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The 6th Conference on Managing Tourism Across Continents MTCON'2025

April 30-May 03, 2025
İstanbul - Türkiye

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The Conference on Managing Tourism Across Continents

The 6th Conference on Managing Tourism Across Continents (MTCON'2026)

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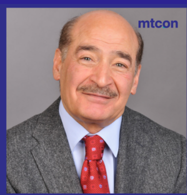
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Assessing digital technology affordance and rural community-based tourism (CBT) enterprises as a collaborative framework for sustainability.

Njabulo Ndlovu, Portia Pearl Siyanda Sifolo, Ndivhuwo Tshipala

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Abstract

Purpose: This article underscores the need to accelerate the promotion of affordable digital technology adoption and use among rural community-based tourism enterprises for socio-economic development and sustainability in the sub-Saharan Africa context. Hence, this study seeks to equip CBT actors with practical knowledge about how to use digital technologies innovatively to boost socioeconomic initiatives and promote sustainability.

Study design/methodology/approach: This study's research design is qualitative and seeks to provide in-depth information enabling the exploration of issues in their context. A cross-sectional study was conducted, and the participants were identified through snowballing and opportunistic sampling.

Results: The CBT actors acknowledged knowing different types of digital technologies and their use. These results indicate that digital marketing dominates the Internet with many engaged in social media and digital platforms such as (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok), Google and Gmail. The findings also indicated the use of community radios for information transmission. However, despite knowing the identified digital technologies, their usage for professional marketing and online content creation is limited, hence the need for more upskilling through synergies with other stakeholders.

Originality/value: the study underscores the significance of affordable innovative digital technologies in promoting socioeconomic initiatives and sustainability in rural CBT. The results of this study offer a new perspective relating to the adoption and effective utilisation of affordable digital technologies towards enhancing CBT performance and ultimately promoting socioeconomic development and sustainability.

Keywords Community-based tourism, rural, digital technology, affordance, sustainability

Introduction

Community-based tourism remains pivotal in promoting any country's social, economic, and environmental developmental agenda (Maquera, da Costa, Mendoza, Salinas, & Haddad, 2022). Because of its nature, this form of rural tourism can present affordable, unique, and deeply shared experiences with long-lasting memories for tourists (Can, Ekinci & Dilek-Fidler, 2025). The nexus between sustainable CBT aligns well with the sustainable development goals (SDG-8) which advocate for the maintenance and preservation of the natural resources, and culture realised through digitalisation (UNWTO, 2023). CBT initiatives are deemed to be at the forefront of stimulating socioeconomic growth, alleviating poverty, and subsequently improving living standards for rural communities (Bakker, van der Duim, Peters, & Klomp, 2023). These sustainable development goals are entrenched in the streams of sociocultural, and educational perspectives considered noteworthy vehicles for sustainability (UNWTO, 2023). CBT initiatives deliver employment opportunities and decent living standards to communities, promoting sustainable economic growth (Woyo & Musavengane, 2023).

However, effectively occupying the digital space may not only enhance their visibility but can lead to discoveries of other destinations, especially within poor communities in developing countries, thereby enhancing the visibility through efficient application of affordable digital technologies leading to subsequent growth of rural communities (Ndlovu, Sifolo & Tshipala, 2025). Digital technologies promote the exchange of information powered by tools such as social media platforms, Gmail, and Google, (Xue, 2021). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) affirm that CBT sustainability realisation should be driven by the effective utilisation of online platforms and associated technologies that will facilitate access to information, shared knowledge, and experiences (UNWTO, 2023). For CBT, affordable digital technologies opened up pathways to directly engage with potential tourists, delivering personalized enhanced experiences. For instance, owing to affordable digital platforms, now tourists can have access to cheap and vast amounts of information. This study explores many of the chronic digital-associated challenges affecting sustainability in rural CBT, and in the quest to contribute to literature, it provides evidence to the following questions: 1. What types of digital technologies are commonly used for business? 2. What is the perceived usability of digital technologies among CBT actors? 3. What are the benefits of adopting and using digital technologies in business? 4. How can the use of affordable digital technologies promote CBT sustainability?

Methodology

Researchers employed a qualitative research approach to provide in-depth information enabling the exploration of issues in their context. A cross-sectional study was conducted, and the participants were identified through snowballing and opportunistic sampling. Participants were divided into 3 categories; those who were not employed but somewhat economically active within the CBT initiatives, those who worked or self-employed in craft centres and other tourism-related activities, and those formally employed in the tourism sector. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Information was collected from a total of 31 participants from Binga, Zimbabwe (16) and Dinokasi, South Africa (15). Due to nascent digital technologies development promoting increased digital space, interaction and intensification of internationalisation swayed researchers to embark on a cross-national comparison. The data was professionally analysed using the ATLAS. ti software version 9.

Results

Data was transcribed, cleaned, and sorted. Themes were then generated from the data before the analysis and report writing. Codes were assigned to each interviewee, followed by the data interpretation. The data collection instrument in Table 1 was developed based on literature (Ndlovu, Sifolo & Tshipala, 2025).

Table 1: Presents Interview Questions

Research questions	In-depth interview questions
RQ 1	Which digital technologies or platforms are commonly used for CBT initiatives?
RQ 2	What are your comments regarding the usability of the identified digital technologies?
RQ 3	What are the benefits of using the identified digital technologies on CBT initiatives?
RQ 4	How can the use of digital technologies promote sustainability in CBT?

Table 2: Summarises participants' profiles

Interview ID	Age	Sex	Category	District	Interview ID	Age	Sex	Category	District
					Inf16	53	Male	2	B
Inf1	35	Male	2	B	Inf17	23	Male	2	D
Inf2	39	Male	1	B	Inf18	29	Female	2	D
Inf3	37	Male	2	B	Inf19	24	Male	2	D
Inf4	40	Male	2	B	Inf20	34	Male	2	D
Inf5	38	Female	3	B	Inf21	36	Male	2	B
Inf6	43	Male	2	B	Inf22	26	Male	2	D
Inf7	41	Female	2	B	Inf23	38	Male	2	B

Inf8	40	Female	3	B	Inf24	42	Male	2	D
Inf9	49	Male	1	B	Inf25	31	Male	2	D
Inf10	34	Male	2	D	Inf26	34	Male	2	D
Inf11	52	Male	3	B	Inf27	41	Male	2	D
Inf12	48	Female	2	B	Inf28	33	Male	2	D
Inf13	42	Female	2	B	Inf29	29	Female	2	D
Inf14	51	Female	2	B	Inf30	34	Male	2	D
Inf15	43	Female	2	D	Inf31	28	Male	2	D

Those who were not employed but somewhat economically active within the CBT initiatives, 2. Those who worked or were self-employed in craft centres and other tourism-related activities, 3. Those formally employed in the tourism sector

Table 2 also shows demographic distribution with the age group that belongs to the economically active population conversant with different types of CBT initiatives. Moreover, this is the age group (generation X and the millennials) active in utilising digital technologies, though with somewhat limitations (Dube and Gumbo, 2017).

Table 3 summarises the thematic qualitative analysis findings on the usability of digital platforms, the benefits to CBRT actors realized through their use, and the role played by technology in promoting CBRT sustainability.

Table 3: Presents a summary of thematic analysis

Theme	Sub-theme	Findings
Types of digital technologi	Social media platforms	Some CBT actors use Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram & TikTok
	Gmail	Some use emails for personalised discussion with clients.
	Community radio station	Some were still relying on communit radio station, particularly from Binga
Digital technology usabilit	Ease of use	Many actors acknowledged familiarity with digital technologies and found it simple to use.
	Content creation skills	Despite familiarity with digital

		technologies, many CBT actors professed ignorance when coming to online content creation for business Purposes.
Benefits associated w embracing & Using digital technologies	Attracting tourists	Products and experiences shared onli enhanced our visibility in the global markets.
	Generating revenue	All CBT actors acknowledged digital technologies have enhanced the marketing of products and other community, cultural and tradition activities.
	Community cohesion	Digital technologies enable society Integration, a meeting can be quickly arranged, information about possible harm to our resources can be quickly disseminated
Digital technologies a sustainability In CBT initiatives	Preservation of resources	CBT actors acknowledged that digital technologies have bestowed upon the a sense of conserving their culture. Pictures can be digitally stored to be passed on to the next generation

Most CBT actors acknowledged that one way or another they make use of different digital technologies for communication and marketing their products and tourism destinations (Can, Ekinci & Pino, 2024). This point is also alluded to by Xue (2021), that in the age of big data, digital marketing dominates the Internet with many engaged in social media and digital platforms such as (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok), Google and Gmail. Further, they acknowledge digital technologies as fundamental to global connectivity. Whereas, some CBT actors particularly from Binga indicated reliance on community radios characterised by limited coverage. Although some CBT actors perceive that digital platforms are simple to use, their usage for professional marketing purposes remains elusive, only limited to common perceived usefulness. This reflects minimum engagement with digital platforms, ultimately pointing to a lack of sufficient digital skills (Azira, Samad, Salehuddin & Zahari, 2024). Participants further indicated their lack of skills in creating interactive business content on Facebook or WhatsApp. Thus, the ability to create a Facebook business profile and WhatsApp business apps can be a game changer for CBT initiatives (Haider, Shannon & Vatananan, 2022). These perspectives align with the view that digital technologies have become ubiquitous, permeating every sphere, including rural areas (Monda, Feola, Parente, Vesci, & Botti, 2023).

Digital technologies make information dissemination easy and fast, thereby providing convenient services to tourists, and this is consistent with findings advanced by Xue, 2021, who holds that the digital space has since become a marketplace for many. Through these affordable and easy-to-operate digital technologies, they have enhanced market expansion for CBT, deemed an important remedy to performance, contribution to socio-economic development and sustainability (Maquera et al., 2022). This further enhances social cohesion and promotes sustainability in CBT initiatives.

Conclusion

The study established that as much as rural communities were conversant with various digital technologies such as social media platforms, their benefits, and their roles in day-to-day usage. Despite acknowledging the presence and utilisation of social media platforms, many CBT actors exhibited limited understanding regarding their effective utilisation for business purposes. For instance, they still lack in creating a Facebook business account and creating business content that can draw the attention of prospective tourists. Such limitations hinder socioeconomic development associated with job creation and income generation. The study underscores the important role digital technologies could play in accelerating the amplification of CBT initiatives. Thanks to digital technologies, which are deemed a panacea to many challenges affecting CBT. Through digital technologies, CBT actors can enhance global visibility, thereby creating markets for their products and services. At the same time, elevating these areas toward attractive tourist destination centres. This may as well ultimately lead to enhancing sustainability. However, the effective utilization of digital technologies by CBT remains underrepresented and requires attention. The drive toward promoting and enhancing the global visibility of CBT could lead to job creation and poverty reduction. However, this underscores the need for public-private partnerships and a sound governance system directed towards promoting rural tourism initiatives through training and upskilling of communities. Future studies could consider comparing rural and urban settings regarding the effective utilisation of digital technologies.

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Does Community Recognition (CR) Vital in Improving Sustainable Tourism Development (STD)? Evidence from East African, Kenya.

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Abstract

Sustainable tourism development is a vital phenomenal aspect for countries across Africa, particularly in regions like Kenya, East Africa where socioeconomic challenges are prevalent. This study explores how vital is Community Recognition in achieving Sustainable Tourism Development. Drawing on scholar literatures, case studies, and expert opinions, it analyses how sustainable tourism development can be achieved through community participation and recognition. By promoting inclusivity, participatory decision-making, and respect for diverse cultural communities, East African countries like Kenya can embark on allowing communities to be part of decision-making towards sustainable tourism development. This paper provides insights and recommendations for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders to enhance sustainable tourism development through effective community participation and recognition. From the findings East Africa encompasses a diverse array of nations, cultures, and ecosystems. While the region holds immense potential for tourists' attractions and economic growth and development, it also has its own pitfalls such as low level of income amongst the locals, lack of awareness, high prices of tourism products, lack of promotion, environmental degradation, and social inequality. Achieving sustainable tourism development in East Africa requires innovative approaches that integrate effective sustainable development and cultural democracy into policies and decision-making processes.

***Purpose**:* Community recognition plays a vital role in improving sustainable tourism, it ensures that local residents feel valued, involved, and benefit from tourism activities, however, the main purpose of the study is to investigate how vital is community recognition in Improving Sustainable Tourism Development especially in the case of Kenya East Africa.

Study contribution and Originality/value: This research contributes to the field of sustainable tourism development by addressing the unique role of community recognition and participation in fostering responsible tourism practices, particularly in Kenya and the East African region. Studies have elaborated how community attitudes and involvement assist the growth of sustainable tourism in rural areas, public participation in government policy formulation, decision making as well as the implementation of government programs. How ever very few studies have talked about community recognition (CR) and participation in improving sustainable tourism development (STD)in East Africa, Kenya. This research will be one of its kind that will elaborate on community recognition (CR) and participation in improving Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) in East African, Kenya.

Study design/methodology/approach*:* This research is based on qualitative approach, semi-structured and in-depth questions were prepared to address the main topic. Local communities & indigenous groups such as Community-Based Tourism Enterprises (CBTEs**),** Maasai, Samburu, and other indigenous communities were involved in the study.

Results: The results or the findings of the study indicates that if the local communities are recognized and involved in the process of decision making, it will impact STD positively which will lead to sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Kenya, sustainable development, recognition, communities, participation.

Introduction

Community recognition and participation is very essential in achieving sustainable tourism development, communities generally are more supportive when they are actively engaged in decision making and they perceive positive impacts (Egresi & Kara, 2018). Communities and local groups are more supportive when they are actively involved and perceive positive impacts (Jaafar et al., 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). However, negative consequences such as conflicts, resistance, and feelings of dependency can arise when communities feel excluded or perceive adverse tourism effects (Canavan, 2017). Recognizing tourism as a continuous process, ongoing monitoring of impacts and stakeholder engagement is essential for effective and equitable development (Sharpley, 2014).

Sustainable tourism development has developed as a global imperative, necessitating effective community development and recognition to address the interconnected challenges with tourism stakeholders, social equality, and cultural homogenization need to be implemented through recognition and participation of community groups. Community groups play a critical role in driving sustainable tourism development initiatives worldwide (Northouse, 2018). Through the implementation of policies and strategies that prioritize community involvement, social equity, and economic prosperity, communities can inspire transformative change at various levels of society (United Nations, 2015). Moreover, recognition, participation and democracy, which emphasizes inclusive decision-making and the preservation of cultural diversity, is essential for fostering sustainable development (Rwigema, 2024). By engaging communities in decision-making processes and promoting intercultural dialogue, decision makers and policy makers can ensure that development initiatives are culturally sensitive and responsive to local needs (UNESCO, 2021).

Literature Review

The Concept of Sustainable Tourism Development (STD)

The concept of sustainable Tourism development, as elucidated by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, emphasizes on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 2017). At its core, sustainable tourism development requires community participation and recognition to balancing economic growth with social equity. Transitioning to a regional perspective, sustainable Tourism development in Africa is characterized by unique challenges and opportunities. African in general and Kenyan leaders in particular have increasingly embraced sustainable development agendas, recognizing the importance of community participation, jobs availability leading to poverty alleviation, and social inclusion (UNECA, 2020). Initiatives like the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) exemplify regional efforts to promote economic growth while ensuring sustainability and social equity (African Union, 2015; African Union, 2018). Effective participation by tourism stakeholders in Africa acknowledges the continent's diverse cultural and ecological contexts, striving to harness local knowledge and resources to drive sustainable tourism development.

The existing literature on tourism in Kenya principally focuses on broader national- or regional-level effects, with less attention given to the local, community-level effects of CR and STD, especially in rural settings. While studies have understood and acknowledged the general vital importance of tourism for socioeconomic development, there is a gap in understanding how community participation and recognition will materialize in rural communities, where sustainable tourism is often positioned as an alternative livelihood. For instance, previous research has highlighted the importance of tourism in creating employment, generating income, and fostering cultural preservation, but the specific dynamics in rural settings remain underexplored Rasoolimanesh et al (2017), Sharpley, (2020. **This paper aims to address this gap** by examining community recognition and participation in achieving STD in rural communities regarding the socioeconomic impact of sustainable tourism and exploring how these perceptions impact community involvement and backing for the growth of sustainable tourism.

Community Recognition (CR) and Sustainable Tourism development (STD)

Effective CR plays a central role in driving sustainable development initiatives. Government or state Leaders have the power to inspire change, mobilize resources, and enact policies that promote and social welfare. Transformational leadership, characterized by vision, integrity, and empathy, can galvanize communities towards sustainable development goals (Avolio & Bass, 2014). In East Africa, visionary leaders are essential for implementing strategies that balance economic sustainable development with social justice. state leadership forms the cornerstone of sustainable

development initiatives in East Africa. As noted by (Chepkosgei, et al, 2018), leaders possess the ability to articulate a compelling vision for the future and mobilize resources towards its realization. Moreover, community is instrumental in crafting and implementing policies that promote sustainability across various sectors, including agriculture, energy, and infrastructure (Awotona, 2019). Such leadership fosters accountability and transparency in governance, ensuring that resources are allocated judiciously and utilized for the collective welfare of the populace (UNEP, 2020). Community support and engagement in achieving STD are very vital for achieving sustainable development goals, Jaafar, & Rasoolimanesh, (2015). Community support refers to the behavioral intentions of residents towards supporting tourism development in their locality, influencing cost-level visitors' willingness and satisfaction Fan, et al (2020). Local communities play an important part in reviving, protecting, and sustaining tourist heritage sites, contributing to their socioeconomic gains, quality of life, and effective collaboration Olya, et al (2018). Community participation is essential for successful tourism planning, hence there is a need for them to be recognized and participate in decision making process, Özel, et al (2017) . The theory of community recognition and participation suggests that when a community perceives positive benefits from sustainable tourism development, it will participate in interactions and exchanges with tourists, supporting the development Khalid, S. et al. (2019).

Community Participation in Decision making process.

Empowering-maasai-communities-in-kenya-through-sustainable-tourism-initiatives

Methodology

This research was carried out in Nairobi, Kenya, the research targeted tourism stakeholders, local groups, local communities & indigenous groups such as Community-Based Tourism Enterprises (CBTEs**),** Maasai, Samburu, and other indigenous communities were involved in the study. This population was selected due to the proximity of the participants, which they are directly exposed to tourism activities and potential future developments in sustainable tourism. 10 were local groups, 10 were Community-Based Tourism Enterprises making a total of 20 respondents. 8 men and 12 women, ages 18 to 34, with a variety of experiences made up this group.

Results

According to the results, the majority of individuals in the community view STD as a means to improve their livelihood, they want to feel a sense of belonging by being recognized and being involved in the decision-making process, which will enhance tourism positively.

"Tourism has brought opportunities for our community, and there is a sense of pride in showcasing our beautiful culture and wildlife through sustainable tourism development programs. "Sustainable Tourism development has impacted this area positively; we have improved infrastructure and job opportunities. On the negative side, our original natural environment is slowly disappearing"

"I rarely attend meetings to discuss local tourism. I believe that even if we participate in such forums and meetings, our opinions and our community's voice are never heard." "Forums are a great way to express opinions about local tourism development. We are willing to actively engage in these discussions and attend meetings only when we feel we are included in the conversation about tourism in our area."

The results revealed that encouraging insights into residents' attitudes and willingness to engage in various dimensions of tourism development within their community is very essential in achieving sustainable tourism.

"I believe we should all have a say in how tourism develops in our area. Count me in for decision making processes. It is our community and our input matters. I want to actively participate in shaping the direction of our local tourism."

"Being involved in local tourism decision-making is important to me. I have seen other communities' benefit from the active engagement of residents, and I want the same for us. I am open to being part of the discussions that will shape our tourism future."

According to one of the respondence, the communities and the stakeholders does not have a "say" when it comes to decision making. It will be better and preferable if stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process because this will give them some sense of belongings and know that the government cares about them.

Inclusively, these results propose a positive attitude and a strong willingness among residents to actively contribute in countless facets of tourism development, and share long valuable insights into community insights and preferences regarding local tourism initiatives.

Implications.

Community participation and recognition in sustainable tourism have far-reaching social, economic, and environmental implications. These can either be positive (benefits) or negative. (challenges), depending on how effectively communities are engaged in tourism development and involving local communities in tourism creates employment opportunities, fosters communication and collaborative relationships between the locals and the government. The hoteliers/tourism stakeholders can enhance the hotel**s** services by constantly improving services**,** tour guiding, handicrafts, and transport services in other to attraction tourist into their country. Entrepreneurship growth can also be encouraged such as local businesses, eco-lodges, cultural performances, and localcrafts.

Revenue Redistribution & Poverty Reduction: revenue is not fairly distribution, if revenue is fairly distributed there will be need for investments and tourism earnings, reducing economic inequalities and improves livelihood.

Future suggestions and Limitations

The study suggests that to enhance STD, community participation and recognition has to be fostered. it is important for local communities to actively participate in discussions and decision-making related to regional tourism projects. This should be handled by the County administration and tourist partners. Community forums, seminars, and other participatory processes that try to gather opinions and feedback from locals could help achieve this. The advantages of community involvement in tourism-related activities should also be promoted, with a focus on how it influences sustainable tourism development and protects regional culture and history. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) should foster collaboration between the government, businesses, and local communities.

One of the major limitation encounters was Limited Funding – Many communities lack access to capital to invest in sustainable tourism. Unequal Benefit Distribution – Tourism revenues often favor investors and tour operators, with minimal benefits for local residents, there should be equal distribution fund and resources in other to enhance Sustainable tourism development programs.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research sought to establish the connection between residents' and policy makers and their participation and recognition in the community. Community involvement in tourism development activities favorably, as indicated by the data gotten from respondence. However, there is a need for greater community participation to promote active involvement in discussions and decision-making processes related to local tourism development. Hence, encouraging higher levels of community participation may result in improved attitudes and outcomes for local tourism growth projects. In conclusion, sustainable tourism development in East Africa, as it is in Kenya requires a multi-dimensional approach that integrates effective recognition and participation into developing strategies. By embracing tourism stake holders and local communities/groups, fostering cultural inclusivity, and promoting diversity in the tourism industry, East African nations can achieve sustainable tourism development by recognizing and involving local communities in decision making process. It is imperative for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders to collaborate towards building a more resilient and prosperous future for all.

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A comparison of women informal farm entrepreneurs and women informal tourism entrepreneurs in terms of coping strategies

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Abstract

Purpose: This research investigates two cohorts of women informal farm entrepreneurs and women informal tourism entrepreneurs situated in economically disadvantaged rural destinations in Iran in terms of their coping strategies to access different types of resources.

Study design/methodology/approach: On-site interviews were conducted by a trained female interviewer in four villages for an average of 16 days. The qualitative constructivist grounded theory methodology (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006, 2014) guided the procedures throughout this study. A network approach combined with Stones' (2005) Strong Structuration Theory was also applied based on abductive reasoning (Oliver, 2012) to formulate theoretical interpretations and assumptions.

Results: The network-based model developed in this study aptly captures the dynamic nature of entrepreneurs. The model also suggests that venturing efforts and activities tend to evolve from an informal to formal situation as entrepreneurs transition from necessity-driven to opportunity-driven entrepreneurship.

Originality/value: While most studies assume that positions of informal entrepreneurs do not usually change over time, this study emphasizes that women entrepreneurs seek to enhance their entrepreneurial activities either within the informal economy (through horizontal ties) or on the path to the formal economy (through vertical ties).

Keywords: Informal women entrepreneurship, Coping strategies, Constructivist grounded theory.

Introduction

Faced with limited access to collateral and financial support from traditional banking institutions, informal entrepreneurs, particularly women, establish social networks that encompass both formal and informal relationships with local and non-local individuals, including microfinance social enterprises (MSEs), friends, relatives, and families (Lindvert et al., 2017). These networks serve as crucial avenues through which these entrepreneurs can access the resources necessary for the viability and improvement of their businesses. Such actions are referred to as 'network resource acquisition' (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

The dynamics of social networks used by subsistence tourism women entrepreneurs in emerging disadvantaged rural Islamic destinations to acquire resources for businesses development, along with individual and group-level disparities, have been largely neglected in the extant literature. Furthermore, while past studies have focused on either the formal or informal economy, to the best of our knowledge, none have investigated the intersection of formal and informal economies in emerging rural tourism destinations.

This study, therefore, examines the complexities, interdependencies, and complementary relationships between MSEs and two local groups of women informal entrepreneurs in four poor rural areas in the setting of Iran: women informal farm entrepreneurs and women informal tourism entrepreneurs (hereafter farm group and tourism group). The study's main research question is:

RQ: Do the two groups of farm and tourism entrepreneurs manage to deal differently with local social systems to acquire resources for developing their informal businesses? If so, how?

The response to this research question contributes to the literature on whether and how different groups of women informal entrepreneurs cope with patriarchal social systems remains. The study's significance lies in the comparison of two groups of informal entrepreneurs, employing a combined network approach with Strong Structuration Theory (Stones, 2005) to shed light on how diverse women in disadvantaged rural destinations manage social constraints to develop their micro-businesses in particular and resilience capacity in general.

Methodology

On-site interviews were conducted by a trained female interviewer in four villages for an average of 16 days from April 16 to June 20, 2022. The interview questions were framed around the five components of strong structuration theory (internal and external structures, active agency, and outcomes) utilizing measurement scales from Sirmon and Hitt (2003) and Jiang et al. (2018) that were subsequently modified for relevance. The interviewees were asked about the resources they received from their network actors, the social ties to acquire these resources, and the impact of local norms and traditions on their businesses. For example, "How do you see the impact of local cultural and social traditions on your business growth?", "Can you elaborate on who you consider the most influential individuals such as family members, close friends, neighbors or others in contributing to the growth or decline of your business?" Notably, SST mainly contributes to understanding how individuals' internal structures, such as ways of thinking, behaviors, motives, and desires (i.e., 'conduct analysis') are associated with external structures such as a social environment that contains both enabling and constraining factors (i.e., 'context analysis').

The qualitative constructivist grounded theory methodology (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006, 2014) guided the procedures throughout this study. CGT was in particular chosen to conduct an inductive analysis of interview transcripts and subsequently, to abductively develop a substantive theoretical model (Oliver, 2012). Grounded in naturalistic inquiry, CGT is deeply 'grounded' in the participants' own expressions, viewpoints, and experiences (Charmaz, 2014). Diverging from classic grounded theory, which adheres to a more positivistic perspective and stringent guidelines (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), this interpretive methodology acknowledges the presence of 'multiple socially constructed realities' and contextually grounded knowledge (Charmaz, 2014). Rather than asserting an objective and universally applicable theory, the primary goal of CGT is to generate interpretative understandings or narratives of a less-explored social phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014). In essence, our methodological approach adheres to the core principles of CGT, allowing theory to emerge organically from the data and contributing to a nuanced understanding of women informal entrepreneurs.

Two researchers independently analyzed the transcripts of the two groups of interviewees (agents). In this respect, MAXQDA software and an initial, focused, and theoretical coding procedure were applied (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). Rather than strictly adhering to a coding technique advocated by classic grounded theory, a flexible coding approach was embraced to accommodate the dynamic, interactive, and open-ended nature of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014). During the initial coding phase, transcripts were dissected into discrete parts and coded line-by-line to stay grounded in the experiences of female participants. Subsequently, a focused coding approach was employed to select the most prominent and recurrent codes, synthesizing more extensive data segments (Charmaz, 2014). Aggregate features of the two groups were identified and theoretically categorized during this phase. During theoretical coding, we identified different distinctive and similar mechanisms employed by members of the two groups to address poverty and progress along the opportunity-necessity continuum. Importantly, at this stage, and when the categories emerged inductively, we employed a combined network approach incorporating SST based on abductive reasoning (Oliver, 2012) to formulate theoretical interpretations and assumptions.

Results

Characteristics of the samples

The farm group tended to be older on average, with an average age of 38.85 compared to the tourism group's average of 36.05. Regarding education levels, the tourism group appeared to be more educated. Of the 34 interviewees in the tourism group (vs. 37 in the other group), 67.65% (vs. 54.05%), 20.59% (vs. 35.13%), 8.82% (vs. 5.41%), and 2.94% (vs. 5.41%) had a high school diploma, followed by elementary school's or below, bachelor's, and master's degrees, respectively. The micro-businesses of informal tourism entrepreneurs encompassed various activities, including the production and sale of products such as handicrafts, home-cooked foods, organic fruits/vegetables, and clothing on the street. Additionally, these entrepreneurs engaged in renting houses, offering independent local tours, and guiding tours for travel agencies. On average, they reported being involved in their micro-businesses for 4.3 years, with durations ranging from one month to 10 years. In contrast, farmers in the study had an average agricultural experience of 7.5 years, with individual experiences ranging from one to 15 years.

The interviews revealed that many members of both groups engaged in resource exchange and reciprocity processes within horizontal network structures. These practices enhanced the effectiveness of their micro-business initiatives and allowed for more cost-effective management. The range of exchanged resources was quite diverse, including plant seeds, knowledge (e.g., for planting), collaborative efforts in harvesting and transporting crops (labor), and agricultural tools and machinery (e.g., tractors) for the farm group. Similarly, for the tourism group resources included cooperation as vendors of products (labor), catering items, handicraft materials, food ingredients, and knowledge (e.g., for producing different handicrafts).

Theoretical model

The categories emerging from the CGT analysis for the farm group include: (1) preserving external structures, (2) allegiant internal structures, (3) horizontal social ties, (4) vertical social ties, and (5) entrepreneurial orientation. Correspondingly, the categories for the tourism group comprise: (1) challenging external structures, (2) critical internal structures, (3) horizontal social ties, (4) vertical social ties, and (5) entrepreneurial orientation. While three of the categories are similar between the groups, with different qualities, the farm group primarily aims to preserve prevailing contextual social norms and rules, whereas the tourism group actively challenges these norms and rules. Moreover, individuals within the farm group predominantly exhibit allegiant internal structures, indicating a general inclination toward adherence and conformity. Conversely, members of the tourism group generally possess critical internal structures regarding their social context.

The theoretical model, illustrated in Figure 1, encapsulates the interplay between the two groups' active agents, internal and external structures, within a rural context. The upper part of the model depicts the different propensities of agents to preserve or challenge external structures, while the lower part represents the continuum between necessity-driven and opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. Although both groups are largely considered necessity-driven entrepreneurs, more members of the tourism group exhibit characteristics that make them inclined toward opportunity-driven entrepreneurship.

The model suggests that the farm group relies more on a small group of family members, relatives, and neighbors (strong horizontal ties) for business advice or resources, as indicated by the left side of the continuum. In contrast, the tourism group tends to have both horizontal (intimate friends, local friends of friends) and vertical networks (e.g., MSEs, and external friends of friends), being less dependent on family links to identify entrepreneurial opportunities and acquire resources, shown by the right side of the continuum.

Vertical ties allow entrepreneurs to establish connections with influential individuals, such as investment enterprises and MSEs, operating in both the formal and informal sectors, leading to more accessible resources like business information and advice. The on-site observations and interviews consistently revealed that, even though MSEs offer resource acquisition opportunities for both groups, tourism entrepreneurs demonstrate a greater effort and interest in availing them. Such services also facilitate their gradual employment of friends and relatives as labor.

According to the interview results, individualistic factors such as ambition, autonomy, diligence, perseverance, cooperation, competition, and reciprocity contribute to the two groups' effective navigation of contextual barriers, collectively encapsulated in the concept of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) (i.e., the fifth category). EO is defined as "the methods, dispositions, practices, and decision-making styles managers use to act entrepreneurially" (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, p. 136).

Women informal entrepreneurs with high EO engage in new ideas, processes, and experiments, including learning behaviors and network resource acquisition through maximizing the positive effects of social capital (i.e., innovativeness). They exhibit bold behaviors, such as disregarding some local social norms, tolerating uncertainty in collaboration, and borrowing money from emerging networks (e.g., MSEs) with a high risk of failure due to the probability of inadequate demand for their products (risk-taking). Furthermore, they proactively initiate networking initiatives and seek out rare micro-entrepreneurial opportunities and resources by employing 'step-ahead' tactics within their community (i.e., proactiveness). These features collectively drive a greater inclination toward vertical and weak social ties to fulfill entrepreneurial ambitions. Thus, the value of EO for generating significant outcomes (e.g., acquiring resources) likely varies among segments of women, depending on the nature of their internal structures (general-dispositional traits and conjuncturally-specific knowledge) and their interplays with external structures.

Conclusion

Theoretical contributions

The developed model in this study indicates entrepreneurial dualism among women informal bricolage entrepreneurs when facing sociocultural and financial constraints. Women entrepreneurs in impoverished rural areas may venture into establishing micro-scale businesses; however, they do not uniformly adhere to local male and female stereotypes while developing their enterprises. While previous studies have highlighted entrepreneurial dualism between the formal and informal sectors (Shehryar Shahid et al., 2020) and between men and women (Chapelle, 2012), to the authors' knowledge, this is the first study reporting dualism concerning social capital and the extent of conformity to local social norms and values in the context of subsistence women entrepreneurs. This corresponds to the research question that the two groups of farm and tourism entrepreneurs manage to deal differently with local social systems to obtain resources for the development of their informal businesses.

The application of SST provided a robust perspective to fill the above research gap (i.e., heterogeneity and dualism across groups in terms of social capital) and to interpret the findings. High levels of conformity to social and religious norms were found to lead to more positive psychological effects of strong horizontal social ties among farm entrepreneurs than among tourism entrepreneurs. On the other hand, lower conformity among tourism entrepreneurs leads to a preference for a combination of weak horizontal and vertical social ties while avoiding the negative effects of strong horizontal ties.

