain points of independent hoteliers in the areas of generating bookings and creating visibility for their property. The research questions were compiled and aligned from diverse stakeholders and resulted in the following areas:

1. Creating visibility: What are hoteliers pain points on how to differentiate their property from competitors?
    a. What are the pain points hoteliers have with how their property is featured on the Online Travel Agency (OTA)?
    b. How does a hotel stand out from other hotels on an OTA?
    c. What is the typical content a hotelier has that they are struggling to feature on an OTA?
    d. What are reasons behind deciding for an attribution channel?
2. Generating bookings: How do hoteliers decide on which distribution channels to use?
    a. What are the challenges hoteliers have with metas?
    b. What are the challenges hoteliers face with OTAs?

The JTBD map would help to find answers to the questions above.

4. Methodology

To kickstart the application of the JTBD framework, it was needed to systematically uncover the jobs that hoteliers need to get done. This involved collecting internal previous knowledge, creating an assumption-based JTBD map and conducting qualitative interviews for a focused JTBD map.

4.1 Collecting Internal Knowledge

The initial step was to gather existing internal knowledge about the jobs and needs of hoteliers. Collecting previous knowledge also carried the following risks:

- Existing data: Existing research in the organiztion was from 2015 to 2018, meaning that the data could have been outdated and needed to be updated to reflect the current state.
- Lack of focus on key markets: previous research and insights were derived from a variety of countries and continents.
- Pre-pandemic data: The collected data was pre-pandemic and may not accurately represent the post-pandemic reality.

- Lack of JTBD Focus: The existing data did not specifically focus on the JTBD framework.

To mitigate the risk, new research was conducted (Section 4.4), in a post-pandemic era, focused on new key markets and on JTBD.

4.2 Creating an Assumption-Based JTBD Map

The research team mapped out an assumption-based JTBD map in the online collaboration tool, Mural. It encompassed all job areas from hoteliers to reflect the existing knowledge, ranging from topics such as customer service to guests, house-keeping or monitoring of costs. Due to the challenges highlighted in the previous section, this JTBD map was not reliable, as it was based on outdated data and had missing information, specially regarding desired outcomes and pain points.

However, this step was highly relevant to visualise the possible width of the research project with involved stakeholders and define the focus for continuation of the project. This step helped clarify the direction and objectives of the study, focusing on generating bookings and creating visibility. It ensured alignment and involvement from stakeholders and creating actionable insights.

4.3 Understanding Hoteliers' Context and Existing B2B Product

The researchers of the project focused on product walk-throughs, exchanges with the respective product teams and desk research in order to gain a deeper understanding of the existing B2B products of the organisation and terminology used by hoteliers. Additionally, two members of the team attended the world's biggest tourism fair, the Internationale Tourismus-Börse (ITB) Berlin, to observe first-hand which products and challenges competitors and the visitors were targeting. The outcome was an increased knowledge of the domain-specific terminology used and an overview of capabilities and limitations of the organisation's own products.

4.4 Creating a Research-Based JTBD Map

This research phase aimed to gather insights directly from the target user group to overcome the limitations (Section 4.1 and 4.2) and further evolve the assumption-based JTBD map.

5. Methodology Selection: JTBD interviews

Qualitative research was selected to enable researchers to focus on the experiences and perspectives of the users, exploring the "how" and "why" of behaviours and decisions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Within the range of qualitative research, JTBD interviews were selected as the method. JTBD interviews involve engaging with participants to explore the circumstances and motivations behind their product or service choices. This method is valuable for uncovering the underlying factors that influence consumer behaviour, as it delves beyond demographic information and focuses on the functional, emotional, and social dimensions of decision-making.

The interviews were conducted remotely via the research platform UserZoom and lasted approximately one hour, following a structured JTBD interview script (Section 5.2) and were conducted by three researchers. The script helped ensure that the data collected would be relevant to the research objectives and the JTBD framework. JTBD interviews were conducted in English to streamline the research process and minimise the need for translation.

Once this is defined, follow-up questions can help understanding subsequent job stages (Boysen, 2018):

- [LOCATE] "What steps do you take to locate and gather the needed inputs?"
- [PREPARE] "What steps do you take to prepare or organize those inputs?"
- [CONFIRM] "What steps do you take to confirm you are ready to execute the job?"
- [EXECUTE] "What steps do you take to execute the core functional job?"
- [MONITOR] "What steps do you take to monitor or verify the execution step is executed effectively?"; "What do you track as you perform the job?"
- [MODIFY] "What steps do you take to make modifications to the execution when something goes wrong?"
- [CONCLUDE] "What steps do you take to properly complete the job, or prepare for the next job cycle?"

Section 5.2 elaborates on the interview questions that can be used for replication of future studies. For note-taking the research team involved several stakeholders for efficiency, engagement on the topic and knowledge

transfer. Additionally, observers and notetakers, mostly experts in the B2B product area, could write questions to the moderator. These were asked at the end of the interviews to the participants to ensure the needs of the stakeholders were met.

5.1 Sample

The target user of this research project consisted of hotel owners, sales managers and marketing managers of independent hotels (no chains) with a minimum of 10 or more rooms, from central Europe. Product intercept surveys, email, panels and phone calls were used for recruitment (see Section 5.1.), leading to both convenience and random sampling. The final sample of the research project consisted of 12 participants from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Spain, and Greece; three of them existing users of the organisations B2B products and nine non-customers, representing a diverse sample of the European tourism industry.

5.2 Analysis

Following the interviews, the research team analysed the collected data by clustering notes from individual interviews around specific themes related to the jobs hoteliers needed to perform. Subsequently, a JTBD map was produced, highlighting the tasks that hoteliers experience pain points with existing solutions in the market. Additionally, several presentations were done to share the findings to stakeholders and the wider organisation.

6. Recommendations and Results

The following section provides recommendations based on the application of the JTBD framework. A decision tree for participant recruitment (Section 5.1.) and guidelines for applying JTBD interviews within the hotelier sector (Section 5.2.) were developed. The impact of the resulting JTBD map is described in Section 5.3.

6.1 Participant Recruiting

In B2B research, the recruitment of participants is challenging (Kuhn, 2023). Through the project, the research team continuously learned about the response rate and success of each method through trial and error. Table 1 provides decision tree recommendations when choosing participant recruitment methods. The decision tree is based on three criteria: sample size, screening criteria and time scale. The recommended methods as summarised in Table 1 can be described as follow:

- **Intercept survey on the product platform.** An intercept survey is a research method used to gather on-site feedback from an audience (Research and Marketing Strategies, 2021). In analogue context, they are often used at events, restaurants, conferences, and in shopping malls. In the digital context and in this specific use case, an intercept survey was launched to users of a B2B product through the survey tool *Hotjar* which collected on a voluntary basis the e-mail address of interested users.
- **Participant recruitment providers** with broad participant panels. In this use case, our options were *Userzoom* and *Testingtime* as two successful leaders in the European and American markets.
- **Mass emails** to target user in accordance to their legal consent through organisational newsletter address. E-mails were sent to hoteliers who fit the screening criteria.
- **Personal and individual requests** (e-mail or phone) via existing contacts from account managers. Account management refers to a structured approach to managing and growing relationship with customers to achieve mutually beneficial goals (Schultz, 2023).

Table 1: Decision tree to select the most suitable participant recruitment method

Methods	Sample size	Screening criteria	Time scale
Intercept survey	small (N < 15)	loose (< 3 criteria)	long (30+ days)
Participant recruitment panels	small	loose	short (< 30 days)
E-Mail recruitment	large (N > 15)	strict (> 3 criteria)	short
Account Management	small	strict	short

In addition to the relevant criteria to determine adequate recruiting method, the research team experimented with different amounts of compensation for participants to increase participants' motivation and response rate. For each method of recruitment, the initial message to possible interviewees and consequent communication,

as well as storage and use of the obtained information, was aligned with the legal department and terms and conditions always accessible in full to participants.

6.2 Interview script

As preparation for the JTBD interviews, the researchers focused on applying the theoretical framework and guidelines from Boysen (2018) and Ulwick (2017a), into specific research goals and interview questions.

In the use case of this interview the *jobs* were to "generate bookings" and "create visibility" (asked separately to the participants). Table 2 contains the interview questions derived for this study based on the theoretical framework. Additional questions suggested by Boysen (2018) were asked as follow-up questions when needed.

Table 2: Interview questions and research goals

Interview questions	Research goal guidelines
Please introduce yourself shortly: Which is your role? What are your main tasks in this role?	Understanding participants role
Tell us a about the accommodation you are working for: Location and name? Which type of trip is your typical guest taking? How many rooms does it have? How do you represent the accommodation online?	Understanding context: participants accommodation
To understand your task better, we want to first focus on your task of "generating bookings". Is this a relevant task for you? Why or why not? What are you trying to accomplish (for the accommodation/hotel) when generating bookings? What are your goals and objectives? What problems are you trying to prevent or resolve?	Exploring job of generating bookings
What are the most central tasks that must be accomplished when generating bookings? What needs to be happen before generating bookings can be successfully carried out? Do you need any inputs or resources to ensure success in generating bookings? Which role plays content, such as images or texts? (pain points on content)	Understanding subsequent job stages of generating bookings
Think of a time when **generating bookings** didn't turn out as planned? Why do you think that was? What was different about this time than other times? Did you do something differently? Did you do it prior to entering the context (out for a run)? Did something around you have an impact? Have you changed the solution/method you use? How and why did that help?	Understanding pain points and desired outcomes of generating bookings
What products and services do you currently use to generate bookings? You mentioned different approaches to generate bookings: When do you select one solution over another?	Understanding existing solutions in the market and respective pain points
Based on the previous question, a set of solutions and products were identified to generate bookings. For each mention, the following questions were asked: What are you trying to accomplish by using each product/service? What goals or objectives does each product/service help you to accomplish? What problems does each product/service help you to prevent or resolve?	Understanding existing solutions in the market and respective pain points
To understand your task better, we want to first focus on your task of "creating visibility ". Is this a relevant task for you? Why or why not? What are you trying to accomplish (for the accommodation/hotel) when generating bookings? What are your goals and objectives? What problems are you trying to prevent or resolve?	Exploring job of create visibility
What are the most central tasks that must be accomplished when generating bookings? What needs to be happen before generating bookings can be successfully carried out? Do you need any inputs or resources to ensure success in generating bookings? Which role plays content, such as images or texts? (pain points on content)	Understanding subsequent job stages of creating visibility
Think of a time when creating visibility didn't turn out as planned? Why do you think that was? What was different about this time than other times? Did you do something differently? Did you do it prior to entering the context (out for a run)? Did something around you have an impact? Have you changed the solution/method you use? How and why did that help?	Understanding pain points and desired outcomes of creating visibility
What products and services do you currently use to create visibility? You mentioned different approaches to create visibility: When do you select one solution over another?	Understanding existing solutions in the market

Interview questions	Research goal guidelines
	and respective pain points
Based on previous question, a set of solutions and products were identified to create visibility. For each mention, the following questions were asked: What are you trying to accomplish by using each product/service? What goals or objectives does each product/service help you to accomplish? What problems does each product/service help you to prevent or resolve?	Understanding existing solutions in the market and respective pain points

6.3 Impact of JTBD Map for Product Development

In the context of this research, 28 jobs were identified and sorted according to the stages of the respective guest journey. The JTBD map was visualised using the online whiteboard tool Mural, where jobs along with respective pain points and desired outcomes were colour coded. Figure 1 provides an illustrative example of the job "monitor customer feedback".

Figure 1: Simplified example of the job "monitor customer feedback", with respective micro-jobs (blue), desired outcomes (yellow) and pain points (red).

The JTBD map assisted stakeholders to assess the different jobs and align on which ones to prioritise for upcoming product objectives. Additionally, the framework helped to identify areas where further UX Research was needed. The study also met short-term objectives of answering the specific research questions asked by stakeholders, helping the product team to guide their current initiatives.

In a short interview with involved with the relevant product leads, they described the success and impact:

- *"The JTBD map helped us understand the main challenges that hoteliers are facing and potential B2B product opportunities. We were able to validate assumptions we had and ensure that we did not have any blindspots when scoping out future product offerings."*
- *"We are still using the JTBD and it is a pivotal part of our 2024 strategic product planning."*

7. Summary

The primary goal of this research was to illustrate how to apply the JTBD framework in an online accommodation comparison platform, with the focus on B2B. The research methodology can be summarised as follow:

- Collect internal knowledge;
- Create an assumption-based JTBD map;
- Understanding the hoteliers' context and the relevant product: product walk-throughs, exchanges with the teams owning the product and desk research;
- Create a research-based JTBD map: JTBD interviews.

The results can be utilized to increase success and efficiency in future research projects in the industry. The interview script in Section 5.2 can be utilized to uncover additional JTBD from hoteliers or other target groups within the travel industry by exchanging the respective job in the questions.

The following research goals were created and can be considered as a guideline when creating JTBD interviews:

1. Understanding participants role: to which extend are participants involved in the job?
2. Understanding the context: what external factors influence the job?
3. Exploring the job: focusing on goals and objectives

4. Understanding subsequent job stages
5. Understanding pain points and desired outcomes
6. Understanding existing solutions in the market and respective pain points

Additionally, the decision tree for participant recruiting reflects the learnings on efficient recruitment in the hotelier industry, enabling researchers to find relevant participants who can provide valuable insights into their jobs and needs. A combination of product intercept surveys, email, panels and phone calls can be used for recruitment.

The resulting JTBD Map created a shared terminology, shared understanding and the ability for products team to exchange more efficiently on user's objectives. The key benefit of the map is its longevity and longer-term impact as the B2B product team can use and reference the JTBD Map for years to come when mapping new features to user needs.

The following challenges and limitations were identified:

- The case study being conducted in a single travel organisation was a limitation of the study;
- When recruiting from an existing customer base, participants can show biases in the interviews toward being positive with the organisation to maintain a positive relationship. A key take-away was to broaden the research to both users and non-users of the product, resulting in new product opportunities being identified.

Future research is needed to replicate results in different travel organisations to increase generalisability. Additional methods to build and maintain a JTBD map for hoteliers is also a candidate for future research.

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Voluntourism in the Context of Community-Based Tourism, and Regenerative Tourism: A Theoretical Exploration Focusing on Responsibility

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Abstract: The paper examines the theoretical interconnection between the concepts of voluntourism, community-based tourism, and regenerative tourism. Voluntourism, widely criticized for its implementations unethical towards local environment and community, is re-evaluated in the light of community-based and regenerative tourism principles including unequal power dynamics and questionable long-term benefits to host communities.

This paper claims that re-imagining voluntourism within the framework of regenerative tourism offers a new perspective. Regenerative tourism, characterized by its commitment to restoring, revitalizing, and enhancing the wellbeing of both natural environments and local communities, can serve as a guiding principle for voluntourism programs. Community-based tourism is integral to this theoretical exploration, as it emphasizes local participation, cultural and natural preservation, and economic empowerment. When voluntourism aligns with community-based tourism principles, it shifts its focus from short-term, self-serving actions to responsible community-driven initiatives. By channelling the motivation and resources of volunteers towards community-led regenerative initiatives, voluntourism can contribute to positive, lasting impacts. Ethical reflection is done within the actors only.

This paper is theoretical; however, its purpose is in the pragmatism of tourism concept development. It concludes to enhance the understanding of voluntourism's potential to transition from a problematic form of tourism to an ethical and responsible force for change. By reconciling voluntourism with the principles of regenerative tourism and community-based tourism, this paper aims to provide a theoretical foundation for the development of more responsible and sustainable tourism practices. In doing so, it strives to contribute to the theoretical knowledge surrounding alternative and socially sustainable tourism concepts.

Keywords: Voluntourism, Regenerative Tourism, Community-Based Tourism, Responsible Tourism, Ethical Tourism Concepts

1. Introduction

Voluntourism (VT), community-based tourism (CBT), and regenerative tourism (RT) are widely used approaches within the broader field of tourism. The paper examines the theoretical interconnection between them, placing voluntourism in the centre. It seeks to enhance the understanding of voluntourism's potential to transition from a problematic form of tourism to an ethical and responsible force for change. This paper is a continuation of our previous research on voluntourism (Röntynen & Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2022; Röntynen, 2022; Tunkkari-Eskelinen & Röntynen, 2023) as we noticed the need of expanding and concretizing the theoretical framework of voluntourism. As a theoretical paper, its purpose is in the pragmatism of tourism concept development. By reconciling voluntourism with the principles of regenerative tourism and community-based tourism, it aims to provide a theoretical foundation for the development of more responsible and sustainable tourism practices.

2. Research Methods

Given the research objectives, we present literature review to develop the theoretical framework. We conducted a comprehensive search of academic databases, journals, books, but also non-academic sources, as large share of voluntourism is practically oriented and detached from academic field, and regenerative tourism is a newly emerging tourism concept. We used both databases accessible through our university and freely available online. In this search, we used relevant keywords, some of them representing synonyms, such as "voluntourism," “volunteer tourism,” "community-based tourism," "regenerative tourism," and related terms, such as “saviorism,” “white saviorism,” “neocolonialism,” “transformative tourism,” “responsible tourism,” “sustainable tourism”, in different combinations. We started with an attempt to find clear definitions of the three main paradigms discussed in the paper, incorporating different perspectives. We refined the search according to the initial findings and conducted several iterations to include more specific aspects. We created a snowball effect by investigating the reference lists of sources already identified. Further, we systematized the collected sources according to their topic and content. This provided us with the opportunity to note both consensus aspects and existing gaps in the literature. We took the key components, identifying essential

characteristics that define the concept. We explored how the concept relates to other concepts and to each other using Strauss & Corbin's (1991) grounded theory analysis frame. We also considered the historical context and development of the concepts into practice in the latest publications. We noted critique, debates, and controversies surrounding the concepts. Literature analysis required several iterative phases of revisiting and refining the findings and scope of the research, as it is typical for grounded theory approach (see Strauss & Corbin, 1991).

3. Three Tourism Concepts: Literature Review

3.1 Voluntourism

Voluntourism is a phenomenon within the tourism industry which has evolved over a long period of time but has been systematically studied only in the last two decades, starting with Wearing's book "Volunteer tourism: Experiences that make a difference" (2001). Consensus on the definition of VT does not exist. It is important to note that some popular literature authors attempt to justify a difference between voluntourism and volunteer tourism (Röntynen & Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2022, 361), but in the academic literature the terms are used as synonyms (e.g., Wearing & McGehee, 2013). The most significant definitions originating from academic research are listed in Table 1, which indicates that the perception of VT is becoming more inclusive as these definitions complement each other. According to Wearing (2001), voluntourism has suffered from not being separated from other forms of tourism or volunteering, but belonging to, i.a., alternative tourism, international volunteering, and social work. Most research, including the pioneering work of Wearing stems from sociological premises but we endeavour a wider, socio-economical perspective without forgetting that tourism as an industry naturally aims at economic results.

The main stakeholders of voluntourism, are the volunteering travellers, the intermediary organizations organizing the trip, and the local community at the destination (Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Bentele, 2023). The most researched aspects of VT seem to be the traveller's motives (Brown, 2005; Siebert & Benson, 2009; Tomazos & Butler, 2010; Mustonen, 2005; Proyrungroj, 2020), forming volunteering-oriented and vacation-oriented travellers (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Brown, 2005), and transformative effects of VT on travellers (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Bentele, 2023). Some authors insist on weighing some motives as more positive as beneficial than others (Callanan & Thomas, 2005), but from economic perspective it is much more important what is the actual impact, not the initial motivation of the tourists involved (Röntynen & Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2022, 367). Although VT is inevitably related to local community (e.g., Wearing & Grabowski, 2011; Bentele, 2023), its regenerative potential for the host community and the destination is underexplored (Wearing & McGehee, 2013; McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Hernandez-Maskivker, Lapointe & Aquino, 2018). The vital role of intermediary organizations, either non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-for-profit organizations (NPOs), or tour operators and commercial entities (Pompurová & Marčeková, 2017) for the successful management of VT has only recently been realized (Wearing & McGehee, 2013; McGehee & Andereck, 2008; Bentele, 2023; Pompurová et al., 2020; Hernandez-Maskivker, Lapointe & Aquino, 2018). Online platforms have most recently diversified the spectrum of intermediaries (Röntynen & Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2022), introducing less coordinated activity based on direct communication between hosts and travellers. Wearing and McGehee (2013) also identify the potential of social media as a facilitator of unpackaged VT experiences.

Although VT is widely considered sustainable (Bentele, 2023; Röntynen & Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2022; Pompurová et al., 2018), it is related both to benefits and shortcomings. Its positive impact is characterized by transforming traveller's attitudes and behaviour (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Bentele 2023; Brown, 2005), spreading awareness of some communities' problems (Bentele, 2023), cultural exchange and new ideas and models (Hernandez-Maskivker, Lapointe & Aquino, 2018), economic benefits for the locals and the destination (Pompurová, Sokolová & Cole, 2020), but at the same time it is criticized for its unethical practices involving orphanage tourism (Birrell, 2010; Van Doore & Nhep, 2023), unequal power dynamics (McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Mohamub, 2013) including saviorism (Bentele, 2023; Baumgarten, 2022), neocolonialism (e.g., Guttentag, 2009; Palacios, 2010), commodification of community's needs and culture (Wearing & McGehee, 2013; (Wearing, Young & Everingham, 2017), reinforcing stereotypes (Mostafanezhad, 2013; Guttentag, 2009; Gharib, 2017), as well as extensive carbon footprint (El Geneidy & Baumeister, 2019), short unimpactful visits (Anderson, Kim & Larios, 2017), low-skilled volunteers (Guttentag, 2009), weakly communicated responsibility benefits (Smith & Font, 2014). As a result of the criticism (Hernandez-Maskivker, Lapointe, & Aquino, 2018), but also because of the multidisciplinary character of VT (McGehee, 2002), many practitioners refrain from associating themselves

with VT, although their activity can be described as such (Röntynen & Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2022), which only adds up to the misunderstanding and the poor coordination.

Table 1: Definitions of voluntourism in academic literature

Author	Definition	Perspective
Wearing (2001,1)	"those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment"	• international voluntourism • development aid • tourists and local community as stakeholders • focus of the trip is volunteering
Brown (2005, 480)	"type of tourism experience where a tour operator offers travellers an opportunity to participate in an optional excursion that has a volunteer component, as well as a cultural exchange with local people"	• tour operator • intermediary organization and tourists as stakeholders • focus of the trip is tourism
McGehee & Santos (2005)	volunteer tourist uses "discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need"	• voluntourist • helping others • volunteer and locals as stakeholders • focus of the trip is volunteering
Wearing, Young & Everingham (2017)	"reframe volunteer tourism away from development aid" "to look at the concept of 'making a difference' not through the lens of 'helping', but through a lens of intercultural understanding and mutuality"	• international voluntourism • purpose of voluntourism
Pompurová, Sokolová & Cole (2020,3)	"a voluntourist as an individual who, in free time, meets the specific need of traveling in order to gain a comprehensive experience, and engages voluntarily, without a claim and reward, in various voluntary activities while staying at a destination (outside usual residence)"	• both domestic and international voluntourism • volunteers as stakeholders • focus both on volunteering and tourism as a "complete experience"
Röntynen & Tunkkari-Eskelinen (2022, 367)	"voluntourism is a combination of two sets of values – tourism and volunteerism in coexistence"	• both domestic and international voluntourism • focus both on volunteering and tourism as a socio-economic phenomenon

Wearing, Young, and Everingham (2017) call for a refocusing of VT from development aid towards cultural exchange. Some authors suggest that we might as well need to forget about the tourism aspect and focus on charity to create genuinely positive impact (Anderson, Kim & Larios 2017). In our previous research, we have identified that more examples from VT in developed countries can contribute to its ethics and improve its reputation (Röntynen & Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2022; Röntynen, 2022). However, this paper concentrates on the possibility of theoretical exploration and transformation of voluntourism by establishing links to other concepts. As Wearing & McGehee (2013, 127) state, "theory will be especially valuable in […] the opportunity for volunteer tourism to create a new paradigm in tourism that places the community at the centre".

3.2 Community-Based Tourism

A plethora of definitions of community-based tourism exists (Dangi & Jamal, 2016, 9), emphasizing different aspects of it and not completely agreeing on its scope and focus (Zielinski et al., 2020; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2018). To summarize, CBT is bottom-up approach that places an emphasis on involving and benefiting local communities in tourism activities, seeking to empower local residents and communities by allowing them to take an active role in tourism development and management. Academic world has not yet reached a consensus on the following matters:

- the scope of locals' involvement in tourism: involvement vs. participation vs. facilitation; ownership vs. management

Is participation in decision-making giving enough benefit to the community or is it just tokenism? Should the tourism be in total control of residents in order to empower them, while external actors and intermediaries take the role of bare facilitators? (Blackstock 2005; Lee & Joo, 2023.)

- the ownership and goals: locally privately-owned vs. community-owned vs. local employment

Should tourism business be owned jointly by the community for it to be community-based or is it enough that its private owner's origin from local community, or alternatively local residents are among the employed (Zielinski et. al, 2020; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012)?

- shared goals vs. shared benefits

Should the tourism-related goals be shared by the community or is it enough that single actor's goals benefit the whole community and lead to its empowerment (Zielinski et. al, 2020)?

Recent literature has seen efforts to formulate frameworks and scales measuring the sustainability of CBT (e.g., Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Wolters, 2021; Naranjo Llupart, 2022), but mostly this tourism approach is seen as sustainable (e.g., Ngo & Creutz, 2022) economically – creating jobs and minimizing economic leakages, socio-

culturally – prioritizing the wellbeing of the community, preserving its cultural heritage, empowering it to take future in its own hands, as well as environmentally – upholding local natural resources of high value for the locals according to the destination's carrying capacity (Mtapuri, Camilleri & Dłużewska, 2021). These sustainability dimensions manifest themselves on a local level (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). Empowerment as a key element of CBT occurs economically (jobs and income), psychologically (community pride and self-esteem), socially (cohesion and wellbeing), and politically (reduction of power and domination relationships in society) (Scheyvens, 1999). CBT relates to other tourism concepts, e.g., ecotourism, fair trade tourism, heritage tourism (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). Pro-poor tourism on the other hand is seen as undesirable direction, affirming neoliberalist, capitalist, and colonialist structures (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012; Blackstock, 2005).

The primary stakeholders of CBT are the community, tourists, public governmental organizations, and intermediaries. Community is at the centre of this tourism effort but usually is wrongly seen as a homogenous group (Zielinski et al., 2020; Blackstock, 2005). Communities usually engaged in CBT are vulnerable, underprivileged, and prone to marginalization, either coming from developing countries and indigenous peoples, or living in peripheral areas and rural regions (Zielinski et al., 2020; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012). They are not self-sufficient and require external funding and additional expertise (Lee & Joo, 2023) to become equal and competitive (Mtapuri, Camilleri & Dłużewska, 2021) in the contexts of tourism. Public agencies oversee tourism-related policies and provide funding; thus they are crucial to the existence and success of CBT (Zielinski et al., 2020; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012). Intermediaries, usually non-governmental organizations (NGOs), complement the funding spectrum and facilitate the development process for resource mobilization and capacity building (Lee & Joo, 2023). Diligence should be exercised in cases when the intermediary possesses crucial resources, setting it in a power position (Lee & Joo, 2023; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012). The tourist as a stakeholder of CBT is rarely discussed. Liang (2022) highlights the active, cocreator role of the visitor before, during, and after the CBT trip, providing meaningfulness and leading to transformative effects and satisfaction both with tourism experience and own life. Tourists in CBT could be both affluent and price-sensitive (Mtapuri, Camilleri & Dłużewska, 2021), which is similar to voluntourism (e.g., Röntynen, 2022). Notably, private sector actors are rare stakeholders of CBT initiatives (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009) – on the one hand, for the risk of shifting resources and benefits away from the community, but on the other hand, resulting at market inadequacy.

Tourists are increasingly attracted to CBT due to the desire for closer relationships with locals and authentic experiences (Mtapuri, Camilleri & Dłużewska, 2021; Zielinski et al., 2020), similar to some motives of voluntourists. Some opt for rural CBT for the pieceful and idyllic characteristics of the countryside as a contraty to hectic urban life, while others seek indigenous and traditional communities to learn new and meet new cultures (Zielinski et al., 2020). Liang (2022) distincts recreational and learning motivations.

CBT's shortcomings include the ephemerality and project character of development assistance (Zielinski et. al, 2020; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009), the lack of tourism expertise of some governments and NGOs, the risk of culture clash between original and newly introduced principles and activities (Zielinski et. al, 2020), negative host-visitor relations (Chatkaewnapanon & Lee, 2022) detachment of the CBT initiatives from relevant markets (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

3.3 Regenerative Tourism

Regenerative tourism is an approach that emerged partially as a continuum of other regenerative development concepts (Bellato, Frantzeskaki & Nygaard, 2022; Owen 2007) and partially as an effort to rethink tourism in post-covid-19 times (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Ateljevic, 2020). Like VT and CBT, it is opposed to neoliberal values (Pollock 2019).

It can be argued that RT cannot be universally defined as it is pluriversal in nature: it accounts for the real-world cultural context and is not based on abstractions and reductions (Bellato, Frantzeskaki & Nygaard, 2022). Recently, however, a working definition has been produced, containing the most significant components of RT:

"Regenerative tourism is a transformational approach that aims to fulfil the potential of tourism places to flourish and create net positive effects through increasing the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems. Derived from the ecological worldview, it weaves Indigenous and Western science perspectives and knowledges. Tourism systems are regarded as inseparable from nature and obligated to respect Earth's principles and laws. In addition, regenerative tourism approaches evolve and vary across places over the long term, thereby harmonising practices with the regeneration of nested living systems." (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2022, 9.)

RT goes beyond sustainability – not only minimizing negative but also creating positive impacts, providing not only sustainability but hope (Pollock 2019). The impacts are concrete and local, focusing on the destination (Bellato, Frantzeskaki & Nygaard, 2022). Intention is flourishing and thriving, and not just growth and profit (Pollock 2019; Cave & Dredge, 2020). This challenges the current economic system and urges the coexistence of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and non-capitalist practices, producing cocreated and shared non-monetary value of tourism (in addition to the monetary) and building resilience (Cave & Dredge 2020). Moreover, in RT the worldview is challenged: world is not considered anymore as a machine to be manipulated but as a "living system with consciousness and intelligence" (Pollock, 2019, 5).

RT involves asset management, "making the best use of an organization's assets in order to maximize shareholder value and to provide the best possible return to other stakeholders", otherwise tourism industry is selling cultural and natural assets "off at discount prices" (Pollock, 2019, 3).

Stakeholders of RT have not been explicitly named and described in the literature, as the idea of RT is in inclusion and wide accountability. The primary concern of RT is the destination, its community, culture, and nature, subject to regenerative practices. The other side of tourism, or who and how actually advances regeneration, is only indirectly discussed. From case and other empirical studies (e.g., Cave & Dredge, 2020; Inversini et al., 2023; Duxbury et al., 2021) it can be concluded that further stakeholders include traditional tourism businesses (hotels, activities), NGOs (non-profit activity), governing agencies (imposing regulations affecting tourism), technologies (e.g., platforms), and also the tourists. Tourists' role ranges from spreading awareness through charity and idea exchange to volunteering at the destination. Hussain (2023) argues that only 1% would consciously choose regenerative tourism experiences but it depends on policymakers to motivate and engage the rest 99% for a collective positive impact.

In present RT literature there is more hope than criticism, however some aspects should be handled with caution. Due to its recent development, regenerative tourism needs more context for better understanding and easier practical application (CBI, 2022) to fulfil its promise and "move beyond simply advocating" (Cave & Dredge, 2020, 2). It is not yet clear, where exactly its transformative potential lies (Bellato, Frantzeskaki & Nygaard, 2022). Another shortcoming is that RT as scientific development and practice still largely relies on Western and English-language sources. Indigenous and traditional knowledge should be included in RT's development (Bellato, Frantzeskaki & Nygaard, 2022), since regenerative mindset is "an ancient and traditional way of living" (Hussain, 2023, 2), and the existing alternative economic practices of the Global South should be recognized and utilized (Cave & Dredge, 2020).

4. The Interrelation between Voluntourism, Community-Based Tourism, and Regenerative Tourism

Evidently, all three examined tourism concepts aim at providing alternatives of power, hierarchy, and dependency as features typical for neoliberal structures. None of them, however, provides tourism with panacea, and each comes with its own criticism. We claim that not only voluntourism can be re-imagined as responsible in the context of CBT and RT, but all three approaches complement each other's focus in contributing to tourism's responsibility and overcome its shortcomings with each other's help.

Voluntourism's overly commodification and detachment from genuine needs, as well as its neocolonial practices exploiting the community in the destination, can be overcome by placing its control in the hands of locals who know best how their own needs should approached and whose significant resources are utilized in the process. However, their lack of tourism expertise and networking, as well as the funding shortage can draw them in a vicious cycle of projectifying the tourism efforts into short-term initiatives leaking the economic benefits elsewhere. Thus, regenerative approach is needed to focus the efforts on the destination and push them towards long-term impact. RT with its holistic, hopeful mindset is an attractive approach but the tools for its implementation are yet to be developed. The existing case studies describe some indications of regenerative mindset in the community or on the supply side but, in order to involve visitors and achieve impact, regenerative tourism should offer hands-on transformative experiences, utilizing voluntourism practices. If this interrelation between the studied tourism approaches (presented in Figure 1) gets utilized, this will result in stronger focus on responsibility of all tourism stakeholders.

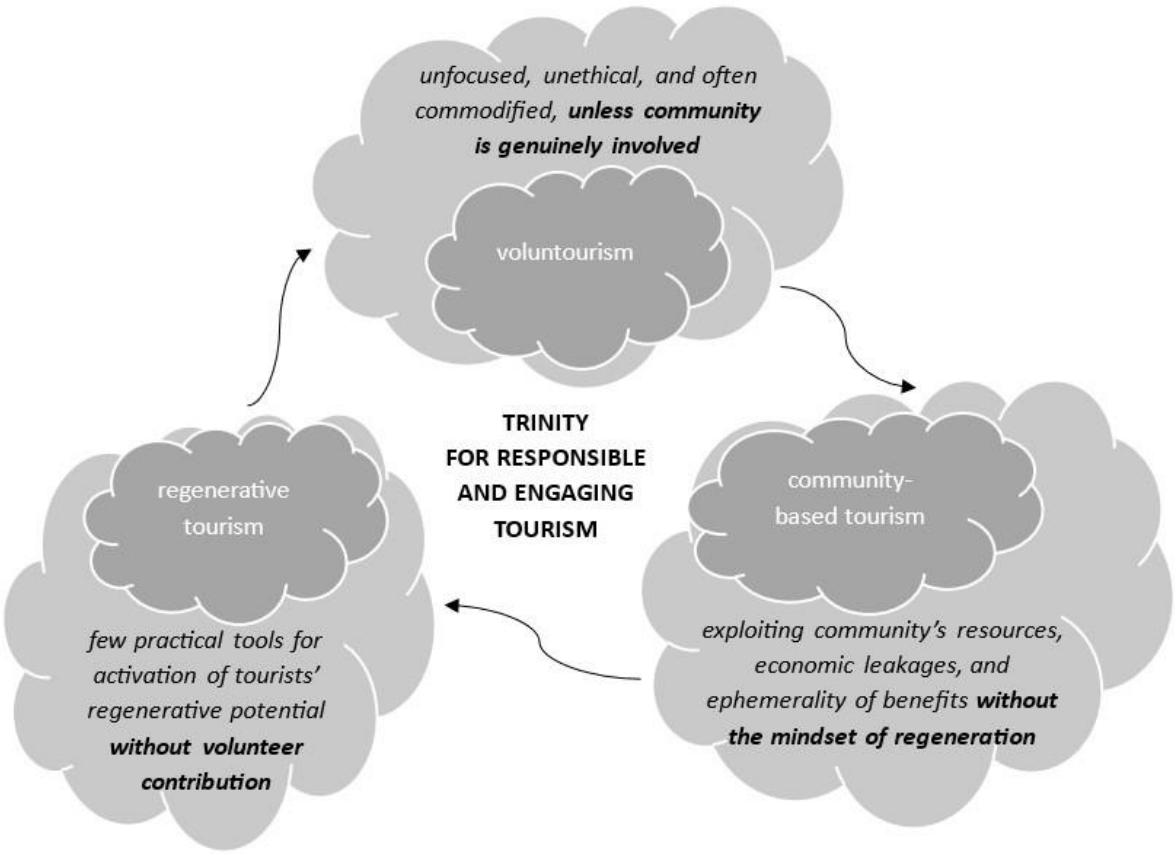

Figure 1: The trinity of voluntourism, CBT, and regenerative tourism for responsible and engaging tourism (figure by the authors)

Moreover, for each stakeholder to be accounted for its responsibility in the process, first the spectrum of stakeholders should be mapped thoroughly. Our literature review synthesized some of the core features of stakeholders in VT, CBT, and RT from direct, but more often indirect indications of their roles and functions. Comparing the characteristics of the three concepts, there is much in common, but also much that could be loaned from each other to broaden the understanding about each paradigm.

5. Discussion, conclusions, and further directions

This theoretical exploration was provoked by the need for re-imagining voluntourism to give it an opportunity to take more responsible and ethical dimensions. The discovered interrelations between VT, CBT, and RT go far beyond expectations. However, voluntourism retains its central role in the trinity because it provides concrete tools for the functioning of new-age participative, decolonized, responsible tourism. The most familiar challenge has been the ethics within voluntourism, and this can be tackled – at least theoretically evidenced and shown in this paper.

Community together with its residence is the key in each of the concepts. In CBT, the ethicality is in the hands of locals – whether they represent a local authority or are active residents interested in tourism development. Regenerative tourism is the mostly recognized with its ethical purposes, and this also helps voluntourism implementation to consider ethics more concretely. The focus on either volunteering work or tourism in VT is a relevant indicator of the visitors' motives for community impact, but this impact should be achieved by directing volunteers' input in the right direction by other stakeholders. Additionally, CBT is considered ethically sustainable, but the criteria remain unclear.

This study's limitation could be found in its theoretical nature. Empirical studies, observation of cases, and developmental experiments should be undertaken to broaden the trinity framework and enrich the understanding of these tourism approaches. Voluntourism was in the centre of the current exploration, and we have demonstrated its relation to CBT and regenerative tourism. However, regenerative tourism includes a wide

variety of stakeholders. Community-based and volunteer tourism address the involvement of tourism's demand (tourists) and supply (hosts) in regeneration but only grasp the existence of intermediaries and influencers of many kinds. These additional stakeholders and the tools for realizing their regenerative potential should also be studied.

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Host Scaling and Revenue Management: Is There a Link?

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Abstract: This study explores how a revenue management capability can be created by Airbnb hosts and the role played by their degree of professionalization, defined as the number of listings (apartments) the hosts manage.

Considering the explorative nature of this research, a qualitative approach based on interviews has been adopted. The sample includes 55 interviews realized in the Milan destination (Italy). A protocol was created using the four theoretical blocks. These latter identify the main processes of revenue management: i) identifying the required information to establish the revenue management strategy, ii) making strategic and then tactical pricing and revenue management decisions, iii) managing communication with the guests, and iv) making available software dedicated to revenue management. Milan was selected for two reasons: first, is the second leading Italian destination after Rome in terms of overnights. Second, Milan attracts different targets, such as business, leisure, and trade fairs. Therefore, there are continuous changes in off- and on-pick revenue constituting an ideal setting for exploring the creation of a revenue management capability.

Three groups of hosts were identified: i) single hosts, ii) hosts managing three to five listings, iii) hosts managing more than 10 listings. Results show strong differences between single hosts and those managing 10 or more listings, explaining why professional hosts are able to extract more value from their listings compared to single hosts.

Two theoretical contributions are proposed. First, the research adds to the knowledge about how a revenue management capability (RMC) is created in the context of short-term rentals (STR). The crucial role of professionalization is confirmed, and a complex set of relationships emerge between tangible (such as the presence/absence of a RM software and dedicated staff) and cultural (such as the orientation towards price discrimination and to revenue or price maximization, as well as the approach to guest selection) barriers to RMC.

Second, findings can explain why quantitative studies have sometimes shown controversial results on factors affecting price and revenue performance. Interviews with multiple hosts highlighted how they often manage third-party listings based on agreements that include a limit price, reducing the rooms for dynamic and discrimination price, and more generally revenue maximization.

Keywords: Revenue Management Capability; Airbnb; Professionalization Degree; Individual Hosts; Professional Hosts

1. Introduction

The large diffusion of the sharing economy and in particular the phenomenon of short-term rentals (STR) has attracted the interest of many supply papers, mainly focused on price/revenue determinants (Sainaghi, 2020). This literature is growing and based on quantitative data has identified many price antecedents and more general pricing strategies. Size, listing amenities, host variables, accessibility, guest reviews and contractual terms are the main groups of variables used (Sainaghi, 2020; Sainaghi & Chica-Olmo, 2022).

Previous studies agree that host professionalization has an impact on revenue management and pricing strategy. Professional hosts are more oriented on revenue rather than on price maximization (Oskam, van der Rest, & Telkamp, 2018). At the same time, some previous articles agree that this quantitative approach is unable to explore why professional hosts are more efficient and in particular how they are able to create a revenue management capability (Cocola-Gant, et al., 2021). This is the goal of this study, based on Milan hosts' interviews depicts the links between professionalisation degree and revenue management capability creation. The theoretical lenses used by this study is the resource-based view and in particular the capability approach. Resources are the assets that the firm possesses or controls, whereas capabilities refer to the firm's skills in exploiting and combining these resources through organisational routines (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993). Previous studies on hosts suggest the presence of some relevant capabilities, such as the preparation of the listing, commercialisation, interaction with guests, financial capability (Cocola-Gant, et al., 2021). This study focuses on the commercialisation capability, defined in this paper as revenue management capability.

2. Professionalisation Degree and Host Performance

Some quantitative studies exploring the price determinants revealed that professional hosts achieved higher (Chica-Olmo, González-Morales, & Zafra-Gómez, 2020), lower (Tong & Gunter, 2020) or even marginal positive or negative effects on STR rates. Therefore, professionalisation degree appears generating controversial effect on STR price (Sainaghi, 2020). However, these ambiguities are mainly related to the focus on price rather than on revenue. In fact, other quantitative supply studies agree that professional hosts achieve higher revenue than unprofessional hosts (Sainaghi, Abrate, & Mauri, 2021). The professionalisation degree is usually operationalised considering the number of listings managed (Abrate, Sainaghi, & Mauri, 2022) eventually integrated with other variables, as experience, type of listings and year-round availability (Bosma, 2021). While in many studies there is a juxtaposition between professional and individual hosts, recent articles introduced the idea of professionalisation degree (Bosma, 2021). In big cities, there are dozens of thousands of hosts. The twofold segmentation (professional and non-professional) appears too simplistic. The reality of the STR hosts is more complex and the boundary between different types of providers is more nuanced. The professionalisation degree favored the recent development of some new types of hosts. For example, the corporate hosts were threefold segmented (Cocola-Gant, et al., 2021), while in the case of marginal hosts some analytic distinctions have been proposed (Semi & Tonetta, 2021) or the hosts' segmentation based on the number of listings managed has been enlarged, distinguishing between single, two listings, three listings, four to ten listings or more than ten listings managed (Sainaghi & Baggio, 2021).

Considering the explorative nature of this study, the professionalisation degree in the current paper has been operationalised considering the number of listings managed. Furthermore, the focus was only on host managing an entire apartment or house, excluding shared room providers. This choice is related to the goal of this paper, that is exploring revenue management capability.

3. Revenue Management Capability

This section identifies which resources can generate revenue management capability. The resource-based view defines resources as stock of factors that are owned or controlled by a company, while capabilities focus on firm ability to use these resources, usually in combination (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993). Resources can be tangible and intangible, human and financial. Following a resource-based view of the firm, the pricing process is considered a capability that combines routines, skills and coordination mechanisms (Dutta, Zbaracki, & Bergen, 2003).

Based on previous studies on revenue management in the field of hospitality, a wide list of routines, skills, know-how and coordination mechanisms are considered to explain how the revenue management capability can be created by a host. In particular, the revenue management process can be segmented into four major components: i) identifying the required information to set the revenue management strategy, ii) taking strategic and then tactical pricing and revenue management decisions, iii) managing the communication and interaction with the guests, and iv) the availability of a software dedicated to revenue management.

The first activity focuses on the information necessary to set up the revenue management capability and includes, among others the following resources, skills and coordination mechanisms: i) data availability, ii) data analysis know-how, iii) benchmarking know-how, iv) demand forecasting know-how. The availability of data can support the revenue management process, especially if they are well-organised and simple to access. However, data sometimes is available, but the host has not the skills to use them. For this reason, the data analysis know-how is very relevant for the entire revenue management process. Rates should generate a transaction between the landlord and the guest; however, STR providers operate under concurrence. Benchmarking know-how is considered an important skill to understand who are the most relevant competitors, to scan their rates and to consider them in the revenue management process. Rates focus on the future transactions, therefore when a host decides the prices should have an idea about the future market condition. This requires demand forecasting know-how, able to consider if the demand is rising or not, if the destination offers some special events, and so on.

The second component can be defined as pricing formulation and is the heart of revenue management capability. It includes mainly the following sub-topics: i) dynamic pricing know-how, ii) revenue rather price maximisation focus, iii) multi-channel ability, iv) presence of a revenue manager. Dynamic pricing know-how is able to improve the listing revenue, but this pricing strategy generates additional work. In fact, to change continuously price requires knowing the destination seasonal periods, the rates proposed by competitors, the saturation degree of host capacity. Not surprisingly, many hosts prefer to achieve less revenue but avoiding this

additional work. Some papers analysing price determinants revealed that professional hosts apply lower rates rather than single-unit hosts, or, more generally, the relationship between commercial host and price is controversial (Sainaghi, 2020). However, other studies have shown an interesting relationship, professional hosts achieve higher revenue, rather than mom-and-pop providers. Said differently, what really changes comparing professional and single-listings providers is a different focus. While single providers search price maximisation, professional hosts are more interested in revenue maximisation. To improve the listing revenues, the hosts can use (simultaneously or not) more than one channel. In the study of corporate hosts, three main platforms are used: Airbnb, Booking.com and VRBO (Cocola-Gant et al., 2021). Multi-channel ability is therefore needed, including the ability to set up the rates for the different platforms, to avoid rate disparity or overbooking. Finally, the presence of a revenue manager or a host with a background in this field represents a crucial point, able to change and improve the entire revenue management activity. The revenue manager can be an external consultant that supports the host (Cocola-Gant, et al., 2021).

The third component focuses on managing, communicating and interacting with the guests. The skills, resources and routines are many. In this study we focus on. i) ability to interact with potential clients and ii) reputation. The ability to interact with potential clients plays a pivotal role. As confirmed by some quantitative studies, response rate and time positively affects the listing results, as well as the number of photos published (and their quality). Moving to reputation, some items refer to the number of reviews collected by the listing, the overall rating, the presence of superhost badge, the host experience.

Finally, a coordination mechanism is introduced and is the presence of revenue management software. The availability of revenue software plays a crucial role. In fact, all the items previously identified are influenced by the software.

4. Methodology

Considering the explorative nature of this research, a qualitative approach based on interviewees was adopted, in line with some recent papers focused on STR hosts (Cocola-Gant, et al., 2021). These studies usually realize 30-40 interviewees mainly on Airbnb hosts, using semi-structured questionnaires (Bosma, 2021). When saturation is achieved, the authors report the main findings using quotations and typically describing categories (as different types of hosts). The same approach was used in the current study.

The sample was extracted by the AirDNA database from Milan. Milan is the second leading Italian destination after Rome and attracts different targets, as business, leisure and trade fair. Focusing on this last segment, Fiera Milano organises dozens of events (Sainaghi & Mauri, 2018). Therefore, in the Milan city there are continuous change in off- and on-pick (Sainaghi, et al., 2018a), constituting an ideal setting for exploring the creation of a revenue management capability (Sainaghi, et al., 2018b).

As typical for qualitative research, a polar approach was adopted in this study, in order to understand how the professionalisation degree can help the emergence of a revenue management capability. In line with previous studies, three different groups of hosts were identified: i) single hosts (also called group one), ii) hosts managing 3-5 listings (group two), iii) hosts managing more than 10 listings (group 3). The host segmentation based on listings managed was used in some previous studies (Deboosere, et al., 2019). Only hosts managing the entire apartment/house were considered. The final sample includes 27 interviews: interviews numbered 1-11 for single hosts, interviews numbered 12-20 for 3-5 listings and interviews numbered 21-27 for hosts managing more than 10 listings. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded using NVIVO software.

5. Findings

5.1 Information and Data Analysis Skills

The code data availability illustrates some relevant differences moving from single to multiple hosts. Single hosts usually do not have a dedicated register with all the past data; they use the repository offered by Airbnb but mainly for fiscal and administrative purposes. “The archive is used only for personal information and documentation for any checks, including for tax purposes. I don’t consider the historical archive important for formulating prices” (interview #5). The opposite is for big hosts (group 3). “The reservation archive is entered in the PMS (Property Management Systems). The data is analysed directly by the system. The historical data are our starting point for defining the future rates” (interview #22). The second group oscillates between hosts that do not consider very relevant historical data and others that invest more time and attention. The threshold is

again the presence or not of a software. "It has a historical archive of reservations, which can be consulted in the company management system. The software proposes the prices charged in the past and the occupancy rate" (interview #18).

Data analysis know-how is the second code. Many hosts of the first group invest limited time for analysing data. "Historical data is not used to formulate prices" (interview #9) or "I have a historical archive of bookings, but it doesn't seem very important to me and then it's complicated to extract the information" (interview #11). Again, the approach of the third group appears the opposite. Thanks to the software, the data process analysis is simple, fast, and is done periodically. "We collect a lot of data: past sales data, competitors' prices, offers near our apartments, events, weather (it's not the same thing as a sunny weekend or a rainy one). Thanks to the software we can combine all this data on one platform and examine it easily. We regularly set aside time for this activity" (interview #22).

Benchmarking know-how is perceived an important activity during the start-up by the single host. "I spent a lot of time benchmarking activity at the start-up of my business. Currently I dedicate about an hour a month" (interview #3). Some hosts affirm the relevance of benchmarking however they have not time enough to do this activity. "I'm aware about the importance of benchmarking. It would be useful to do so but I have not the necessary time to dedicate to it" (interview #9). For the second group, benchmarking is an ordinary activity perceived relevant. "I look on Airbnb and Booking what are the prices in the area and the services that are offered. This activity is useful for defining prices and it requires at least ten hours a month" (interview #19). Big hosts (group three) declare the strategic relevance of benchmarking. "I constantly look at the websites of competitors, I observe their prices, I consider the quality of their listings, the area. This continuous observation helps me a lot in changing the price frequently. I certainly dedicate a lot of time to this activity which is one of the most important" (interview #21). "I dedicate at least an hour a day to this activity. It is essential for my work" (interview #24).

Concerning demand forecasting know-how, the city of Milan is registering a strong turnaround after the Covid. The demand is growing, and the consumer behavior patterns are changing. For this reason, some hosts (small and big) consider unpredictable the demand. "After the pandemic there is an incredible demand" (interview #13). "The prices we are practicing from May 2022 onwards are very high compared to the past. There is a boom in requests" (interview #24). "After the pandemic, the seasonality of Milan has changed: there is almost always a very high demand" (interview #27). With this premise, small hosts are not able to predict the tourism demand. "I wouldn't know how to predict the number of customers or even what data I could use" (interview #4). The second group forecasts demand considering the Milanese seasonality. "Thanks to the calendar of events in Milan, I am able to roughly predict the number of customers" (interview #17). The professional hosts (group three) use mainly the software and the number of requests/reservations. "To predict potential demand I use price lab, a module of our revenue management software" (interview #22). "The intensity of the requests we receive, together with the reservations made well in advance, help us to estimate the expected demand" (interview #27). The availability of historical data are also very important for demand forecasting. "We predict demand based on our experience and the historical data (the company is 12 years old)" (interview #25).

5.2 Pricing and Revenue Management Decisions

This second group of activities and routines plaid a crucial for understanding the role of professionalisation. Dynamic pricing know-how is probably a key threshold between small and big Airbnb providers. Single hosts tend to use one static price or to articulate the rates in a few classes of price. "For my apartment, I consider a price of €80 to be optimal" (interview #1). "I set the price 10 years ago and have broadly held it constant" (interview #3). "Prices from the apartment are always quite similar" (interview #4). "If we take a year as a reference, I use 2 or 3 different prices" (interview #5). The second group abandons the static price and uses a deep price discrimination. "The prices of the apartments during the course of the year are differentiated mainly when there are events" (interview #17). Furthermore, the price variation increases. "Within a year, I use about four significantly different prices" (interview #18). Big hosts enlarge the price discrimination or adopt a dynamic pricing approach. "In a year I use at least 6-7 different prices and then further changes are made within them" (interview #26). "I don't use price ranges but continue to rebalance rates based on demand. The dynamism of the price is guaranteed by the daily observation of the market" (interview #21). "Every day I apply a different price. We do the same work that hotels do" (interview #22).

Concerning revenue or price maximisation, the focus of the interviews confirms important differences among the groups. Single hosts are more oriented on price. "For me it is more important to have a high price rather

than higher revenues" (interview #3). "I prefer to have a high price and less reservations" (interview #6). Sometimes a higher price is perceived as a useful tool to select guests and avoid problems. "Lowering prices would bring disrespectful people to my house who are different from my target" (interview #15). The quote, despite focusing on the second group of hosts emerges in many single host interviews. Again, big hosts show a completely different approach. "Our revenue management system helps us fill apartments at the optimal price. "Every unsold night is a loss of revenue" (interview #22). "We have fixed costs to cover, which is why it is more important to generate high revenues" (interview #24).

Big hosts show a clear multi-channel ability. "To sell apartments, I use many different portals: Airbnb, Booking, Expedia, TripAdvisor, Trivago, HomeAway, VRBO, casavacanza.it, Home Togo and others. The most efficient channels are Booking and Airbnb" (interview #22). The presence of channel management software plays a pivotal role. "Multi-channel is managed through a management system called "cross booking", a channel manager" (interview #24). Some hosts have dedicated employees responsible for this activity. "Multi-channel is managed through a channel manager and the people in charge of booking" (interview #24). Also, many hosts of the second group show a multi-channel ability. "To sell apartments, I use Airbnb, Booking and our site" (interview #12). However, the prevalent focus is on Airbnb. "Booking generates more traffic, but I prefer working with Airbnb because these customers are much more polite. They have the idea that they come to my house, and they have respect" (interview #12).

Moving to the presence of a revenue manager, the first two groups are not big enough to have a dedicated person in staff. "I formulate the prices" (interview #3). "I've never felt the need to have external support or a dedicated figure to formulate the prices" (interview #12). Some big hosts have a revenue manager in their staff. "The prices are formulated by the staff who take care of the booking and are familiar with the principles of revenue management" (interview #24). Nearly all hosts in group three have attended price training, while hosts in groups one and two report the opposite.

5.3 Guest Communication and Interaction

The ability to interact with potential clients is a crucial activity for Airbnb hosts. Single hosts usually are enthusiastic to have a personal relationship with guests. In fact, these hosts are involved in many operating activities, as check-in, cleaning service (sometimes with the support of collaborators), and guest assistance. "I personally welcome my guests upon check-in" (interview #2). "The interaction with the potential customer is very intense. I also like to provide information about Milan. It's more of a friendly relationship than a professional one" (interview #5). "I have kept the initial spirit of Airbnb, that of welcoming guests into their own home" (interview #10). The answers are similar for hosts belonging to the second group. By contrast, in the third group the interaction is partially mediated by the employees and collaborators, on one side, and technology, on the other. "We have digitised the entire check-in process, thanks to digital locks" (interview #22). "Our company has eight employees. We also make use of external collaborators. Check-in is done by our staff" (interview #25). Response rate and response time is very efficient for all the hosts, without significant differences concerning the number of listings. In the interaction process the listing photos are considered very relevant. While single hosts prefer to realise by themselves the pictures, big hosts (group three) use more intensively professional photographers. "I've realised the photos by myself. I'd like to change them and have better quality images, but I've never trusted a professional photographer" (interview #2). "The photos used on the platforms are not changed often. However, if an apartment does not sell as it should, we intervene, perhaps even just changing the order and putting the most beautiful as the first photo. The photos were taken by a professional photographer who specialises in interiors" (interview #22). Another important difference between the host groups concerns the guest selection. Single hosts are more sensitive to selecting their guests and to avoid problems. "I do everything by myself. I host people in my house, and I want to know who comes" (interview #1). "I no longer use Booking because customers arrive who think they are in the hotel and therefore leave dirt, break objects and say nothing" (interview #12). Hosts belonging to the third group usually adopt instant booking and therefore do not select their guests. "We spend little time interacting with the customer before booking as we have adopted the instant booking system" (interview #22).

The second item is reputation. Hosts consider very important the reviews – "On a scale of 1 to 10 I think reviews are important 11!" (interview #6) –, more the score than the number. Reviews as so relevant that some Airbnb providers, during the start-up, prefer to apply cheap prices to attract many guests and collect reviews. "During the first four months we applied very low prices. It has served to have a greater number of reservations and therefore increase the number of reviews. Once we reached a reasonable number, we were able to increase the prices" (interview #6). "Reviews are a key element in building trust to the listing" (interview #12). A difference

among hosts emerges considering the ability of reviews to guide listing and service improvements. Hosts belonging to the first two groups usually have a strong and personal interaction with guests. Therefore, they are able to intervene when problems arise. "Weaknesses almost never emerge from the reviews because I intervene promptly during the stay when problems arise" (interview #14). By contrast, big hosts use more intensively reviews for identifying problems. "I happened to intervene on weaknesses that emerged from the reviews: for example, if it happens several times that they tell me that the apartment is too hot, I try to boost the air conditioning" (interview #22). The majority of big hosts have reported concrete examples of improvements introduced thanks to the reviews. Another important difference regards the time dedicated analysing the reviews. While small hosts affirm only to quickly read the reviews – "I spend little time analysing the reviews" (interview #4) –, large hosts invest more time. "Every time I check out, I scan the reviews. They help me understand how each apartment is positioned" (interview #21).

5.4 Revenue Management Software

The presence of software has a strong influence on the entire pricing process. Single hosts do not use software and Excel file. The support provided by the Airbnb platform is enough. Not surprising the multi-channel approach is not used and prices are mainly static or basically discriminated. By contrast, the third group of hosts largely adopt a software, mainly related to the benchmarking and pricing activity.

6. Conclusions

Focusing on theoretical conclusions, the study supports the host classification in three proposed groups. The first threshold is one and the second is around ten and supports the idea of professionalisation degree. The rising number of managed listings, in fact, requires a progressive creation of a firm, with employees and external collaborators, raising the fixed costs. By contrast, single hosts are widely involved in the operating activities (usually they realise everything by themselves), are less skilled, especially in providing and using information to orient the pricing. Furthermore, the goals are different. Small hosts are more interested in selecting their guests and preserving the listing. Therefore, they prefer maximising price rather than revenue. Big hosts are organised as a company, with employees and fixed costs. Therefore, they are "number" driven, researching more volume and revenue than price. Second, the four theoretical blocks used to understand the revenue management capability are relevant in explaining why and how the professionalisation degree is able to change the pricing process.

The study is in reach of possible empirical implications for Airbnb hosts and more generally for people involved in short-term rentals. The four blocks and sub-blocks provide concrete examples about the pricing formulation.

The main study limit is the space constraint that limited the findings. For this reason, the article reports only the pricing components without providing the "overall picture" (how the four blocks and the sub-topics interact). By contrast the number of interviews is not perceived as a limitation. In fact, there is a high overlapping between the interviews (especially for hosts pertaining to group one and two) and saturation is quickly reached. Said differently, additional interviews tend to repeat the same items.

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Exploring word-of-mouth: The Impact of Social Interaction, Attitudes and Video Ad Design in Tourist Behaviour

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Abstract: Internet travel advertising shapes and influences consumer behaviour and purchase decisions. The quality and form of the messages conveyed through these advertisements directly impact customer purchasing intent. Considering the information-intensive nature of the tourism industry and the growing significance of online platforms in destination marketing, web-based advertising has emerged as a popular method for promoting travel products to consumers. The initial perception of the destination showcased in the ad, and its presentation can substantially influence social interactions and ultimately affect how information about it is shared among acquaintances, both online and offline. By creating persuasive and captivating ads, marketers have the power to influence consumer behaviour profoundly and arouse their interest in various destinations. Therefore, this study focuses on the interactions between attitude towards the region, advertising design, and social interaction and how these can affect word-of-mouth behaviours in tourism promotional videos. The study collects 906 responses and examines the data using a structural equation model. For this purpose, a quantitative methodology using the SMART-PLS program was used. This study's findings highlight the importance of social interaction in spreading word-of-mouth, emphasising the crucial role of captivating visual design in creating positive associations with the brand. In addition, the mediating role of social interaction has also proved essential in the influence of visual design in ads on the spread of word-of-mouth among video viewers. These results are essential for marketing professionals, providing indispensable guidelines for creating persuasive and impactful content in tourism promotion videos.

Keywords: Attitude Towards the Region, Advertising Design, Social Interaction, Word-Of-Mouth, Tourism Promotional Videos

1. Introduction

In the increasingly competitive market, it is crucial to capture consumers' attention. This can be achieved through the development that is visually appealing and emotionally engaging. By leveraging emotional appeals and emphasising the unique characteristics of our tourism products, we can forge a deep connection with potential tourists and create a lasting impression in their minds. Social media destination advertisement videos play a crucial role in influencing travel decision-making. With their interactive and shareable features and effective destination promotion strategies, these are among the most impactful sources of information for travelers (Firoz, 2021).

The influence of electronic word-of-mouth on consumer decision-making in the digital era is substantial. In today's age, travelers actively share their experiences and seek information through online platforms, significantly impacting their attitudes towards different destinations (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020). As a result, this plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions of the attractiveness of specific locations. Therefore, electronic word-of-mouth has emerged as a decisive factor in driving travelers' choices and facilitating an informed decision-making process (Bui et al., 2022). Tourists' perceptions and attitudes towards a destination are crucial to its success. Portugal, known for its cultural diversity, historical significance, delicious food, and welcoming atmosphere, has become a popular choice among travelers. To keep up with the evolving digital landscape of tourism, Turismo de Portugal's promotion managers are utilising platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to market their offerings effectively and influence the perceptions of potential visitors (Turismo de Portugal, 2022). Regional branding initiatives aimed at shaping regional perception have the potential to influence tourist attitudes and preferences significantly, thus impacting their destination choices (Charton-Vachet et al., 2020).

Moreover, to captivate consumers' attention and generate interest, tourism promotional campaigns should use visually appealing and emotionally engaging designs (Duffett, 2015). The visual appeal of online advertisements can significantly influence consumer confidence and preference (Charton-Vachet et al., 2020). Visual elements

such as images and colours are vital in conveying commercial messages and attracting attention without requiring extensive cognitive effort (Scott, 1994).

In this context, the study presents a comprehensive model that examines the connections between social interaction and electronic word-of-mouth, the visual design of advertisements, and attitudes towards tourism promotional videos. Extensive research was conducted to explore and validate these relationships using the SMART-PLS program and PLS-SEM methodology. The study gathered data from 906 participants who interacted with promotional videos. The findings of this research not only enhance the understanding of how social interactions and visual perception influence the spread of electronic word-of-mouth but also highlight the significant impact that promotional videos can have on shaping destination marketing in the future.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Interaction and Word of Mouth

Travelers intensely yearn for social connections as they seek to feel a sense of belonging and form relationships within a larger community. Travel is widely recognised as inherently social, with positive interactions crucial in shaping destination image perception (Prayag & Hosany, 2014). Social media engagement encompasses the range of emotions and perceptions individuals experience when approached with specific content on a particular platform. These experiences can fulfil various needs, such as seeking valuable information, passing time, and connecting with others meaningfully (Voorveld et al., 2018). Hsin Chang et al. (2013) state that attitudes influence behaviour and actions. This means that people with a positive attitude towards advertisements are more likely to respond positively to those ads.

The powerful influence of online word of mouth must be addressed in today's digital age. As consumers exchange information and opinions on the Internet, it significantly shapes their decision-making behaviours (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020). With the ever-growing influence of social media platforms, more and more potential travelers embrace sharing their travel experiences online to make informed choices (Zhu et al., 2021). Nowadays, most people engage in this activity through the Internet since it offers instant communication, privacy, long-lasting information storage, influential impact, and freedom from limitations such as time and location (Ma et al., 2015). Tourists' attitudes towards a specific region can be influenced by the information they gather on social networks. This information, in turn, shapes their perception of the destination. Electronic word-of-mouth plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards destinations and allows tourists to share their experiences and acquire knowledge about travel sites (Bui et al., 2022). Multiple incentives motivate individuals to engage in word-of-mouth communication, including personal development, consideration for others' experiences, support for the company or brand, financial rewards, and social advantages (Shen et al., 2016). By sharing information, consumers can provide valuable feedback and assist others in making decisions. This act of engagement validates their opinions and allows them to feel included within a community that values their input. Whether through face-to-face interactions or digital platforms, word-of-mouth can connect ordinary consumers who freely share recommendations without seeking monetary compensation for their efforts (Kang et al., 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is posed:

H1: Social Interaction influences Word of Mouth.

2.2 Tourist's Attitude Towards the Region

Tourism plays a crucial role in driving global economic growth and social development. Portugal, known for its diverse cultures and rich heritage, has emerged as a renowned tourism destination. The country is intriguing and unparalleled with its unique traditions and welcoming atmosphere. Furthermore, Portugal's gastronomy and overall pleasant ambience make it an attractive choice among vacationers (Ramos & Costa, 2017). The tourism industry in Portugal has experienced significant expansion and development, making it a crucial contributor to the country's economic prosperity. Turismo de Portugal (2022) states that this sector generates wealth and employment opportunities. The tourism industry is undergoing rapid technological change, leading tourism promotion managers to develop a communication strategy that relies mainly on digital marketing using platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. The emergence of YouTube as a video marketing platform has revolutionised how businesses aim to generate web traffic and promote their products. This powerful tool allows companies to engage with target audiences effectively, providing an opportunity to showcase their touristic products and services (Roy et al., 2020).

Attitude is a learned and experiential predisposition that shapes consumers' consistent responses towards something, whether favourable or unfavourable (Pereira et al., 2019). In the tourism context, attitude refers to tourists' feelings and predispositions towards vacation destinations and the services offered by those destinations (Bresciani et al., 2015). The distinguishing aspects of a region's culture, traditions, methods and geographical conditions must be considered. These factors, along with human activities and local resources, make that region's offerings unique and differentiate them from others (Charton-Vachet et al., 2020). According to the same author, efforts towards regional branding initiatives can shape how a region is perceived, ultimately influencing tourism attitudes and preferences for that destination. When consumers have a favourable opinion of the brand and positive experiences, coupled with a sense of emotional connection, they develop an affection for the brand (Karjaluoto et al., 2016). According to Karjaluoto et al. (2016), this emotional attachment ultimately results in the dissemination of positive and electronic word-of-mouth. That said, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Tourists' Attitude Towards the Region featured in the ad influence their Social Interaction.

H3: Tourists' attitudes towards the region featured in the ad influence Word-of-mouth.

2.3 Ad Visual Design

Internet users tend to focus on information or messages relevant to their current needs or interests while disregarding other irrelevant information. This is because attention is a limited mental resource, and individuals can only allocate a certain amount at any given time (Chang & Wang, 2019). In today's highly competitive environment, it is imperative to grab the consumers' attention and interest. This can be accomplished by designing campaigns that are visually captivating and emotionally compelling (Duffett, 2015). Persuasive information in tourism advertisements must effectively appeal to potential consumers, evoking emotions, desires and rationality (Kazakova et al., 2016). To effectively connect with consumers, regional branding strategies such as tourism promotional videos should focus on developing a solid and enduring relationship, as stated by Szondi (2010). Therefore, by using emotive appeals and highlighting the distinctive qualities of the region's tourism products, the opportunity to establish a deep connection with potential tourists and leave a lasting impact on their perceptions arises.

The visual design of a web ad is vital for its effectiveness and success. Aesthetically pleasing design positively impacts consumer confidence, making it an essential factor in the visual appeal of the web ad (Cho, 1999; Cyr, 2008). According to Visual Rhetoric Theory (Scott, 1994), visual elements, such as images and colour, play a crucial role in conveying commercial meaning in marketing messages, having the power to capture attention and significantly impact the target audience without requiring much cognitive effort. Therefore, various captivating techniques in online advertisements, like bold visuals and vibrant colours, can capture visitors' attention and create a lasting impression (Shaouf et al., 2016). The same research has shown that when consumers have a positive attitude towards web advertising, they are more likely to prefer the advertised brand and develop positive attitudes towards it (Shaouf et al., 2016). Thus, the following hypothesis is theorised:

H4: Ad Visual Design influences Tourists' Social Interaction.

H5: Ad Visual Design influences Word-of-Mouth.

The hypotheses proposed in this study have formulated a conceptual model, illustrated in Figure 1. This model aims to illustrate the interrelationships and associations between various variables being examined.

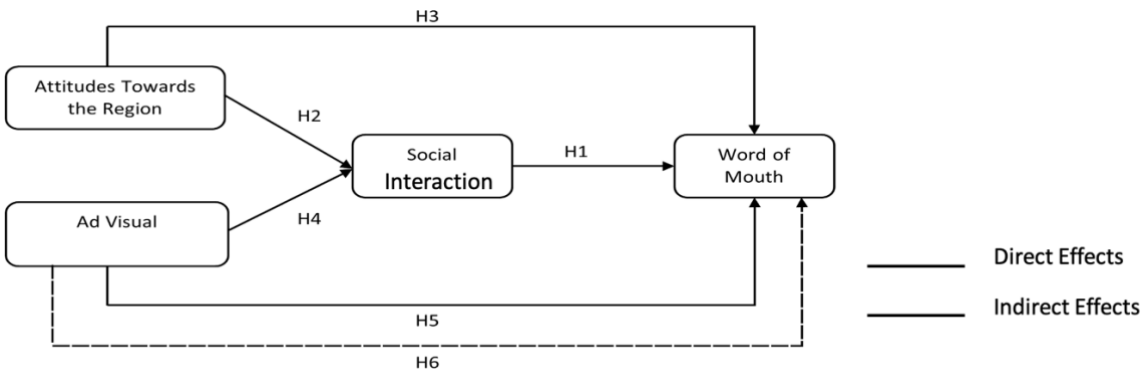

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach and utilises survey questionnaires to collect data. The variables used in the study were measured using scales created by previous researchers, which were adjusted for better understanding. Data was gathered by presenting participants with a video advertisement and providing them with a questionnaire link for completion. Upon viewing the video, the participants utilised their electronic devices, such as smartphones, tablets, or laptops, to respond to the questionnaire effectively. The social interaction scale was derived from a study by Voorveld et al. (2018), while the scale for measuring word of mouth was based on the work of Kang et al. (2020). In order to assess ad visual design, a scale designed by Shaouf et al. (2016) was employed. Lastly, attitudes towards the region were evaluated using an adjusted version of the scale developed by Carlson et al. (2020). The survey questions were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This allowed participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statements. The study's sample comprised 906 individuals in the Center of Portugal (70.3%). The data revealed that 68.3% of respondents identified as female, and 47.6% were under 22.

Table 1: Sample Characterisation

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	284	31.3
	Female	619	68.3
	Other	3	0.33
Age	≤22	431	47.6
	23-38	216	23.8
	39-54	195	21.5
	55-73	63	7.0
	≥74	1	0.1
Academic Qualifications	Primary Education	71	7.8
	Secondary Education	416	45.9
	Bachelor Degree	342	37.7
	Master’s Degree	70	7.7
	Doctorate	7	0.8
Occupation	Student	381	42.0
	Worker-Student	79	8.7
	Employed	401	44.2
	Unemployed	25	2.8
	Retired	20	2.2
Residence	North of Portugal	122	13.5
	Center of Portugal	638	70.4
	Lisbon Region	48	5.3
	Alentejo Region	63	7.0
	Algarve Region	13	1.4
	Açores	3	0.3
	Madeira	3	0.3
	Out of Portugal	16	1.8

4. Results

The analysis was performed using the Smart PLS 3.3.2 software, employing a two-step procedure. Firstly, the measurement model's validity and reliability were assessed. Then, the structural model was analysed to examine the connections between constructs and evaluate hypotheses accordingly. Table 2 presents the findings of the measurement model analysis, which includes various metrics to evaluate the model's performance. The explained variance within each construct is satisfactory, with the average variance extracted ranging from 0.814 to 0.858 (AVE>0.5). All standardised coefficients for the items meet the minimum acceptable value of 0.7, as Hair et al. (2017) recommended, confirming their validity. Additionally, high levels of internal consistency are observed among items within each construct, indicated by composite reliability values ranging from 0.932 to .960, which exceed literature recommendations (CF > 0.7) provided by Hair et al. (2017), ensuring robustness and validity of the constructs.

Table 2: Measurement Model

Latent Variable	Code Items	λ	*t-values*	CF	AVE
Ad Visual Design	AD_DSG01	0,907	79,655	0,960	0,858
	AD_DSG02	0,937	152,440		
	AD_DSG03	0,929	118,815		
	AD_DSG04	0,932	112,959		
Attitude	Att01	0,905	97,048	0,946	0,814
	Att02	0,889	71,801		
	Att03	0,910	93,786		
	Att04	0,905	83,826		
Social Interaction	SOCINT01	0,915	123,511	0,936	0,829
	SOCINT02	0,920	119,160		
	SOCINT03	0,897	95,242		
Word of Mouth	WOM01	0,925	132,611	0,932	0.820
	WOM02	0,931	154,229		
	WOM03	0,858	71,795		

To evaluate the measurement model, discriminant validity was examined. The Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion was used to assess if the square root of the average variance extracted from each construct is more significant than its correlations with other latent constructs (Hair et al., 2017), as shown in Table 3. These findings demonstrate that there is differentiation between the constructs, supporting discriminant validity.

Table 3: Discriminant validity - Fornell and Larcker criterion (1981)

Construct	AD_DSG	Attitude	SOCINT	WOM
AD_DSG	0,926			
Attitude	0,408	0,902		
SOCINT	0,489	0,425	0,911	
WOM	0,343	0,367	0,743	0,905

After verifying the accuracy and consistency of the measurement model, the causal link between these variables was examined. The results strongly support six out of seven tested hypotheses, with one hypothesis remaining unsupported (Table 4).

Table 4: Hypothesis Validation – Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Trajectory	β	*t-values*	*p-values*	Validation
H1	SOCINT □ WOM	0,734	29,755	0,000	Corroborated
H2	Att □ SOCINT	0,272	8,486	0,000	Corroborated
H3	Att □ WOM	0,075	2,746	0,006	Corroborated
H4	AD_DSG □ SOCINT	0,378	11,372	0,000	Corroborated
H5	AD_DSG □ WOM	-0,047	1,755	0,079	Not Corroborated

The indirect results were also analysed and are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Hypothesis Validation – Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Trajectory	β	*t-values*	*p-values*	Validation
H6	AD_DSG □ WOM	0,277	10,271	0,000	Corroborated

5. Discussion

Hypothesis 1 was proven valid ($\beta_{SOCINT \rightarrow WOM}$ = 0,734; p<0.01), indicating that engaging in social interaction significantly impacts the dissemination of word-of-mouth information. Interacting with others validates consumer opinions and creates a sense of belonging within a community where their contributions are valued. Whether through face-to-face conversations or online platforms, word-of-mouth serves as a means for everyday individuals to establish connections and willingly share recommendations. Consequently, when consumers engage socially, they are more inclined to participate in word-of-mouth behaviours by expressing their opinions.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 were confirmed ($\beta_{ATT \rightarrow SOCINT}$ = 0,272; p<0.01; $\beta_{ATT \rightarrow WOM}$ = 0,075; p<0.01) and are in line with the views of authors such as Karjaluoto et al. (2016) and Charton-Vachet et al. (2020). The attitude of tourists towards a destination impacts their social interactions and willingness to share opinions, both offline and online. According to Charton-Vachet et al. (2020), culture, cuisine, local people, and advertisements shape tourists' perceptions of the destination, affecting their attitudes and preferences. The connection between tourists and the destination leads to positive word-of-mouth spread through various channels, including electronic platforms (Karjaluoto et al., 2016).

Hypothesis 4 ($\beta_{AD_DSG \rightarrow SOCINT}$ = 0,378; p<0.01) has been validated, so it is possible to conclude that the design of advertisements, including colours, visuals, and overall aesthetics, significantly impacts viewers' social interaction. These factors are crucial in capturing consumers' attention and generating attraction towards the advertised brand, ultimately leading to positive feelings and perceptions. These views align with those of Shaouf et al. (2016). The findings did not support Hypothesis 5 $\beta_{AD_DSG \rightarrow WOM}$ = -0,047; p>0.05, suggesting no significant connection between the visual design of the advertisement and the spread of word-of-mouth. This is not in line with authors such as Al-Gasawneh et al. (2023), who state that visual social media marketing aims to provide entertainment and valuable information, engaging customers and encouraging them to share their feedback. The study described is conducted in the real estate sector and is based in Jordan, which is why the results may differ, given that this study is in the tourism sector and features Portuguese tourists as its target audience. Under these conditions, ad visual design does not contribute significantly to spreading word of mouth among viewers. However, by examining the indirect relationships between the visual design of advertisements and word-of-mouth while considering the mediating role of social interaction (H6), it can be determined that there is a positive correlation.

6. Conclusion

This study delves into the complex dynamics between attitude towards a destination, design elements in advertising, social interactions, and their impact on word-of-mouth behaviours within tourism promotional videos. Internet travel advertising shapes consumer behaviour and purchase decisions. The messages conveyed through these ads directly impact customer intent. Web-based advertising is popular for promoting travel products to consumers. The initial perception of the destination showcased in the ad substantially influences

social interactions and affects how information about it is shared online and offline. Marketers can profoundly influence consumer behaviour towards destinations by creating persuasive and attractive ads.

This research highlights the importance of social engagement in stimulating the expression of opinions and facilitating the spread of word-of-mouth. Additionally, it underscores how various factors shape tourists' perceptions and preferences, ultimately fostering a solid connection between tourists and their chosen destinations. This connection serves as a catalyst for positive word-of-mouth dissemination through electronic platforms and other channels. Notably, captivating visual design is crucial in capturing consumers' attention and generating attraction towards the advertised brand. As a result, they evoke positive emotions and perceptions among the public, reinforcing the association between visual design aesthetics and social interaction dynamics. The mediating role of social interaction also proved essential in the influence of visual design in ads on the dissemination of word of mouth by video viewers.

The research highlights some insights for marketers in the tourism sector. Firstly, developing positive perceptions towards a destination or brand is essential to marketing strategy. By understanding which attitudes influence social interactions and word-of-mouth, marketers can focus on strategies to foster these attitudes, such as promotional campaigns and creating impactful customer experiences. Additionally, it is crucial to recognise that ad design, including colours, visuals, and overall aesthetics, plays a significant role in capturing the audience's attention. Marketers should aim to create visually appealing ads that evoke positive emotions and align with brand values. The quality of ad design directly affects social interactions and subsequently influences WOM.

To enhance future research, exploring the variability of these variables in diverse cultural contexts and international tourist destinations is recommended. Gaining insights into how cultural factors impact the connections between these variables could facilitate the development of more efficient global marketing strategies. It would also be interesting to explore the impact of various social media platforms on social interactions, attitudes, and word-of-mouth. Each platform possesses distinct qualities that can shape communication dynamics and audience perspectives.

The findings of this study are derived from data explicitly gathered from Portuguese tourists, which may restrict the broader application of these results to different demographics or cultural settings. To validate the generalizability of these findings on a global scale, further research with more diverse samples is required. Additionally, it is worth noting that approximately half of the respondents in this study are women under 22 years old. This limited demographic representation could impact the robustness of the conclusions drawn. Therefore, a comprehensive and balanced analysis is recommended for future studies to obtain more accurate and reliable insights.

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Tourism Destination Management and Public-Private Partnership Networks: a Literature Review

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Abstract: The competitiveness of tourist destinations depends on their management and the role played by the actors in this activity. In this aspect, the study proposes, based on the review of research on the management of tourist destinations and public-private institutional collaboration networks, to demonstrate the feasibility of carrying out quantitative studies linking these two variables. The method of descriptive bibliographic review of the main databases was applied to find an approach to the most important research and studies on the subject. In the first place, qualitative inquiries directed to destination management and oriented to public and private networks from 2003 to 2022 were analyzed, observing the linkage between these two categories; where the importance of destination management for competitiveness is led by the different tourism stakeholders of the place, who through public-private networks optimize the performance of the locality. Secondly, quantitative cohort studies are presented where the variables of destination management and private public networks are analyzed from the dimensions and indicators for each one, evidencing that these two constructs lead to a relationship, proposing a model in which the factors of the authors Dwyer framed in the management of tourist destinations and that of Chiappa and Presenza channeled to private public networks are included. It is concluded the existence of a theoretical support on a linkage of these categories oriented to the qualitative and relational approach from the quantitative approach between destination management and private public networks, indicating that their study is relevant for the competitiveness of a tourist destination.

Key words: Management, Tourism, Social Network, Competitiveness, Narrative Review.

1. Introduction

There have been several investigations concerning destination management and the analysis of social networks both in terms of structure and relationships, all of them show the evident cooperation that private public institutions induce to have a better performance for the development of the destination, even more so when these organizations offer value and commitment (Olavarría-Benavides, 2023). However, in the review conducted, there are few articles that analyze the relationship between these two variables in the competitiveness of the destination.

The competitiveness of destinations is closely linked to the capacity to offer goods and services that provide a better experience to the visitor compared to other places (Dwyer and Kim, 2003). In other words, the activities and/or strategies developed by public and private sector tourism companies influence the types of products and services offered (Gamarra-Ramirez, 2024). These may or may not be oriented to improve their competitiveness and increase the market share of the place (Olavarria-Benavides et al, 2023). For this reason, destination management should include strategies oriented to marketing, planning and development, management organization, human resource development and environmental management, which were proposed in the Tourism Competitiveness model proposed by these two authors (Dwyer and Kim, 2003).

For this reason, it is relevant to study the behavior of the private public networks of a destination and the types of relationships that exist with the management of this, as Strobl and Peters (2012) indicate, because the development of the place will depend on how and in what way the actors are connected to each other and if they have influence on the network, as they are the drivers of creativity and innovation to face the changes in the environment that may affect the competitiveness of the tourist destination.

It is important to emphasize that even when there is a direct interrelationship between public and private companies in the tourist destination, these must be integrated into a social network, according to Chiappa and Presenza (2013), because its performance depends on the links between all the stakeholders of the place and the management carried out. Cobán and Yildiz (2019) state that, although destination management could be key to manage a place effectively and efficiently, it depends largely on having an administration model, where cooperation and coordination are the functions to be highlighted in the relations between public and private institutions of a destination.

Destination management and private public networks are clearly seen as variables that are related and should be worked together, however, the existence of research focused on relating these two variables quantitatively is scarce, according to the literature review this may be due to the presence of studies with a qualitative

approach, aimed at deepening the knowledge of both destination management (Pearce, et al, 2016; Coban and Yildiz, 2019; Crotts, et al, 2022) and private public networks (Fontesy Melo, 2014; Tuohino and Konu, 2014; Boiko, et al, 2017; Boiko, et al, 2017; Strobl and Peters, 2012; Olaya, et al, 2021; Trang and Tamara 2022;), which has led to the formulation of models and theories in this regard or applying factors, dimensions and indicators to evaluate the destination or a social network in a relational or structural way from the years 2003 to 2022 from Science Direct and Scopus databases.

Therefore, it is necessary to deepen the relationship between destination management and public-private networks in the competitiveness of a tourist destination; to this end, scientific articles on these variables will be reviewed from the theoretical perspectives proposed in these articles and how they were approached.

1.1 Objectives

The objective of the study is to conduct a literature review on the variables of tourism destination management and public-private institutional collaboration networks applied to qualitative and quantitative studies to demonstrate the feasibility of conducting quantitative studies presenting a model linking these two variables.

2. Literature Review

When speaking of destination competitiveness, it is imperative to mention Ritchie and Crouch (2003) who are the first authors to delve into the theory of competitiveness, indicating that this depends on the institutions responsible for coordinating and directing the actions of the tourism system and one of the most important aspects is that all the institutions of the sector must be committed to enhancing the tourism service. In this sense, there has been a diversity of research related to destination management and social networks, denominating them as the articulation of associations, organizational networks, tourism clusters or organizational coordination and governance, being these relevant in the articulation between public and private institutions and indispensable in the management of the destination and its competitiveness.

In the competitiveness model proposed by Crouch and Ritche (2003), destination management is one of the most important factors of the model, which is made up of organization, marketing, quality of the service experience, information and research, human resources management, capital, visitor management, resource management and administrative crisis; this factor of the model being one of those that focuses on activities oriented to the destination's policy framework and planning by the destination managers.

Similarly, Dwyer, et al, (2004) in their model of Competitiveness of Tourism Destinations present the determinant of destination management, where the main role is played by local stakeholders, who will be in charge of improving the quality and efficiency of resources and support factors. This determinant has been extensively studied by Marketa (2020) who determines that "sound governance is common in developing countries, but development patterns differ" (p. 14) from one country to another and the challenge of destination management is given to the change of government by the different policies implemented in the place, on the other hand, it is imperative to understand how the competitive environment works if you want to reach a development of tourism activity.

In that sense, Goffi (2013) explains that destination management is focused on economic profitability and to avoid the deterioration of tourist spaces; in that aspect, Solazzo, et al, (2022) reveal that a destination develops and becomes an attractive one for the visitor, due to the management of organizations and current, deep and wide information about the characteristics, attitudes, preferences and attributes framed in tourism that must be present to design marketing strategies and achieve an efficient planning of the demand.

For which, Coban and Sevket (2019) indicate that well-defined destination management could help the place to be more competitive, and the fact of having resources is not enough if there is no good destination management; where they emphasize cooperation and coordination as the most important functions, especially, for destinations with natural and cultural assets; also indicating that, as the complexity of the destination increases, it needs more efficient management.

Thus, the research conducted by Czernek-Marszałek (2020) mentions social integration as a dependency of the sociocultural and institutional context, therefore, this context should be taken into account to generate awareness in entrepreneurs about the relevance of social relations, which would facilitate the opening of the market. In this regard, Deladem et al. (2020) argue that the purpose of examining the public-private partnership through tourism development can empower stakeholders in the tourism development of a locality focused on

improving the management of the place by directing their efforts to promote the eradication of scarcity or poverty.

In another study by Czernek-Marszałek (2018) on the formation of networks or associativity indicates that while there is greater business cooperation, communication, knowledge, trust, understanding and dialogue between members, the higher the level of evaluation of collaboration and when a member feels an active belonging the better their performance will be oriented to individual and group cooperation, emphasizing on this Moreno-Lobato, et al (2022) that the joint vision can bring common benefits to the management of the destination and there must be a willingness to cooperate among the actors. In this regard, they state the importance of creating an identity, this being the critical factor in the development of the destination, for this it is necessary to evaluate the tourism product and thus identify opportunities to work together, such as designing strategies to promote the place, new tourism products or generate better experiences for the visitor.

In that orientation, the research conducted by Tang, et al (2019) propose the existence of 04 types of linkages, which impact on product innovation, and these can be worked as: intra-company linkages, very suitable for institutional, management and product innovations, while inter-sectoral linkages foster innovations in processes and products, and finally the types of linkages both intra-company and inter-sectoral foster innovation in marketing and tourism product for the destination.

The aforementioned research is framed in qualitative studies on destination management and public and private networks, however, some quantitative research has also been identified separately as the study conducted on destination management by Dwyer et al. (2014) who use the Importance and Performance method called IPA, used to develop business management strategies and can identify opportunities for improvement; they raised 06 factors to analyze destination management which are: product development and innovation, marketing, sustainable development, tourism and hospitality training, risk management and climate change; finally indicating, that if tourism agents do not apply strategies focused on improving their competitiveness and at the same time making it sustainable, the same will not reach their potential, in the same way, they state the use of the IPA approach in other places, to evaluate tourism capacity and the challenges to be faced by destination managers.

Likewise, in another research conducted by Armenski et al. (2017) in Serbia, they investigated the dimensions of destination competitiveness, classifying them into five factors, these being: risk management and environmental adaptation strategies, product development, innovation, networking, sustainable development planning and concern for the community and education for sustainability, concluding that companies linked to the tourism sector have little knowledge of how to increase productivity in tourism activity, explaining that the lack of information may be one of the aspects by which they fail to make timely and efficient decisions to achieve competitiveness in the destination.

On the other hand, Chiappa and Presenza (2013) talk about the evaluation of the different existing relationships between public and private actors in tourist destinations, especially in the relationship networks, indicating that the study of these is becoming indispensable to address the interaction between them, for such reason, they propose to evaluate the network through the analysis of the following concepts such as systemic awareness, trust, reciprocity, collaboration and involvement, which would lead to the identification of the level of relationship existing among these actors, in the same way it states that the presence of networking leads to achieving a consensus to design marketing strategies aimed at strengthening the tourism product and destination branding.

On the other hand, Elvekrok et al, (2022) expressed that organizations perceive the existence of a benefit from cooperation among destination stakeholders, especially when they observe an increase in their sales and greater customer satisfaction; being government institutions the one that should lead this commitment (Olavarría-Benavides, 2023).

In this sense, a model of the relationship between destination management and private public networks is proposed, adapted from the studies conducted by Dwyer et al. (2014) who propose 06 factors involved in destination management, and the research presented by Chiappa and Presenza (2013) in terms of private public networks, composed of 05 factors involved in analyzing the existing relationships between the actors of the place.

3. Methodology

In order to locate the scientific articles, a search was carried out in English based on the following literature review variables: "destination management", "competitiveness", public-private networks", "public-private social networks", "cooperation", "governance" using Boléan operators such as: and, or and not in Scopus and Science Direct databases, the selection of articles was from 2003 to 2024 worldwide. For the organisation of the information, a spreadsheet was used at first and then the JabRef software, with which the information could be arranged in tables and figures. For the analysis of the information, criteria such as the focus of the study, objective of the research, applied methodology, theories, results and conclusions were taken into account, with which the most relevant articles for the study could be identified, and finally the information was presented in tables and figures as shown in the results and discussion. The exclusion criteria were studies that were not published in journals in the Scopus or Science Direct databases.

4. Results and Discussion

According to the search of scientific articles in the Scopus and Science Direct databases, applying specific filtered searches according to the purpose of the research related to the variables of destination management and public-private networks, 63 articles were obtained, 18 of which were selected and contributed to the research objective.

The following table shows the title of the research, the year of publication, the country where the study was carried out and the research approach used, which made it possible to analyze and propose the linkage model between the destination management variable and public-private networks.

Table 1: Qualitative and quantitative approach publications

Research Title	Year of publication	Country	Approach
Achieving destination competitiveness: an importance–performance analysis of Serbia	2014	Serbia	Quantitative
Attributes of destination competitiveness: A factors Analysis. Tourism Analysis	2003	Korea and Australia	Qualitative
Exploring the relationship between government and destination competitiveness: The TALC model perspective	2020	Global	Qualitative
A Model of Tourism Destinations Competitiveness: The case of the Italian Destinations of Excellence	2013	Italy	Qualitative
Extracting insights from big social data for smarter tourism destination management	2022	Italy	Qualitative
Developing a destination management model: Case of Cappadocia	2019	Turkey	Qualitative
Social embeddedness and its benefits for cooperation in a tourism destination	2020	Poland	Qualitative
Developing sustainable tourism through public-private partnership to alleviate poverty in Ghana	2020	Ghana	Qualitative
Cooperation evaluation with the use of network	2018	Poland	Qualitative
Axestión público-privada na rede de destinos dos Itinerarios Culturais do Consello de Europa: a Ruta do Emperador Carlos V	2021	Cooperation Network of the Routes of the Emperor Charles V: Algeria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Morocco, Netherlands, Panama, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, Mexico, and Peru	Qualitative
Are different types of interfirm linkages conducive to different types of tourism innovation?	2019	China	Qualitative
Destination Competitiveness: Public and Private Sector Tourism Management in Serbia	2017	Serbia	Quantitative
The use of network analysis to assess relationships among stakeholders within a tourism destination: an empirical investigation on costa smeralda-gallura, Italy	2013	Italy	Quantitative
Effects of network relations on destination development and business results	2022	Norway	Quantitative
Organizational Climate and the Achievement of Objectives in a Governmental Tourism Management Institution	2023	Peru	Quantitative
Requirements for destination management organizations in destination governance: Understanding DMO success	2014	Switzerland, Austria, and South Tyrol	Quantitative

Research Title	Year of publication	Country	Approach
Exploring the relationship between government and destination competitiveness: The TALC model perspective	2020	Global	Qualitative
Relational risk and public-private partnership performance: An institutional perspective	2021	Egypt	Quantitative

The following table shows the selected articles by year, with 50% of the articles being from 2020 to 2023 and 44% scientific articles from 2013 to 2019 and only 5.6% articles from 2003.

Table 2: Years

Year	Quantity	%
2003	1	5.6
2013 a 2019	8	44.4
2020 a 2023	9	50.0
Total	**18**	**100**

Table 2 shows the number and percentages of scientific articles according to the research approach, with 61% of the articles having a qualitative approach and 39% having a quantitative approach.

Table 3: Article approaches

Approach	Quantity	%
Qualitative	11	61
Quantitative	7	39
Total	**18**	**100**

Figure 1 shows the scientific articles that were selected by country, showing that these two variables are widely used by the different destinations.

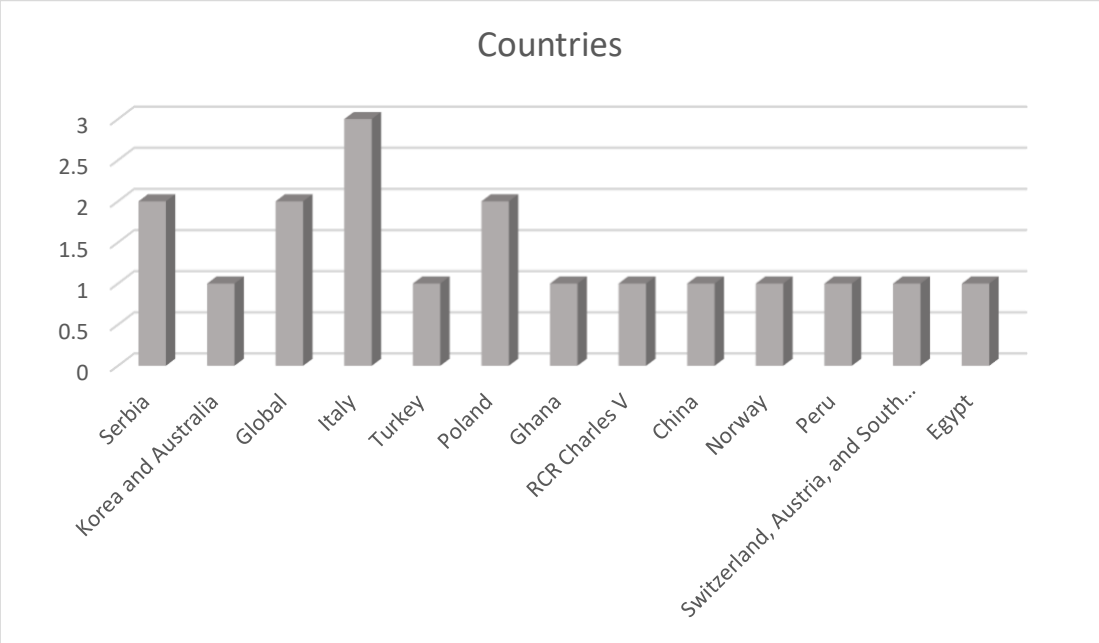

Figure 1: Countries

While it is true that there are many qualitative studies on the management of tourist destinations and private public networks, which support the relationship between these two variables, it is evident that quantitative studies are very scarce, especially when it comes to demonstrating this relationship.

The possibility of demonstrating this relationship is observed in the different competitiveness models proposed by the pioneers on the subject (Dwyer and Kim, 2003, Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) who contemplate in these models factors or determinants oriented to destination management which have been widely studied, one of them is the one proposed by Dwyer et al. (2014) who proposed six factors to analyze destination management, these are: product development and innovation, marketing, sustainable development, training in tourism and hospitality, risk management and climate change, formed with their respective indicators, which allow a measurement on the variable.

Similarly, there has been a great theoretical advance on private public networks, framed to sustain that tourism managers play a predominant role in the development and success of a place, and this depends on the vision, planning and strategies developed in the destination to face the competition and the different challenges that tourist spaces must face due to the changing environment. In this sense, one of the studies provided quantitative data, presented by Chiappa and Presenza (2013), who propose five dimensions to measure the management of private public relations: systemic awareness, trust, reciprocity, collaboration, and involvement.

After analyzing the different articles related to destination management and public-private networks, a model of the relationship between destination management and public-private networks is proposed, adapted from the studies conducted by Dwyer et al. (2014) who propose 06 factors involved in destination management, and the research presented by Chiappa and Presenza (2013) in terms of public-private networks, composed of 05 factors involved in analyzing the existing relationships between the stakeholders of the place.

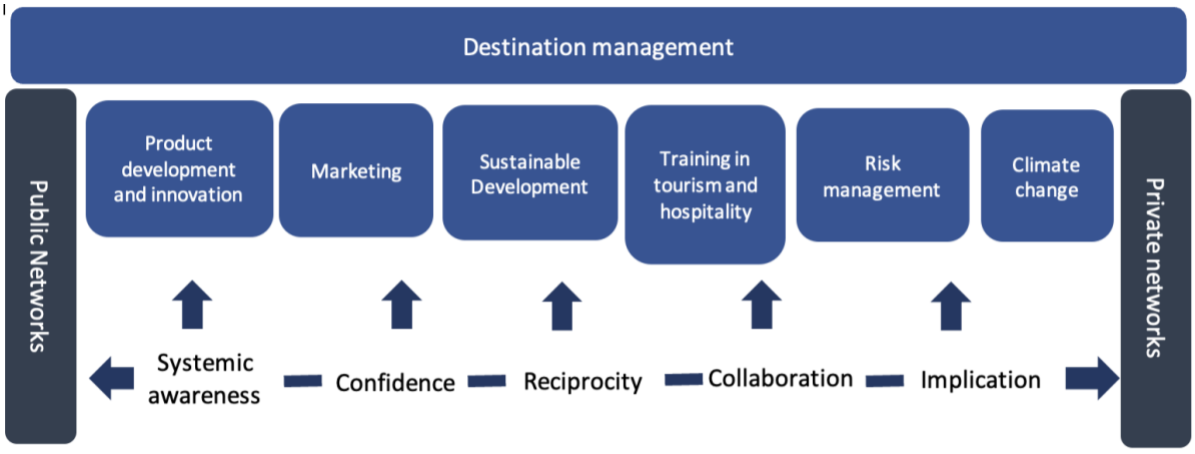

Figure 2: Proposed model of the relationship between destination management and private public networks.

5. Conclusion

It is concluded that to date there is 61% research with a qualitative approach to both the variable of destination management and the variable of public-private networks, and 39% with a quantitative approach, indicating that these two variables are widely studied in various countries around the world, especially in European countries. Similarly, it is shown that to date these constructs are still being investigated in the tourism sector, because destination management and public-private networks are relevant variables for the good performance of a destination and to improve competitiveness through an articulated planning of the actors of a community. Similarly, it is worth mentioning that the authors Dwyer et al. (2014) are those who proposed 06 intervening factors in destination management, indicating that these can be applied in other destinations; similarly, indicate that the research presented by Chiappa and Presenza (2013), is one of the few studies with a quantitative approach, proposing 05 dimensions to be studied in public-private networks.

In this sense, it is argued that these variables can be worked together in other types of studies such as relational and even causal studies, which is why this article proposes a model that relates the variable of destination management and private public networks adapted from the studies conducted by Dwyer et al. (2014) who propose 06 factors involved in destination management, and the research presented by Chiappa and Presenza (2013) in terms of private public networks, consisting of 05 factors involved in analysing the existing relationships between the actors of the place.

In which it is shown that the pillars of destination management are the actors, i.e. the public and private institutions of a locality and for this network to manage the destination, the authors Chiappa and Presenza (2013) state that systemic awareness, trust in each other, reciprocity in management, collaboration between actors and involvement are relevant factors for a destination to be on the right path for destination management.

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Impact of the Pandemic on Event Tourism: The Resilience of Japanese Pop Culture Events

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Abstract: Using a theoretical framework that recognises the pervasive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global tourism and events, this study examines the unique complexities of Japanese pop culture events. These events, characterised by their ability to attract large audiences, especially enthusiastic youth, have traditionally flourished through interpersonal interactions. This discrepancy between the interactive nature of events and pandemic-induced measures has necessitated fundamental changes in event management strategies. However, pandemic responses and restrictions contrasted sharply with the nature of these events, posing significant challenges for event organisers. This study analyses qualitative data from seven semi-structured interviews with Japanese theme researchers, journalists, and representatives of the main events on the theme in four countries. The pandemic crisis clearly affected Japanese pop culture events, which were among the most frequently suspended. The interviewees believe that it is easy to return to the normalcy of face-to-face events because the audience for these events is predominantly young and enthusiastic, but this requires adaptations and the care that each country demands. This research sheds light on both the difficulties and setbacks that Japanese pop culture events face, as well as their ability to endure and adjust in response to difficult circumstances. By shedding insight into the complex dynamics and demographic characteristics of these events, it also enables event organisers and policymakers to develop strategies to facilitate the safe and successful recovery of similar events in the future. In addition to connecting with other studies in the event sector, this research contributes to the body of knowledge needed to develop effective responses to unforeseen obstacles by shedding light on exceptional events and their potential resilience pathways.

Keywords – COVID-19; Events; Impacts; Japanese Pop Culture; Technology; Tourism.

1. Introduction

Tourism and leisure were particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Liu et al, 2023). The pandemic affected both the supply side and tourist demand, creating global spatial and temporal inequalities, and disrupting tourism worldwide (Allan et al, 2022; Sigala, 2020). These effects had a negative impact on tourism, both economically and socially, as well as in terms of policy structuring (Abbas et al, 2021).

Interconnected with tourism and a critical component of its system, the events sector was equally impacted by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Davies, 2021). As these were convenient times for large concentrations of people, events had to be limited and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, practically cancelled, as these events could easily increase the number of cases of infection (Liu et al, 2022). These consequences were felt by all types of events, whether due to travel restrictions, the need to implement security measures or participant limitations (Mohanty et al., 2020).

One category of events that was relatively restricted in scope due to the inherent socialisation criteria for attendees, were the Japanese pop culture events (Severino, 2022; Woo et al, 2022). These events, with a culture valued by the West for its exoticism and cultural differentiation (Kawamata et al, 2017), were also canceled or postponed, with only a few taking place in 2020 with various restrictions and adaptations (Alberto and Tringali, 2022).

Despite the return to normalcy, it is advantageous to contemplate the most effective strategies to facilitate the full resumption of activities in the event of a future pandemic. It is also essential to understand the preferred formats that participants adhere to in events, particularly in terms of valued factors, such as technology or virtual experiences. This understanding will help to minimise the future impact of counterproductive events, such as pandemics.

The present research aims to understand the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourist entertainment events and to identify the most effective approaches for managing such circumstances, using Japanese pop culture events as a case study. Consequently, an assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Japanese pop culture phenomena is sought, including an examination of the optimal course of action, the likelihood of a return of typical Japanese pop culture events, and the viability of technological solutions as an

alternative.

Japanese pop culture events are fan meetings within a cultural event, like festivals or conventions (Severino & Silva, 2023). Nevertheless, the findings derived from these events have the potential to be extrapolated to other domains encompassing community participation, celebration of a particular occasion, and active involvement in the festivities. Using Japanese pop culture events as a case study, the conclusions can be applied to other active participation events like festivals, fairs, conventions, and even sport or musical events. This is because these moments are characterised by a multidisciplinary nature, where a variety of activities take place for the benefit of the community present at these events.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Events, Japanese Pop Culture and the Technology Solution

An unprecedented array of technological advancements has expanded the possibilities for enhancing event offerings, including the use of digital platforms (Ton and Do, 2022). Furthermore, to expand their reach, these virtual tools have become of interest for supporting events to expand their reach (Johnson, 2022). Events that involve active participant participation are difficult to implement with the currently available technology. New or more sophisticated digital tools are very interesting and enhance the innovation and quality of events, especially MICE, scientific, and certain cultural events (Estanyol, 2022; Valenti et al, 2021; Yao et al, 2021).

The events associated to Japanese pop culture can be highlighted within the context of a specific area of interest, as they exhibit a comprehensive mastery of cultural themes and content (Simeon, 2006). These events include Japanese versions of television series and movies (“anime”), comics and books (“manga”), music, fashion, character dressing (“cosplay”), video games, traditional culture, cinema, workshops, conferences, gastronomy, lectures, and sports (Simeon, 2006; Sabre, 2013).

Japanese popular culture incorporates a diverse array of elements that pertain to nowadays Japan. Although it originated in Japan, this cultural phenomenon has gained international recognition and has amassed a substantial base of followers and fans on a global scale (Tajima et al, 2022). Subsequently, their gatherings began to operate primarily to attract followers of this culture. Over time, however, the audience has become more heterogeneous, encompassing not only enthusiasts (referred to as "otakus") but also individuals with a vested interest in some facet of this culture, whether collectively or individually (Kawamata et al, 2017). For example, events such as the "Anime Expo" in Los Angeles and the "Japan Expo" in Paris have attracted significant participation, with hundreds of thousands of individuals attending (Tung et al, 2019).

Popular culture events in Japan are characterised by a unique thematic element and active participation from individual attendees (Severino and Silva, 2023). Furthermore, these occasions serve as ideal settings for their admirers to manifest their passion by participating in contests, attending workshops, "cosplaying", and casual admiring the recreated environment, among numerous other activities (Kawamata et al, 2017). Since international travel to Japan can be quite costly for non-Westerners, these events provide the ideal opportunity to cater to the sophisticated tastes of culture enthusiasts (Severino, 2022).

Japanese popular culture events, like events of all other kinds, have undoubtedly encountered numerous obstacles in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Alberto and Tringali, 2022). As a result of cancellations, restrictions, and postponements, the event organisers were compelled to develop temporary solutions. Additionally, precautions were taken regarding food and beverages, social distancing, and the venue's constant disinfection; safety measures were heightened; and technological advances were used primarily to develop new event services (JNTO, 2020). Live event streaming can be applied to business meetings, but it can also be used as a temporary solution, with virtual technology having the potential to be useful due to its capacity to supplement live events and overcome geographical barriers (Scrivani, 2021). The audience of Japanese pop culture events is predominantly comprised of young adults who are accustomed to using the Internet and are therefore accustomed to digital environments and interaction (Severino, 2022). Consequentially, the live interaction emphasised at these events can serve as a supplement or a temporary solution during lockdown periods to sustain the interest of the fans (Alberto and Tringali, 2022).

The prospect of technology assuming a crucial role in Japanese popular culture events and demonstrating its indispensability in the face of future pandemics is intellectually stimulating. The Internet and digital media are undoubtedly beneficial resources in our increasingly globalised society, primarily because they enable individuals who cannot afford to travel to attend events (Puccinelli et al, 2022).

3. Methodology

After understanding the literature on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on events and defining Japanese pop culture events, this research used a deductive process (qualitative method) to conduct semi-directive interviews with event organisers, researchers, and other stakeholders.

The interviewees were selected using non-probabilistic diversity (maximum variation, with different specialties for different opinions) and casuistry (who cooperated and facilitated access to information). A total of seven interviews were conducted. Four with event organisers were evaluated through interviews with representatives of the largest Japanese pop culture events in each country: "Comiket" in Japan; "Japan Weekend" in Spain; "J-Popcon" in Denmark; and "Iberanime" in Portugal. A Japanese international researcher and a Portuguese-based Japanese pop culture researcher were also consulted. Finally, one Japanese pop culture interview was conducted with a North American journalist who covers American popular culture. The interviews were conducted online between August and December 2020, the first year in which the COVID-19 pandemic affected global events.

Semi-directive and open-ended questions were used in the interviews. After introducing the interviewee, the first section examined how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Japanese pop culture events, particularly the event under consideration if the interviewee was the event organiser. The second section examined the best response to Japanese pop culture events, considering the respondent's opinion on their fit with the typologies. The third section examined respondents' views on a return to normalcy or Japanese pop culture events and their future implications. The literature review suggests that the Internet and technological solutions are constantly being used during the pandemic, so the fourth section asked if they could be useful for Japanese pop culture events. The fifth and final section focused on the Japanese pop culture event organisers, especially those who organised events in 2020 despite constraints. The challenges of organising and implementing these pandemic-related events, as well as their impact and public adherence, were examined in detail.