It is noteworthy that members of the farm group, in general, do not view entrepreneurship as a means of emancipation, as they do not perceive local traditions and norms as patriarchal. Conversely, lower levels of conformity predominantly lead members of the tourism group to prefer a thoughtful combination of weak horizontal and vertical social ties while actively avoiding the negative effects associated with strong horizontal social ties. These findings underscore the idea that various dimensions of social capital and the emancipatory role of entrepreneurship may be perceived with contingent values by different groups within the same context.

This study's model extends the framework of opportunity-necessity entrepreneurship continuum. Unlike previous studies focusing on extreme ends of the continuum (Fuentelsaz et al., 2015), this work explores communities with challenging conditions yet with characteristics of voluntary recognition of opportunity and motivation for independence and emancipation in tourism.

Managerial contributions

The complementary effects of vertical and horizontal business networks serve as sources of resilience for tourism entrepreneurs. Unlike informal farm entrepreneurs, informal tourism entrepreneurs are less bound by local social norms, allowing them to expand their business interactions beyond traditional limitations. Nonetheless, this characteristic puts their social image and security at risk, challenging significant others' thoughts, beliefs, and values. This highlights the need for policymakers and social enterprises, such as MSEs, to address patriarchal beliefs and obligations through long-term educational programs, mitigating the potential negative impact of social capital for informal women tourism entrepreneurs.

Moreover, the study reveals that different general dispositional traits and conjuncturally-specific knowledge (i.e., internal structures), along with their interactions with local norms and resources (i.e., external resources), lead to different strategies in network resource acquisition among informal entrepreneurs. For example, informal tourism entrepreneurs, more than the farm group, recognize weak horizontal and vertical ties as means of emancipation from gender restrictions. This influences their progression along the opportunity-necessity continuum. The results emphasize the need for tailored strategies and policies to empower various groups of subsistence women entrepreneurs, considering their unique characteristics even within small rural regions.

Limitations and future research

Firstly, the model was developed based on a male-dominated, poor rural region in a developing Islamic country. While the context-specific nature of the model offers insights into gendered traditions and norms, caution is advised in generalizing findings on social capital to different societies, as diverse communities may require varied combinations of social capital for social and economic development.

Secondly, the assessment of the impact of MSEs in poverty alleviation was qualitative in nature. Future research is encouraged to adopt a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between MSE performance in poverty alleviation and individual or society-level disparities in social capital dimensions, considering objective financial and social determinants.

Finally, due to inaccessibility to locals and privacy concerns in a traditional rural context, the study was limited in approaching interviewees in multiple phases over an extended period. Future research could consider longitudinal studies as a technique to explore the trajectories of individual interviewees or different respondent groups along the opportunity-necessity entrepreneurship continuum.

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Women's Entrepreneurial Resilience from the Perspective of Small-Sized Tourism Businesses

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Abstract

Purpose: Our proposed research aims to investigate the entrepreneurial resilience of women in different sectors of the tourism industry specifically small businesses.

Study design/methodology/approach: The overall framework of this proposed research is based on an exploratory and cross-sectional design following a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach.

Originality/value: There is a significant research gap in the literature on how women-led small businesses actively contribute to building resilience. This research will offer an interdisciplinary view of entrepreneurship, gender, and resilience, fulfilling the gap by analyzing how female entrepreneurs integrate sustainable business practices, adapt to ecological challenges, and foster resilience in their communities. Furthermore, our study can encourage a shift in focus from entrepreneurial ecosystems toward more inclusive business models, where women are recognized as key agents of social change.

Keywords: Women's Entrepreneurship, Resilience, Sustainable Business

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has been a key factor for economic growth and expansion. It is a human activity focused on recognizing, altering, and benefiting from issues whose determination create economic and social value (Dean, 2007). Sustainable entrepreneurship refers to business strategies that align financial success with positive impacts on society and the environment (Dean, 2007). It is crucial for national economies since it allows for the adoption of a range of eco-friendly practices within businesses, thus creating favorable conditions for sustainable economic growth.

Shifting societal expectations, climate change, and the transition towards ecological sustainability are prompting businesses to adjust their operations to integrate social and environmental considerations (Hechavarría, 2016). Nonetheless, some businesses are fundamentally sustainable and flourish in the existing economy, guided by sustainable entrepreneurs who recognize opportunities amid social and environmental challenges.

The number of female entrepreneurs has steadily grown all over the world in all societies, although women's participation in entrepreneurship is lower than men and it is commonly believed that men have greater entrepreneurial intentions than women (Poggesi, Mari, & De Vita, 2016). Intensifying recognition of how society shapes gender roles, which negatively impacts women's entrepreneurial efforts, has encouraged scholars to adopt a gendered review to confront deeply rooted and oversimplified narrow-mindedness regarding women and their businesses (Shinnar, Giacomin, & Janssen, 2012). Cultural values can influence the formation of societal gender roles and stereotypes regarding which occupations are deemed suitable for men or women. These gender role stereotypes contribute to the classification of jobs as either primarily feminine or masculine.

Psychological resilience is another key factor in entrepreneurship, and it varies between males and female entrepreneurs. Psychological resilience refers to a person's capacity to stay strong during adverse circumstances and to withstand those challenging situations (Rezaei-Moghaddam, Badzaban, & Fatemi, 2023).

This paper's conceptual framework integrates key theories of entrepreneurship, resilience, and gender dynamics to examine how female entrepreneurs develop sustainable businesses in response to socio-environmental challenges.

The relationships between these variables can be defined as follows:

- Women's entrepreneurship is influenced by both psychological and environmental resilience.
- Psychological resilience enables female entrepreneurs to overcome gender-based challenges and economic constraints.
- Sustainable business practices contribute to the economic performance of women-led enterprises.
- Economic performance further reinforces entrepreneurial resilience, creating a cyclical effect.

Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Psychological resilience positively influences the entrepreneurial success of women in the tourism sector.

H2: Sustainable business practices mediate the relationship between environmental resilience and economic performance.

H3: The economic performance of women entrepreneurs reinforces their resilience and long-term sustainability in the industry.

By testing these hypotheses, this research aims to provide empirical insights into the role of resilience in fostering sustainable entrepreneurship among women in Iran's tourism industry and also to improve and confirm previous frameworks.

RQ: What role does environmental resilience play in shaping sustainable entrepreneurship among women in Iran?

Methodology

In this research we will use a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Since our research aims to explore the relationship between women's entrepreneurship, resilience, and sustainability, an exploratory cross-sectional approach will provide insights at a single point in time. Mixed-Methods Approach will allow us to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, giving a comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurial resilience. A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to ensure the inclusion of women entrepreneurs with experience in sustainable business practices.

Successful women entrepreneurs will be selected in the tourism sector and analyze their strategies, business models, and resilience-building approaches. Data will be collected through observations, interviews, and secondary sources. Semi-Structured Interviews will be conducted in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector to understand their experiences, challenges, and resilience strategies (At least 15 – 30 female entrepreneurs). We will also use thematic analysis to identify key themes related to resilience, gender roles, and sustainability. Statistical methods, including regression analysis and correlation tests, will be applied to analyze the relationships between entrepreneurship and environmental resilience.

Conclusion

This study will attempt to enhance the current discourse around women's entrepreneurship by providing a comprehensive insight into the distinct challenges and opportunities facing women entrepreneurs in Iran. It will examine the social, cultural, and economic barriers that women face, along with potential avenues for growth and success in the entrepreneurial sector. By identifying these elements, the research provides significant recommendations for policymakers and NGOs, facilitating the development and implementation of targeted strategies aimed at supporting and empowering women entrepreneurs.

The results of this study can play an important role in informing policies that specifically address the needs of women in business, thereby ensuring their meaningful participation in the economy. Such policies may include promoting gender-sensitive frameworks, improving access to finance, and providing applicable skill development initiatives to equip women with the necessary tools to succeed in various industries. By focusing on these fundamental areas, a more comprehensive environment can be promoted that not only encourages women's entrepreneurship, but also contributes to greater economic growth and sustainability. Eventually, the research seeks to provide practical solutions that enhance the long-term success and resilience of women entrepreneurs both within Iran and other parts of the world.

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Outcomes of increased participation in protected area tourism policy making

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the paper is to investigate the extent to which greater democratization in decision-making impacts the quality of governance in protected area tourism. The study is based on a case study of the Batanes Protected Landscapes and Seascapes in the Philippines.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study reviewed quantitative and qualitative data from a longitudinal research program focused on monitoring the sustainability of tourism in the islands. Part of the research is the investigation of Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) resolutions issued from 2014 to 2023. The period covers the time before and after the management board was expanded in 2018. Interviews were also conducted with key members of the management board, as well as government leaders and industry players. The data collected were subjected to quantitative and qualitative data analysis using SPSS and NVIVO, respectively.

Results: Findings reveal that the expansion in the membership of the PAMB is viewed positively as it has allowed greater representation and has provided some check and balance. On the other hand, it has been observed that the membership of more politicians in the board has led to the increased weight for politics, rather than rational-technical bases, in the decisions. Coupled with external developments such as tourism growth, this has resulted in the PA producing more resolutions that enhance socio-economic activities (such as tourism) rather than prioritize biophysical protection and improve governance, a situation that is changing how PA and tourism sustainability issues are discussed in the province.

Originality/value: The paper contributes to the wider discussion on the value of participatory governance in decision-making and shows that it may lead to mixed results particularly if some actors, such as state actors, dominate the process.

Keywords protected area tourism, Batanes, Philippines, participatory governance

Introduction

Participatory governance is seen as an important factor in improving quality in tourism governance context. The participation of various stakeholders is argued to foster commitment, synergies and collaboration among key actors and communities towards tourism development (Bua & Bussu, 2021; Bichler, 2021). Even in contexts outside of tourism, for example, protected areas, stakeholder participation is seen as paramount (Slocum, Wiltshier & Read, 2022). The significance of this factor is acknowledged by broader policy process theories such as advocacy coalitions framework and policy network approaches, where sub-system communities and stakeholders are central elements (Weible, Fischer & Ingold, 2024).

However, as some scholars argue, a discursive space given to other stakeholders including community actors result in "wicked problems" even when the space is meant to provide and clarify directions (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). This is the situation presented by this paper. As the paper shows, increased participation does not automatically lead to better outcomes for the community. Rather, intractable issues may ensue and problems can continue to fester, thus affecting ultimately tourism outcomes.

The context of the paper is the Batanes Landscapes and Seascapes (BPLS) in the Philippines, the only province that is wholly declared as a protected area (PA) unlike any other province in the country where only parts are proclaimed. In addition, the province is an ancestral domain area, thus creating a perfect brew for policy interaction between indigenous peoples and environmental conservation advocates.

Serving as the highest policy-making body in the islands is the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB). In 2018, governance of PAs and PAMBs in the country was expanded with the inclusion of more representatives in the board. Thus, appointed ex-officio members were the regional director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, governor of the province, a senator, the district representative, mayor(s) of local government units encompassed by the PA, *barangay* (village) chairpersons, joined by regional directors of other line agencies such as agriculture, economic development, science and technology, police, and national defense. Other PAMB members include NGO/PO representative; at least 1 but not more than 3 indigenous people's representative, 1 from the academe, and 1 from the private sector.

It is obvious that where the PA is composed of several political units such as municipalities and barangays, politicians will form a significant group, much more than other interest groups or stakeholders. Such is the case for BPLS where the current composition of the PAMB is dominated by politicians. What has been the impact of the increased representation?

Methods

Analysis of data from a much wider research program to monitor the sustainability of tourism in the islands provides some insights into this question. This research program started in 2019 and is focused on monitoring sustainability issues such as governance, economic benefits, solid waste, wastewater and other issues totaling 11 following the framework of the UNWTO International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories, where the province became an affiliate in 2023. Part of the research is the investigation of PAMB resolutions issued from 2014 to 2023. The period covers the time before and after the management board was expanded in 2018. Interviews were also conducted with key members of the management board, as well as government leaders and industry players. The data collected were subjected to quantitative and qualitative data analysis using SPSS and NVIVO, respectively.

Results

Findings reveal that the expansion in the membership of the PAMB is viewed positively as it has allowed greater representation and has provided some check and balance. For example, the presence of IP representatives in the management board is looked upon as a step in the right direction, so that PAMB priorities can be aligned to the rights and aspirations of the indigenous community. Tourism's permanent representative to the board, originally not part of the board, has only recently been added, ensuring that the interest of the sector is served.

On the other hand, it has been observed that the membership of more politicians in the board has led to the increased weight of politics, rather than rational-technical bases, in the decisions. Interviewees assert that the political ambition of some members contrast with the overall conservation agenda of the board. Consequently, the board has found itself identifying mitigating strategies instead of evaluating projects for clearance, particularly those coming from local government officials representing the interests of their constituents. Mostly, these projects pertain to addressing socio-economic goals of PAs. Coupled with external developments such as tourism growth, this has resulted in the PA producing more resolutions that enhance socio-economic conditions (such as tourism) rather than prioritize biophysical protection and improve governance, a situation that is changing how PA and tourism sustainability issues are discussed in the province, with some calling for more relaxation of strict PA rules, to allow, for example, greater quarrying of indigenous materials – a particularly intractable issue between cultural heritage protection and environmental conservation groups.

Conclusion

This paper was concerned with investigating the extent to which greater democratization in decision-making impacts the quality of governance in protected area tourism. It was observed that increased participation in decision making leads to a broadening of discussions particularly for issues represented by sectoral representatives. Nonetheless, the process may be dominated by state actors, particularly if the institutional arrangement was so designed to enhance their participation. The result is that political players (particularly those purported to represent the people) and their values tend to reign it over other actors. One outcome of this process, as shown in the case study, is that the discourse as far as PA and sustainability could change. Where PAs in the past were mainly set up to conserve resources, the economic imperative as driven by political-economic actors who dominate representation in decision-making, is strongly taking root. Will the trend continue, so that PAs allow more economic activities particularly as tourism recovers from the pandemic? Or will increased participation from civil society shepherd the PA back to its original roots? These are important questions and how tourism development is ultimately affected by participatory processes is definitely an agenda for future research. From a practical point of view, efforts must be exerted by civil society to counterbalance the hegemony of state actors, perhaps by banding together into a network, and pushing more for their interests to be included in the agenda of the board. In this way, governance outcomes are not skewed against them; rather, be much more equitable and inclusive.

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"Hey! You there... Spare me some change, will ya?": Carnival street Blocs and their relationship with Stakeholders from a Hospitality Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose: To analyze, from a hospitality perspective, the strategies used by the coordination of street carnival blocs to acquire financial sponsorship from the stakeholders interested in the realization of the carnival event.

Study design/methodology/approach: A qualitative and exploratory study, supported by asymmetric observation techniques and a semi-structured interview script applied to street carnival bloc coordinators in the city of Belo Horizonte-MG/Brazil. The data treatment was carried out using the software MAXQDA and content analysis.

Results: When comparing the theory related to vertical and horizontal identity with the rituals of hospitality, the interviewees from the four blocs provided information demonstrating the transposition of identities and their legitimation, as well as the exercise of hospitality among stakeholders.

Originality/value: Sponsorships were obtained through hospitable relations - informal donations - and, currently, contracts and public notices defined by the state and municipal governments and private companies have joined the context, establishing norms and rules so that the street carnival bloc, in its informality, has access to financial benefits.

Keywords Carnaval; Street Carnival Blocs; Hospitality in Bussiness; Strategic Stakeholder Management.

Introduction

In 2024, the carnival in Belo Horizonte-MG/Brazil received investments amounting to 8.5 million from the state government of Minas Gerais and the municipality's city hall, ensuring proper infrastructure for the street block parades. Additionally, direct sponsorships and resources from the State Culture Incentive Law were provided. The goal was to attract tourists, relying on the hospitality of the local population and its gastronomy, reinforcing the state as one of the main carnival destinations in Brazil. Currently, the carnival in Belo Horizonte-MG/Brazil is considered the third-best in Brazil, bringing together approximately 4 million people during the four official days of celebration, besides its 2 million residents. This achievement has been reached in just 12 years (Agência Minas, 2024).

The organizers of the street carnival blocks could not have imagined the proportions the carnival of Belo Horizonte would achieve, becoming an event that moves millions of reais, promotes temporary jobs in hospitality, restaurants, public transportation – urban, road, and air –, artists in all expressions, merchants, and service providers from various sectors. This occurs in the initial phase of the event, as many activities are carried out throughout the year to prepare the blocks for parading on the city's streets.

Several aspects could be discussed as the management of a street carnival block involves topics that deserve deeper exploration in other disciplines. However, this article focuses on the strategies employed by coordinators to obtain financial support to enable the parades during the event's four days and the incorporation of hospitality into business relationships aimed at ensuring safety, the physical environment, transportation, accessibility, personal behavior, and many other criteria. In organizations, hospitality has been recognized as spaces for creating meaning, facilitating commercial relations based on ethics, and addressing important aspects beyond welcoming guests (Schänzel, Brocx & Sadaraka, 2014; Cockburn-Wootten & Brewis, 2014).

From this perspective, the following question was raised: What strategies, from the hospitality perspective, are used by the coordinators of street carnival blocks to secure financial sponsorship for the carnival parades in Belo Horizonte-MG/Brazil? Based on this guiding question, the goal is to analyze, from the hospitality perspective, the strategies employed by the coordinations of street carnival blocks to obtain financial sponsorship from stakeholders interested in making the carnival event happen. In this article, the term stakeholders is defined by Freeman, Harrison, and Wicks (2007).

To address the issue and achieve the article's objective, it relied on the theory of hospitality with an emphasis on business, aligning with discussions on: open governance system proposals advocated by Filatóchev, Aguilera, and Wright (2020) considering innovation in organizational management; the pursuit of organizational identity from the social actor's perspective, aiming at legitimizing the organization in vertical and horizontal relations established with its audience and collaborators (King, Felin & Whetten, 2010); and stakeholder management strategies theorized by Freeman (2023) to define the Stakeholder Management Capacity of these organizations.

Hospitality in business and governance

In commercial relationships, hospitality is managed with a focus on safety, physical environment, transportation, accessibility, personal behavior, and many other aspects. In organizations, it is increasingly being recognized as a space for meaning-making, facilitating commercial relationships based on ethics and communication, addressing significant issues such as inclusion, exclusion, and surveillance (Schänzel et al., 2014; Cockburn-Wootten & Brewis, 2014).

In the realm of business hospitality, Boudou (2014) critiques Gideon Baker's work, Hospitality and World Politics, published in 2013, for perceived distortions in the concept of hospitality: seeing it as a relationship of symbolic power; using it as a management tool for negotiating entry and exit; and proposing a law of hospitality with duties and rights. Despite the critique, it is worth considering the broad scope of hospitality to identify diverse issues, offering deeper reflection on current themes. In this context, the relationships established between organizations and stakeholders merit attention in discussions regarding hospitality in the business domain.

The dialogue between organizations and stakeholders is generally based on contractual obligations, which still reflects the host and guest positions, implied in the exchange relationship, even if monetary. This necessitates understanding the concept of another's territory, which must be respected for the realization of a hospitable and reciprocal encounter (Souza, 2010). The author highlights efforts to make the relationship and commercial environment more hospitable but stresses the need for behavioral changes in individuals, whether hosts or guests. Such behavioral changes, rooted in human attributes, enable attitudes like otherness, mutual knowledge encouragement, and, why not, the creation of bonds that go beyond a commercial encounter.

In this context, the concept of open governance systems is introduced, driven by the emergence of new business models, particularly those focused on well-being, culture, and socio-environmental responsibility grounded in ethics, while not disregarding value delivery to investors. Fonseca and Carnicelli (2021), Filatotchev et al. (2020), and Klein, Mahoney, Mcgahan, and Pitelis (2019) highlight the utility of open governance systems in times of innovation and technology, given their speed in adapting to organizational and social changes and providing strategic responses to stakeholder pressures and demands. Issues of efficiency and effectiveness are analyzed from a broader perspective, moving beyond narrow management definitions and creating space for learning.

Rules and contracts are part of business engagements, even when supported by hospitality relationships. Businesses involving domains considered public-use can influence governance or corporate strategy. Klein et al. (2019, p.12) explain that "public-use resources are subsets of public goods," which can lead to rivalry between what is public and private during consumption. However, one does not exclude the other, with conflicts resolved by creating valuable assets that become public domain, benefiting all stakeholders and the community. The authors emphasize that using common resources requires organizations to understand their organizational structure, culture, reputation, and capacity to attract stakeholders and, subsequently, develop their governance framework.

In this regard, the importance of new business models and open governance systems must be considered, as they align with recent discussions on regenerative hospitality by promoting innovations and transformations through management practices and commercial and personal relationships that contribute to the social and environmental system as a whole (Inversini et al., 2024; Araneda, 2017). However, despite the current literature on regenerative hospitality still focusing on hotel or tourism establishments, in this study's context, its focus is on business relationships with a perspective of genuine and hospitable encounters between people, aiming for partnerships with positive outcomes through knowledge exchange for all actors involved. Moreover, regenerative hospitality contributes to strengthening local identities and organizations, being understood as a tool for social transformation (Araneda, 2025).

Hospitality, Organizations and Stakeholders

For a long time, organizations were understood as social actors, both in the scope of individuals and legal entities, based on the theoretical analysis of human behavior. However, organizations are composed of individuals who share the same values that guide a given environment. From the perspective of social actors, Haslam, Cornelissen, and Werner (2017) consider that the goal focuses on creating an organizational identity for external legitimacy, built through relationships established with its audience and collaborators, whether through contracts or encounters facilitated by its social network. Understood in this way, the explanation about the vertical identification of actors in the social context by King et al. (2010) regarding the interaction of individuals, organizations, and the State makes sense. It is up to the State to regulate these interactions and to the individuals and organizations to format regulatory actions as much as possible.

In terms of horizontal identification, organizations take on two forms of social entities: communities and the market, also regulated by the State, but they are not always considered as actors, despite sharing the same cultural values. The main difference between organizations and the community and the market lies in their sovereignty, responsibility, and intentionality, which become a conceptual distinction in relation to the other two. In the early stages of an organization, it presents similarities in satisfying monetary needs and sharing objectives of the market and community, and even when established, it can act in a hybrid manner through overlap, particularly with the market. However, at some point in its process, the organization acquires the ability for self-governance, a distinct and independent vision, differentiating itself from the market (King et al., 2010).

Among the various denominations and definitions of social actors, the term "stakeholders" is adopted here, defined by Freeman, Harrison, and Wicks (2007) as individuals or groups who have the ability to influence an organization or who may be affected by it. They highlight the existence of primary stakeholders, investors, employees, suppliers, customers, and the community, due to their continuous interest and responsibility for the organization's survival, and secondary stakeholders, government, media, competition, consumer advocacy groups, and interest groups, who, even though not directly involved with the organization, can influence and interfere in its daily routine.

For Freeman (2023), having an expanded notion of who the stakeholders are, even those considered illegitimate, but who, due to differing beliefs and values, can affect the organization's goals. To this end, the author proposes adopting techniques and procedures for their management, defined at three levels: level 1: in a rational aspect, to know and understand who the stakeholders of the organization are and what their objectives in relation to it are; level 2: to know the implicit or explicit organizational management processes used to manage the organization's relationships with its stakeholders and whether they fit into the Rational Stakeholder Map; and level 3: to understand how transactions, negotiations, and relationships between the organization and its stakeholders occur and whether they are pertinent to the Stakeholder Map and the organizational model adopted.

These three levels favor the analysis of the Stakeholder Management Capacity of a given organization. An organization that understands its map, knows all interested parties, and adopts continuous procedures considering the participation of all groups that may participate or interfere in its daily routine maintains the necessary balance to achieve its goals, being considered to have High Stakeholder Management Capacity. In contrast, organizations that do not know their stakeholders, do not have management and negotiation procedures, are considered to have Low Stakeholder Management Capacity (Freeman, 2023).

From the perspective of stakeholder theory, collectivity; individuals, groups, organizations, and cities, establishes various modes of relationships through institutional interaction that occurs in the same space designated to promote well-being and safety. It opens the same space for rituals of hospitality, culture, and ethics, consequently enabling sociability founded on accessibility, legitimacy, and identity construction. It is in this context that the relationships between host and guest in the procedures proposed by stakeholder theory are perceived; the organization and all those who are affected by it or who affect it, where the occupation of each actor's position involved depends on the situation and the moment of the encounter. However, interactions are based on principles of hospitality between organizations and stakeholders, enabling sociability through the participation of all, strengthening, and valuing relationships in community life (Rodrigues & Wada, 2022).

Method

This is a qualitative and exploratory study that includes a semi-structured interview script applied to coordinators of street carnival groups. Data processing was carried out using MAXQDA software for the transcription and coding of the reports. It is emphasized that the coding provided by this software allowed for the separation of excerpts from the reports according to the categories of analysis, and thus does not characterize a quantitative study. Subsequently, content analysis was conducted using inference techniques, based on the teachings of Bardin (1977). To carry out the analysis in this modality, the researcher relied on the asymmetric observation technique, as during the carnival festival period, she actively participated as a reveler, following the parades through the streets of Belo Horizonte. Moraes and Mont'Alvão (2003) explain that this method typically occurs at the beginning of research, usually in a casual manner, which should not be understood to mean that all observations were made in a disorganized way.

It is worth noting that various observation techniques support the analysis of the data obtained through interviews, as the interviewee is not always clearly aware of their behavior or speech, depending on their ability and willingness to provide their account (Klein et al., 2019). Observing the subject in their own environment can reveal contradictions, as well as the influence of their aspirations, culture, and values. Based on this, the categories were predefined: Street Carnival

Groups; Hospitality; Stakeholders. The interviews were conducted between April 26 and May 10, 2024. The research subjects were selected based on accessibility. Contact was made via WhatsApp, where an overview of the subject to be addressed was provided. The interviews were recorded, approximately 50 minutes of recording for each, and conducted both in person and via videoconference. The coordinators of the interviewed groups gave permission for the use of their names as well as the names of the groups they coordinate. The recorded interviews were fully transcribed and analyzed. Table 1 presents the groups that participated in the research.

Table 1: Blocs participating in the research

Street Bloc	**Interviewee**	**Function**	**Number of Members**	**Number of revelers**
Asa de Banana	Pedro	Coordination	5	90.000
Putz Grilla	André	Coordination	2	100.000
Belorinho	Andre	Coordination	2	60.000
Beiço do Wando	Monks	Coordination	5	90.000

Analysis and discussion of results

The analysis and discussion of the data obtained were conducted through the lens of strategic stakeholder management based on the relevance classification presented in this study. Initially, the interviewed groups are introduced.

The Asa de Banana group was founded in 2017, mostly by people who were already part of drumming teams from other groups that were emerging in Belo Horizonte's Carnival. The members of the group shared some aspects they wanted to improve, as well as their love for the two bands being honored: Asa de Águia and Chiclete com Banana. Thus, 19 people, including the interviewee, gathered to found the Asa de Banana group in January 2017. They organized the group in 2017, but the first parade only took place in 2018. Currently, the organization includes five members (Asa de Banana, 2024). It is noted that until 2024, it performed during the pre-Carnival Sunday, attracting approximately 90,000 revelers to the streets of the state capital, but did not participate in parades during the official four days of Carnival. However, starting in 2025, due to its success, it will parade on Carnival Saturday, with the theme "The Song of the City," celebrating the women of Axé Music.

The Beiço do Wando group was founded in 2016 and currently has five members in its organization. With the structure the group has achieved, it requires attention throughout the year: "We like to do things well, and we're always working on it. Seeking partnerships, sponsorships, raising resources." It establishes a schedule that they enjoy following (Beiço do Wando, 2024).

Since its founding, it has always paraded, except during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2024, its theme was "Spread Your Wings," attracting approximately 90,000 revelers singing plenty of "brega" music.

The Belorinho group was founded in 2016. Initially, it started with the name "Banda Pelorinho," performing retro axé music at private events. Later, it was renamed Belorinho and had its first parade in 2017. Currently, the group's overall organization consists of two members, but they rely on a third person for securing sponsorships from private companies. In 2024, the Belorinho group attracted approximately 60,000 revelers to the rhythm of axé from the 1980s.

The Putz Grilla group has two unique characteristics: first, it shares the same coordination as the Belorinho group, and second, it promotes "carnarock," that is, rock music from the 1980s and 1990s in a Carnival rhythm. It was founded in 2018, and its first parade occurred during the 2019 Carnival. In 2024, its parade carried the theme "We're Going to Invade Your Beach," attracting approximately 100,000 revelers to the streets where it performed. It is worth noting that Putz Grilla is not just a Carnival group. In fact, it is a rock band very well-known in Belo Horizonte and the interior of Minas Gerais, with 18.7 thousand followers on Instagram alone and maintaining a loyal audience at its performances.

Street Blocs

In this category, the analysis focused on the internal organization of the carnival groups (known as blocs) with the aim of preparing them to parade during carnival days. Based on the obtained accounts, it was observed that the internal organization of the blocs is beginning to take steps toward a business structure. Out of the four groups interviewed, two have not yet organized themselves in a corporate manner, as noted in the account: "Everything is done as an individual [...], making the contacts. But it's just me. I always take the lead. Like in Putz Grilla, I always take the lead on everything" (Belorinho; Putz Grilla), meaning there is no formation of a legal entity or division of functions.

The interviewee confirms a good partnership with another member in organizing the two blocs, along with the collaboration of another person who assisted in acquiring sponsorships and their excellent relationship with several companies, facilitating the acquisition of resources. Based on this account, it was perceived that hospitality within the business domain helps build spaces that facilitate commercial relations based on ethics and communication (Schänzel et al., 2014; Cockburn-Wootten & Brewis, 2014). Although the group has not yet been formally established as a company, through open governance systems of organizations sponsoring the festival, they manage to obtain enough resources to put the blocs on the streets via hospitality rituals (Araneda, 2025; Klein et al., 2019). In terms of corporate governance, these two blocs are at the beginning stages of new business dimensions, bringing a new product to carnival, rock music, to a public space and event, transforming it into a public good (Fonseca & Carnicelli, 2021; Filatóchev et al., 2020; Klein et al., 2019).

With support from Haslam, Cornelissen, and Werner (2017), it can be considered that both the Belorinho group and the Putz Grilla group, over time, have created an organizational identity based on the career of their coordinator and leader of the rock band bearing the same name as the group. They legitimized themselves externally through relationships established with their audience and collaborators, whether via contracts or facilitated meetings through their social network. Thus, they may serve as examples for King et al. (2010)'s explanation of identification verticality, where it is the State's responsibility to regulate these interactions and, for the individual and organizations, to shape, as much as possible, regulatory actions.

On the other hand, the Asa de Banana group recognized the necessity of legally establishing themselves as a legal entity to facilitate business relations, whether with the government or private initiatives: "What we have is ourselves. We create a MEI [Individual Microentrepreneur] to be able to present it when we need to issue an invoice [...] just to make things easier. And also to participate in tenders." They explain that some companies require the CNPJ [General Registry of Legal Entities], but "others can be done through a CPF [Individual Registry], although the tax discounts are much higher. When you issue an RPA [Self-Employed Payment Receipt], it's much higher indeed." This account illustrates the public domain's interference in corporate governance and the group's management strategy. They discovered that by legalizing their organization, they would have advantages in obtaining financial resources by participating in public notices and streamlining donation processes, as well as attracting investor interest in contributing to a social system based on local culture (Inversini et al., 2024; Klein et al., 2019; Araneda, 2017).

The Beiço do Wando group revealed that this is their first year with a CNPJ. They formed a partnership among the organization's five members and state: "It took us a while to understand [...] this is not a joke [...]. Although the clear intention is fun, bringing joy to people, for us who organize [...] we have to take this seriously." They claimed that before, everything was done as individuals, facing numerous difficulties and obstacles: "Companies told us they could only help with a CNPJ for tax contributions." The legal establishment of their company allowed them to participate in various government tenders and direct sponsorships, "Things that, as individuals, we could barely achieve, honestly [...]. With this account, it was observed that these two blocs are transitioning from vertical to horizontal identification. With the emergence of new business models and the adoption of open governance systems for organizing parades, it was observed that investors require formal rituals to release financial resources by demanding contracts, invoices, and the General Registry of Legal Entities (CNPJ) (Filatóchev et al., 2020). However, open governance systems are utilized, enabling quicker adaptation to organizational and social changes, and offering strategic responses for stakeholders (Fonseca & Carnicelli, 2021; Klein et al., 2019).

Hospitality

In this category, the understanding that the interviewees have about hospitality is analyzed. It was noted that all interviewees know what hospitality entails, as Asa de Banana stated: "in my view, it has to do with receptivity, with welcoming, with respect, [...] treating others well, reciprocity."

Beiço do Wando declared: "we know that the most important thing for a bloco is to take care not only of those who organize it but also the drum corps and, especially, those who accompany the bloco." It was considered, then, that the blocs can assume the roles of host and guest, in accordance with the principles that govern hospitality, building meanings, spaces for inclusion, and facilitating commercial relationships (Schänzel et al., 2014; Cockburn-Wootten & Brewis, 2014; Souza, 2010). The bloco Belorinho affirmed that the parade is only possible "by joining forces," as well as the bloco Putz Grilla, which emphasized: "I go after people with whom I have a great relationship."

Based on the accounts, it was observed that the breadth of hospitality in business relationships is based on entrepreneurial behavior and human attributes, creating bonds of friendship in a commercial meeting (Souza, 2010), bringing to the forefront symbolic elements of domestic and social hospitality such as care and reciprocity: "it ends up being a second family in these bands because we spend a lot of time together" (Belorinho; Putz Grilla), and "street carnival is a carnival for everyone. Class D, C, B. There's no limitation, no barriers" (Beiço do Wando). In this sense, reflections on hospitality in business should be analyzed but never underestimated, as pointed out by Boudou's critique (2014).