After careful transcription, the interviews were analysed using the program "Nvivo". Thematic content analysis was used to identify and categorise subjects, resulting in an accurate analysis of the speeches. Furthermore, word cloud processing was used to highlight and display the most emphasised terms in each question to reflect the responses of the sample interviewee (DePaolo and Wilkinson, 2014). Therefore, the data was organised, and subject-respondent connections were verified.

4. Findings and Discussion

There is a prevailing consensus regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on events within Japanese pop culture. Attendees typically participate in an immersive experience involving an unfamiliar culture, while simultaneously engaging in social interactions with individuals who share similar interests and passions. COVID-19's pandemic precautions have required the enforcement of a number of regulations that are inconsistent with the core principles of personal freedom resulting in numerous challenges.

Japanese popular culture events were canceled, and it was not feasible to hold them even with a reduced number of participants due to the continued socialisation of practices associated with dance activities, "cosplay", and other related phenomena. Respondents believed that this condition would persist for a significant period, as they expected fully recovery by 2023. Physical and in-person events were considered impracticable due to their large scale, constant congestion during activities, and problematic public administration. These events engendered community engagement and social integration, alongside the interchange of knowledge and cultures, with economic and social impacts.

Except for a temporary online edition with a small in-person component, the physical edition of the "Japan Weekend" in Madrid, Spain, was abruptly postponed until 2021. In the same year, the regional editions of this event were canceled. The structure was identical for the "J-Popcon" in Denmark and the two editions of "Comiket" in Japan (May and December). All of these events required adjustments to the plan, resulting in significant financial consequences for the organisation. The preeminent Japanese pop culture event in Portugal, "Iberanime", was postponed from its original dates in Lisbon and Porto to 2021.

As illustrated in Figure 1, an examination of the concepts and vocabulary used by the interviewees in relation to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic reveals that "tourism" and "people" were the most frequently mentioned terms. Specifically, "people" attending such events were found to be the most impacted, with numerous direct influences on "tourism".

Figure 1: Word cloud on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Japanese pop culture events.

The adequate strategy for Japanese popular culture events considering the COVID-19 pandemic closely resembles the overarching response to the crisis. It must be adapted to each nation's health metrics and government policies. Typical preventive measures to mitigate the spread of viruses encompass social distancing protocols, use of mask, gathering restrictions, stringent sanitation practices, and enhanced ventilation systems. Outdoor events are potentially feasible, but their implementation depends on atmospheric conditions, climate, and the availability of large-scale venues.

Adaptation entails the organisation of more frequent, smaller gatherings that focus on specific cultural components, such as "anime", "manga", or Japanese popular music, in recognition of the multifaceted nature of Japanese popular culture. An expanded range of participants can be accommodated while capacity management is upheld through the implementation of a specialised ticketing system within this framework.

An alternative strategy, supported by certain organisations, is to improve the online component. Nevertheless, significant investment in cutting-edge technology and platforms are necessary to attain excellent levels of engagement and interactivity. This includes interactive features such as live-streamed shows with real-time commentary, participant-driven question-and-answer sessions, and flexible seminars. High quality streaming should be a top priority when selecting widely available online platforms. These solutions can help contain outbreaks and mitigate the destructive effects of the pandemic. Although temporary, it is important to recognise that not all participants may easily adopt the virtual format of events.

Opinions vary on the effectiveness of these measures. Because of the difficulty in communicating this diversity, especially to young attendees who may have difficulty with extended online engagement, Japanese popular culture events are regarded as more vulnerable. These events may achieve greater success by focusing on specific aspects of this culture. This adaptability may be lacking on other specialised events. The inclusion of culturally specific elements and the involvement of participants in the selection of event themes must also be considered.

The use of digital platforms is a controversial issue, with 43% of respondents believing it undermines the essence and purpose of these events by reducing social interaction and eliminating the opportunity for physical experiences, while 57% support its use as a method to generate revenue and sustain participant interest.

After the words "Japanese" and "culture", the most expressed concepts in an analysis to this issue, as shown in Figure 2, were "people", in line with what had been expressed about the difficulties and possible strategies to use with one of the primary stakeholders of these events, but also the concept of "online", which was a possible and plausible strategy for the respondents.

Figure 2: Word cloud on the best response of Japanese pop culture events.

It was generally acknowledged that Japanese popular culture events would eventually return to normal or evolve. Respondents were optimistic about the eventual restoration of these events to their full capacity. Considering the travel restrictions and the prioritisation of quality, these events proved to be critical junctures for those seeking a more practical means of immersing themselves in Japanese culture without undertaking a physical trip to Japan.

Future attendees will develop a deep sense of longing and exhibit heightened fan loyalty in response to these events. Frequent travel to a distant country such as Japan can be challenging, and the event may provide an opportunity to experience authenticity, that may be difficult to achieve. Additionally, future developments may see the emergence of hybrid events that combine in-person and virtual participation, which may increase attendance. Event flow management, as used in certain museums and exhibitions, may become ubiquitous to prevent overcrowding. Open areas will continue to be advantageous for security purposes while allowing for the expansion of event space.

Limiting the availability of tickets for rare events runs counter to the core value of social inclusion that underpins the culture. In contrast, live broadcasting can function as a tactic to ensure the participation of those who cannot physically attend the event through a virtual presence. It has the potential to maintain attendance, cultivate a feeling of inclusion, provide alternative choices, and ultimately foster loyalty to the event.

As can be seen in Figure 3, respondents emphasised the word "people", which represents the essence of the events. This was followed by the words "return" and "tourism", which underscore their optimism that the events will return in force in a post-pandemic future.

Figure 3: Word cloud on the possibility of returning to normality and the implications for the future.

Again, opinions were divided on the Internet and technological alternatives for Japanese pop culture events. Half of the respondents felt these tools were ineffective and undermined the events' goals of promoting fan interaction and celebration. The other half defended its continuation, highlighting both the adaptability of Japanese culture to digital formats, and the advantage of offering a future alternative for those who cannot attend in person and when the event capacity is limited.

According to these respondents, technology is crucial for communicating this trend to the public and providing experiences during severe limitations. While it is widely agreed that full exploitation of this digital platform is

temporary, incorporating it into events, such as via well-known online platforms and cameras to provide live feeds, can improve proceedings and increase their scope.

Investing in augmented reality, holographic visits, or virtual reality may result in positive returns, if capital is allocated strategically toward these technologies, with an emphasis on event immersion. Additionally, a well-thought-out pricing strategy tailored to the specific jurisdiction is required.

When analysing the dominant words about the opinion that the internet and technology could provide viable solutions for Japanese pop culture events, the term “online” stands out alongside “people”, highlighting the significant potential of digital channels in shaping the landscape of these events (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Word cloud of the opinion on whether the Internet and technological solutions can be a possible solution to Japanese pop culture events.

Regarding the challenges faced during the coordination and execution of events during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, the events "Japan Weekend", "J-Popcon" and "Iberanime" were analysed.

Each of these events faced challenges in integrating their online platforms due to their last-minute efforts to ensure that the event could take place in person. In addition, there were intermittent periods of uninterrupted online transmission during the events, accompanied by challenges including video transmission quality, file transfer, and participant interaction. Despite this, they managed to provide their audience with a moment of celebration regarding Japanese popular culture during a period when action was scarce or nonexistent.

The "Japan Weekend" implemented a hybrid format, although with a significantly reduced physical footprint and was abruptly relocating from a large room to a small cinema room. Despite its significant limitations, the event fulfilled the organisation's objective of establishing connections with the space for potential hybrid events in the future. This event was drastically different from the usual, as hundreds of thousands of attendees were reduced to hundreds both in person and online. Public opinion was positive regarding the social impact.

The "J-Popcon" conference, conducted exclusively online for two days, was also affected by a significant drop in attendance. However, the organisation highlights favorable outcomes stemming from its decision to forgo advertising expenditures. This enabled it to attract a substantial number of involved participants, in addition to support from other stakeholders (including affiliated businesses and retail establishments) that extended discounts during the event, and artists who delivered complimentary lectures. It was challenging to spend the varied and lived moments that were considered normal at the event, but the primary objective of this edition was to provide a gratifying moment for its intended audience in these times considered complex; this served as a preliminary step for future maintenance alongside the physical versions.

The "Iberanime" in Portugal, which took place for a single day, acknowledges that there were challenges and limitations in the online implementation of the complete version. It emphasises the importance of continuously learning from errors to advance and satisfy the audience's expectations.

The online edition of the "Japan Weekend" attracted approximately 150 people in person over the course of two days (September 25 and 26, 2020, Friday and Saturday). Additionally, the event garnered 152 online views on the first day and 564 virtual presences on the second. The organisation asserts that these were comparatively smaller numbers than those in attendance during the actual event, considering the temporal constraints and the prevailing pandemic circumstances (the previous edition, held in 2019, attracted 161 000 attendees, reflecting a 99.56% decrease in attendance).

The online "J-Popcon", which took place on August 8 and 9, 2020, attracted 400 attendees per day for a program that was remarkably short and designed solely to maintain their interest. Evidently, like the "Japan Weekend", the number of participants was significantly reduced compared to the 2900 that attendees in 2019 (a 72.41% decrease in attendance).

Finally, the online viewership of "Iberanime" for the event reached 5700 people on May 30. This represents a significant decrease of 82.79% in comparison to the 33 125 participants that attended the Lisbon edition in 2019 over the course of two days.

The most worrisome statistic is that of "Japan Weekend", which attracted only 0.44% of its usual attendees compared to the previous year's physical edition. In contrast, "J-Popcon" exhibited a more promising result, as 27.59% of its attendees were in attendance via its online edition, in contrast to the attendance rate of its in-person edition.

Following the concept "event", "people" (or participants) emerge as the most significant element and concern of the interviewees, as shown by a general analysis of the interviews (Figure 5). It is noteworthy that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on "tourism", which is a direct consequence of the execution of these events. Despite the implementation of numerous "measures" of concern that function as a "solution", it is believed that digital tools accessible "online" can be more beneficial to the events, with an unwavering faith in their "future" "return". While "smaller" events may still necessitate "adaptation", all respondents are confident that "community" fans of Japanese pop culture events will maintain "interest" due to their familiarity with the "virtual" environment and the "Internet", through which they frequently access a significant portion of the pre-existing Japanese pop culture content. "Face-to-face" interaction is undoubtedly "vital" for event attendees; however, "digital" may serve as a temporary "solution" or even become an integral part of subsequent "editions" of Japanese pop culture events.

Figure 5: Word cloud about the general concepts of the interviews carried out

5. Conclusion

When public movement is restricted, as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, arrangements for tourist entertainment must be modified accordingly. To be adequately prepared for the challenges ahead, it is imperative to assess recent experiences, understand the most effective strategies, and incorporate new concepts. By scrutinising a classification of tourist entertainment events that experienced a surge in popularity prior to the pandemic, primarily due to its heavy reliance on physical interaction, one can gain insight into future trends when conducting a case study analysis.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on all events, and those of Japanese pop culture, were no exception. Even in a wholly virtual world, the number of devotees had nothing to do with the numbers before 2020, and the offered panel could not be compared. The most effective strategies for future pandemics or similar consist primarily of adhering to health and government regulations. Additionally, the possibility of smaller events focused on a single topic, rather than addressing a wide range of concerns is being considered.

Undoubtedly, the pandemic has demonstrated that hybrid events are a viable alternative for expanding event offerings and engaging a broader audience. While it is clear that investment should be made in the platforms preferred by the target audiences, this could be an interesting way for some participants to overcome distance

and movement restrictions. Complete technological or digital replacement is not considered, but it is viewed favorably in mixed-use scenarios. Profitable ventures are possible with virtual reality, holographic visits, and augmented reality, but this depends on the further development of the technologies.

In sum, understanding the uniqueness and subtleties of experiences is essential for effective solutions. Maintaining socialisation is therefore key to the success of these events, especially under challenging conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, considering the specific participation requirements of different events and analysing the origins of each type of event is also crucial to ensure positive outcomes even in difficult and restrictive situations.

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Perceptions and Realities of Lisbon: An Examination of the Image of a Tourist Destination

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Abstract: Destination image is related to comprising cognitive, emotional, and conative components and includes an individual's thoughts, ideas, and perceptions of a place. Images consistently coincide with the internalisation of distinct perspectives, demonstrating that people have different perceptions of the destiny. Influences include media, authority figures, music, and movies. Although the experience may not match their initial expectations, these effects form their preconceived beliefs and expectations of a trip. Accordingly, it is important to explore the trustfulness of the positioning of tourist destinations to ascertain its alignment with the expectations of tourists.

Given that, Lisbon has been regarded as one of the foremost European cities in recent years, owing to its high level of accessibility and its multifaceted sensory attributes, it was deemed pertinent to investigate the perceptions of the visitors towards the city.

The present study used a mixed methods approach, incorporating a multimedia component that showcases various locations in the Lisbon region with open-ended questionnaires to gather the perspectives of the tourists and a closed-ended questionnaire that inquiries about the primary factors that attract visitors to Lisbon. This analysis employed graphical representations, including word clouds and graphics to explore the identified impressions,.

The research revealed a robust association between cultural, historical, and aesthetic variables and the choice of travel destination. Certain visual representations highlight the imperative of pursuing sustainable and responsible development to mitigate the potential for enduring degradation. This holds significance as certain images are linked to instances of environmental and social irresponsibility. The study also revealed that History and Heritage emerged as the most significant factors that attract individuals, followed by Cultural Attractions, Weather and Climate, Gastronomy, and Panoramic Views and Landscapes. A notable perception exists regarding the insufficiency of sustainability and eco-friendly practices, underscoring the necessity for targeted sustainability endeavours to promote responsible and sustainable development of tourism destinations.

Indeed, additional research on the contrast of perception and reality at the location is needed to evaluate the picture provided to visitors. However, understanding tourist-relevant areas like Lisbon is a good foundation for advertising them, allowing various stakeholders to make authentic and valuable marketing decisions.

Keywords – Destination Image, Lisbon, Tourist Experience, Tourism Perception, Travel Marketing.

1. Introduction

In the field of tourism research, there is a widely accepted consensus regarding the essential importance of understanding the factors that motivate tourists and impact their decision-making processes concerning travel destinations (Njagi et al., 2017). Understanding these motivations is imperative for market segmentation and enabling tourism stakeholders to effectively concentrate on their intended target audience (Baniya and Paudel, 2016; Mwawaza et al., 2022; Reihanian et al., 2015). To enhance customer satisfaction with their travel experiences, it is imperative to possess widespread knowledge of travel motivations, as Camilleri (2019) stated.

The term destination image encompasses the holistic portrayal of an individual's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of a particular geographical area (Lee et al., 2023; Beerli and Martin, 2004). The intricate nature of this concept is influenced by a multitude of factors, including its portrayal in media, endorsements

from influential figures, and depictions in music and film. The formation of mental imagery among travellers results from a collective endeavour involving a multitude of sources (Tocquer and Zins, 1999).

Tourists often embark on their journeys with preconceived notions and anticipations, which may or may not align with their actual experiences at the intended destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). The disparity between the projected benchmarks and the real-life encounter of travel underscores the significance of scrutinising the dependability of the depiction of tourist destinations and the impact of appealing factors in shaping these perceptions (Stylidis, 2020).

The main objective of this study is to examine the intricate connection between pull factors and destination image, recognising that the former often plays a pivotal role in the decision-making process of tourists when choosing a destination (Lee et al., 2002). To comprehensively analyse this subject, a meticulous review of academic literature was conducted, with particular emphasis on the interconnected relationship between pull factors, destination image, and the diverse range of travel motivations.

The present research focuses on the Lisbon region, which has garnered recognition as a prominent European destination in recent years (Vidal et al., 2023). Lisbon is widely recognised for its outstanding accessibility and its capacity to provide a wide array of sensory experiences to its tourists (Resonance Consultancy, 2023). This study employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the perception of pull factors in the Lisbon region and its association with the destination image among tourists. The aim was to comprehend the nature of this relationship and explore potential variations, such as those based on gender.

To provide visitors with a more accurate representation, it is essential to undertake a more extensive examination of the relationship between destination image and pull factors. However, gaining an understanding of tourist-relevant destinations, such as Lisbon, and how they align with factors that attract visitors, lays the foundation for effective promotion, allowing tourism agents to make informed and authentic marketing decisions.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Travel Decisions: Destination Pull Factors

Travels allow individuals to engage in self-exploration, cultivate fresh social relationships, and fortify familial ties, ultimately enriching both their social and personal identities (Liutikas, 2012). The formation of travellers' personalities is substantially influenced by their engagement with various cultures (Wearing et al., 2010). This phenomenon is especially noteworthy in situations involving working holiday volunteers who participate in cultural immersion experiences, which result in improved self-assurance, skill development, and emotional equilibrium (Tsaur and Huang, 2016). Moreover, religious tourists, who are frequently attracted to holy sites, continually endeavour to attain a deep sense of affiliation (Bideci and Albayrak, 2016; Poria, 2003). Hence, travellers' psychological well-being could be positively impacted by the distinctive experiences provided by the host culture (Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2017).

Pull factors, inherent to the physical resources and appeal of a destination, substantially impact how travellers make decisions (Rita et al., 2018). These factors encompass a wide range of destination activities. Demographic characteristics, including age, occupation, and educational background, can influence these activities. Additionally, the type of vacation under consideration, like city excursions, nature-oriented trips, resort getaways, theme park visits, or cruise vacations, also affects these factors (Rao et al., 1992; Hsieh et al., 1992). A multitude of scholarly research has discerned unique pull motivators, encompassing travel convenience, natural wilderness, cosmopolitan settings, accessible amenities, hunting prospects, and financial feasibility (Yuan and McDonald, 1990). The region's image and visitor influx are notably impacted by a multitude of factors associated with the destination, including environmental sustainability, safety protocols, and travel infrastructure quality (You et al., 2000).

The interaction between internal and external forces that influence the decisions of travellers is clarified within the conceptual framework of push and pull factors (Uysal and Jurowski, 1994; Mutinda and Mayaka, 2012). Push factors originate from intrinsic motivations and include the pursuit of escapism, relaxation, social status, daring experiences, intellectual growth, and social engagement. On the other hand, pull factors encompass the concrete elements of tourism, including the anticipations and perceptions of visitors concerning the calibre, allure, and characteristics of a particular location, including but not limited to climate, historical significance, natural splendour, and cultural contributions.

Furthermore, travellers seeking an escape are enticed by a variety of appealing factors, including picturesque beaches, pleasant local communities, natural landscapes, recreational facilities, theme parks, historical sites, unique ways of life, and breathtaking landscapes (Kassean and Gassita, 2013; Li et al., 2016; Li and Cheng, 2016). Prominent pull factors that substantially impact the choice of destinations include opulent lodgings, dining establishments, and shopping prospects (Chen and Peng, 2018; Park et al., 2010; Xu et al., 2018).

Additionally, five pull motivational variables, and six push motivational variables were identified in the cohort of British outbound leisure travellers by Jang and Cai (2002). The push factor identified as "knowledge seeking" was found to be the most influential, whereas "cleanliness and safety" emerged as the most prominent pull factor. Jonsson and Devonish (2008) underscore the substantial influence that demographic variables, including gender and age, have on the perception of tourist destinations.

According to Meng and Uysal (2008), the gender aspect can also contribute to differences in tourist preferences in pull factors. The study explored the gender-specific dimension of tourist motivation, offering valuable insights into the nuanced variations in how males and females perceive the attributes of a given destination. When examining preferences, it is commonly observed that males tend to prioritise engaging in outdoor activities and making use of amenities offered by resorts. On the other hand, women generally place more importance on leisure activities that involve outdoor settings and the appreciation of scenic landscapes. Moreover, a study conducted by McGehee in 1996 revealed that males are more inclined to engage in daring and thrilling experiences while driving.

The primary objective of the research undertaken by McGehee, Murphy, and Uysal (1996) was to examine potential gender discrepancies in the push and pull motivating factors of Australian tourists. The results of the research revealed noticeable discrepancies in the interests of female and male travelers. An investigation was similarly undertaken by Li, Wen, and Leung (2011) to examine the underlying factors that drive Chinese female travelers to participate in travel activities. Push and pull elements were identified by the researchers as the two distinct factors that influenced these individuals. Additionally, gender differences were apparent among the travelers, with females demonstrating a predilection for seeking tranquility and rejuvenation while males exhibited a preference for seeking pleasure and participating in active activities at the travel destination.

In brief, pull factors exert an influence on the process of travel decision-making and shape individuals' perceptions of potential destinations. Various demographic factors and types of vacations exert an influence on individuals' decision-making processes. A range of pull factors influences the appeal of a destination. The inherent magnetic attraction of the destination serves as a catalyst for attracting tourists, thereby stimulating growth in the tourism sector. It is imperative for destination marketers and other relevant stakeholders to possess a comprehensive understanding of pull factors and destination image perception to effectively curate captivating and alluring travel experiences.

3. Method

The objective of this study was to explore what factors influence tourists to visit Lisbon Metropolitan Area, as well their perspectives on this region, which encompasses various municipalities in the Portuguese capital region, including Alcochete, Almada, Amadora, Barreiro, Cascais, Lisbon, Loures, Mafra, Moita, Montijo, Odivelas, Oeiras, Palmela, Sesimbra, Setúbal, Seixal, Sintra, and Vila Franca de Xira. To accomplish this objective, the study employed a mixed-method research design integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches. This choice was based on the belief that using these approaches can yield more robust findings, thereby enhancing the overall value and coherence of the study (Davies, 2003). In order to accomplish the general objective, the current study was divided into two secondary objectives. The first aimed to understand the perceptions of tourists regarding the Lisbon region as a destination, with a specific emphasis on identifying the fundamental attributes that these stakeholders perceive in the region. The second secondary objective was to analyse the primary factors that attract individuals to the Lisbon region, followed by a comparison between their perception of the region and the considered attraction factors.

The study incorporated two higher schools in Portugal: "Escola Superior de Ciências Empresariais" in Setúbal and "Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril" in Estoril. The data collection process consisted of two main phases. In the qualitative phase of the study, a group of 193 participants actively participated in questionnaires with audiovisual aids. The process involved presenting a series of fifteen distinct images, each representing various areas within the Lisbon Metropolitan Region. Participants were given a limited viewing time of 5 to 10 seconds per image, during which they were instructed to provide one word that best captured their emotional response to each image. The objective was to identify the initial perceptions of each participant regarding images

depicting the Lisbon Metropolitan Area.

During the quantitative phase of the study, the same participants (193) were invited to answer a brief online survey. The instrument encompassed an inquiry pertaining to the primary factors (pull factors) that a tourist considers when selecting the Lisbon Metropolitan Area as their preferred tourist destination. Furthermore, alongside the primary stages, sociodemographic information, including age, gender, and income, was gathered. The suggested pull factors were determined based on previous studies conducted in the Lisbon region and Portugal as a whole (Albernaz, 2023; Barreira et al., 2017; Miranda and Dias, 2020; Sarra et al., 2015; Silva, 2021; Vareiro and Mendes, 2019). The most relevant and intriguing factors were selected, taking into account input from two tourism professionals with practical experience in the region under investigation.

Given that the data collected in the first phase consisted of qualitative text-based information, the data were subjected to analysis using a graphical representation known as a Word Cloud. This technique organises key phrases based on their frequency or other relevant parameters, and visually presents them with varying attributes such as size and color (Ye et al., 2019). By employing this approach, it was possible to gain insights into the primary perceptions of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and its impact as a tourist destination. Subsequently, the data collected in the second phase was analised. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarise and rank the pull factors using frequency analysis, complemented by the inclusion of graphics and tables. The results of this analysis provide valuable insights into the impact of tourists and their perceptions on the Lisbon Metropolitan Area.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Lisbon Region Perception

From a sociodemographic perspective, it is noteworthy that 85% of the participants fall within the age range of 18 to 25 years. This distribution of age within the sample is significantly skewed, indicating an imbalance in age representation. Similarly, it is worth mentioning that 68.4% of the participants possess an income below 500€, while 15.8% have an income ranging from 501€ to 1000€. Furthermore, 8.5% of the respondents fall within the income bracket of 1001€ to 2000€, whereas 4.5% have an income between 2001€ and 4000€. Lastly, a minority of 2.8% reported having an income exceeding 4000€. In relation to gender, the sample exhibits a balanced distribution, comprising 50.3% male and 47.2% female participants, while 2.6% of participants chose not to disclose their gender.

Considering the characteristics of the participants, a total of fifteen images were carefully selected to evaluate the respondents' perception of the Lisbon region. These images were chosen to represent various aspects of this Portuguese region, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Description of the images used to collect the perception of the Lisbon region, Portugal.

Upon conducting an analysis of the lexical content, it becomes evident that the cultural element prominently distinguishes itself from the remaining components, as evidenced by the frequent occurrence of the term "castle" which manifests itself 156 times. Indeed, it is accurate to assert that two of the depicted images can be readily identified as castles, while a substantial portion of these interpretations may plausibly originate from direct visual observations of the images. Nevertheless, to manifest such regularity and in conjunction with other pertinent aspects associated with the visual representation, it becomes imperative to underscore the inherent capacity of the cultural element within the given region. Likewise, the term "beach", occurring 128 times indicates the potential inherent in the coastal region, exerting discernible impacts on the domain of tourism centred around sun and sea activities. The present scenario resembles castles, as evidenced by the presence of beach imagery in two distinct visual representations.

Despite all factors, the third notion that arises carries a pessimistic undertone, denoted as "garbage" with a frequency of 70 instances. This observation highlights the need for further efforts in the realm of environmental sustainability within the given area. One of the images prominently depicted this harmful factor, while the term was also seen in other images, mainly associated with urban or city centre images.

The three consecutive words that occur most frequently are "market" (repeated 69 times), "Lisbon" (repeated 63 times), and "tram" (repeated 59 times). These repetitions primarily serve as observations about the image's content, lacking significant relevance for in-depth analysis. Nevertheless, the frequent occurrence of the word "sea" (58 occurrences) in the content underscores the significance and inherent possibilities associated with the coastal region of the area. The term "polluted" is reiterated 56 times, further highlighting the perspective aligned with environmental sustainability that necessitates attention in this region. This issue is intrinsically linked to the aforementioned perspective and requires concerted efforts to address it. The subsequent two words, namely "Belém" with a frequency of 51 occurrences, and "bridge" with a frequency of 49 occurrences, are once again discoveries associated with the visual representations presented. However, the term "crowd" is mentioned 42 times, which highlights the challenge posed by the significant influx of tourists and its potential impact on social sustainability.

The term "History" is reiterated 42 times, thereby emphasising the cultural significance and intangible heritage of the Portuguese territory. Similarly, the word "people" appears 41 times, highlighting its association with the substantial influx of tourists in the Lisbon region.

In conclusion, as shown in Figure 2, the Lisbon Region is commonly perceived as a culturally, historically, and aesthetically attractive destination, primarily due to its coastal area and beaches. However, concerns regarding environmental and social sustainability are frequently brought up, often in a critical manner, and these concerns can also be linked to the overall perception of the entity.

Figure 2: Word cloud about the Lisbon Region perception.

4.2 Lisbon Region Pull Factors

Regarding the pull factors associated with the Lisbon region, thirty factors connected to the region's distinctive characteristics were presented, as depicted in Figure 3. The participants were given the opportunity to select, using a multiple-choice format, the factors they deemed most significant in attracting individuals to the region. A total of twelve main factors emerged from the responses: "History and Heritage" received 134 responses, "Cultural attractions" received 129 responses, "Weather and Climate" received 122 responses, "Museums and Art" received 100 responses, "Local Cuisine" and "Panoramic Views and Landscapes" both received 96 responses, "Nightlife and Entertainment" received 88 responses, "Architectural Heritage" received 77 responses, "Historical Landmarks" received 74 responses, "Portuguese Tiles" received 73 responses, and "Beaches and Coastal Scenery" and "Security and Protection" both received 71 responses.

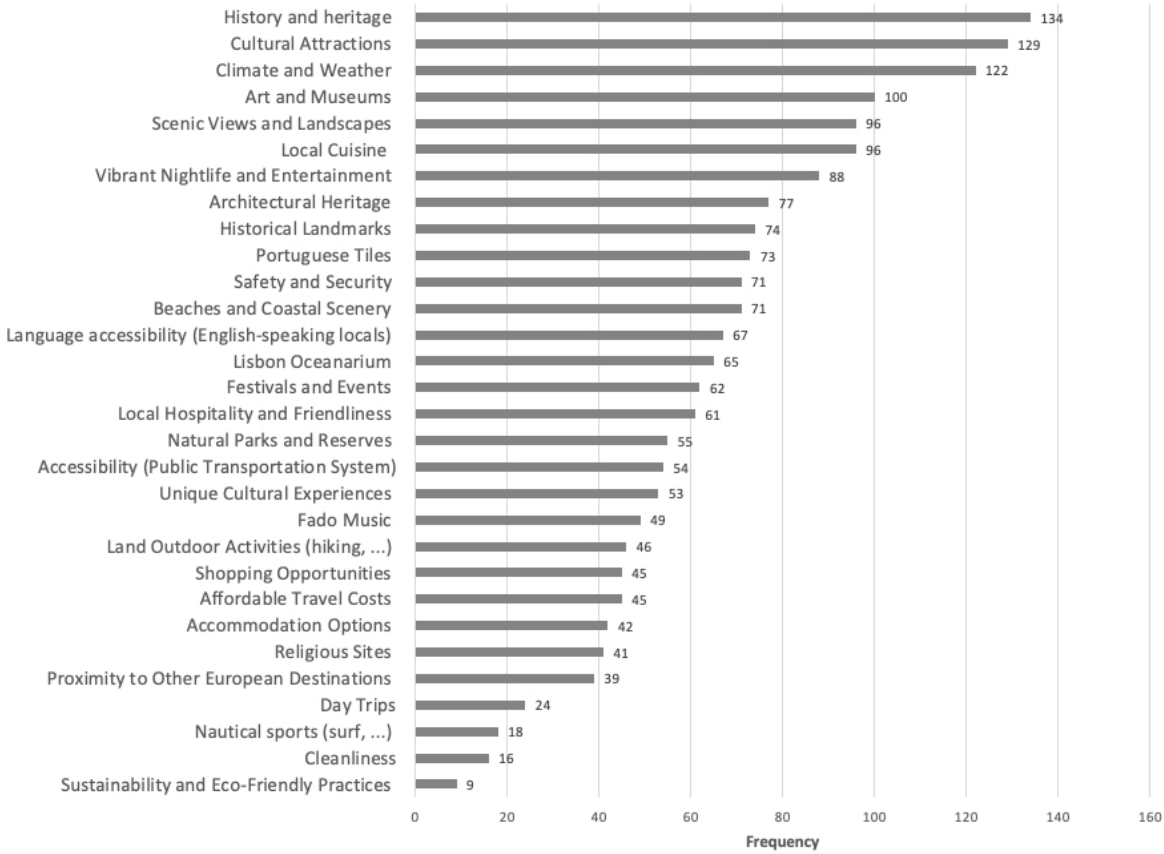

Figure 3: Graphic with the main pull factors linked to the Lisbon region.

In a comprehensive global analysis, it becomes evident that the variables associated with culture and history exhibit the highest proportion. Specifically, "History and Heritage" garnered a substantial percentage of 76.2% (147 respondents), while "Cultural Attractions" obtained a significant proportion of 71.5%. The topic of "Weather and Climate" accounts for a majority of 67.9%. Two other notable aspects are "Local cuisine" and "Panoramic views and landscapes", both of which received a 53.9% rating.

One aspect that merits attention is the relatively low level of responses in the category of "Sustainability and Eco-friendly Practices", which accounts for only 5.2% or 10 participants.

The responses were examined with consideration given to the gender of each participant (excluding the 2.6% who did not disclose their gender). The analysis revealed that there were no statistically significant variations in the selections made, as depicted in Figure 4. The factors selected by the majority of participants are consistent with the overall observations.

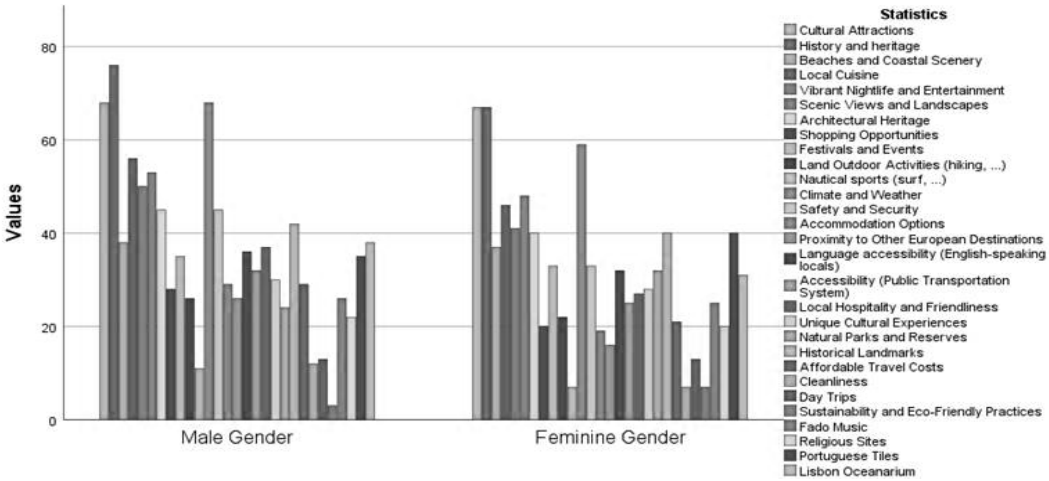

Figure 4: Graphic with the crosstabulation of the pull factors with the gender.

5. Conclusion

This study intended to study Lisbon's perceptions of tourists towards the cityand encompassed two phases: (1) to identify the perceptions of visitors regarding images depicting the Lisbon region and (2) characterise the main pull factors associated with the destiny.

Concerning the first phase, it is possible to verify that cultural, history and aesthetics are associated with this destination. This first conclusion, the mention of some inputs associates to images, reveal the need to plan and implement more sustainable and responsible strategies for this tourism destination development to avoid its degradation in the medium and long term. In fact, the lack of environmental and social sustainability is frequently associated with some images. Regarding the second phase, the study confirmed the pull factors related with "History and Heritage" followed by "Cultural Attractions", "Weather and Climate" , "Local cuisine" and "Panoramic views and landscapes". During this phase, the perception of lack of “Sustainability and eco-friendly Practices" was confirmed.

In terms of gender, the study explored possible differences considering tourist motivation, however, it was not possible to conclude that there are differences when examining preferences among genders.

This study reinforces the idea that touristic destination image studies are valued to understand which elements are more important to tourists, since this information can be used in promotion and strategy.

Finally, it is important to note that the sample size was ideal, as the statistical validity would have been bigger with more observations. This is related to two main constraints: time and resources. Consequently, the study will be repeated with a larger and age-representative sample.

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Instagram as a Digital Marketing Tool of a Hotel Brand

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Abstract: Social media marketing is increasingly seen as one of the main ways of communicating with consumers, platforms where visual content is the main form of communication, such as Instagram. The human brain is programmed to not only pay attention to individual resources, but also to the stories that these resources tell. Stories allow humans to relate, inspire, motivate, and often be persuaded, because they mix information with emotion. In marketing, this concept of storytelling focuses mainly on details of a brand's branding. Therefore, although content shared on social networks can reach a large audience, that same content can be abandoned in the same instant, and so marketers must consciously create content that is relevant and interesting to their target audience, that tells the story of the brand and that engage the target audience with the brand. The presence of hotel units on social media, particularly Instagram, is increasingly seen as one of the main tools in the hotel industry's digital strategy.

This exploratory study evaluates the role of visual marketing by analyzing how it can impact the performance of Instagram posts from a five-star hotel group brand in the city of Porto, Portugal. 77 Instagram posts were analyzed according to the following categories: day of the week of publication, content creator, engagement dimensions (number of likes, number of comments and number of hashtags), presence of people, topic, visual content analysis method (objects identified and predominant tone), color (description of color and tone) and finally, storytelling (the presence of storytelling in the publication and the type of story). The Google Vision API platform was used to analyze the visual content and color of all the publications collected.

This study reveals that hotels should analyze the colors, type of stories, photographic content and topics that have the most positive effect on consumers - making the most of the interaction with consumers, leading them to make a reservation at the hotel. In this sense, the main aspects of visual marketing that are most effective are suggested, in terms of color, topic and storytelling, as well as identifying good visual marketing practices.

Keywords: Social Media, Digital Marketing, Hotel Brand, Instagram

1. Introduction

In the last decade, social networks have become fundamental in the communication between organizations and consumers, thus making the digital presence of hotels is essential. Therefore, it is important for all industry professionals to evaluate the role of social media in travel planning (Leung et al., 2013). Guests are increasingly turning to hotel social media in the booking process, so hotels should see social media as an opportunity to build relationships with their guests (Ristova & Dimitrov, 2019). Tatar and Eren-Erdoğmuş (2016) concluded that easy and speed of booking, agility in communicating with consumers, sharing opinions and the possibility of including other hotel services as a link are some of the advantages of social media marketing. Kurniawan et al. (2021) also concluded that social networks are an effective tool for promoting products or services. In this sense, professionals must consider the content published on social networks; as well as the respective interactions, often referred to as engagement likes and comments that this content receives.

Social media marketing is increasingly seen as one of the main ways of communicating with consumers. Ways of communicating with consumers using platforms where visual content is the main form of communication, such as Instagram. Square photography in 1:1 and 4:5 aspect ratios and more recently the instastories and reels (Maehle et al., 2023).

However, although content shared on social media can reach a large audience, that same content can be abandoned in the same instant by the same audience, which is why marketers must consciously create content that is relevant and interesting to their target audience (Dwivedi et al., 2015).

It is therefore essential to evaluate the role of visual marketing by analyzing how it can impact the performance of posts on Instagram and to propose a manual of good visual practices in social media management, particularly Instagram, in the hotel industry.

This exploratory study evaluates the role of visual marketing by analyzing how it can impact the performance of Instagram posts from a five-star hotel group brand in the city of Porto, Portugal.

This paper is organized into four sessions, first it is presented the literature review, after the methodology applied in the study, then the results are presented and finally the conclusions, limitations of the study and future work.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Marketing and Tools

Digital marketing is defined by Veleva & Tsvetanova (2020) as an essential tool in the digital transformation of businesses, using technology tools and communication tools in the digital environment. In particular, customer relationship management tools, which aim to increase revenue and consumer satisfaction through interactivity with them.

Veleva & Tsvetanova (2020) define digital marketing tools as:

- **Website:** the online platform of a business, i.e. the digital representation of a brand.
- **E-mail marketing:** based on sending promotional e-mails, where it is possible to segment the target audience with real consumers and potential followers.
- **Social networks:** social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are used as a communication tool with a community, attracting potential consumers. Through this tool it is possible to advertise a particular product/service and offer assistance to the consumer.
- **Blogs:** similar to the website, it is a platform that allows the discussion of certain topics and the publication of relevant information.
- **SEO:** is based on optimizing the website so that it appears in first positions in search engine results.
- **Big Data Marketing:** this tool allows you to collect, process, analyze and interpret information to segment consumers.
- **Online advertising:** a paid tool that allows you to promote a product/service through specific formats such as banners, landing pages, intermediate pages and promoted articles.
- **Visual marketing:** a tool that promotes a product/service through visual communication means, for example youtube.

The same authors also point out that the main advantages of digital marketing is the high interactivity with consumers, the disappearance of the geographical barrier in marketing activities, provides the opportunity for the brand to respond to the needs and desires of consumers, allows the results of marketing campaigns in a more detailed way, facilitates the segmentation of consumers, allows campaigns to be customized according to consumer characteristics, is more direct to consumers interests and needs, allows the brand to reach a larger audience, increases the number of a larger audience, increases the number of visits to the brand's website and requires less investment compared to more physical or traditional marketing tools (Veleva & Tsvetanova, 2020).

2.2 Social Media in Hospitality

In the digital age, social networks have become a form of communication integrated into people's daily lives (Aji et al., 2020). On the Web, information is usually shared via official brand websites, but on social media the system is different. Social media is about people sharing their opinions by sharing content such as photos, videos and text (Yardi & Aksoz, 2019), as well as their behavior as consumers, product/service preferences and experiences with other users (Aji et al., 2020). It is therefore important for the brand to include social media in its marketing strategy to create a community of followers and increase their interaction with the brand (Aji et al., 2020).

The main social networks used in the hotel industry are known as content communities, which allow the sharing of different types of multimedia, i.e., in text, photo and video such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Pinterest (Minazzi, 2015). Instagram has as its main goal the sharing of visual content, through various functionalities such as the feed, the main page; the reels short 30-second videos; stories, moments that are shared and available for 24 hours, and video. Instagram is one of the most widely used social networks and is one of the most interactive when it comes to sharing of visual content and opinions. Users can share with a large number of people and identify brands, people and organizations (Yardi & Aksoz, 2019).

Aji et al. (2020) concluded that promoting products and services through Instagram increases brand awareness and creates value for consumers, as well as increasing revenue. Another advantage of social media marketing is the positive effect it has on consumer trust in the brand, especially in hotel services (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016). Hotels should use this form of marketing to build consumer confidence and thus ensure long-term brand loyalty. Social media also allows consumers to communicate in real time, asking questions and expecting immediate answers (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016).

Consumers don't expect static forms of social media communication from hotels, such as the hotels' social media, as is the case with the hotel website, but rather interactivity, i.e., two-way communication (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016).

It should be noted that authenticity and being genuine are important characteristics in social media marketing. Organizations should not try to manipulate the truth and the image that consumers have of the brand but should interact with consumers and use social media tools to potentiate the interaction with them (Al-Zyoud, 2018).

2.3 Visual Marketing and Social Media

Visual marketing is much more than simply sharing photos or videos on social media. Social media, it is the development of a visual strategy that considers where and how the target audience will interact with the visual content (Gretzel, 2016).

According to Maehle et al. (2023), it is possible to categorize social networks according to their different modes of communication. Twitter and Facebook are social networks mostly textual with some visual aspects, such as photos and videos; Pinterest is mostly visual, with images and videos collected from various websites; TikTok and Youtube are mostly visual, differing in the length of the videos and finally. Instagram, the social network of focus in this study, is virtually text-free and mainly visual, with images and videos of short duration (Maehle et al., 2023).

In the case of photography, Negri & Vigolo (2015) found that hotels more often publish photographs of the hotel's common areas, restaurant and food and attractions of the destination, rather than what tourists like to see most, such as photographs of the landscapes seen by the hotel. The same study demonstrates the importance of the hotel satisfying the interests of consumers, not only because of the impact it can have at the booking stage, but also post-booking (Negri & Vigolo, 2015). In the same Ren et al. (2021) confirmed that hotel interiors, the surrounding environment and leisure activities should be publicized due to their importance in the consumer experience, as well as details of decoration and architecture capture their attention.

2.4 Instagram in Hospitality

Hotels can interact with consumers through daily updates on upcoming activities and events, campaigns, questions, competitions and receiving suggestions. Sharing photos is also one of the most attractive ways, especially photos of celebrity or influencer stays (Yoong & Lian, 2019).

The content shared on Instagram can be presented in a combination of various formats, such as images, videos and text (Aydin, 2020).

In terms of vividness, text is considered to be content with low richness and visual content, such as images and videos, is considered high gaudiness content (Aydin, 2020).

Interactivity in Instagram posts can be manifested in the form of contests, questions and answers and external links through comments (Aydin, 2020). According to Aydin (2020), these forms of interaction increase engagement with publications.

Engagement can also be measured by the hotel through five dimensions, knowledge, expression of attitude, expression of opinion, advocacy, and loyalty. These five dimensions were proposed by Hashim & Fadhil (2017), to analyze the level of engagement by hotel operators. Although Hashim & Fadhil (2017) applied this study to the social network Facebook, the same dimensions and can be applied to Instagram:

- **Knowledge:** consumer realization of the page;
- **Expression of attitude:** consumer acceptance of the content published on the page;
- **Expression of opinion:** consumers' opinion of the content published on the page;
- **Advocacy:** word-of-mouth of consumers or the sharing of content shared on the page;
- **Loyalty:** the number of consumers offline who interact with the hotel.

3. Methodology

For this research, the following general objective was defined: "To understand how the visual content of a photograph influences the consumers of a hotel unit", clarified by the following questions: "How does the visual content of a photograph attract the attention of a hotel's consumers?"; and "What are the main visual marketing visual marketing practices adopted by the hotel that influence the performance of Instagram posts?"

Bearing in mind the questions described, we intend to verify and analyze the following general and specific goals:

General goal: Analyze the role of visual marketing in social media management, in particular Instagram.

Specific goals:

a. To understand which strategy for publishing photographic content on social networks is the most effective for hotels.
b. Identify the colors used in photo editing that most attract consumers, according to the different categories of hotel service.
c. Understand how photography contributes to storytelling of hotels.

The hotel under study is group with three five-star luxury boutique hotels, 2 located in Porto and 1 located in Lisbon. The hotels are all thematic representing the art and design of Portuguese artists. The hotels located in Porto totalize 84 rooms and suites, and the hotel located in Lisbon have 26 rooms and 6 apartments. In terms of services, all the hotels have a restaurant, which offers breakfast, brunch, lunch and dinner, and a spa. The hotels also have bar, gym, and swimming pool.

The study strategy was to analyze the content published by the hotel on its Instagram social network over a 4-month period, between November 1, 2022, and February 28, 2023, where 77 posts were collected.

These publications were collected and analyzed according to the following categories: day of the week of publication, content creator, engagement dimensions (number of likes, number of comments and number of hashtags) presence of people, topic, visual content analysis method (objects identified and predominant tone), color (description of color and tone) and finally, storytelling (the presence of storytelling in the publication and the type of story). In the case of the method of analyzing visual content and color, all the publications were entered into the Google Vision API platform (Ren et al., 2021).

The Google Vision API platform makes it possible to detect objects and analyze photo metadata. Using the demo version of this platform, which is available on Google's website, we inserted all the images from the publications to extract the main objects identified and the main color of the images. An Excel table was created to relate the performance of a publication with the different categories of digital and visual marketing, checking which ones have the greatest influence.

About color, after extracting the main color code of each photograph, this was inserted into the Color Hexa platform, to obtain the textual description of the color and thus arrive at the main shade of each photograph.

The following steps were taken to analyze the publication strategy of each hotel:

1. Collection of the day of the week of publication.
2. Collecting the dimensions of engagement dimensions: number of likes, number of comments and number of hashtags used.
3. Identifying the presence of people in the photos.
4. Identification of the topic of the publication, in this case the categories used were room, restaurant, food, hotel, spa, gym, staff, pool and bar.
5. Visual content analysis method - carried out using the Google Vision API platform - collection of the main objects identified and the predominant color code.
6. Description of the color and identification of the shade - using the color Hexa platform, the color code was entered, and the description was transcribed. description was transcribed and the main shade concluded.
7. Storytelling: the presence of a story in the description of each publication was identified and the type of story was analyzed, according to identified in the scientific review.

4. Results

The results will be discussed with the analysis of the posts collected in the following topics:

1. Creator of the content
2. Topic and people
3. Visual content
4. Color
5. Storytelling
6. Engagement dimensions (number of likes and number of comments)

4.1 Creator of the Content

The first factor to analyze in each publication in the period under review was the creator of the content. In the case of Hotel 1, it was found that photographs created by the hotel photographer are the most published, with only two photographs created by digital influencers. In the case of Hotel 2, only three photographs were created by the rest were created by the hotel photographer. As for Hotel 3, all the photos were created by the hotel photographer.

In view of this data, the Hotel Group prefers to publish content produced by the hotel photographer and that it does not republish the photographs of digital influencers, i.e., it does not monetize these partnerships.

4.2 Topic and People

The second factor to analyze in each publication is the topics and people. At Hotel 1, the most common topic was Room (10 posts), followed by Food and Staff (3 posts), City, Gym and Restaurant (2 posts) and Pool, Spa and Christmas (1 post). At Hotel 2, the most common topics were Room (10 posts); Hotel (9 posts); City, Restaurant (3 posts) and Spa (2 posts). With regard to Hotel 3, the most common topics are Room (8 posts); Restaurant, City and Hotel (4 posts); Staff (3 posts) and, Bar and Pool (1 post).

Looking at the topics of the hotels under analysis, it can be seen that 36% of the publications have the room as their main topic; 17% the hotel; 12% the city and the restaurant, respectively; 8% the staff; 4% the food and spa, respectively; 3% the pool; 2% the gym and, lastly, 1% the bar and Christmas, respectively, resulting in the following graph shown in Figure 1.

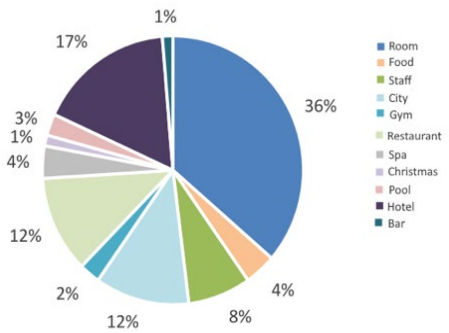

Figure 1: Topics in hotel publications

Regarding the presence of people, we found that in Hotel 1 and Hotel 3, 16 publications did not include people and 9 publications included people, and in Hotel 2, 16 publications did not include people and 11 publications did.

4.3 Visual Content

According to the visual content analysis method proposed by Maehle et al. (2023), the objects identified in the publications and the predominant tone were analyzed for the purposes of this study.

In Hotel 1, a greater number of posts were identified with People (9 posts); furniture (8 posts); lamp (7 posts); bed (6 posts); chair and food (3 posts); sofa, tableware, dumbbell, boat and cushion (2 posts) and lastly, mirror, pool, table, shoe, water, lake, jacuzzi, massage table, cutting board, dispenser, bathtub and plate (1 post).

In Hotel 2, a greater number of publications were identified with People (11 publications); Lamp (8 publications); Chair (6 publications); Furniture and Table (3 publications); Bed, Books, Bridge, Flowers and Building (2 publications); and Brush, Bicycle, Tableware, Sofa, Window, Drink, Glass of Wine and Stairs (1 publication). In the case of Hotel 3, a greater number of publications were identified with

Table and Chair (8 publications); Person (6 publications); Plant, Sofa, Bed, Lamp (4 publications); Tableware, Food (3 publications); Bathtub (2 publications); Bicycle, Bridge, Picture, Furniture, Window, Television, Cushion and Bench (1 publication).

It is possible to group these different objects identified in the various hotel units into the most prevalent in these hotels. We can group these different objects as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Objects identified in publications according to category.

Category	Objects identified
People	Guest
Décor	Furniture, Lamp, Bed, Chair, Sofa, Cushion, Mirror, Table, Dispenser, Bathtub, Books, Flowers, Bicycle, Window, Stairs, Picture, TV, Bench
Restaurant	Food, Dish, Tableware, Cutting board, Drink, Wine glass
Gym	Halter
Spa	Jacuzzi, Massage table, Brush
Outside	Boat, Pool, Water, Lake, Bridge, Building

Regarding the predominant tone in hotel publications, the Figure 2 shows the different variations that will be analyzed according to their tone.

Figure 2: Predominant tone present in the publications of the hotels

Another important factor in analysing the visual content of a photograph is colour. Using the *Colour Hexa Platform* (2023), it was possible to extract the colour description and, in turn, conclude the tonality of the image.

The orange hue was present in the most posts (9 posts) in Hotel 1, followed by the red and blue hues (4 posts), the yellow hue (3 posts), the green hue (2 posts) and finally the violet, brown and pink hues (1 post). In the case of Hotel 2, the orange hue was seen in more publications (15 posts); followed by blue and red tones (4 posts); green tones (3 posts) and violet tones (1 post). In Hotel 3, it was possible to see that the orange hue was the most present (10 posts), followed by blue (7 posts) and green and red (4 posts).

If we add up the shades present in all the hotels in the group, we see that 44% of the publications had orange as their main shade; 19% had blue as their main shade; 16% had red as their main shade; 10% had green as their main shade; 4% had yellow as their main shade; 3% had pink and violet as their main shades; and lastly, 1% had brown as main shade, as shown in the Figure 3.

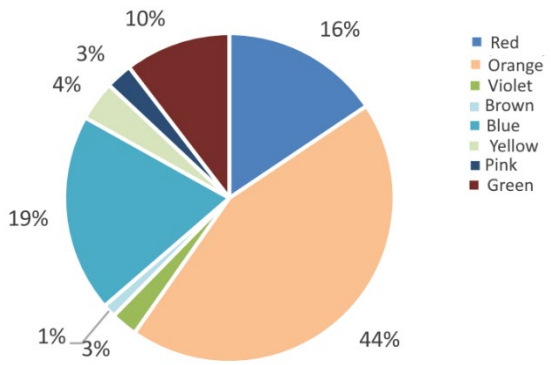

Figure 3: The tones of hotel publications

Related with the topics, it can be seen that orange was the most present in the topics room (39.3%), hotel (61.5%), spa (66.7%), food (66.7%), restaurant (44.4%), staff (50%) and bar (100%); blue in the topic city; yellow (50%) and pink (50%) in the topic gym and red (50%) and blue (50%) in the topic swimming pool, as shown in the Figure 4.

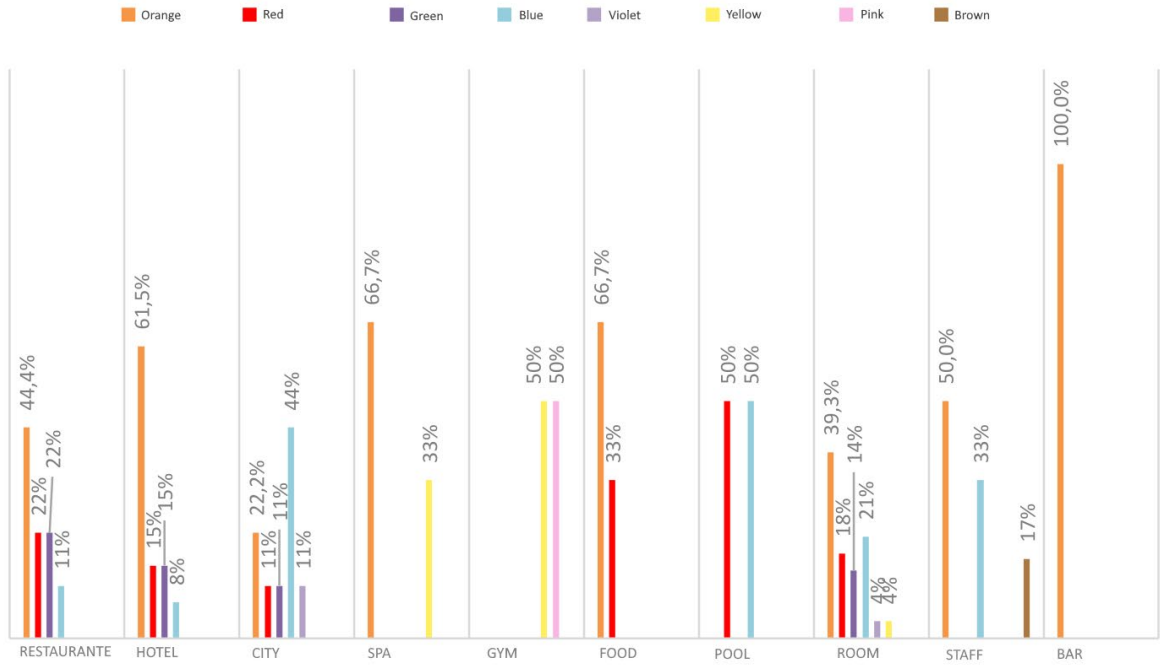

Figure 4: Topic vs Tone

4.4 Storytelling

Regarding storytelling, the publications under analysis showed the presence of storytelling in 22 posts at Hotel 1. As for the type of story, in the case of Hotel 1 the stories most present in the descriptions of the publications are Stories about the Company (10 posts), six of which are related to promotional campaigns; stories about figures who inspired the hotel (6 posts); stories about the sector and the people in it (4 posts) and finally, stories about the city (3 posts).