Aspects such as inclusion and exclusion refer to what must be respected for the realization of a hospitable and reciprocal meeting (Souza, 2010): "there might even be a professional there among us, but it's a professional who wanted to join and is there among the group [...] this first rehearsal already includes these registered people; we have an attendance list." Those who register to join the drum corps contribute financially to cover the cost of rehearsal spaces, sound equipment rental, and conduction. This account also highlighted the presence of new business models aligned with regenerative hospitality by promoting innovations and transforming management practices in relation to stakeholders (Inversini et al., 2024; Araneda, 2017).

Stakeholders

This category analyzes the knowledge that the interviewees have about their organization in relation to their stakeholders. It was observed that the "Belorinho" and "Putz Grilla" groups are still in the vertical identity stage, as they have not been established as legalized companies, and the functions are executed according to the availability of each member's time. However, they are aware of the people who collaborate with their organization. When situations need to be resolved, the one with the most availability or ease in solving it steps in: "she was fundamental for the group to maintain quality over these two years." Regarding the acquisition of sponsorships requiring responses to public calls, it was mentioned that they were not successful.

Based on Level 1 proposed by Freeman (2023), it can be considered that these two groups do not possess sufficient knowledge of public call procedures. However, a strong relationship between "Belorinho" and "Putz Grilla" groups and private stakeholders was noted, emphasizing that in the vertical identity, the organization exemplifies monetary satisfaction and shared goals with the market and the community (King et al., 2010): "a venue [event space, bar, and restaurant] that is a partner, our sponsor [...]. So, every Tuesday is rehearsal day for the group, and the participants contribute financially" (Putz Grilla; Belorinho). In this way, the opening of a physical space supported by a hospitable gathering, enabling accessibility, legitimacy, and the construction of identity (Rodrigues & Wada, 2022), was perceived. However, according to Freeman (2023), these groups still show low stakeholder management capacity, as they lack strategic management and negotiation procedures.

For Level 2 proposed by Freeman (2023), the "Asa de Banana" group was considered to be on the path to understanding the implicit and explicit processes for the management of its organization. They formalized themselves as a MEI (Individual Microentrepreneur) to facilitate procedures for obtaining funding and infrastructure from the government and private companies: "from the beginning, there was a division of functions [...] so there were marketing groups, administrative groups. It was like a company without a registration number, Asa always operated in an organizational, institutional way" (Asa de Banana). Freeman's (2023) Level 2 procedures have always guided the group regarding internal management and its relationships with stakeholders.

Level 3 applied to the "Beiço do Wando" group, which currently understands how negotiations are conducted, how relationships between the organization and stakeholders occur, and whether they are beneficial for their growth and popularity (Freeman, 2023). The interviewee states that after forming the company and obtaining the registration number, relationships changed significantly: "with the registration number, sponsors came looking for us. Oh! We're opening a call here, are you participating? It kind of flipped the game" (Beiço do Wando). Before formalizing as a company: "We used to ask... Can we participate in the call? Then, it took a long time. Now they come to us" (Beiço do Wando).

According to Freeman (2023), an organization that understands its stakeholder map begins to adopt continuous procedures related to the influences that may or may not affect its daily routine and balance in pursuing its goals: "Now, we can apply for several calls. We applied for direct sponsorships. Something that, as individuals, we could barely achieve, actually" (Beiço do Wando). The interviewee adds: "we've always managed to stand on our own feet, selling shop products and forming partnerships in pre-Carnival events." These accounts indicate that the "Beiço do Wando" group has already achieved high stakeholder management capacity.

Conclusion

During the interviews, it was observed that, for all the respondents, the revelers who follow the blocs are the primary stakeholders: without the revelers, the blocs would not exist. On the same level, there is the public sector; security, health, cleaning, and tourism, among others. As secondary stakeholders, there are other interested parties such as street vendors selling food and drinks, pharmacies, and supermarkets, who need to be closely monitored during the festivities. To make the parade happen, they use friendship ties as a strategy to obtain donations and partnerships, and they benefit from formalizing as legal entities to participate in public funding opportunities. For the street carnival blocs of Belo Horizonte, it is the people who make the celebration happen. The participation of both the local government and private sector came many years later when they realized that the carnival, which emerged as a natural movement of the population, could generate profits for the city, commerce, and tourism. They then began to promote and enhance the quality of this popular festivity.

The respondents provided information that, upon analysis, revealed the transposition of identities and their legitimization, as well as the exercise of hospitality among the stakeholders. It is noteworthy that, although some still exhibit a low capacity for strategic stakeholder management, there is a strong trend toward achieving high stakeholder management capacity. Nonetheless, regardless of the level of stakeholder management, they rely on the foundations of hospitality to achieve their goals. It should be understood that the street carnival blocs of Belo Horizonte are very new compared to those in other cities with a history of great carnivals. However, they have the advantage of embodying what it means to be hospitable and of leveraging this concept to their benefit, as stated by Belorinho and Putz Grilla: "Mineiros are very... very open, right? Very welcoming. That's why it's becoming increasingly enjoyable to do carnival here. This year? 5,500,000 people."

The limitation in conducting the research was due to the acceptance of more blocs being hindered by work and scheduling issues. For future work, there are many unexplored areas, including research focused on the organization and infrastructure of the blocos, the actions of public authorities to ensure the event happens, the perception of revelers' satisfaction, and other aspects that are making Belo Horizonte-MG one of the best places for this celebration.

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Empowering DMOs in Crisis through Knowledge

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Abstract

Purpose: This conceptual study aims to explore the potential role of knowledge in destination management organisations activities during crises, specifically examining how these organisations can utilise various types of knowledge to actively support their collaborating partners.

Study design/methodology/approach: The proposed study is based on a literature review of selected papers related to the area of knowledge management in the context of crisis management in tourism.

Results: By synthesizing the knowledge taxonomy by Lundvall and Johnson (1994) with knowledge management insights from the tourism literature, a conceptual structure of knowledge for DMOs during crises has been developed. This research output consists of four distinct levels, namely, know-what, know-why, know-who, and know-how, and offers guidance as to how to proceed in a particular area, offering support to DMOs in coping with crisis situations.

Originality/value: This study contributes to the body of knowledge by improving the understanding of knowledge and its role in tourism crisis management by destination management organisations. It provides DMOs with practical advice on how to leverage internal and external knowledge to support their collaborating partners.

Keywords: knowledge, crisis management, DMO, tourism

Introduction

Tourism crises are relatively common, having a considerable effect on the functioning of the entire industry. Even though companies are taking steps to mitigate the impact of crises, the greatest potential seems to lie in the coordination of these actions. Hence, Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), are becoming an important player in crisis management (CM). These institutions have a strategic role within the tourism industry, as they build and stimulate a complex network consisting of public and private stakeholders, such as: national / regional government, local authorities, transport providers, cultural organisations, hotels, tour operators, restaurants, media, etc. (UNWTO, 2007). In a dispersed environment like this, crisis management becomes heavily relying on knowledge management (KM).

DMOs are in the middle of the entire tourism system. Therefore, especially in a crisis, their role as a knowledge broker becomes particularly important (Toubes et al., 2021). Knowledge broker serves as a link between at least two other parties, with the aim "[…] to facilitate the movement of ideas and knowledge by bringing people and diverse communities of practice together and enabling them to create and share new ideas, thereby supporting the creation and flow of knowledge." (Blackman et al., 2011). Kir Kuščer et al. (2021) affirm that knowledge in managing a crisis can improve organisational defence mechanisms, minimise potential negative consequences, as well as accelerate the recovery. Therefore, it is important to understand what kind of knowledge can be used by DMOs during a crisis to support companies from the tourism sector in struggling with hazardous events. This includes both practical, experience-based knowledge from previous crises, as well as theoretical insights derived from research. By using the right types of knowledge, DMOs can make informed decisions, coordinate responses more effectively, and provide timely guidance to tourism stakeholders.

In the literature, there are many knowledge typologies available. One of them is the classification provided by Lundvall and Johnson (1994) which enables companies to analyse various types of knowledge that is essential to achieve their organisational objectives. This taxonomy is built on four types of knowledge: know-what, know-why, know-who, know-how (Lundvall and Johnson, 1994), and it can be used in a situation of crisis when fast actions and efficient decision-making are required.

This paper integrates the taxonomy by Lundvall and Johnson (1994) with DMOs operations while facing a crisis. By synthesizing insights from the literature, this study aims to explore the potential role of knowledge in DMO activities during crises, specifically examining how these organisations can utilise various types of knowledge to actively support their collaborating partners.

Methodology

This study is conceptual in nature. It is based on a literature review of selected papers related to the management field. Key articles from knowledge management and crisis management domains have been reviewed. A reference snowballing technique has been applied to obtain additional pieces of literature. This method is useful in management science, especially when initial keyword searches provide limited or scattered results, allowing researchers to find influential but less-indexed studies (Badampudi et al, 2015). At the same time, the authors of this paper are aware that this method can introduce selection bias if the initial set of studies is not comprehensive or if researchers overlook key research due to limited citation links, which may reduce the objectivity and replicability of the review (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005; Badampudi et al., 2015). This bias has been overcome by cautious search and selection of papers for analysis, both in the field of knowledge management and crisis management in tourism. Methodological approach in this study involves an identification of relevant concepts based on a broad search of peer-reviewed articles, critical analysis of the identified literature and development of theoretical framework.

Results

By integrating the taxonomy of knowledge by Lundvall and Johnson (1994), with KM-related insights that appear in the tourism literature, a conceptual structure of knowledge, assisting DMOs while managing a crisis, has been proposed (Table 1.). Our theoretical approach consists of 4 levels (namely: know-what, know-why, know-who and know-how) and guidance as to how to proceed in a particular area.

Know-what

This type of knowledge relates to “knowledge about facts” (Lundvall and Johnson, 1994). DMOs, as leaders and facilitators of partnerships between government entities (or local authorities) and the tourism industry companies (Carter & Fabricius, 2006), have access to up-to-date knowledge concerning for example the scale of the crisis, the steps taken to mitigate the effects of the crisis, and planned actions. Using their communication channels, such as newsletters and websites, they can quickly and efficiently share all the relevant information with stakeholders (Orchiston & Higham, 2016). By collecting data about past events from various stakeholders, DMOs can aggregate knowledge in the form of a centralised knowledge repository (Racherla & Hu, 2009) and make it available as a historical database for the sake of tourism companies support. DMOs may also organise webinars and create collaborative networks based on their know-how and connect tourism organizations with experts and real-time information (Becken & Hughey, 2013).

Know-why

This stands for understanding the context (Lundvall and Johnson, 1994). Concerning the DMOs’ role as coordinators of operations, which goes in line with a principle that such organisations “[…] do not control the activities of their partners but bring together resources and expertise” (UNWTO, 2007), destination management organisations can understand the broader context. Having established relationships and access to many sources of knowledge, they are able to explain and interpret sudden events more quickly, “connecting the dots” from different sectors. “Why did this happen?” shall be the foundation for creating procedures and strategies (Bhaskara & Filimonau, 2021) as part of proactive crisis prevention planning. DMOs may help tourism companies in the analysis of sources of their problems during crises, by collecting feedback and having an overall view from the sector. Being able to conduct such an analysis, DMOs can come up with solutions to help tourism entities in times of future crises and be better prepared for the unknown.

Know-who

This concerns the network of contacts and involves recognising stakeholders’ individual capabilities and expertise (Lundvall and Johnson, 1994). DMOs, given their crucial role in establishing strong relationships within the market (Negrusa & Coros, 2016), have built a wide network of partners who can be a source of knowledge needed to solve the crisis-related problems. Acquaintanceship with key actors (including representatives of the tourism industry and local authorities), and consequently their active involvement in creating an industry network (Blake et al., 2019), are of great importance in mitigating the effects of hazardous events. Knowing the right persons in particular institutions and organisations can speed-up the process of knowledge gain and dissemination, which is crucial in times of a crisis.

Know-how

This refers to the competence level (Lundvall and Johnson, 1994) and can be interpreted from two perspectives. Firstly, as sharing the knowledge of DMOs' employees and collaborating experts regarding for example the ways of mitigating the crisis effects with the use of proven methods and tools. Secondly, as creating space for knowledge exchange between different stakeholders, including creating opportunities and connecting representatives of different sectors for best practices sharing. Know-how knowledge allows DMOs to fulfil the role of an advisory body providing constant support to tourist service providers (Presenza et al., 2005). This can be done by application in practice with the set of educational training (Badri & Kazemi, 2021), workshops or webinars. Additionally, DMOs can integrate crisis management training and scenario planning into their support programs to foster the resilience and preparedness of local tourism organisations (Hystad & Keller, 2008).

Table 1. Conceptual structure of knowledge during crisis

Knowledge types	**CM- related explanation**	**Practical representation**
Know-what	Knowledge regarding the current situation and measures taken.	Knowledge bases, knowledge repository, newsletters, websites, trainings in advance to create resilience
Know-why	Understanding of crisis context, ability to explain and interpret sudden events, analysis of the past events and drawing conclusions on the situations/undertaken measures	Crisis procedures and strategies
Know-who	Mapping of stakeholders' competencies and expertise	Strong network with actively involved industry and local authorities' representatives
Know-how	Competences and practical skills to handle the crisis	Trainings, workshops, webinars and best practices sharing

Sources: Own elaboration based on Lundvall and Johnson (1994).

Conclusion

This theoretical paper is a synthesis of the literature in KM and crisis management in tourism. Based on the analysis of this literature, it can be concluded that for DMOs, knowledge is important, especially during a crisis. The appropriate application of knowledge by DMOs allow them to effectively support companies in the tourism industry in coping with the effects of crisis situations, as well as preparing properly for the crises to come on the basis of the previously gained knowledge

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by improving the understanding of knowledge and its role in tourism crisis management by destination management organisations. It provides DMOs with practical guidance and advice on how to leverage internal and external knowledge to support their collaborating partners. It indicates various knowledge types, based on the classification by Lundvall and Johnson (1994), in the context of crises in tourism. These knowledge types can be used by DMOs as a guideline for reflections on previous crises and undertaken actions, as well as a support in managing a current crisis. By analysing various knowledge types, DMOs may identify knowledge that is of crucial importance in this particular situation and for future events. They may also identify key actors (know-who), causes and effects (know-why) and practical ways to overcome crises (know-how).

The proposed study is theoretical in nature, which constitutes a research limitation. This limitation will be addressed in future studies through the research involving a sample of DMOs from various regions.

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Outcomes of increased participation in protected area tourism policy making

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the paper is to investigate the extent to which greater democratization in decision-making impacts the quality of governance in protected area tourism. The study is based on a case study of the Batanes Protected Landscapes and Seascapes in the Philippines.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study reviewed quantitative and qualitative data from a longitudinal research program focused on monitoring the sustainability of tourism in the islands. Part of the research is the investigation of Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) resolutions issued from 2014 to 2023. The period covers the time before and after the management board was expanded in 2018. Interviews were also conducted with key members of the management board, as well as government leaders and industry players. The data collected were subjected to quantitative and qualitative data analysis using SPSS and NVIVO, respectively.

Results: Findings reveal that the expansion in the membership of the PAMB is viewed positively as it has allowed greater representation and has provided some check and balance. On the other hand, it has been observed that the membership of more politicians in the board has led to the increased weight for politics, rather than rational-technical bases, in the decisions. Coupled with external developments such as tourism growth, this has resulted in the PA producing more resolutions that enhance socio-economic activities (such as tourism) rather than prioritize biophysical protection and improve governance, a situation that is changing how PA and tourism sustainability issues are discussed in the province.

Originality/value: The paper contributes to the wider discussion on the value of participatory governance in decision-making and shows that it may lead to mixed results particularly if some actors, such as state actors, dominate the process.

Keywords protected area tourism, Batanes, Philippines, participatory governance

Introduction

Participatory governance is seen as an important factor in improving quality in tourism governance context. The participation of various stakeholders is argued to foster commitment, synergies and collaboration among key actors and communities towards tourism development (Bua & Bussu, 2021; Bichler, 2021). Even in contexts outside of tourism, for example, protected areas, stakeholder participation is seen as paramount (Slocum, Wiltshier & Read, 2022). The significance of this factor is acknowledged by broader policy process theories such as advocacy coalitions framework and policy network approaches, where sub-system communities and stakeholders are central elements (Weible, Fischer & Ingold, 2024).

However, as some scholars argue, a discursive space given to other stakeholders including community actors result in "wicked problems" even when the space is meant to provide and clarify directions (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). This is the situation presented by this paper. As the paper shows, increased participation does not automatically lead to better outcomes for the community. Rather, intractable issues may ensue and problems can continue to fester, thus affecting ultimately tourism outcomes.

The context of the paper is the Batanes Landscapes and Seascapes (BPLS) in the Philippines, the only province that is wholly declared as a protected area (PA) unlike any other province in the country where only parts are proclaimed. In addition, the province is an ancestral domain area, thus creating a perfect brew for policy interaction between indigenous peoples and environmental conservation advocates.

Serving as the highest policy-making body in the islands is the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB). In 2018, governance of PAs and PAMBs in the country was expanded with the inclusion of more representatives in the board. Thus, appointed ex-officio members were the regional director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, governor of the province, a senator, the district representative, mayor(s) of local government units encompassed by the PA, *barangay* (village) chairpersons, joined by regional directors of other line agencies such as agriculture, economic development, science and technology, police, and national defense. Other PAMB members include NGO/PO representative; at least 1 but not more than 3 indigenous people's representative, 1 from the academe, and 1 from the private sector.

It is obvious that where the PA is composed of several political units such as municipalities and barangays, politicians will form a significant group, much more than other interest groups or stakeholders. Such is the case for BPLS where the current composition of the PAMB is dominated by politicians. What has been the impact of the increased representation?

Methods

Analysis of data from a much wider research program to monitor the sustainability of tourism in the islands provides some insights into this question. This research program started in 2019 and is focused on monitoring sustainability issues such as governance, economic benefits, solid waste, wastewater and other issues totaling 11 following the framework of the UNWTO International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories, where the province became an affiliate in 2023. Part of the research is the investigation of PAMB resolutions issued from 2014 to 2023. The period covers the time before and after the management board was expanded in 2018. Interviews were also conducted with key members of the management board, as well as government leaders and industry players. The data collected were subjected to quantitative and qualitative data analysis using SPSS and NVIVO, respectively.

Results

Findings reveal that the expansion in the membership of the PAMB is viewed positively as it has allowed greater representation and has provided some check and balance. For example, the presence of IP representatives in the management board is looked upon as a step in the right direction, so that PAMB priorities can be aligned to the rights and aspirations of the indigenous community. Tourism's permanent representative to the board, originally not part of the board, has only recently been added, ensuring that the interest of the sector is served.

On the other hand, it has been observed that the membership of more politicians in the board has led to the increased weight of politics, rather than rational-technical bases, in the decisions. Interviewees assert that the political ambition of some members contrast with the overall conservation agenda of the board. Consequently, the board has found itself identifying mitigating strategies instead of evaluating projects for clearance, particularly those coming from local government officials representing the interests of their constituents. Mostly, these projects pertain to addressing socio-economic goals of PAs. Coupled with external developments such as tourism growth, this has resulted in the PA producing more resolutions that enhance socio-economic conditions (such as tourism) rather than prioritize biophysical protection and improve governance, a situation that is changing how PA and tourism sustainability issues are discussed in the province, with some calling for more relaxation of strict PA rules, to allow, for example, greater quarrying of indigenous materials – a particularly intractable issue between cultural heritage protection and environmental conservation groups.

Conclusion

This paper was concerned with investigating the extent to which greater democratization in decision-making impacts the quality of governance in protected area tourism. It was observed that increased participation in decision making leads to a broadening of discussions particularly for issues represented by sectoral representatives. Nonetheless, the process may be dominated by state actors, particularly if the institutional arrangement was so designed to enhance their participation. The result is that political players (particularly those purported to represent the people) and their values tend to reign it over other actors. One outcome of this process, as shown in the case study, is that the discourse as far as PA and sustainability could change. Where PAs in the past were mainly set up to conserve resources, the economic imperative as driven by political-economic actors who dominate representation in decision-making, is strongly taking root. Will the trend continue, so that PAs allow more economic activities particularly as tourism recovers from the pandemic? Or will increased participation from civil society shepherd the PA back to its original roots? These are important questions and how tourism development is ultimately affected by participatory processes is definitely an agenda for future research. From a practical point of view, efforts must be exerted by civil society to counterbalance the hegemony of state actors, perhaps by banding together into a network, and pushing more for their interests to be included in the agenda of the board. In this way, governance outcomes are not skewed against them; rather, be much more equitable and inclusive.

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Marketing Strategy for Tourism Destinations Using PESTLE Analysis, Case Study of SEZ Mandalika, Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyzes the external factors of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ), a priority destination in Indonesia, and recommends marketing strategies to attract tourists and tourism business investors to enhance the economy in Lombok Tengah Regency.

Study design/methodology/approach: The analysis uses the PESTLE model and SWOT analysis by IFAS-EFAS to determine the position of marketing strategies.

Results: The results showed that the quadrant points for each element are in quadrant I, which indicates SO (Strength and Opportunity), which means a Rapid Growth position. The results showed that the rapid growth strategy proposes marketing expansion by maximizing strengths and opportunities in external PESTLE factors.

Originality/value: This research is an update and a reliable reference in the marketing of Mandalika SEZ and contributes to give recommendations for marketing strategies in accordance with political, economic, sociocultural, technological, environmental and legal factors and phenomena in Indonesia.

Keywords Mandalika SEZ, PESTLE Analysis, Marketing Strategy, Rapid Growth Strategy

Introduction

Mandalika SEZ is one of the national tourism strategic areas and a super-priority tourism Destination managed by the central government. Being a concentrated resort, Mandalika SEZ is expected to trigger economic development and accelerate the economic growth rates in Central Lombok Regency (I Gusti Lanang Ardana et al., 2020). Along with sports tourism attractions on the region's beaches, the Mandalika International Circuit is a fishing hook for massive domestic and foreign tourists. The realization of Mandalika SEZ's achievements attracted an investment of IDR 4.79 trillion (Wijanarko, 2023) and enhanced tourism businesses. However, the destination development process faced challenges, as the economy and tourism highly depend on the international racing agenda (Rahmatika & Della, 2024) and the event has not supported enough accommodation (Saef Alfath & Aini Hall, 2024). Marketing strategies highlight external factors that are key aspects driving destination progress (Mahadiansar & Aspariyana, 2020). This study focuses on analyzing the marketing strategy of Mandalika SEZ using PESTLE analysis (political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, legal, and environmental conditions) assisted by SWOT, and provides marketing strategy recommendations.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative. The data was obtained by conducting deep interviews with destination management, the local government, the community, and tourists. Planning documents and previous studies are analyzed as secondary data. The analysis uses the PESTLE model (Politic, Economy, Social-cultural, Technology, Law, and Environment) to identify external factors that require consideration in business development due to their relatively certain realization. The SWOT analysis by IFAS ((Internal Factor Analysis Summary) – EFAS (External Factor Analysis Summary) determines the position of marketing strategies by assessing 60 facts consisting of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Seven tourism experts assessed each factor by giving a score. The sum of all scores then generates the recommended quadrant to determine the marketing strategy.

Results

The study reveals that the external factors of Politics, Economy, Social culture, Technology, Law, and Environment indicate facts mentioned by respondents, government documents, and previous studies. It raises 60 facts that are considered in generating strategies, based on the experts' assessment and counted using SWOT and IFAS EFAS to determine the quadrant position for each factor as presented below:

1. **Politics**

SWOT identification through IFAS and EFAS on the economic factors of Mandalika SEZ can be observed as follows:

Strength
Managed by a State-Owned Enterprise, PT ITDC, so that it is qualified for broader development with optimal funding
Mandalika Tourism Destination is one of the 5 National Priority Destinations, National Tourism Strategic Area (KSPN)
Weaknesses
The lack of collaboration between the public and private sectors in creating accommodation is evidenced by insufficient accommodation at international events to accommodate the surge of tourists who attend
The different interests of the central and local governments reduce opportunities for coordination.
Most affected people were not consulted for the Mandalika project.
Opportunities

The Lombok Tourism Development Masterplan Policy in 2019 integrated inclusive tourism development with the Key Tourism Area consisting of Gili Senggigi, South Pantau, Mataram, and Mount Rinjani, opening enormous opportunities for Mandalika SEZ
The replacement of the Republic of Indonesia president in 2024 and the head of the region allows for a policy change.
Threat
The lack of collaboration between ITDC and the Central Lombok tourism office reduces the potential for cooperation to increase the role of Mandalika SEZ in Central Lombok tourism
The corruption issues in most provinces in Indonesia and uncertainty affect public and investor confidence in the government (Al Hazmi, 2024)

SWOT analysis based on the above factors, as follows:

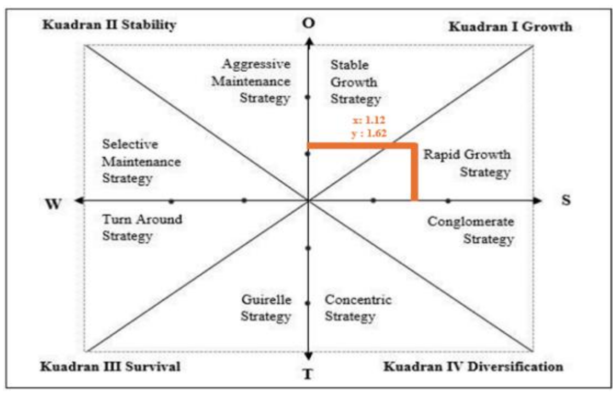

Figure 1. SWOT quadrant matrix of Rapid Growth strategy of Politic factors

2. **Economy**

SWOT identification through IFAS and EFAS on the economic factors of Mandalika SEZ can be observed as follows:

Strength
The existence of the Mandalika Circuit, an arena for prestigious international racing events such as MotoGP and the World Superbike Championship, can increase the local economy by 3.5% and create transactions of around IDR 4.5 trillion with a surge in tourists
The private sector's ease in creating accommodation businesses is characterized by a variety of accommodation and restaurant facilities ranging from standard to exclusive quality, such as homestays to star hotels
The goods, services, and products of micro, small, and medium enterprises provide income to the community or business actors

The increasing value of Central Lombok's GRDP will reach 2.01 trillion in 2023
Weaknesses
Backpackers with lower expenses dominate foreign tourists
Dependency of the tourism sector on international events
Foreign tourists are dominated by backpackers with lesser expenses
Externalities: tourism leakage
Opportunities
The centralized development of Mandalika SEZ provides extensive opportunities for investors, especially in tourism, which contributes to regional economic income. For example, the Pullman Hotel expands employment opportunities
Based on statistics Indonesia 2023, the number of tourists in 2022 reached 91,292, and it is predicted to increase along with the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a total of 63,522 foreign tourists and 27,770 domestic tourists
Most backpacker tourists use cheap homestay services, providing direct income to residents
Developing local products and creative tourism-related industries provides additional economic opportunities for the community
Threat
The competition of destinations within the island, such as Gili TraMeNa destinations, and inter-island competition, such as Bali, Sumbawa, Labuan Bajo
The price of land around Mandalika has increased significantly
The price of goods and necessities will soar, such as the price of essential goods

SWOT analysis based on the above factors, as follows:

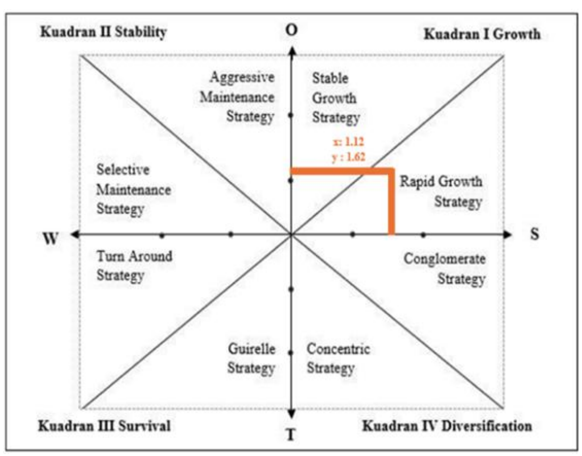

Figure 2. SWOT quadrant matrix of Rapid Growth strategy of Economic factors

3. Social culture

SWOT identification through IFAS and EFAS on the socio-cultural factors of Mandalika SEZ can be observed as follows:

Strength
Cultural tourism that offers Lombok's cultural attractions, such as the annual event Bau Nyale and Lombok's typical attractions or art performances
Various tourist motivations and oriented towards halal/religious tourism, natural tourism consisting of mountain and marine, sports tourism, and cultural tourism combined with local products in Lombok attract a diverse segmentation of tourist interests
Weaknesses
Many underage children selling and middle-aged mothers tend to force buyers and reduce tourists' comfort in enjoying Kuta Mandalika beach
Various local products from Mandalika are woven, but this type has similarities with the Nusa Tenggara Timur region
Opportunities
The attraction of Lombok's distinctive socio-cultural heritage includes most of the population, the Sasak tribe with a building-type culture cemented with cow dung and bamboo roofs, mass traditional celebrations such as Bau Nyale, Perang Topat, Nyongkolan, which are still celebrated primarily in the traditional villages of Sade, and Ende and tourism products in the form of woven fabrics.
The attitude and behavior of the community, which is already open to tourism activities, are reflected in the services and provide a sense of comfort for tourists
Threat
Conflict issues among villages, such as Ketare village and others, influence the lack of security felt by tourists; besides that, it is difficult to collaborate with fellow villagers
The issue of terrorism crimes in Indonesia reduces the sense of safety and security of tourists and investors
The conflict between the community and managers regarding the ownership of Mandalika SEZ lands makes investors consider investing

SWOT analysis based on the above factors, as follows:

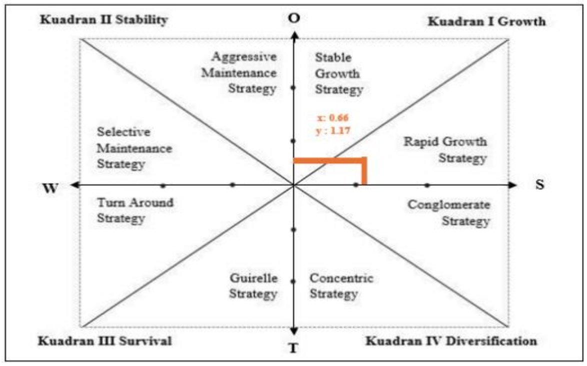

Figure 3. SWOT quadrant matrix of Rapid Growth strategy of Social-culture factors

4. **Technology**

SWOT identification through IFAS and EFAS on the technology factor of Mandalika SEZ can be observed as follows:

Strength
The availability of transportation that accommodates tourists from outside the island, which are Lombok International Airport, Lembar Port, and bus/shuttle terminals from the Hub to the destination location
The ease of tourists to find basic facilities such as ATMs, banks, hospitals, stable internet conditions, etc
The Media such as 'go Mandalika', social media, and RRI Mataram in Promoting MotoGP at Mandalika Circuit (Riyayanatasya et al., 2023) are used to promote tourism in Mandalika SEZ
Weaknesses
Low investment in transportation is indicated by minimal international direct flights, which are only from Malaysia and Singapore
The payment system still mainly applies cash, and non-cash implementation is lacking
The use of online transportation restrictions from Hub to destination has caused tourists to have limited transportation options and reduced flexibility in choosing modes
Opportunities
Social media makes information about Lombok tourism easily accessible, allowing potential tourists to obtain information and monitor the international race event
Information media provides a competitive image of Lombok tourism, offering adventure tourism with natural and cultural wealth

Lombok's tourism image that offers adventure tourism and its natural and cultural beauty attracts tourists with special interests supported by the concept of "The Ultimate Lifestyle Sportstaiment Destination" from ITDC
Threat
Increased risk of cybercrime attacks such as ransomware attacks and data theft on tourism systems
Vulnerable to the spread of Sara issues, hoaxes, or misinformation about Mandalika tourist destinations

SWOT analysis based on the above factors, as follows:

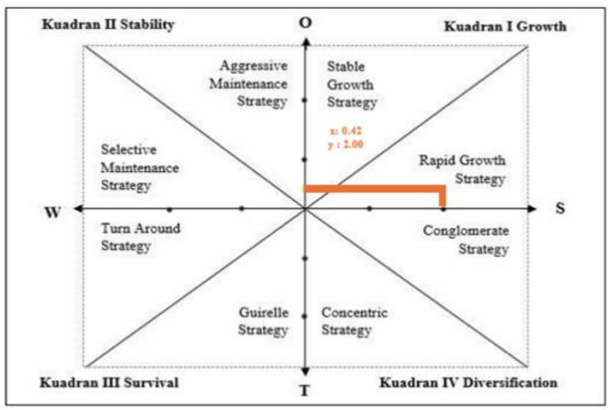

Figure 4. SWOT quadrant matrix of Rapid Growth strategy of Technology factor

5. **Law**

SWOT identification through IFAS and EFAS on Legal factors is as follows:

Strength
ITDC is committed to minimizing negative impacts on local ecosystems, supporting sustainability, and inspiring eco-friendly practices in Mandalika SEZ to become a role model for responsible tourism destinations
The legal protection of tourists' rights in Law No. 10 of 2009 allows tourists to travel freely without fear of insecurity
Weaknesses
Policies on public transportation management that remain inadequate encourage tourists to prefer private modes of transportation, which, if allowed, will cause congestion at specific points and certain times (Andari et al., 2023; Aprianto et al., 2024)
The restriction on online transportation use from the Central Lombok Hub to the Mandalika SEZ area means that tourists do not have many transportation options.

Opportunities
Omnibus Law provides convenience for businesses to invest
Easy policy and visa exemption to enter Indonesia
Investment incentives in Mandalika SEZ, among others: Free from VAT and STLG, Ease of entry and exit of goods, Ease in the field of immigration, import restrictions in PP No. 40 of 2021
Threat
The controversial RKUHP on giving a 1-year prison term for foreign tourists who have sex outside of
There are still violations of the Job Creation Law, such as hiring salted labor
Laws governing foreign-owned businesses result in high externalities

SWOT analysis based on the above factors, as follows:

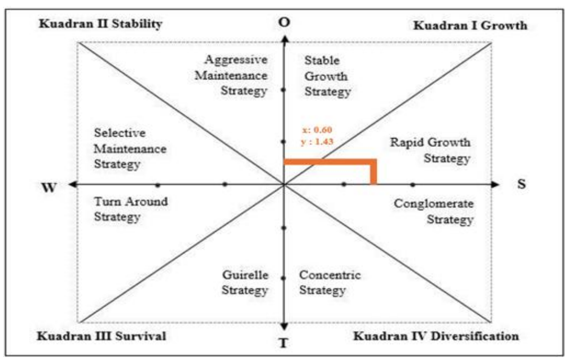

Figure 5. SWOT quadrant matrix of Rapid Growth strategy Law factors

6. **Environment**

SWOT identification through IFAS and EFAS on environmental factors supporting Mandalika SEZ can be observed as follows:

Strength
Marine tourism offers natural marine attractions with diverse sports tourism activities such as diving, snorkeling, surfing, kayaking, etc.
The potential wealth of natural, artificial, and cultural tourism in Mandalika SEZ
Weaknesses
The lack of public awareness of waste and lack of waste management in Kuta Mandalika
Lack of basic facilities found in the attraction, such as clean water and sanitation facilities

Opportunities
The warm weather conditions and temperature of Nusa Tenggara Barat Province are suitable for foreign tourists, including from Europe
Mandalika SEZ is geographically close to Bali, making it an option for tourists who have visited Bali because of its alternative, easy transportation access
Different tourist destinations in NTB province, such as Gili Trawangan, Gili Tramena, Mount Rinjani, etc., have integrated interconnected access
Threat
The lack of clean water resources (drought) in villages that surround Mandalika SEZ (Suryade et al., 2022)
The risk of natural disasters such as flash floods, earthquakes, and tsunamis in Lombok, the 2018 earthquake significantly reduced tourists (Statistics Indonesia, 2023).
Unstandardized waste management is incompatible with the increasing number of tourists; waste piles disturb the aesthetics.

SWOT analysis based on the above factors, as follows:

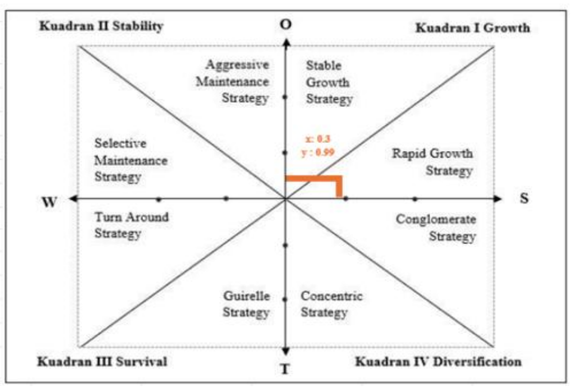

Figure 6. SWOT quadrant matrix of Rapid Growth strategy Environment factors

Based on the IFAS EFAS calculation results, the quadrant point is in quadrant I, SO (Strength and Opportunity), with a Rapid Growth position that utilizes strengths and opportunities. The Mandalika SEZ environment has the potential for marine tourism, which attracts surfer tourists. The marketing strategy must facilitate tourists in peak and low seasons by adjusting tourist services throughout the year. Identify the origin of tourists and the forecast of tourists' needs and desires. Ensure valid and updated natural conditions, disaster predictions, and disaster warnings and signage at vulnerable attractions.

Based on the IFAS EFAS calculation results, the quadrant points for each element are in quadrant I, which indicates SO (Strength and Opportunity) with a Rapid Growth position. It showed that the rapid growth strategy proposes marketing expansion by maximizing strengths and opportunities in external PESTLE factors. Examining the existing facts through the perspective of the PESTLE model shows that public and private political stability strengthens Mandalika's position, macroeconomic strength in the country, social acceptance by the community and appreciation of local culture, optimization of the use of technological trends, strength of the tourism and investment legal system, as well as environmental sustainability and disaster response. In addition, tourists' perception of the natural attractions, hospitality, and supporting facilities has fulfilled their needs, especially in Kuta Mandalika (MPWK and PMK, 2024) should be considered in arranging the marketing strategies.

The recommended strategy designs optimizing the strengths and opportunities of external factors (PESTLE) are as follows:

1. Enhance cooperation and collaboration among the manager and local stakeholders of tourism destinations with competitive and collaborative marketing.
2. Strengthening diplomatic relations and networks in potential countries through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
3. Improve the image branding of natural attractions, including sports, cultural, religious, and artificial tourism, especially optimizing the Mandalika Circuit through adequate facilities and holding more events.
4. Identify tourists by segmenting to determine the right target market. Reach out to new tourists from various sources of special interest tourism by establishing networks with tour managers of the highest number of foreign tourists.
5. Maintaining community awareness of tourism with community empowerment.
6. Investment in Technology and Innovation: Expanding promotion with social media and upgrading new technology to improve efficiency and competitiveness
7. Promotion and campaign for legal protection of investors and tourists

Conclusion

Mandalika SEZ development is one of the driving forces of the economy of West Nusa Tenggara Province, especially Central Lombok Regency. The Mandalika destination potential is an optimistic situation in encouraging marketing strategies through massive expansion. In addition, it is important for destination managers to adapt to changes and develop innovative marketing strategies to remain competitive in the market for an extended period (Gery Azhari Putera & Jerry Heikal, 2021). Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ) can be a benchmark in developing Mandalika SEZ destination-based tourism marketing strategies. The specialized area in the Ad-hoc policy expands the manager's capability in making market and investor-friendly policies. The impact of economic development encourages the growth of foreign investment, including increased labor, community productivity, and tourist satisfaction of the services with the technology implementation. In addition, effective marketing must be accompanied by adequate actual conditions and meet the expectations of investors and tourists visiting the Mandalika SEZ destination. This study can be applied as a marketing reference for the same case, but it does not limit the possibility of other marketing strategies.

Acknowledgment

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Promoting Balikdami Wetland as a Birdwatching Tourism Destination: A SWOT and QSPM Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to evaluate the birdwatching tourism potential of the Balikdami Wildlife Protection and Development Area, one of the important wetlands in Turkey.

Study design/methodology/approach: The Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) matrices are utilized to ascertain the wetland's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in relation to enhancing birdwatching tourism. SWOT and QSPM analysis of the Balikdami Wildlife Protection and Development Area are conducted.

Results: The region has a high biodiversity and unique ecological characteristics that present considerable advantages for attracting tourists. However, existing managerial, infrastructural, and promotional shortcomings have been identified as significant impediments to fully realizing these potentials. By developing and implementing a comprehensive roadmap based on the strategies determined, Balikdami Wetland can be successfully promoted as a sustainable and competitive birdwatching tourism destination at both national and international levels. Emphasis on the development of tourism infrastructure, enhancement of promotional activities, establishment of modern monitoring systems, and reinforcement of community participation are identified as key factors for achieving these objectives.

Originality/value: To precisely evaluate Balikdami's potential as a birdwatching destination, it is essential to analyze its assets, limitations, possibilities, and dangers. However, no studies that collectively present the mentioned features specifically for Balikdami have been found in the literature. The results are expected to assist decision-makers and practitioners in reconciling conservation efforts with tourist development in Balikdami Wetland.

Keywords Birdwatching, Birdwatching Tourism Destination, SWOT analysis, QSPM Analysis, Balikdami Wetland.

Introduction

Birdwatching refers to recreational activities involving observing birds in their natural habitats, individually or collectively (Sevindi, 2013). Sekercioglu (2002) also defined birdwatching, which has an important place in wildlife watching, as "the activity of observing and identifying birds in their habitats." Birdwatching tourism, which can be evaluated within special interest tourism (Cakici & Harman, 2006), is a type of tourism that includes the activity of watching birds in their natural habitats without harming them. Birdwatching tourism may enhance year-round visitors, mitigate environmental stresses through balanced activities, and facilitate a more equitable distribution of financial benefits (Seven, 2019).

This study is about the evaluation of the birdwatching tourism potential of the Balikdami Wildlife Protection and Development Area, one of the important wetlands in Turkey. The Balikdami Wildlife Protection and Development Area is 25 kilometers south of the Sivrihisar district center of Eskisehir. It provides breeding, feeding, and sheltering areas for both resident and migratory bird species. Currently, the region serves as a hub for farming and animal husbandry. Although this region has important potential for birdwatching tourism, it is not known for it today. To precisely evaluate Balikdami's potential as a birdwatching destination, it is essential to analyze its assets, limitations, possibilities, and dangers. However, no studies that collectively present the mentioned features specifically for Balikdami have been found in the literature. To fill this gap, this study aims to conduct a SWOT and QSPM analysis of the Balikdami Wildlife Protection and Development Area. The results are expected to assist decision-makers and practitioners in reconciling conservation efforts with tourist development in Balikdami.

Methodology

Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) Matrices are used to find the most significant internal (weaknesses and strengths) and external (opportunities and threats) factors affecting the wetland. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) matrix is then made to compare different strategies using the IFE and EFE matrices. Finally, the Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM) is used to pick the best ways to promote birdwatching tourism in Balikdami Wetland.

The Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) matrices were utilized to ascertain the wetland's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to enhancing birdwatching tourism. To do this, secondary data, comprising academic studies, government reports, environmental assessments, and tourism development plans, were meticulously examined to discern significant indicators (Kotler et l., 2017; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Then, ten academic experts were selected through purposive sampling to weigh the matrix factors. Secondly, a SWOT matrix was developed using the results of the first step. Finally, the Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM) was used to prioritize the extracted strategies (David, 2013).

Results

High biodiversity, an advantageous geographical position, and unique wetland features such as serving as the last refuge for wild aquatic fauna in Western Asia were identified as major strengths. On the other hand, managerial, promotional, and infrastructural deficiencies, particularly the inadequacy of birdwatching facilities and transportation challenges, have been shown to adversely affect the overall potential of the destination (Table 1). Moreover, while the opportunities presented by the official conservation status and the growth of ecotourism are promising, they are

Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE)

Key Internal Factors	**Weighting**	**Rating**	**Weighted Score**
Strengths			
1. The wetland is located in the Sivrihisar district and has a high tourist appeal.	0.06	3	0.27
2. The wetland is close to major tourist centers (such as Istanbul and Ankara).	0.08	4	0.32
3. There is a bird observation tower.	0.04	3	0.24
4. Birds play an important role in pest control, seed dispersal, and as an indicator of ecosystem health.	0.06	3	0.18
5. Migratory birds use this area intensively, especially in the spring, the breeding season.	0.07	3	0.21
6. The area's research identified 210 bird species from 18 orders and 47 families.	0.07	4	0.28
7. Balikdami Wetland is the West's last stop for waterfowl in Asia.	0.08	4	0.32
Weaknesses			
1. There is only one observation tower, and it is not possible to observe the entire area from this tower.	0.09	2	0.18
2. Management and control problems arising from the size of the area	0.05	2	0.1
3. Inadequate touristic promotion of the area	0.05	1	0.05
4. Insufficient interest in public institutions in the area	0.07	1	0.07
5. Inadequate management of the area from a public perspective	0.04	2	0.08
6. The road providing transportation to the area is not comfortable.	0.05	2	0.1
7. Lack of accommodation, food, and beverage facilities	0.07	1	0.07
8. The area is in danger due to intensive use, human activities, environmental pollution and habitat destruction	0.06	1	0.06
9. Lack of awareness of local people about bird watching	0.06	2	0.12
Total	**1,00**		**2.65**

Table 1. Internal Factor Evaluation Matrix (IFE)

counterbalanced by threats such as habitat destruction and developmental pressures, resulting in a complex landscape of challenges and capabilities (Kotler et al., 2016; Weihrich, 1982) (Table 2).

External Factors Evaluation Matrix (EFE)

Key External Factors	**Weighting**	**Rating**	**Weighted Score**
Opportunities			
1. This area has been given a protection status	0,07	3	0.21
2. Ecotourism tours for bird watching have increased in recent years	0,07	2	0.21
3. The 210 bird species identified in the study show that the Balikdami Wetland is a suitable area to be evaluated for birdwatching tourism	0,08	3	0.24
4. The area is suitable for canoeing thanks to the meanders, and this already attracts tourists to the area, it can be combined with birdwatching tours, and the accommodation period can be extended	0,07	1	0.07
5. Bird photography is done in the area and this creates a tourist attraction	0,05	2	0.1
6. Birdwatching tourism in the area is the subject of academic studies and scientific research projects	0,03	3	0.09
Threats			
1. Overgrazing, shepherd dogs, and agricultural machinery pose serious threats to birds and other wildlife, especially during the breeding season	0,05	2	0.1
2. The possibility of falling behind in potential competition with wetland destinations that have previously started birdwatching tourism	0,06	1	0.06
3. Inadequate control of the protection-use balance and this threatens the sustainability of the area	0,07	1	0.07
4. The decrease in bird species over time and this negatively affects the ecosystem	0,05	1	0.05
5. The loss of quality, pollution, and degradation of the wetland with the development of tourism	0,05	1	0.05
6. Although hunting is prohibited, birds are under hunting pressure due to gunshots	0,06	2	0.12
7. Excessive use of water resources for sugar beet cultivation and water withdrawal for irrigation purposes, which negatively affects the natural structure of the region	0,06	1	0.06
8. Seasonal workers negatively affect bird life in the region	0,04	2	0.08
9. Opening of new agricultural areas and DSI's Upper Sakarya Irrigation Project aiming to dry the western part of the wetland and convert it into agricultural land	0,06	1	0.06
10. The plan to transform the eastern part of the area into a pond of approximately 500 hectares	0,07	2	0.14
11. Bird populations are sensitive to factors such as climate change and habitat loss	0,06	1	0.06

Total	**1,00**	**1.77**

Table 2. External Factors Evaluation Matrix (EFE)

Based on this comprehensive analysis, strategies were formulated in four categories: Strength–opportunity (SO) strategies, Weakness–opportunity (WO) strategies, Strength–threat (ST) strategies, and Weakness–threat (WT) strategies (Table 3).

Internal Factors / **External Factors**	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
	S1 The wetland is located in the Sivrihisar district and has a high tourist appeal. S2 The wetland is close to major tourist centers (such as Istanbul and Ankara). **S3** There is a bird observation tower. **S4** Birds play important roles in pest control, seed dispersal, and as indicators of ecosystem health. **S5** Migratory birds use this area intensively, especially in the spring, the breeding season. **S6** The area's research identified 210 bird species from 18 orders and 47 families. **S7** Balikdami Wetland is the West's last stop for waterfowl in Asia.	**W1** There is only one observation tower, and it is not possible to observe the entire area from this tower. **W2** Management and control problems arising from the size of the area W3 Inadequate touristic promotion of the area **W4** Insufficient interest of public institutions in the area **W5** Inadequate management of the area from a public perspective **W6** The road providing transportation to the area is not comfortable. **W7** Lack of accommodation, food, and beverage facilities **W8** The area is in danger due to intensive use, human activities, environmental pollution, and habitat destruction **W9** Lack of awareness of local people about bird watching
Opportunities	**Strategy SO**	**Strategy WO**
O1 This area has been given a protection status **O2** Ecotourism tours for birdwatching have increased in recent years	**SO1** Create focused advertising pieces (brochures, digital media) highlighting these distinctive attributes and obtain endorsements from conservation organizations. (S6, S7, O1, O3) **SO2** Coordinate familiarization	**WO1** Augment promotional activities, encompassing marketing campaigns, educational seminars, and partnerships with social media influencers, by collaborating with academic and research

O3 The 210 bird species identified in the study show that the Balikdami Wetland is a suitable area to be evaluated for birdwatching tourism **O4** The area is ideal for canoeing thanks to the meanders and this already attracts tourists to the area, it can be combined with birdwatching tours, and the accommodation period can be extended **O5** Bird photography is done in the area, and this creates a tourist attraction **O6** Birdwatching tourism in the area is the subject of academic studies and scientific research projects	excursions and media tours to enhance visibility in the primary markets of Istanbul and Ankara. (S2, O2) **SO3** Improve the current bird observation tower by integrating facilities for avian photography and interactive educational exhibits, targeting niche markets. (S3, O5) **SO4** Collaborate with academic institutions to organize birding festivals, scientific gatherings, and biodiversity research initiatives that concurrently advance tourism and conservation funding. (S6, O6)	organizations to enhance public awareness of wetland bird species and their ecological importance. (W3, O6, O3) **WO2** Address infrastructural deficiencies by including observation points and offering facilities and dining options for birdwatching and canoeing. Plan a phased development strategy to seek conservation grants and public-private partnerships. (W1, W7, O2, O4) **WO3** Work with local officials to improve transportation and infrastructure using the wetland's protected status. (W6, W7, O1) **WO4** Initiate community outreach and educational initiatives to enhance local understanding and engagement in birdwatching, transforming citizens into advocates for sustainable tourism. (W9, O6)
Threats	**Strategy ST**	**Strategy WT**
T1 Overgrazing, shepherd dogs, and agricultural machinery pose serious threats to birds and other wildlife, especially during the breeding season. **T2** The possibility of falling behind in potential competition with wetland destinations that have previously started birdwatching tourism	**ST1** Engage with environmental authorities and research institutes to implement ongoing monitoring systems and enforce regulations. (S4, S6, T1, T5) **ST2** Establish conservation initiatives aimed at safeguarding migratory and distinctive waterfowl populations to mitigate possible decreases due to habitat degradation and climate change by launching extensive research projects and obtaining legal protections to guarantee the	**WT1** Create a multi-stakeholder task force with local government, tourism experts, and conservationists to develop and implement comprehensive management and promotion that addresses administrative and infrastructural issues and controls tourism growth to avoid overuse and environmental degradation. (W2, W3, T3, T10) **WT2** Create a partnership to coordinate infrastructure upgrades, environmental

T3 Inadequate control of the protection-use balance and this threatens the sustainability of the area. **T4** The decrease in bird species over time negatively affects the ecosystem. **T5** The loss of quality, pollution, and degradation of the wetland with the development of tourism **T6** Although hunting is prohibited, birds are under hunting pressure due to gunshots. **T7** Excessive use of water resources for sugar beet cultivation and water withdrawal for irrigation purposes, which negatively affects the natural structure of the region **T8** Seasonal workers negatively affect bird life in the region **T9** Opening of new agricultural areas and DSI's Upper Sakarya Irrigation Project aiming to dry the western part of the wetland and convert it into agricultural land **T10** The plan to transform the eastern	stability of avian populations. (S5, S7, T4, T11) **ST3** Collaborate with lawmakers to advocate for more rigorous enforcement of environmental legislation. Utilize scientific information and the designation of the region as protected to advocate for more stringent regulations that prohibit detrimental agricultural practices and restrict large-scale developments that alter the landscape. (S6, O1, T7, T9)	monitoring, and sustainable tourist practices to acquire finance, technical help, and regulatory enforcement to overcome infrastructure shortages and avoid (W4, W8, T5, T9) **WT3** Implement community-based management to establish local training programs, volunteer monitoring organizations, and incentives for community members to assist in conservation initiatives. This will enhance local stewardship and mitigate the harm caused by unregulated human activities and seasonal labor on avian populations. (W9, T1, T8)

part of the area into a pond of approximately 500 hectares **T11** Bird populations are sensitive to factors such as climate change and habitat loss		

Table 3. SWOT Matrix

The results obtained from the QSPM analysis have indicated that, among the various strategies presented, the WO2 strategy achieved the highest attractiveness score. The implementation of this strategy emphasizing the correction of infrastructural deficiencies through the addition of observation points and the establishment of reception facilities and canteen services could result in a significant transformation in the Balikdami Wetland tourism market, provided that adequate support is obtained from governmental and private institutions as well as sufficient financial and technical resources are secured. In parallel, the SO1 and SO2 strategies are expected to raise public awareness and attract both domestic and international tourists by enhancing promotional efforts and organizing introductory tours. Additionally, the ST1 and ST2 strategies are projected to play a key role in countering environmental threats by establishing monitoring systems and reinforcing conservation measures. The WT strategies, which are based on multi-stakeholder cooperation and community participation, are anticipated to serve as important complementary measures to further improve management and address the existing weaknesses (Weihrich, 1982; David, 2017) (Table 4 and 5).

Table 4. Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM)

		Strategy alternatives																													
		Strategy SO								Strategy WO								Strategy ST						Strategy WT					
		SO1		SO2		SO3		SO4		WO1		WO2		WO3		WO4		ST1		ST2		ST3		WT1		WT2		WT3	
Key factors	WT.	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS	AS	TAS
Strengths																													
S1	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
S2	0.08	1	0.08	4	0.32	3	0.24	2	0.16	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
S3	0.04	3	0.12	1	0.04	4	0.16	2	0.08	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
S4	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.18	2	0.12	1	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-
S5	0.07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.14	3	0.21	1	0.07	-	-	-	-	-	-
S6	0.07	4	0.28	2	0.14	1	0.07	3	0.21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.21	1	0.07	2	0.14	-	-	-	-	-	-
S7	0.08	4	0.32	3	0.24	2	0.16	1	0.08	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.16	3	0.24	1	0.08	-	-	-	-	-	-
Weaknesses																													
W1	0.09	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.09	4	0.36	2	0.18	3	0.27	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
W2	0.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.15	2	0.10	1	0.05
W3	0.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	0.20	3	0.15	1	0.05	2	0.10	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.15	2	0.10	1	0.05
W4	0.07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.14	3	0.21	1	0.07
W5	0.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
W6	0.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.05	3	0.15	4	0.20	2	0.10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
W7	0.07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.07	4	0.28	3	0.21	2	0.14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
W8	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.12	3	0.18	1	0.06
W9	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.18	2	0.12	1	0.06	4	0.24	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.12	1	0.06	3	0.18
total	**1.00**																												
Opportunities																													
O1	0.07	4	0.28	3	0.21	2	0.14	1	0.07	3	0.21	2	0.14	4	0.28	1	0.07	2	0.14	1	0.07	3	0.21	-	-	-	-	-	-
O2	0.07	3	0.21	4	0.28	2	0.14	1	0.07	3	0.21	4	0.28	2	0.14	1	0.07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
O3	0.08	4	0.32	3	0.24	2	0.16	1	0.08	4	0.32	3	0.24	2	0.16	1	0.08	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
O4	0.07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.21	4	0.28	2	0.14	1	0.07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
O5	0.05	3	0.15	2	0.10	4	0.20	1	0.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
O6	0.03	3	0.09	2	0.06	1	0.03	4	0.12	3	0.09	2	0.06	1	0.03	4	0.12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Threats																													
T1	0.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.15	2	0.10	1	0.05	2	0.10	1	0.05	3	0.15
T2	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
T3	0.07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.21	2	0.14	1	0.07
T4	0.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.10	3	0.15	1	0.05	-	-	-	-	-	-
T5	0.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	0.15	2	0.10	1	0.05	2	0.10	3	0.15	1	0.05
T6	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
T7	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.12	1	0.06	3	0.18	-	-	-	-	-	-
T8	0.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.08	1	0.08	3	0.12
T9	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.12	1	0.06	3	0.18	2	0.12	3	0.18	1	0.06
T10	0.07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
T11	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.12	3	0.18	1	0.06	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**1.00**		**1.85**		**1.63**		**1.03**		**0.92**		**1.63**		**2.06**		**1.45**		**1.26**		**1.59**		**1.36**		**1.13**		**1.24**		**1.25**		**0.93**

Rank	**Strategy**	**Sum of total attractiveness scores (STAS)**
1	WO2	2.06
2	SO1	1.85
3	SO2	1.63
4	ST1	1.59
5	WO1	1.54
6	WO3	1.45
7	ST2	1.36
8	SO3	1.30
9	WT1	1.29
10	WO4	1.26
11	WT2	1.21
12	ST3	1.13
13	SO4	0.92
14	WT3	0.86

Table 5. Prioritization Table for Strategic Alternatives

Conclusion

This study has provided a detailed analysis of the status and potential of Balikdami Wetland in the realm of birdwatching tourism through a multi-dimensional approach and the utilization of validated analytical tools. The findings indicate that the region's high biodiversity and unique ecological characteristics present considerable advantages for attracting tourists. However, existing managerial, infrastructural, and promotional shortcomings have been identified as significant impediments to fully realizing these potentials. The analyses based on the IFE and EFE matrices have clarified the necessary grounds for formulating strategies to exploit opportunities and remedy weaknesses. In this context, the SWOT analysis has provided a framework for deriving SO, WO, ST, and WT strategies, each aimed at enhancing the tourism profile of the region (Weihrich, 1982; Kotler et al., 2016).

In summary, the findings in this study indicate that by developing and implementing a comprehensive roadmap based on the WO2, SO1, SO2, ST1, and ST2 strategies, Balikdami Wetland can be successfully promoted as a sustainable and competitive birdwatching tourism destination at both national and international levels. Emphasis on the development of tourism infrastructure, enhancement of promotional activities, establishment of modern monitoring systems, and reinforcement of community participation are identified as key factors for achieving these objectives. Moreover, continuous monitoring, performance evaluation, and periodic updates to the implementation programs are considered essential for ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of the proposed strategies.

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Trends in Immersive Tourism Research: A Bibliometric Analysis of Emerging Themes and Conceptual Evolution

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Abstract

***Purpose**:* This study maps the intellectual landscape of immersive tourism research through bibliometric analysis of keyword co-occurrence patterns to identify dominant themes, research connections, and emerging frontiers.

***Methodology**:* A bibliometric analysis was conducted on 164 Scopus-indexed articles (2015-2025) using VOSviewer to analyse keyword co-occurrence networks, centrality measures, and temporal evolution patterns. Keyword clustering and temporal overlay visualisation revealed thematic structures and evolutionary trajectories.

***Results**:* Four distinct thematic clusters were identified: technological foundation (virtual reality), marketing frontier (tourism, destination), heritage dimension (cultural heritage, storytelling), and sustainability paradigm. The field has evolved from technology-centric (2015-2019) to experience-focused (2020-2022) to strategic application research (2022-2025). The "metaverse" emerged as the keyword with the highest burst strength, signalling new research directions.

***Originality/Value**:* This analysis provides the first comprehensive mapping of immersive tourism's conceptual landscape, identifies emerging research frontiers, and introduces the Immersive Tourism Research Integration Model (ITRIM) to guide future research and practice.

Keywords: immersive tourism, bibliometric analysis, virtual reality, metaverse, tourism futures

Introduction

Immersive technologies—Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR)—have transformed tourism from passive sightseeing into multi-sensory journeys that transcend physical limitations (Tussyadiah et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2024). These technologies address persistent challenges in tourism, including overtourism, accessibility barriers, and sustainability concerns (Stankov & Filimonau, 2024), while creating entirely new tourism possibilities, such as historical recreations and digitally enhanced environments (Orellana et al., 2024).

Despite the rapid expansion of immersive tourism research, a comprehensive understanding of its intellectual structure, dominant themes, and emerging frontiers remain limited (Chen & Navaneethakrishnan, 2024). Previous reviews have focused on specific isolated applications (Loureiro et al., 2020; Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019) without mapping the conceptual ecosystem as a whole. This gap is significant given the accelerating pace of technological innovation and its transformative potential for tourism's future (Cui et al., 2023).

Bibliometric analysis provides a powerful lens for visualising and analysing research field structures through quantitative analysis of published literature (Zupic & Čater, 2015). By examining keyword co-occurrence patterns, researchers can identify central themes, emerging topics, and interconnections defining the intellectual landscape of a field (van Eck & Waltman, 2014).

This study aims to delineate the intellectual landscape of immersive tourism research by (1) identifying dominant conceptual pillars through cluster analysis, (2) discovering connections between research themes through network analysis, (3) tracking the temporal evolution of research priorities, and (4) developing an integrated theoretical framework to guide future research and practice.

Methodology

This study employed co-word analysis using the VOSviewer methodology (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), focusing on keyword co-occurrence patterns to reveal the conceptual structure of immersive tourism research. The Scopus database was searched in March 2025, using Boolean terms "*immersive*" AND "*tourism"* within the title, abstract, and keywords fields for the period 2015-2024.

The initial search yielded 884 records, which were systematically filtered following PRISMA 2020 guidelines to focus on peer-reviewed journal articles in English. After exclusions based on publication type, language, relevance, and accessibility, the final corpus comprised 164 articles. A comparative analysis between excluded and included articles confirmed no significant differences in publication years (χ^2=7.42, p=0.59) or journal distribution (χ^2=12.84, p=0.38), suggesting representativeness.

Author keywords were extracted, harmonised, and standardised to eliminate variants. A co-occurrence network was constructed, where nodes represent keywords and connections indicate their co-appearance in articles. Keywords appearing at least five times (n=89) were included in the final analysis. Multiple centrality measures, including degree, betweenness, and eigenvector centrality, were calculated. VOSviewer's clustering algorithm (resolution 1.0) identified naturally occurring thematic communities, while temporal overlay visualisation and burst detection analysis revealed chronological evolution patterns.

Results

1) Keyword Frequency, Centrality, and Network Metrics

Table 1 revealed "virtual reality" as the dominant technological platform in immersive tourism research (114 occurrences, link strength: 326), with the highest betweenness centrality (0.47) and eigenvector centrality (0.82). Similarly, "tourism" functioned as a conceptual anchor (87 occurrences, link strength: 264), linking technology-focused and experience-orientated research streams.

Table 1: Top 10 Keywords in Immersive Tourism Research with Network Metrics

Rank	Keyword	Occurrences	Link Strength	Betweenness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	Burst Strength (2022-2024)
1	Virtual Reality	114	326	0.47	0.82	0.71
2	Tourism	87	264	0.39	0.79	0.43
3	Augmented Reality	36	89	0.21	0.54	0.62
4	Tourist Destination	26	115	0.18	0.41	0.37
5	Immersive	25	95	0.25	0.53	0.44
6	Cultural Heritage	23	67	0.11	0.32	0.38
7	Metaverse	23	55	0.11	0.26	3.42
8	Tourism Development	20	88	0.09	0.44	0.92
9	Tourist Behavior	19	77	0.15	0.37	0.78
10	Virtual Tourism	17	49	0.13	0.28	1.24

2) Four Domains of Immersive Tourism Research

Cluster analysis revealed four distinct yet interconnected thematic domains (Figure 1):

1. **Technological Foundation** (red cluster): Centred on enabling technologies, including virtual reality, augmented reality, and metaverse platforms.
2. **Marketing Frontier** (green cluster): Focused on how immersive technologies reshape tourism marketing and consumer psychology, including tourist destinations, behaviour, and development.
3. **Heritage Dimension** (blue cluster): Examining applications in cultural heritage, storytelling, and interpretive approaches.
4. **Sustainability Paradigm** (yellow cluster): Exploring contributions to responsible tourism, including sustainability and COVID-19 resilience strategies.

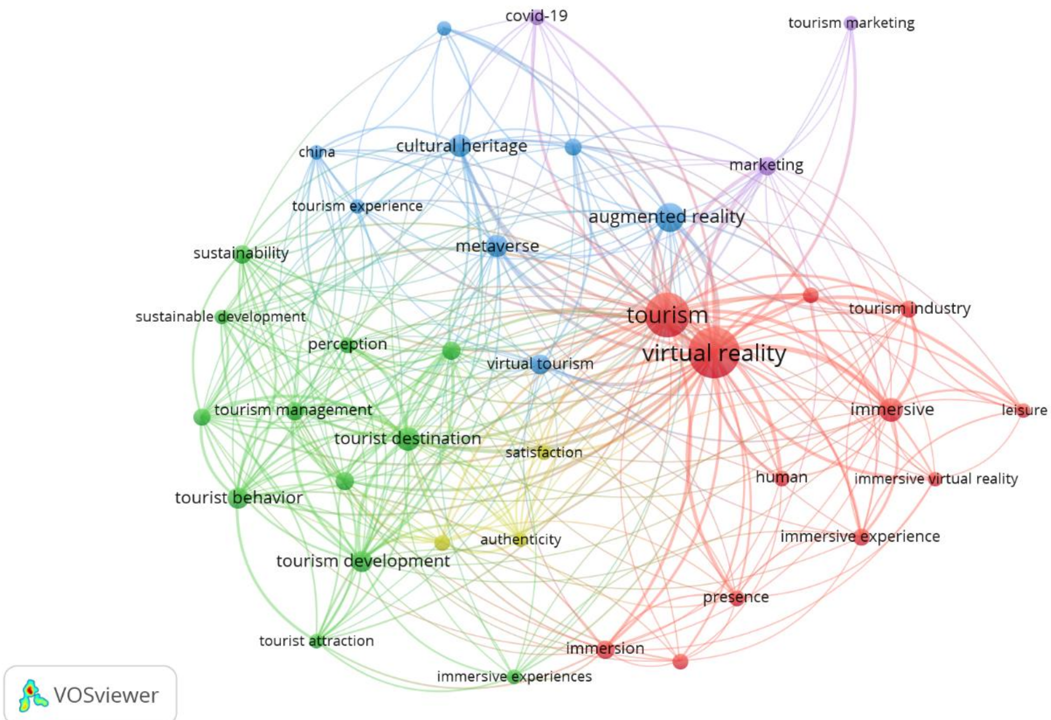

Figure 1: Clustered Network Visualisation of Immersive Tourism Research Keywords

3) Temporal Evolution: From Technology to Experience to Strategy

Temporal analysis revealed a clear evolutionary trajectory in immersive tourism research from 2015 to 2024 (Figure 2):

- **First Generation (2015-2019)**: Characterised by foundational technological exploration, with strong burst patterns for "virtual reality" (burst strength: 2.17) and "augmented reality" (burst strength: 1.92).
- **Second Generation (2020-2022)**: Expanded beyond technology to experiential dimensions, with significant bursts for psychological concepts like "user experience" (burst strength: 1.38) and "presence" (burst strength: 1.56).
- **Third Generation (2022-2025)**: Characterised by next-generation platforms like the "metaverse" (burst strength: 3.42), integration with pandemic response strategies, and deeper exploration of sustainability applications.