On the other hand, stories about the company (14 posts), four of which were related to promotional campaigns, were the stories most present in Hotel 2's posts; followed by stories about figures who inspired the hotel (8 posts) and stories about the city (3 posts).

It was also noted that, at Hotel 3, the most frequent stories were stories about the company and stories about figures who inspired the hotel (6 posts), respectively; and, stories about the city and stories about the sector and people in it (3 posts), respectively.

As with the other factors, 45% of these hotels' publications are about stories about the company, 30% are stories about figures who inspired the hotel, 14% are stories about the city and 11% are stories about the sector and the people in it, as can be seen in the Figure 5.

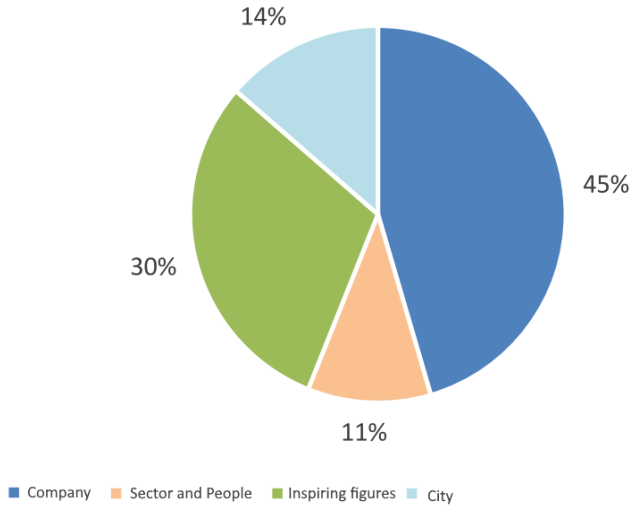

Figure 5: Storytelling in hotel units

4.5 Engagement Dimensions

This factor analysed the number of likes and the number of comments used in these posts were analysed.

4.5.1 Number of Likes

According to the number of likes, the main characteristics of the three publications with the most likes from the hotels under analysis were compiled, as shown in the Table 2.

Table 2: The posts with the highest number of likes from the hotels

	Hotel 1	Hotel 2	Hotel 3
Week day	Sunday	Sunday; Sunday; Wednesday	Thursday; Thursday; Sunday
Content creator	Influencer; Influencer; Hotel Photographer	Hotel Photographer; Hotel Photographer; Photographer	Hotel Photographer
Hashtags number	16; 11; 11	15; 13; 10	13; 14; 14
People	Yes; Yes, No	Yes; No; No	No
Topic	Room; Room; Restaurant	Room; Hotel; City	Hotel; Pool; Hotel
Objects identified	People; Jacuzzi; Décor	People; Décor; Hotel exterior	Décor

	Hotel 1	Hotel 2	Hotel 3
Tons	Red; Blue; Red	Orange; Orange; Blue	Blue; Red; Orange
Storytelling	Yes	Yes	Yes; No; No
Type of story	Stories about the company; Stories about the company; Stories about the sector and the people in it	Stories about the company; Stories about figures who inspired the hotel; Stories about the city	Stories about the company

4.5.2 Number of Comments

According to the number of comments, the main characteristics of the three publications with the most comments from the hotels under analysis were compiled, as shown in the Table 3.

Table 3: The publications with the most comments from the hotels

	Hotel 1	Hotel 2	Hotel 3
Week day	Sunday	Sunday; Wednesday; Tuesday	Sunday
Content creator	Influencer; Hotel Photographer; Hotel Photographer	Hotel Photographer; Hotel Photographer; Photographer	Hotel Photographer
Hashtags number	11; 16; 16	13; 14; 0	14; 16; 13
People	Yes	No; No; Yes	No
Topic	Room; Staff; Staff	Hotel	Hotel; Hotel; Room
Objects identified	People; Jacuzzi; Décor	Décor; Hotel exterior; People	Décor
Tons	Blue; Brown; Orange	Orange; Orange; Red	Orange; Green; Blue
Storytelling	Yes	Yes	No; No; Yes
Type of story	Stories about the company; Stories about the company; Stories about the sector and the people in it	Stories about figures who inspired the hotel; Stories about figures who inspired the hotel; Stories about the company	Stories about the company

The posts with the highest number of likes are not necessarily the same posts with the highest number of comments. The main differences are regarding the topic of the post. Room and staff posts provoke more comments, while room and restaurant posts provoke more likes, in the case of Hotel 1. At Hotel 2, posts about the hotel are the three with the most comments, and in the case of those with the most likes, the room and city topics are also added. At Hotel 3, posts about the hotel and the room get the most comments and the hotel and the pool get the most likes. Analysing the main tones, we see that warm tones cause more likes and more comments in all the hotels, except for Hotel 3, where there are more posts with more comments with cooler tones. In the other categories of analysis, there is agreement on the characteristics of the publications with the most likes and comments.

Although we do not inquiry the customers about the posts, there are few comments of them in Instagram that it is worth to state as "*Love this view and room*" and "*I miss this place everyday*", associated with photos of the room and garden of the hotel.

Finally, it worth to notice that in the moment of the study, the followers and reach of the hotel group under analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: The followers and reach of the hotel group under analysis

	Number of followers in the beginning of November	Number of followers in the end of February	Number of reach in the beginning of November	Number of reach in the end of February
Hotel 1	20.569	22.991	10.848	23.380

	Number of followers in the beginning of November	Number of followers in the end of February	Number of reach in the beginning of November	Number of reach in the end of February
Hotel 2	7.421	9.739	12.331	12.685
Hotel 3	8.587	10.148	7.318	11.187

5. Conclusions

This research has provided insight into some aspects of the digital and visual marketing strategy of a boutique hotel group, in relation to photographic content, tones and storytelling.

The literature review points out that there are several steps when it comes to analysing the content of a photo, which can be used to increase the performance of Instagram posts, increasing likes, comments, and the consumer's intention to buy. Thus, the use of visual marketing practices in the hotel industry becomes essential.

Regarding the objectives set, by analysing the posts of these three hotels, it was possible to identify the main aspects of visual marketing that are most effective, namely in terms of colours, topic and storytelling.

The conclusion is that, as well as it being essential for hotels to maintain a presence on social media, it is important to use the various tools available to increase engagement. Hotels should analyse which colours, type of stories, photo content and topic that have the most positive effect on consumers. In this way, they will be able to capitalize on consumer interaction by building a relationship with them, leading them to make a reservation at the hotel.

Some limitations emerged during this research. The main limitation was the number of publications analysed for each hotel unit, which in a period of four months was based on 77 publications in three hotel units.

In addition, this study represents a single case study and is therefore considered an exploratory study on the subject. Although the notoriety of each publication was analysed by the interactions received from users. It is also a limitation that customers were not asked about the impact of the publications and images, namely the emotions and reactions they provoke.

About future lines of research, it would be interesting to analyse which emotions that the shades represent for consumers and to understand which shades they prefer for each hotel service topic, in order to understand which shades cause a greater intention of attitude and expression of opinion.

It would also be relevant to extend the study to all five-star hotels in Portugal, by region, and analyse how the main tones of each region influence the publications made by the hotels.

Analyse which publications were promoted by paid advertisements and how these impact on engagement and how they influence the hotel's notoriety would also be relevant to analyse.

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Tourists' Luxury Value and Sustainability Perceptions of South African Exotic Leather Products

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Abstract: Travelling mostly involves expenditure on products beyond daily consumables (i.e. tourism shopping), but sometimes tourists visit a country with the specific intention of acquiring goods unique to that particular context, either for personal or commercial use. This type of "shopping tourism" contributes to the growth of luxury markets such as the exotic leather industry. In stimulating shopping tourism and promoting the local exotic leather industry, it is crucial to understand tourists' underlying perceptions and sustainable values that influence their luxury shopping behaviour. Using animal skins to create fashion accessories involves several environmental concerns and remains controversial among American and Chinese consumers, who rank among the world's top luxury goods spenders. This research, therefore, investigated American and Chinese shopping tourists' luxury value perceptions, sustainability excellence perceptions, and purchase intent for South African exotic leather products. Data was derived from a purposive sample including both American and Chinese tourists, aged 25 years and older, who had either visited South Africa in the past or intended to visit the country soon. A structured online questionnaire consisting of scales adapted from prior empirical research was developed. The English version of the questionnaire was translated into Mandarin and Cantonese for Chinese tourists. Data analysis involved two structural equation models (one based on the American and another on the Chinese tourists' responses) to test hierarchical relationships among variables. The results confirm that personal luxury value strongly influences sustainability excellence and the purchase intent of exotic leather products for both American and Chinese respondents. These findings highlight the potential of positioning South Africa as a luxury shopping tourism destination for exotic leather products, thus contributing toward economic growth and employment opportunities. However, environmental concerns must be addressed to conform to Eastern and Western tourists' sustainable luxury value perceptions.

Keywords: Exotic leather, Luxury Value, Shopping Tourism, Sustainability Excellence

1. Introduction

The global luxury market (including exotic leather products) is one of the fastest-growing and most profitable segments worldwide (Hennigs et al, 2015). This market is spread across various countries and thus influenced by different cultures, resulting in multiple luxury value perceptions and other underlying motives for buying luxury goods (Shukla, 2012). Currently, America and China are still seen as the world's two largest luxury goods markets (Statistica, 2024), with consumers who seek to travel and spend their income on luxury goods across the globe, including South Africa (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2016). Therefore, understanding these consumer segments' unique luxury value perceptions, including perceptions about sustainability issues and their willingness to acquire exotic leather luxury products, is essential for growing the local exotic leather luxury industry. Sustainability, in particular, has become a priority for the luxury goods market since consumers have become increasingly conscientious, thus changing the conventional approach to marketing luxury products such as exotic leather goods (Hennigs et al, 2013).

The luxury value perception framework, initially developed by Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009) and further advanced by Shukla and Purani (2012), served as a theoretical basis for this study. This framework postulates that luxury value is based on four dimensions, namely financial, functional, individual and social value. Theoretically, it is argued that these luxury value perceptions are compatible with the pursuit of sustainability and collectively form the basis for perceptions of "sustainability excellence", which, in turn, influence consumers' perceptions of and purchase intentions for sustainable luxury goods (Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013). However, to date, the interrelationship of these concepts has not been extensively investigated in the exotic leather industry. It is further argued that consumers' perceptions of luxury value and sustainability excellence could be influenced by their nationality, cultural profile and background since value perceptions and consumption motives may differ from one country and culture to the next (Sharma, 2010; Aliyev & Wagner, 2018).

Therefore, this study's overarching aim was to compare American and Chinese tourists concerning the interrelationship of their luxury value perceptions, perceptions of sustainable excellence, and purchase

intentions towards exotic leather products. It was envisaged that the findings of this study would enable stakeholders in the local exotic leather industry to effectively market luxury exotic leather goods to both American and Chinese tourists in a sustainable, effective and value-focused manner.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Luxury Associated with Exotic Leather Goods

The word "luxury" is derived from the Latin word "Luxus", which describes excessive and splendorous living, extravagance, wealth and affluence (Christodoulides, Michaelidou and Li, 2009). Thus, luxury goods relate to excessive possessions that extend beyond necessity (Brun and Castelli, 2013) and are primarily associated with quality, exclusivity and status (Atwal and Williams, 2009). Most luxury goods are bought for the connotations linked to them rather than for functional use (Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013). Derived from alligator, crocodile, ostrich, snake, and lizard skin, exotic leather is defined as leather that is either made from relatively rare animal species or from skin parts of animals that are hardly ever processed into leather (Leather Dictionary, 2024). Because it is not derived from cows, pigs, goats, sheep, buffalo and zebra, it accounts for less than 1 % of the world's leather production (Mendal, 2016). It is often imbued with connotations of quality, exclusivity, and status. Its unique and rare texture, look, and colour set it apart from conventional leather. For many years, it has served as a differentiating factor in the designs of many luxury fashion brands.

2.2 Luxury Value Perceptions

In the case of luxury goods such as exotic leather products, individuals' assessment of the subjective worth of products can be determined by their specific value perceptions of luxury. The luxury value perception framework of Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009), which was further advanced by Shukla and Purani (2012), offers an essential theoretical basis to interpret consumers' luxury value perceptions based on four dimensions, namely financial, functional, individual and social value. These value dimensions function independently but also work together to shape and influence consumers' luxury value perceptions, purchase intent and behaviour (Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels, 2009). The financial dimension of luxury value perception refers to the product's value expressed in monetary terms, such as price and investment, and what had been sacrificed to obtain the product. It is important to note that consumers often discriminate between the actual price of a product (i.e. objective price) and the perceived cost from their own subjective perspective (Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels, 2009). The functional dimension of luxury value perception relates to physical product benefits such as quality, uniqueness, usability, reliability, and durability (Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels, 2009), thereby recognising the product's functional or utilitarian value and its ability to perform the desired function (Shukla, 2012, Shukla and Purani, 2012). The individual dimension of luxury value perception is centred on personal aspects such as self-identity, hedonism and materialism (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004), thus relating to consumers' personal orientation towards luxury consumption (Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels, 2009), including their emotional needs, experiential rewards, hedonic motives, materialistic attitudes, sensory pleasure and acts of self-gift giving (Hennigs et al, 2015). Luxury consumers intently focused on personal motives are typically more concerned with matching their individual tastes and internal self with the luxury product's image and deriving an enjoyable experience from purchasing and owning the product (Shukla, 2012). Lastly, the social dimension of luxury value perception focuses on outer-directed consumption preferences, such as conspicuousness, symbolism and prestige value, thus relating to the instrumental aspect of impression management and the pursuit of social approval through consumption (Shukla, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels, 2009).

2.3 Sustainability Excellence

Consumers are increasingly more concerned about environmental and social issues in the luxury fashion supply chain, ranging from harmful emissions and chemical pollution in production processes to excessive waste (Mok, Yu and Zihayat, 2022). Such concerns also specifically include the farming and slaughter of animals for their skins and fur, along with the reasonable management and rights of the workers employed in this supply chain (Shaw and Shiu, 2003). For these reasons, supply chain transparency and ethics have become in high demand (Shen et al, 2012), and consumers' support of sustainable and ethical luxury products has significantly escalated - luxury brands thus acknowledge that "sustainability excellence" has become the norm rather than the exception (Hennigs et al, 2013) Kapferer and Michaut (2015) further explain that, even though luxury consumers may not

always voice their interest in sustainability issues when they purchase a luxury product, they notwithstanding expect sustainability practices to be adhered to by the producer/ supplier of such products.

Sustainability excellence can thus be conceptualised as consumers' overall sustainability value perceptions of luxury that are motivated by their individual perceptions and subjective expectations of luxury value (Hennigs et al, 2013). In line with the original luxury value perception framework proposed by Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009), Hennings et al. (2013) further refined the framework to include luxury value-based sustainability, as illustrated in Figure 2. This framework depicts sustainability excellence at the core of the four luxury value perceptions (i.e. financial, functional, individual, and social value) that were discussed in section 2.2.

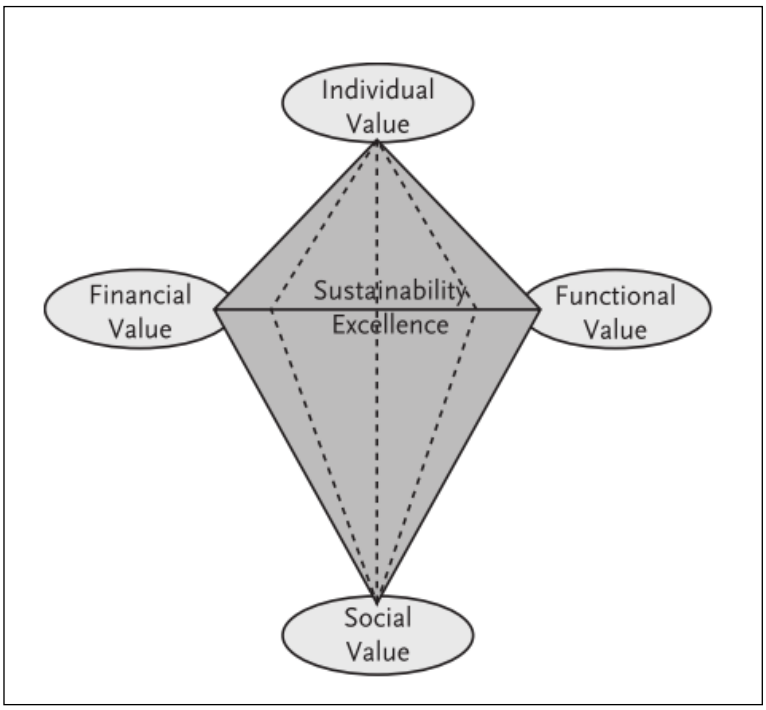

Figure 1: A conceptual model for luxury value-based sustainability (Hennigs et al, 2013)

The argument brought forward is that consumer' luxury value perceptions combined with their perceptions of sustainability excellence could influence their purchase intent for luxury goods such as exotic leather products. Yet, the interrelationship of these concepts requires further investigation in the exotic leather sector. This luxury segment has received comparatively limited attention in current literature surrounding luxury goods and, more specifically, within the context of tourists' luxury shopping behaviour. Many debates surround the importance of ethical considerations in the decision-making process for luxury exotic leather products, and some might question whether strong luxury values are, in fact, compatible with sustainability values for these products.

2.4 Positioning South Africa as a Luxury Shopping Destination for Exotic Leather Products

Although the South African domestic luxury market remains small compared to international luxury markets (e.g. the UK, US, Korea and China), exotic leather products, such as personal accessories, are an essential segment of the South African luxury market. Thanks to sustainable practices, standards and systems of accreditation that are promoted by industry stakeholders and non-profit organisations such as Exotic Leather South Africa (South Africa Online, 2024), as well as financial incentives from the South African Department of Trade and Industry, the local exotic leather industry is well positioned to tap into the international luxury markets and to develop sustainable world-class exotic leather goods (TMG Digital, 2016). South Africa mainly produces two types of exotic leather, namely ostrich and crocodile leather. These leathers are considered scarce and exclusive and, coupled with their high-quality characteristics and unique aesthetic appearance, are highly sought-after raw materials that are often exported for manufacturing products targeted at international luxury markets (Ferreira, 2017). However, international tourists who visit South Africa to acquire luxury goods unique to the country may offer lucrative grounds for further expansion of the local exotic leather industry and retain profits within the countries' borders.

Recent reports issued by Statistics South Africa (2023) show that North America and China are among the top 10 leading overseas countries in terms of the number of tourists visiting South Africa, while China has shown the highest year-on-year increase of tourists to South Africa. Regarding revenue, America and China are also ranked among the world's leading luxury goods markets, particularly for the apparel and shoes sector (Statistica, 2024). Previous studies showed that consumers from different nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and market segments may differ concerning their perceptions of luxury value (Alegre and Cladera, 2012) and sustainability value (Leiserowitz, Kates and Parris, 2006). Consequently, it is of the utmost importance for marketers of luxury exotic leather products to understand these tourists' luxury value perceptions and their perceptions of sustainability value. Additionally, if South Africa wants to compete with luxury brands internationally, marketers must align their product offerings and marketing with their target markets' most crucial luxury value perceptions and perceptions of sustainability excellence. Based on the arguments mentioned above, the following research question was formulated for this study: *How do American and Chinese tourists compare with regard to the interrelationship of luxury value perceptions, perceptions of sustainable excellence and purchase intentions towards exotic leather products?*

3. Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative research approach. It was based on an existing data set gathered for a larger project conducted by the University of Pretoria in partnership with the Exotic Leather Research Centre (ELRC). Qualtrics, a reputable and well-known international research firm, was contracted to recruit respondents and collect data within the study's allocated timeframe. Using non-probability convenience sampling, Chinese and American tourists who had visited South Africa in the previous five years or intended to travel to South Africa in the following five years were purposely targeted to participate in the study. Many Chinese and American tourists travel yearly to South Africa, and the USA and China are ranked among the top luxury markets worldwide (Statistica, 2024: Statistics South Africa, 2023). Previous research has also shown that the differences in luxury consumption and value perceptions between Eastern and Western consumers may be significant (Alegre and Cladera, 2012) and thus warranted a comparison of these two nationalities. A final sample size of N=1 043 male and female respondents (aged between 25 and 45 years) voluntarily participated in the study, of which approximately half (n=518) were American and half (n=518) were Chinese. Although non-probability sampling limits the generalisability of research findings, it was deemed appropriate for the exploratory purposes of the overarching research project.

The research group developed an online survey questionnaire for this study. The first section of the questionnaire assessed the demographic profile of the respondents, including their prior or intended travels to South Africa, along with their interest in exotic leather products. The second section determined respondents' luxury value perceptions (including financial, functional, social and individual values) based on scale items derived from previous empirical research (Hennigs et al, 2012). The third section measured respondents' sustainable luxury value perceptions about exotic leather products such as crocodile and ostrich leather goods. The questions included in this section were based on Hennigs et al's (2013) theoretical model of sustainability excellence with responses anchored on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The last section included a scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004) to determine respondents' purchasing intent based on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = never to 5 = definitely). Qualtrics translated the survey questionnaire from English to Cantonese and Mandarin, ensuring lexical equivalence, clarity and eliminating potential errors in a pilot study before proceeding with data collection. Ethical clearance was obtained before data collection, and all respondents consented to anonymously completing the online questionnaire. Responses were captured electronically and, after that, subjected to various statistical procedures, including exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modelling (SEM) utilising SPSS AMOS software. The following section will predominantly report results derived from the SEM procedures performed on the respective American and Chinese datasets.

4. Results and Discussion

To determine the interrelationship of luxury value perceptions and sustainability excellence as antecedents of American and Chinese tourists' purchase intentions for sustainable exotic leather products, SEM models were specified for both the American and Chinese datasets, which comprised five latent factors (based on prior EFA and CFA procedures), namely personal (pleasure) luxury value, social luxury value, exclusive (financial) luxury value, sustainability excellence and purchase intent. Prior EFA and CFA procedures revealed that only 3 of the original four luxury value perceptions, as postulated by Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009), manifested in

these datasets. More specifically, functional luxury value did not emerge as a distinct factor and seemingly fulfilled a secondary role in respondents' overall luxury value perceptions.

Before commencing with SEM, discriminant and convergent validity were sought for all the remaining factors. Even though some did not achieve satisfactory convergent validity, all of the factors complied with the discriminant validity criteria, which allowed for further SEM analysis. The results of the SEM analysis in both datasets revealed that personal-, social- and exclusive luxury values are strongly correlated concepts, which is to be expected since they all form part of a person's overarching luxury value perceptions. Although both the American and Chinese datasets obtained an acceptable model fit, the model fit for the Chinese dataset was superior to the corresponding model fit for the American dataset, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of SEM model fit for the American and Chinese datasets

Model fit indices The goodness of fit criterion	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF(X^2) $2 \leq x \leq 5$	NFI ≥0.95	CFI ≥0.95	RMSEA ≤0.070
American dataset (n=518)	188,342	124	0,000	1,519	0,953	0,983	0,032
Chinese dataset (n=525)	140,228	124	0,151	1,131	0,962	0,995	0,016

Figure 2, which is based on the American dataset, reveals that personal luxury value, social luxury value and exclusive luxury value collectively explain 72% of the variance in sustainability excellence. Moreover, 82% of purchase intent variance is jointly explained through personal luxury value, social luxury value, exclusive luxury value and sustainability excellence.

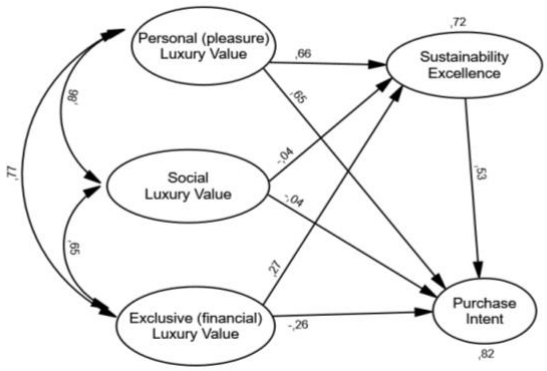

Figure 2: Structural Equation Model (SEM) based on the American dataset (n= 518)

Figure 3, which depicts the SEM model based on the Chinese dataset, shows that personal luxury value, social luxury value and exclusive luxury value collectively explain 65% of the variance in sustainability excellence. For purchase intent, 68% of the variance is jointly explained through personal luxury value, social luxury value, exclusive luxury value and sustainability excellence. These values are somewhat lower than the corresponding values in the SEM model specified for the American dataset.

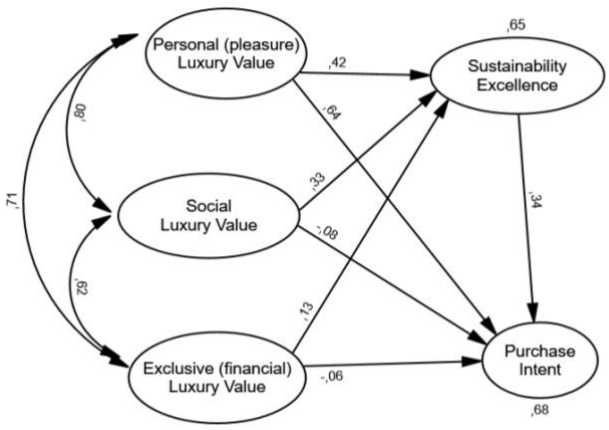

Figure 3: Structural Equation Model (SEM) based on the Chinese dataset (n=525)

In comparing Figures 2 and 3, the personal luxury value was found to have the strongest influence on sustainability excellence and respondents' intention to purchase exotic leather luxury goods for both the American (respectively β= 0.66, β= 0.65) and Chinese (respectively β= 0.42, β= 0.64) datasets. As pointed out in the literature review, consumers' personal luxury values are related to personal motives for buying exotic luxury leather goods, including matching their personal tastes and preferences with the product's image and gaining personal enjoyment from the product (Shukla, 2012). Additionally, satisfying the self is an essential concept of luxury consumption and relates to the expressive aspect of impression management (Tsai, 2005). It would seem that both American and Chinese consumers are alike in their consumption of luxury goods to derive self-directed or personal hedonic experience as well as symbolic benefits from it, as postulated by Shukla (2012).

In the American SEM model (Figure 2), it is seen that social luxury value had a negative, weak and insignificant influence on both sustainability excellence (β= -0,04) and purchase intent (β= -0,04). In the Chinese SEM model (Figure 3), social luxury value also had a negative, weak and insignificant influence on purchase intent (β= -0,08), yet it proved to be more significant as a predictor of sustainability excellence (β= 0.33). The fact that social luxury values had a limited impact on both American and Chinese respondents' purchase intent may support Shukla's (2012) statement that conspicuousness value is no longer a significant predictor of luxury consumption across developed and emerging markets. As times change, consumers worldwide are avoiding social prestige or status-driven displays of luxury brands and abandoning prominent displays of brand names and logos as they settle for more subtle designs (Shukla, 2012). The positive influence of social luxury value on sustainability excellence (β= 0.33) in the Chinese model, on the other hand, may confirm Shukla's (2012) observations that luxury consumers in Eastern emerging markets may be more concerned about the perspectives of others when consuming luxury goods, specifically as it relates to sustainability issues.

In both the American and Chinese SEM models, the exclusive luxury value had limited influence on sustainability excellence. However, the path coefficients between exclusive luxury value and sustainability excellence were slightly stronger in the American SEM model (β= 0.27, p = 0,008) than in the Chinese SEM model (β= 0.13, p = 0,139), which also had a p-value> 0.1. As for the influence of exclusive luxury value on purchase intent, both American (β= -0,26) and Chinese (β= -0,06) datasets presented a negative, non-significant influence. Contrary to Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009) as well as Hennigs et al (2015) view that status-conscious luxury consumers often tend to perceive high price cues and rareness as an indicator of exclusiveness and prestige, the American and Chinese SEM models in this study indicate that exclusive luxury value does not have a significant influence on sustainability excellence nor purchase intent. The assumption that can be made is that luxury exotic leather products are expected to be rare and expensive and would, therefore, not have a decisive influence on purchase intentions. Furthermore, its exclusivity is not related to its sustainability features.

Finally, both SEM models (Figures 2 and 3) reveal that sustainability excellence is a strong predictor of purchase intent, although the American dataset presented a stronger influence (β= 0.53) than the Chinese dataset (β= 0.34). Moreover, the American sample had a stronger intention to buy an exotic leather luxury product because of its sustainable values than the Chinese sample. According to Hennigs et al (2013), luxury consumers are increasingly aware of social and environmental concerns and prefer to support sustainable and ethical products that reveal their personal beliefs and values. The findings of this study indicate that these concerns may be more pronounced among American respondents than their Chinese counterparts.

5. Conclusion and Future Research Recommendations

In conclusion, this study's findings offer practical insight for stakeholders in the South African exotic leather Industry about the relevance of American and Chinese tourists' luxury- and sustainability value perceptions, which could further guide their marketing strategies. Since sustainability excellence emerged as a strong predictor of purchase intent among both American and Chinese tourists, international competitiveness could be improved through sustainable and ethical trading practices and by improving the sustainable quality and traceability of exotic leather products. In addition, marketing communication may benefit from emphasising the personal luxury value dimension of exotic leather goods in targeting both American and Chinese tourist segments rather than focusing on social or exclusive luxury value perceptions, which are seemingly not as important.

In addition to practical implications, the study's findings add theoretical insight to existing literature surrounding luxury value perceptions and sustainability excellence, which to date has not been extensively explored in the context of exotic leather luxury products. In this regard, this study may serve as a foundation for future studies that further investigate luxury value perceptions and sustainability excellence in the local luxury market. Yet,

future studies may benefit from larger and more representative samples to ensure that results can be generalised to a broader population. Since this study only included American and Chinese tourists, future research could also be extended to include other nationalities, generating more encompassing cross-cultural perspectives that could have much value for the local exotic leather and tourism industry.

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The Impact of Covid-19 on Consumer Behavior in the Food VS Clothing Sectors

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Abstract: The global covid-19 pandemic situation has led to significant changes in consumption habits. Thus, the present work has as its main objective to analyze the impact of the pandemic on consumer behavior at the time of purchase, more precisely in the food and clothing sector. In order to carry out this investigation, we used a quantitative approach methodology, which was materialized in a questionnaire survey, having obtained a sample of 212 individuals. Based on the results, it was possible to identify that the changes that occurred due to the pandemic, indirectly or directly, affected the behavior of consumers at the time of purchase.

Key-words: Covid-19, Consumer Behavior, Purchase

1. Introduction

This work intends to carry out an analysis of the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic may have on consumer behavior at the time of purchase, more precisely on consumers in the Food and Clothing sector and, consequently, carry out a comparative study between the two. This work aims to understand the impact of the pandemic on consumer behavior, more precisely at the time of purchase. The Covid-19 pandemic had a serious impact on consumer behavior as, due to the containment measures imposed by governments in favor of public health, consumers had the need to look for new forms of consumption. Thus, with the closure of physical stores, adherence to online purchases has become a reality for most consumers in order to circumvent this situation.

The truth is that, year after year, the online market has already withdrawn sales from physical stores due to its characteristics in the purchase process (Sahoo, Dellarocas, & Srinivasan, 2018). However, the pandemic provided an increase in this type of sales because people were literally forced to opt for this solution as a result of confinement. According to data from SIBS, "between January 15 and February 28, online shopping in Portugal grew by 46% compared to the same period in 2020, the highest growth since the pandemic began" (Vicente, 2021). It is important to note that, in this specific period, the population was in social confinement.

In this sense, the main question of this study aims to understand what impact the Covid-19 Pandemic had on consumer behavior at the time of purchase? Seeking to understand new consumer habits and trends triggered by the pandemic, namely in the food and clothing sector. As specific objectives, we intend to observe and understand whether consumers in the food and clothing sector started to buy more frequently in online stores during the pandemic; whether they will remain with the same preference, given the type of store, as well as to understand whether the decision-making process by consumers at the time of purchase has a more rational or emotional character.

2. Literature Review

The first studies on consumer behavior date back to the 60s of the last century. They emerged when companies realized that, in order to develop marketing strategies that were able to satisfy consumers' needs and desires, it was necessary to understand their attitudes and purchase decision behavior. There are numerous definitions found to qualify consumer behavior. Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (2000), define consumer behavior as that which comprises the activities directly involved in obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services, including the decision-making process.

Authors such as (Martins, 2013) and Solomon (1998) refer that motivation occurs when a need is awakened and the consumer wants to satisfy it, while perception for Kotler & Keller (2013) describe it as the process through which " someone selects, organizes, and interprets incoming information to create a meaningful picture of the

world". With regard to learning, it is through this that an individual changes his behavior as a result of previously lived experiences (Silva, Rocha, Bringel, & Filho, 2010) or, as Palma, Waneide de Sousa and Carneiro (2011) refer, learning it is the variable that allows companies to more easily retain their consumers.

Kotler & Keller (2013), see consumer behavior as the study of how individuals, groups and organizations select, buy, use and discard goods, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy their needs and desires. For these authors, cultural factors are those that exert the greatest influence on consumer desires and behavior, however aspects such as: culture, social class, social factors, reference groups, and family influence consumer behavior. They also refer that personal factors relate to people's own characteristics, that is, moments and experiences that an individual goes through and ends up interfering with their habits and their purchasing decisions.

Kotler & Keller (2007) present the delay in payment as a disadvantage of purchasing in this type of store. Regarding online stores Sara Moreira (2015) and Lima (2012), state that consumers turn to this type of store for its simplicity, autonomy, speed and convenience, the variety of offers, the payment methods and the availability of certain products. and also for the ease of obtaining information without leaving home. Vieira (2019), adds that the diversity of delivery methods provided by online stores, namely home delivery, are also a determining factor in the purchase process for the consumer.

In this way, it is possible to characterize digital consumers as consumers who are increasingly connected, informed, aware, independent, less impulsive and difficult to impress (Vieira, 2019). However, despite their superior level of curiosity and knowledge, according to Kotler (2017), consumers do not control what they want to buy and are essentially influenced by three factors: by marketing communications in various media (such as television, advertisements, public relations); are heavily dependent on the opinions of friends and family; have personal knowledge and attitudes towards certain brands based on past experiences.

Smart Shopping - Consumers make a more thoughtful purchase of food products, demonstrating intelligence and a greater degree of demand in their choices, such as: health and well-being - Consumers are more likely to buy organic and organic food products, that is, they try to avoid to the maximum extent harmful foods for health; trust - The consumer shows greater interest in the companies that produce food products. They seek to consume more consciously of the social and environmental impact, which originates their choices; convenience - With the pandemic, buying food over the internet is no longer seen as a convenience and has become a necessity, until then people resorted to online shopping and delivery options because it was a faster way and without much personal effort; experience - The consumer associates experiences with the consumption of the food product, that is, they try to buy food that has created good memories for them.

Currently, the world lives in the "Digital Age". This era, also known as the "technological era", began in the mid-twentieth century, when technology became a milestone in the modernization of industry. Over time, and given the constant technological evolution, there has been a change in consumer behavior as they have started to use the internet more frequently. Appel, Grewal, Hadi and Stephen (2019) argue that the growth of social networks, and digital platforms and media, was what impacted so much the change in consumer behavior.

In 2020, the coincident indicator for private consumption showed a negative evolution, while the savings rate increased from 6.8% in 2019 to 12%, this increase being justified by the restrictions that limited expenditure (Banco de Portugal, 2020).According to a study by EY (2020), around 91% of consumers surveyed in that same study say that this pandemic crisis has triggered new consumption habits and trends, namely due to economic pressures, store closures and changing priorities. With regard to the food sector, it is possible to mention five major consumption trends in Portugal: Smart Shopping, Health and well-being, Trust, Convenience and Experience.

The dynamics of the clothing market has always been quite peculiar and with constant challenges, largely due to the enormous influence of trends and fashions and consequent regular changes in the needs and tastes of consumers. Currently, the biggest challenges in this sector are imposed by the particular context of the pandemic that we are experiencing. The Clothing sector is, after tourism, the most affected, as with the restriction measures imposed by the government, people are less predisposed to consume (ANICEV/APIV, 2020).

Online consumption has increased significantly in several categories, with clothing included among the fastest growing. According to Falcão (2016), consumers' preference for purchasing in physical stores is due, fundamentally, to the possibility of establishing physical proximity to the product and having the opportunity to establish direct contact with employees in order to clarify any doubts. Still, according to the same author, going to the physical space can constitute a moment of leisure for the consumer, that is, a form of entertainment. In the words of Ho et al. (2019) in the standard learning hierarchy for example in the experiential hierarchy,

consumers (e.g. Western consumers) act based on emotional reactions ("feeling"). This perspective focuses on the idea regarding intangible product attributes (e.g. aesthetics and brand) to shape consumers' attitude towards a product.

Regarding the evolution of markets, as well as the perspective of consumers, we can see that Philip Kotler (2019), in his commentary entitled 'The Market for Transformation', also describes that in modern times consumers are increasingly looking for hope, medicine and anchors that can change a consumer's persona (body/mind) and see value in being transformed. Also Thich (2019), in his commentary on 'A Buddhist Approach to Consumption' also elucidated on this spiritual dimension of behavior in which consumers break the habitual ways in which they consume and begin to see that they do not need anything else.

Recent studies interested in exploring the cognitive variables related to sustainable behaviors have highlighted, on the one hand, that social factors and technological knowledge that favor sustainable consumption, forming the basis of the sharing economy (Dabbous and Tarhini, 2019; Goyal et al ., 2022). Unusual consumer behavior was observed during the early stages of the pandemic (Covid-19), where consumers hoarded essential goods and foods so they could self-isolate due to cyberchondria (Laato, S. Et al., 2020). In this type of crisis, companies would not have anticipated and planned adequately (Reid et al., 2020). Food and food supply chain safety was the first emerging issue to be considered, requiring an increasing number of precautionary measures as we move from farm to plate (Rizou et al., 2020).

The current crisis can also teach us a lot about our recent history. Many companies have a limited view of what efficiency means. They focus primarily on short-term cost reductions at the micro level and pay little or no attention to the time, energy and (ethical background of) the factors of production used in their operational processes. This limited approach has been adopted excessively in some companies, resulting in large-scale outsourcing rather than in-house production, low stock levels, a high degree of dependence on foreign manufacturers (e.g. in China) and low prices (as as for groceries).

It should also be noted that the online market also plays an important role in offline consumers' decision-making, so they turn to online sites to compare prices and look for information about products before making a physical purchase. It is necessary to make it clear that online shopping creates the perception among consumers that it involves more risks than purchases made in physical stores. Therefore, the perceived risks of online shopping are: financial, psychological, social, lost future opportunity, temporal, physical, satisfaction and functional risk (Queiroz, 2019) Finally, it is important to emphasize that reason and emotion are not processes antagonistic, but complementary (Goleman, Mckee, & Boyatzis, n.d.), that is, emotional decision-making can be justified by rationalization mechanisms (Cardoso, 2019).

3. Methodology

In this study, a quantitative methodology was adopted, with data collected through the application of a questionnaire survey, to individuals residing in Portugal aged eighteen years or over. This method allows researchers to obtain answers, helping to support results, as well as their reflections. The questionnaire surveys used were designed exclusively for this study and sought to present questions that were clear, simple and short so as not to provoke doubts in respondents.

The questionnaire had closed or dichotomous and multiple-choice answers and was distributed between December 27th and January 16th, 2022. The questionnaire survey was carried out through Google Drive and sent through social networks to the contacts and connections of its authors. Therefore, non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used. According to Shaughneessy (2012), convenience sampling is characterized by selecting respondents based mainly on their availability and willingness to respond. The sample obtained was 212 responses.

3.1 Descriptive Analysis

As for gender, the sample has mostly female respondents 62.7%, and only 37.3% male. With regard to age, 48.6% of respondents are between 18 and 24 years old and 25% are between 25 and 34 years old, which makes these two age groups together represent 73.6% in the sample. The fact that the internet was used as a means of collecting responses may explain the higher prevalence of these younger age groups.

Soon after come the ages between 45 and 54 years old (13.2%), then the ages between 35 and 44 years old 8.5%, 55 and 64 years old (4.2%) and, finally, the over 64 years old (0.5%). In general, we can say that, although

heterogeneous, our sample prevails at a young level. With regard to educational qualifications, shown in table 5, it appears that 63.3% of respondents have qualifications at higher education level - 0.5% at bachelor's level, 1% higher technical degree, 45.3% degree, 0 .5% post-graduate, 15.1% at master's level and 0.9% at doctoral level. Secondary education follows with a representation of 34.9% and finally basic education with only 1.9%.

Regarding marital status, most participants are single (71.7%), followed by married or in a de facto union (24.1%), divorced (3.8%) and widowed (0.5%). In terms of monthly income, it can be seen from Graph 3 that 37.3% of our respondents (79) do not have any net monthly income. This is followed by the income bracket between €1,001 and €1,400 (17.5%) and 16% in the income bracket between €665 and €1,000. With regard to professional status, respondents are mostly employed (44.3%) and students (35.4%). The self-employed represent 7.1%, the unemployed 3.8% and retired/pensioners 0.9%.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by professional occupation

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage valid	Accumulating percentage
	Unemployed	8	3,8	3,8	3,8
	Employed on behalf of others	94	44,3	44,3	48,1
	Self-employed	15	7,1	7,1	55,2
	Student	75	35,4	35,4	90,6
	Retired/Pensioner	2	,9	,9	91,5
	Student worker	18	8,5	8,5	100,0
	Total	212	100,0	100,0	

Source: Own elaboration

As for shopping online in the food sector, more than half of respondents (68.9%) say they do not shop online in this sector. Contrary to what happens in the food sector, in the clothing sector most respondents (77.4%) claim to shop online.

Table 2: Purchase at an online store in the food sector

		Frequency	Percentage
	No	146	68,9
	Yes	66	31,1
	Total	212	100,0

Source: Own elaboration

Table 3: Purchase at an online store in the clothing sector

		Frequency	Percentage
	No	48	22,6
	Yes	164	77,4
	Total	212	100,0

Source: Own elaboration

With regard to the food sector, we can see that, before the pandemic, within a period of one month, 42% of respondents made online purchases in this sector with a frequency of “1 time”. Already during the pandemic, only 12% of respondents assume to buy “1 time” in the same time frame. However, contrary to what happened before the pandemic, during the pandemic almost half of the respondents answered “4 and 5 times” (26%) and “more than 5 times” (19.7%). It should be noted that, both before and during the pandemic, the frequency “2 to 3 times” was the

most answered by our respondents.

Regarding the clothing sector, it appears that before the pandemic, more than half of respondents (59.1%) claim to make online purchases in the clothing sector, within a month, "once". During the pandemic, only 35.4% claim to perform "1 time". However, as can be seen, during the pandemic there is a higher percentage of respondents answering "4 and 5" times (18%) and "more than 5 times" (15%).

Table 4: Frequency of purchases in the food sector

	Before the pandemic	During the pandemic
1 time	28	8
2 to 3 times	30	28
4 to 5 times	3	17
More than 5 times	5	13
Total	66	66

Source: Own elaboration

Table 5: Frequency of purchases in the apparel sector

	Before the pandemic	During the pandemic
1 time	97	58
2 to 3 times	48	53
4 to 5 times	10	29
More than 5 times	9	24
Total	164	164

Source: Own elaboration

As for the reasons that led our respondents not to make purchases in the food sector, as can be seen in Table 12, the need to evaluate the product (50%) and the preference for going to the physical store (63.7%) stand out. As can also be seen, and as expected, only a tiny percentage of respondents (1.4%) agree that the difficulty of accessing the internet is an impediment to online shopping in this sector.

Table 6: Reasons for not making a purchase at an online store in the food sector

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Partially Disagree	neither agree nor disagree	I agree in part	I agree	I totally agree	Answers
Lack of confidence in payment security	52,1%	17,8%	11,0%	11,0%	4,8%	3,4%		146
Need for evaluation. product face-to-face	11,6%	9,6%	11,0%	17,8%	9,6%	16,4%	24,0%	146
Difficulty internet access	87,0%	5,5%	1,4%	4,8%		1,4%		146
Lack of confidence in transportation	44,5%	17,8%	11,6%	9,6%	11,0%	3,4%	2,1%	146
Preference for traveling to physical store	8,2%	4,8%	7,5%	15,8%	8,9%	14,4%	40,4%	146

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the clothing sector, as seen in the food sector, the need to evaluate the product in person and the preference for going to the physical store are the main impediments presented by our respondents for not buying clothing online (66.6% and 56.3 %, respectively).

Table 7: Reasons for not making a purchase at an online store in the clothing sector

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Partially Disagree	neither agree nor disagree	I agree in part	I agree	I totally agree	Answers
Lack of confidence in payment security	35,4%	20,8%	12,5%	22,9%	4,2%	2,1%	2,1%	48
Need for face-to-face evaluation of the product	10,4%	10,4%	8,3%	4,2%	12,5%	20,8%	33,3%	48
Difficulty accessing the internet	68,8%	20,8%	4,2%	4,2%				48
Lack of confidence in transport	35,4%	20,8%	18,8%	10,4%	6,3%	4,2%	4,2%	48
Preference for visit to the physical store	12,5%	14,6%	8,3%	8,3%	14,6%	10,4%	31,3%	48

Source: Own elaboration

With regard to the reasons that lead respondents to choose to buy from an online store, we note that regarding "saving time", the response given by respondents was on average 4.64, with the response option equivalent to partially agree.

It is also verified that the respondents partially disagree with the reasons "buying in an online store makes me feel better", "buying in an online store makes me relieve stress" and "buying in an online store I spend less money".

As for the reasons "buying in an online store is stimulating" and "most of the time I buy online when there are sales", the respondents answer neither agree nor disagree.

Table 8: Reasons for choosing to buy in an online store

	Average	Standard deviation
Buying in an online store is stimulating	3,99	1,774
Shopping online makes me feel better	3,06	2,014
Buying from an online store relieves stress	2,93	1,988
Most of the time I buy from an online store when there are sales	4,06	2,095
Buying from an online store saves time	4,64	1,896
Buying from an online store I spend less money	3,17	1,918

Source: Own elaboration

With regard to current consumer characteristics, we note that the response given by respondents was an average of 5.35, with the response option equivalent to partially agreeing with the statement "price is an essential variable to evaluate my purchase alternatives". It was also verified that in relation to the statement "Currently, I resort to the opinion of friends and family about a certain product" the response of the respondents was on average 3.32, with the response option equivalent to partially disagree. As for the remaining statements, our respondents answered the option neither disagree nor agree.

Table 9: Current consumer characteristics

	Average	Standard deviation
I currently invest a lot of time in looking for information before purchasing any type of purchase.	4,13	1,87470
Currently, I limit myself to the information and knowledge I have about the product	3,5	1,67066
Currently, I use the opinion of friends and family about a certain product	3,32	1,64335
Price is an essential variable to evaluate my purchase alternatives	5,35	1,78257
With the pandemic, I became a more rational consumer	4,32	1,86027

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the opinion of individuals about the place where they feel safer to shop, physical stores were the majority of the answers, with a total of 115, which makes a total of 54.2%. It should be noted, however, that the answer for both also has a good representation, with 38.7%. When it comes to choosing an online store, only 7.1% of respondents consider it to be a safer place to make their purchases.

The online store was the option with the highest incidence by our respondents (140 respondents), followed by google (86 respondents), social networks (67 respondents), physical stores (53 respondents) and finally Youtube (2 respondents).

Table 10: Where to look for information about the product

Product information search locations				
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Valid percentage**	**Cumulative percentage**
Google	20	9,4	9,4	9,4
Physical stores	27	12,7	12,7	22,2
physical stores, google	1	,5	,5	22,6
Physical stores, online stores	7	3,3	3,3	25,9
Physical stores, online stores, Google	9	4,2	4,2	30,2
Physical Stores, Online Stores, Social Networks	1	,5	,5	30,7
Physical Stores, Stores Online, Social Networks, Google	4	1,9	1,9	32,5
Physical stores, social networks	1	,5	,5	33,0
Physical stores, social networks, Google	3	1,4	1,4	34,4
Online stores	59	27,8	27,8	62,3
Online stores, Google	21	9,9	9,9	72,2
Online stores, social media	24	11,3	11,3	83,5
Online Stores, Social Networks, Google	15	7,1	7,1	90,6
Social media	6	2,8	2,8	93,4
Social media, Google	12	5,7	5,7	99,1

Product information search locations				
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Valid percentage**	**Cumulative percentage**
Social media, Google, YouTube	1	,5	,5	99,5
Youtube	1	,5	,5	100,0
Total	212	100,0	100,0	

Source: Own elaboration

With regard to the act of purchase itself, as can be seen in Graph 6, 56.6% of respondents characterize their purchase as being partially planned, 31.6% as being fully planned and only 11.8% as purchasing on impulse.

In the question "Looking forward to the next year, how often do you see yourself shopping in physical stores and online stores?", which we consider to be a very valuable question to understand the consumption trend of respondents (49.1%) predict in the next year often buy in physical stores. It should be noted that, as expected, none of the respondents answered that they would never shop in a physical store in the next year. Thus, the remaining population is divided into sometimes (28.3%), followed by very often (15.6%) and always (7.1%).

Regarding the frequency of purchases in an online store, most respondents expect to buy from time to time (58%) through this channel. However, contrary to what was shown in the frequency of purchases in physical stores, 9 respondents (4.2%) said they would never shop online in the next year.

Table 11: Predicted frequency of purchases in physical stores

Predicted frequency of purchases in physical stores				
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Valid percentage**	**Cumulative percentage**
Sometimes	60	28,3	28,3	28,3
Often	104	49,1	49,1	77,4
Very often	33	15,6	15,6	92,9
Ever	15	7,1	7,1	100
Total	212	100	100	

Source: Own elaboration

Table 12: Predicted frequency of purchases in an online store

	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Valid percentage**	**Cumulative percentage**
Sometimes	123	58	58	58
Often	49	23,1	23,1	81,1
Very often	29	13,7	13,7	94,8
Never	9	4,2	4,2	99,1
Ever	2	0,9	0,9	100
Total	212	100	100	

Source: Own elaboration

4. Conclusions

As mentioned in the EY study (2020), around 91% of consumers surveyed in that same study stated that this pandemic crisis triggered new consumption habits and trends, particularly due to economic pressures, store closures and changes in priorities, such as guiding question of this study whose objective was to understand what impact the Covid-19 Pandemic had on consumer behavior at the time of purchase?

Thus, regarding online shopping in the food sector, more than half of respondents (68.9%) say they do not shop online in this sector, pointing out as the main reasons the preference for going to a physical store and the need for a face-to-face meeting facial assessment of product. As Falcão (2016) states, consumers' preference for purchasing in physical stores is fundamentally due to the possibility of establishing physical proximity to the product and having the opportunity to establish direct contact with employees to clarify any doubts. Contrary to what happens in the food sector, in the clothing sector most respondents (77.4%) say they shop online,

It was also found that the covid-19 pandemic was a major driver of e-commerce, as it was found that during the pandemic our respondents began to buy more frequently from online stores, both in the food sector and in retail and clothing. This unusual consumer behavior was observed during the early stages of the pandemic (Covid-19), where consumers hoarded essential goods and foods so they could self-isolate due to cyberchondria (Laato, S. Et al., 2020).

We found that there are partially discordant answers for the reasons “buying from an online store makes me feel better”, “buying from an online store makes me relieve stress” and “buying from an online store spends less money”. Still, despite the increase in online shopping having become a growing trend in the way of shopping, in this study we can conclude that the consumers observed will continue to prefer the physical store.

As limitations of this study, we can state that the convenience sample, which is quantitative in nature, does not represent all Portuguese consumers. We can list future studies that should have a more representative sample, as well as the incorporation of qualitative studies, for a better understanding of the topic.

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Tourism and Hospitality Industry Employees' Experiences of Career Shocks and Career Resilience

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Abstract: Employees in the tourism and hospitality industry (THI) have experienced a wide range of sudden changes that have had various impacts on their careers. *Career shock*s are disruptive and extraordinary events often caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that trigger a deliberate thought process concerning one's career. Although career shocks are usually difficult to predict, we can prepare ourselves in advance by developing career resilience. *Career resilience* refers to an individual's ability to adapt to new situations, overcome negative ones and recover from changes. Research is exceptionally important, especially from the perspective of the THI, which has suffered from a wide range of crises which have caused a significant decrease in workforce engagement and labour shortages. This research aimed to study the experiences of THI employees in career shock situations and how career resilience has affected these situations. The research questions were: What kind of career shocks have employees experienced during their careers? What kind of consequences have these career shocks had on employees' careers? How have career shock situations strengthened their career resilience? This study was conducted based on a narrative approach and the data consisted of 30 career narrative writings of the students of the Tourism and Hospitality Management master's degree programme. A three-phase qualitative inductive content analysis was used as an analysis method. The results suggest that employees have experienced a wide range of career shocks during their careers, partly because the THI and workplaces have been sensitive to change. According to the data, career shocks could be categorised into global, organisational, and individual level shocks. Employees experienced career shocks and their consequences mainly positively. In addition, the experiences of surviving career shock situations strengthened individuals' career resilience in many ways. This study highlights the importance of understanding individuals' experiences of career shocks and the ways to prevent uncertainty to retain employees in the workplaces and an industry suffering from labour shortages.

Keywords: Tourism, Hospitality, Tourism And Hospitality Industry, Career Shock, Career Resilience, Employee

1. Introduction

An individual's career development has become more complex and difficult to predict (Akkermans et al, 2018). The significance of career shocks from outside individuals and workplaces for career development has increased (e.g., Akkermans and Kubash, 2017). Despite this, organisational and management studies still emphasise the individual's own agency in career development in the desired direction (Akkermans and Kubasch, 2017; Hall et al, 2018; Akkermans et al, 2021a).

The theoretical and conceptual basis of the study lies in career research, and it examines the meaning and consequences of unexpected events, such as career shocks, for careers and career resilience (Akkermans et al, 2020; Akkermans et al, 2021b). Studies on career shocks have shown that they influence, e.g., career planning (Seibert et al, 2013), career success (Kraimer et al, 2019) and employability (Blokker et al, 2019). In this study, the concept of career shock refers to 'an exceptional and surprising event from outside the individual, which the individual cannot control, and which initiates the individual to reflect on his own career as a result of uncertain future prospects' (Akkermans et al, 2018).

Although career shock is difficult to predict, it is possible to develop ways to cope with it in the best possible way in advance. Developing career competencies, in this study career resilience, helps in coping with career shocks (Seibert et al, 2016). The concept of resilience has been defined in many ways. It refers to the ability to recover from adversity and continue previously known activities afterwards (e.g., Lengnick-Hall et al, 2011; Luthans et al, 2006). Career resilience refers to the ability to continue progressing towards current career goals with resources and strategies developed in advance. Resilience is a critical factor in surviving career shocks. (Seibert et al, 2016.) Organisational resilience refers to how well employees withstand adversity and recover from it to move on (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). 'Career resilience is an essential survival skill in the 21st century' (Cascio, 2007), and it is crucial in today's turbulent working life (e.g., Peeters et al, 2022).

Career resilience has been defined as 'a developmental process of persisting, adapting, and/or flourishing in one's career despite challenges, changing events, and disruptions over time'. Career resilience has been thought of as a process, which includes personal factors (individual characteristics/skills, attitudes, career history, behaviours/habits) and contextual factors (supportive workplace, job characteristics, supportive family). Career resilience affects career satisfaction, intentions to change careers and subjective career success. It is less restrictive than an ability or outcome, and it considers the different mechanisms that help a person deal with career disruptions, thereby providing deeper insights into how people become more career resilient. (Mishra & McDonald, 2017.) Optimism and confidence (Fletcher and Sarkar, 2013), faith (Pargament, 2001) and embeddedness in social networks (Ekonen and Heilmann, 2021) are crucial attributes for resilience at the individual level (Ma et al, 2018).

This study fills several research gaps. Firstly, we need more research to understand career shocks and there is a need to study their consequences for employees' careers (Peeters et al, 2022; Mishra and McDonald, 2017). Career shocks can cause career disruption or affect the search for new opportunities if the current job or position is not meaningful. A career shock can force employees to change their career direction (Nair and Chattarejee, 2021). Secondly, in this study, career shocks are examined from the perspective of career resilience. Career shocks are usually hard to predict, but employees can prepare for them in advance by developing career resilience (Blokker et al, 2019). Career resilience means an individual's ability to adapt to new situations, overcome negative events and recover from changes (Seibert et al, 2016). It is a significant resource (Bimrose and Hearne, 2012) and helps to cope with adversity during a career (Verbruggen and De Vos, 2020). More research is needed on its meaning for individuals and workplaces (Han et al, 2021).

Career shock and career resilience are under-researched phenomena in the THI as well. The research has focused on crises faced by employees (Zheng et al, 2022), students' insecurity, professional career anxiety and career prospects (Üngüren and Kaçmaz, 2022; Seyitoğlu et al, 2022; Bernaraba et al, 2022). Career shocks lead to a risk of losing employees (Pak et al, 2021). Career resilience reduces the uncertainty experienced by the individual in crisis situations and thereby increases well-being at work.

2. Methodology

In 2021 Finland, compared to 2019, had more than 20,000 fewer employees working in the THI, and there are significant challenges as regards the availability of skilled labour (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2022). The industry has long faced challenges in terms of attractiveness, recruitment and employee retention, and there is also fierce competition between organisations for skilled labour. The industry faces challenges related to a negative employer image and employee engagement. (For example, O'Leary and Deegan, 2005.) In addition, the THI is one of the most critically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, both globally (UN, 2021) and at the Finnish level. Business restrictions led to collapsed incomes, job losses and, most importantly, high uncertainty for employees (e.g., Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). The economic situation in the THI has worsened since autumn 2022 (Yang et al, 2021). Due to the attractiveness of the sector, it would be important to engage employees in organisations and to improve employer image (see, e.g., Törn-Laapio and Ekonen, 2021).

In this study, the data consisted of 30 career narrative writings of master's programme students (Tourism and Hospitality Management), which was based on the writing request: 'Your task is to write your life story, career path and reflections on the future.' In the analysis, we applied qualitative inductive content analysis (Azungah, 2018) to identify career shocks and career resilience in shock situations in the narratives written by students working in the THI. Content analysis summarises and classifies information, where words and phrases that have the same meaning or that are related to the same theme fall into the same categories (Cavanagh, 1997). The analysis was carried out in three phases (see, e.g., Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

3. Findings

3.1 Career Shocks and Their Consequences

3.1.1 Global-Level Career Shocks

According to the data, the *COVID-19 pandemic* caused a variety of shocks for companies in the THI. The pandemic caused layoffs and, for those how stayed on, it led to the *expansion of the job content*, covering tasks as needed. At the same time, there were challenges as regards finding new employees:

´For the last two years, because of the pandemic, I've mainly been doing the jobs of restaurant manager, chef, driver and supporting people on sick leave. Now I'm gradually trying to get out of the job I was hired for, but it will be a long time before I can make up for two years of backlogs and train new staff to replace those who have left. ´ (R3)

The pandemic also caused *uncertainty* about whether it is worth pursuing a career in the THI anymore. Employees began to make back-up plans for their careers. For some, the thought of leaving provided emotional security in the face of an uncertain future. However, it did not necessarily lead to a definitive decision to leave, but rather remained at the level of a thought. The industry and work content seemed to be attractive despite the uncertain prospects:

´I seriously considered a change of industry and applied for a few jobs. This was perhaps more of a mental thing for me than a real option. It created a certain comfort during the layoff, knowing that if things got discouraging and kept going, there was a way out.´ (R14)

As a result of the pandemic, activities in the industry came to a standstill. For some, it offered *an opportunity to stop and reflect* on their career in more detail. The stagnation caused by the career shock gave a sudden respite from the hectic working life:

'The pandemic brought the whole industry to a standstill and, although it eventually led to a change in my own case, it perhaps only hastened and sealed a process that had begun several years ago... I had time to think about what I wanted out of life.' (R27)

According to the data, the employees had experienced several redundancy negotiations during their careers. Some respondents felt that layoffs, caused partly by the pandemic, had eventually forced them **to** *move forward* in their careers. Without an external push factor, the career would have stagnated in the same familiar and unmotivating position:

'I have experienced two cases of redundancy negotiations in different workplaces, which have also been very instructive experiences. The first ones were awful and yes, the second ones also made me cry when the employment relationship ended quite unexpectedly. However, in retrospect, I am pleased that the decision to move on was, in a way, made on my behalf. Personally, I might have been stuck with tasks that were not actually ones I enjoyed.' (R30)

3.1.2 Organisational-Level Career Shocks

The respondents had experienced several organisational-level career shocks. Some had *lost their jobs* after an *organisation's bankruptcy or a takeover*. Recovering from these shocks was often easier when there were plenty of jobs available in the industry and a new job was found immediately without career interruption:

'I myself have twice lost my job when 'a ship was sold or flagged out.' Fortunately, I have never been unemployed for more than a few days or a week but have always found new work.' (R8)

Some experienced negative career shocks after *changes in management*. The changes had led to a significant deterioration in terms of their duties and so they were forced to *look for a new job* that would better suit their own life situation. On the other hand, it was ultimately a positive turning point:

'After returning from maternity leave, a lot had happened in the meantime. The restaurant manager had changed and there had also been changes in the kitchen staff. In two months, I was given 100 hours of overtime, after which, at the start of the Christmas holidays, I decided to look for another job. This job was no longer suitable for a mother of young children. Organisation X was looking for a restaurant manager. I sent in my application and soon after the interviews, I heard that I had been offered the job. Thus, I turned a new page in my life once again.' (R3)

The source of the career shock was sometimes *poor management*. This impaired the employee's well-being at work and put the organisation at risk of losing an employee. One participant described how her boss bullied her at work. Fortunately, she had the courage *to speak up about the unpleasant matter*. The supervisor was finally given a warning and everything turned out well:

'One of my supervisors had it in for me. He belittled me to the rest of the work community when I wasn't there. He always bullied me in front of others when I went to demand an induction, which was my right. I felt bad during my early days at that company, until I dared to speak up and tell his supervisor about the bullying. He got a warning, and I stayed in the house.' (R18)

The employees had experienced positive career shocks that pushed them forward. Getting a *surprising job offer* was one example. The industry offered new career opportunities, at least for those who had a good reputation. Many considered afterwards that the decisions had been wise ones, and compared it to winning the lottery:

'I changed job, because I got a call from Organisation X asking me if I wanted to take a job as a kitchen assistant. It was the lottery of my life! I have never dared to play the lottery again, because I believe that you can only win once in a lifetime.' (R3)

3.1.3 Individual-Level Career Shocks

According to the data, the respondents had experienced several individual-level career shocks. For some, the cause of the career shock was a matter that related to their own personal wellbeing, e.g., *career exhaustion or burnout*. Experiencing burnout has been a major turning point in life, both personally and professionally. It forces you *to reflect on your personal values* at work and to take better care of yourself:

'I experienced burnout, which was a major turning point for me, both in my professional and personal life… During that period of sick leave, I took stock of my life values and their order of importance. I decided that I did not want to be in that situation a third time...' (R9)

For some, taking a *voluntary career break* from working life, such as family leave, has also made it possible to *re-evaluate their career* from different perspectives. This has resulted in reflections and decisions regarding how much of one's life one wants to give to work and how much to other areas:

'However, with family leave, I have found that I value myself and my free time so much that I don't want to go back to that. With young children around, my ability - and, in a way, my willingness - to be flexible is much more limited.' (R2)

Career shock was also caused by other people's personal networks, both in private and working life. For example, a *spouse's job-related relocation* caused a career shock. In these cases, participants had to quit their jobs and look for another job in a new city. This forced them to *change their personal career direction* and find a new job:

'The move from my place of study to Southern Finland was guided by my spouse's work, and I made my own choices in line with it.' (R9)

Personal networks have also played a significant role in causing career shocks. The role of friends has been of great importance from the early stages of their careers, and the importance has not diminished in the later stages. These networks have *led to several career opportunities*:

'While I was finishing my studies and working part-time as a barman, a friend gave me the opportunity to go and help as a dishwasher on board the XX ship. I'm still there 18 years later. Friends have been the biggest influence on all my career paths: whether it's working in a bar, doing promotional experiments for different products, or working on a ship, I've always found my way into jobs through my friends.' (R8)

3.2 Career Resilience in Career Shock Situations

According to the data, career shocks have strengthened career resilience in many ways. The respondents felt that even difficult situations have turned out to be positive turning points in their careers and they have been able to learn from them. Career shocks have *strengthened positive faith in the future*. For example, the loss of a job has led to a new and even better job than before. The result can be even better than expected:

'My career has had its ups and downs. I've been made redundant and have also been able to progress in my career. I feel that adversity has only taught me. After the initial disappointments, they have been a turning point in my career. That's why, for example, I'm not afraid right now that my current job will end, but I believe that it will lead to something different and maybe even better.' (R11)

Different life experiences and positive attitudes have created faith that things will turn out for the best in the end. The *attitude towards difficulties has become more relaxed*, even though various unexpected events occur in their careers:

'I believe that things tend to work out, and life experience has supported this belief. I have two degrees and in my working life I've done just about everything possible, apart from working as a checkout clerk. So, I don't take it too seriously, even if there are unexpected changes in my working life.' (R7)

Accepting a sudden job offer has required courage and tolerance of uncertainty. You cannot know in advance whether the decision to leave your current job will be the right one in the end. *The courage to take risks* in one's own career is apparent in several participants' answers. Jumping into the unknown is always a risk and needs courage:

'I have often seized opportunities by chance, and they have brought a lot of good in my career. Taking a chance requires courage and the ability to tolerate uncertainty. In those situations, you must understand that you can make the right choice as well as the wrong one.' (R10)

Survival of career shocks relates to career resilience in many ways. Even if you have learned something about career shocks before, they can still come as a surprise even to a more experienced employee. That is why some respondents have developed several methods of coping with different situations. These have formed a *toolbox of coping methods* for employees, from which you can choose the appropriate method for the given situation:

'I've learned a lot from the surprising changes, but sometimes they are "too unexpected" for me, too. Depending on the change and the situation, I use different "coping methods." Usually, I try to influence, respond, learn, change or do something about it as quickly as possible, but if there are no quick solutions, in the worst situation, I take a step back and follow the situation for a couple of days, and sometimes I also wait until the issue resolves itself.' (R12)

Some respondents described the *ability to act practically* without paralysis in a career shock situation as a survival skill. That is, they try to concentrate on the issue at hand and put emotions aside in the career shock situation. As this respondent wrote, this skill has been useful in working life because it helps to continue working and solve problems even in the most difficult places:

'I have it in me to be tough in times of challenge and crisis. I have always focused on the practicalities first: what has happened and how to resolve it. I am a very rational person during a crisis; I don't give much room to emotions; I focus on reasoning. In a way, this has also become an asset in my professional life, as I can act rationally under pressure and solve problems and conflicts effectively.' (R14)

4. Discussion and Implications

To address the shortage of skilled labour in the THI, as well as to improve the image of work and the attractiveness of work in the sector, it is important to understand ways to promote employee engagement and commitment. So far, researchers have paid little attention to career shocks and their consequences, as well as career resilience in career shock situations in the THI. This research helps to broaden the understanding of career shock and career resilience experiences of THI employees. It is critical in enhancing the understanding of individuals' experiences of career shocks and ways to prevent insecurity to retain employees in workplaces and in the industry, which is suffering from labour shortages. Previous studies have shown an increase in career shocks affecting individuals' careers, caused by factors outside the individual and workplace factors (e.g., Akkermans and Kubash, 2017).

The findings revealed that THI employees had experienced global, organisational and individual level career shocks during their careers, and these caused both positive and negative consequences on one's career. The COVID-19 pandemic, which had a major impact on companies in the field, emerged as the main global cause of career shocks. Based on the results, the shocks caused temporary expansion of the job content and uncertainty, which are negative consequences. On the other hand, the pandemic gave people the opportunity to stop and reflect on their careers and forced them to move on (e.g., Akkermans et al, 2020). Career shocks at the organisational level included, for example, job losses, changes in management or poor management. On the other hand, the organisational changes also brought new job opportunities and job offers. The individual-level career shocks related to well-being were burnout, changes in personal values, voluntary career breaks and career reassessments. People's personal networks also influenced career shocks, such as family relocations, but, on the other hand, networks enabled new career opportunities. Consistent with past research, this study supports the finding that there exists diversity of career shock events and the variety of their consequences for employees' careers (e.g., Seibert et al, 2013; Kraimer et al, 2019; Blokker et al, 2019). Career shock experiences have strengthened career resilience and created a strong belief and self-confidence that it is possible to survive in challenging situations in the future (e.g., Fletcher and Sarkar, 2013; Bonanno et al, 2006).

As a practical implication, it is crucial that supervisors comprehend the diverse career shocks employees may experience and their consequences. Therefore, they can individually support the employee's adaptation to sudden career shocks. Because the tourism and hospitality industry is sensitive to changes, proactive preparation for career resilience is essential from both individual and managerial perspectives. Strengthening proactive career resilience can promote coping with career shock situations (e.g., Akkermans et al, 2020) and enhance the workforce situation in the industry.

The study is not without its limitations. One inevitable limitation concerns the generalisability of the findings. As the data was collected from employees in the Finnish THI, these findings cannot be generalised to other organisations globally. For this reason, there is a need for future research that would cover other countries to

provide more in-depth knowledge of this subject. The other limitation is that the amount of data was quite small, so we need more data in order to obtain more reliable results.

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The Challenges of Tourism Sector Employees in Türkiye: Aegean Region Example

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to reveal the challenges experienced by employees in the tourism sector in Türkiye and to privede suggestions for the remediation of issus.The method of the research is a qualitative research method. Research sample includes 21 tourism employees in the Aegean Region, which is one of the important regions of the tourism sector for Türkiye. A semi-structured interview form has been used for the research. The form contains 6 open-ended questions and 5 demographic variables. Content analysis has been used in the research. According to the results, the most important challenges of employees have become evident as low wage level, long working hours, lack of social-cultural activities, lack of motivation, and insufficient accommodation opportunities in Türkiye. An important point that draws attention here is that the challenges expressed by employees indicate the dimensions of job satisfaction. At this point, it can be said that tourism sector employees have no/insufficient job satisfaction. In this respect, it may be recommended to measure the job satisfaction of tourism sector employees in future research. In order to eliminate or alleviate these challenges, wage policies can be reconsidered and wage increases can be achieved, wage policies specific to the tourism sector can be developed. Regarding the regulation of long working hours, the 4-day working week model is currently implemented in various countries of the world (such as England and Germany). Pilot applications can be made for tourism workers. In addition, social-cultural activities can be organized for employees at regular intervals. Lodgings and houses close to workplaces can be provided by employers to improve accommodation opportunities for their employees. Thus, improving the problems of employees in the tourism sector, which is an important source of income for Türkiye, will increase both the quality of life and job satisfaction of employees.

Keywords: Tourism, Tourism Sector Employees Challenges, Working Life, Occupational Psychology, Türkiye

1. Theoretical Background

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the tourism sector is developing increasingly every year. It plays a major role in bringing people and countries together, providing cultural interaction, and being a significant source of income and employment (https://www.unwto.org/tourism-data/unwto-tourism-dashboard, 24.01.2024).Particularly, tourism countries can make serious contributions to the country's economy and human resources if they evaluate and develop their tourism sector well (Ntibanyurwa, 2006).Türkiye is also an important tourism country and is among the leading countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece, Caribbean, Hawaii, Maldives, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, especially in terms of sea tourism. Tourism is an important source of income and employment for Türkiye (TURSAB and https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Turizm-Istatistikleri-III.-Ceyrek:-Temmuz---Eylul,-2023-49604, 24.01.2024). For these reasons, it is envisaged that it is important to conduct a research in the tourism sector in Türkiye. One of the starting points of this study is that Türkiye is an important tourism country in the world.

Tourism was one of the fastest growing sectors in the world economy in the 1950s (Yanardağ and Avcı, 2012), especially after 1980 (Bilgiçli and Altınkaynak, 2016). It is possible to say that the employees of this sector, which has been a significant place in the world economy for approximately 75 years and have a large share among the employees in the world. So, the importance of tourism employees in the development and quality of the tourism sector is also great (Costa, 2004). The need for manpower is relatively higher than other sectors, because tourism is a labour-intensive sector. In countries where the tourism sector stands out, an important factor why these countries are preferred is their human resources and organizational structure (Çeken, 2003). For this reason, employees employed in tourism have an important dynamic for the sector.

When the relevant literature was examined, it was noted that the studies carried out addressed the general problems of the tourism sector (Priestley, 1995; Thomson et al, 1995; Weaver and Elliott, 1996; Ondicho, 2000; Koch and Massyn, 2013; Cholik and Se, 2017, Tagi et al, 2021). On the other hand, it has been noted that some studies focused on employer problems or factors affecting tourism (Aymankuy, 2001; Dilber, 2007; Tutar et al, 2023, Öztürk, 2021). Another issue that is mainly focused on in studies on the tourism sector is how tourism can be developed (Sathiendrakumar and Tisdell,1989; Carlsen and Hughes, 2008, Tsartas, 2014; Lolos at al., 2021; Leka et al, 2022). These are some of the results revealed by theoretical and applied studies. And that the studies specifically addressing the problems of tourism sector employees and proposing solutions were limited.However, it was stated that the tourism sector is a labor-intensive sector and provides employment to

many people. For this reason, it is thought that it is a deficiency for this field that among the studies conducted, those focusing on the problems of tourism sector employees are in the minority compared to others (development of tourism, problems of tourism, problems of tourism employers). Thus, it is anticipated that this study will be important in filling this gap.When the studies conducted for Türkiye are examined, it is seen that the research conducted in the tourism sector is aimed at general problems or the development of tourism, as in other studies conducted in the world (Gunduz and Hatemi, 2005; Tosun el al, 2009; Bulgan et al, 2019; Saint Akadiri et al, 2020; Ulucak et al, 2020). In this respect, it can be argued that this study will fill a significant gap in the relevant field, as the problems of tourism sector employees in Türkiye are not focused enough on.On the other hand, another deficiency in this research field is that the problems of tourism sector employees are addressed within employment problems (Ball, 1988; Yanardağ and Avcı, 2012; Koçak, 2019; (Özdemir and Erol, 2019; Kaya, 2012; Ekiz Gökçen, 2018). In summary, this research will make important contributions to both the Turkish and the world tourism sector, in the context of tourism sector employees.

2. Methodology/Design

The method of the research is a qualitative research method. Data was obtained through the interview form. A semi-structured interview form was prepared for this research. The interview form consists of 2 parts. There are 6 interview questions in the first part, and 5 questions about demographic characteristics in the second part. Thus, a total of 11 statements are included in the interview form. One of the questions “If you need to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of working in the tourism sector, what would you like to say?”. The questions are open-ended. The main question of the research is “What are the problems of hotel employees in the Aegean Region of Türkiye?”

Interviews were conducted face to face, by telephone and online with 21 hotel employees. Sample selection was made according to maximum diversity sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods within the scope of the qualitative research method (Patton, 1990 and Yıldırım, 1999). First, the data was coded, then the themes of the coded data were determined. In the third stage, codes and themes were organized. In the fourth stage, the findings were defined and interpreted (Guba and Lincon, 1982). In this process, Miles and Huberman's (1994) compliance percentage method was adopted and The compliance percentage of the analysis is 79%.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Variables

11 of the sample are male and 10 are female employees. 9 people are between the ages of 23-32, 10 employees are between the ages of 33-45. Only two employees are under 22 years old. 9 Employees are high school graduates, the others are primary school, associate and bachelor's degree graduates. 6 Employees have been working for more than 10 years, 11 employees have been working for 10 years or less, and 4 employees have been working for less than 1 year. Daily working hours are on average 10.5 hours.

3.2 Qualitative Analysis Results

According to the data obtained from the interviews, five themes emerged. These are "Wage Level (Low wage level), Working Hours (Long working hours), Workplace Relations (Negative Relations with manager, colleagues and customers sometimes), Workplace Opportunities (Lack of social-cultural activities, insufficient accommodation opportunities), Other (mobbing, lack of motivation)". In order to hide the identities of the participants and represent their ideas in the research, they were given codes as P1, P2, P3, ... P21, respectively.

Theme 1: Wage Level (Low wage level)

The problem most frequently expressed by employees is low wages. 18 out of 21 participants complain about the low wage level. As a result of the interviews, some participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

P2: “An employee's biggest wish is salary. If the salary is good, a person's desire to work increases. But if I works for minimum wage, I want to work for the salary I receive. I work reluctantly and without morale….”
P7: “Wages are low and I think our rights are decreasing day by day. This puts me under stress and I have a hard time making ends meet…”
P8: “Even when I work overtime, they pay me less than the hours I work. There is a great injustice. If you seek your rights, you may be unemployed, mobbing may be applied. That's why everyone is silent. We are afraid of losing our jobs..."
P13: “I can't say that I get a very good salary. My salary is not enough and the hotel where I work pays a low wage. I even work overtime, but I am not paid for this overtime...”
P17: “My social insurance is incomplete, it is incomplete and the money I earn in half the year is not enough for the other half…”
P21: “When I work overtime, I am paid less than the hours I work, so I do not want to work overtime…”

Theme 2: Working Hours (Long working hours)

One of the results obtained as a result of the research is that employees complain about long working hours. They state that long working hours and uncertainty about starting and finishing work are serious problems for them. Some participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

P2: “There is generally no concept of a specific hour at my workplace. It is known that I work 8 hours a day, but I work beyond this hour; because tourism businesses work at an intense pace..."
P6: “During the season we work 7 days a week, essentially 11 hours a day. This makes 77 hours a week, I don't think it's fair or humane at all...”
P8: “For example, I normally work from 8 in the morning to 4 in the evening. During this period, the intensity continues without any interruption. It wouldn't be possible to say that I leave at 4 o'clock. Sometimes I work until 5 and I don't get paid. I cannot get paid in monetary terms; I'm just known to be a hard-working staff member, that's all…”
P11: “You work long hours, it is an extremely negative situation for me…”
P12: “We work 8 hours a day; However, due to the lack of personnel in our department, we work with 2 personnel and sometimes 3 personnel. The workload is very high during working hours. Working hours are very long and tiring to me, I feel exhausted..."
P16: “Long, tiring! Depending on the location, permits are canceled due to workload...”

Theme 3: Sometimes negative Relations with manager, colleagues and customers

Another negativity for employees is the communication problems that occur from time to time in the workplace. They claim that they sometimes have communication problems with managers. Some statements on this subject are as follows:

P4: “Some of our manager friends were very successful in creating difficulties…It is terrible for me!...”
P7: “However, the words and actions of managers are cursed due to their own ego and narcissism...”
P8: “My manager practices mobbing, causing poor performance…”
P10: “Managers are sometimes aggressive. It's demoralizing. My colleagues are good, we have to be polite with customers and be friendly. When I have good customers, I feel happy, and when nervous customers bother me...”
P12: “How does mobbing cause poor performance in working life...”
P13: "If you are a manager, you do it all the time, you sacrifice yourself, you run around, get sick one day, have you received a report, in his eyes, you are the one who doesn't work and avoids work..."

Theme 4: Workplace Opportunities (Lack of social-cultural activities, and insufficient accommodation opportunities)

Another result of the research is that the workplace lacks accommodation or social cultural activity support. They expressed these situations as lack of workplace opportunities. Some participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

P6: "There is no activity or socialization during the season. There is an intense work tempo and long hours of work…"
P7: "Our workplace definitely does not encourage social or cultural activities…"
P13: "Unfortunately, they do not spare time for social activities because we are so busy…"
P20: "The facilities of the lodging I stay in are very inadequate, it needs improvement; I would like to stay in a more humane place. After all, it is a living space…"

Theme 5: Other (mobbing, lack of motivation)

Mobbing etc. for employees. practices and other factors that reduce motivation were also considered as problems. Some participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

P9: "I always have to be actively working and that's why my family is a little secondary. This is a situation which makes me sad and stressed..."
P14: "Institutions are reluctant to unionize, this situation affects the staff negatively, and the reason for this is that the staff cannot receive all their rights…"
P16: "I cannot pay much attention to my private life because of being busy and working too much. I cannot maintain a work-life balance..."

The themes obtained were summarized in a table and this table is as follows.

Table 1: Expression Frequencies by Themes

The Challenges	Expression Frequency
Wage Level (Low wage level)	18
Working Hours (Long working hours)	16
Workplace Relations (Relations with manager, colleagues and customers)	7
Sometimes negative relations with manager, colleagues and customers	11
Other (Mobbing, lack of motivation)	8

As seen in Table 1, the two most important problems of the tourism sector for the participants of this research are low wages and long working hours.The third important theme is sometimes negative relations with managers, colleagues and customers.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

As a result of this research, it was revealed that the wage level was perceived as an important problem by the employees.Low wages are a major problem for tourism industry workers (Marcouiller & Xia, 2008; Lacher & Oh 2012). Previous studies have also concluded that low wages are negative for employees. Wage is one of the most basic elements that ensure employee motivation (Kolaylı & Lorcu, 2017). It is an important reason for job satisfaction (Luthans, 1995). Wage is an extrinsic motivation (Tesone, 2008), and low wages cause employees in the tourism sector to move away from the sector (Yanardağ and Avcı, 2012), and because of low wages, people want to quit their jobs and find new jobs (Nasöz and Demirkol, 2014). By making a sectoral regulation regarding the low wage level, unions can develop suggestions for wage improvement demands.

One of the research findings is dissatisfaction with long working hours. It was revealed that the people interviewed worked an average of 10.5 hours per day. This corresponds to a working time of 63 hours per week. This period is higher than the world average (https://data.oecd.org/emp/hours-worked.htm, E.T. 11.09.2023). Previous studies have revealed that long working hours have negative effects on employees. Working time is an important factor affecting an employee's productivity and motivation. Not having long working hours increases job satisfaction and motivation and reduces stress (Solanki, 2013). Excessive working hours and lack of flexibility are negatively evaluated by employees (Aydın and Sevim Korkut, 2019). Additionally, a study confirmed that working hours are a strong predictor of job stress, well-being, and depression. Long working hours have a

significant indirect effect on depression through work stress (Hong et al, 2022). These days, some countries are working on reducing working days and hours. Efforts to reduce working hours are also on the agenda in Türkiye.

(https://www.haberturk.com/mesai-saatleri-dusurulecek-mi-bakan-bilgin-den-son-dakika-calisma-suresi-aciklamasi-3588129, 08.09.2023).

Another consequence is negative working relationships. Similar results have emerged in previous studies. Negative relationships at various levels in the work environment negatively affect employees' work experiences (Morrison and Nolan, 2007). Negative workplace relationships can cause employees to negatively affect each other and prevent them from doing business (Baron, 1989). It is also a situation that reduces employee motivation (Huberman and Miles, 1994). However, good working relations at the workplace increases the workplace happiness of employees (Turan, 2022). Training and development programs can be planned for tourism sector employees on issues such as good relations and communication in the workplace.

Another result is the lack of social and cultural activity. When organizations offer accommodation or accommodation to their employees, it increases the quality of life of employees and increases business performance (Kensbock et al, 2017). A study revealed that insufficient support by companies for workplace accommodation was perceived negatively by employees and even prevented new job applications (Shahin et al, 2020). Providing accommodation to employees is an important indicator of a fair and favorable working environment(https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=4slQ6QSmlBEDzFEovLCuW1a0Szab0oXTdImnsJZZVQfoUYY19kME5pOqRbao%2BukB1Kzn1MMnQL24FFvtIIdk%2F%2FR%2FF0GthE%2BTiGSATb%2BUa3WMs0%2F%2BfVfQFg02%2BY%2FTVuqU, E.T. 11.09.2023). Organizing social activities for sector employees will increase their motivation. Access to accommodation opportunities will improve their quality of life. In conclusion, improving the problems of employees in the tourism sector, which is an important source of income for Türkiye, will increase both the quality of life of employees and customer satisfaction.

As a general result, it is noteworthy that the problems stated by the participants are expressions/dimensions of job satisfaction (Cooper et al, 1989; Lee et al, 2007). Therefore, future research can be designed to include quantitative studies such as measuring the job satisfaction of tourism sector employees and addressing the problems in this context.

4.1 The Theoretical and Practical Implication

This study revealed the challenges experienced by tourism sector employees with the example of Türkiye, a tourism country. It will be an important resource for both theory and practice in developing solutions to these challenges. This research will improve tourism research theoretically and shed light on other studies to be conducted in the future. Examining the problems of employees, especially in the tourism sector, with scientific data will be an important theoretical resource.For practice, this research will be a good resource for tourism sector managers in tourism countries to raise awareness about the problems of their employees and to take action.

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PhD Research Papers

Encouraging Intersectoral Collaboration to Promote Medical Tourism in South Africa

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Abstract: Rebuilding is a prominent theme in a post pandemic era where economies are looking to attract all opportunities to recover. Tourism has always been a key driver to boost economies particularly in countries which are rich in cultural diversity and natural beauty. South Africa, which already has a thriving tourism industry, has seen an increase in medical tourists who are motivated by the desire to avoid high healthcare costs, long wait times for services and specific procedures that are not offered in their own countries. South Africa's private healthcare system is world-class for medical tourism because it is supported by a thriving medical insurance market. The rise of medical tourism in South Africa has stemmed from synergies formed with the private sector healthcare system because of the growth of tourism. Currently, only private sector hospitals are involved in rendering services related to medical tourism. The current rollout of the National Health Insurance (NHI) poses as an opportunity for the public healthcare sector to also benefit from the revenue generated by medical tourism, however there are challenges that exist that must be alleviated.

This paper will begin with an overview of the medical tourism and healthcare sectors in South Africa based on secondary research conducted. Thereafter the empirical data highlighting challenges experienced at selected public central hospitals in South Africa will be presented. The paper will then explore the collaboration potential of the tourism and healthcare industries to overcome the challenges presented. Recommendations will be contributory in highlighting the need for revenue to restore trust in the public healthcare sector and boost medical tourism.

The empirical study, through adopting a descriptive exploratory paradigm, emphasises the quantitative method used to gather data from a purposive sample with the use of a questionnaire. Data collected from 322 respondents revealed that the daily challenges, underpinned by a severe lack of funding at the selected public central hospitals in South Africa, inhibit high quality service delivery, making the public healthcare sector an undesirable option for medical tourism.

Keywords*:* Health and medical tourism, South African Tourism, Public healthcare, Private health care, National insurance fund, post pandemic.

1. Introduction

Tourism has historically been utilised as a tactical instrument to aggressively promote economic growth through employment creation, which ultimately results in the improvement of community livelihoods. However, due to the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, governments were forced to put national lockdowns in place, implementing border closures, travel bans, the ban on large gatherings, and the suspension and cancellation "super-spreader" events (KPMG, 2020). With substantial losses in global tourism revenues, these measures posed significant challenges to the world's tourism industry. Because tourism had been classified as a "nonessential service", restrictions on travellers' movements put the industry at risk for declining employment, travel confidence, and viability resulting in lower tourist numbers.

Lower tourist numbers, greater unemployment rates, decreased investment and lower tax revenues exacerbated socioeconomic conditions and pushed mainly developing nations into a more fragile state. One of the most important lessons from previous pandemics is that, as part of a proactive strategic response plan, intersectoral communication needs to be triggered between important tourism and hospitality players and the local and regional public health authorities (Musavengane, Leonard & Mureyani, 2022). Since the pandemic impacted on the healthcare system, recommendations to focus on strengthening current health systems using multisectoral approaches and obtain long-term commitment from all stakeholders were made (WHO,2022). The pre-pandemic weaknesses in the healthcare sectors such as public and private sector inequality, financial sustainability issues, lack of resources, outdated data and digital health systems were aggravated during the pandemic (WHO, 2022). In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, other illnesses including HIV/AIDS, monkey pox and tuberculosis have brought attention to the numerous shortcomings and inadequacies experienced by South Africa's already failing healthcare system. Additionally, the high rates of maternity and infant mortality, violence and injury, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases and cancer have all had a devastating impact on healthcare systems (Maphumulo and Bhengu, 2019). Significant differences between the public and private healthcare sectors were also brought to light, widening the wealth disparity in South Africa even further.

In addition to evaluating the challenges that impede the provision of healthcare services and could hinder the expansion of the medical tourism sector, this paper will investigate the potential of medical tourism as a strategic tool to enhance South Africa's tourism and healthcare sectors. The challenges that will be emphasised are those relating to strategy implementation, confusion with responsibility and financing scarcity, all of which have a ripple effect on the healthcare system holistically. Insufficient funding causes a shortage of material and human resources, which exacerbates overcrowding, poor infection control, and long wait times.

Additionally, the paper reviews health and medical tourism secondary literature to present an argument for the development of the industry, and the identification of challenges to the growth of health tourism. The empirical study will highlight challenges experienced by the South African healthcare sector hoping to level out the playing field when competing with the South African private healthcare sector for medical tourists. South Africans may engage in outbound medical tourism because of the challenges. Large-scale investments in the health sector have the potential to significantly enhance incoming medical tourism and lower the cost of healthcare for all South Africans.

In doing so, the following section considers current trends identified in the tourism and healthcare sectors in the South African context.

2. The Tourism Industry in South Africa

Battered economies post covid turned to tourism as a means to diversify their economies and attract revenue to increase their GDP. However, pre and post Covid-19, the South African tourism industry has been a global leader in using tourism to creates job, attract investment, foreign exchange and diversify the economy (Henama,2014). Following a sharp decline in visitor arrivals in 2020 and 2021, South Africa is now welcoming an increased number of tourists. According to Statistics South Africa's Tourism 2022 report, the number of visitors fell by 19,5% between 2020 and 2021 and by 72,6% between 2019 and 2020, from 10 228 593 to 2 802 320. From 2 255 699 travellers in 2021 to 5 698 062 tourists in 2022, the number of tourists climbed by 152,6%. The number of visitors increased gradually from January to December 2022, but it is still 44,3% below the pre-pandemic year of 2019. Due to South Africa's expanding tourism industry, a number of "special" tourism niches have emerged, including ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, business tourism, sports tourism and event tourism. This paper will focus on medical tourism.

The medical tourism industry is flourishing globally, which benefits the destination country (Orekoya & Oduyoye, 2018 and Campra, Riva, Oricchio & Brescia, 2022). By 2025, the size of the global medical tourism market is anticipated to be USD 131.35 billion, growing at an average annual rate of 20%. When medical tourism occurs, a sizeable sum of money from the departing country is lost which could have provided income for the home country (Orekoya & Oduyoye, 2018) and improving the South African healthcare sector will prevent outbound medical tourism in South Africa.

In South Africa, medical tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the country, with Cape Town serving as the continent's premier medical destination (Wesgro, 2018). South Africa has made significant progress in the medical tourism sector, with estimates indicating that between 300,000 and 350,000 visitors from all across Africa visited South Africa for medical treatment in 2012. In 2016, South Africa received 1.8% of international tourists who came to the country for medical reasons. However, the proportion of tourists has declined from 2.3% in 2014. Current statistics show that 24 006 visitors arrived in the country for medical reasons between 2018 and 2022. The numbers fell due to the pandemic, but they are rapidly rising (Wesgro, 2018). Majority of tourists who travel to South Africa for medical tourism arrive in November and 31% of those arriving for medical care are from the United Kingdom (UK), 40.2% are from Botswana, and 16% are from Kenya (StatsSA, 2022).

The practise of seeking medical care outside the home region is referred to by a variety of names, including medical tourism, health tourism, wellness tourism, transplant tourism, reproductive tourism abortion and dental tourism (Bagga, Vishnoi, Jain & Sharma,2020). Campra et al. (2022) differentiated medical tourism from health tourism by emphasizing that medical tourism include medical or surgical interventions such as dentistry, cardiac surgery or cosmetic surgery while simultaneously being holidaymakers (Kim, Arcodia & Kim,2019) whereas health tourism entails non-medical interventions such as enjoying a spa, visiting hot springs or receiving massages. Orekoya & Oduyoye (2018) added that medical tourism involves patients who travel away from the home, sometimes outside of their country of origin for the purpose of accessing medical care services.

Medical tourism has huge potential as one of the fastest growing sub-sections of the tourism industry (Henama, 2014 and Bagga et al., 2020). There is an increasing number of medical tourists travelling from developed to

developing countries due to the increased disposable income in developed countries which facilitates the purchasing of services in developing countries where the pricing is very competitive (Kim et al.,2019). For example, 11,8% of medical tourists to SA arrive from the US (StatsSA, 2022). The reasons cited include expensive treatment costs, long waiting times to access medical services, serious health insurance problems, and out-of-pocket expenses for elective surgery, expensive health insurance fees and the high procedure costs. Additionally, 31% of the medical tourists who arrive from the UK (StatsSA, 2022) and 2.6% who arrive from Canada (StatsSA, 2022) are exposed to a lack of timely access to elective procedures, although both countries provide universal healthcare coverage. This lack of timeliness motivates residents to participate in medical tourism. However, it is not just inconvenient healthcare systems in developed countries that are leading to the growth of the medical tourism industry; other factors are also important, such as the serious growth in aging populations, the development of the Internet, the affordability of overseas transportation, improved standards in international healthcare, multilateral trade agreement and legal issues regarding certain procedures (Capra et al.,2022, Kim et al.,2019 and Henama, 2014). These characteristics are comparable with the results of this study, suggesting that South Africans might partake in outbound medical tourism. Huge investment in the health sector can drastically improve inbound medical tourism and make health care services affordable to all South Africans.

The medical tourism market is currently being contested by 28 nations across the globe (Kim et al., 2019) with South Africa being the only competitor in Africa (Musavengane, Leonard & Mureyani, 2022). Negative perceptions of healthcare in developing nations and the presumption that low prices equal low quality are two obstacles to the sector's growth. In response, hospitals and other healthcare facilities have attempted to obtain international accreditation to demonstrate the quality of their systems (Henama, 2014 and Bagga et al., 2020). In South Africa, barriers to growth is only applicable to the public sector as the private sector boasts high costs and high quality supported by a robust medical insurance market. South Africa's private healthcare sector assists the country to meet the criteria of an ideal medical destination due to availability of world-class medical facilities, medical expertise, top-notch medical tourism infrastructure coupled with destination appeal, culture and communication convenience (Campra, Riva, Oricchio and Brescia, 2022). Before picking a medical tourism location, travellers should be well-informed and current on country-specific advancements, technology and medical inventions and innovations, security and privacy provisions (Kim et al., 2019 and Bagga et al., 2020).

Additionally, South Africa is being promoted as a "surgery and safari" or "sea, sun, and surgery" trip by medical tourism agencies. However, a competent healthcare system with the expertise and resources to make the trip worthwhile is necessary for medical tourism to prosper (Bagga et al., 2020) particularly in South Africa which is maintained by a failing public sector and a thriving private healthcare industry. Combining the public and private sectors may produce a powerful synergy that would expand the medical tourism industry and revitalise the public healthcare sector. The trend of patients frequently travelling abroad for medical care, helps the health care sector in the destination country expand (Orekoya and Oduyoye, 2018).

3. The Healthcare Sector in South Africa

Section 27 of the Constitution, states that every person has the right to access health care services and no person may be refused emergency treatment. Furthermore, in relation to health care services, the government must respect the right to access to health care services by providing fair and reasonable access. The government must also protect and promote the development of frameworks to create the necessary conditions for people to access health care (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).

3.1 Private vs Public

The healthcare sector in South Africa is divided into public and private sector. While the private sector enjoys the freedom of charging high rates to their patients to facilitate up to standard operations, the public healthcare sector been an object for scrutiny over the past 30 years. Many authors discuss the highly fragmented and discriminatory nature of the healthcare sector during the apartheid regime and link current issues to historical inequalities experienced (Maphumulo and Bhengu, 2019). However, it is now almost 30 years post-apartheid, and such credits should be seen as excuses (Sithole and Mathonsi, 2015). The WHO (2018) emphasised the value of acknowledging the presence of both governmental and nongovernmental sectors in a country. The private healthcare sector in SA has seen substantial growth which was a market response to the declining standards in the public domain. People with medical insurance prefer to utilise the private health sector due to the availability of highly skilled health care providers, accessibility and no time wasting. Although private health insurance is pricey, the benefits of private healthcare include quick wait times, high-quality care, superior facilities,

appropriate resources, appointments that are not hurried, and the use of effective disease control and prevention techniques. The drawbacks of private healthcare include its high cost, and requirement that patients foot the bill for doctor appointments, prescription medications, and supplementary equipment like wheelchairs or crutches. Public healthcare is used by people who can afford to purchase private insurance (Young, 2016).

The government health care sector caters for a higher percentage of the population. Public health care is available to all citizens for free even if they do not have any formal health insurance plans. At least 82 out of every 100 South Africans do not have health insurance and are therefore exclusively dependent on public healthcare (Jiyane, 2020, International Citizens Insurance, 2023). This places a heavy load on the already overworked public health system, which is characterised by a lack of staff, crowding, lengthy waiting times, a lack of medication, and infrastructure that has deteriorated (Mukwena and Manyisa, 2022). Public health is characterised by low quality, longer waiting periods and crowded conditions. Pre-existing problems such as poor hygiene, poor infection control measures and high patient-to-staff ratios lead to a disquieting observation that patients who arrive for care at a public healthcare facility may put themselves at further risk of getting infected with some other disease or virus. Overcrowding may lead to issues such as poor waste management and poor handwashing techniques, strain on aging amenities such as bathrooms, inadequate environmental cleaning, inter-hospital transfer of patients with drug-resistant infections and inadequate disinfection of medical equipment. Resultant issues include a longer and more expensive stay in hospital for the patients but an increased chance of death of patients leading to an increase in the number of litigation cases.

The South African public healthcare system is divided into three levels of health services. Primary care facilities are the first point of contact for patients which provides an initial assessment of the patient. The first level is the primary healthcare clinic. These primary care clinics and are mostly staffed with nurses providing community health services. The second level are the district hospitals where patients can be tested, and minor procedures can be performed here. The third level which is much bigger in terms of technology and infrastructure are the tertiary, central and specialist hospitals where advanced technologies are available for major surgeries and specialist treatments. Only patients with serious conditions are referred to the tertiary/central/specialist hospitals. These hospitals have been designated to handle larger numbers of patients with more complex health issues due to its involvement with training, research and innovation. The third level typically receives additional funding from government (NDoH, 2012) and may be suitable for inclusion in the medical tourism arena.

Funding is separated according to three levels. The public healthcare sector is decentralised and is organised into three levels which are national, provincial and local government (Maphumulo and Bhengu, 2019). There is a decentralized distribution of funds from government to local municipalities, giving local public health agencies independence over allocation of funds (Expatica,2023). The government of South Africa has recognised the disparity between the public and private healthcare sector and resolved work towards Universal Health coverage as part of the efforts to provide equitable healthcare for all (Young, 2016). The National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme was established by the South African government to increase the majority of South Africans' access to healthcare.

3.2 National Health Insurance (NHI)

With the National Health Insurance (NHI), South Africa aims to achieve universal health coverage to ensure that everyone in the country, including families and individuals, has access to high-quality medical care regardless of their socioeconomic situation. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the Constitutional mandate based on Section 27 of the Constitution, and the 1997 White Paper for the Transformation of the Health System are the sources of the movement towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC) through implementation of NHI. This action is also supported by the National Development Plan's (NDP) Vision 2030, which states that by the year 2030, everyone shall have equitable access to health care of a comparable standard, irrespective of income. In accordance with the National Development Plan's (NDP) Vision 2030, all South Africans, including immigrants, would have access to free and equitable health care, regardless of their socioeconomic situation, through the creation of a shared fund for private and public health providers (Young, 2016, Heunis, Mofolo & Kigozi, 2019 and Michel et al., 2020, WHO,2018).

The NHI was to be implemented in 3 phases over a 14-year period (Mukwena and Manyisa, 2022). Phase 1 (2012–2017) consisted of testing and developing systems and processes to guarantee the effective running of the health system. Phase 2 (2017–2022) concentrated on developing mechanisms and practises to ensure the effective management and operation of the NHI Fund and Phase 3(2021–2025) signals the completion and

implementation of the Medical Schemes Act and the NHI Act by introducing the prepayment for authorised private hospitals and specialised treatments.

In 2019, a trial implementation was carried out, and the pilot districts' responses to it were conflicting. The evaluation study for the NHI Phase 1 pilot project in South Africa suggested that the healthcare system is broken and needs to be fixed. Other problems include a lack of political will, a lack of human and financial resources, a lack of coordination and communication, and the absence of monitoring systems at the time of execution. Public hospitals in South Africa are experiencing problems like an increase in illnesses and a lack of funding and employees to manage the project. This is exacerbated by the existing situation in most government-funded healthcare institutions, which is marked by inadequate management, a small budget, mediocre infrastructure and a lack of pharmaceuticals, as recorded in several studies (Maphumulo and Bhengu, 2019, Malakoane et al.,2020). The difficulties reported in the public healthcare sector by both employees and patients, as well as the fact that public institutions are plagued by a lack of funding, poor infrastructure, a lack of training, delays in development, and poor technological advancements, cast doubt on the readiness for the implementation of the NHI (Mukwena & Manyisa, 2022, Heunis et al., 2019 and, Michel et al., 2020).

While the NHI presents a chance to level the playing field for public sector healthcare providers to draw medical tourists, it is important to note that the obstacles prevent the plan from being implemented quickly, necessitating extra interventions and collaboration.

4. Research Design and Methods

A positivist research approach was used in this study to ensure that the research was completely impartial, that the researcher was free from any conflicts of interest, and that the focus of the study was on the facts rather than the thoughts and feelings of the respondents (Kaur, 2016). Additionally, information was systematically gathered using quantitative techniques and a descriptive exploratory paradigm. A five-point Likert scale that was a component of the questionnaire used in this study was employed to collect quantitative data. There were also tick boxes to select the best option. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0 was used to conduct an exploratory component analysis using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Promax rotation.

In keeping with the quantitative methodologies used in this study, ethical considerations about concerns of confidentiality, dependability, and credibility were made during the sample selection, data collecting, analysis, and reporting. An overall response rate of 89% was achieved for the study by interviewing 322 frontline healthcare personnel from selected central hospitals in South Africa. In order to guarantee that the respondents had direct patient contact and held jobs in administration, admissions, nursing, medicine, pharmacy, and ward attendance, a purposeful sample technique was used to select the respondents. A targeted sample of frontline respondents made sure that they had firsthand experience with the challenges and that useful information could be gathered.

5. Research Findings

5.1 Finding 1: The Challenge of Service Quality Improvement Plans

The public healthcare sector is experiencing numerous challenges which impact on service delivery negatively. The ability to provide high quality of service may be a deciding factor when marketing to and attracting medical tourists. It is therefore important to improve the service delivery levels to meet the expectations of the tourists. In response to this, government has implemented a few quality improvement strategies, which according to the respondents should include critical success factors. The results shows that while planning and development are important, there are certain factors that must be considered during the implementation stage of such projects. Figure 1 below highlights the critical success factors as perceived by the frontline workers that must be considered during implementation of projects related to quality of service delivered.

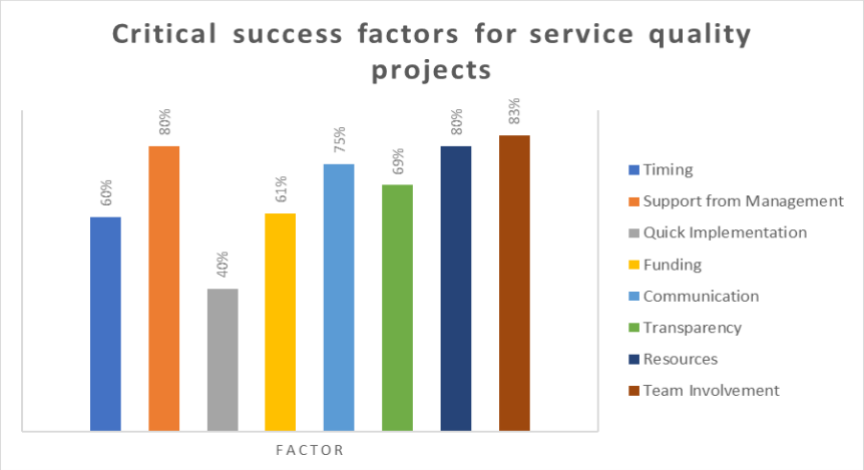

Figure 1: Critical success factors when implementing service quality projects

Source: Author's construction based on responses

According to the responses received, team involvement (83%), resources (80%) and support from management (80%) forms the foundation of implementing successful projects. All projects need necessary funding to procure the necessary resources (human and material) to facilitate success. Funding (61%) is normally distributed by managers, so the results shows that support from management is important. If these factors are not available, it might be impossible to achieve the objectives of the project. Next in priority is communication (75%) and transparency (69%) about how the project is going to roll out. Communication amongst all relevant groups is imperative and this enforces team involvement. Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that timing is also important to consider. Only 40% of the respondents indicated that speed is important. Quick implementation may not be the best way when implementing projects, but this is very dependent on the type and scale of projects. Small projects which involve only one department might be easier and quicker to implement, while big projects may take a little longer (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2020).

5.2 Finding 2: Responsibility for driving quality

There seems to be disparity regarding who is responsible for driving service quality at the selected hospitals. Using a nominal question which is a type of question that presents respondents with multiple answer choices which were non-numerical in nature, the question aimed to ascertain the perception of the respondents regarding responsibility. The results are shown in figure 2 below:

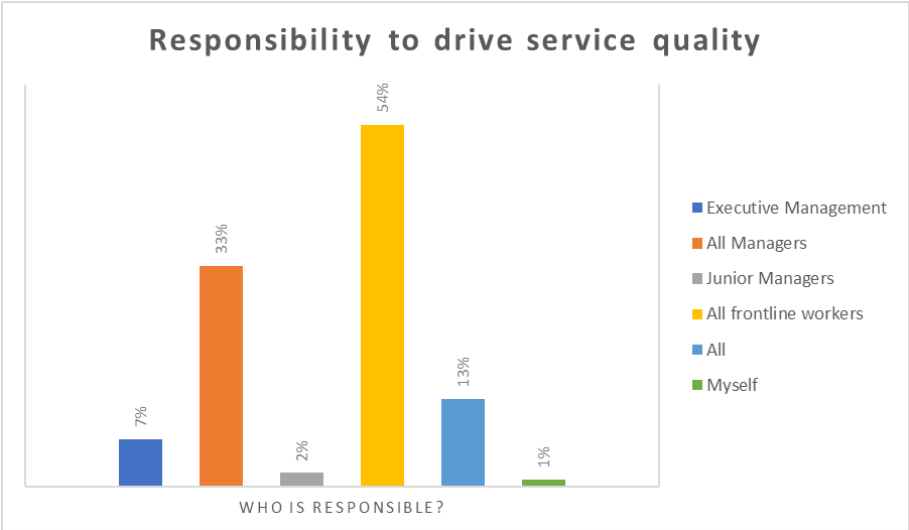

Figure 2: Responsible for driving service quality

Most of the respondents (54%) believe that all frontline workers are in charge of implementing plans to improve service quality at their institution. One third of the respondents (33%) indicated that implementing service quality programs is managerial task and 13% indicated that it is everyone's duty. Only a small percentage of responses recorded showed that executive management (7%) and "myself" (1%) are the responsible groups. This disparity alludes to a lack of employee engagement and confusion about levels of responsibility for service quality.