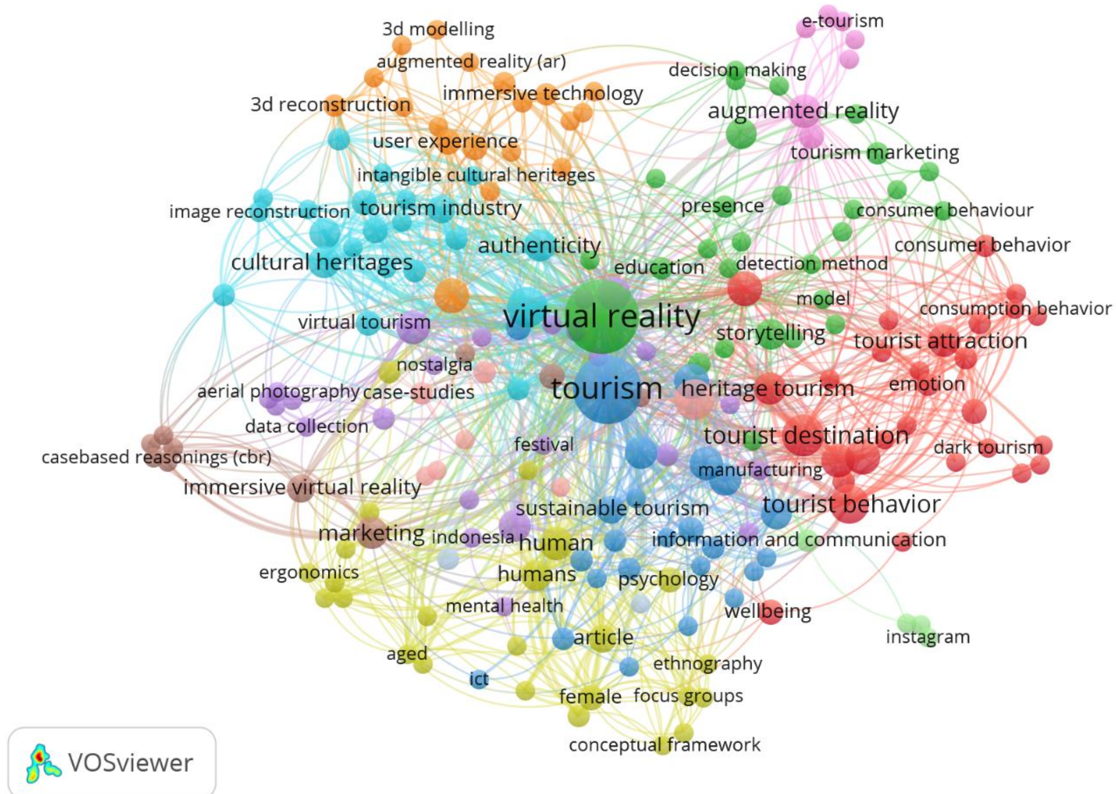

Figure 2: Temporal Overlay Visualisation of Immersive Tourism Keywords (2015 -2025)

Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis reveals immersive tourism as a dynamic research field that has evolved from technological fascination to sophisticated strategic application. Virtual reality's dominant position confirms its foundational role, while the emergence of metaverse-related keywords (highest burst strength: 3.42) signals a potential paradigm shift toward persistent, social virtual environments.

The temporal evolution from technology-focused to experience-focused and finally to strategically orientated research highlights a maturing field. Recent research increasingly investigates how immersive technologies can address fundamental tourism challenges, including overtourism, accessibility, and sustainability, suggesting a transition from technological novelty to purposeful application.

Based on these patterns, this study proposes the Immersive Tourism Research Integration Model (ITRIM), Figure 3, which conceptualises immersive tourism research as comprising three interconnected layers: technological affordances, experiential dimensions, and strategic applications. This framework offers researchers a structured approach to positioning their work and identifying connections with other research streams.

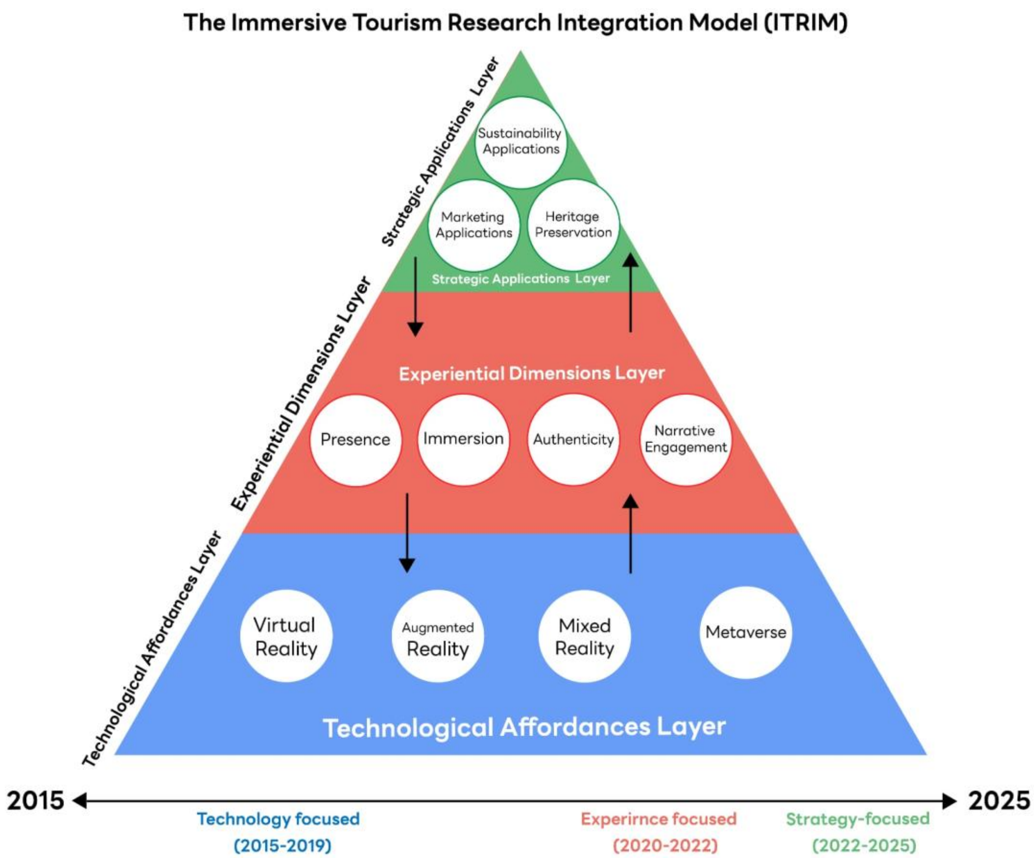

Figure 3: The Immersive Tourism Research Integration Model (ITRIM)

The study's limitations include focusing on Scopus-indexed articles and relying on author-provided keywords. Future research should incorporate multi-database approaches, examine citation patterns alongside keyword co-occurrence, and develop frameworks that address the unique characteristics of metaverse environments for tourism.

Acknowledgement

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Technology-Related Stress Factors in Customers' Food and Beverage Experience: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined the various techno stress factors affecting the customers' experience in food and beverages (F&B) through the lens of socialization. As service encounters transform through digitalization, understanding the impact of technology-induced stress on customer satisfaction and engagement should be pivotal in examining dining experiences.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study uses a systematic review of the literature to analyze technology-induced stressors affecting customers' experiences in restaurants and bars. An analysis of the various technology-induced stressors contains usability failures, privacy concerns, lack of human interaction, system reliability issues, and a plethora of digital overload issues. The study demonstrates how technology is oftentimes a double-edged sword: it can either distract from or enrich a seamless experience.

Results: Through an understanding of techno stress, F&B businesses can better optimize their digital interfaces, enhance their customer service strategies, and scale digital interface approaches that balance automation and personalization. Ultimately, the excellent design and implementation of technology can ***enhance customer satisfaction by reducing stress.***

Originality/value: This study adds to the contemporary debate on techno stress situated within the F&B industry, offering insights into how businesses can maximize technology use while leaving customer comfort and engagement intact.

Keywords Experience Stress Technology Food and Beverage Restaurant

Introduction

The culinary world has experienced tremendous transformation in contemporary times, spearheaded by the fast embrace of technology in the whole process of dining. Online menus, mobile ordering applications, AI-driven recommendations, and touchless payment systems have transformed how patrons engage with restaurants, bars, and cafes. While these innovations bring more convenience and efficiency, they also introduce new problems and concerns for customers.

Kim and Qu's (2021) study acknowledges that while technology has enhanced service delivery, it can also lead to frustration and anxiety among some consumers who cannot cope with the fast rate of evolution of digital technologies. Challenges in learning new systems, fear of data security, and potential technical failure can also complicate the dining experience. Likewise, Beldona et al. (2018) observed that customers experience 'technology stress' when they use self-service technologies, particularly when the systems are not user-friendly. Moreover, a move towards technology-facilitated interactions has a tendency to diminish the human touch, a very critical aspect of the hospitality sector. Tussyadiah and Park (2018) observe that reducing personal contact in service experiences has a tendency to create a feeling of isolation and decline in customer satisfaction.

This literature review examines the technology-based stressors that influence customer experiences within the food and beverage sector. With an in-depth examination of the literature that is available, it identifies the key themes and implications and provides practical recommendations on how firms can create and enact technological interventions that contribute to, rather than detract from, the overall dining experience.

Methodology

This study employs a systematic literature review method to examine technology-driven stressors in customers' dining and drinking experiences. The review aims to find, categorize, and synthesize the literature on the impact of technology on customer stress in the food service industry.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

An extensive search was carried out on academic databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. The search process included keywords such as:

"technology-related stress" AND "food and beverage industry"

"customer experience" AND "digitalization" AND "stress"

"technostress" AND "restaurant" OR "hospitality"

"self-service technology" AND "consumer dissatisfaction"

It only considered peer-reviewed journal papers, conference papers, and authentic industry reports between 2000 and 2024.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included based on the following criteria:

-Published in English.

-Investigated technology-induced stress in food and beverage settings.

-Measured consumer attitudes, affective reactions, or behavioral outcomes.

-Empirical or theoretical research with a well-founded methodological approach.

Exclusion criteria included:

-Research that concentrated only on employee-based stress.

-Look into non-food and beverage industries.

-Papers lacking empirical evidence or theoretical frameworks.

Restrictions

This review is constrained by its concentration on English-language research and use of secondary sources. Also, given the pace at which technology is advancing, some findings could be outdated in the future. Future studies can include primary data gathering to corroborate findings. By employing this methodological framework, the present literature review offers a systematic comprehension of the food and beverage sector's technology-based stressors, thus creating additional value for academic discussion as well as real-world usefulness to service providers.

The Role of Technology in the Food and Beverage Industry

Technology is now a part of the food and beverage sector, impacting how customers find, purchase, and experience their meals. The growth in internet websites, mobile apps, and online platforms has established a synchronized and unified food system. Platforms like OpenTable and Yelp simplify customer reservations and review reading, whereas food ordering sites like Uber Eats and DoorDash allow customers to order and receive food with minimal effort (Kimes, 2008). Moreover, restaurants are now embracing self-service kiosks, QR code menus, and AI-powered chatbots to streamline and enhance customer interactions (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

Though these innovations have enhanced efficiency and usability, they also introduced at the same time complexities that may cause customer stress. The next sections elaborate on the key technology-related stressors found in the literature.

1. Information Overload and Decision Fatigue

One of the most potent stressors in the modern digital landscape is information overload. The spread of online websites, virtual menus, and food ordering applications has raised the level of available choices to customers, sometimes to a bewildering degree. Schwartz (2004) referred to the "paradox of choice," the notion that more choices can be freeing but also lead to decision fatigue and stress.In the food and beverage sector, consumers are usually faced with very large menus, many customization options, and a very large amount of online reviews, making it even harder to choose. Chernev et al. (2015) discovered that consumers exposed to too much choice in menus experienced increased stress and dissatisfaction. Likewise, Moe and Schweidel (2012) underscored the notion that excessive review and rating can lead to confusion, as consumers find it difficult to determine credible sources. This overabundance of information can eventually deteriorate satisfaction and generate a feeling of frustration.

2. Data Security and Privacy Concerns

The mass application of technology requests personal information, such as credit card information, geographic location, and food preferences, from customers in the food and beverage sector. While information definitely provides improved personalization and ease of transaction, it may also expose the customer to privacy and security risks. In particular, Smith et al. (2011) remark that risks such as identity theft, data breach, and misuse of information are increasingly worrying consumers. An example of this phenomenon is in mobile payment systems, or loyalty programs, which often require users to set up accounts and share sensitive personal information. Customer anxiety may occur as a result of their belief that their information is not being adequately protected, and a customer unwillingness to engage with such technologies may be evident (Belanger & Crossler, 2011). Furthermore, insufficient transparency regarding data collection and usage processes could undermine consumer trust even further.

3. Technical and Usability Challenges

Usability of technology is also a key driver of stress. Poorly intuitive interfaces, slow system performance, and technical faults can disrupt transactions and frustrate consumers. Nielsen (2012) emphasizes the importance of user-centered design in creating intuitive and productive digital experiences. Where technology falls below these standards, it has the potential to negatively affect brand impression and consumer satisfaction. Parasuraman and Grewal (2000) discovered that shoppers who found it hard to use self-order kiosks or mobile order applications would abandon their purchase and find a substitute. Technical glitches, including app breakdown, payment issue, or incorrect orders, are likely to trigger elevated anxiety levels, especially among shoppers who have limited time or availability.

4. Loss of Human Interaction

Despite the benefits technological advancements bring, a significant population of patrons hold personal interaction with high priority as they enjoy eating out. Automation and digital processes may lead to alienation despite the benefits technological advancements bring. Bitner et al. (2000) argue that interactive relationships are fundamental in building excellent and memorable dining experiences. For example, QR code menus and self-service kiosks reduce direct contact with employees, resulting in an aspect that might be perceived as impersonal by certain clients. Lu et al. (2020) find customers who had contact with employees during their meal were more satisfied than customers who only used technology. Additionally, the lack of human contact can cause it to be challenging for customers to obtain assistance when something goes awry, resulting in increased frustration.

5. Adjustment to New Technologies

The pace at which technology evolves necessitates that consumers continuously learn new tools and platforms. Although younger generations, being technologically inclined, will adopt these developments, older or less technologically inclined consumers may find them daunting. This disparity in technical competencies will cause stress and anxiety in the individuals who feel either bombarded by or left out of technology-driven systems. For instance, the shift to contactless payment methods and digital menus amidst the COVID-19 pandemic was tricky for most consumers, especially the elderly (Kim et al., 2021). Struggling to get through these technologies may cause frustration and feelings of insufficiency. It is, therefore, crucial that companies take into account the varying needs of their clientele and introduce technology in a way that is inclusive and accessible.

6. How Technological Advancement Impacts Consumers' Expectations

With evolving technology, customer expectations evolve as well. Current consumers require smooth, personalized experience, and quick services, which are difficult for firms to deliver consistently. Inability to achieve such high expectations, as cited by Kimes (2008), results in stress for both customers and service providers. At the same time, food delivery delays or mistakes in web orders create dissatisfaction and frustration, particularly if consumers anticipate perfect service founded on past experiences. Moreover, artificial intelligence-driven personalization and custom-tailored offers can occasionally have unexpected side effects. Consumers can become uneasy or feel their privacy invaded if they believe that their preferences are scrutinized to an inappropriate degree (Ascarza et al., 2018). Achieving a proper balance between personalization and privacy is critical in sustaining customer trust.

7. Coping Strategies and Mitigation Mechanisms

To manage the stressors linked to technology within the food and beverage sector, companies ought to adopt measures focused on customer wellness and satisfaction. One of the useful strategies is simplifying the user experience by limiting the variety of options and making decisions easier. Also providing personalized menus according to customers' preferences can assist in alleviating information overload (Chernev et al., 2015). Further, putting money into easy design and robust technical infrastructure will minimize usability issues. Good instruction, tutorials, and readily accessible customer support can help customers easily navigate new technology (Nielsen, 2012). Maintaining a balance between technology and human touch is crucial as well—companies must integrate digital tools in a way that augments but does not replace human service.

Conclusion

Technological innovations in the food and beverage sector have completely changed the dining experience, with mostly advantages in form of efficiency, personalized service, and convenience. However, such advantages also come with new challenges that could potentially curtail the customer experience. Some of the major issues pointed out in several academic studies include information overload, privacy concerns, usability issues, less human interaction, adaption toward technology would be difficult, and higher expectations from customers. As an example, Wang et al. (2020) reported that a plethora of digital menus or the recommendation systems may confuse consumers and result in decision fatigue. Similarly, Parasuraman et al. (2005) stated that usability problems become the main cause of annoyance to the customers.

To combat these challenges, businesses will need to find a middle ground while adopting technology into their operations. In this regard, creating user-friendly designs; providing correct training and support provided to the omnichannel experience; and ensuring adequate transparency regarding credit card and data use can serve to improve customer satisfaction and trust. Guttentag et al. (2018) argue that companies that tend to focus on accessibility and usability of any product or service are more likely to provide the customers with positive experiences. The business should strive to keep a hybrid, where the warm-hearted experience and personalized service, which the guests enjoy, may continue.

Future research should continue to explore the interactive relationship between technological innovation and consumer satisfaction, particularly with the advent of innovations such as virtual reality dining and AI-enabled personalization. Buhalis and Sinarta (2019) argue that the hospitality industry's fast-changing technology continuously evaluates customer stress levels and satisfaction. Because will address this timely and proactively, this will ensure that customers don't fault technology for an unpleasant experience in the restaurant, ultimately leading to an enjoyable experience for all.

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Problems and Challenges Faced by Micro-Entrepreneurs Providing Services on the Sharing Economy Platforms in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to reveal the problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs providing services on the sharing economy platforms in the tourism and hospitality (T&H) industry.

Study design/methodology/approach: To reveal the problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs providing services on the sharing economy platforms in the T&H industry. Qualitative data was collected by interviewing five Airbnb hosts in Türkiye. Following the purposeful sampling method, a semi-structured interview form was used, and the collected data was analyzed using the thematic analysis method.

Results: The thematic analysis reveals three main dimensions, including problems with guests, problems with platforms, and legal challenges regarding the problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs providing services on the sharing economy platforms in the T&H industry.

***Originality/value*:** This study contributes significantly to the literature by empirically examining the problems and challenges encountered by micro-entrepreneurs providing services on sharing economy platforms in the tourism and hospitality industry. In addition, as a practical inference, it presents knowledge about the issues encountered by micro-entrepreneurs who provide services to large sharing economy actors (Airbnb, Uber, etc.) on the platform.

Keywords: Sharing Economy, Tourism Sharing Economy, Entrepreneurship, Micro-Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Challenges

Introduction

There are various entrepreneurial challenges as well as opportunities for micro-entrepreneurs. Studies on entrepreneurship challenges in the SE (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018; Hajli et al., 2024; Karlsson et al., 2017; Kapoor & Tucker, 2017; Liu, 2006; McNamara, 2015; Ruilin & Xin, 2021; Tussyadiah, 2015; Tussyadiah & Park, 2018; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Zhang et al., 2019); however; to the best of authors knowledge, no studies has focused on the problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs providing services on the SE platforms in the T&H industry. Based on this gap, this preliminary study aimed to reveal the problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs operating in the SE in the T&H industry to contribute to the literature. In this direction, three main themes (problems with guests, problems with platforms, and legal challenges) were revealed regarding the problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs.

Methodology

To gain an in-depth understanding of the problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs providing services on the SE platforms in the T&H industry, because of the lack of a solid framework to reveal the problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs, using the purposive sampling method was deemed appropriate. Through purposeful methods, Airbnb hosts were reached through the online collaboration platform, where they share Airbnb hosts. Given its preliminary nature, this study included a sample of only five participants. Semi-structured interviews with five hosts operating on the Airbnb platform in Türkiye were conducted via phone and video calls and transcribed verbatim. The interviews lasted 34 minutes on average. Interview data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method, so themes intentionally stated by participants were selectively coded (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Original quotes taken from the original interview transcripts were used to increase the data's reliability and help better understand the findings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

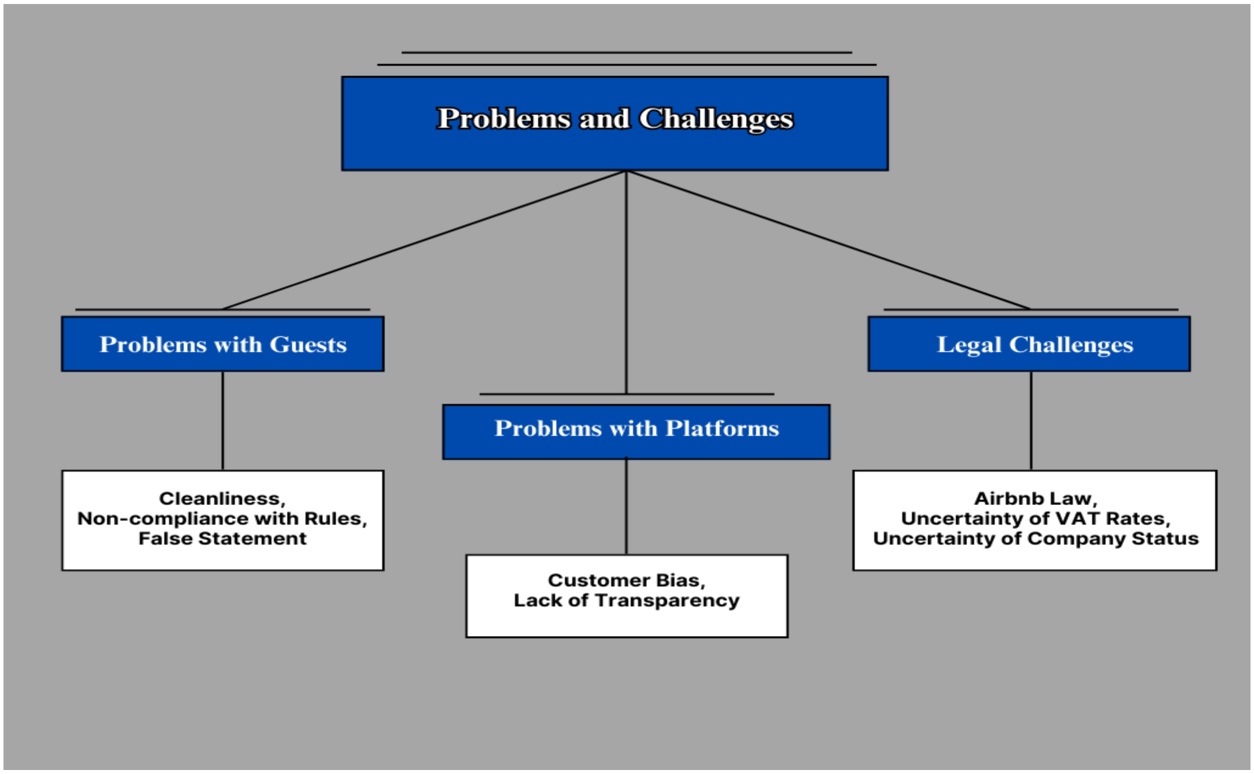
Table 1. Profiles of Participants

Participant	**Sex**	**Age**	**Marital Status**	**Education Level**	**Profession**	**Sharing Economy Activity**
P1	Male	67	Married	Bachelor Degree	Mechanical Engineer	Airbnb Host
P2	Woman	52	Married	Bachelor Degree	Banker	Airbnb Host
P3	Male	30	Single	Bachelor Degree	Pool Company Owner	Airbnb Host
P4	Woman	60	Married	Bachelor Degree	Retired	Airbnb Host
P5	Male	35	Single	Bachelor Degree	Tourism	Airbnb Host

Results

As a result of the thematic analysis, three main themes and eight sub-themes emerged.

Figure 1. Theme and Sub-Themes



Problems with Guests

Zhang et al. (2019) revealed that as micro-entrepreneurs in the SE, emotional stress caused by guest reviews. This study revealed that, unlike the emotional stress caused by guest reviews during the micro-entrepreneurship stage, micro-entrepreneurs faced different problems with guests (cleanliness, non-compliance with rules, and false statements) after becoming entrepreneurs. Participants stated that they had problems with cleanliness regarding guests. **(P1)** stated the following on this issue:

"I had a problem with the guests. I had four single male guests. They left it very dirty. I also had a female guest with three children. They left it very messy because of the children. "

Participants also stated that problems were caused by the guests not following the rules. **(P3)** stated the following on this issue:

"Although we wrote on our Airbnb profile that noise should not be made after midnight, we faced problems 4-5 times due to guests making noise after midnight."

Participants stated that the guests made false statements. **(P2)** stated the following on this issue:

"I have had a few problems there due to communication problems with guests from abroad regarding check-in times. I encountered a guest who bad-mouthed the house by falsely claiming it was dirty, despite it being spotless, to get a refund ."

Problems with Platforms

Although there were no challenges related to platforms among the challenges faced during the entrepreneurship stage (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018; Hajli et al., 2024; Ruilin & Xin, 2021; Tussyadiah & Park, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019), this study revealed that micro-entrepreneurs faced various problems (customer bias and lack of transparency) with platforms after becoming entrepreneurs. The opinions of participants who have problems with platforms are as follows :

"Airbnb does not stand behind the host in any way. It always puts the customer in the right place." ***(P2)***

"Airbnb's commission rates are not fully transparent. While it shows 100,000 TL on my screen when the customer comes to the payment screen, it says it is 110,000 TL. It needs to be clearer ." ***(P3)***

"Airbnb refunds the guest if they complain for an unethical reason. Airbnb customer representatives accept the customer's statement as real. They immediately deduct 30% and send the remaining amount to the host as a penalty. They are not being fair in this regard." ***(P5)***

Legal Challenges

Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh (2018) and Hajli et al. (2024) revealed that legal challenges are an important obstacle for entrepreneurs in the entrepreneurship phase in the SE. This study revealed that micro-entrepreneurs who faced legal challenges in the entrepreneurship phase also faced different legal challenges (Airbnb law, uncertainty of VAT rates, and uncertainty of company status) after becoming entrepreneurs. The participants' opinions about the challenges they faced are as follows:

"I asked a tax office, and they told me 10%. In short, there is uncertainty. If this law sees us as a tourism business, why don't we pay 10% VAT instead of 20% VAT?" ***(P1)***

"Regarding the Airbnb law, getting permission from all the hosts in the building where Airbnb will be built is very difficult." ***(P4)***

"The Tax Office says we have to pay 20% VAT. However, hotel businesses pay 10% VAT. If they see us as a commercial business, why do they want us to pay accommodation tax and tourism share?" ***(P5)***

Conclusion

Many studies have been conducted on the challenges faced by entrepreneurs in the entrepreneurship phase in the SE however, the problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs providing services on the SE platforms in the T&H industry has been ignored. Therefore, this study made a significant contribution to the literature by revealing problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, this study also provides knowledge about the problems and challenges faced by micro-entrepreneurs serving on platforms (Airbnb) serving in the SE platforms in the T&H. As in every study, there are limitations to this study. Since this study reveals the problems and challenges faced by Airbnb hosts serving on the Airbnb platform, the problems and challenges of micro-entrepreneurs serving on platforms other than the accommodation area of the SE platforms in the T&H (transportation, food and beverage, and tourist guidance) could not be determined.

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The Use of Artificial Intelligence Applications in Tourism Education

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the use of artificial intelligence (AI) applications in education, with a particular focus on their role in tourism education. AI in education (AIE) is becoming increasingly prevalent; however, there are different perspectives regarding its application in both education and research.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: This research is based on secondary data and consists of a literature review. It synthesizes findings from primary sources to provide a comprehensive overview of AI applications in education. The study was conducted by analyzing scholarly articles on AI and examining recent technological advancements.

Results: AI can process educational, psychological, and social data, making it a valuable tool for both students and educators. AI applications enhance the efficiency of educational systems by streamlining tasks and improving learning outcomes. As universities strive to remain competitive, they increasingly adopt AI technologies to attract students and enhance their academic offerings. In tourism education, practical training is essential for gaining industry experience; however, it may create time management challenges for students. AI applications support students academically by offering personalized learning and flexible study options.

Originality/Value: There is limited research on AI in tourism education, making this study a valuable contribution to the literature. By providing insights into AI applications in tourism education, this research helps bridge the gap and supports future studies in the field.

Keywords Artificial Intelligence in Education, Educational Sciences, Tourism, Tourism Education

Introduction

There is an opinion that the first scientific discussion about a machine close to human intelligence was made by Alan Turing (Turing, 1950). He raised the question, "Can machines think?" Although Turing discussed the concept of artificial intelligence (AI) broadly, he did not specify what should be done to achieve artificial intelligence. Newell and Simon (1954) were the first to work on creating a computer program with general intelligence (McCarthy, 2007). The term "artificial intelligence" was first used by McCarthy at the Dartmouth Conference in 1956 (Digital Transformation Office, 2023).

Algorithms used in computers were developed in the 20th century. As they developed, machines were built to mimic human intelligence according to specific rules. Artificial intelligence has been defined as the science and engineering of making smart machines (Ng, Leung, Chu, and Qiao, 2021). However, there is no widely accepted definition. The term artificial intelligence has been used in different ways in various fields. The general definition of artificial intelligence now includes learning and performing cognitive tasks with technological innovations such as neural networks, machine learning, and natural language processing (Wang, 2019).

Machine learning and artificial intelligence are related but not the same. Machine learning refers to a method where a computer learns from the data stored in its memory. Machine learning helps the computer to have artificial intelligence. AI, on the other hand, is defined as the ability of a computer or a robot controlled by a computer to perform tasks typically associated with intelligent beings. The term artificial intelligence is used to describe adapting human-like features such as reasoning, understanding, learning from past experiences, and making generalizations to computers (Copeland, 2023).

To explain artificial intelligence in the tourism sector, Huang et al. (2022) used the Diffusion of Innovations theory. Developed by Rogers (2003), the Diffusion of Innovations theory mentions five characteristics in the adoption of new technologies in the tourism sector. These characteristics are "compatibility," "complexity," "relative advantage," "trialability," and "observability."

Devices with AI simplify people's lives with the data they collect and their updatable, customizable programs. AI is used in image processing applications such as facial recognition, security, tagging photos on social networks, synthetic images, and generating fake photos and videos. It also handles voice processing tasks like voice assistants, response systems, music recognition, and converting speech to text and text to speech. AI enables translation, online chat and assistant applications, software fixes, and text processing applications. It is also used in data processing tasks such as advertisements, music, and campaign recommendations, weather forecasting, route planning, game engines, performance evaluation, and periodic maintenance reminders. In addition to supporting health-related applications and autonomous vehicles, AI is used in big data analytics, fraud detection, damage management, cybersecurity, agriculture, and livestock support (Digital Transformation Office, 2023). AI applications have entered people's daily lives in many ways, such as through smartphones, Google applications, smart assistants, and smart home devices. In addition to being used in many sectors to improve user experience and increase efficiency, its use is also becoming widespread in the field of education (Ng et al., 2021).

The research is based on secondary data. Studies conducted in the literature have been compiled. The research in primary sources is summarized (Okumuş, 2018). Articles related to AI have been researched, and recent developments in the field of education have been examined.

(Luckin et al., 2016) stated that AI can be adapted to learning sciences, showing how learning occurs by providing personalized education. (Altınpulluk, 2018) mentioned that AI is used in smart learning environments together with Internet of Things applications. (Swiecki et al., 2022) highlighted its use in grading and accessing materials. (Lund et al., 2023) pointed out its role in producing written content, while (Skavronskaya et al., 2023) discussed its use in spelling and grammar checks.

There are studies in the literature on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education. İşler and Kılış (2021) explored the purposes of using AI to develop students' personal learning. Chiu (2021) focused on the application of AI in the curriculum of K-12 schools. Wong et al. (2020) discussed where AI should start in education and teaching. Arslan and Kürşat (2020) examined its contributions to education. Yang (2019) highlighted the different uses of AI in education. Nelson and Hoover (2020) studied the collaboration between processors and AI, and deep learning. Garrett et al. (2020) worked on how universities should hire AI-experienced individuals to develop AI. Touretzky et al. (2019) explained the role of AI in K-12 education and its use in new curricula. Hao (2019) discussed the rapid impact of AI in teaching and its effect on students' futures. Eaton et al. (2018) addressed ethical issues in the use of AI.

According to the findings from studies in the literature, AI facilitates reaching results by quickly analyzing big data, and can assist in analyzing data from devices that communicate with each other through the Internet of Things. AI can also help identify students' abilities in virtual worlds created with virtual reality. Providing education related to robotics and using tools like ChatGPT can contribute to students' academic development. This study aims to examine the use of AI applications in education and determine their potential contributions to tourism education. By identifying the effects of AI applications on the tourism education process, it is believed that the study will contribute to the literature.

Artificial Intelligence in Education

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education is an important and popular topic in educational sciences. Research on AI in education dates back about 30 years. AI and adaptive learning technologies are considered significant developments in education. The 2018 and 2019 Horizon reports by Educause predicted that AI use in education would increase. As educators explore the pedagogical benefits of AI for supporting students, the development of AI also requires ethical practices and carries certain risks (Zawacki-Richter, Marín, Bond, & Gouverneur, 2019).

In online courses, AI-powered robots explaining lessons to students have raised concerns among educators. AI applications may cause worries about data protection and student privacy. Russel (2010) emphasized the importance of ethical practices in AI research. Computers can perform many tasks as if they have human-like understanding and intuition. However, even though they may appear to reason like humans while completing a task, they do not actually have comprehension or awareness.

With AI, it is possible to create intelligence at a human level, which could lead to significant changes in people's lives. The abilities that computers gain through AI might reach a level where they could threaten human freedom and autonomy (Russell, 2010).

The primary goal of using artificial intelligence in education (AIE) is to make precise calculations related to educational, psychological, and social information. This helps determine how students are affected by technology, as well as socio-economic and psychological factors. AI-powered computers interact using human-like abilities. With AIE, precise calculations generate information to enable the most effective learning (Luckin et al., 2016). Computers associated with human cognition can perform learning and problem-solving tasks. The image categorizes AI in education (AIE) into three main areas (Baker ve diğerleri, 2019):

Student-Centered AIE:

- Adapts learning materials to students' needs
- Identifies students' strengths, weaknesses, and gaps
- Provides feedback
- Facilitates collaboration among students

Teacher-Centered AIE:

- Automates tasks
- Provides information on student and class progress
- Supports innovation and experimentation

Education System-Centered AIE:

- Assists in decision-making
- Facilitates data sharing
- Identifies deficiencies
- Manages schedules
- Supports evaluation

Baker et al. (2019) stated that student-centered AI in education (AIE) applications are "smart," "personalized," and "differentiated." These applications can identify students' needs and create engaging and customized learning materials. AI can also detect students' strengths and weaknesses, helping them overcome their deficiencies through personalized study programs. Additionally, it provides feedback to support learning.

AI in education (AIE) enhances the teacher's role by automating tasks. These applications assist with grading, plagiarism detection, feedback, and administrative work efficiently. Additionally, AI allows teachers to track both class and individual student progress (Baker et al., 2019).

AI in education (AIE) benefits both education system administrators and school management. With AIE, schools can share information, and updates about the education system can be quickly distributed to all institutions (Baker et al., 2019).

AI in education (AIE) aims to address all aspects of learning. Research focuses on enabling machines to use language, form concepts, and understand abstract ideas (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). There are various studies in the literature related to AIE.

İşler and Kılış (2021) researched the role of AI in students' personal development. They found that AI enables personalized learning, improves academic success, makes online education more effective than self-learning, and helps teachers save time.

Chiu (2021) studied AI integration into K-12 curricula. He identified key AI components, including AI knowledge, content, processes, student engagement, teacher-student interaction, and application flexibility.

Wong et al. (2020) discussed how AI can encourage students' curiosity in learning.

Arslan and Kürşat (2020) explored AI applications in exploratory learning, data mining, article analysis, and education for special needs children.

Yang (2019) and Touretzky et al. (2019) examined AI's role in K-12 education and its integration into new curricula.

Nelson and Hoover (2020) studied AI collaboration with computing systems and deep learning[1].

Garrett et al. (2020) analyzed how universities contribute to AI development by hiring AI experts.

Hao (2019) discussed the rapid impact of AI in teaching and its effects on students' futures. In his study, he mentioned that students followed lessons through laptops and listened to the lessons using headphones in the school he used as an example.

Eaton et al. (2018) emphasized the ethical use of AI. They stated that educational institutions should benefit from AI's interdisciplinary use. They highlighted the importance of training on AI to get the maximum benefit from it.

Artificial Intelligence in Tourism Education

The benefits brought by technology have become important for institutions providing tourism education. Software that can help students gain hands-on experience while learning can be used to create plans aimed at increasing students' knowledge and experience. With AI applications, learning methods enhance students' knowledge and assist in developing their skills. By involving students dynamically in education, it moves them away from a passive role (Ali, Nair, and Hussain, 2016). Developments in technology, such as thinking machines and artificial intelligence, have caused changes in the education system (Chow, 2013). Students' educational needs and expectations have changed, and they are now seeking different options. As students' expectations have increased, universities have tried to compete and improve their attractiveness. They have developed their education systems by benefiting from technological advancements (Jackson et al., 2013).

[1] Deep learning is similar to machine learning, but instead of relying on predefined rules, the computer organizes and adjusts data patterns on its own (Kaspersky, 2023).

Studying tourism at vocational schools and universities helps train qualified workers and supports the growth of a country's tourism industry (Kruss, 2004). Practical training and internships help students gain experience and understand the industry better (Busby, 2005). However, financial difficulties may force students to work part-time while studying. This can cause tiredness, absenteeism, and time management challenges (Littlejohn & Watson, 2004).

Since tourism is a service-based industry, learning on the job helps students gain experience and apply their education in real life. However, working while studying may also make it harder to focus on classes. New technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIE), can support students' academic success by offering personalized learning, study assistance, and smart tutoring systems.

As technology advances, educational institutions have started using big data, the Internet of Things (IoT), simulations, 3D modeling, artificial and vertical system integration, cloud computing, cybersecurity networks, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and robotics. The internet, mobile devices, social media communication, and online courses have begun transforming tourism education (Avgeli et al., 2020).

Methodology

The research was conducted by compiling secondary data. Review studies help provide a general perspective on a topic by analyzing previous research in the literature. In such studies, the researcher does not present original data but examines and interprets existing research (Datamining, 2024).

In this study, literature was reviewed based on the keywords artificial intelligence, tourism, and education.

Results

In the digital age, AI-powered applications are becoming part of tourism services. However, there are relatively few studies in the literature on the relationship between tourism education and artificial intelligence.

Ivanov and Soliman (2023) stated that ChatGPT can enhance tourism education and should be integrated into the learning process. ChatGPT can reject inappropriate requests, generate responses, and track users' previous searches. Although the accuracy of its information is sometimes debated, ChatGPT is a time-saving tool. Tourism students can use it to support their research on specific topics (Anders, 2022).

Skavronskaya et al. (2023) researched the academic effects of ChatGPT. They found it useful for case studies, exploring specific topics, and working on projects. However, they also emphasized the importance of considering ethical issues.

Avgeli et al. (2020) researched the role of AI in tourism education. They highlighted that AI is used in small-class seminars, social media integration, and online courses. They emphasized the need for students to be trained with cutting-edge technologies.

However, they also pointed out that in tourism services—where empathy, communication, teamwork, and customer relations are crucial—AI and robotic management models might overshadow human skills.

Conclusion

The concept of "artificial intelligence" emerged for computers that, by adapting human-like logic, the ability to draw conclusions from past experiences, and generalize, can evaluate data recorded in their memory through machine learning (Copeland, 2023).AI applications have started being used in education, and adaptive, personalized learning technologies are becoming more widespread. While there are studies in the literature on AI and AI applications in tourism, research on the use of artificial intelligence in tourism education is relatively limited. Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIE) is used to assess how students are affected psychologically, educationally, and socially. AIE applications help determine materials based on the student's needs, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and provide feedback. They also facilitate collaboration among students. Teachers and educators can automate administrative tasks, monitor the status of the class and students, and implement innovations with the help of AIE applications. These applications are used in administrative decision-making, data sharing, identifying weaknesses in the education system and institution, scheduling, and further evaluations (Baker et al., 2019). AIE facilitates information sharing between schools, allowing even schools with limited financial resources to access necessary materials. It also provides educational opportunities for students from disadvantaged groups. Through inter-school knowledge exchange, tourism students can transfer the courses they take in online programs to count toward their graduation credits (MicroMasters, 2024). Through the use of AIE applications, the education system in tourism faculties and vocational schools is improving. Hsu (2018) stated that learning with robots will become more common in schools offering tourism education, and the shift toward a blended learning model will require the use of teaching assistants. He also suggested that as AR and VR applications are increasingly used in tourism education, there will be changes in the roles of educators. Universities are trying to increase their appeal by leveraging technology. They store big data in the cloud and, with the help of AI, can quickly analyze the data. Through AIE programs, tourism data science programs can be developed, and students can take courses to analyze the large data obtained (Hsu C. H., 2018).

The research has led to the following recommendations:

- AIE applications can help assess educators' psychological and social skills, as well as their communication abilities.
- Academics can benefit from using ChatGPT in their research to save time.
- AIE applications can offer personalized education and research opportunities on topics that interest students.
- Assignments can be tailored to students' interests.
- With the introduction of robots in the tourism sector, it is essential to highlight human empathy in the course content. Creating course content that helps students learn to work in harmony with robots can provide them with a competitive advantage in the future.
- Gamification applications can allow students to virtually visit hotels, helping all tourism students, especially those studying guiding, learn about historical sites and destination-specific cultures.
- In food and beverage-related courses, virtual presentation lessons can make it easier for students in their future careers.
- In AI-supported virtual reality applications for ticket or tour sales, students can engage in dialogue with customers.

Limitations

This study investigated the use of artificial intelligence in tourism education. While there are relatively more examples of AI use in educational sciences, the information available on AI in tourism education is limited. The limitation of the research at this stage is the inability to gather opinions from students and instructors regarding the use of artificial intelligence applications. The changes brought about by AI applications in tourism education, such as virtual reality, the effects of robots on services and employees, and the influence of ChatGPT on research, cannot be clearly determined. In the future, researchers may conduct studies on the use of AI applications in educational institutions and academia. They can compile user opinions on AI applications.

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Advancing Accessible and Sustainable Tourism Through Generative AI: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Purpose: Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has the potential to advance inclusion and sustainability in digital tourism by improving the accessibility of tourism experiences for people with disabilities (PwD). However, GenAI's expansion and versatility simultaneously create challenges as tourism stakeholders must consider various factors and make numerous decisions while exploring the possibilities. To manage this complexity, this paper aims to create a conceptual framework for guiding tourism stakeholders in the process of creating accessible, digital, and sustainable tourism services that actively leverage GenAI's capabilities at every stage.

Study design/methodology/approach: The conceptual framework was formed by reviewing the literature on digital accessibility, sustainable tourism, and GenAI applications to identify the stages for developing accessible digital and sustainable tourism services and ways to integrate GenAI.

Results: The findings highlight a preliminary framework that outlines its guiding principles and key stages, allowing the effective integration of GenAI at different phases of the development cycle.

Originality/value: This paper provides a novel framework that guides tourism stakeholders in strategically integrating GenAI tools to develop and deliver services that address the unique needs of PwD while contributing to the broader goals of digital inclusion and sustainable tourism.

Keywords Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), People with Disabilities, Conceptual Framework, Digital Accessibility, Sustainable Tourism, Smart Tourism, Assistive Technologies

Introduction

Sustainable tourism promotes inclusivity and utilizes technology as a key enabler to achieve its broader goals (UNWTO, 2021). One such transformative technology is Generative AI (GenAI), particularly in the form of Large Language Models (LLMs), which offers a range of capabilities (Dwivedi et al., 2023). GenAI can enable a gamut of personalized and adaptive tourism applications and services (Nataraj et al., 2024; Theofanous et al., 2024; Vujičić et al., 2024) while simultaneously addressing the needs of people with disabilities (PwD). Beyond enhancing existing tourism applications and services, GenAI can also aid in creating them, an aspect that has not been adequately explored.

Although the tourism industry already takes advantage of AI and GenAI-powered applications, mainly as chatbots and virtual assistants, the degree of adoption is low, differs across tourism sub-sectors, and neither addresses accessibility nor sustainability issues (OECD 2024). This can be attributed to various parameters, including the technology's early stage and the necessity to make significant investments in financial, technical, and human capital. Further compounding this situation is the lack of frameworks guiding tourism stakeholders in understanding the process and the tradeoffs involved in developing GenAI powered applications. Therefore, businesses face significant risks with only a few capable of absorbing potential losses.

To the best of our knowledge, existing frameworks in the tourism literature focus on evaluating the effect of GenAI on customer experience and perceptions (Gajić et al., 2024; Vena-Oya et al., 2024), marketing strategies (Khan and Khan, 2024; Abrokwah-Larbi, 2023), or specific applications (Ilieva et al., 2024). This observation highlights the absence of a structured approach to facilitate broader GenAI adoption. Towards this end, this paper formulates a conceptual framework integrating GenAI into the development cycle of inclusive tourism experiences aiming to strengthen sustainable e-commerce, augment inclusivity, and create an equitable and sustainable digital environment.

Methodology

The paper's conceptual research involved scanning the literature for content, including the following search terms: "sustainable tourism," "digital accessibility," "Generative AI," and "inclusive tourism". Key databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, IEEE Xplore, MDPI, and Springer were utilized to gather relevant academic articles, policy documents, and industry reports. The collected literature (26 academic articles, 1 policy document, and 1 industry report) was analyzed regarding the technologies employed in tourism, technologies that promote accessibility for PwD, how AI, particularly GenAI, is utilized, and finally, the steps involved in developing accessible digital services.

Results

The literature review highlighted numerous technologies employed in the tourism industry, including the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotics, Big Data, Blockchain, Virtual and Augmented Reality, Speech and Facial Recognition, Chatbots, and Social Media (Buhalis et al., 2024). Furthermore, according to OECD (2024), the tourism industry leverages AI-powered solutions in marketing, sales, and business administration with 11% of firms in the travel agency and tour operator sector having used at least one AI technology while the percentage of businesses in accommodation and food services is at 4%.

The multitude of AI-powered applications focuses on improving customer experience and business operations. Customer-wise, examples include 1) personalized and cost-effective destination suggestions (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2022) based on tourists' travel history and other travel-related services, 2) travel itineraries optimization based on contextual information (Santamaria-Granados et al., 2021), 3) tourist guide applications providing real-time navigation and information (Chen et al., 2020) and 4) translation applications of written or spoken text to assist tourists with language obstacles (Bulchand-Gidumal, 2022). Business-wise (OECD, 2024), AI can be used to 1) automate internal processes, 2) optimize price/cost through predictive maintenance and resource allocation and 3) manage visitor flows with real-time data and automated decision-making.

Accessibility-wise, the few existing applications aim to improve the experience phase of tourism by helping tourists immerse themselves in their activities. Examples of such assistive technologies include autonomous indoor and outdoor navigation applications for people with visual disabilities and blindness (Meliones and Sampson, 2018; Theodorou et al., 2022a, 2022b), and for the deaf and hard of hearing (Milicchio and Prosperi, 2016), AI-powered wearable systems supporting audio-based navigation, obstacle detection and avoidance for individuals with visual and kinetic disabilities (Iakovidis et al., 2022), mobile applications that present points of interest (Ponciano et al., 2021), enable remote navigation in museums (Jacobe et al., 2021) and provide augmented reality exploration of cultural places (Constantinou et al., 2022).

The review revealed, also, that the developing process of such accessibility-enabling applications is iterative and consists of various stages (Theodorou et al., 2022a, 2022b; Theofanous et al., 2024). These stages include the transformation of the requirements of PwD into a design, the implementation and evaluation of the solution in terms of the initial requirements and user feedback, and the solution's refinement after multiple repetitions of the process. Critical to both the effectiveness of the process and of the generated artifact is the integration of stakeholders into the development cycle (Theodorou & Meliones, 2022), as technological innovation and adherence to established guidelines are not sufficient on their own (Theodorou et al., 2024a, 2024b).

GenAI provides opportunities to improve the process outlined above. However, given its versatile capabilities, it is critical to identify where and to what extent it can be integrated into the development process with inclusion and sustainability as priorities. Thus, a preliminary conceptual framework is proposed to serve as the guiding foundation for these efforts (see Figure 1).

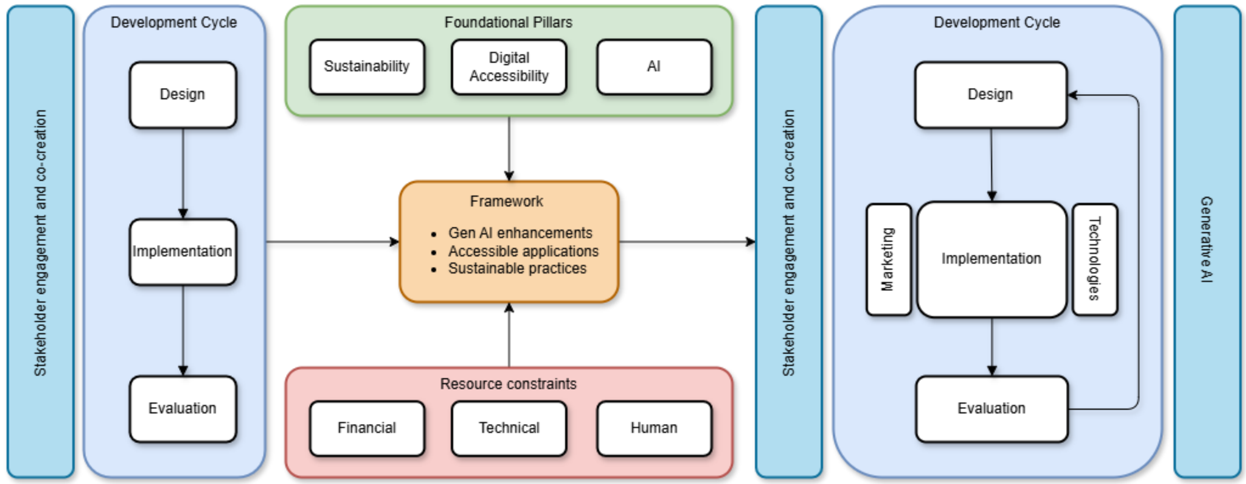

Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework

As illustrated, sustainability, digital inclusion, and AI are the foundational pillars of the framework. It adopts established guidelines (Theofanous et al., 2024) for sustainability and digital inclusion while promoting AI literacy among the stakeholders, and AI technologies that are human-centric and responsible towards society and the environment (Daswin de Silva et al., 2024). In addition to the core principles, the framework incorporates the development cycle stages to generate a specialized GenAI-enhanced process for developing a digitally accessible and sustainable application.

The framework emphasizes gaining awareness of the available tools and their capabilities, exploring potential use cases, and defining a strategy to access key resources, including computing platforms and AI models required to accomplish its objectives. This will allow stakeholders to tailor GenAI's integration based on their available resources, technological expertise, and operational capacity. Therefore, organizations with extensive resources will be able to implement advanced GenAI solutions across multiple stages of the development cycle while those with limited resources can adopt a more incremental approach, prioritizing GenAI opportunities that can provide immediate benefit.

These opportunities are different in scope and results. Starting from the design phase, GenAI can help to extract accessibility requirements for PwD and promote stakeholder co-creation by facilitating better communication, streamlining the ideation process, and assisting in project management. The implementation phase can leverage GenAI along with other technologies, such as IoT devices, smartphones, and narrow AI, to create an accessible and sustainable product. Simultaneously, GenAI can help develop effective personalized marketing strategies. The last phase of continuous evaluation and refinement can leverage GenAI to test and gather feedback from the user base to verify goal alignment. Specifically, GenAI can summarize user feedback, identify patterns and sentiments, and facilitate the collaboration of stakeholders by generating clear documentation of evaluation findings and suggested improvements. Finally, the framework emphasizes adopting short iteration cycles to keep up with the rapid technological progress and the intense competition in the field. This framework will allow organizations to remain agile, preserve high stakeholder engagement, adapt to emerging trends, and maintain a competitive edge.

Conclusion

This paper presented a conceptual framework that allows stakeholders and organizations to navigate the space of GenAI solutions and customize the stages of the development cycle of accessible applications based on the organization's resources and the opportunities GenAI offers for each stage. The framework, although in the preliminary stage, suggests numerous ways to integrate GenAI into the development cycle and emphasizes fast iteration cycles to keep up with technological advances and the competition. Finally, a limitation of this study is the preliminary nature of the conceptual framework; however, in the near future, it will be further refined and its value validated with a use case.

Acknowledgements

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Revolutionizing Hospitality: Managerial Insights into Digital Transformation in Tourism

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Abstract

Purpose: The study investigates the perceptions and experiences of managers regarding digital transformation (DT) in the tourism and hospitality industry. By analyzing their adaptation to and competence with digital technologies, the research aims to provide empirical insights into the integration of digital tools in daily managerial tasks and strategic operations. The study focuses on understanding how digital technologies influence managerial practices, including their knowledge, adaptation, and operational use. It addresses the question: "What are the perceived and experienced digital technologies at the managerial level in the tourism and hospitality industry?" Using a stakeholder approach, it examines how DT has revolutionized hotel operations and managerial experiences, drawing on current real-life business practices in North Cyprus.

Methodology: A qualitative research design is employed, incorporating in-depth interviews with department heads and participant observations at selected hotels. A case study approach enables an in-depth exploration of DT processes and their practical implications.

Originality: This research bridges significant gaps in the existing literature by offering empirical insights into DT in hospitality. It provides actionable recommendations for practitioners while advancing academic understanding of DT's role in fostering innovation and competitiveness in the sector.

Keywords Digital transformation, hospitality industry, managerial experiences, tourism innovation, technological adoption

Introduction

In an era defined by globalization, businesses face relentless pressure to adapt to rapid environmental changes, driven largely by technological advancements. The rapid integration of digital technologies into all aspects of business operations and societal interactions highlights digital transformation (DT) as a critical and emerging area to study which is driven by the need for organizations to adapt to the profound changes brought about by globalization and technological advancements. Due to globalization, businesses have been under increasing pressure to adapt themselves to changes in their environment in recent decades (Kraus et al., 2021).

The tourism and hospitality (T&H) industry are chosen for this study, with its diverse segments and far-reaching economic and social impacts, continuing to be a critical sector for global economies. As it evolves in response to technological advancements and changing consumer behaviors, understanding its dynamics becomes increasingly important for both practitioners and researchers. Digital transformation in tourism has significantly impacted the economy and society, altering how enterprises compete and how tourism services are perceived, consumed, and accessed (Kindzule-Millere & Zeverte-Rivza 2022).

The study aims to provide empirical analysis of the perceptions and experiences of managers by understanding their level and competency of technological integration under the digital transformation (DT) framework. The research will provide a scientific source to understand the impact of existed digital technological tools at the business and impacts of those tools on their daily business tasks and responsibilities by collecting data from managers. The goal of the study is to comprehensively explore and analyze the digital transformation process in the tourism and hospitality industry, focusing on understanding managers' experiences, technological adaptation, and strategic frameworks that can enhance organizational competitiveness and innovation in the digital age.
The current study designed to examine the main research question; What are the perceived and experienced digital technologies in the T&H industry at the managerial level?'' For instance, the study is designed to examine to 'What are the current and ongoing practices by managers in terms of their technology usage and its reflection to their business (daily routines' The study will provide current real-life business data in this context. The research question of the study directly addresses the study's focus on understanding the level of knowledge, adaptation, and experiences of managers during their current ongoing daily business actions and responsibilities. The research employs a stakeholder/ people approach to analyze 'how digital transformation has fundamentally altered hotel operations and manager's experiences', and 'how digital transformation is revolutionizing hotel operations and management practices'. Examining how managers view DT in relation to their operational management is the main goal of the study.

Scholars put their attention that the current literature on digital transformation reveals significant research gaps that warrant further investigation (Rupeika-Apoga et al., 2022; Plekhanov et al., 2023; Iranmanesh et al., 2022; Enholm et al., 2022; Alphun et al., 2024; Konopik et al., 2022; Loureiro & Nascimento, 2021). In the evolving landscape of hospitality digital transformation (DT), significant research gaps persist that demand scholarly attention (Peng et al., 2024; Busulwa et al., 2022; Fan et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). Furthermore, there is a knowledge gap since there is still a dearth of empirical study on the factors driving digital transformation, despite its growing significance (Rupeika-Apoga et al., 2022). Iranmanesh et al., 2022 added that existing studies predominantly utilize quantitative approaches (secondary sources) without empirical data, limiting the depth and generalizability of insights, particularly in sectors like hospitality and tourism. The last but not least the slower pace and scope of digital transformation (DT) in the hospitality industry compared to other sectors highlight the need for future research to address industry-specific obstacles and explore technologically advanced hospitality companies through case studies (Peng et al., 2024).

Methodology

A case strategy method was applied in this research. The case study method is very helpful to apply when trying to understand a topic, event, or phenomena in depth and in the context of real-world experience. (Crowe, et al., 2011). Given that the objective of this research is to obtain insights into the hospitality business under DT framework in north Cyprus, the case study approach is well-suited for this purpose. This is because the case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the subject matter.

A qualitative research method will be used for collecting data from the study. The study results will be achieved by in-dept interviews with the head of the main departments of the hotel business. Selected research methods will be applied to understand the level of digital knowledge and experiences of managers with existing digital technologies of the hospitality business. Furthermore, a case strategy method was applied in this research. Given that the objective of this research is to obtain insights into the hospitality business under DT framework in north Cyprus, the case study approach is well-suited for this purpose. This is because the case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the subject matter. The method of the study will be completed with interview sessions and participant observations at the selected hotels. Interview sessions will held at the close and separated rooms at hotels where interviewers feel more relaxed and sharing their thoughts and experiences objectively. Interview questions of the study are created based on the literature foundations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, digital transformation in tourism and hospitality is reshaping operations, consumer engagement, and strategic frameworks. This study, using a qualitative case approach in North Cyprus, highlights managerial perceptions and the extent of technological integration in business routines. This study aims to dive into technological or digital transformation that has been taking place for a long time in hospitality business such as what and how and which technologies are applied. Findings into literature indicate knowledge gaps and uneven adaptation, emphasizing the need for enhanced digital literacy and workforce upskilling. Therefore, this study is designed to determine the actual and present use of technology in the hospitality industry. Currently, no research has been conducted using actual empirical data for such reasons. The goal of the study is to produce useful information for practitioners as well as scientific research for academics.

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Leveraging digitalised tourism supply chains to promote value co-creation in Small Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs)

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the impact of digitalised tourism supply chains on value co-creation and performance improvement in small, micro, and medium enterprises (SMMEs) in the tourism industry within the KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces of South Africa. It aims to provide SMMEs with actionable insights on leveraging digital technologies to enhance their supply chain efficiency and value co-creation capabilities.

Study design/methodology/approach: The research design for this study is a quantitative research survey. Data was collected through an online questionnaire administered to the study participants. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to identify the impact of digitalised tourism supply chains on value co-creation in SMMEs

Results: The results validate the findings by Ivanov and Dolgui (2021), who found that value co-creation was more often instrumental in enhancing SMME efficiency, thereby creating critical synergies deemed pertinent to the business. Besides, this kind of setup will further improve information flow and expedite processes regarding business-client interaction.

Originality/value: the study underscores the significance of value co-creation as important in driving the tourism supply chain network within SMMEs. The results of this study offer a new perspective relating to the role of value co-creation towards enhancing business efficiency through digitalisation. This mediated test presented in this study enhances our understanding of how and under what circumstances value co-creation can influence supply chain networks toward improved business performance.

Keywords Value co-creation, Digital supply chains, Supply chain networks

Introduction

Small, micro, and medium enterprises (SMMEs) are vital to South Africa's economy, contributing significantly to employment and economic growth, whilst fostering social and political justice in the nation (Ramsuraj, 2023). SMMEs provide self-sufficiency and enterprise entrance for those in disadvantaged segments of society as well as serve as a breeding ground for innovation and entrepreneurship (Rungani & Potgieter, 2018). SMMEs play a vital role in new product development and technological innovation, driving industrial renewal and economic growth. However, these enterprises face numerous challenges, including resource constraints, competitive pressures, and dynamic market demands (Abid, Ceci & Aftab, 2024). Mhlongo and Daya (2023) conducted a study on SMMEs in Gauteng which revealed that SMMEs consistently suffer from relatively high levels of failures and lower performance levels caused by a lack of entrepreneurial leadership skills, financial resources, financial education, infrastructure constraints, training, and digital technologies. However, digital technologies and automating the tourism supply chain enable SMMEs to improve supply chain efficiency, speed up processes, provide better insights, and cut down manual errors, which all help to reduce total acquisition costs (Huser, 2024). Digitalised tourism supply chains offer a significant competitive advantage for enterprises. For example, decision-making is made easier and faster with the use of new disruptive technologies (Big Data, Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, etc.). Fundamentals for this is the dynamic capabilities theory (DCT) which has emerged as both an extension to and a reaction against the inability of the resource-based view (RBV) to interpret the development and redevelopment of resources and capabilities to address rapidly changing environments (Bleady, Ali & Ibrahim, 2018). The DCT is highly relevant to understanding the impact of digitalization on tourism supply chain networks and value co-creation among Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs). This theory, rooted in strategic management, posits that an organisation's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies is crucial for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997).

In the context of digitalization within tourism supply chain networks, DCT suggests that SMMEs must develop dynamic capabilities to effectively leverage digital tools and technologies. These capabilities include sensing market opportunities, seizing those opportunities through the deployment of digital resources, and transforming or reconfiguring their operations to maintain competitiveness. The study sought to address failures by SMMEs to effectively integrate digitalisation into their operations, which can limit their competitiveness. This study presents the following hypothesis;

H1: Digitalisation has a positive impact on tourism supply chain networks

H2: Enhanced value co-creation through digitalisation leads to improved overall performance of SMMEs supply chain networks

Methodology

A literature review was conducted to identify the existing research on value co-creation and digitalised tourism supply chains in SMMEs. The research design for this study is a quantitative research survey that aims to investigate the impact of digitalised tourism supply chains on value co-creation in SMMEs. There are 2.4 million SMMEs in South Africa, with 381742 in KwaZulu Natal, and 232367 in Eastern Cape (SEDA, 2021). The research method used in this study is a survey questionnaire developed by the authors, and it was administered to 288 SMMEs in KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape. The study participants were 288 SMMEs, including 126 from KwaZulu Natal and 162 from the Eastern Cape. The inclusion criteria for this study were SMMEs that had implemented digitalised supply chain practices and were willing to participate in the survey. The exclusion criteria for this study were SMMEs that did not have digitalised supply chain practices or were not willing to participate in the survey. The data was collected through an online survey questionnaire that was administered to the study participants. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to identify the impact of digitalised tourism supply chains on value co-creation in SMMEs. Regression analysis was used to test hypotheses. This enabled researchers to explore relationships between identified concepts.

Results

The descriptive and inferential statistics analysis of the data was undertaken and presented thereof. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed and distributed. The questionnaire was assessed for internal and external consistency. The data was collected from a sample size of 288 respondents.

Table 1: Reliability test

Constructs		Item-test correlation	Cronbach's test
Digitalisation			0.8752
D1	Big data to interact with suppliers	0.7675	
D2	Different platforms to interact with government services online	0.7048	
D3	Customer relationship management system	0.6893	
D4	Analytics tools (e.g., Google Analytics, etc)	0.6897	
D5	Computerised customer reservation system (web booking engine)	0.7910	
D6	Mobile app	0.6735	
D7	Chat/ instant online advice	0.6369	
D8	Generative AI such as ChatGPT	0.6832	
D9	Online professional/ community networks	0.7308	
Value Co-creation			0.8195
VCC1	Information (financial, production, design, etc.) is shared with our suppliers.	0.6261	

VCC2	We exchange information with our supplier frequently.	0.6102	
VCC3	Any event or change that might affect the other party is immediately communicated to the other.	0.6404	
VCC4	Information provided assists in building capacity to contribute, or offer modified or different models of engagement.	0.6745	
VCC5	In our organisation, we deal flexibly with our partners	0.6216	
VCC6	We create value through interactions and are purposeful	0.6226	
VCC7	Our roles in different phases form part of co-creation;	0.4813	
VCC8	Our digital tools impact value creation and consider everyone in the supply network	0.4822	
VCC9	Data sharing platforms we use generate, acquire, and store data to support the creation of value	0.5058	
VCC10	We use a data sharing platform to enable and incentivise stakeholders to make valuable interactions.	0.5591	
VCC11	We keep each other informed	0.5442	
VCC12	We listen to each other's concerns	0.4817	
VCC13	We consider insights, and provide feedback on our decisions	0.4567	
Supply Chain Networks			0.7987
SCN1	We outsource widely available areas of expertise	0.5280	
SCN2	We have a variety of different backgrounds and experiences	0.6296	
SCN3	The resources or SMMEs in this community complement each other	0.5930	
SCN4	We have skills and abilities that complement each other	0.5938	
SCN5	We regularly organize formal, strategic, or operational meetings among our community.	0.5881	
SCN6	We also periodically organize informal social occasions among our partners.	0.5951	
SCN7	The entrepreneurs themselves are usually involved in these meetings.	0.6098	

SCN8	In our network, partners' staff are often involved in teamwork with colleagues of the other partner firms.	0.5341	
SCN9	In our network, we often organize training courses and seminars for the partner entrepreneurs.	0.6182	
SCN10	In our network, we often organize joint training courses and seminars for the employees of all partners	0.6738	

The reliability test, validity test, and item correlation analysis were conducted. All items were found suitable for further statistical analysis. Table 1 shows that all constructs scored Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.7. It measures the internal consistency of the items on a scale. Further, results show a positive relationship amongst study constructs with coefficients ranging from a moderate positive relationship of 0.4813 to a strong positive relationship of 0.7910 respectively. This signifies a positive relationship between digitalisation, value co-creation, and supply chain networks.

Regression Analysis

Table 2: Number of observations

Number of observations	288
F (6, 281)	31.83
Prob > F	0.0000
R-Squared	0.4047
Adjusted R-Squared	0.3920
Root MSE	1.8783

Table 3: Parameter annotated output.