5.3 Finding 3: Challenges Experienced

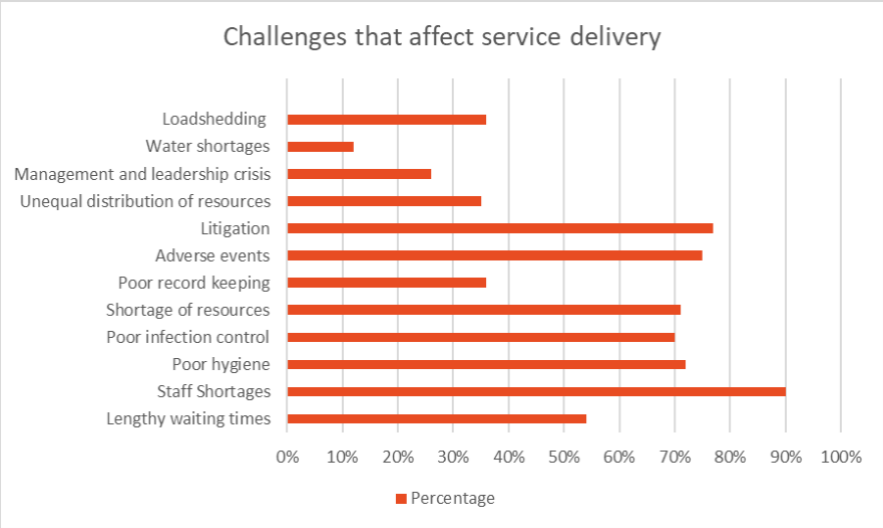

Figure 3: Challenges experienced in service delivery

There are several challenges that were identified that inhibit high quality of service delivery. These challenges are largely interlinked making the public sector incapable of competing on a level playing field for medical tourism. Staff shortages (91%) and shortage of resources (71%) are underpinned by a severe lack of funding in the public sector domain holistically. The resources that are available are unequally distributed (35%) which could be related to a management and leadership crisis (26%) as the leader generally make distribution decisions. The repercussions include increased litigation (77%) as staff are unable to do what is required as they do not have the capacity to do so. Adverse events (75%) such as pandemics and outbreak of disease lead to larger numbers of patients (50%). Additionally, 36% of respondents reported poor record keeping. This looks like a fantastic recipe for lengthy waiting times reported by 54% of the respondents. Poor hygiene (72%) and poor infection control(70%) can also be linked to lengthy waiting times and increased disease burdens with a lack of resources, staffing and water shortages (12%) and the impacts of loadshedding (36%)

6. Discussion

This section focuses on the discussion of the findings against literature reviewed. South African government officials have implemented numerous plans to reach the goals set to recover from economic and social turmoil during tough times. However, these planned implementations have seen many challenges. To overcome the challenges, it is important to understand the critical success factors in implementing plans. Team involvement, support from management and having the right resources such as funding and expertise contribute to a successful implementation of a plan. Similarly, every employee must have a clear understanding of their role and responsibility regarding the implementation of service quality plans. The main causes of citizens becoming medical tourists are inadequate health facilities and equipment, poor human resource management, poor health care financing, a shortage of necessary medications and supplies, inadequate access to healthcare, and the absence of a system for disease response (Orekoya and Oduyoye,2018). Consequently, these characteristics are comparable with the results of this study, suggesting that South Africans might partake in outbound medical tourism. Huge investment in the health sector can drastically improve inbound medical tourism and make health care services affordable to all South Africans. These challenges may also be the reason for the reluctance in the adoption of the NHI.

While the results may look very grim for the public healthcare sector, the private healthcare sector should look at the this as an opportunity for growth as collaborative efforts could result in astounding results due to the existing infrastructure, expertise and investments in the public sector. Additionally, the tourism sector may benefit from collaboration as the medical tourism sector may see unprecedented growth due to the location and existing tourism offerings in South Africa.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper's goal was to investigate how cooperation between the tourism and healthcare sectors might benefit both sectors. The study looked at secondary literature on the healthcare industry, medical tourism, and other related topics. The empirical study revealed that obstacles including defective plan implementation and a lack of awareness of roles and duties prevent the South African healthcare industry from overcoming challenges.

South Africa must ensure that it concentrates on ensuring that it attains maximum benefit from medical tourism whilst minimising the negative impacts of medical tourism at the destination area. Medical tourism currently benefits the private healthcare system in South Africa; however, opportunities must be created to integrate resources for effective and efficient public health management to overcome the challenges so that the public healthcare sector can also benefit from medical tourism and ensure shared growth.

Medical tourism product offerings can be marketed as healing in a place with the immense scenic beauty of South Africa, great climate, cultural richness, wildlife and game parks. This may also create business during off peak tourist seasons thereby reducing the seasonality that adversely affects the tourism industry. In addition, because this is a niche market, this will decrease the unhealthy reliance of South Africa on the mass tourism markets that have a negative impact on the natural environment as SA is visited primarily for sea, sand and wildlife tourism. Having the best standards, enforced by statutory bodies and having highly skilled staff and the best facilities should be the hallmarks of medical tourism in South Africa.

The synergies between tourism and healthcare sectors should be harnessed to foster improvement and create opportunities in both sectors. One of the major opportunities is training. Employees in the tourism industry share many of the same critical skillsets. Skills include compassion, understanding, responsibility, being aware, paying attention, and so forth (Zsarnoczky-Dulhazi, Zsarnoczky, Kopper, Karpati, Molnar, Adol & David, 2023). Tourism and hospitality is considered as a culture that organises and enables service employees to deliver great customer experiences, making the hotel business leaders in service.

Further research on how the healthcare sector can benefit from training based on best practices in the tourism sector regarding service delivery. This may create a mutually beneficial relationship between the two sectors. The tourism industry can benefit from an influx of medical tourism and the healthcare sector can benefit from training. Due to the revenue that provision of training, delivering quality healthcare and tourism create, both industries will profit.

Acknowledgments

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Aspects of Ecosystem Approach in Governing a Tourism Destination

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Abstract: This theoretical study offers an extensive exploration of the ecosystem approach to tourism destination management. Ecosystems have gained prominence in contemporary discourse across various domains, including business and the academic world. The study examines tourism destinations through the lens of a business ecosystem, shedding light on the intricate interplay of elements within such ecosystems. For this purpose, first, the concept of a business ecosystem is defined and delimitated, laying the foundation for its application to the unique context of tourism destinations.

Ecosystems, both in biology and in business, are complex and spontaneous structures, which raises profound questions about the feasibility of managing an ecosystem, the responsible entities, and the methods entailed. This paper argues that rather than a traditional management approach, it is plausible to adopt a governance perspective when dealing with the tourism destination ecosystem. By synthesizing existing bibliographical data on the characteristics of the ecosystem, the roles and functions of actors in it, as well as unique attributes of tourism enriching the understanding of the ecosystem approach, the research concludes on the important aspects that could be used for successful governance.

This study serves as the initial phase of a broader research endeavor, which overarching goal is to contribute to the socio-economic understanding of tourism management, casting it through the prism of business ecosystems by expanding on these foundational insights and conducting further empirical investigations on particular types of tourism.

Keywords: Tourism Destination, Destination Management, Business Ecosystem, Ecosystem Approach, Business Ecosystem Governance

1. Introduction

The relevance of the study is determined by the growing use of ecosystem concepts in management sciences, and the need for specific methods and tools for tourism development. The concept of ecosystem, borrowed from natural science, in business serves for the complex relationships - partly spontaneous and informal - between operators to be realized. One relevant area for an ecosystem approach in management is tourism, which is a fragmented, multilateral industry proven to be dependent on multiple non-tourism operators and factors, most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic (Milwood & Crick, 2021).

The present work attempts at answering the following questions:

- Can the tourism business ecosystem be managed?
- Which aspects of the tourism ecosystem should be considered in the governing a tourism destination?

The article presents a brief statement of methodology, a chapter designated to the delimitation of relevant socio-economic ecosystem concepts, as well as one on reviewing ecosystem approach in tourism before making conclusions and discussing the application of results.

2. Methodology

The methodology used is literature analysis based on comprehensive search of academic literature from online databases and physical libraries. The key words of the search were "ecosystem", "business ecosystem", "tourism ecosystem", and the delimitation of relevant sources was made according to their applicability to the concept of destination. A snowball method was used to enrich the data by further examining the referenced sources of initially accessed articles. Essential characteristics were identified both for the business ecosystem and the tourism ecosystem, and the examined concepts were linked to other related concepts. Information was analyzed, and conclusions were made to aid the next phases of the ongoing research.

3. Socio-Economic Ecosystem Concepts

3.1 Definition and Delimitation of the Business Ecosystem

Moore (1993, 1996a) first mentioned the *business ecosystem* (BE), defining it as a "growth-oriented synergistic economic" community of "mutually supportive" "customers, suppliers, lead producers and other stakeholders", investors, owners, "relevant trade associations, standards bodies, labor unions, governmental and quasigovernmental institutions", "interacting with one another to produce goods and services" (Moore, 1998,

168), coming "together in a partially intentional, highly self-organizing, and even somewhat accidental manner" (Moore, 1998, 169). These agents "work in cooperation and competition" for a common goal, e.g., a new product or satisfaction of a customer's need, until they finally engage in the next round of innovation (Moore, 1993, 76).

Business science adopted the use of the biological ecosystem model to analyze business relationships and strategic decision-making (Iansiti & Levien, 2004a,b) in the state of significant change in competitive environment caused by rapid technological change, the rise of the information age, and globalization (Hoskisson et al., 1999) as the complexity of the business environment increases (Peltoniemi & Vuori, 2005).

Although Moore (1996a) justifies the BE by adding a new layer of agents beyond this of *business network*, BE is considered a type of business network with specific characteristics rather than a new organizational structure (Anggraeni, Den Hartigh & Zegveld, 2007), encompassing both production-side and user-side actors (Thomas & Autio, 2012).

The term BE should be distinguished from other concepts describing the economic community, parallel or only seemingly related: *cluster* (Porter, 1990), *value network* (Mariotti, 2002), *innovation network*, *industrial network* (Thomas & Autio, 2012), *supply chain* (Den Hartigh & Van Asseldonk 2004), *business ecology* (Townsend, 2006), *digital business ecosystem* (e.g., De Tommassi, 2005), *technological ecosystem* (e.g., Adomavicius et al., 2006), *social ecosystem* (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003), *innovation ecosystem* (Thomas & Autio, 2012), *entrepreneurial ecosystem* (e.g., Spigel, 2015), *industrial ecosystem, economy as an ecosystem* (Peltoniemi & Vuori, 2005).

A plethora of theoretical work exists concerning BE (Peltoniemi, 2004; Peltoniemi & Vuori, 2005; Peltoniemi, 2005a,b; Peltoniemi, Vuori & Laihonen, 2005; Vuori, 2005). Empirical studies, a quarter of a century after its coining, are still rare, mostly concerning information technology (Den Hartigh & Van Asseldonk, 2004; Basole, 2009; Iyer, Lee & Venkatraman, 2006) and only a few works focusing on tourism (Selen & Ogulin, 2015; Milwood & Crick, 2021; Henche, Salvaj & Cuesta-Valiño, 2020). In some studies, BE is simply used as a term replacing business network, but none of its characteristics is discussed (e.g., Quaadgras, 2005; Duy et al. 2020).

BE is also studied through the lens of *service-dominant logic* (Vargo & Lusch, 2008, 2016). This approach is excluded from the study because it takes away from its focus on the tourism destination.

3.2 Characteristics of the Business Ecosystem

The key characteristics of BE contribute to its understanding:

3.2.1 Complexity

According to *complexity theory*, *complex adaptive systems* (CASs) are non-linear, adaptive, and co-evolving (Urry, 2005). A complex system can only be understood in its entirety, not as the sum of its constituent parts (Baggio 2008). BE meets the criteria of a complex system, because it contains many heterogeneous parts, relatively independent, but highly interconnected and interacting, which in a somewhat mystical process of self-organization acquire an order and awareness (Peltoniemi & Vuori, 2005). In CAS, the *butterfly effect* is observed, where small contributions or changes in initial conditions can lead to dramatic consequences and unexpected results (Lewin, 1993). The health of the BE can turn around extremely quickly (Iansiti & Levien, 2005b).

3.2.2 Self-Organization

An ecosystem is born in a chaotic process (Peltoniemi & Vuori, 2005) whereby it is unknown how individual organisms congregate in a stable community (Kauffman, 1995), but this takes place partly under the influence of environmental factors, with each ecosystem responding to a particular challenge (Peltoniemi & Vuori, 2005). Self-organization lacks both an external and an internal leader, and the process occurs through local interactions (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). Despite this absence, control and incentives can be provided to encourage the process rather than to impose parameters on the emerging structure (Peltoniemi & Vuori, 2005).

3.2.3 Interconnectedness and Coevolution

Distinguishing individual ecosystems is difficult because there are no clear boundaries between communities and habitats (Den Hartigh & Van Asseldonk, 2004). More important are the connections within and between ecosystems (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). The compatibility or complementarity of an ecosystem's products could be an indicator of an agent's participation in it (Den Hartigh & Van Asseldonk, 2004).

An ecosystem involves an abundance of agents depending on each other for effectiveness and survival, but the connections between them are loose. The interconnectedness is expressed in a shared fate: if the ecosystem is healthy, individuals in it thrive, but if not, each individual suffers the consequences. (Iansiti & Levien, 2004b.) If customers as agents of an ecosystem leave it, its value to producers and other customers decreases (Den Hartigh & Van Asseldonk, 2004). The interconnections in an ecosystem can also be social (March & Wilkinson, 2009). Efficiency is expressed in optimizing the resource usage, which in the BE equal the energy flowing through the biological ecosystem (Power & Jerjian, 2001). To survive, an ecosystem must interact with its surroundings, maintaining an energy input and output flow (Baggio, 2008).

The interconnectedness can also be explained through the distinction between influencers and influenced. Agents that cannot affect value, nor are affected by it, are irrelevant to the ecosystem and leave it. Those not affected by value but affecting it are necessary agents with resources needed for ecosystem's success Those both influencing and influenced by value are interdependent agents, and agents influenced by value without resources to influence it are remote agents. (Hillebrand, 2022.)

3.2.4 Dynamics

A BE is not static but goes through a lifecycle of birth, expansion, leadership, and self-renewal or death (Moore, 1993). Change indicates the necessary adaptation to the constantly changing conditions of the environment and a pronounced response to tension created by the different values and interests (Hillebrand, 2022).

Resilience is also characteristic to BEs, meaning flexible resistance. It represents "the autonomous reorganisation capabilities of a complex system, exercised to react to external impulses that may disrupt it" and refers to "the magnitude of a shock that the system can absorb while remaining within a given state" (Baggio, 2008, 18).

3.2.5 Added Value

The existence of the BE is justified by the production of added value, which makes it "greater than its constituent parts" (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003, 40). Moore (1996) considers the value received by the customer, which consists in the *total experience*, including complementary offers. Complementary products, intended to be used together, bring greater value to the consumer than their separate use, and complementarity can be observed both at product and technology level (Den Hartigh & Van Asseldonk, 2004).

3.2.6 Cocreation and Stakeholder Participation

A distinguishing feature of BEs is the participation of consumption parties. The paradigm of value creation today is changing towards creating personalized experiences for the customer, which requires involving them in creating this value through active dialogue and product's co-construction (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b). In addition to customers, the parties in the cocreation process of the BE can also be businesses and public organizations.

Regarding cooperation, the *stakeholder involvement* must also be considered. Stakeholder is "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, 46). Stakeholder involvement is widely used in development and has both supporters and opponents: some see it in a social aspect to promote active citizenship, avoid conflicts of interest, and improve community spirit; others criticize it as tokenism and seeming sustainability (Wanner & Prönstl-Haider, 2019).

3.2.7 Coopetition

Companies', associations', public bodies', and other participants' roles depend on the situation and interaction between them. They can be partners, complementing each other's services, subcontractors, strengthening each other's resources, and competitors, sharing the market (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011). When cooperation and competition occur simultaneously, the observed phenomenon is *coopetition* (Luo, 2004) and the course of operation is non-linear (Selen & Ogulin, 2015).

3.3 Roles in the Business Ecosystem

In a BE there are multiple species that have unique functions, needs and desires, and unique contributions to the survival and growth of the system (Den Hartigh & Van Asseldonk, 2004).

Iansiti and Levien (2004b) the roles of *keystone*, *niche players*, *dominators*, and *hub landlords*. Keystones are rare ecosystem agents strongly influencing it. Most ecosystem agents constitute niche players producing complementary products. Dominators and hub landlords attract ecosystem resources to themselves, but do not always allow the fair distribution of the produced value. Hub landlords could be connections between participants offering a platform for realization of relationships (Den Hartig & Van Asseldonk, 2004).

The *shaper* attempts to build an ecosystem around his own product or technology at the cost of large-scale investments, and the *follower* follows the shaper. The *adapter* role is also possible, contractually developing complementary products, learning, and increasing its scale in the shadow of the dominator. (Hagel, 1996.) Another possible role is the *reserving the right to play*, who keeps its options open to obtain a strong position at a later stage (Den Hartigh & Van Asseldonk, 2004). An organization which considers the connections between agents in addition to its own relations to them sees the potential for creating coalitions and can become a *broker* between unrelated agents (Hillebrand, 2022).

It is not clear how the described roles can be incorporated into the level structure of the ecosystem (core business, extended enterprise, business ecosystem) and what roles may be played by agents located closer to the periphery.

For institutional stability of the BE, a locus of coordination (LoC) must exist - a central agent that brings together all the participants and provides the necessary tools to generate and distribute value. Legitimacy of the ecosystem is ensured through the good reputation of the LoC. Institutional stability is also accomplished by the governance mechanisms that LoC utilizes to exercise power: values, norms, rules, agreements shared by participants as a framework for value cocreation and symbiosis and reducing the complexity of the ecosystem. (Thomas and Autio, 2012.)

3.4 Business Ecosystem Governance

BE governance is underrepresented in scientific literature. Consensus is not reached on whether a BE (or any network) can be managed – due to the lack of a clear hierarchy. Power and Jerjian (2001) point out that an individual business cannot be managed in isolation – instead the entire ecosystem has to be managed. The use of *governance* is preferred over *management* (Anggraeni, Den Hartigh & Zegveld, 2007). Since governance is exercised by an organization without formal authority over other actors, it is about *influencing* (Anggraeni, Den Hartigh & Zegveld, 2007) or *coordinating* (Thomas & Autio, 2012). This can also be seen as *leadership*. Leadership is "the process by which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2010, 3). In complexity theory, governance is influencing change through anticipation and adaptation (Vargas-Sánchez, 2017).

The purpose of ecosystem governance is to provide support to participants in value creation (Hillebrand, 2022). Moore (1996) notes that the most common ways of governance of the BE are community governance systems and quasi-democratic mechanisms. According to Iansiti and Levien (2004b), BEs are driven by their shared destiny. Vos (2006) describes BE governance as balancing between providing incentives for participants to work towards a common goal and preserving their freedom to achieve own goals and undertake initiative, so not to hinder their motivation; using steering mechanisms, ensuring that agents' actions will achieve the common goal, seeking to improve the ecosystem's ability to cope with external changes and the internal pace of innovation.

De Meyer and Williamson (2020, 8) use soft expression regarding governance, encouraging agents to "nurture" and "guide" the development of the BE. They discuss the *building* and *development* of ecosystems and not their creation as other authors express (Heikkilä & Kuivaniemi, 2012), which would contradict with ecosystems' spontaneous emergence. They conclude that sometimes organizations participate in ecosystem unconsciously; thus, following their recommendations for nurturing and guiding the development, the ecosystem actors can become its leaders by increasing their awareness of their own position and the deriving possibilities.

4. Ecosystem Approach in Tourism

4.1 Tourism Destination as a Business Ecosystem

Tourism is an experience economy, where the ability to offer successful experiences is crucial for tourism organizations struggling with changes in the industry, including new destinations, strong competition, introduction of new technologies, etc. (Buonincontri et al., 2017). Academic literature concludes that tourism is multi-layered and fragmented (Leiper, 1990; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007; Palmer & Bejou, 1995; Scott, Baggio &

Cooper, 2009). It is often difficult to determine whether a firm is a tourism business because the demand for its services is divided between locals and tourists (Lassila, 2019). Moreover, these firms often work in multiple fields at the same time (Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2014) or offer different services, e.g., seasonally. Tourism is not easily perceived because of the lack of traditional production functions, with tourism activities passing through several traditional economic sectors (Baggio, 2008).

Tourist organizations providing tourism services (tour operators, hotels, cruise lines, activity providers, destination management organizations (DMOs), etc.) must work together and in a network of agents, including customers, authorities, groups with special interests, local communities, co-suppliers (Hillebrand, 2022). Interconnectedness and cooperation are critical to the tourism product (Björk & Virtanen, 2005). Networking in tourism also benefits sustainability as the industry relies on a mass of small actors unable to achieve sustainability in isolation (Halme, 2001). Networking compensates for tourism's fragmentation, and cooperation is the reason for the existence of networks (Scott, Baggio & Cooper, 2009).

Selen & Ogulin (2015) state that the tourism destination operates in a unique combination of interrelated factors including authorities, visitors, and the natural environment. Tourism ecosystem is mentioned in the context of a destination led by a hotel, DMO or travel agency, and in the sense of the tourism digitalization (*smart tourism business ecosystem*), where a digital technology company acts as a central hub (Baggio & Chiappa, 2013). The ecosystem approach is particularly relevant in complex situations, e.g., in radical innovations or development of sustainable tourism (Hillebrand, 2022).

Tourist destination is defined as "a geographical location (city, region, resort, etc.), with a pattern of attractions, facilities and services, which tourists choose for a visit", "a complex agglomeration of diverse systems of interrelated economic, social and environmental phenomena and networks" (Baggio, 2008, 3, 16). Tourism experience in the destination is evaluated by the visitor holistically based on the experience of using multiple services provided by a network of organizations (Selen & Ogulin, 2015). Its representation depends not only on its internal characteristics, but on the network of interrelationships in it (March & Wilkinson, 2009). Although the destination is concentrated in a location, some agents contributing to the holistic tourist experience can be located elsewhere, without violating the principle of BE's independence from the location. A destination contains not only the tourism product, but a set of core competencies, leadership, knowledge flow, entrepreneurship (Brawn, 2005) that add to its value.

4.2 Agents of the Tourism Ecosystem

For the tourism ecosystem it is important to map which agents are interconnected and how (Selen & Ogulin, 2015). Agents of the tourism ecosystem are not only those involved directly in offering tourism services, but also those who provide general amenities (local authorities, businesses, and producers), tourists as cocreators, as well as the local community (March & Wilkinson, 2009). Because of its wide range of agents, tourism offers excellent opportunities for stakeholder involvement, which on its turn contributes to responsible development and sustainability (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019).

The locals are tourism-specific stakeholders representing both a tourism resource and a reason for tourism development in a place (Richards & Hall, 2002). In many cases, however, residents have limited resources to affect value, and are overlooked as *remote agents* (Hillebrand, 2022).

Cooperation ensures the vital tasks and functions of destination management by enhancing destination's competitiveness (Zehrer et al., 2014). Cooperation is also complementing the competition inherent in business, achieving flexibility and efficiency, thus coopetition is observed. Coopetition is contextualized in tourism by the *collocation* of ecosystem agents as they, in a location-based market, are concentrated in this location, using its resources (nature, infrastructure) collectively and experiencing it holistically. The *synergy* of cooperation between otherwise competing organizations has varying dimensions depending on the destination. (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011.)

The economic agents of the tourism ecosystem also cooperate with consumers in conditions of cocreation. Tourists get to decide what to experience by interacting with destination's service providers and influence other tourists (Buonincontri et al., 2017). Interaction between service providers and visitors occurs both face-to-face and in technological environments (Milwood & Crick, 2021). Social media's development activates tourists for cocreation of tourism value (Giannopoulos et al., 2020), occurring before, during, and after the use of a service (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a). Technology plays a significant role in the cocreation of the tourism product, providing more information, transparency, dynamics, and user orientation (Buonincontri et al., 2017).

4.3 Destination's Ecosystemic Governance

According to its governance structure, the destination ecosystem can be either product-oriented, based on destination's resources, or market-oriented, based on tourism demand. By the presence or absence of dominance in the ecosystem, it can be governed with a community approach (without dominance) or a corporate approach (with a dominant organization). Market-oriented governance is linked to the corporate approach, and product orientation, focused on the balance between socio-cultural, economic, and environmental values and resources, to the community approach. (Selen & Ogulin, 2015.)

Community approach is common in tourism (Zehrer et al., 2014) because, especially in Europe, a large part of tourism businesses consists of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Peters & Buhalis, 2013). In it, individual businesses operate in a decentralized manner and none of them has administrative authority or dominant ownership in the destination, which requires them to harmonize their goals, collaborate on common strategies, and pool their resources (Zehrer et al., 2014). Cooperative destination self-governance has many advocates, but destination agents are not always willing to cooperate, because of transaction costs and the presence or lack of social ties (Selen & Ogulin, 2015). In community approach, destination leadership is not formal management but rather influence. Tourism organizations possessing or developing key motivators for visiting the destination are potential leaders (Zehrer et al., 2014). Assuming that the common goal of destination agents is to attract tourists, this corresponds to the incentives for ecosystem participation proposed by Vos (2006). By providing motivators to visit the destination, an agent stimulates other agents to participate in the ecosystem, guaranteeing its leadership position. Other participants agree with the leadership for achieving destination's goals (Zehrer et al., 2014).

Another way to gain leadership is by orchestrating network connections (Cipollina & Presenza, 2010). The necessary skills to articulate common interests, create connections, coordinate negotiations, and promote cooperation are often attributed to a DMO (Halme, 2001).

Public-private partnership models, where attracting more tourists would bring financial benefits to the business, but also social benefits to the public sector, are receiving increasing attention in tourism management, and public sector has reasons to be interested in tourism promotion (March & Wilkinson, 2009).

Nowadays the discussion on *smart tourism* is intensifying (Bhuiyan et al., 2022; Collado-Agudo, Herrero-Crespo & San Martín-Gutierrez, 2023; Polese et al., 2018), imposed by globalization, digitalization, and hyper-connectedness of tourism industry (Vargas-Sánchez, 2017). Smart tourism is based on harnessing the potential of information technology advancement in favor of significant issues like sustainability, universal accessibility, and innovation, using intelligence as the ability to understand and solve problems with knowledge (Vargas-Sánchez, 2017). Destination intelligence goes beyond applying information technology, implying a comprehensive management innovation based on technology to strengthen destination's competitiveness for more efficient and sustainable resourcing and a better tourism experience (Collado-Agudo, Herrero-Crespo & San Martín-Gutierrez, 2023). Smart tourism is not a new type of tourism, but a way to steer tourism by analyzing vast volumes of structured and unstructured information (*big data*) via technologies (Vargas-Sánchez, 2017).

Smart tourism introduces the concepts of a *smart tourism destination* and a *smart tourism business ecosystem* (STBE), which again are not new organizational units, but a way of governing the destination as BE. Vargas-Sánchez (2017) proposes a model of STBE which closely resembles the original BE model of Moore, but divides agents into sub-sectors, also called external forces, determining destination's success. Subsectors, describing influences over the ecosystem, do not allocate agents categorically but rather emphasize the role of knowledge procured for effective ecosystem governance. Vargas-Sánchez (2017) compares the management of a "traditional" and smart tourist destinations, and by the derived characteristics of the smart destination (interconnectedness, co-creation, dynamics, complexity, non-linearity) he proposes an ecosystem approach. The new feature introduced is the abundance of information, received in real time, posing the problem of relevancy filtering (Vargas-Sánchez, 2017).

The need for centralized planning and coordination by DMOs is being questioned in the presence of modern information technologies (Vargas-Sánchez, 2017) as tourism is moving towards direct connections controlled by the client, where intermediaries are avoided, and information is widely available. DMOs could rather focus on the management of complexity and knowledge (Vargas-Sánchez, 2017). The smart innovation of a destination, however, usually requires the leadership of a public or semi-public institution (Collado-Agudo, Herrero-Crespo & San Martín-Gutierrez, 2023).

5. Conclusions and Discussion

The theoretical exploration indicates the lack of established methods and tools for BE governance in general or in tourism, however, some guidelines for this governance can be derived. Since literature on tourism BEs is yet insufficient, lacking context or examples of each general BE characteristic, conclusions are drawn separately regarding the BE generally and in tourism, reserving the right to revisit and relink the more general theory to findings of further tourism research.

5.1 Conclusions Regarding the Business Ecosystem Generally

Ecosystem is a widely used concept in management sciences. Considering it, one must carefully observe the context and objectives. The parallel development of multiple socio-economic ecosystem concepts can detract from the focus on the managed object.

When studying the BE, its exact boundaries are not important - they are dynamic and changeable. Crucial are the relationships between the participants and their roles.

A BE cannot be created - it arises spontaneously from the totality of relationships between individual agents and external impacts, but its development can be encouraged and supported. The BE cannot be managed in the traditional sense because of the lack of contained power and total control exercised. Its governance is practiced through "soft power": coordination, promotion of the desired activities and behaviors, inclusion and activation of agents in its composition, directing towards a common goal of value creation, accounting for the roles and available resources, building an environment of ecosystem-wide trust and respect for the ecosystem.

5.2 Conclusion Regarding the Tourism Business Ecosystem

Complex and fragmented by nature, tourism can be considered an ecosystem, and ecosystem approach can contribute to its effective governance. This can happen at a service and destination level (with this research focusing on the latter).

Specific agents of the tourism BE are tourists and locals. Tourists actively participate in the cocreation of tourism services, interacting with the tourism business before, during and after their visit, sometimes through information technology. Locals should not be neglected, as their involvement in ecosystem processes can contribute to its legitimacy, tourism's sustainability, as well as improvement of social engagement.

Coopetition justified by the collocation of tourism agents is observed, creating destination-specific synergistic effects.

There is no consensus on whether a DMO is needed or should the destination be more democratically, collectively governed. More significant is the presence of leadership to support agents in value creation. Communication skills, the ability to create connections, and networking are vital to leadership.

Technology plays an increasingly important role in tourism destination's governance, providing tools for processing and analyzing big data and distributing the intelligence widely among participants. This can release management resources from marketing focusing them on managing the complexity and knowledge.

5.3 Practical Application and Limitations

This study's limitations are in its theoretical nature. The significance of the ecosystem approach in tourism governance should be concretized by empirical studies on different tourism types in destinations, revealing distinctive examples of governance practices.

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Masters Research Paper

Indigenous Games as a Catalyst for Sport Tourism Development in South Africa

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Abstract: This preliminary study seeks to investigate the role of indigenous games as catalysts for sport tourism development in South Africa. By employing a mixed-methods approach, qualitative data will be gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants, including government officials responsible for cultural affairs, organizers of indigenous games, and various stakeholder groups. Quantitative data on its part will be sourced from residents in host communities and from event participants and spectators. By examining multi-stakeholder perspectives on the phenomenon, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how indigenous games can be utilised as tools for sport tourism development in South Africa. The anticipated outcomes of the study include insights into the ways indigenous games can enhance South Africa's appeal as a sport tourism destination. Understanding key stakeholders' perspectives regarding indigenous games could reveal the potential areas of leveraging indigenous games for sport tourism. The implications of this research could be far-reaching, offering guidance to policymakers, tourism boards, and cultural organisations involved in their hosting. By recognizing the value of indigenous games in the broader context of sport tourism, stakeholders could develop strategies to promote sustainable tourism practices, preserve cultural heritage, and foster inclusive economic growth. This study outcomes should contribute to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of culture, sports, and tourism, emphasising the importance of indigenous games as a unique and underexplored asset in South Africa's sport tourism landscape. Ultimately, the findings could inform initiatives that capitalise on the synergies between cultural heritage and tourism for the benefit of both local communities and the broader South African economy.

Keywords: Indigenous Games, Sport Tourism, Tourism Development, South Africa.

1. Introduction and Background

Sport tourism, as an emerging field within the tourism industry, has gained significant attention as a niche market that combines travel, recreation, and cultural experiences. This tourism niche offers opportunities for economic growth, cultural exchange, and community development (Aghili *et al*. 2023; Bonang *et al*. 2022). The subsector also serves as a bridge for cultural exchange as sporting events often draw diverse audiences, including athletes, coaches, and fans from around the world. Many countries around the world are actively involved in the organisation and management of sporting events for the opportunities they present to destinations. As a result, these events are being integrated into national development strategies (Bama 2018).

Indigenous games, deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of nations, represent a unique and rich aspect of South Africa's sporting heritage and have the potential to be catalysts for sport tourism development. Moreso, indigenous games offer unique and authentic cultural experiences which position them as visitor attractions. Given the benefits presented by these games, research is required to understand their potential for sport tourism development and identify strategies for such leverage. South Africa, known for its vibrant multicultural society and rich history, has a diverse range of indigenous games that have been passed down through generations (Burnett and Hollander 2004). These games hold significant cultural and historical value, embodying the traditions, values, and identities of various communities across the country (South Africa. Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation 2009). However, the potential of indigenous games as a tourism attraction and economic driver remains largely untapped and under-investigated. Indigenous games have the potential to provide an authentic and immersive cultural experience for tourists, offering insights into local traditions, customs, and values (Burnett and Hollander 2004). They can create opportunities for community engagement, cultural exchange, and the empowerment of local communities through the preservation and promotion of their heritage. Furthermore, the development of sport tourism around indigenous games can contribute to the economic development of local communities, generating income, employment, and infrastructure development.

Despite the potential benefits, the integration of indigenous games into the sport tourism landscape faces various challenges. These include a lack of infrastructure and facilities to support tourism activities, limited awareness and promotion of indigenous games among tourists, and the need for capacity building and skills development within local communities (Odounga-Othy 2020). Additionally, there may be cultural sensitivities and concerns about the commercialisation and commodification of indigenous traditions that need to be addressed in the development of sport tourism initiatives. Therefore, this proposed study aims to investigate the role of indigenous games in promoting sport tourism development in South Africa. By exploring the current status of indigenous games as a tourism product, identifying the barriers and opportunities for their integration into the sport tourism sector, and developing strategies and recommendations for leveraging indigenous games to drive sport tourism development, this study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge on sport tourism, cultural heritage, and sustainable community development in the South African context.

1.1 Research Problem

The development of sport tourism in South Africa presents a significant opportunity for economic growth, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. However, there is a lack of scholarly attention on the potential of indigenous games as catalysts for sport tourism development. Deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of South Africa's diverse indigenous communities, such games have the potential to attract domestic and international tourists seeking unique and authentic experiences. Despite the potential significance of indigenous games, there exists limited scholarly enquiry into their potential impact on sport tourism development in South Africa. The existing focus on mainstream sports events and facilities overlooks the untapped potential of indigenous games to contribute to tourism growth, community engagement, and socio-economic development. This study is thus premised on the dearth of a comprehensive understanding of how indigenous games can be effectively leveraged as a catalyst for sport tourism development in South Africa. This knowledge gap inhibits the development of strategic initiatives, policies, and infrastructure that can harness the economic and socio-cultural benefits of indigenous games for sport tourism.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The study aims to investigate the role of indigenous games as catalysts for sport tourism development in South Africa and provide insights, recommendations, and strategies to harness their potential for sustainable tourism growth and socio-economic development. As such, the study is guided by the following objectives:

- To assess the current state of sport tourism development in South Africa in relation to opportunities for incorporating indigenous games.
- To explore the socio-economic impacts of incorporating indigenous games into sport tourism.
- To identify the challenges hindering the integration of indigenous games into the sport tourism development framework in South Africa.

1.3 Rationale and Significance of the Study

This proposed study is underpinned by a well-defined rationale driven by a convergence of critical factors. South Africa, known for its rich cultural heritage and vibrant indigenous games, presents untapped potential in the realm of sport tourism as indigenous games, deeply rooted in the traditions and identities of diverse communities, offer a unique avenue for sport tourism development. However, such potential remains largely unexplored, necessitating a comprehensive study to harness these cultural treasures. Additionally, the study presents a laudable opportunity to transform South Africa's sport tourism landscape. Indigenous games possess the power to attract domestic and international tourists seeking authentic and immersive cultural experiences, thus representing an opportunity to expand and diversify South Africa's tourism offerings, thereby leveraging their socio-economic benefits.

Beyond its practical implications, this proposed study aims to expand the scholarly discourse on the relationship between indigenous games and sport tourism development. It seeks to offer fresh insights and knowledge to the fields of sport tourism, cultural heritage, and sustainable tourism, especially within the South African context. This study further highlights the need to explore and capitalise on the cultural richness of indigenous games as catalysts for sport tourism development.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy and practice in the field of sport tourism. The findings could provide valuable insights for tourism organisations, cultural institutions, and community

stakeholders on how to harness the potential of indigenous games for sport tourism development. By showcasing the cultural heritage and unique experiences associated with indigenous games, South Africa can diversify its tourism offerings, attract a broader tourist base, and create opportunities for community development and economic growth.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Sport Tourism in South Africa

Swart and Bob (2007) observe that the sport tourism sector in South Africa has not consistently fulfilled its inherent potential, a situation attributed, at least in part, to the historical sanctions imposed during the apartheid period. Consequently, the South African government has taken significant measures to proactively promote the development of sport tourism. This includes the provision of essential infrastructure, training programs, marketing initiatives, and broader promotional efforts aimed at fostering the growth of the sport tourism segment within the overall tourism industry on a national scale (Swart and Bob 2007). In line with this perspective, Cornelissen (2004) contends that South Africa has recognised the potential of sport tourism to serve as a means of establishing a national identity and as a catalyst for broader economic growth and development of the country.

South Africa established itself as a prominent sport tourism destination through its successful hosting of a spectrum of sporting events, from small-scale and recurring events to mega and one-time occurrences, as documented in the literature (Bama and Tichaawa 2015). Notably several iconic sport tourism events have been hosted in the country over the years, including the 1995 Rugby World Cup, the 1996 African Nations Cup, the 2003 Cricket World Cup, the 2009 FIFA Confederations Cup, the 2010 FIFA World Cup, as well as recurring events such as the Cape Town Cycle Tour, the Two Oceans Marathon, the annual Durban July, and the Comrades Marathon (Bama and Tichaawa, 2021; Knott and Hemmonsbey, 2015). These events collectively contribute to South Africa's status as a leading sport tourism destination.

2.2 Indigenous Games in South Africa

While various scholars have extensively studied various types of games, it is evident that there exists limited focus in the literature regarding indigenous games, mostly hosted in rural communities in South Africa (SA Sport Awards 2022). A plethora of scholarly focus has been dedicated to Western games, thereby overlooking the rich and diverse tapestry of indigenous games inherent to the South African cultural landscape. Annually, the Department of Sport and Recreation South Africa (DSRSA), in coordination with its provincial counterparts, orchestrates the Indigenous Games Festival (SA Sport Awards 2022). These festivals serve as a platform to honour the diverse cultures of Africa and represent a dedicated initiative to invigorate indigenous games. These games carry profound cultural significance and are integral to the identity and heritage of the communities. The DSRSA recognises the value of indigenous games in preserving and celebrating culture. Each province is encouraged to establish a unifying body that oversees the indigenous games hosted within its jurisdiction (SA Sport Awards 2022). This local-level structure helps streamline the organisation, promotion, and regulation of these games.

Once a particular indigenous game gains traction and is adopted by five provinces, with established rules and operational procedures, it is deemed ready to transition to the national stage. Thereon, the game's stakeholders are urged to establish a national governing body that operates independently (SA Sport Awards 2022). Additionally, the governing body can seek recognition and affiliation with the DSRSA, a process that ensures that indigenous games benefit from localised support and the broader national sports framework, contributing to their sustained development and promotion.

2.3 Historical and Cultural Significance

Indigenous games possess a historical lineage that can be traced to the dawn of human civilization. Long before South Africa experienced the impact of colonialisation, these games thrived as an integral part of the cultural and social fabric of the region (SA Sport Awards 2022). Knowledge and traditions associated with indigenous games were transmitted across generations through a combination of oral teachings and hands-on practice. Within the rural settings, children received their initial exposure to these games within the confines of their own homes, where informal education was practiced (SA Sport Awards 2022). This early home-based instruction made indigenous games the recreational pastime for children before they engaged in communal games.

These games form an integral part of the country's heritage and are deeply connected to the identity and traditions of various communities. Scholars have highlighted the role of indigenous games in promoting social cohesion, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering a sense of community pride (Segwapa, 2019). These games often carry symbolic meanings and serve as vehicles for passing down ancestral knowledge and values from one generation to another. Beashel and Taylor (1988) aptly contend that these indigenous games held an enduring appeal for people who relished the enjoyment and amusement they provided. The desire to partake in these games has been an enduring and robust characteristic of African culture. It is noteworthy that not only children but also adults participated in various indigenous games, such as those illustrated in Figure 1. These games serve as avenues for relaxation and pleasure, highlighting their significance as forms of leisure and entertainment among the local communities.

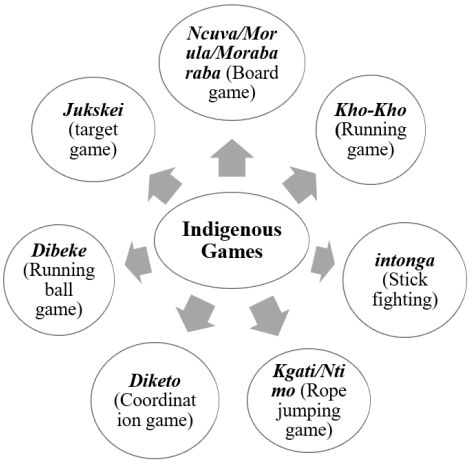

Figure 1: Major types of Indigenous games in South Africa

Source: Western Cape Gov (2023)

Sport tourism, through indigenous games, could create platforms for cultural exchange and interaction between visitors and host communities. They could allow for meaningful engagement with local communities, providing opportunities for mutual learning, understanding, and appreciation of diverse cultures. This enriches the overall sport tourism experience by going beyond mere athletic competition and delving into the cultural heritage and social dynamics of the destination. Additionally, the promotion of indigenous games through sport tourism can have significant socio-economic benefits for host communities. It can stimulate local economies by attracting visitors and generating revenue from tourism-related activities such as accommodation, transportation, and local crafts. This, in turn, could contribute to community development, infrastructure improvements, and the preservation of cultural endowments.

2.4 Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the potential benefits, several challenges need to be addressed for the successful integration of indigenous games into sport tourism. Lack of infrastructure, limited marketing efforts, and insufficient funding are common barriers faced by indigenous game initiatives (Dladla 2022). Additionally, issues related to cultural appropriation, intellectual property rights, and ethical considerations must be carefully navigated to ensure the respectful and sustainable promotion of indigenous games. However, there are also opportunities for collaboration and capacity building. Engaging local communities, establishing partnerships between tourism stakeholders and indigenous game custodians, and implementing responsible tourism practices can help overcome these challenges and create a positive impact.

2.4.1 Lack of Infrastructure

One of the primary challenges is the lack of infrastructure to support indigenous game initiatives. Many communities that host these games lack suitable facilities, equipment, and venues necessary to host such sport tourism activities. The absence of proper infrastructure hinders the organization and promotion of indigenous games as tourist attractions. In many communities where indigenous games are practiced, there is a significant dearth of essential infrastructure components such as suitable facilities, equipment, and venues that are necessary to host sport tourism activities. This deficiency in infrastructure impedes the ability to effectively

organise and promote indigenous games as tourism attractions. For instance, in South Africa, the game of *Jukskei* is a traditional target sport where participants throw a large wooden pin to knock down a group of smaller pins. Promoting *Jukskei* as a sport tourism attraction requires well-maintained playing fields with properly set-up target pins. Communities that lack the infrastructure for *Jukskei* may find it challenging to organise tournaments and attract tourists to experience the game. Conversely, regions with adequate infrastructure, such as well-maintained *Jukskei* courts and available equipment, are better positioned to leverage the game for its tourism potential. Tourists can participate in *Jukskei* competitions, and the presence of infrastructure allows for the effective organisation and promotion of the game as a cultural and sport tourism attraction. Therefore, while the potential for indigenous games as tourism attractions exists, their successful integration into the tourism sector in South Africa is hindered by the absence of infrastructure. Adequate facilities, equipment, and venues are essential for the effective organisation and promotion of these games, making the development of such infrastructure a crucial step in harnessing the tourism potential of indigenous games.

2.4.2 Limited Marketing Efforts

Limited marketing efforts pose another challenge. Indigenous games initiatives often struggle to gain visibility and reach potential tourists due to limited promotional activities and awareness campaigns. Effective marketing strategies tailored to the unique cultural experiences offered by indigenous games are crucial to attract tourists and generate interest in these activities. Following are some key aspects of this challenge, along with practical examples from South Africa.

2.4.3 Visibility and Awareness

Indigenous games are often not well-known outside the communities where they are traditionally played. As a result, potential tourists, both domestic and international, may not be aware of the existence and cultural significance of these games. Without awareness, there is a limited pool of tourists interested in experiencing them. For instance, the South African game of *Ncuva,* a traditional Xhosa board game, is relatively unknown to tourists. In the absence of marketing efforts, it remains a hidden gem within Xhosa communities, with tourists missing out on the opportunity to engage with this culturally rich game.

2.4.4 Insufficient Funding

Insufficient funding presents a significant hurdle for the sustainable development of indigenous games as a sport tourism niche. Financial resources are needed to invest in infrastructure development, marketing campaigns, capacity building, and training programs for local communities. Without adequate funding, it becomes challenging to realize the full potential of indigenous games as a catalyst for sport tourism.

2.5 Underpinning Theoretical Framework

Applying Freeman's stakeholder theory as the underpinning framework this study can ensure that the development of indigenous games as a catalyst for sport tourism in South Africa is inclusive, sustainable, and beneficial to all stakeholders (Freeman 2010). Prioritising open communication, collaboration, and mutual respect, the research can contribute to a thriving tourism industry that celebrates cultural diversity, supports local communities, and promotes long-term economic growth in South Africa. In addition, the application of the stakeholder theory helps enhance the study by giving a holistic understanding of the diverse interests, concerns, and relationships among the various stakeholders involved in sport tourism development (Nilsson and Aquino 2021; Getz and van Niekerk 2019; Vrontis *et al*. 2022). This helps facilitate the development of nuanced and inclusive approaches to leveraging indigenous games for sport tourism development in South Africa (Ernawati *et al*. 2019).

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

According to Papachroni and MacIntosh (2014) a research design is a plan from which research participants are obtained and information is processed. Creswell (2014:3) views the research approach or design as “plans and procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.” Creswell (2014:12) further adds that research designs include “the types of enquiries within qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach that provides specific direction for

procedures in a research design". With the current study, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are envisaged whereby the sequential design will follow a QUAL-quant approach (Morse and Niehaus 2009). Since the primary focus of the study is on qualitative interviews, substantiated and supported by quantitative data, linked to the study's exploratory sequential design.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is described as a set of basic beliefs that deal with ultimate or first principles (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Rahi 2017). Based on the nature of the proposed study, two research paradigms, constructivism and positivism will be adopted. A constructivist approach is dependent on the transactional and subjectivity of the study and indicates that the investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the findings can be created as the investigation proceeds (Bogna *et al*. 2020). With the constructivist research position, the researchers believe that knowledge or phenomena can be better understood through social interaction between the researcher and the researched, thereby leading to the theory creation (Adom *et al*. 2016). In the proposed study, researchers will construct own understanding and knowledge of the world through "experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences" (Adom *et al*. 2016:1). For this study, interactive sessions involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with key sport tourism stakeholders including representatives of cultural institutions, policymakers, local community leaders, and business owners in locations where indigenous games are mostly hosted will be conducted.

Additionally, by adopting the positivist stance, embedded in the view that there is a 'single reality' that can be understood through scientific methods the researchers will implement a survey instrument comprising questions with mostly predetermined response options that relate to the research objectives to assist in confirming or refuting the views and opinions expounded in the qualitative data (Guba and Lincoln 1994). The positivist paradigm of exploring social reality assumes that one can best gain an understanding of human behaviour using only objective and observable facts (Park *et al.* 2020).

3.3 Data Collection and Fieldwork

A qualitative interview guide will be implemented for the semi-structured interviews with indigenous games' stakeholders including representatives of cultural institutions, policymakers, local community leaders, and business owners where these games are typically hosted. The interview questions will be determined based on the extant theory as well as the research aim and objectives. This will ensure the validity of the questions being posed. The semi-structured interview design will be guided by a set of questions since this protocol permits the researcher to probe where necessary (Curran *et al.* 2014).

Furthermore, the quantitative element of the study will use a structured, whereby a face-to-face survey instrument will be completed by spectators, participants of indigenous games as well as residents of host environments. Close-ended questions will be asked for respondents to indicate their perceptions regarding the socio-economic impact of indigenous games and elicit overall satisfaction and experience levels of these games. The instrument will be piloted to provide an opportunity to check if the instrument will be easy to use with the participants including testing for reliability (Goodman *et al*. 2003). The proposed questions in the survey instrument will be centred around the study's aim and objectives. Piloting will allow for the identification of any potential problems with the survey so that they are addressed prior to conducting the study.

3.4 Population, Sample Size and Data Analysis

The qualitative interviews will be conducted until data saturation is achieved. In the proposed study, at least 12 key informants (selected stakeholders) would be interviewed to achieve data saturation (Guest *et al*. 2020). However, for the quantitative survey, based on the population size of each participant group (event spectators, participants, and residents), the researchers would determine the representative sample size that enables the achievement of a 95% confidence level with a margin error of 5% (Isaac and Michael 1981). The data analysis would be informed by the methodological approaches. Content analysis and thematic analysis would be used for the interviews while SPSS version 29 would be used to assist in analysing quantitative data (frequency tables and graphs will be generated and presented).

3.5 Ethical Consideration

The study will comply with all ethical requirements including obtaining permission from the different stakeholder groups. In addition, permission to conduct the study was sought from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee, and an ethical clearance certificate was issued for the study. The purpose of the study and the confidentiality of participants' details will be explained before signing consent letters. Moreover, confidentiality will be guaranteed by not publishing the names of the participants during and after the interviews and the collected data will only be used for academic purposes.

4. Envisaged Outcomes and Conclusion

The envisaged outcomes of this research are manifold including providing an increased awareness of the value and potential of indigenous games as a unique aspect of South Africa's cultural heritage and tourism landscape. Additionally, the study offers opportunities for an enhanced understanding of the role of indigenous games on sport tourism development, drawing from the perspectives of various stakeholder groups and local communities. Since multiple stakeholder groups will contribute to the study, this could lead to an improved capacity of the stakeholders especially in the development and implementation of practical strategies that leverage indigenous games for tourism, while ensuring the preservation of cultural identity and the promotion of sustainable tourism practices. Moreso, the study could also solidify collaboration among the stakeholders, fostering a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for the development and promotion of indigenous games and sport tourism in South Africa.

The research findings will be disseminated through a variety of channels, including peer-reviewed publications, presentations at academic conferences and industry events, and policy briefs for relevant sport tourism stakeholders. The research team is also committed to engaging with local communities throughout the research process and ensuring that the findings are accessible and beneficial to all stakeholder groups.

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Work in Progress Paper

Bridging the Gap Between Legitimacy and Neutralisation Strategies in Sustainability Reporting

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Abstract: Amid global sustainability challenges, such as climate change, companies operating in different industries face increasing demands for accountability and transparency. To meet these demands, sustainability reporting (SR) has become a mainstream business practice in communicating companies' positive and negative sustainability impacts. This short paper aims to increase our understanding of how companies may release negative information while seeking to maintain their legitimacy. For this purpose, the paper bridges the gap between legitimacy strategies, impression management and neutralisation techniques by reviewing their associated literature. The nature of neutralisation techniques and how organisations use them in the SR context is underexplored by scholars. Finally, the paper presents prospective discussions of an ongoing study that examines negative sustainability disclosure in the tourism transportation context, namely the airlines.

Keywords: Sustainability, Legitimation Strategies, Impression Management, Neutralisation Techniques, Tourism Transportation

1. Introduction

The international literature has highlighted the growing demand for accountability and transparency in corporate environmental responsibility issues (Fusco and Ricci, 2019), such as climate change. As stakeholders rarely witness companies' engagement in such issues directly, they must rely on information in corporate sustainability reporting (SR). The users of this information include shareholders who wish to evaluate companies' ability to transition to a lower carbon economy and activists and NGOs who use the information to pressure polluters to change their behaviour (Herbohn, Clarkson and Wallis, 2022). The credibility of this information is largely associated with external reporting standards, notably the GRI (KPMG, 2013), the most widely used SR standard (KPMG, 2020). However, prior literature has criticised such reporting as allowing for cherry-picking positive information (Ringham and Miles, 2018) while concealing negative (Talbot and Boiral, 2018; Talbot and Barbat, 2020). Another concern in this regard is how companies may strategically rationalise their negative disclosure or its omission to protect their *legitimacy*, that is, the conformation with social expectations (Palazzo and Scherer, 2006). However, the research on negative disclosure regarding these issues is underexplored (Einwiller and Carroll, 2020). Hence, this work-in-progress paper seeks to build a bridge between legitimacy strategies, impression management and neutralisation techniques, which may help future research advance our understanding of how companies address negative disclosure. The paper briefly reviews the associated literature and then presents prospective discussions of an ongoing study that examines negative disclosure in the tourism transportation context, namely the airlines.

2. Literature Review

In sociology, companies' discretion to release information about sustainability performance is often explained by the overlapping legitimacy theory, stakeholder theory, and institutional theory, which all essentially postulate that companies seek legitimacy for their operations, without which their existence can be undermined (Chen and Roberts, 2010). Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) recognise two general approaches to achieving legitimacy: 1) substantive and 2) symbolic management. The substantive approach entails activities that create real material change in the organisational goals and processes or socially institutionalised practices. It occurs, e.g., by meeting the performance expectations of those stakeholders upon which the firm depends for critical resources and increasing the quality and quantity of disclosure due to stakeholder demand (Herbohn, Clarkson and Wallis, 2022). Symbolic management focuses on the representations by which firms present their actions to others (Sandberg and Holmlund, 2015). Although symbolic management is often necessary to inform stakeholders about the organisation's substantive management efforts, firms may prefer to employ symbolic assurances only to preserve their flexibility and resources (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990). In this situation, symbols can be employed to obfuscate or even change the meanings of the firm's substantive activities (Bansal and Kistruck, 2006). When such tactics are used routinely to shape the impressions that others hold of them, the practice can be called impression management (Sandberg and Holmlund, 2015).

Although prior literature has identified many impression management tactics in the organisational context, Hooghiemstra (2000) broadly distinguishes them into acquisitive and protective strategies, where acquisitive strategies are associated with positive acclaiming, mainly used in conjunction with successful or desired outcomes, and protective strategies are reactive and associated with negative disclosure whose employment involves various 'excuses' and 'justifications'. Employing the latter can be associated with neutralisation theory.