Supply Chain Network	Coefficients	Standard error	t-value	p-value	95% CIE	
Digitalisation	-.0026468	.0459988	-0.06	0.954	-.0931928	.0878992
Value Co-creation	.2724437	.0415999	6.55	0.000	.1905566	.3543308
Mediation effect of	-.0072009	.0033075	-2.18	0.030	-.0137115	-.0006902

value co-creation					
Constant	17.60559	.3654252	48.18	0.000	16.88627 18.32491

As shown in Table 2, the R-squared is 0.4047 indicating that approximately 40.47% of the variance in the dependent variable (supply chain network) is explained by the independent variables in the model. The adjusted R-squared (0.3920), which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, is slightly lower at 39.20%, suggesting a modest adjustment for the number of predictors. The root mean square error (RMSE) of 1.8783 provides a measure of the standard deviation of the residuals or prediction errors. However, from the annotated output in Table 4, the results show that value co-creation statistically predicts the tourism supply chain network, but the same cannot be said with digitalisation which was found not to possess any prediction effect on the outcome variable. For example, the results indicate that value co-creation had a significant predictive effect on the tourism supply chain network. The relationship was statistically significant (B = 0.2724437; p = 0.000).

The results validate the findings by Ivanov & Dolgui, (2021) who found that value co-creation was more often instrumental in enhancing SMME efficiency thereby creating critical synergies deemed pertinent to the business. This includes external critical synergies embedded in the dynamic capabilities streams. Besides, this kind of setup will further improve information flow, and expedite processes regarding business-client interaction. The digitalisation variable did not have a predictive effect on the tourism supply chain network. The relationship was not statistically significant (B= -.0026468; P=0.954). However, the outcome is in contrast with findings by Sigala (2018) who state that digitalisation was a key driver in promoting tourism supply chain networks through stakeholder collaborated efforts. They facilitate real-time information, data sharing, and communication through different digital channels. Further, regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis that value co-creation had a mediating effect between digitalisation and the tourism supply chain network. The findings also present a statistically significant mediating effect of value co-creation on digitalisation and tourism supply chain networks with an F-statistic value of 31.83, which is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.030 at 95% confidence. In essence, dynamic capabilities enable SMMEs to be flexible, innovative, and strategically respond to external and internal environment thereby enhancing sustainable competitiveness toward value co-creation (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997).

Conclusion

From the research findings, it could be concluded that value co-creation enhances the functioning of tourism supply chain networks deemed crucial for attaining sound business performance. Inversely, digitalisation did not have a predictive effect on tourism supply chain networks. instead, its predictive effect only came when the mediation effect of value co-creation. However, the study underscores the significance of value co-creation as important in driving the tourism supply chain network within SMMEs. The results of this study offer a new perspective relating to the role of dynamic capabilities theory in promoting value co-creation towards enhancing business efficiency through digitalisation. This mediated test presented in this study enhances our understanding of how and under what circumstances value co-creation can influence tourism supply chain networks toward improved business performance. Digitalisation in place alone may be inadequate, the system should be tailor-made to meet the needs of various stakeholders, hence the need for SMMEs to constantly engage with stakeholders within the value chain.

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Systematic literature review on hospitality and leisure in the context of the metaverse tourism

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Abstract

Purpose: The objective of this study is to examine how hospitality and leisure in the context of the metaverse have been addressed in scientific publications in tourism since 2022, when this topic emerged in society.

Study design/methodology/approach: This article presents a systematic literature review combined with a narrative review.

Results: A multitude of extant studies have indicated that the metaverse is redefining hospitality and leisure by offering immersive virtual spaces with digitally customizable services.

Originality/value: The concept of hospitality and leisure in the metaverse is frequently linked to the recreation of conventional experiences within a highly immersive virtual environment, incorporating innovative components such as avatar-based interactions and customized services.

Findings/conclusions: The concept of hospitality and leisure in the metaverse encompasses not only the extension of conventional practices but also the potential for their reinvention, through the integration of technology, culture, and innovation. This integration fosters the creation of tourist experiences that transcend the boundaries between the physical and virtual realms, thereby establishing a phygital environment.

Keywords: Metaverse, Metaverse Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure, Hospitality Tourism, Metaverse Hospitality, Immersive Experiences.

Introduction

The accelerated growth of tourism has given rise to the phenomenon of overtourism. This phenomenon has been extensively documented in the extant literature (Gössling et al., 2019; Go & Kang, 2023), with a particular emphasis on its impact on the environment and the socio-economic challenges confronting local populations. In response to these challenges, novel approaches and alternatives to tourism have been considered, and the metaverse has emerged as one of them.

The metaverse is a digital immersive space that utilizes advanced technologies, to facilitate social interactions and generate customized experiences (Filimonau et al., 2022). This emerging technological frontier holds the potential to transform the way tourists experience the world, offering immersive experiences that are independent of physical presence at a destination. Consequently, this investigation aims to examine the manner in which hospitality and leisure within the metaverse have been addressed in scientific publications in the domain of tourism since 2022, a significant year in the emergence of this theme in society. To this end, the systematic literature review method was adopted, focusing on the last three years, 2022 to 2024, associated with a narrative review.

The extant literature (Pizam & Tasci, 2019; Filimonau et al., 2022; Buhalis et al., 2023; Koo et al., 2023), suggests that the metaverse has the potential to serve as an innovative alternative to physical tourism. Alternative viewpoints, advocate for metaverse tourism to be regarded as a complementary modality to physical tourism, thereby enriching and diversifying tourists' experiences without supplanting the prevailing paradigm (Ramkissoon et al., 2024). Studies such as that by Filimonau et al. (2022) underscore the significance of incorporating cultural factors, technological accessibility, and personalization of experiences in the metaverse. Almeida (2023) underscores its significance in regional development, a domain with a robust association with tourism. This discourse underscores the emergence of the research domain and the manifold possibilities for the tourism industry. Thus, it is crucial to acknowledge that immersive virtual tourism should not be regarded as a substitute for physical tourism; rather, it should be regarded as a complementary alternative.

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of hospitality and leisure in the context of the metaverse, a recent topic in scientific tourism publications, with particular attention to the emergence of this approach from 2022 onwards. While traditional tourism has been extensively studied in relation to sustainability and social and environmental impacts, the metaverse offers an innovative and disruptive perspective that merits further investigation.

This work begins with the presentation of the central themes of the study, advancing to the review of the literature and methodology. Afterwards, the results and discussions follow and, finally, the conclusion is summarized.

Literature review

Metaverse

According to Stephenson (1992), the term "metaverse" has its origins in narrative fiction, representing a three-dimensional universe where individuals transcend their physical limitations by interacting with avatars in a shared virtual reality. Initially confined to the domain of science fiction, this concept has evolved to become a prominent feature of the contemporary digital landscape. The metaverse is defined as a continuously evolving digital domain that integrates virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), a technologically advanced internet, and semiconductors, thereby enabling individuals to experience personal and professional interactions at an increasingly immersive and realistic level. In this paradigm, the physical and digital domains are converging, enabling users to seamlessly navigate between these environments for various purposes, including work, health, education, personal interests, and social interaction.

The metaverse is a unification of various immersive technologies, distributed recording, spatial computing, and other digital innovations, which collectively enable a more interactive, engaging, and realistic digital experience for the user when consuming tourism products and services. This integration underscores the significance of cognitive, affective, social, and sensory aspects as foundational components of the user experience (Pizam & Tasci, 2019; McKinsey & Company, 2022).

The metaverse exerts a substantial influence on the customer experience with tourism companies, encompassing the various phases of the journey: pre-trip, during the trip, and post-trip. In the pre-trip phase, the metaverse contributes to the inspiration, planning, and booking of tourism products and services. This technology enables customers to explore tourist attractions in destinations, such as museums, parks, and local heritage sites, and to visualize and interact with the destination's landscapes. Furthermore, it allows them to virtually experience the services offered by traditional hotels and restaurants (Pizam & Tasci, 2019; Gursoy et al., 2022; Ramkissoon, 2022, 2024b; Buhalis et al., 2023).

In the subsequent phase, the metaverse encompasses all the customer's interactions with tourism products and services during the trip. At this stage, the metaverse provides the customer with the opportunity to acquire in-depth knowledge about the importance, origin, and evolution of tourist attractions through textual data or audiovisual information on destinations, which can enrich their understanding of these places. Furthermore, it has the potential to enhance the tourist experience by incorporating educational and entertainment resources, rendering the visit more engaging and informative (Gursoy et al., 2022; Ramkissoon, 2022, 2024a; Buhalis et al., 2023).

In the post-trip phase, the metaverse offers the potential to facilitate the recollection of events and the documentation and sharing of user-generated content. The expansion of knowledge and engagement with individuals who have experienced similar things become significant factors in socializing and exchanging information. The metaverse facilitates the revisiting and reliving of past moments, as well as the sharing of content, knowledge, and resources with one's closest social circles. This contributes to an impactful experience and memorable satisfaction (Gursoy et al., 2022; Ramkissoon, 2022, 2024b; McKinsey & Company, 2023; Buhalis et al., 2023).

Hospitality and Leisure

Contemporary literature indicates a shift towards a new paradigm, emphasizing the necessity of incorporating the social, natural, and cultural dimensions to accurately comprehend the consumer experience in the hospitality environment and the services provided (Pizam & Tasci, 2019). A notable milestone in this evolution is the transition from conventional services to a more digital model, marked by the integration of live broadcasts, the adoption of interactive websites, and the increasing implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in the hospitality sector (Ji et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2023).

The interaction between different cultures has been shown to have a significant influence on the manner in which services are provided to consumers, thereby impacting the expectations that are generated by their use. These disparities are particularly evident in the hospitality sector. In this

context, adopting a multidimensional approach to creating immersive virtual spaces that are both respectful and representative of cultural and religious values presents a wide range of opportunities to enhance the experiences provided by the metaverse in the hospitality sector. Furthermore, this approach contributes to the advancement of marketing literature by broadening the discussion on the configuration of an emerging metaverse environment that is more favorable to the development of services aligned with the needs of specific markets (Hall & Prayag, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2022).
It is imperative to acknowledge that emergent trends are inextricably linked to perpetual evolution, influenced by a myriad of factors including government policies, market demand, and the dynamics of social systems. Within the domain of leisure and recreation, for instance, experts engage in analysis of prevailing development trends, addressing their underlying causes and ramifications. However, classroom teachers face the challenge of empowering students to identify these trends autonomously. The cultivation of these competencies enhances students' analytical capacity and fosters more sustainable benefits in their training and professional performance (Gursoy et al., 2022; Ramkissoon, 2017; 2022; McKinsey & Company, 2023; Buhalis et al., 2023).
Proficiency in acquiring knowledge about emerging trends plays a pivotal role in teaching, as it underscores the ability to carry out a holistic and systematic analysis of the dynamics in the leisure, tourism, hospitality, recreation, and sport (LTHRS) sector. In extant research and pedagogical materials concerning the evolution of the LTHRS industry, the emphasis has been on elucidating and deliberating contemporary trends (Claveria & Poluzzi, 2018).

Research methodology

This study employs a hybrid approach, integrating a systematic literature review (SLR) with a narrative review. The initial stage meticulously adheres to the standards of a systematic literature review (SLR), implementing the PRISMA protocol to ensure a structured and transparent process for selecting and analyzing relevant studies. The RSL facilitates the identification of significant scientific contributions within the metaverse tourism and hospitality domain, underpinned by a robust methodological framework founded on systematic inclusion and exclusion criteria (Guedes & Borschiver, 2005; Marques, 2010; Costas, 2017; Wolfram, 2017).
Due to the limited number of studies analyzed (nine in total, with only six articles investigated in depth), the second part of the study employs a narrative review, providing a more in-depth and reflective analysis of each author's findings. This methodological approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of the selected studies, taking into account both the prevailing context and the emerging challenges pertinent to the subject matter. Additionally, it facilitated a reflective examination of how diverse approaches can contribute to a more profound comprehension of tourism within the metaverse.
A systematic approach was employed, entailing a search of the Scopus database utilizing the search string ["metaverse AND tourism hospitality"; "metaverse AND "tourism hospitality" AND leisure]. Given the recent emergence of this subject area, documents were exclusively identified from 2022,2023,2024, due to the interest in more contemporary issues in the last 3 years. The inclusion

criteria encompassed studies that explored the impact of the metaverse on hospitality and leisure, encompassing the analysis of objectives, methodologies, and outcomes. We therefore use the following PRISMA protocol:

1. Identification
   - Database used: Scopus
   - Search period: 2022 to 2024
   - Search terms:
     - "metaverse AND tourism hospitality" (9 documents)
     - "metaverse AND tourism hospitality AND leisure" (2 documents)
   - Records identified in the databases: 11 documents
2. Screening
   - Records after duplicate removal: 9
   - Records deleted after reading titles and abstracts: 0
   - Records eligible for full review: 9
   - Open access documents: 4
3. Eligibility --- Articles read in full: 4
4. Inclusion
   - Studies included in the systematic review: 11
   - Studies analyzed in the narrative review: 4

The search was conducted in the Scopus database, encompassing the period from 2022 to 2024, and employed a set of key terms. Following a thorough screening and analysis of the documents, nine studies were selected for inclusion in the review, offering a comprehensive overview of the intersection between metaverse, tourism, hospitality, and leisure. However, it should be noted that the researchers' access to the full corpus of studies was restricted, as the remaining studies were subject to restrictions that precluded their full inclusion in the review.

Subsequently, the narrative review method was adopted, which allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the selected studies. This approach offered the advantage of contextualizing the authors' findings within emerging trends in the field of tourism and hospitality in the metaverse, facilitating the identification of research gaps and areas that require further investigation. This methodological approach facilitated a critical and interpretive examination of the results, thereby complementing the systematic structure of the RSL with a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of the subjects addressed.

Studies investigated

The study by Ramkissoon, Singh, and Iqbal (2024) presents an exhaustive analysis of the potential impact of the growth and expansion of the metaverse on smart tourism and other immersive technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). The article provides an extensive academic review of these topics, highlighting how the metaverse can transform the tourist experience by providing more immersive and personalized interactions, as well as facilitating remote access to tourist destinations. The authors explore the benefits of the metaverse in creating immersive experiences, suggesting that it can complement physical tourism, reducing negative impacts such as overtourism, while offering new opportunities for tourists.

However, the study also underscores the necessity for additional research to comprehensively understand the long-term implications of metaverse integration in tourism sectors, particularly in relation to accessibility, cultural concerns, and the consumer experience. A salient issue that merits attention is the challenge of balancing the use of immersive technologies with the preservation of the cultural authenticity of tourist destinations. Ensuring the sustainability of digital tourism is contingent upon addressing this critical issue.

This article makes a significant contribution to the field of smart tourism by offering a comprehensive analysis of the implications of the metaverse for tourism. However, the article also raises crucial questions for future research, such as the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and the personalization of experiences in the metaverse. In exploring these themes, the authors posit the necessity for a more robust framework for the effective and sustainable integration of these technologies into the tourism sector. The authors further posit that the metaverse can serve as a pivotal strategy for mitigating the adverse impacts of conventional tourism. However, a more thorough examination of the implementation of these technologies in an accessible and ethical manner is imperative to substantiate these claims.

Filimonau, Ashton, and Stankov's (2022) study provides a thorough examination of the emergence of virtual spaces as novel consumer scenarios within the domains of tourism, hospitality, and events. Through the integration of technologies such as the metaverse, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR), the authors underscore the opportunities and challenges presented by these technologies to the tourism industry. Notwithstanding certain limitations, the study provides a solid foundation for future research into how these technologies are shaping practices and experiences in the tourism and events sector. It is imperative for companies looking to adapt to a digital future. The advent of virtual spaces is precipitating a paradigm shift in the manner in which consumers experience tourist destinations, hospitality services, and events, given the mounting demand for digital experiences. Consequently, the integration of these emerging technologies is inaugurating an unprecedented era in consumption, offering experiences that are more personalized, immersive, and interactive. Consequently, the accessibility and adaptation of these technologies pose challenges for the tourism and events sector, necessitating innovations in the design and delivery of services. This scenario underscores the mounting imperative for regulatory frameworks and ethical considerations in the integration of these technologies, with a particular focus on safeguarding consumer privacy and ensuring security measures are in place.

The study by Meena et al. (2024) posits that the integration of goods and experiences within the metaverse can serve as a strategic conduit for diversifying tourism resources and fostering sustainable tourism practices. This integration offers profitable and innovative alternatives, thereby contributing to the enhancement of tourism sectoral sustainability. The authors emphasize that this viewpoint enhances the discourse on sustainability in the tourism sector by incorporating digital technology as a means to mitigate the environmental and social ramifications of conventional tourism. The metaverse has the potential to offer virtual experiences that complement physical visits, thereby reducing pressure on popular tourist destinations and providing new sources of revenue without the costs associated with traditional tourism. A thorough examination of these benefits within the framework of sustainability underscores the necessity for additional research to ascertain the efficacy of immersive virtualization as a strategy for harmonizing the advancement of the tourism industry with environmental, cultural, and economic challenges.

The study by Gau et al. (2024) presents the results of two "exploratory orientation" projects that employed methodologies based on artificial intelligence (AI) and compared them with the results obtained using the conventional method of content analysis. Additionally, the research explores two supplementary projects in the context of "confirmatory verification," examining the effectiveness of AI techniques in relation to traditional content analysis approaches.

A thorough examination of the case studies reveals that while AI can offer significant benefits, such as rapid processing of large volumes of data and the identification of complex patterns, it is not without its limitations. While traditional content analysis methods retain a valuable role in research, AI offers a more dynamic and modern approach, especially in large datasets and emerging research areas such as metaverse tourism.

The authors' contributions to the extant literature are twofold: first, they explore the impact of emerging technologies, such as AI, in the field of tourism and hospitality; and second, they suggest that future research should consider a deeper integration of these new tools, balancing them with traditional practices. The utilization of AI, particularly in the domain of large-scale data analysis, has the potential to enhance the comprehension of the dynamic facets of tourism.

The study by Noor et al. (2024) makes several notable contributions to the extant literature on tourism in the metaverse, with a particular focus on the halal market and the specific needs of Muslim travelers. The paper introduces the concept of "experienscape" as a service landscape model applicable to the halal metaverse, identifying the need to create immersive and cultural experiences suitable for this audience in the digital context. The proposed "experienscape" model represents an adaptation of the traditional service landscape model, tailored to accommodate the cultural and religious particularities of Muslim consumers in the virtual environment. This innovative approach offers a novel framework for the development of tourist services in the metaverse.

The authors of the research paper propose the "5 Ps of the halal metaverse," which address the fundamental aspects of catering to the needs of Muslim travelers in the metaverse. These aspects include personalization, privacy, protection, service delivery, and purpose. This model underscores the distinctive challenges and opportunities inherent in adapting the metaverse to a particular market, emphasizing the necessity of aligning with the cultural, religious, and social expectations of travelers—a critical aspect frequently disregarded in the development of emerging technologies. The "5 Ps" framework emerges as a pragmatic instrument to facilitate the development of more inclusive and culturally sensitive virtual tourism experiences.

In conclusion, the study makes a significant contribution by developing a service landscape model for the halal metaverse. This model integrates relevant digital media components with the cultural and religious needs of the target audience. This model provides a theoretical and practical foundation for the design of experiences in the metaverse targeting the halal market. It proposes a unique framework that can be utilized by companies and professionals in the tourism industry to develop and offer services that are more aligned with the demands of this specific audience. The study underscores the imperative for meticulous and culturally sensitive development of the metaverse to cater to specific cultural markets, thereby unveiling novel prospects for digital inclusion in metaverse tourism (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of the studies investigated

Authors	Title	Year	Relevance to the Study	Categories
Ramkissoon H., Singh R., Iqbal J.	A Research Agenda for Tourism, Hospitality and the Metaverse	2024	Discusses the impact of the metaverse on tourism and hospitality, addressing future research questions.	Metaverse, Smart Tourism, Immersive Technologies.
Filimonau V., Ashton M., Stankov U.	Virtual spaces as the future of consumption in tourism, hospitality and events	2022	He analyzes how the metaverse can change consumption practices in the tourism and hospitality sector.	Consumption, Metaverse, Events, Hospitality
Gau L.-S., Chu H.-T., Pham D.T., Huang C.-H.	Innovative Teaching of AI-Based Text Mining and ChatGPT Applications for Trend Recognition in Tourism and Hospitality	2024	It presents use cases of AI in tourism, comparing it with traditional data analysis methods.	Artificial Intelligence, Data Analysis, Tourism
Noor N., Sharifonnasabi F., Nallarasan N.K.	Halal servicescape in the metaverse	2024	Explores the concept of "experienscape" for halal tourism in the metaverse, focusing on the inclusion of cultural needs.	Halal Tourism, Metaverse, Service Landscape
Meena M.K., Kumar S., Valeri M.	Role of Metaverse in Future of Tourism, Hospitality, and Events: Insights	2024	Presents a bibliometric study on the role of the metaverse in tourism and hospitality.	Metaverse, Tourism, Bibliometrics, Hospitality

	from Bibliometric Review			
Morrison A.M.	Marketing and Managing Tourism Destinations: Third Edition	2023	It analyzes the management of tourist destinations, relevant to understanding how marketing applies to digital tourism and the metaverse.	Marketing, Destination Management, Digital Tourism

Source: Authors.

The categories in Table 1 reveals the presence of two overarching themes that serve as the guiding principles for the analysis of the studies. Immersive Technology and Application Sectors.

a) Immersive Technology: This category encompasses the metaverse, immersive technologies, and artificial intelligence. These elements signify the technological innovations that are reshaping the tourism experience and its promotion. The metaverse, for instance, introduces novel forms of interaction and immersion for tourists, while artificial intelligence (AI) facilitates personalization of experiences, process optimization, and real-time data analysis.

b) The following list enumerates the application sectors: The studies encompass pivotal domains such as tourism, hospitality, events, destination marketing, and halal tourism. These fields represent areas in which emerging technologies, particularly the metaverse, are being applied, each with its own set of challenges and opportunities.

The two central themes of technology and sectors of application facilitate comprehension of the impact of emerging technologies on various dimensions of tourism. In this regard, the study by Gau et al. (2024) is noteworthy for its proposal of an alternative method for trend analysis. Similarly, Noor et al. (2024) make a significant contribution by exploring the intricacies of culturally sensitive tourism. Ramkissoon et al. (2024) and Meena et al. (2024) adopt a more profound theoretical stance on the impact of the metaverse. Additionally, Gau et al. (2024) underscore a significant lacuna in the evaluation of the impact of AI on consumer behavior in tourism.

Results and discussions

The findings suggest that the metaverse has the potential to facilitate virtual visits to cultural and natural heritage sites, thereby complementing in-person experiences and redistributing tourist flows to lesser-explored destinations. Furthermore, the gamification and interactivity of digital environments have the potential to encourage more sustainable behavior among tourists, thereby preparing them for more responsible in-person experiences. However, it is imperative that the metaverse fosters inclusivity, ensuring that users with varying degrees of technological familiarity can access and derive enjoyment from its offerings, as highlighted by Ramkissoon et al. (2024).

Another salient issue pertains to the existence of the illiterate metaverse user (Almeida, 2023), i.e., an individual who, while acquainted with digital technologies, still requires the development or enhancement of skills to effectively interact in immersive environments. This predicament underscores the imperative for digital inclusion and specialized training, underscoring the necessity for the implementation of educational strategies that facilitate accessible and continuous learning. In the context of tourism and hospitality, this gap can directly influence the user experience, underscoring the need for companies and destination managers to invest in intuitive interfaces, technical support, and training programs. These investments ensure that a broader audience can capitalize on the opportunities provided by the metaverse.

Furthermore, the design of interactions and services in the metaverse must prioritize users' individual preferences, creating experiences that include a sense of belonging. By taking into account the unique needs and expectations of each user, it becomes feasible to construct a more engaging and personalized digital environment that fosters a profound emotional connection with the destination or service offered. As Rather (2023) emphasizes, the alignment of personalization with the user's interests and values is instrumental in fostering loyalty and continuous engagement. These scenarios are also essential for creating memorable experiences, as well as for the success of the "metaverse territorial brands" (Almeida, 2024) of tourist destinations.

For Kang (2023), metaverse tourism can be based on the development of immersive tourism products and experiences, with significant potential to support sustainable tourism. This approach has the capacity to transform consumer attitudes and behavior, directly affecting their purchasing decisions, influencing their choice preferences, consumption patterns, perceived value, and decision-making processes. This impact is especially salient in the context of tourism, where adapting to novel digital models has the potential to redefine tourists' expectations and promote more sustainable practices in the sector (Gursoy et al., 2022).

A fundamental aspect of the discourse surrounding the metaverse pertains to the development of increasingly immersive and interactive experiences. In this context, the level and type of interaction with customers plays a crucial role in defining the experience. The integration of advanced technology and sensory elements in novel interaction modalities holds the potential to transform consumer perceptions and interactions with services, thereby broadening their expectations and enriching the overall user experience (Koo et al., 2023; Gursoy et al., 2022).

However, significant challenges emerge as the metaverse expands in the tourism sector, including technological barriers, digital inclusion, and the need for robust infrastructure to ensure its large-scale adoption (Koo et al., 2023; Gursoy et al., 2022). The lack of accessibility for different user profiles, especially in contexts with less connectivity or technological limitations, still represents an obstacle. To facilitate the effective implementation of the metaverse, there is a necessity for investment in advanced technologies and the establishment of an inclusive digital ecosystem. Despite its nascent state, the metaverse demonstrates considerable potential in mitigating the effects of overtourism by facilitating a more equitable distribution of tourist flows and offering virtual alternatives that attract visitors without overloading physical destinations. Therefore, the metaverse has the potential to function as a strategic instrument for the promotion of tourism that is more balanced, sustainable, and accessible for both tourists and local communities.

Final considerations

This study examined the impact of emerging technologies, particularly the metaverse and immersive technologies, on the tourism sector. A comprehensive review of six seminal studies was undertaken to identify the predominant trends and challenges associated with the integration of the metaverse in tourism. These challenges encompass a wide range of issues, from the application of artificial intelligence to the creation of inclusive and culturally sensitive tourism experiences.

The objective of this study was met, allowing for the investigation of how hospitality and leisure in the context of metaverse tourism has been addressed in scientific publications in tourism since 2022, a relevant moment for the emergence of this topic in society. The analysis of this research has enabled us to examine the implications of the metaverse for tourism and related sectors. The study identified two overarching themes: technology and application sectors. The study's primary findings include the escalating significance of immersive technologies, such as the metaverse and AI, in the enhancement of tourist experiences.

Theoretical contributions include the expansion of knowledge regarding the impact of the metaverse and other emerging technologies on consumer behavior and the provision of tourism services. From a social perspective, the study underscores the significance of crafting more inclusive and diverse tourism experiences. From a practical standpoint, the findings underscore the necessity to adapt tourism services to the emerging technological landscape, including the challenges posed by nascent technologies. The implications for destination marketing and hospitality practices necessitate innovations that consider the integration of AI and the development of immersive experiences in the metaverse.

A notable limitation of the study was the relatively small number of studies that were analyzed. While these studies offer a relevant overview, they do not fully capture the full potential of metaverse tourism. Consequently, subsequent research endeavors may benefit from expanding the sample of studies, incorporating more empirical approaches and field data.

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the transformation of tourism driven by the metaverse and other emerging technologies. It highlights the opportunities and challenges that arise from this innovation. As the metaverse continues to evolve, it is imperative for the tourism industry to persist in exploring its potential, adapting its practices, and creating increasingly interactive and accessible experiences. The metaverse's advent has given rise to novel dynamics in the portrayal of destinations as tourism products, a shift in the competitive landscape of destinations, and the promotion of the sustainability of existing resources.

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Collaboration between tourism education and the industry in fostering digitalization and entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates and analyses the collaborative pathways between tourism education and industry in fostering digitalization and entrepreneurship through an Afrocentric approach like Ubuntu—that can enhance academic-industry partnerships, promote inclusive growth and address systemic challenges within the South African tourism sector.

Study design/methodology/approach: This study adopts a qualitative research design and peer-to-peer dialogue to explore collaborative pathways in tourism education and industry among six facilitators from different institutions, 45 postgraduate students, and six industry leaders. The methodology integrated primary and secondary data collection methods, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced analysis. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders helped to capture experiences, insights, and perspectives on digitalization and collaborative practices.

Results: Findings underscored the importance of digital innovation, creative teaching tools, and direct engagement with industry practitioners in preparing students for dynamic careers. Adopting an Afrocentric lens grounded in Ubuntu enriches the discourse on tourism collaboration by embedding principles of empathy, solidarity, and shared humanity. This approach aligns with the cultural values of South Africa whilst providing a universal model for fostering meaningful partnerships and sustainable development in the global tourism education landscape.

Originality/value: Framed within the Ubuntu philosophy, which is an Afrocentric framework emphasizing interconnectedness and mutual support, it provides a strong theoretical foundation for exploring collaborative pathways in tourism education and industry in fostering digitalization and entrepreneurship.

Keywords Tourism education, entrepreneurship, digitalisation, collaborative pathways

Introduction

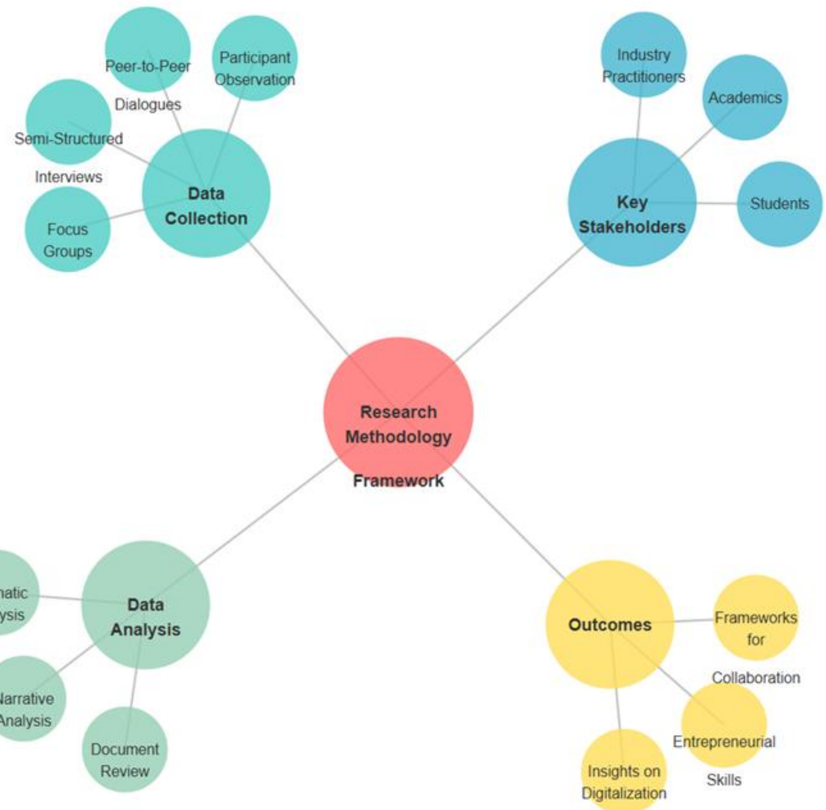
Tourism is a cornerstone of Africa's economic growth and cultural preservation (Pinto, Odoi, Nogueira & Viana, 2025). This study investigates and analyses the collaborative pathways between tourism education and industry in fostering digitalization and entrepreneurship, through a form of collaborative session that brought together stakeholders from academia and industry, aiming to prepare students for future tourism roles. The session addressed critical issues in aligning tourism education with industry needs by exploring entrepreneurial opportunities, digital tools, and interdisciplinary learning. The intersection of tourism education, digitalization, and entrepreneurship represents a critical area of research, particularly in preparing future-ready graduates who can navigate the complexities of the modern tourism landscape. The sector faces challenges stemming from digital disruptions and evolving workforce demands. This study examines key scholarly perspectives on the role of digitalization, interdisciplinary collaboration, and entrepreneurship in enhancing tourism education and aligning it with industry demands. Studies embedding ubuntu leadership concepts in travel and tourism management are limited (Sifolo, 2020). This study is grounded within Ubuntu Philosophy, which is the Afrocentric framework emphasizing interconnectedness and mutual support which provides a strong theoretical foundation for exploring collaborative pathways in tourism education and industry. Translated as "I am because we are," (Adeola & Kimbu, 2024); Ubuntu aligns with the paper's focus on bridging academia, digitalization, and entrepreneurship. According to Banerjee and Khan, (2024), embracing the concept of Ubuntu (I am because we are) can enhance tourism sustainability through digitalisation. It emphasizes community-centred collaboration, inclusivity, and shared growth, which is particularly relevant in addressing systemic inequalities (Banerjee & Khan, 2024), not only in South Africa's tourism sector, but in the African continent.

Despite the growing importance of collaboration between academia and the tourism industry in fostering digitalization and entrepreneurship, significant gaps remain in aligning educational practices with industry needs. In South Africa, where the tourism sector is a critical contributor to economic growth and job creation, the lack of cohesive academic-industry partnerships hampers the development of digital skills and entrepreneurial competencies among students (Abrahams, 2019). Additionally, systemic inequalities and limited access to digital technologies exacerbate these challenges, particularly for small, micro, and medium enterprises (SMMEs) in the tourism sector. This disconnect hinders the sector's ability to adapt to technological advancements, innovate, and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving global market. Furthermore, the absence of culturally relevant frameworks in collaborative efforts limits inclusivity and community empowerment. The research problem, therefore, lies in understanding how academia, industry, and entrepreneurship can collaboratively leverage digitalization to address these challenges and promote inclusive, sustainable growth within the South African tourism sector.