Neutralisation theory (Sykes and Matza, 1957) seeks to explain why individuals who believe in the prevailing societal norms deviate from them with little or no remorse. Accordingly, such individuals view the norms as 'qualified guides' rather than 'categorical imperatives' and learn to use various neutralisation techniques to avoid violating them. While the literature on these techniques has traditionally been restricted to individuals, a growing body of research has applied this approach to organisations, including sustainability issues (Boiral, 2016). However, the research in the SR context is limited to a few studies in mining (Boiral, 2016; Talbot and Barbat, 2020) and energy sectors (Talbot and Boiral, 2018), summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Neutralisation techniques identified in past studies

Neutralisation Technique	Description	Source
Distancing from the reported impacts	Corporate actor places the negative impacts in a broader context, notably of time and space, or focuses on the uncertainties surrounding the impacts or the legality of corporate operations.	(Boiral, 2016)
Dilution of responsibilities	Corporate actor suggests the responsibilities for the impacts are beyond their control as the sum of actions by various actors and circumstances causes them.	(Boiral, 2016)
Claim of net positive value	Corporate actor claims that the environmental harm will be corrected or balanced. Overlooking the negative impact allows the actor to emphasise its environmental responsiveness or neutral impact. The technique is generally associated with offsetting practices.	(Boiral, 2016)
Denial of significant impacts	Corporate actor relativises and minimises the company's environmental issues.	(Boiral, 2016) (Talbot and Barbat, 2020)
Minimising the impact of non-measured emissions	Corporate actor minimises the importance of unmeasured emissions either by emphasising the importance of other sources of emissions and the insignificance of the unmeasured elements and/or affirming that this practice is widespread in the industry.	(Talbot and Boiral, 2018)
Excuses and future commitments	Corporate actor apologises for the non-disclosure of certain information and promises significant improvements to the measuring system in the coming years.	(Talbot and Boiral, 2018)

While the use of neutralisation techniques seems consistent in the above literature, providing insights into the rhetorical strategies companies use to rationalise, justify or limit negative disclosure, such studies can also be seen as critical of business. However, critical studies can have an optimistic agenda when exposing companies' problems with SR. As Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) highlight, businesses attempting to increase legitimacy through symbolic means may find themselves in vicious circles where stakeholders become sceptical about companies' actions, which may motivate companies for subsequent symbolic practices, ultimately decreasing their legitimacy. From a critical perspective, exposing neutralisation techniques is essential because continuous justifications for and limiting negative disclosure will likely perpetuate various sustainability issues. One such issue is climate change, in the context of which Talbot and Boiral (2018) highlighted the need to analyse the quality of emissions disclosure from different sources.

3. Discussion and Final Ideas

In light of the above review, the nature of neutralisation techniques and how carbon-intensive industries report their emissions provides a societally important yet underexplored research avenue. Considering the industry's significant environmental impacts, airlines' SR has received surprisingly little attention from critical researchers. Accordingly, the ongoing study aims to assess the extent and quality of the emission disclosure in airlines' FY19 reports to increase our understanding of how an environmentally unsustainable industry discloses negative information. The sample of disclosures is delimited to reports following the GRI Standards, as they are often regarded as the highest disclosure standards. However, companies claiming to adhere to the GRI may not necessarily do so. Hence, the study adopts a counter-accounting approach, which in the area of SR can be

understood as the process of combining corporations' accounts with external accounts "in view of verifying, complementing or countering organizations' official reports on their performance and achievements" (Boiral, 2013, p. 1037). In this research, the procedure is realised by comparing airlines' emission disclosure with the GRI Standards. The research also realises that the released information can be misleading, even without being incorrect, based on the assumption that companies can use neutralisation techniques to place their actions in a different perspective in the minds of stakeholders. To examine this assumption, the analysis draws upon thematic analysis to identify patterns of more explicitly stated justifications for negative disclosure, combined with critical discourse analytical methods to analyse more latent meanings.

The preliminary research has provided evidence that non-disclosure and non-compliance with the GRI Standards exist in airlines' emission disclosure, raising questions about the potential symbolic use of the GRI and the credibility of such reporting. The final results are expected to shed light on the extent and nature of the non-compliance. Analysing and categorising neutralisation techniques and their possible intentions will also be the focus of further research. Although the results will be limited to the sample provided, they are expected to serve wider implications. As societal concerns over various sustainability issues are growing, the demand for more meaningful SR is also likely to increase, and the integrative view of legitimacy strategies, impression management, and neutralisation techniques may guide others to look for defects in SR in other industries.

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Late Submissions

e-Sports Events: A Sports Parent's Perspective

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Abstract: e-Sports is a rapidly growing industry, which has gained popularity in the recent years. It is estimated that the global e-sports market will have a value of $1.87 billion in 2025. e-Sports competitions and tournaments are becoming increasingly popular, especially among schoolchildren and college students. The growth of leagues, at school level, requires that parents should understand this sport and have a positive attitude towards e-sports and e-sports events, due to the likely support that parents are required to provide to participants at these events. The study is a preliminary study, which aims to understand parents' view of e-sports, as a form of sports, to determine the financial investment to participate in e-sports and parents' experience during an e-sport event. The study used a qualitative approach, utilising a semi-structured interview schedule, with six parents interviewed at an event, as well as a focus group discussion, with 21 parents of e-sports players. The study found that parents have a positive perception of e-sports events and are fully supportive of their children participating in them. Further, it was concluded that e-sports is viewed as a form of sports and, in comparison to other 'traditional sports', it is actually a very affordable form of sport to partake in. Parents spend most of their money at e-sports events on food, whilst some parents will go to a restaurant after the event, to celebrate the child's accomplishments. The results of this preliminary study will guide further studies on e-sports events and are already giving an indication to e-sports organisers what the perspectives and needs of parents are.

Keywords: parents, perspectives, e-sports events, experience, sport

1. Background and introduction

Competitive gaming, commonly known as e-sports, is a fast-expanding industry that has gained enormous popularity in the past decade. The growth of e-sports can be attributed to numerous factors, such as technological advancements (Lal 2019), growing business opportunities and sponsorships (Mahlangu & Naudé-Potgieter 2022), which is resulting in global e-sports revenue being valued at over $1.38 billion and projected to reach $1.87 billion by 2025 (Statistic 2023). Currently, Asia and North America present the biggest e-sports markets globally (Statistic 2023). The expansion of the e-sports market has created a chance for e-sports events and e-sports tourism to flourish (Ioannis & Ioulia 2021). While e-sports competitions are held worldwide, they are primarily held in Europe, Asia and the United States (Jenny, et al. 2018). But, e-sports aren't just growing in the northern hemisphere, according to Games Industry Africa (GIA), sub-Saharan Africa will see the biggest growth in e-sports gaming globally (Libera, 2022). Ioannis and Ioulia (2021) state that e-sports events, which are classified as e-sports tourism, have many similarities with traditional sports tourism. The main distinction is that spectators watch video game players, rather than athletes participating in "traditional" team or individual sports.

According to research conducted by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), men under the age of 25 make up the majority of e-sports participants. Anderson (2019) reports that global e-sports participation has increased in high schools, due to the prospect it presents for students to acquire new abilities and skills that foster both personal and competitive growth. Looking from a South African perspective, the development of the largest school e-sports arena in the southern hemisphere, at a Johannesburg high school (Centennial Schools 2023), and the hiring of an online gaming journalist by a well-known media organisation (Broad Media) display examples of the region's growth and focus on e-sports events (My Broadband 2022).

Winning is the primary goal of e-sports competitions, which are structured as leagues or tournaments involving players competing against one another, as individuals or professional teams (Anderson 2019). Nowadays, e-sports are seen as a professional endeavour, with its roots in a hierarchical, competitive and regulated worldwide environment (Thompson et al. 2022), where players seek to become experts at games that required specialised knowledge, endurance and skills.

Cho et al. (2019) report that the occurrence of both school and collegiate e-sports leagues are rising globally. For this relatively novel kind of sport, it is mostly unknown what motivates spectators and competitors, as well as what their expectations are of an event. This statement is supported by Anderson (2019), who describes e-

sports as an emerging trend and who further points out the paucity of research on this type of event. The rise in e-sport leagues, competitions and events present a contemporary, technologically advanced online trend that offers event destinations the chance to offer alternative forms of tourism, in addition to the ability to develop new tourism goods (Leon, et al. 2022, Ioannis & Ioulia 2021).

Learners, who compete in school leagues, need parental approval and support, both monetarily as well as permission to participate in the league. It is, thus, key to comprehend the parents' perspective on the following: a) e-sports as a form of sport; b) the financial implications associated with children playing e-sports; and c) the needs and behaviour of parents during an e-sports event. This article's primary goal is to ascertain how e-sports have evolved, from being solely seen as a recreational activity, to a more professional activity (i.e., a sport) by parents, and their level of involvement at e-sports tournaments. Given that e-sports are still seen as a relatively new phenomenon that has the potential to develop into a new subsector of the tourism industry, it is important to understand how parents feel about e-sports and the associated events that take place in relation to these sports.

2. Defining e-sports

The term "e-sports" refers to a form of sports, where the primary feature of the sports is played by electronic systems: human-computer interfaces mediate both the e-sports system's output and the input of players and teams (Juho & Max 2017). e-Sports, put simply, is competitive video gaming (broadcasted on the internet, in contrast to traditional major sports, where participants play a single game type) e-Sports competitors compete in a variety of games, each with unique subtleties and target audiences (Abby, Long, Nick, Drabicky, Hayley & Rhodes 2018). e-Sports encompasses all games played professionally, as well as younger-targeted mobile games, and first-person shooter games with a predominantly adult player base (Abby, et al. 2018).

Video games of many different kinds and unique styles comprise e-sports (Juho & Max 2017). e-Sports is not frequently thought of as the "electronic" version of a "traditional" activity like athletics, soccer or basketball, despite the fact that FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) video games replicate "conventional" sports like football (Juho & Max 2017). e-Sports games include titles like Street Fighter, Pike and Shot, CS:GO, League of Legends, Call of Duty, Call of Duty 20, Tekken 7, Fortnite, Overwatch, PubG Rainbow Six Siege, and Dota 2 (Johnson 2021; YOU Digital 2020; Wagner 2006; BOO Games 2020; Online Casino Review 2020). The six categories that can be used to group the games are first-person shooter (FPS), real-time strategy (RTS), sports, multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), fighting games, and games tailored for mobile devices. The two most well-liked e-sports categories are multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) and first-person shooter (BOO Games, 2020). Whatever the e-sports genre, it includes player/team organisations, games, management structures, prize monies, tournaments, leagues, and sponsorship deals (Anderson 2019). Thus, it may be claimed that e-sports encompasses a variety of game genres, such as racing games, sports games, and first-person shooters. These games are played competitively, in small teams or one on one (MOBA).

3. Adopting e-sports

Despite being around for almost 20 years, e-sports is still an emerging industry and is only now becoming mainstream (Juho & Max 2017). Thus, there is no universally accepted definition of e-sports. Due to its recent global growth and significant opposition (particularly from fans of traditional sports), e-sports cannot be called a sport, because players/gamers are seated, and their competency is not assessed by physical elegance or prowess (Juho & Max 2017). However, "professional gaming", in other words, competitive computer gaming in a professional setting, is sometimes compared to sport (Wagner 2006).

However, as stated by Mahlangu and Naudé-Potgieter (2022), Guttman's model of contemporary sports supports e-sports being considered a form of sport, with the model having four transitional stages, namely play, games, contests, and sports. All sports begin with play - a realm of freedom where non-utilitarian physical or mental activity is done just for the pleasure of "doing". The play's essence can develop in the second stage, which includes organised and spontaneous performance. This level means every play has rules that players must follow. In this second stage, players agree to follow the adjusted rules and avoid instinctive behaviour. An organised game's rules are meant to make it harder to play and minimise inefficiencies. Most games in the third stage can be played competitively or non-competitively, and they must be win-lose games. However, competitions can be further separated into intellectual and athletic categories (Jia 2019). Greenhill and Houghton (2017) found that e-sports take as much physical effort as shooting, pool/snooker, and bowling; yet, require less physicality than basketball, football, and tennis. Since they need concentrated, polished motor skills and quick, accurate hand-eye coordination, e-sports are intellectually demanding (Greenhill & Houghton 2017). According to Jia (2019), and Greenhill and Houghton (2017), e-sports is similar to the preliminary paradigm

(2017). Play is the foundation of sports and e-sports. Wagner (2006) use the terms "training", "cyber fitness", "high performing teams", "strategy" and "cyber-sports", to classify e-sports as a sport. Elite league teams often have experienced coaches, dieticians, mental health specialists, and fitness trainers, just like traditional sports (Online Casino Review 2020). Thus, defining e-sports can assist to distinguish between sports and e-sports (Juho & Max 2017).

e-Sports and e-sports competitions were once considered niche or fringe activities (Funk, et al. 2018). Despite the establishment of international and national bodies, teams with uniforms, coaches, management, competitions, leagues, marquee events, endorsement deals, scholarships, and issues related to doping and gender-related issues, e-sports' increasing similarity and legitimacy to traditional sports events and competition is still debated (Funk, et al. 2018). According to Tjønndal and Skauge (2021), some athletes, professionals, sport officials and fans still oppose e-sports being considered a 'real sport'.

4. Purpose

In the sports and events sector, e-sports is a relatively new trend that has the highest participation rate among minors. The purpose of the study is to investigate how parents view their children competing in e-sports events and what the parents expect and actually experience at the e-sports events.

This study aims to ascertain the following:

- Do parents view e-sports as a form of sport?
- What do parents anticipate from an on-site e-sports event?
- What are the financial implications associated with e-sports participation?

5. Methodology

The preliminary exploratory study used a qualitative approach, utilising a semi-structured interview schedule, as well as a focus group discussion. The interview method has been deemed the most useful method for this study, as an interview has the potential to elicit rich and thick descriptions. This method, furthermore, gives the researchers an opportunity to clarify statements, as well as probe for additional information. A large benefit of collecting data through semi-structured interviews is that this allows potential to capture a person's perspective of an experience or event (Bloomberg & Volpe 2012). An e-sports event was held at a South African high school in Gauteng, in May 2023, during which the interviews were conducted by the researchers. It is estimated that approximately 20 parents attended the event, with 6 parents that agreed to participate in the interviews. Each parent had a child who was participating in the e-sports tournament held between different school e-sports teams.

A second set of data was gathered during a focus group discussion held at a Gauteng high school that offers e-sports as an extramural activity, in which school children can participate. Parents, whose children participate in e-sport at the school were invited to attend the focus group discussion. A total of 21 parents attended the focus group. The invite was sent out by the school, who facilitated the focus group in terms of distributing the invitations, communication about the research and provision of a venue for the researcher. During both interview processes, the participants signed the informed consent forms, were given a short introduction to the study and then the researcher commenced with the questions. Both the interview and focus group followed similar questions, as guided by the interview guide.

The proceedings of the interviews and focus group were recorded and transcribed by the researchers, after the event. Thematic analysis was conducted, with codes extracted from the various transcribed interviews. The two researchers further observed each other's transcriptions, to confirm codes assigned. The results of the thematic analysis will be discussed in the subsequent section.

6. Results

6.1 In the semi-structured interviews, parents were asked how many e-sports events their children (also called participants) attend each year and if they travel for these events.

Whilst parents in the focus group were asked what initially attracted them to supporting their children's interests in participating in e-sports events.

In the semi-structured interview, every parent mentioned that they were either on an official e-sports team or were relatively new to participating in e-sport events (tournaments). Each participant has been preparing for one to two years to compete in competitions. Every participant has already participated in one to three e-sports

competitions. The focus group's parents said that their children's participation has varied, from 6-7 months to 2 years.

The reason for parents supporting their children in e-sports varied, with a majority of the parents stating that their children were not necessarily sporty or good at 'traditional sports', but their children had an affinity for computers and technology. A specific parent noted that they hope their children get recognised for who they are, even though they don't necessarily fit into a normal sporting team. "This is for those other kids who are nerdy or shy and just don't fit in the normal sports." e-Sports provide these children with an opportunity to participate in a team, and in a sport in which they have the possibility to excel, due to their strengths. However, not all children played e-sports only, with one child participating in various 'traditional sports', as well as e-sports, in order for the child to learn which sports are the best fit for them. This sport allows them to have contact with other children (socialise), get out of the house, or even communicate with children from other countries. "When my son heard about e-sports, he was like, 'yes, I can sit behind my computer and interact with people that are very far from me' The parents then went deeper into the discussion on why e-sports is valuable, noting that the children learn skills such as strategic thinking, coding and the ability to work collaboratively, in teams.

It's clear that young gamers with the support of their parents are becoming interested in eSport and are spending the time and effort to practice of eSports tournaments. With parents making a shift, from viewing eSport as hobby to more of a sport. These findings align with Thompson, et al. (2022) who stated that eSports is gaining the recognition as a sport. This is further supported by Guttman's model of contemporary sports (Mahlangu & Naudé-Potgieter 2022) which illustrates that eSport events at a school level, are organised (level 1 of the model), competitive (level 2 of the model) and a combination of intellectual and physical contests. As Greenhill and Houghton (2017) stated that eSport requires as much physical effort of sports such as pool, shooting and bowling as well as a large intellectual demand. These results are also support by Libera (2022), who stated that sub-Saharan Africa will growth in e-sports.

6.2 Parents were asked if they are spectators at e-sports events (tournaments) and what their experience has been of the e-sports events that they have attended thus far?

Parents stated that they have attended e-sport tournaments that have been hosted at local schools, in and around the Gauteng province. Parents also attended a schools e-sport tournament, which was hosted at Comicon Africa in 2023. Parents stated that they stay at the e-sport event for two main reasons, namely the safety of the children and to support and watch their child/ren play. One parent commented as follows:

> *"So, I did not enjoy it. I enjoyed watching my son play and that is why I stayed the whole time. It was too far, too busy, too loud, too early for him. So that is not my scene at all, but I sit there the whole time and watched him."*

An interesting statement that was made was of parents who stayed and watched the children play, even though they do not understand or follow what is happening in the tournament. "It is very long, and I don't understand what is going on." Therefore, the parents can be considered a captured market, at the eSports events with them spending money to spend at the tournament. With another parent commented:

> *"Just to add, Comicon and the downside of it, leave your bank card at home. You get there and then get exposed to all the gadgets that they need and everything, and it is very pricey".*

Whether it is a larger tournament such as Comicon or a smaller eSports event which is hosted a schools, it is observed that parent spend money, with the researcher observing that the parents at the local school tournament were purchasing food and drinks throughout the day at the school's catering facility.

It is important to note that the experience at a larger school tournament (i.e., Comicon Africa) differs for both parents and children. In such environments, they were exposed to the various elements of e-sports and the different type of e-sport tournaments and games that exist in the e-sports industry. At e-sports tournaments, at local schools, children only play Minecraft, which has been selected as the e-sport game played at local schools' tournaments, as it meets the necessary safety standards for children under the age of 15, with proper access, firewalls and distribution in place to support e-sports in school, and with the Minecraft maps incorporated being able to be used for educational purposes. Comicon exposed parents and children to other games which exist in e-sports. A parent also stated that, at Comicon, they "learnt a lot, on how big the sports is and how big the community is". A second parent comments on such events as follows:

> *" … the thing with the big event what we try and do with those events, we try and give kids exposure to potentially what is there … what is available, so it is not necessary wanting to the SuperSport's corner, its more to give them a visual, because with other sports, cricket, rugby, they are national stadium sports, … it's easy for someone to see if I'm a very good cricket player that what I can done, with eSports it not that. So, as part of that, we try to feature the sports what is the potential within this line."*

Another parent stated that they went exploring and missed their child's game. Some parents found Comicon and the eSport event at Comicon a memorable experience and indicated that they will be planning to visit the next Comicon and e-sport tournament, with the whole family, which is hosted.

It is noted that the experience for all parents is not universally positive, with some parents enjoying their experiences at e-sports events, whether it is big or small, and others attending the tournaments out of obligation and not necessarily pleasure. The common thread is that money is spent at these events, as parents would be buying food and, at larger events, spend money on technological products and services. The spending of money at the eSport event aligns with Leon et al. (2022) states that the economic potential of eSports events. With this further supported by Ioannis and Ioulia (2021) who stated that the expansion of the e-sports market has created a chance for e-sports events and e-sports tourism to flourish.

6.3 Parents were asked about the financial aspects of their children participating of e-sport and e-sports events.

Parents in the semi-structured interviews stated they do not spend a lot of money on e-sports equipment, besides paying for tournament registration. There are several possible explanations for this, including the following: a) the school provided them with the e-sports games and the software licensing; b) prior to making any additional investments, the parents still want to see if the e-sports participant will continue to demonstrate an interest in e-sports; and c) the parents think the event registration cost is fair, considering what the e-sports participant stands to gain from it.

One parent said that, if their child wants to compete professionally in e-sports, they will look for sponsorships. Additionally, they didn't think of e-sports as an expensive kind of sports. One parent stated they purchased e-sports gear for R20,000, in 2023, offering the following explanation:

> *"Investing in e-sports requires one-time purchases of a laptop and software. Should my kid participate in soccer, I would need to purchase a new uniform for him each year.''*

Parents, who participated in the focus group, mirrored the same feelings, saying that their child could participate in e-sports with just a laptop or tablet. While they are aware that there are devices that can improve their child's performance, parents are delaying buying such equipment, in order to first assess their child's e-sports aptitude and interest in the sport in the long run.

6.4 Parents were asked if they see e-sports as a sport or do they see it as a form of entertainment?

Many parents, who participated in the semi-structured interview said they first thought of e-sports as a way to entertain their kids. Parents' attitudes are shifting, and they are beginning to see e-sports as a sport now that players are entering competitions and taking the activity more seriously. Initially, the parents thought it was a "waste of time", but a parent remarked that "they actually break a sweat when they are playing; this stuff is the hardcore". This was due to the demands placed on teamwork, the necessity of practicing the game, and the need for analytical abilities. After a while, the parents started to see the benefits of e-sports, which include the benefits of skills in strategic thinking and teamwork. Parents also realised that e-sport has the same benefits as 'traditional team sports', with the children socialising and creating bonds with other children. Parents in the focus group also stated that they can see the hard work that goes into preparing for e-sport tournaments. Parents also stated that they are now aware that there are numerous career opportunities which exist in e-sports; these opportunities vary from being a professional gamer, to coding.

Notably, one parent mentioned that they are aware that e-sport can be addictive, unlike other sports; however, there are measures and restrictions that they can put into place to try manage the children spending too much time in front of the screen. A second parent concurred, saying, "It seems that the children have the capacity to manage their exposure to e-sports."

This indicates a shift in parental perception, with many initially viewing eSports as a form of entertainment for their children but gradually recognising it as a legitimate sport. The acknowledgment of the physical and mental demands, as well as the benefits of strategy and teamwork, reflects a deeper understanding of eSports' intricacies. It's evident that parents understand that the world has changed, and that e-sports is now considered

a professional endeavour, rather than a significant hobby (Thompson, et al., 2022). This shift in perception is crucial for the acceptance and growth of eSports in mainstream society.

7. Conclusions

The early and preliminary research indicates that parents are generally supportive and positive regarding their children's participation in e-sports gaming and events. Generally, it seems that, on the topic of gaming addiction, parents are aware of this possibility, and they are well-informed regarding it, but both the parents and children are all managing it in their own way. Some children are able to manage their gaming exposure themselves, while some parents have to apply ground rules on the time spent on gaming devices. The parents were all in agreement on the benefits of e-sports participation, especially in giving their children exposure to technology and learning information technology skills like coding, shortcuts, etc. e-Sports have further given children, who would not usually be classified as "sporty", the opportunity to also take part in a sport, socialise and learn much-needed life skills. No concerns were raised with regard to the financial expenses required to participate in e-sports events, due to a basic laptop or iPad being sufficient for e-sports gaming.

Tournaments for electronic sports are very new in South Africa, particularly in Gauteng, and there is currently a lack of information regarding the perspectives of parents regarding tournaments. Despite this, there is a significant amount of interest in e-sports and e-sports tournaments by sponsors, which is resulting in a significant amount of economic potential presented at e-sports events. It is also clear that there has been a movement in the perception of e-sports as a sport, as well as a shift in the perception of e-sports as a sector that provides a variety of career prospects for children and young adults in their future. It is possible that this sentiment may lead to the expansion of the e-sports industry, which will result in e-sport being treated as a 'traditional sport'.

Recommendations for this sector include considering supplying even more information to parents, among others, how tournaments work, tournament schedules, and gaming addiction information. Attending a mega gaming event has opened up new horizons to parents, who saw the potential of gaming and were exposed to all of the hardware and software that can enhance the participants' playing. The rest of the family were exposed to the prospects of gaming as well. The importance of human face-to-face contact was highlighted, prompting the need for team get-together sessions to be arranged, to facilitate socialising among the children.

7.1 For research purposes, the following recommendations are made:

To continue with focus groups with parents of e-sports participants, to expand on the data gathered and gain further insights. To survey e-sports participants, to better understand their attraction to this form of sport and their current experiences. To engage more effectively with industry partners and leverage opportunities where more research can be done and further insights can be gained regarding this new event type. To attend more e-sports events, to gain a better understanding and perspective of the fast-growing sector in South Africa. To compare results of studies of events held among private schools versus public schools.

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The Perceptions of Tourism Students Towards Blended Learning: A Case From a Comprehensive University in South Africa

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Abstract This paper explores tourism students' perceptions of blended learning (BL) and examines the correlations between BL statements, student academic performance (AP), and the level of satisfaction with blended courses (BCs). A questionnaire survey was used to collect data from 166 randomly selected tourism students in a comprehensive University in South Africa. For data analysis, IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0 (IBM Corporation, 2022) software was used. The results indicate that most tourism students had positive perceptions of BL based on their degrees of AP and satisfaction with the BC. Most tourism students claim that they are not comfortable completing assignments and taking assessments online. The results further reveal that students they are frequently disappointed with the assessment approach of online discussions. The study recommends that the university studied conduct a variety of reform programmes geared at strengthening tourism lecturers' BL abilities (such as upgrading online assessment methodologies and lecture design). To encourage learning involvement, tourism lecturers could improve students' perceptions of the BL platform in their instructional design. This will gradually improve tourism students' low perceptions of BL, as identified in this study.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Tourism Students' Perceptions, Advantages And Disadvantages, Tourism Education, South Africa

1. Introduction

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has moved with the international trend towards blending face-to-face (f2f) with online instruction when developing new educational processes (Ali, 2023). The advantage of BL has been recognised by the South African Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation as a solution to the rapidly growing student population in South Africa (SA) (Chibisa & Mutambara 2022). BL is defined in this study as "an instructional method that integrates online learning and f2f classroom learning" (Zhang, 2022). According to Okaz (2015), the rapid growth of technology has changed the behaviour of students and transformed the way they learn and communicate. Therefore, lecturers are compelled to adapt their teaching practices with these changes, to remain relevant and exciting to the current student cohort. More recently, Ali (2023) evaluated how undergraduate students in Australia, perceived BL and examined differences of opinion between disciplines. According to Ali (2023), students studying tourism and business show less interest in BL, while students studying science and Islamic sciences enjoy BL more than others within the institution. This purports that many students in various disciplines around the world may have slightly different attitudes and behaviours towards BL from one institution to another. Students show different learning interests and styles, which should be understood using multiple modalities for learning to deliver content effectively. Many empirical studies have investigated students' perceptions of BL in general and compared BL to f2f learning, but with conflicting results (Ali, 2023; Anthony et al., 2019; Rafiola et al., 2020). For example, while some researchers believed that BL improved students' AP (Li & Wang, 2022), others found that it did not (Hwang et al., 2019; Lo & Hew, 2020). These ambiguous findings highlight the need for more rigorous assessment of students' perceptions towards BL in higher education (HED) settings. In addition, although there are some previous studies on BL (Lo & Hew, 2020; Zhang, 2022), and the relationship between students' perceptions on BL platforms with blended learning processes (Bruggeman et al., 2021), much attention is still needed. Little is known about the tourism students' perceptions of BL. Tourism research issues are heavily emphasised in tourism students' competences in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly SA. Hence, there is an opportunity to test what has remained relatively obscure, thereby moving the tourism field beyond its exploration stage of BL in SA. This paper, therefore, explores how tourism students perceive BL. The following section focuses on the review of related literature.

2. Literature Review

BL is a pedagogic approach that involves purposeful integration of f2f interaction and technology-mediated instructions (Brown, 2016; Bruggeman et al., 2021). In other words, BL might take several forms. However, it frequently comprises f2f lectures followed by "online asynchronous learning" (Ali, 2023; Deale, 2023), or "online

lectures followed by in-person tutorials", or "a combination of the two modalities" (Anthony Jnr, 2022; Anthony et al., 2019). BL has grown in popularity as a method of delivering information in HED, with the objective of providing students with greater learning experiences by integrating f2f instruction with the benefits of digital technology. However, a lack of understanding of how tourism students perceive BL may make it difficult for lecturers to give uniform and inclusive learning experiences to students, resulting in uneven learning experiences and poor assessment methods.

BL is described as the inter-mixing of instructional formats to achieve an educational purpose (Anthony et al., 2019; Driscoll, 2002; Rafiola et al., 2020), whereas Garrison and Kanuka (2004) argue that blending simply implies merging classroom teaching with online encounters. According to Singh (2003), lecturers can use resources such as live chats, Moodle, Blackboard, Jamboard, etc., to incorporate the internet in their teaching. The goal of BL is to increase student performance and participation, while also improving learning outcomes (Anthony Jr, 2021; Luka, 2023; Mestan, 2019).

While BL has grown exponentially in recent years, attracting lecturers, HED providers, and researchers globally (Deale, 2023; Graham & Halverson, 2023; Yang et al., 2023; Ibrahim & Nat, 2019), some aspects of the learning method, such as the learning environment, the proportion of seating time, and methods to integrate f2f and online instructions, still require further discussion (Ali, 2023; Luka, 2023). According to various studies, BL enhances student access to learning (Wang & Huang, 2018), student and lecturer flexibility (Deale, 2023; Thai, De Wever & Valcke, 2020), and student engagement (Mestan, 2019; Luka, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has forced academic institutions to provide their courses remotely with little f2f contact, BL has emerged as a preferred mode of course delivery for many HED providers. Therefore, because the transition to a BL model marks a significant change in the South African educational system, taking student perspectives into consideration is critical, as they are the directly affected by the learning environment, and lecturers cannot provide students with personalised and rich content to achieve learning outcomes unless they understand student perceptions (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2018). The tourism industry, especially hospitality sector (Deale, 2023), aims to attract young graduates who are dynamic and possess knowledge, skills, and competencies that match sector trends and demands (Ezeuduji, Chibe & Nyathela, 2017; Luka, 2023). The university educators must therefore develop critical and reflective thinkers to manage this dynamic environment in the tourism industry (Ezeuduji, Chibe & Nyathela, 2017). In the next section, the researchers outline the study's design and methods used.

3. Research Design and Methods

3.1 Study Design

This study targeted tourism undergraduate students at a comprehensive institution in SA. The university in question is one of the few in the country that offer tourism qualifications at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Ntshangase & Ezeuduji, 2022). This university's geographical position can be described as "rural". Students in settings where there are not much technological developments going on (rural) may differ from those in settings with much technological developments (urban). Due to the nature of the topics under inquiry and the study objectives, the study used an exploratory yet descriptive research approach (Iwu et al., 2019). Therefore, a quantitative research method hinging on the positivist paradigm is valuable to the study. Veal (2011) proposed that a questionnaire survey be used to generate quantitative data, thus most relevant to this study.

3.2 Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed to a randomly selected tourism students' population from the university's two campuses. The questionnaire is largely comprised of closed-ended questions. The researchers distributed questionnaires to 47 tourism students on the university's smaller campus and to 200 students on the main campus. However, only 30 students from the smaller campus and 136 students from the main campus returned completed questionnaires, which were deemed to be usable for data analysis. The sample size of 166 students was deemed sufficient to establish conclusions on the research objectives. The variables in the questionnaire were categorical and ordinal in nature, with the ordinal variables or dimensions (students' perceptions of "of BL"; "perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of BL," and "perceptions of the environment of BL") measured using a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) ("1 - strongly agree; 5 - strongly disagree"). From the Scholarship of

teaching and learning (SoTL), the chosen variables have received less attention in discussing students' perceptions and the forthcoming state of BL (see Anthony Jr, 2021; Graham & Halverson, 2023; Mestan, 2019).

3.3 Data Analyses

For data analysis, IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0 (IBM Corporation, 2022) software was used. All questionnaire variables were initially subjected to descriptive analysis to generate frequencies and mean scores. A reliability test was performed on ordinal questions using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient to assess the level of internal consistency of variables measuring the study dimensions, respectively. Researchers use a cut-off value of 0.5 to 0.7 to represent the internal consistency or reliability of variables measuring a specific dimension (Collier, 2020; Iwu et al., 2019). A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.6 or higher was deemed acceptable for good reliability in this investigation.

The study's bivariate analysis (comparing two variables) used Spearman's Correlation (two-tailed), a non-parametric test (Bolboacă et al., 2011). Spearman's Correlation was used to determine whether there were positive or negative correlations between ranked or ordinal variables (Veal, 2011). The Spearman's Rank correlation (2-tailed) test was used to assess the relationships between the statements "students' perceptions of BL", "the advantages and disadvantages of BL", and "perceptions of the environment of BL" on the one hand, and respondents' level of AP on BL and respondents' level of satisfaction with the BCs on the other. In this study, researchers make their judgments based on the respondents' perceptions by computing the weighted average value (WAV). To compute the WAV, researchers simply add the items' mean (M) values and divide by the total number of items. The following section presents the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

As presented in Table 1, 95.8% of respondents have taken tourism-related module/s online, and about 58.1% of the respondents were satisfied with the online module content and lecture quality. Most respondents (about 83%) say they would recommend BL in their field of study in the future. Table 1 shows that respondents rated their APs during BL as "excellent" (14.2%) or "good" (45.8%). Others considered their APs to be "moderate" (31.7%) or "poor" (5.3%) and "failing" (3.3).

Table 1: Respondents' profile (N=166)

Variables	Categories	Frequency %
"Did you take any tourism-related module/s online courses in your first year of study?"	"Yes" "No"	95.8 4.2
"If your answer to question above is yes, how satisfied are you with the online module content and the quality of lectures?"	"Highly satisfied" "Mostly satisfied" "Neutral" "Mostly dissatisfied" "Highly dissatisfied"	20.5 37.6 30.8 9.4 1.7
"Would you recommend blended learning in your field of study in the future?"	"Yes" "No"	82.5 17.5
"How would you rank your academic performance during blended learning?"	"Excellent Performance" "Good Performance" "Moderate Performance" "Poor Performance" "Failing Performance"	14.2 45.8 31.7 5.8 3.3

Results in Table 2 throughout, show that the correlation tests done between perceptions of tourism students' perceptions of BL's statements in the questionnaire on the one hand; and respondents' profile – "level of AP", and "student' level of satisfaction with the BC", on the other, yield interesting results for this study. The results in Table 2 also show the respondents' perceptions (high or low).

Table 2: Relationship between tourism students' perceptions of BL and level of AP, and student' level of satisfaction with the BCs

Tourism students' perceptions of BL				
Statements[a]	**Correlation with AP[b]**	**Correlation with BCs[b]**	**Mean[c]**	**Decision[c]**
"BL is a learning environment that combines both f2f learning and e-learning activities"	N.S	N.S	3.17	High perception
"I had been officially introduced to BL"	*, Negative (*r*= -0.176; *P*=0.024)	N.S	2.48	Low perception
"BL is sometimes referred to as hybrid learning"	N.S	Negative (*r*= -0.003; *P*=0.927)	2.67	High perception
"BL is a distance learning utilising e-learning"	*, Positive (*r*= 0.170; *P*=0.028)	Negative (*r*= -0.046; *P*=0.569)	2.67	High perception
"BL means, I would be able to study from home using the Internet"	**, Positive (*r*= 0.290; *P*=<0.001)	N.S	2.35	Low perception
"I did not like the BL at first but later I got used to it"	**, Positive (*r*= 0.272; *P*=<0.001)	*, Negative (*r*= -0.169; *P*=0.034)	2.36	Low perception
"I am not used to submitting the assignments and writing tests online"	Negative (*r*= -0.106; *P*=0.176)	Negative (*r*= -0.059; *P*=0.467)	2.51	High perception
"The system is a little bit complicated for me"	N.S	Negative (*r*= -0.071; *P*=0.378)	2.03	Low perception
"I have noticed that the term e-learning is used instead of BL by other students"	**, Positive (*r*= ,222; *P*=<0.004)	Negative (*r*= -.080; *P*=0.318)	2.21	Low perception

*Reliability Statistics (Perceptions of **Blended Learning**), Cronbach's Alpha =0.681, N of Items = 9, Valid cases = 161 (97.0%), Excluded cases = 5 (3.0%), Total = 166*

Notes: *[a]Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree. [c]Decision WAV=22.45/9=**2.49***

*[b]Spearman's Rank correlation (two-tailed) test significance: *, p < 0.05; **, p < 0.01; ***, p < 0.00; N.S., no significant results.*

Table 2 indicates that most respondents with higher levels of APs and/or high levels of satisfaction with the BC agree (see the mean scores) with the perceptions of BL statements that show significant results. There is no significant correlation between the levels of AP and three (3) perceptions of BL statements labelled N.S. Again, there is no significant correlation between BC levels and three (3) perceptions of BL statements labelled N.S. In this study, researchers attempted to base their conclusion on the respondents' impressions by calculating WAVs. Any M score less than the WAV=2.49 indicates a low perception (LP), meaning that the statement does not apply to many students. Furthermore, results show that the four items labelled "high perceptions" (HPs) apply to students, but the other five assertions do not.

Table 3. Relationship between tourism students' perceptions of "the advantages of BL" and level of AP, and student' level of satisfaction with the BC

Tourism Students' Perceptions of the Advantages of BL				
Statements[a]	**Correlation with AP[b]**	**Correlation with BC[b]**	**Mean[c]**	**Decision[c]**
"BL increases development of my computer skills"	N.S	N.S	1.76	Low perception
"BL enhances my critical discussion engagement skills"	**, Positive (*r*= -0.207; *P*=0.008)	**, Positive (*r*= -0.234; *P*=0.004)	2.35	High perception
"BL provides me with flexibility which eliminates the barriers of time and space"	**, Positive (*r*= 0.207; *P*=<0.001)	**, Positive (*r*= 0.357; *P*=<0.001)	2.07	Low perception
"I can easily read course announcements, and submit assignments online"	*, Positive (*r*= 0.195; *P*=<0.013)	Negative (*r*= -.099; *P*=0.227)	1.70	Low perception
"I can easily download lecture notes, and participate in online discussion at my convenience"	**, Positive (*r*= 0.227; *P*=0.003)	N.S	1.70	Low perception
"I always prefer submitting my assignments online"	**, Positive (*r*= 0.322;	N.S	2.04	Low perception

Tourism Students' Perceptions of the Advantages of BL				
	P=<0.001)			
"BL offers me sufficient opportunity for participation at my convenience"	**, Positive (*r*= 0.167; *P*=0.032)	N.S	2.23	High perception
"BL is helping me to use the computer better	N.S	Negative (*r*= -0.087; *P*=0.279)	2.47	High perception
I am a married person, I do very well in my blended courses"	N.S	Negative (*r*= -0.033; *P*=0.685)	2.99	High perception
"BL encourages my self-reliance in tourism content learning"	N.S	Negative (*r*= -0.089; *P*=0.272)	2.15	High perception

*Reliability Statistics (Perceptions of the **Advantages**), Cronbach's Alpha =0.671, N of Items = 10, Valid cases = 151 (91.0%), Excluded cases = 15 (9.0%), Total = 166*

Notes: *[a]Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree. [c]Decision WAV=21.46/10=**2.15***

*[b]Spearman's Rank correlation (two-tailed) test significance: *, p < 0.05; **, p < 0.01; ***, p < 0.00; N.S., no significant results.*

The results in Table 3 indicate that most respondents with higher levels of AP and/or high levels of satisfaction with the BC agree (see mean scores), with the perceptions of advantages of BL statements, that show significant results. Meanwhile, there is no significant correlation between the levels of AP and four (4) perceptions of advantages statements labelled N.S. Again, there is no significant correlation between BC levels and four (4) perceptions of BL statements labelled N.S. The respondents also mark the LPs on five (5) benefit assertions. At this point, any M score less than the WAV (2.15) indicates that the LP meaning does not apply to many students, however the other 5 statements with WAV more than 2.15 indicate that the statements apply to a large number of students.

Table 4: Relationship between tourism students' perceptions of "the disadvantages of BL" and level of AP, and student' level of satisfaction with the BC

Tourism Students' Perceptions of the disadvantages of BL				
Statements[a]	**Correlation with AP[b]**	**Correlation with BC[b]**	**Mean[c]**	**Decision[c]**
"The lack of the required skills is still a serious challenge for me"	Negative (*r*= -0.034; *P*=0.667)	N.S	1.73	Low perception
"The poor of internet connectivity is still a serious challenge for me"	N.S	Negative (*r*= -0.057; *P*=0.488)	2.14	Low perception
"My parents forbid the Internet at home for all the family members"	N.S	N.S	2.66	High perception
"I like using the internet, but I am not motivated to study online"	Negative (*r*= -0.034; *P*=0.305)	Negative (*r*= -0.074; *P*=0.364)	2.52	Low perception
"I do not like uploading my assignments and following up the course announcements online"	**, Negative (*r*= -0.242; *P*=0.002)	*, Negative (*r*= -0.164; *P*=0.042)	3.12	High perception
"I spend many hours on the internet daily, but I do not prefer e-learning"	Negative (*r*= -0.112; *P*=0.155)	Negative (*r*= -0.074; *P*=0.363)	2.90	Low perception
"I cannot manage my study time at all"	Negative (*r*= -0.138; *P*=0.080)	Negative (*r*= -0.106; *P*=0.190)	2.91	High perception
"I am a student who does not have a computer and enough computer skills"	*, Negative (*r*= -0.195; *P*=0.012)	Negative (*r*= -0.026; *P*=0.746)	2.84	High perception
"I think BL is not appropriate for problem-solving courses such as tourism"	Negative (*r*= -0.027; *P*=0.729)	Negative (*r*= -0.156; *P*=0.054)	2.70	High perception
"I am usually get disappointed with the assessment approach of the online discussions"	N.S	N.S	2.61	High perception

*Reliability Statistics (Perceptions of **the disadvantages**), Cronbach's Alpha =0.648, N of Items = 10, Valid cases = 158 (95.2%), Excluded cases = 8 (4.8%), Total = 166*

Notes: *[a]Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree. [c]Decision weighted average=26.13/10=**2.61***

*[b]Spearman's Rank correlation (two-tailed) test significance: *, p < 0.05; **, p < 0.01; ***, p < 0.00; N.S., no significant results.*

The findings in Table 4 indicate that respondents with higher levels of AP and/or high levels of satisfaction with the BC agree with the perceptions of disadvantages of BL statements that show significant results. In particular, there is no significant correlation between the levels of AP and three (3) statements on the perceptions of the disadvantages of BL labelled N.S. Also, there is no significant correlation between BC levels and three (3) statements on the perceptions of the disadvantages of BL labelled N.S. The WAV (2.61) shows LPs on four (4) statements on students' perceptions of the disadvantages of BL, meaning that the claims do not apply to them, whereas the other six (6) statements do.

Table 5: Relationship between tourism students' perceptions of "the Environment of BL" and level of AP, and student' level of satisfaction with the BC

Tourism Students' Perceptions of the Environment of BL				
Statements[a]	**Correlation with AP[b]**	**Correlation with BC[b]**	**Mean[c]**	**Decision[c]**
The learning objectives must be clearly stated in each lesson or unit	N.S	*, Positive (*r*= 0.173; *P*=<0.033)	1.80	Low perception
The organisation of each lesson must be is easy to follow	N.S	N.S	1.88	Low perception
The expectations of assignments and marking guidelines must clearly stated	Negative (*r*= -0.025; *P*=0.755)	Negative (*r*= -0.115; *P*=0.154)	1.87	Low perception
The permission to ask my lecturer on what I do not understand must be granted	N.S	**, Positive (*r*= 0.208; *P*=<0.009)	1.81	Low perception
My lecturers must give me a quick comment on my work	Negative (*r*= -0.080; *P*=0.310)	NS	2.00	Low perception
The positive support from my lecturers is assisting me a lot	Negative (*r*= -0.136; *P*=0.084)	Negative (*r*= -0.056; *P*=0.489)	2.23	High perception
The online material must be accessible at locations suitable for me	**Negative (*r*= -0.218; *P*=0.005)	Negative (*r*= -0.008; *P*=0.921)	2.09	High perception
Using BL should allow me to explore the interest of my own	Negative (*r*= -0.024; *P*=0.758)	Negative (*r*= -0.026; *P*=.752)	2.13	High perception
I find Moodle useful for catching up with the lectures	N.S	*, Positive (*r*= 0.202; *P*=<0.012)	2.11	High perception
Students should learn Moodle on their own	**Negative (*r*= -0.233; *P*=0.003)	Negative (*r*= -0.019; *P*=0.812)	3.04	High perception

*Reliability Statistics (Perceptions of the **Environment**), Cronbach's Alpha =0.826, N of Items = 10, Valid cases = 160 (96.4%), Excluded cases = 6 (3.6%), Total = 166*

*Notes: [a]Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, Strongly agree; 2, Agree; 3, Neutral; 4, Disagree; 5, Strongly disagree. [c]Decision WAV =20.96/10=**2.09***

*[b]Spearman's Rank correlation (two-tailed) test significance: *, p < 0.05; **, p < 0.01; ***, p < 0.00; N.S., no significant results.*

Table 5 shows that respondents with higher levels of AP and/or high levels of satisfaction with the BC agree with the perceptions of the environment of BL statements, that show significant results. However, there is no significant correlation between the levels of AP and four (4) statements on the perceptions of the environment of BL labelled N.S. The results further reveal that no significant correlation between BC levels and two (2) statements on the perceptions of the environment of BL labelled N.S. The students exhibit LPs on five (5) statements of perceptions of the environment of BL lower than WAV=2.09, meaning that the students believe the claims do not relate to them, but the other five (5) statements higher than WAV=2.09 students believe they apply to them.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Most tourism students had positive perceptions of BL based on their degrees of AP and satisfaction with the BC. For example, they had strong beliefs that a BL environment should incorporate both face-to-face and e-learning activities, a concept known as hybrid learning. However, the majority of students claim that they are not comfortable completing assignments and taking assessments online, concurring with Kallou and Kikilia (2022) Despite this, they believe that BL improves their critical discussion engagement abilities, provides ample chance for involvement at their leisure, assists them in improved computer use, and fosters their self-reliance in tourism content study. They also expressed strong beliefs that their parents forbade all family members from using the Internet at home, and they dislike posting assignments and following up on course announcements online. The majority of students appear to believe that they cannot manage their study time at all, and the majority of them do not have computers or adequate computer abilities. They also expressed strong beliefs that BL is unsuitable for problem-solving courses such as tourism, and they were frequently dissatisfied with the assessment approach of online forums. Interestingly, tourism students had strong beliefs that positive assistance from instructors is very helpful, and that online content should be available in convenient settings for them. They believe that using BL should allow students to explore their own interests, and they found Moodle handy for catching up on lectures. However, pupils should study Moodle on their own. The findings of this study reveal that students' AP level and degree of satisfaction with the BC have a substantial influence on their opinions of BL.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, a few recommendations are provided to the relevant management staff at the university under consideration. The study recommends that the university studied conduct a variety of reform programmes geared at strengthening tourism lecturers' BL abilities (such as upgrading online assessment methodologies and lecture design). To encourage learning involvement, tourism lecturers could improve students' perceptions of the BL platform in their instructional design.

- When implementing BL, lecturers should consider students' needs as well as their positive perceptions of the BL. As the majority of students agree that a BL environment should include both face-to-face and e-learning activities. The learning activities and objectives should be developed to capture students' critical discussion engagement abilities, as well as to assist them in strengthening their computer skills and fostering their self-reliance in tourist content study.
- Tourism students' abilities and skills should be evaluated on a regular basis to give them the impression that BL is also appropriate for problem-solving courses such as tourism, and online assessment techniques should be improved (online rubrics should be provided to students, and feedback should be shared). As a result, tourism students' low perceptions of BL, as identified in this study, would eventually improve.
- Therefore, to improve tourism student participation with Moodle, the department should ensure that the learning platform has a friendly interface, is functional, and that online discussion is available with immediate feedback.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study acknowledges its significant limitations. Firstly, the sample coverage was insufficient (N=166). Simple random selection was employed to evaluate tourism students at only two university campuses in one province of KwaZulu-Natal, which has certain limits in scope. Second, the study simply took into account tourism students' perceptions of BL. Whether other latent variables, such as perceived usefulness, resources, social norms, perceived ease of use, attitude toward using BL, and so on, can better explain tourism students' perceptions of BL. In the future, a comprehensive model could be built by merging the latent variables with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The model constructs and their hypotheses should be analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

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Potentials of Rural Tourism Around Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park, South Africa: Local Community Perspective

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Abstract: Developing nations continue to place a high priority on rural development, especially those like South Africa (SA) that have large rural populations and little or no economic activity. In addition to urban tourism, rural tourism is another type of tourism that is gaining popularity. This study conducted in the context of SA, KwaZulu-Natal, aimed at assessing the potentials of rural tourism in the communities surrounding Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park (HiP). A qualitative research method based on the explorative and interpretative paradigms was used. A purposive technique was used in a form of non-probability sampling. Focus group discussions were held with the participants. Three (3) focus group discussions were conducted with a total of twenty-four (24) participants, eight (8) participants in each group. Content analysis was performed to analyse data. Results revealed that the study area lacked access to basic infrastructure like decent road networks as well as access to clean water and sanitary facilities. The research further revealed that residents in the study area lacked fundamental understanding of what it takes to operate effective tourism enterprises. The study recommends that rural offerings be positioned and offered as parts of tourist products and services within this rural space, after the study area weaknesses have been addressed. The study further suggests that leadership should be committed to advancing the growth of rural tourism through capacity building, including training citizens and assisting in the creation of business strategies and the acquisition of funding for the launch of new ventures.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Rural Tourism Resources, Rural Tourism Capabilities, Rural Tourism Activities, South Africa.

1. Introduction

According to earlier research (Corina, 2018; Ghasemi & Hamzah, 2014; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020), tourism is both the largest industry in the world and the market segment with the fastest growth rate. According to several studies (Corina, 2018; Osman & Sentosa, 2013; Strydom et al., 2018), it is also regarded as one of the top and fastest developing sectors in the globe, considerably boosting the growth of the national economy as well as the prosperity of the surrounding areas. Rural tourism is a promising industry for the development of both urban and rural areas, according to contemporary researchers (such as Gao & Wu, 2017; Wijijayanti et al., 2020). According to Corina (2018), rural tourism is one of the types of tourism that is gaining popularity as an alternative to urban tourism. Additionally, the author (Corina, 2018) argues the point that rural tourism is mostly a private sector activity, driven by income production, employment creation, and frequently the diversification of agricultural holdings, which is built on landscape and conservation, as well as heritage infrastructure. In addition to protecting and enhancing the destination's socio-cultural, historical, natural, and built resources, this type of tourism has the potential to maintain a balanced and healthy economy by generating related jobs, revenues, and taxes (McComb, Boyd & Boluk, 2017; Munien, Phungula & Bob, 2018).

The literature review conducted revealed that many studies have been conducted and they have shown more interest concerning other aspects of rural tourism (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2012; Zhang, 2012; Vitasurya, 2016; Guzman-Parra et al., 2015; Gao & Wu, 2017). However, despite the growing body of research on rural tourism (e.g., Corina, 2018; Ghasemi & Hamzah, 2014; Osman & Sentosa, 2013; Strydom et al., 2018; Wijijayanti et al., 2020), only a small number of studies have looked at the potential for rural tourism in the regions surrounding popular tourist destinations (like HiP) that are in rural areas. Prior to starting the process of developing rural tourism, the current study suggests that it is crucial to look at the main stakeholders that need to be considered. Therefore, this study tried to add to the body of knowledge on rural tourism by evaluating the potentials of rural tourism in the nearby communities of HiP, which is in South Africa's (SA) KZN province. It can be argued that although HiP does employ locals, it may be argued that the local communities living close to this protected area can provide alternative tourism goods and services for outbound tourists or visitors, as well as increase the critical mass of attractions for the tourists.

2. Literature Review

According to Paresishvili, Kvaratskhelia, and Mirzaeva (2017), rural tourism can be thought of as a field with two sets of interests: on the one hand, there are the residents (hosts), while on the other, there are the visitors (guests). According to McComb et al. (2017), several characteristics in rural communities prevent them from fully benefiting from tourism. Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) was enacted by the South African government that won the 1994 elections as a strategy to combat inequality, unemployment, and poverty (Strydom, Mangope, & Henama, 2018). Numerous recent studies (e.g., Strydom et al., 2018; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019; Bate & Taylor, 2019) have demonstrated that tourism has since been recognised as an engine for growth for the nation's economy and a contributor to the GDP of the country. Rural tourism is increasingly seen as a cure for boosting the economic viability of marginalised areas, as well as for promoting social regeneration and bettering the living conditions of rural populations, according to Munien et al. (2018, p. 65). According to the body of existing tourism research (Ezeuduji, 2015; Munien et al., 2018), rural tourism is addressing the issues that rural areas are facing, particularly those that are connected to the collapse of traditional industries and rising emigration.

In developing nations like SA, tourism is seen as a powerful tool for the development of small businesses, the generation of jobs, and the improvement of the standard of living in local communities (Ezeuduji, 2015; Ezeuduji, 2017; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020; Strydom et al., 2018). In other words, where rural tourism is effectively implemented, Strydom et al. (2018, p. 7) state that "there is a potential to provide some exceptional opportunities for communities by offering not only better benefits" but also enhancing their contribution in planning and managing tourism in their communities" (Ezeuduji, 2017). For instance, communities near the HiP (protected area) in the KZN Province of SA appear to have a significant growth potential for tourism due to its pristine natural beauty and significant cultural and historical aspects. To determine this potential in terms of resources and capabilities, research can be employed (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020; Sanagustin-Fons, Lafita-Cortés, & Mosee, 2018; Temelkov & Gulev, 2019; Zhou, 2018). In areas near HiP, previous survey research has revealed a high unemployment rate (Nsukwini, & Bob, 2016), and most families depend on state social assistance to put food on the table (Nsukwini, 2015). As a result, the development of rural tourism in these areas may be seen as one of the most effective methods for reducing poverty and creating jobs.

Nsukwini and Bob (2016) argue that it is important to pinpoint the local assets that draw visitors and encourage them to spend money participating in the activities or enjoying the rural lifestyle. Rural tourism typically depends on the unique region's natural and cultural resources, where people are the main drivers (Sanagustin-Fons et al., 2018). Capabilities are ways to combine and coordinate resources, according to Bakhru et al., (2013). According to Ezeuduji (2015), promoting rural communities' expertise and knowledge is a crucial step in the commercial process of creating rural tourism. Sanagustin-Fons et al. (2018) suggest that enabling factors, which include the necessary knowledge and experience, awareness, information accessibility, and financial assistance, determine the capacity of community members to participate in conservation initiatives and tourism-related activities.

Rural tourism can serve as a catalyst for a variety of new economic ventures, partnerships, and networks that just supplement established industries like agriculture (Zhou, 2018). However, the concept of rural tourism goes beyond simple village holidays to include all other activities in rural areas. Rural tourism's cultural attractions include traditional dances, regional cuisine, music, rural lifestyles, local crafts, local languages, festivals, and rituals, according to a study by Ezeuduji and Rid (2011) in rural Gambia. The reason why rural tourism operations and amenities differ from one country to the next may be because each one tailors its rural tourist development strategy to its unique circumstances (Temelkov & Gulev 2019). Therefore, a wide range of activities that might be offered by residents as a part of their rural tourism exist. As a result of the literature research, it has been determined that rural communities must highlight the skills and knowledge required to start developing their tourism industries (Ezeuduji, 2015; Temelkov & Gulev 2019; Nsukwini & Bob, 2016). For the growth of rural tourism, communities must also have the appropriate resources.

3. Research Design and Methods

The HiP is located to the west of Mtubatuba and borders Hlabisa town to the east. According to Adeleke and Nzama (2013) HiP is a well-liked tourist location and is recognised as the top wildlife attraction in KZN. This study used a qualitative research method since its research purpose leaned more toward exploratory and interpretive research. As the research target population was unclear, the study used a non-probability sampling technique in the form of a purposive approach to choose 24 participants. To gather information from participants (the

communities surrounding HiP), focus group discussions were held with them utilising a focus group guide. The variables that served as the basis for the data collection came from a variety of information sources and other research (such as Ezeuduji & Rid, 2011; Phi, Dredge & Whitford, 2014; Ezeuduji, 2015; Kheiri & Nasihatkon, 2016; Rangus, Brumen, & Topler, 2018). Verbatim transcripts of the information were created for data analysis after it was captured on audiotape with the participants' consent. Discussions were held with the nearby HiP communities' men, women, and youth.

The coding of the data was done using themes and sub-themes that were produced from the research and ultimately connected to the study objectives. This was done using the content analysis approach. Researchers independently reviewed the content analysis to make sure it was accurate, representative, and reliable. The codes for the themes and sub-themes were manually created after the verbatim transcripts had been prepared, based on the study objectives and discussion topics (See Table 1.1). Opinion frequency was divided into three categories: "very commonly recorded" opinions (those said five times or more), "commonly recorded" opinions (those mentioned three to four times), and "not commonly recorded" opinions (those mentioned one to two times).

Table 1: Main themes (MT) and sub-themes based on study objectives (Obj.)

MTs	Sub-theme 1	Sub-theme 2	Sub-theme 3	Sub-theme 4
MT 1 – Obj. 1 Rural tourism resources	Financial resources	Human resources /development	Physical resources/ infrastructure	Intangible resources (sanitation)
MT 2 – Obj. 2 Rural tourism knowledge and capabilities	Lack of business education	Lack of trust to cooperate with themselves	Lack of experience/ know-how, e.g. people who have operated tourism businesses	
MT 3 – Obj. 3 Rural tourism strategies	Training and development	rural tourism cooperatives	Securing funding to start business	

Note: The main themes (MT) reflect the research objectives (Obj)

MT1 reflects – Obj. 1; MT2 reflects – Obj. 2; MT3 reflects – Obj. 3.

The researchers selected the participants based on their belief that the participants could offer the pertinent data needed for the study's focus. Men, women, and youth groups from three nearby areas were used as study participants; for further information, see Table 1.2 in the following section.

4. Results and Discussion

Men, women, and youth groups were recruited as volunteers for this study from three communities close to the park. The participant profile is displayed in Table 1.2 of the results.

Table 2: Profile of the participants (N = 24)

Group number	Category	Size per focus group	Age groups
01	Men	Eight **(8)**	36 - 55
02	Women	Eight **(8)**	36 - 55
03	Youth	Eight **(8)**	18 - 35
		4 young men	
		4 young women	

Table 1.2 represents the demographic characteristics of the forty-four (24), where three focus group discussions were held with eight (8) participants in each group - men, women, and youths were divided into three (3) groups. In African culture, youngsters are not normally particularly loud when combined with more older people - and the same is true for women, who prefer men to lead talks because men are seen to be the heads of households (see Ezeuduji & Rid, 2011). As these participants felt free to respond to questions and participate in discussions without hindrance in their groups, researchers further separated them into distinct age and gender groups to gather as much information from them as possible. Four young males and four young women were recruited for the youth group, attaining gender equality. The men and women that participated were all over the age of thirty-five (35) while the participating youths ranged in age from eighteen (18) to thirty-five (35) years old.

4.1 Theme 1: Rural Tourism Resources

The research location (HiP)'s characteristics were discussed with the participants, as well as what they believed may draw tourists there. Some of the scarce resources were cited by locals as barriers to rural tourism. Along with physical resources (infrastructure), which are *(commonly recorded)*, they also mentioned financial resources.

4.1.1 Sub-Theme 1: Financial Resources

Community members revealed that there is a high level of unemployment in the area and proposed, that if they could get financial support, they could establish their own employment rather than hunting for one elsewhere. (*very commonly recorded*).

> *"Most of our children do not work, maybe if there can be some sort of financial support presented to us they can be able to create their own employment and be able to put food on the table".* **(Men, community member**).
>
> *"Even if we want to start tourism businesses, it is not easy because we do not have money to start, and the level of unemployment in this community is too high, more especially unemployed youth".* **(Youth, community member).**
>
> *"Even though we make some money out of selling our craft works, as women we still feel the need to achieve greater financial independence. If maybe, we can be assisted with the construction of a craft market where we can exhibit and sell our craft works. Also financial support would be much appreciated*". (**Women, community member**).

The findings suggested that financial resources could make a significant contribution to the growth of rural tourism in HiP and the neighbouring communities. This supports the claim made by Radovi et al., (2020) that a lack of funding is a major obstacle to the growth of sustainable rural tourism. However, poor financial management by the owners or other management members could be a serious issue that results in stagnation or slow growth.

4.1.2 Sub-Theme 2: Human Resources Development

The findings typically show that residents of these communities lack sufficient awareness of tourism. Local community members have stated that they were not provided with enough tourism educational training and that if given the opportunity, they would take advantage of it (*very commonly recorded*).

> *"We see those big cars coming in and out of the park, they say 'abavakashi' I think that all tourism is about, people coming from other places to watch wild animals inside the park."* **(Men, Community member).**
>
> *"I studied Tourism in High School, I have a little background on what it is all about, it is basically about visiting places for different purposes"* **(Youth, community member).**
>
> *"Eeeh! my child I do not know what it is except that I sometimes hear children at home talking about but I have no idea of what is it all about".* **(Women, Community member).**

Pimonratanakan and Pooripakdee (2017) discovered that training is a vital activity that can generate learning and increase knowledge and skill for job operation.

4.1.3 Sub-Theme 3: Physical Resources (Infrastructure)

This sub-theme contains factors relating to physical resources, such as roads (accessibility) and lodging facilities. Local people in the neighbourhoods surrounding HiP complained about inadequate accessibility and poor road conditions (*Very commonly recorded*).

> *"We lack access to basic infrastructure, for instance, our roads consist predominantly of gravel, they often deteriorate rapidly, especially in the wet season, disrupting transport services and access to health centres, towns, schools and markets when it is most needed".* **(Women, community member).**
>
> *"Our roads are very bad, even the one that goes inside the park is not well maintained and most of the roads are not tared"*. **(Youth, community member).**

According to Dalimunthe, Valeriani, Hartini, and Wardhani (2020), the growth of the tourism industry is closely tied to and dependent upon the improvement of the existing infrastructure. In this sense, infrastructure development may play a crucial part in the communities surrounding HiP.

4.1.4 Sub-Theme 4: Intangible Resources (water and sanitation)

Communities in areas surrounding HiP made note of the issue of the inadequate water supply and sanitation experienced by locals in the communities nearby HiP.

> *"We do not have water taps or tanks in the community, only rely on water from the dams and river, our local municipality does nothing about this issue, only once in a while (3 months' time) they get to send water tanks to deliver water to the community"*. **(Women, community member).**

According to this viewpoint, having access to basic sanitary facilities is one of the factors that should be considered to promote the tourism business, especially in developing nations (Elysia & Wihadanto, 2020).

4.2 Theme 2: Rural Tourism Knowledge and Capabilities

Communities near HiP should be given the knowledge and skills they need to be better prepared because the sector is continually in need of up-to-date information and new skills to keep up with shifting tourism trends. However, residents in these communities have demonstrated a lack of business education.

4.2.1 Sub-Theme 1: Lack of Business Education

The community's members unanimously agreed that they possessed the qualities needed to successfully operate and manage businesses on their own *(very commonly recorded).* Some of the statements they made are highlighted as follows:

> *"Although there are no formal business qualifications that we hold, but generally I think we can be able to run and manage a business successfully".* **(Men, community member).**

> *"I would say that we as black people are not into tourism because if you look at the tourism businesses found here are dominantly owned by whites"*. **(Youth, community member).**

For two main reasons, according to Marais, du Plessis, and Saayman (2017), talent development is essential for the SA tourism business. First, skill development makes sure that formerly excluded groups of society are involved and able to participate in the industry, while making sure that they also get to benefit from it. According these authors, to create enduring first impressions, personnel providing the service must be well-educated and outfitted due to the unique nature of the tourism sector, where both service production and consumption occur simultaneously.

4.2.2 Sub-Theme 2: Lack of Trust to Cooperate with Themselves

While some residents appeared to no longer believe in cooperative enterprises, others still expressed an interest in joining them. *(commonly recorded).* Some of the opinions they pointed out are presented as follows;

> *"We once tried a cooperative group whereby we were constructing bricks, the group failed, finances disappeared into thin air, I do not know if I can be able to be involved in any cooperatives programme".* **(Youth, community member).**

> *"I have heard of some cooperative businesses that went wrong, but that does not mean we are no longer interested in it, if the opportunity can present itself, I will certainly jump to it".* **(Men, community member).**

Trust, teamwork, and cooperation, according to Qurniati, Febryano, and Zulfiani (2017), are crucial for building social capital and boosting productivity. The results of this study indicate that locals prefer working alone since they don't trust one another. However, they are receptive to chances that can help them win back the lost trust.

4.2.3 Sub-Theme 3: Lack of Tourism Business Experience

Results revealed that most, if not all, of the participants lacked the essential business or job experience in the tourism industry. It was also observed that the locals were eager for any form of growth that would occur in the area. *(Very commonly recorded).*

> *"I do not have enough work experience but I am very good with people and I know that being in tourism requires one to be friendly to customers".* **(Youth, community member).**
>
> *"Cleaning is part of our everyday chores that way I can be able to work in housekeeping department only if I can secure an employment."* **(Women, community member).**
>
> *"We can be able to do a great work; experience is not a problem only if such opportunities can be presented to us"*. **(Men, community member).**

Considering these comments, Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, and Tangit's (2018) research revealed that a significant barrier to community participation in tourism is a lack of knowledge and expertise.

4.3 Theme Three: Rural Tourism Strategies

Based on the findings of the study, theme three of this research offers practical strategies to promote rural tourism in the areas surrounding HiP.

4.3.1 Sub-Theme 1: Training and Development

The findings indicated that training and development should be prioritised as one of the approaches to encourage the growth of rural tourism. *(commonly recorded).* Few of the participant's statements are presented hereunder:

> *"Training can go a long way on helping us to improve the little knowledge that we have about tourism and in assisting us to welcome tourism development in a positive manner".* **(Youth, community member).**

According to the findings of this study by Bauer et al. (2012), education and training for local citizens should be provided on a regular basis to increase their knowledge, awareness, and capabilities.

4.3.2 Sub-Theme 2: Rural Tourism Cooperatives

Local communities agreed that if given the possibility to participate in rural tourism cooperatives, they would take the chance. A male community member said;

> *"Rural tourism cooperatives can help us eradicate hunger and reduce the level of unemployment we are faced with in this community"*. **(Men, community member).**

According to Aref and Gill (2009), who conducted research in Iran, rural cooperatives are the most effective organisations in the sector of rural tourism.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, it is suggested that other local attractions, such as local handicrafts, be identified and used as components of rural tourism products. These communities produce unique handicrafts such thatching, the creation of brooms, baskets, mats, wooden spoons, and trays, as well as African animal carvings in wood. Additionally, it is advised to host regular small local markets to sell handicrafts and other items produced locally because women have said they frequently struggle to sell their creations to clients one-on-one. Many other promising developments, however, can be seen in the development of rural housing, the beginning of cooperatives and training centres, and the creation of partnerships with academic institutions and other stakeholders in rural tourism. It may also help to develop a viable rural tourism industry to organise regional gatherings and rural exhibitions where locals may showcase their skills to tourists. After the study area weaknesses have been addressed, the study suggests that rural offers be positioned and offered as components of tourism products and services inside this rural space. According to the study findings, leadership should be committed to supporting the growth of rural tourism through capacity building, which includes training residents and assisting in the creation of business strategies and the acquisition of funds for the launch of new initiatives.

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Tourism Entrepreneurial Education And Intention Among Youths: A Case From KwaZulu-Natal In South Africa

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Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between entrepreneurial education (ED) and youths' entrepreneurial intention (EI) towards starting tourism businesses. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The study used purposive sampling method of the non-probability sampling design to select 400 youths living in different regions of the King Cetshwayo District Municipality (KCDM), KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. The methodology employed partial least squares - structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software version 4.0.8.5 to assess the relationships among the construct variables. The results show a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial intention. Recommendations are offered to the KCDM decision-makers (business support offices), National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), as well as Tourism KwaZulu-Natal to encourage youth entrepreneurship. South African higher education leaders and policymakers can benefit from these findings.

Keywords: Tourism Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Education and Intention, Entrepreneurial Attributes, Youth Entrepreneurship, PLS-SEM

1. Introduction

The high rate of unemployment has led to global discussions on encouraging youth entrepreneurship around the globe (Guanah & Okowa-Nwaebi, 2022; Syed et al., 2020). According to the National Youth Policy (NYP) (2020-2030), the youth population in South Africa (SA) is diverse, accounting for 36% of the total population. However, youth unemployment remains a serious concern in SA (Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), 2023). SA, for example, was reported to have the highest youth unemployment rate of 62.1% in March 2023. In December 2020, Nigeria was reported to have youth unemployment rate of 53.4%, whereas Spain had a rate of 28.4% in April 2023, while Greece and Italy had rates were reported to be 27.4% and 20.4%, respectively (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD), 2023). The numbers provide a comparative insight into these countries' youth unemployment situations, with SA having the highest youth unemployment rate. It becomes important for researchers and other key stakeholders to put more effort into designing successful policies, programmes and initiatives that cater to the needs of youths to unlock their entrepreneurial potential.

Entrepreneurs play a key role in contributing to Agenda 2030 and attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to Syed et al. (2020), much of entrepreneurship research focuses on students' sample and general population, with less attention on youths; hence there are relatively few unanswered questions (Neneh, 2022). The majority of EI literature has been developed and validated using student samples, and some earlier studies' contexts are quite limited (e.g., Adeel, Daniel, & Botelho, 2023; Vinogradova et al., 2023), as some of them are based in developed economies (e.g., Europe and the United States of America), with little evidence from developing economies like South Africa. The limitation in most prior studies (such as Campo-Ternera, Amar-Sepúlveda & Olivero-Vega, 2022; Hassan et al., 2020; Iwu, 2022) is the generalisability of the entrepreneurship education (ED) to entrepreneurial intention (EI) relationship, as these studies have primarily focused on specific sectors and demographics (for example, academic potential entrepreneurs and gender). Hence, the purpose of the survey was to explore the relationship between entrepreneurial education (ED) and youths' entrepreneurial intention (EI) towards starting tourism businesses, using the King Cetshwayo District Municipality (KCDM), KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa as a case. The KCDM boasts of Mining and Agriculture as its largest employment sectors, nonetheless, there is a huge potential for expanding its tourism industry (especially the eco-tourism niche). The largest contributing local municipalities to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the district are the City of uMhlathuze at 44.0%, followed by uMfolozi Local Municipality at 25.7% (KCDM Report, 2020). Following this introduction, the study provides a literature review that includes sub-dimensions for the research hypotheses that govern this work. Next, the paper discusses methodology employed when conducting this research. In the findings, the paper presents the relationship between ED and youths' EI towards starting tourism businesses. Finally, in the discussion and conclusions section the paper reflects on the

implications, lists the limitations, and offers avenues for future research. The following section presents the literature reviewed.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Entrepreneurial Education and Intentions

Entrepreneurial education (ED) has gained popularity in higher education institutions as a means of improving social entrepreneurial knowledge (SEK) and abilities. The government in Malaysia has taken proactive steps to encourage and instil the entrepreneurial mindset through ED in higher education (Ashari et al., 2022). Many scholars (for example, Bazkiaei et al., 2020; Ratten & Usmanij, 2021; Yousaf et al., 2021) confirm that ED can boost entrepreneurial skills and potential. A positive entrepreneurial mindset and knowledge are the basis of ED which trigger interest in starting a business, and therefore, serve as primary mediators of the relationship between ED and EI (Hanandeh et al., 2021; Van Treuren, Eisenbarth & Fry, 2022). Today's competition is driven by technology, thus digital education at South African universities is increasingly essential for potential entrepreneurs to gain skills and competences required for the business to achieve sustainability and competitiveness in the business (Ogunlela & Tengeh, 2021). Thus, an entrepreneur is defined as an innovative individual with strong entrepreneurial competencies (such as knowledge and mindset) and unique skills to develop and market products and/or services to create employment opportunities and to generate profit (Campo-Ternera, Amar-Sepúlveda & Olivero-Vega, 2022; Ntshangase & Ezeuduji, 2020). From the literature reviewed, EI is defined as an individual's psychological state or conscious awareness and willingness to start a business (Kong, Zhao & Tsai, 2020; Yordanova, Filipe & Pacheco Coelho, 2020). Tourism entrepreneurial education is therefore crucial in developing youths' entrepreneurial knowledge and mindset which can lead to participation in entrepreneurship. As a result, the authors propose hypothesis 1 (H1, see results section).

2.2 Entrepreneurial Attributes

Entrepreneurial attributes (such as entrepreneurial meanings and passion) are important towards entrepreneurial intention and business success among youths (Ehsanfar, Namak & Vosoughi, 2023; Laouiti et al., 2022). Entrepreneurship knowledge and passion are therefore prerequisites for starting a tourism business.

2.2.1 Entrepreneurial Meanings and Passion

According to the previous studies (for example, Diandra & Amzy, 2021; Guanah & Okowa-Nwaebi, 2022), becoming an entrepreneur requires an understanding of what it means and what it takes to be one 'entrepreneurial meanings', entrepreneurial abilities, desire and resilience in order to establish a successful business, even though success is not assured. Entrepreneurial passion (EP) is one of the attributes that play an important role in stimulating entrepreneurs' intention. Uddin et al. (2022) posit that, EP is positively influenced by ED, therefore improving the chances of EI and participation. EP is necessary for the integration of the financial, human and social resources required to start a new business is tied to the desire for invention (Anjum et al., 2021). In this paper, researchers further assessed whether entrepreneurial meanings and passion have a significant relationship to EI among youths for tourism businesses and the hypotheses (H2, H2a and H2b) were developed, see results section. The next section presents research design and methods used.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This study employed the positivism research paradigm, as a statistical model is being developed. It is concerned with research hypotheses testing, generalises from sample to population, and uses large samples (Ntshangase & Ezeuduji, 2022). Due to the nature of the constructs investigated, this study was designed as a survey and employed a quantitative approach. The quantitative approach allows researchers to generate statistical data and present it in percentages and tables (Veal, 2011).

3.2 Sample Size, Data Collection and Analysis

The study selected King Cetshwayo District Municipality (KCDM) because of its potential to cater for a wide spectrum of tourism entrepreneurship, thus offering a solution to socio-economic challenges (such as high rates of youth unemployment, poverty and social inequality). Using purposive sampling technique (a non-probability

sampling method), a total of 580 structured questionnaires were distributed to youths residing in uMhlathuze and uMfolozi local municipalities within KCDM in the KwaZulu-Natal province, however, the researchers used a total of 400 questionnaires that were found completed and usable for data analyses. The non-probability sampling was used since the research population was largely unknown (Veal, 2011). Through a post-hoc minimum sample size implemented in SmartPLS 4, version 4.0.8.5 software, this study assessed sample size determination after the data had been collected.

The study employed two stages of analysis, starting with descriptive data analysis and missing data analysis using IBM's SPSS version 28 (IBM Corporation, 2021). The second stage focused on construct validity and reliability testing, as well as the structural model (partial least squares - structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM)), which was evaluated using a multivariate analytical technique on SmartPLS software version 4.0.8.5 (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2022). The SEM analyses tested the underpinned research hypotheses (H) to address objectives. The measurement model includes independent variables such as entrepreneurial meanings (EM), entrepreneurial education (ED), and entrepreneurial passion (EP), as well as a dependent variable, entrepreneurial intention (EI). In this study, convergent validity is evaluated using the average variance extracted (AVE) (see Table 2), while discriminant validity is evaluated using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio correlation (see Table 3). Additionally, reliability is evaluated using indicator reliability, Cronbach's alpha (CA), and composite reliability (CR). To test for Common Method Bias (CMB) in this study, the researchers used a widely known collinearity variance inflation test. The researchers set a benchmark of 3.3 for the variance inflation factor (VIF), and used self-reported - cross-sectional data, which can be susceptible to CMB. The following section presents the results of the study.

4. Results

Table 1 presents the respondents' profile and general information on respondents.

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Profile of respondents	Categories	%
To which local municipality do you belong?	"uMfolozi Local Municipality"	33.3
	"uMhlathuze Local Municipality"	66.2
Which age group do you belong?	"18-25"	71.5
	"26-30"	19.5
	"31-35"	9.0
Did you study a tourism-related Business Management or Entrepreneurship course/programme?	"Yes"	57.5
	"No"	42.5
What is your level of education?	"No western education"	1.5
	"Primary education"	4.0
	"Secondary education (Matric)"	49.8
	"Tertiary education (University, college/TVET)"	44.7
Would you want to start your own business in the future?	"Yes"	95.8
	"No"	4.2
If the answer to the above question is 'yes', then your type of business would be:	"Tourism-related"	48.2
	"Non-tourism related"	51.8

The results in Table 1 show that most of the respondents who participated in the study were from "uMhlathuze Local Municipality" (about 67%), compared to those who were from "uMfolozi Local Municipality" (33.3%), and about 72% of the respondents were between the "ages of 18 and 25". Thus, reflecting that the sample is relatively very young. Results show that more than half of the respondents (about 58%) who participated in this study have taken some "business management" or "entrepreneurship education course", and about 95% of the respondents indicated that they have "secondary or tertiary education". About 96% of respondents surveyed were willing "to start their own businesses in the future". However, out of the respondents who are willing to start a business in the future, more than half (51.8%) of respondents show interest in starting their own "non-tourism related businesses" in the future; and the rest (48.2%) are willing to start "tourism-related businesses". Results confirm previous findings by Arthur-Aidoo, Aigbayboa & Thwala (2018) who suggested that business opportunities are

historically used and dominated by people who were initially non-entrepreneurs, even though most studies in the field of entrepreneurship have only focused on general business intentions.

4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

The study used factor loadings (FL), CA, CR and AVE to evaluate the internal consistency and convergence validity of the constructs. According to the results in Table 2, all item loadings were above the recommended value of 0.60, except for 14 items, which were (ED1, ED2 ED3, ED4, ED5, ED9, EI9, EM1, EM2, EM3, EM5, EM8, EP9, and EP10). Therefore, these items were removed due to their low loading (Hair et al., 2022). Afterward, the CA and CR values were found to be larger than 0.70 and the AVE values were greater than the threshold value of 0.50 (Ayanwale et al., 2022), which indicates satisfactory results in terms of convergent validity and internal consistency. The results in Table 2 implies that the measurement model used in the study is reliable and valid.

Table 2: Summary of reliability and convergent validity assessment (N=400)

Indicators	FL	CA	CR	AVE	VIF
ED10	0.693	0.716	0.824	0.540	1.299
ED6	0.671				1.281
ED7	0.802				1.449
ED8	0.765				1.413
EI1	0.657	0.883	0.906	0.519	1.548
EI10	0.741				1.865
EI2	0.653				1.730
EI3	0.745				2.040
EI4	0.746				1.810
EI5	0.613				1.435
EI6	0.755				1.901
EI7	0.816				2.366
EI8	0.731				1.920
EM10	0.735	0.757	0.837	0.507	1.432
EM4	0.677				1.331
EM6	0.670				1.384
EM7	0.711				1.393
EM9	0.763				1.517
EP1	0.756	0.863	0.893	0.512	2.009
EP2	0.763				1.991
EP3	0.753				1.915
EP4	0.754				1.923
EP5	0.662				1.594
EP6	0.679				1.642
EP7	0.691				1.739
EP8	0.655				1.531

To ensure discriminant validity, the HTMT ratio was used to evaluate dataset (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019). The results are presented in Table 3 and indicate that there were no issues of discriminant validity of data from the respondents.

Table 3: Summary of discriminant assessment- Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (N=400)

Items	ED	EI	EM	EP
ED				
EI	0.612			
EM	0.647	0.483		
EP	0.562	0.822	0.483	

***Notes**: N = Sample size, ED = Entrepreneurial education, EI = Entrepreneurial intention, EM = Entrepreneurial meanings, EP = Entrepreneurial passion, HTMT ≤ 0.85*

4.2 Structural Model Assessment

The study used PLS-SEM and evaluated the model using three criteria: R-square (R^2), predictive relevance using Q-square (Q^2) value and path coefficients (Hair et al., 2022). The R^2 measures the model's explanatory power, while the Q^2 measures whether the model has predictive relevance or not ($Q^2 > 0$ is good). Path coefficients should be significant, while Q^2 values above zero indicate that the model has predictive relevance. A model explanatory power value of 0.19, 0.33, or 0.67 is considered weak, moderate, or substantial, respectively. The study found that the R^2 values for the endogenous variable, EI, ranged between 0.628-0.688 across the study samples, indicating a substantial explanatory power (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2013) (see Table 4). The Q-square values for the endogenous constructs ranged from 0.581-0.627, which can be considered substantial, indicating good predictive relevance (Hair, Howard & Nitzl, 2020). The structural model determines the direct effects of independent variables and the percentage of variance predicted by the model.

Table 4: Summary of path coefficient and hypotheses testing (N=400)

	β	SD	T	P	Result
H1: ED -> EI	0.148	0.042	3.518	0.000	Supported*
H2a: EM -> EI	0.045	0.034	1.325	0.093	Not supported
H2b : EP -> EI	0.728	0.037	19.501	0.000	Supported*
	R-Sq.	**Q-Sq.**			
EI	0.678	0.581			

***Notes:** N= Sample size, ED = Entrepreneurial education, EI = Entrepreneurial intention, EM = Entrepreneurial meanings, EP = Entrepreneurial passion, Relationships are significant at p < 0.05, β - Beta weight coefficient, T = t – Statistics > 1.645 (One-tail test), P = Probability value, SD- Standard deviation. R-sq.= R square; Q-sq.= Q-square*

***H1**: Entrepreneurial education will show a significant relationship to entrepreneurial intention among youths in King Cetshwayo District Municipality for tourism businesses.*

For the respondents (youths) who intend to start tourism businesses, Table 4 shows that entrepreneurial education (β = 0.148, t = 3.518, p < 0.05) has a significant positive relationship with entrepreneurial intention. Thus, the alternative hypothesis stated was supported. However, a unit increase in entrepreneurial education (ED) will bring about a 0.231 increase in youths' intention to venture into tourism businesses in King Cetshwayo District Municipality. The second research hypothesis (H2) testing entrepreneurial attributes (entrepreneurial meanings and entrepreneurial passion) was also developed to further explore entrepreneurial intention for tourism businesses. H2 (with H2a and H2b) is as follows:

***H2**: Entrepreneurial attributes (such as entrepreneurial meanings and entrepreneurial passion) will show a significant relationship to entrepreneurial intention among youths in King Cetshwayo District Municipality for tourism businesses.*

This study assessed whether entrepreneurial meanings and entrepreneurial passion have significant relationship to EI among youths for tourism businesses, the analysis yielded the below hypotheses:

***H2a**: Entrepreneurial meanings will show a significant relationship to entrepreneurial intention among youths in King Cetshwayo District Municipality for tourism businesses.*

There is no statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurial meanings and entrepreneurial intention among youths in King Cetshwayo District Municipality for tourism businesses ($\beta = 0.045$, $t = 1.325$, $p > 0.05$), as shown in Table 4. There may be a chance relationship between entrepreneurial meanings and entrepreneurial intention based on the t-value of 1.325 and the p-value of greater than 0.05. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis cannot be supported.

> ***H2b**: Entrepreneurial passion will show a significant relationship to entrepreneurial intention among youths in King Cetshwayo District Municipality for tourism businesses.*

The results in Table 4 shows a significant relationship between entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial intention ($\beta = 0.728$, $t = 19.501$, $p < 0.05$). According to the beta coefficient of 0.678, an increase in entrepreneurial passion is associated with an increase in entrepreneurial intention of 0.678 units. This relationship between entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial intention does not appear to be due to chance, as the t-value of 10.590 is statistically significant. This supports the hypothesis that entrepreneurial passion is associated with entrepreneurial intention.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial passion, both showed a positive relationship with entrepreneurial intention, while entrepreneurial meaning has no relationship with entrepreneurial intention. The results confirm that the relationship between ED and EI is not due to chance, since entrepreneurial education acquired by youths can have a positive impact on their entrepreneurial intention in the tourism business. This result is in line with the recent study by Ntshangase and Ezeuduji (2020) who posits that ED enables individuals to acquire skills and knowledge for entrepreneurial competency. Furthermore, Ntshangase and Ezeuduji (2022), from the perspective of Shapero and Sokol's (1982) theory of entrepreneurial event (TEE) model, state that ED has a positive influence on EI. However, in practically speaking, the current study' findings suggest that a simple entrepreneurial education programme which is only based on teaching entrepreneurship meanings may not be sufficient to boost EIs among youths in King Cetshwayo District Municipality. Meaning, it is insufficient if youths did simply comprehend the meanings associated with entrepreneurship but did not have enhanced ED which is aimed at providing knowledge and skills (Neneh, 2022). Considering these findings, encouraging and fostering entrepreneurial passion among youths may increase entrepreneurial intentions, which may result in more new business startups in tourism business in the future. These results are in line with other scholars (see Anjum, Heidler, Amoozegar et al., 2021; Sharma & Jamwal, 2022).

6. Recommendations, Limitations and Future Research

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are offered to the King Cetshwayo District Municipality (KCDM) decision-makers (business support offices), National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), as well as Tourism KwaZulu-Natal to encourage youth entrepreneurship. The three recommendations offered in this section are consistent with the study results.

1. Business support officers, NYDA and Tourism KwaZulu-Natal should collaborate to support youths by investing in educational programmes that teach entrepreneurial skills and knowledge, the district municipality can help foster a culture of entrepreneurship and encourage more youths to start tourism businesses. Organising workshops and seminars related to entrepreneurship aimed at promoting tourism economic development in the King Cetshwayo District Municipality can be useful.

2. This finding suggests that a simple entrepreneurial education programme may not be sufficient to boost entrepreneurial intentions among youth in King Cetshwayo District Municipality. To promote tourism entrepreneurship, policy decisions, and educational programmes should emphasise both developing skills and meanings that are tourism-related. The King Cetshwayo District Municipality, for example, may invest in programmes that provide mentorship, coaching, and networking opportunities for young entrepreneurs and successful entrepreneurs.

3. The study further revealed that in the King Cetshwayo District Municipality, entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial intention are strongly correlated among the youths studied. Considering these findings, encouraging and fostering entrepreneurial passion among youths may increase entrepreneurial intentions, which may result in more new tourism business startups. Business support officers, NYDA, and successful entrepreneurs (to be identified by business support officers) can

facilitate the development of entrepreneurial passion among youths in the region by developing programmes that encourage and support them, based on local contexts.

6.1 Study Limitations

This study employed purposive sampling (a non-probability sampling method), and it has some limitations like other previous studies. It therefore implies that one has to be careful in interpreting or implementing the results, as the results can be statistically argued as not being a true representative of the study population (the uMhlathuze and uMfolozi local municipalities within KCDM). The study is, however, significant as it contributes to the body of knowledge regarding the explanation and relationships of the entrepreneurial education and intention in King Cetshwayo District Municipality.

6.2 Future Research

It is advised that in the future, researchers conduct conclusive study in other district municipalities and/or provinces within South Africa. By so doing regional similarities and differences can be identified towards presenting national models.

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Socio-demographic Variables and Push Travel Motivation: Tourists Visiting a Protected Area in South Africa

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the key push travel motivation factors from Dann's theory of push and pull motivation and analysed the influence of tourists' socio-demographic variables on push travel motivation factors to visit protected areas (PAs). Data were collected via a structured questionnaire from 435 randomly selected tourists visiting Hluhluwe-iMfolozi park (HiP). Data analyses employed descriptive statistics to generate frequencies, mean scores and standard deviations using IBM's SPSS version 28 software. Mann-Whitney Wilcoxon test implemented in Stata software version 15 was employed. The findings revealed that the key tourists push factors are "relaxation and family togetherness". The study further indicates that demographic variables such as "nationality, residency, employment status and age" have significant effects on tourists' overall push factors (i.e., relaxation, social interaction, family togetherness, and prestige motivation). Based on the findings, the study made recommendations directed to the park management focusing on promoting and sustaining activities that address the key push motivation factors.

Keywords: Travel Motivation, Push Factors, Nature-Based Tourism, Protected Areas, Tourist's Socio-Demographic Variables

1. Introduction

Tourism in South Africa (SA) is a major driver to conserving and managing intact PAs (Leung et al, 2018). PAs contribute to biodiversity conservation, outdoor recreation, tourism opportunities, educational and spiritual experiences (Casteel & Bridier, 2021; Masina, Boshoff & Sifolo, 2021). However, these experiences can be influenced by specific aspects of PAs, such as their uniqueness, attractiveness, and security, and how they are managed (Buhalis et al., 2023; Masina, Boshoff & Sifolo, 2021). This paper acknowledges that the extent to which tourists' expectations are met will eventually determine their level of satisfaction. According to Agyeman, Aboagye and Ashie (2019), tourists seeking close encounters with nature have been motivated to visit PA due to their exceptional scenic beauty and appeal. However, according to Ferrell, Hartline and Hochstein (2021), managers managing PAs are less likely to use the marketing concept of understanding customers' needs and fulfilling them. Tourism researchers have used motivation to measure tourists' level of satisfaction (Çelik & Dedeoğlu, 2019; Preko, Doe & Dadzie, 2019) and gain an understanding of tourists' travel decisions (Yoo, Yoon & Park, 2018). This study advocates that, at present, PAs management is more transactional in approach and focuses on selling nature (for example, game drives, hiking, nature education), without understanding other emotional or personal needs of tourists visiting PAs. Whereas tourists' evaluation of the characteristics of PAs can contribute to identifying areas of improvement for the enhancement of tourists' experience and satisfaction.

From the literature reviewed, much emphasis has been placed on outlining the push travel motivational factors in general, particularly in well-developed economies such as the United States (US) (Agyeman, Aboagye and Ashie 2019). Less emphasis has been placed on developing economies such as SA, where tourism is a major source of economic growth and the economy is heavily reliant on it (Masina, Boshoff & Sifolo, 2021). Recent studies (for example Masina, Boshoff & Sifolo, 2021; Michael et al., 2020; Said & Maryono, 2018) have looked at the push travel motivational factors in the general tourism context, but little has been done on PA, as a space for specialised nature-based tourism. Hence, this study contributes to the literature on the push travel motivational factors through the assessment of the correlation between the push travel motivational factors and tourists' socio-demographics in nature-based tourism context (as this is important for relationship marketing), with a focus on identifying and satisfying customers' needs. This paper, firstly, explored the key push factors influencing tourists to visit PAs, using HiP as a case, KwaZulu-Natal Province of SA. Secondly, the paper tested the significant effect of the tourist demographic variables to the key identified push travel motivation factors from Dann's theory of push and pull motivation (1977). Said and Maryono (2018) suggest that push factors are socio-psychological factors that influence people's decisions to visit a particular destination. Such decisions may include but are not

limited to peace, loneliness and to experience something new. Thus, push motivation is related to individual needs that drive tourists to travel (Dean & Suhartanto, 2019). Tourists visiting PAs, like any other customers, usually have initial expectations of the type and quality of services to be offered at a particular destination (Moore, Rodger, & Taplin, 2015). The section highlighted below outlines this study literature.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) declared tourism as a "catalyst" in achieving all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and advancing sustainable development (Buhalis et al., 2023). The declaration identifies five central pillars where tourism plays a significant role, namely, sustainable economic growth, social inclusiveness and equality, environmental protection and climate change, cultural diversity and heritage, mutual understanding and peace (Rasoolimanesh, Ramakrishna, Hall, Esfandiar, & Seyfi, 2023). Drawing from Dann's theory of push and pull motivation (1977), the study focused primarily on push travel motivation factors and the influence of tourists' socio-demographic variables (such as gender, nationality, residency, employment status and age) adopted by this study on push travel motivation factors to visit PA. In tourism research, Dann's (1977) push and pull theory of motivation is a widely recognised theoretical framework (Mapingure, du Plessis & Saayman, 2019; Michael et al., 2020; Said & Maryono, 2018). This theory still has huge relevance in the tourism industry. Most recent tourism studies have used this theory as theoretical framework to conduct similar studies.

2.1 Gender and Push Travel Motivation

Gender is a crucial element influencing travel demand (Carvache-Franco et al., 2020; Mkwizu, 2018a). This socio-demographic construct has been studied in the context of travel mobility, motivation, and duration of stay (Mkwizu, 2018b); travel behaviour and willingness to adopt sustainable behaviour (Buhalis et al., 2023; Carvache-Franco et al., 2020; Kara & Mkwizu, 2020). Travel patterns differ between men and women depending on their travel motivation. A recent study by Ma et al. (2018) ascertains that gender had an impact on an individual's desire for relaxation and nature exploration. Females travel to overcome their double disadvantage as ethnic minority and housewives under patriarchy while men travel for business related activities (Moon, Yang & Lee, 2019; Nassuna, 2019). According to Moon, Yang and Lee (2019), women's participation in travel activities is limited by cost, time, and family obligations. As a result, women are more likely to engage in shopping, dining, and cultural activities than outdoor activities, whereas males are more likely to engage in adventure activities (Nassuna, 2019).

2.2 Age and Push Travel Motivation

Tourism researchers (for example Lewis & D'Alessandro, 2019; Wambani, Ogunjinmi & Oladeji, 2020) concluded that tourism participation is strongly related to age, which is a significant socio-demographic factor that indicates how destinations may proceed with marketing segmentation. According to Ma et al (2018), age has a favourable influence on tourists' desire for leisure and nature exploration. Wangari (2017) advocates that the likelihood of an individual involvement in wildlife activities differs with age, implying that the probability of activity participation increases when an individual is young and lowers as that individual matures. Senior tourists tend to be a "specific market segment" seeking a tourist's destination that provides "quiet, culture, environment, climate, quality of life, and accessibility" (Wambani, Ogunjinmi & Oladeji, 2020). Furthermore, Ma et al (2018) studied the relationship between tourist socio-demographic variables, motivation, and satisfaction to predict their visitation patterns and travel behaviours to Guangdong Forest nature reserves. Multiple regression analysis results demonstrated that tourists' age influences travel motivation behaviour and decision-making. Ma et al (2018) findings indicates that age positively influence two types of travel motivation: sense of relaxation and nature exploration.

2.3 Nationality and Residency

The nationality of tourists has been explored in tourism literature, especially in explaining travel motivation (Allaberganov & Preko, 2022; Gunasekara & Silva., 2021). Allaberganov and Preko (2022) investigated inbound international tourists' demographics and travel motives - views from Uzbekistan in Central Asian. According to Allaberganov and Preko (2022), nationality and frequency of visitations of the international tourists to Uzbekistan were statistically associated with their travel motives. However, Woyo, Slabbert and Saayman (2019) suggested that residency was insignificant in explaining destination attractiveness perceptions in Zimbamwe. Likewise, Stylidis (2022) investigated the impact of residency on destination appeal. A recent study by Lee and Jeong

(2023) indicated that the applicability of nationality should be extended as a moderator that interacts with the prior variables that influence decision making. Therefore, the tourist decision-making process for choosing a destination is not consistent.

2.4 Employment and Push Travel Motivation

Income has been predicted as the significant antecedents to tourism decision making and conative behaviour (Allaberganov & Preko, 2022; Kara & Mkwizu, 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023; Wangari, 2017). Employment influences the choice of tourist destinations as well as the distance to the destination (Allaberganov & Preko, 2022) and thus encourages individuals to go on vacation more frequently and choose locations far from their homes to enjoy leisure time, nature, and experience. A study conducted by Wambani, Ogunjinmi and Oladeji (2020) investigated socio-demographic determinants of travel motivation and behaviour of visitors in nature-based destinations in northern Nigeria. According to Wambani, Ogunjinmi and Oladeji (2020), tourists with higher incomes travel more frequently, and spend more time in a destination whereas visitors with lower incomes travel less frequently and spend less time in a destination. Accordingly, visitors with lower income levels are often more sensitive to destination choice than tourists with higher income levels. Therefore, the authors proposed the following hypothesis:

> **H1:** Demographic variables (such as gender, nationality, residency, employment, and age,) do not significantly affect the overall push factor (i.e., relaxation, social interaction, family togetherness and prestige).

This hypothesis (H1) is divided into five sub-hypotheses, H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, and H1e

> *H1a: Demographic variables, such as gender do not significantly affect the overall push factor.*
>
> *H1b: Demographic variables, such as nationality do not significantly affect the overall push factor.*
>
> *H1c: Demographic variables, such as residency do not significantly affect the overall push factor.*
>
> *H1d: Demographic variables, such as employment do not significantly affect the overall push factor.*
>
> *H1e: Demographic variables, such as age do not significantly affect the overall push factor.*

From the above research overview, the next section outlines research design and methods used to address the above research hypotheses. The results are presented in Tables 1,2 and 3.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Study Design and Data Collection

This study adopted the positivist research paradigm for measurement, as a model was developed. The nature of the reported study required quantified information to arrive at conclusions. Therefore, with the study research objectives leaning towards a positivist research paradigm, a quantitative research approach was employed. Veal (2011) asserts that the quantitative approach allows researchers to generate statistical data and present it in percentages and tables. This study therefore used a survey research design to explore the push factors and analyse the influence of tourist socio-demographic variables on travel motivation to visit PAs, using HiP as a case. This study used a probability sampling method, known as simple random sampling, where the researcher randomly selected a subset of respondents from the research population, as the visitor numbers to HiP could be estimated (Veal, 2011). 600 questionnaires were handed-out to tourists who visited HiP, and 435 completed questionnaires were found usable for data analyses. Questionnaire variables included tourists' profile (categorical variables), and ordinal variables based on push travel motivational factors respectively. All ordinal variables (originate from the literature study) were on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 – strongly agree to 5 – strongly disagree).

3.2 Sample Size and Analysis

A significance level of 0.05 and -0.223 were used as the minimal absolute significant path coefficient, and 0.80 was employed as the power level. Considering these two methods (the inverse square root and gamma-exponential method), the sample size generated for this study is statistically appropriate and substantial at 435 tourists who visited HiP. The analysis dealt with data integrity and descriptive statistics (frequency, mean scores and standard deviations) were conducted using IBM SPSS software version 28 (IBM Corporation, 2021). In this

study, Mann-Whitney Wilcoxon test implemented in Stata software version 15 was employed. When the dependent variable is at least an ordinal scale, this statistical tool can be used, which is a non-parametric analog to the independent samples t-test of the parametric tool (Ma et al., 2022). This study surveyed respondents (both international and domestic tourists) in a major nature-based PA (HiP) KwaZulu-Natal province, whose push travel motivation factors were analysed using Mann-Whitney Wilcoxon Test. Further, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on a categorical independent variable (containing at least two categories; age group) and a normally distributed interval dependent variable (for example, relaxation). The Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test with (Chi-Square = 224.690, df = 123, $p < 0.05$) indicated that the data were missing totally at random (Schafer, 1999). Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was used to check for the level of internal consistencies of variables used to explain different research dimensions of push factor. The following section presents the study results and discussions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondents' Profile

Table 1 shows that, more female (51.3%) than male (48.7%) tourists or visitors responded to the questionnaire. About 55% of the respondents were quite mature in age (50 years of age or above). There were more foreign (about 52%) than South African (about 48%) respondents. However, the percentages of tourists who were permanent residents and non-permanent residents in SA were almost equal. The study results show that 69.2% of respondents surveyed in the HiP were employed, while 30.8% were unemployed, indicating that most respondents surveyed were working or had a job – assuming they had disposable income and thus could afford to travel. These results confirm findings from the previous studies (such as those of Allaberganov & Preko, 2022; Stylidis, 2022; Wambani, Ogunjinmi & Oladeji, 2020).

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Variable	Categories	Frequency (%)
Gender	"Male"	48.7
	"Female"	51.3
Age	"18-29"	15.4
	"30-39"	14.5
	"40-49"	14.7
	"50-59"	22.1
	"60 or older"	33.3
Nationality	"South African"	47.8
	"Non-South African"	52.2
Are you a permanent resident of South Africa	"Yes"	49.4
	"No"	50.6
Employment status	"Employed"	69.2
	"Not employed"	30.8

4.2 Measuring the Level of Agreement or Disagreement of "Push Travel Motivation Factors" Influencing Tourists to Visit PAs

The study measured the push travel motivation factors influencing tourists to visit PAs based on the respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with the statements used to measure 'push' travel motivation factors influencing tourists. The total mean score for each push sub-dimension was calculated with the intention of identifying the key push factor(s) influencing tourists to visit HiP. Relaxation, with a total mean score of 1.98, was identified as the key push factor that influences tourists to visit HiP, followed by family togetherness (2.41). This study advocates that tourists visit HiP primarily to relax and enjoy nature's peace and tranquillity with their families. These results partially support the findings of Masina, Boshoff and Sifolo (2021), who suggest that a relaxing atmosphere, getting away, adventure, and excitement are the primary motivators for tourists seeking to escape their normal way of life. The findings also mean that family travel is thought to be a particularly effective way to strengthen family ties and overall well-being (Li et al, 2017). The analyses in this study further examined the 'earlier' mentioned main and sub-underpinning null research hypotheses *(H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, and H1e)* in to address the study objectives.

4.3 Main and Sub-underpinning Null Research Hypotheses Testing

For each of the two independent groups (gender, nationality, residency, and employment), an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the means of normality distributed interval-dependent variables (push factors). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: T-test summary of overall push factors based on gender, nationality, residency, and employment

Gender	Observation	Mean	Std. Dev.	95% CI		Mdiff.	df	t-value	p-value
Male	212	42.028	7.628	40.996	43.061	-0.008	433	-0.010	0.992
Female	223	42.036	7.944	40.988	43.084				
Nationality	**Observation**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**95% CI**		**Mdiff.**	**df**	**t-value**	**p-value**
South African	208	39.750	7.987	38.658	40.842	-4.373	433	-6.094	0.000
Non-South African	227	44.123	6.978	43.211	45.036				
Permanent residency	**Observation**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**95% CI**		**Mdiff.**	**df**	**t-value**	**p-value**
Yes	215	40.093	8.150	38.997	41.189	-3.834	433	-5.295	0.000
No	220	43.927	6.915	43.008	44.846				
Employment	**Observation**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**95% CI**		**Mdiff.**	**df**	**t-value**	**p-value**
Employed	301	41.010	7.810	40.124	41.896	-3.318	433.000	-4.183	0.000
Unemployed	134	44.328	7.238	43.092	45.565				

Results portrayed in Table 2 show that male and female tourists did not show any significant differences in push factors (t = -0.010, df = 433, p = 0.992). The mean scores for males and females were M = 42.028, SD = 7.628, and M = 42.036, SD = 7.944. Therefore, the null hypothesis *1a* was accepted. According to Table 2, non-South African tourists scored higher than South African tourists (M = 39.750, SD = 7.987). There was a greater push for non-South African tourists to visit the HiP than for South African tourists. As for the observed difference in the push factors to visit the HiP, an independent sample t-test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the South African and the non-South African push (t = -6.094, df = 433, p = 0.000). Therefore, the null hypothesis *1b* was rejected. These findings are consistent with those of Stone and Nyaupane (2019), who concluded that domestic tourists are influenced by livelihoods and crowded spaces with a variety of activities, whereas international tourists are influenced by privacy, tranquillity, quietness, history, and culture since they are more relaxing to international tourists. As a result, this may explain why non-South Africans and tourist without a permanent residency have the highest mean scores.

Table 2 also shows a statistically significant difference between tourist groups with and without permanent residency (t = -5.295, df = 433, p = 0.000). Therefore, tourists without permanent residency have a statistically significantly higher mean score on push factors (M = 43.927, SD = 6.915) than those with permanent residency (M = 40.093, SD = 8.150). Therefore, the null hypothesis *1c* was rejected. A higher mean score was found among unemployed tourists (M = 44.382, SD = 7.238) than among employed tourists (M = 41.010, SD = 7810) in Table 2. An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine whether employment status affected the push factor experience at the park; the result indicated that employed and unemployed tourists experienced different levels of push factors (t = -4.183, df = 433, p = 0.000). Therefore, the null hypothesis *1d* was rejected. Compared to employed tourists, unemployed tourists had higher levels of push factors to visit HiP. These results contradict those of Huete-Alcocer, López-Ruiz and Grigorescu (2019) who concluded that a more positive degree of satisfaction when travelling is associated with a higher salary. Based on the push factor, Table 3 also presents an ANOVA for the tourist age group.

Table 3: ANOVA summary of tourists' overall push factor based on age group

Age group	Mean	Std. Dev.	Source	Partial SS	df	MS	F	p-value
18-29	39.746	6.938	Model	1782.678	4	445.670	7.820	0.000
30-39	39.651	7.970	Residual	24502.871	430	56.983		
40-49	42.688	6.951	Total	26285.549	434	60.566		
50-59	40.927	6.938						

Age group	Mean	Std. Dev.	Source	Partial SS	df	MS	F	p-value
60 or older	44.566	8.238						

With a mean score of 44.566, *SD* of 8.238, the 60 and older age bracket had the highest mean score; 40-49 had the next highest score mean (42.688, *SD* = 6.951), 50-59 had a mean score of 40.927, SD = 6.938, 18-29 had a mean score of 39.746, *SD* = 6.938, and 43-39 had a mean score of 39.651, *SD* = 7.970, respectively. The researcher used one-way ANOVA statistics to determine whether there was a significant difference in their mean scores, as shown in Table 3. The study results (F (4, 430) = 7.820, p = 0.000) were marked statistically significant. As a result, the null hypothesis *1e* was rejected. This result implies that older people tend to visit HiP more frequently and enjoy it more than younger people. This study is line with the study of Ma et al (2018) who concluded that older or senior tourists visit nature-based destinations to enjoy a sense of relaxation and nature exploration while young tourists do not picture that to be of any value to their travel motives. Ma et al (2018) confirmed that gender and age have an influence on an individual's desire for relaxation and nature exploration. Females travel to overcome their double disadvantage as ethnic minority and housewives under patriarchy (Moon, Yang, & Lee, 2019; Nassuna, 2019), which may explain why female respondents are slightly higher in number than male respondents in this study. Previous studies (Kara & Mkwizu, 2020; Pereira, Gupta & Hussain, 2022; Woyo, & Slabbert, 2020) posit that the older or senior tourists are motivated by a desire for novelty, relaxation, and nature exploration, which are common push travel motivation factors influencing tourists visiting PAs'.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study is significant for improving service provision to tourists visiting PAs', by employing the marketing principle of identifying, understanding, and addressing the diversity of tourists' needs and their relationships, resulting in more innovative and needs-addressing packages for tourists. The study further indicates that demographic variables such as "nationality, residency, employment status and age" have significant effects on tourists' overall push factors (i.e., relaxation, social interaction, family togetherness, and prestige motivation), However, 'gender' does not have a significant effect on tourists' overall push factors. Based on the study findings, the study puts forward the following recommendation which serve to illustrate various ways of moving forward in achieving the goal of sustainable nature-based tourism, sustainable marketing and promotion of visitation to PAs.

- Crafted messages emphasising the identified key push (relaxation and family togetherness) factors should be delivered to target markets to reinforce visitor satisfaction behaviour. Such promotional and communication initiatives can be presented on-site, online (social media inclusive), and in advertisement or promotion campaigns using relevant marketing tools, and information should be easily accessible.
- HiP management should design products and services offerings in harmony with the identified key push travel motivation factors "relaxation and family togetherness" to attract their target market. The push factors identified will assist in addressing the multiplicity of tourists' needs; the relationships between these needs and tourists' profile are equally critical for relationship marketing.
- HiP should position itself as a place for "relaxation and family bonding" in its facilities found in its rich natural setting and surroundings. Facilities within and immediately outside the park should therefore be designed to provide these needs.
- Park destination marketing operations should cater to tourists based on the identified significant socio-demographic criteria (gender, nationality, residency, employment, and age), rather than the general mass market.

By implementing these recommendations, HiP management can identify and satisfy their customers' needs, enhance the visitor experience, and build customer loyalty. Focusing on providing a relaxing and peaceful atmosphere, HiP management can attract tourists who are looking for a more laid-back experience and ensure that their customers' needs are met. The relationship marketing strategy for the park can rely on the market segments (mostly demographic and geographic based). The park can position itself in targeting these segments using an appropriate marketing mix. By so doing, the marketing concept of identifying customer needs and satisfying them can become a good practice at HiP and other PAs'.

6. Limitations and Future Research

The study only used HiP as a case study thus, the results of this study are true for this study area. Other municipalities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal and other South African provinces could be prospective future research areas. Each of the nine provinces may have unique destination attributes. Further studies can also be conducted to find out which motivation factors or attributes are possessed by tourism-related employees (including park managers and other staff members), as internal customers in relation to visitor satisfaction (external customers).

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