Methodology

This research study adopts a qualitative design emphasizing peer-to-peer interactions and relationships. Breuer, Witz, Skerlj, Braun, Bak, Naceri, Tigard, Haddadin, Buyx, Eisenberger and Müller (2024: 3) state that the term 'peer-to-peer relationship' is used to describe the trusting and collegial connections that can develop between academic peers from different disciplinary backgrounds. This approach is well-suited to exploring the complexities and interrelationships between tourism education, industry collaboration, and the role of digitalization and entrepreneurship. The research adopts a comprehensive data collection approach, incorporating both primary and secondary data sources to investigate and analyse the collaborative pathways between tourism education and industry in fostering digitalization and entrepreneurship.

A free, open-source JavaScript library for visualizing data was used to develop Figure 1, which presents the methodology applied in this study whilst prioritizing a deep understanding of collaborative pathways, fostering mutual learning and actionable recommendations for strengthening ties between tourism education and industry practices.



Results

There were 3 sessions held. Session 1delved into entrepreneurship insights in the African tourism context. Discussions underscored the need for adaptive strategies to leverage local opportunities and global trends. This session highlighted the potential of digitalization to transform the sector. The participants collaboratively identified digital innovations such as blockchain for secure transactions and social media for marketing needed by entrepreneurs in developing countries. Session 2 focused on Human Resources and Skills Development, especially equipping students with future-ready skills through creative teaching tools. Facilitator 2 demonstrated the potential of unconventional platforms like TikTok to enhance student engagement and inspire research innovation. The discussions revealed that integrating such tools into the curriculum can foster critical thinking, creativity, and industry readiness among students. Session 3 was the final collaborative session. The session focused on the practical expectations of tourism industry employers. Industry practitioners shared insights on the effective use of digital tools and provided advice on collaboration strategies. Students were encouraged to align their career aspirations with industry requirements and proactively engage with professionals in their chosen fields. Academic institutions are pivotal in preparing students to navigate and innovate within the tourism sector. Tourism programs can drive sustainable growth and empower graduates to excel in a rapidly evolving landscape by fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and bridging the gap between education and industry.

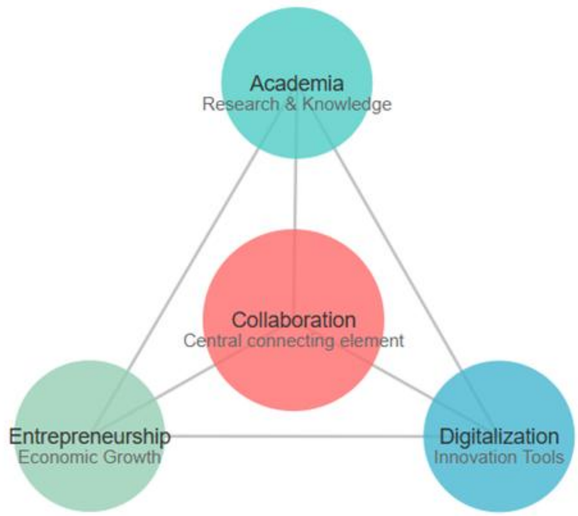


Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of collaborative pathways in Tourism Education that is driven by the philosophy of Ubuntu. Figure 2 illustrates the interplay between academia, digitalisation, and entrepreneurship which is the vital force that connects all other elements;

1. **Academia**: Provides theoretical knowledge and research.
2. **Digitalization**: Offers tools for innovation and engagement.
3. **Entrepreneurship**: Drives innovation and economic growth.
4. **Collaboration**: Acts as the central element.

The central red circle represents 'Collaboration', academia, digitalization, and entrepreneurship. Three interconnected nodes surround the centre, with academia (teal) - labelled with 'Research & Knowledge', followed by digitalization (blue) - labelled with 'Innovation Tools' and Entrepreneurship (green) - labelled with 'Economic Growth'. The connecting lines between all nodes represent the continuous flow of knowledge, resources, and innovation between these sectors. This visualization emphasizes that successful innovation ecosystems rely on the synergy between academic research, digital capabilities, and entrepreneurial drive, all facilitated through active collaboration.

Conclusion

By integrating digitalization, entrepreneurship, and industry engagement into academic programs, educational institutions can foster a workforce capable of driving sustainable growth in the sector.

The insights from this session provide a roadmap for enhancing tourism education and aligning it with industry needs, ensuring that students are well-equipped to thrive in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

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Metaverse as a strategy for global tourism destinations with territorial brand: Digital tools for sustainability in tourism

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Abstract

***Purpose**:* The objective of the study is to analyze strategies employed by tourism destinations in the metaverse, based on case studies of multiple destinations. The research seeks to understand how these strategies are developed, what technologies are used, and what social, economic, and cultural impacts emerge from this process.

***Methodology/approach**:* The methodological approach is qualitative, with a multiple case study that analyzes tourist destinations such as the Colosseum in Italy, the Dubai Frame in the United Arab Emirates, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Seoul City in South Korea, and Thailand.

***Results**:* The findings suggest that the strategic implementation of the metaverse by tourism destinations has proven effective in reaching a broader and more diverse audience, while concurrently offering innovative experiences. Destinations such as Seoul and the Eiffel Tower employ augmented reality to integrate historical and cultural elements into virtual tour, while Seoul utilizes digital twins for interactive simulations.

***Originality/value**:* This work offers an original contribution by exploring the intersections between tourism and the metaverse, presenting a comprehensive analysis of technological strategies applied to the branding and promotion of destinations. The research underscores the significance of the metaverse as an innovation instrument in the tourism sector, demonstrating its potential to enhance accessibility, engagement, and sustainability of destinations. The incorporation of multiple case studies provides a global perspective on the implementation of these strategies, facilitating the identification of common trends and challenges.

Keywords: Metaverse tourism, Tourist destinations, Destination management, Technological strategies, Territorial brand, Technology in tourism.

Introduction

The metaverse, also referred to as Web 3.0, has emerged as a technological frontier that facilitates transformation in the manner of interaction between individuals and spaces, thereby promoting the development of alternative forms of cultural, social, and economic connection. Despite the absence of a universally accepted definition, the metaverse is widely regarded as a highly immersive virtual environment where individuals can engage in real-time interactions with other users and the digital environment, either concurrently or in a complementary manner, through the integration of physical and digital elements (Almeida, 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Martins et al., 2023). In this context, the phygital environment integrates the physical world and virtual reality, enhancing each other's capabilities. Liu et al. (2023) explore the use of the metaverse in tourism destination marketing, highlighting its ability to offer immersive and interactive experiences that transform the way destinations communicate with tourists, mainly through gamified elements. In this sense, the metaverse has the potential to fortify branding strategies at the territorial level, fostering more compelling connections with the public in a context of accelerated global transformation.

The objective of this research is to analyze the strategies employed by tourist destinations in the metaverse, based on case studies of multiple destinations. The objective is to comprehend the evolution of these strategies, the technologies utilized, and the social, economic, and cultural ramifications that emerge from this process. To this end, the researchers have adopted the multiple case study approach proposed by Yin (2018).

In the context of tourism, the metaverse presents destinations with the opportunity to establish a global presence, thereby facilitating the creation of immersive experiences that integrate virtual reality, augmented reality, and digital twins (Auslander, 2022; Almeida, 2023; Liu et al., 2023). These technologies empower visitors to explore historical, cultural, or natural site even before a physical trip, or as a substitute in cases of geographical or economic limitations. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is the Colosseum in Rome, which has developed a digital replica of the historic site. This virtual representation, known as the Colosseum Metaverse, offers visitors a virtual experience that emulates the grandeur of the Colosseum in its prime. This development has given rise to a new form of tourism, termed metaverse tourism, which leverages advanced technologies to provide visitors with alternative and immersive experiences. Furthermore, the Colosseum employs augmented reality (AR) technology, enabling visitors to observe a digital reconstruction by simply pointing their smartphone or tablet at the architectural structure. This study explores the manner in which tourist destinations employ the metaverse and its associated technologies to create differentiation, engage visitors, and enhance their territorial brands.

A prevailing challenge in this field pertains to the prediction of how tourist destinations might leverage immersive digital experiences, such as the metaverse, to promote more sustainable and conscious behaviors. From this perspective, destination management organizations can utilize the metaverse to educate potential "tourists" by providing them with innovative educational environments where they can "live" various types of sustainable experiences (Martins et al., 2023).

In the immersive reality of the metaverse digital environment, destination marketers have the capacity to supply users with sight, sound, hearing and even smell, facilitated by emerging technology (Auslander, 2022). The advent of immersive virtual reality tourism signifies a novel technological frontier with the potential to be mainstreamed, showcasing renowned landmarks such as the Louvre, the Taj Mahal, the Great Barrier Reef, the Eiffel Tower and the London Tower Bridge. Within the virtual space, globally recognised locations are transformed into art exhibitions, concerts or social spaces. Furthermore, travellers interested in historical sites can access notes from old records as part of a self-guided tour, enabled by the metaverse. Furthermore, a specific attraction can be viewed from various angles as if it were live in an immersive virtual environment. Once inside the metaverse, travellers have the capacity to create their avatars, participate in gaming activities, engage in e-commerce, socialise with acquaintances, and explore exotic or traditional destinations worldwide (Auslander, 2022). It is important to note that the metaverse is not intended to replace physical travel; rather, it aims to integrate the digital world into consumers' everyday lives.

It is important to acknowledge the significant advancements in global connectivity, mobile technologies and digital literacy that have led to a notable increase in the relevance of this initiative. The technological field has expressed its intention to move towards the development of immersive virtual spaces that serve as a social, productive and recreational extension of individuals, taking into account three fundamental elements: interactivity, corporeality and persistence (Bautista, 2022). City managers have also articulated their commitment to propel and enhance their public diplomacy processes by leveraging immersive virtual platforms through functional replicas (digital twins). In these virtual spaces, individuals not only interact with each other but also gain deeper insights into the cities, their public services and heritage offerings, and the range of activities and services available in the digital realm. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is the metaverse city developed by the South Korean city of Seoul in 2022, which offers public services in a highly immersive and interactive virtual environment (Almeida, 2023). However, there has also been the phenomenon of building and developing "cities" or "settlements" in the metaverse, with very particular aesthetics and synergies, especially in decentralised proposals in blockchain systems, such as Decentraland or The Sandbox. This scenario demonstrates the emergent nature of the metaverse and the diverse approaches that have been adopted for its utilisation over time. Bautista (2022) asserts that there is a paucity of experimentation with the metaverse in relation to its potential, and that the objective has been to develop thematic digital extensions of certain strategic areas of physical cities, such as historic centres.

Digital immersion provides a medium through which individuals can engage in historical exploration, facilitating the experience of virtual encounters with the past, space exploration, and perilous natural phenomena such as volcanic eruptions. These environments offer a range of applications, including professional, educational, financial, and social activities. Furthermore, the metaverse has the potential to facilitate awareness, positioning, and destination branding, as well as coordination and management, through digital twins. This immersive virtual territory presents opportunities to support travel planning, interaction, and engagement, effectively transforming user-consumer behavior. According to Buhalis et al. (2023), visiting and engaging with virtual destinations serves to motivate physical travel rather than supplant it. The study by Almeida (2023) and Almeida and Almeida (2021) emphasizes that the metaverse will not replace travel, but rather serve as a complement, allowing visitors to enjoy the best of both worlds, the physical and the immersive virtual, thereby giving meaning to the term "phygital."

According to Pero (2022), the metaverse is comprised of two distinct population types: metaverse natives and metaverse settlers. "The metaverse natives are typically under the age of 21 and have been exposed to interactive online games throughout their lives [....] They exhibit a high level of comfort, or even superiority, in socializing in digital spaces compared to the real world. Conversely, the settlers of the metaverse inhabit the opposite side of this digital divide. These individuals perceive a dichotomy between the digital and physical worlds, with the former being perceived as a more confined domain relative to the latter" (Pero, 2022, n.p.). These divergent perspectives give rise to disparate behaviors, influencing the societal acceptance of the metaverse in contemporary times.

Despite the recent surge in research on metaverse attributes (Pero, 2022), the concept of metaverse tourism remains under-explored within the tourism literature. This oversight has prompted the formulation of four metaverse tourism propositions. Primarily, the predominant technologies of metaverse tourism will elevate user immersion to an augmented level. Secondly, metaverse tourists can develop more realistic expectations in the pre-trip stage. Thirdly, researchers should consider the multi-identity profiles of metaverse tourists. Finally, metaverse tourism offers a new business model in a digitalized economy. It is therefore imperative that tourism researchers develop a comprehensive understanding of the metaverse tourism ecosystem and investigate the experience of travelers at all stages—before, during, and after the trip—in order to develop more accurate and relevant studies (Koo et al., 2022).

The metaverse is defined as an interconnected network of immersive and interactive virtual environments where users, through digital avatars, experience a heightened sense of presence. This immersion, which has been demonstrated to occur on both psychological and physiological levels (Jones, 2021), facilitates real-time interactions with other participants and with virtual objects. As such, it is a recent development that demands in-depth understanding within the travel and tourism industry. Tsai's (2022) study explores the integration of concepts related to enactive cognition and positive psychology, proposing and verifying a theoretical framework. The study's findings suggest that the simultaneous effect of perceiving a holistic presence, comprising subdimensions of spatial presence, social presence, and self-presence, along with holistic happiness, which incorporates hedonia and eudaimonia, serves to strengthen the actual intention to visit a tourist destination within the metaverse context. This study makes a significant contribution to the field by offering a novel perspective on the potential of metaverse tours for travel and tourism marketing, a topic that has been previously explored by Almeida and Almeida (2021). These researchers raised the question of whether the metaverse should be regarded as a tourism strategy or a tourism marketing action.

Research methodology

The methodological approach employed is that of a multiple case study (Yin, 2018) with a qualitative orientation, encompassing a systematic analysis of five distinct tourist destinations: The Colosseum in Italy, the Dubai Fountain in the United Arab Emirates, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Seoul City in South Korea, and Thailand were selected for analysis. The research was structured in three main stages:

a) The identification and selection of cases is the foundation of this study. The selection of global tourist destinations was based on consolidated or innovative initiatives in the metaverse, which constitute the central focus of this study. Specifically, destinations that have adopted metaverse-related technologies and have an established territorial brand were analyzed, including: These include the Colosseum in Italy, the Dubai Frame in the United Arab Emirates, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Seoul City in South Korea, and Thailand.

b) Data Collection: The research involved a meticulous examination of documents and a systematic observation of immersive virtual environments on the official websites of each destination. The data considered in this study was exclusively publicly available data obtained through a meticulous combination of documentary research and direct observation of the metaverses.

c) Data analysis: The initiatives of each destination were analyzed based on eight categories: country, destination, strategies, technologies used, social, economic and cultural impacts, and the presence of a territorial brand. These categories are based on theories and models of territorial marketing and destination branding, as well as the literature on metaverse tourism, which investigates how destinations build and promote their identities and what the implications of these strategies are, including their insertion in the metaverse (Almeida, 2018; Auslander, 2022; Bautista, 2022; Koo et al., 2022; Buhalis et al., 2023; Ioannidis & Almeida, 2023; Tsai, 2024). Accordingly, a table was formulated according to the analytical framework, thereby systematizing and verifying the data. The formulation of the table was based on a series of criteria, including but not limited to technological innovation, the presence of the territorial brand, and the contribution of each destination to the sustainable development of tourism.

Results and Discussion

As illustrated in Table 1, an analysis of the strategies developed by tourist destinations in the metaverse is presented, with consideration given to the technologies utilized and the social, economic, and cultural impacts thereof.

Table 1. Metaverse destinations

Country	Destination	Strategies Developed	Technologies Used	Social Impacts	Economic Impacts	Cultural Impacts	Territorial brand
South Korea	Seoul	"Metaverse Seoul": access to official documents, virtual tourist events and public services.	Virtual reality, augmented reality.	Digital inclusion and greater public participation.	Potential increase in physical tourism.	Expanding access to cultural events.	I·SEOUL·U
United Arab Emirates	Dubai	"Dubai Metaverse Strategy": creating virtual jobs and stimulating the digital economy.	Virtual reality, blockchain, augmented reality	Creation of new social interactions.	Projection of 40,000 jobs in the sector.	Consolidating Dubai as a benchmark in digital innovation.	DUBAI

France	Eiffel Tower	Immersive experience called "Eiffel Tower Effect", offering virtual adventure on the second floor of the tower.	Virtual reality, interactive adventure	Enriching the tourist experience with a new form of interaction.	Attracting a wider audience and increasing ticket sales.	Reinforcing the image of the Eiffel Tower as an icon of innovation.	
Italy	Colosseum of Rome	Self-guided tours in 3D virtual reality that allow you to explore the Colosseum as it was in ancient times.	Virtual reality, 3D reconstruction, interactive audio	Increased educational engagement and accessibility.	Increased sales of tickets and related products.	Preservation and interactive dissemination of Roman history.	Discursive brand 

Thailand	Thailand	Creating a virtual world that combines NFT, blockchain and virtual travel experiences, integrating digital assets.	NFT, blockchain, virtual reality	Access to new forms of digital tourism and innovative experiences.	Stimulating the digital economy and new monetization opportunities.	Promoting Thai culture by integrating traditional elements.	

The destinations examined in Table 1 are prominent figures in the global tourism landscape, boasting a substantial presence in the sector. An observation was made that the nature of the territorial brand in these destinations varies between visual (with a logo), discursive (without a logo), or mixed (with a logo and a planned discourse), depending on the strategies adopted. This finding aligns with Almeida's (2023) observations, underscoring that the metaverse does not inherently replicate the same consolidated territorial brand dynamics as physical tourist destinations.

The strategies employed by these destinations encompass a range of approaches, including the promotion of tourist events, the creation of virtual employment opportunities within the digital economy, the facilitation of self-guided tours in three-dimensional virtual reality, the utilization of non-fungible tokens (NFTs), blockchain technology, and the development of digital twins (Table 1). It is evident that a singular strategy for the metaverse is nonexistent; rather, there exists a multitude of approaches that are adapted to the needs and interests of the various social actors involved. For instance, in Seoul, the emphasis was placed on metaverse governance, encompassing the expansion of public services and augmented citizen participation. At the Colosseum, augmented reality technology was employed to recreate the experience of how the Colosseum looked in ancient times, providing a historical immersion. These examples demonstrate the potential of the metaverse to reach a broad and diverse audience, offering innovative and immersive experiences facilitated by advanced technologies.

The technologies employed in this context are diverse and frequently adapted in response to the release of novel updates and innovations, as evidenced by the emergence of virtual and augmented reality. However, the implementation of technologies such as blockchain is often hindered by their technical complexity and the substantial economic costs associated with their integration. Non-fungible tokens (NFTs), popular in the context of the metaverse, have not been widely adopted in tourist destinations, suggesting a lack of familiarity with their use or a limited understanding of how these digital assets can be effectively integrated into tourism.

The social impacts of metaverse tourism in the destinations examined are notable for the creation of new forms of social interaction and educational engagement, with an emphasis on more innovative experiences. Regarding economic impacts, the sector is expected to experience significant job growth, along with a surge in ticket sales and the stimulation of the digital economy. New monetization opportunities, such as the sale of tickets for visits to metaverse destinations, are also anticipated. From a cultural standpoint, the emphasis has been on enhancing access to cultural events and promoting local culture, thereby contributing to the globalization of cultures through virtuais tours that incorporate historical elements. These examples underscore the multifaceted potential of the metaverse, extending beyond its role as a promotional platform to encompass revenue generation and social inclusion, particularly in remote communities.

An analysis was conducted of the contributions of each tourist destination in the metaverse to the sustainable development of tourism. The analysis was based on the digital strategies employed by each destination, the technologies they used, and the resulting impacts. The analysis also took into account the factors that promote the sustainability of tourism. These aspects include the reduction of environmental impacts through the minimization of physical travel, the promotion of inclusive and accessible experiences for diverse audiences, and the generation of new sources of income for local communities. As illustrated in Table 2, each destination employs a distinct approach, emphasizing digital innovation, the creation of economic opportunities, and the expansion of access to sustainable tourism experiences.

Table 2. Analysis of sustainable development in metaverse tourism

Sustainable Development in Tourism promoted by metaverse tourism		
Environmental	**Social**	**Economic**
Reducing the need for physical travel, reducing carbon emissions and the impact of overtourism on destinations.	Diverse cultural experience Historical and cultural preservation. Interactive educational and cultural engagement, without geographical or financial limitations.	New business opportunities, both physical and digital, including virtuais jobs and stimulating the digital economy. Boosting the local economy in a sustainable way, with lower operating costs compared to physical tourism. The integration of NFT and blockchain in the tourism industry opens up new monetization possibilities, promoting digital tourism and attracting investment for the development of

	Environmental education.	immersive experiences and virtual products, which boosts the digital economy in a sustainable way.

An analysis of the aforementioned destinations reveals that the metaverse is employed as a tool to reduce environmental impacts, promote the social inclusion of a wider public, strengthen digital economies, and preserve cultural heritage. The metaverse presents a more sustainable approach to tourism, offering virtual experiences that diminish the necessity for physical travel, while generating new economic and social opportunities by connecting individuals from diverse global regions. This dynamic contributes significantly to the promotion of sustainable practices in the sector, helping to preserve natural and cultural resources, while offering new forms of engagement and access to tourist experiences. Each of these destinations employs strategies that promote sustainability in tourism, including the reduction of the environmental footprint of traditional tourism, the expansion of cultural and educational access through digital platforms, and the generation of economic benefits for local communities. These destinations exemplify the potential of the metaverse to be a transformative instrument for advancing inclusive, accessible, and sustainable tourism.

However, it is imperative to acknowledge the challenges and limitations associated with the metaverse, as discussed in Table 3.

Table 3. Challenges of metaverse tourism

Country	Destination	Challenges of metaverse tourism
South Korea	Seoul	Despite the evident advantages offered by "Metaverse Seoul" in terms of digital inclusion and augmented access to public services and tourist events, the absence of complete immersion may potentially curtail the authenticity of the experience. The transition to the metaverse could potentially lead to a disconnection from physical reality, potentially causing virtual tourists to become detached from the authentic cultural and historical essence of Seoul. Furthermore, an excessive reliance on technology may create an immersive digital divide by excluding individuals who lack the skills to navigate this digital environment.

United Arab Emirates	Dubai	The "Dubai Metaverse Strategy" is a commendable initiative that fosters a remarkable digital transformation. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the potential challenges that may arise from the exclusion of specific social groups. The high cost of cutting-edge technology and the barrier to entry for those without access to suitable devices or technical knowledge can restrict the experience to a limited audience, which may not represent the global diversity of tourists. Furthermore, Dubai's relentless pursuit of innovation in the metaverse could potentially result in a deviation from its traditional cultural values, thereby leading to a dilution of its local authenticity in pursuit of a globally-oriented, digitally-centric image.
France	Eiffel Tower	The "Eiffel Tower Effect" experience offers a unique and immersive way to explore the Eiffel Tower. However, the lack of connection with the real context has the potential to diminish the cultural and historical value of the site. While virtual immersive experiences have the potential to enrich the visitor experience, they can also result in a dilution of the true beauty and significance of the site, as the digital representation may overshadow the experience of the physical environment. Furthermore, the excessive virtualisation of the Eiffel Tower experience has the potential to divert tourists from the physical experience, which can have a negative impact on the local economy, particularly in terms of commerce and services in the vicinity of the monument.
Italy	Colosseum of Rome	The recreation of the Colosseum in virtual reality offers a promising avenue for both the preservation of history and the enhancement of educational access. However, this technological advancement also carries inherent risks, particularly the potential commodification of cultural experiences. The transition of historical sites to virtual tour can potentially diminish their cultural and emotional significance, which is often intrinsic to physical visits. Furthermore, the restriction of access to individuals lacking the technological and infrastructural capabilities to partake in the virtual experience could potentially exacerbate existing digital exclusion and limit the dissemination of this innovation.

Thailand	Thailand	The integration of blockchain and non-fungible tokens (NFTs) in the development of virtual tourism experiences constitutes a noteworthy innovation. However, this development concomitantly gives rise to concerns regarding the economic sustainability and environmental impact of the underlying technologies. While blockchain's efficacy in tracking transactions and digital assets is evident, its substantial energy consumption, particularly the intensive utilization of computing resources, gives rise to concerns regarding its environmental sustainability. Moreover, the overreliance on the digital economy and the commercialization of virtual assets (NFTs) can create a misleading perception of sustainability, while neglecting to address the pressing environmental and social challenges that sustainable tourism is meant to tackle.

One of the most significant challenges associated with the integration of the metaverse into the tourism sector pertains to the provision of a genuinely authentic experience. While the metaverse has the potential to enhance access to and visibility of destinations, it does not substitute for the physical experience. Furthermore, it is incapable of replicating the intricacies and nuances of the cultures and environments it seeks to emulate. This discrepancy can lead to a disconnection between the immersive digital experience and the physical reality of the destination, while concurrently generating positive experiences (real or otherwise) for individuals with mobility impairments.

While virtual platforms within the metaverse have the potential to democratize access, there is a risk of digital exclusion, particularly for individuals lacking access to virtual reality devices, high-quality internet, or the technical proficiency necessary to navigate these platforms. This scenario has the potential to amplify existing disparities, leading to the emergence of a form of digital tourism that is primarily accessible to a niche audience or those with substantial financial resources. This phenomenon, as Almeida (2023) terms it, "metaverse illiteracy," stands in contrast to the concept of "virtual illiteracy."

The metaverse presents solutions with the potential to curtail the carbon emissions associated with physical tourism. However, the technologies that underpin it, such as blockchain and virtual reality, have substantial implications for energy consumption and natural resource utilization. The energy consumption of the digital infrastructures that support the metaverse can, paradoxically, contribute to the tourism sector's carbon footprint. Consequently, while the metaverse offers numerous advantages in the tourism sector, it is imperative to critically assess its limitations and challenges, which are inherent to this nascent technology. Excessive or imbalanced utilization can result in the commodification of cultural experiences, social and digital exclusion, and unplanned environmental consequences. To ensure the sustainability of the metaverse in the tourism sector, it is imperative to develop approaches that not only prioritize technological innovation but also adhere to the principles of respect for local cultures, social inclusion, and environmental preservation. These approaches should aim to enhance the accessibility of immersive virtual platforms, thereby fostering a more balanced and sustainable integration of the metaverse into the tourism industry.

Final Considerations

It is noteworthy that the metaverse is shaping a new paradigm for tourist destinations by allowing them to transcend geographical and mobility barriers, thereby creating immersive and memorable experiences. Consequently, the metaverse emerges as a strategic digital instrument to support sustainability in tourism by offering solutions that harmonize technological innovation, accessibility, and environmental preservation. However, it is imperative that tourist destinations adopt a balanced approach, ensuring that the implementation of the metaverse does not exclude segments of the population or create new digital inequalities.

The objective of the study was met and allowed for the analysis of the strategies employed by tourist destinations in the metaverse, based on case studies of multiple destinations. By examining these strategies in depth, researchers unraveled the developmental processes behind these strategies, identified the technological underpinnings, and elucidated the multifaceted social, economic, and cultural ramifications that ensued. The study's findings indicated that the most successful destinations in leveraging the metaverse are those that align innovative technologies with their cultural narratives, promoting both the attractiveness of the destination and the evolution of the technology itself.

The primary findings suggest that the implementation of the metaverse by tourist destinations has been a deliberate strategy to expand their reach, targeting a more diverse audience, while concurrently offering innovative experiences in pursuit of destination sustainability. A notable finding was the duality in the use of the metaverse for tourism. On the one hand, the digital experience's disconnection from physical reality is perceived as a challenge; on the other hand, the potential for creating inclusive experiences for individuals with mobility impairments or challenging geographical access is regarded as a significant opportunity. This observation is particularly salient in the context of sustainable tourism development, as it underscores the potential of immersive technologies to bridge the accessibility gaps that physical tourism often faces. This suggests that the metaverse can be a valuable tool for promoting social inclusion and equal access to tourism experiences, which is an important contribution to research into tourism in the metaverse.

The study's findings contribute to the development of a more sustainable and responsible tourism model, one that considers the reduction of environmental impacts, the preservation of heritage, and the promotion of sustainable regional development. By enhancing the comprehension of emerging technologies, tourism managers can formulate more informed and innovative decisions that ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism and the destinations examined.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study makes a substantial contribution to the extant literature on metaverse tourism, a nascent field with limited academic production. The research underscores the necessity to broaden the understanding of how immersive virtual technologies, such as the metaverse, have the potential to transform the tourist experience. The study proposes novel conceptual frameworks that elucidate the dynamics between tourists and destinations within the metaverse, underscoring its potential to enhance the experiential aspect of tourism by offering a more immersive, accessible, and interactive environment. Moreover, by examining the potential of the metaverse in the context of tourism, the study underscores the necessity of integrating theories of destination branding and territorial marketing with the emerging digital dimensions, thereby fostering a more comprehensive and innovative approach to the study of tourism. This approach enhances our understanding of how emerging technologies can be applied to augment the appeal of destinations and enrich the tourist experience, not only in physical spaces but also in the digital realm, where the metaverse emerges as a strategic element and a tool to support sustainability in tourism.

The practical implications for tourism managers are twofold: first, to adapt marketing and territorial branding strategies, and second, to consider the unique promotion and visibility opportunities that the metaverse offers for tourist destinations. The integration of the metaverse into strategic frameworks enables managers to extend their reach to a more expansive audience, encompassing individuals from diverse geographical locations, thereby obviating the necessity for physical travel. This development has the potential to augment the value of the territorial brand and enhance the efficacy of tourism campaigns through a more sustainable approach.

Furthermore, policymakers may be influenced by the potential of the metaverse to promote inclusive and accessible tourism. The study ensures that marginalized communities and people with disabilities have access to tourism experiences, regardless of their location or financial conditions, by providing data on how the metaverse can be used to integrate these groups.

The study's limitations stem primarily from its exclusive focus on global tourist destinations that have already established a strong territorial brand. This restriction restricts the generalizability of the findings to a specific group of destinations. This focus may limit understanding of the impact of the metaverse on smaller-scale tourist destinations or those in the early stages of digital development. To broaden the understanding of the impact of the metaverse on tourism, future research could expand the analysis to include a wider range of destinations, including those with different territorial brand profiles, sizes, budgets, and stages of implementation of emerging technologies. This would provide a broader view of how the metaverse can influence tourism dynamics in different contexts.

Despite the challenges presented by the metaverse, there is considerable potential for this tool in the long term, as it enables the concept of an "immersive digital society." This study makes a valuable contribution by exploring the use of the metaverse as an innovative strategy for territorially branded tourist destinations, highlighting its essential role in promoting sustainability in tourism. The metaverse's potential impact on society, whether positive or negative, is contingent on the comprehension and practical implementation of this concept by social actors in destinations. This implementation may yield varying degrees of social inclusion and sustainability. The metaverse will not replace existing promotional and attraction strategies; rather, it will serve as a complementary element, fostering positive expectations.

The study's strength lies in its ability to anticipate future trends and provide direction for the sustainable integration of the metaverse in tourism, making it a crucial resource for understanding the evolving dynamics shaping the global tourism industry.

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Digital cultural tourism and territorial brand: The sustainable preservation of the patrimony of the Pyramids of Giza

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Abstract

***Purpose**:* The aim of this study is to explore how digital technologies, especially augmented reality (AR), can be applied to the preservation and promotion of the historical heritage of the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt and its territorial brand.

***Methodology/approach**:* The research adopts a qualitative approach, using the case study method to analyze the use of augmented reality in the Pyramids of Giza, as well as exploring the connection between this case and the territorial brand.

***Results**:* The results suggest that the application of digital technologies at the Pyramids of Giza provides an immersive and educational experience for tourists and helps preserve the heritage by preventing physical damage to the site, leading to sustainable practices. In addition, AR has a positive impact on the territorial brand of Egypt's pyramids and the brand of the country itself.

***Originality/value**:* This study is innovative in exploring the use of AR to preserve and promote historical heritage. The research contributes to the integration of new technologies into sustainable cultural tourism, providing another way of interacting with world heritage and opening up new avenues for tourist engagement, digital preservation and the use of territorial brand.

Keywords Territorial Brand, Digital Cultural Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Emerging Technologies, Augmented Reality.

Introduction

In recent years, significant advancements in digital technologies, such as augmented reality (AR) and 3D modeling (Carmigniani et al., 2011; Berryman, 2012; Arena et al., 2022), have broadened the scope of possibilities for interaction in the tourism industry, particularly in accessing cultural and historical heritage sites (Yan et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2024). The integration of these technologies signifies a substantial milestone, not only in the realm of tourist experience, but also in the preservation and enrichment of destinations' historical and cultural heritage. However, historical heritage is confronted with mounting challenges, including the repercussions of overtourism, climate change, and the absence of effective conservation strategies (Almeida, 2023; Yan et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2024).

In this context, digital technologies have emerged as innovative solutions, enabling the digital preservation of historical sites of high cultural and tourist value, such as the Pyramids of Giza, without compromising their physical integrity (Yan et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2024). In addition to facilitating remote access, these innovations promote other forms of interaction and education, contributing to more sustainable and conscious tourism (Stankov et al., 2024). Furthermore, these innovations have the potential to bolster the territorial brand of destinations, enhancing their symbolic value and extending their global reach (Almeida, 2018; 2024).

In view of the foregoing, the present study aims to explore the potential of digital technologies, with a particular focus on augmented reality (AR), in the preservation and promotion of the historical heritage of the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, with a view to strengthening the territorial brand. Augmented reality (AR) facilitates the overlaying of digital information on a physical environment, thereby enabling tourists to interact with virtual representations of monuments, artefacts, and other historical and cultural elements, thus creating an immersive and enriching experience (Carmigniani et al., 2011; Berryman, 2012; Arena et al., 2022; Rauschnabel et al., 2022; Malta et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2024). The integration of these technologies into the tourism sector has the potential to enhance the visitor experience, rendering it more educational and interactive. Furthermore, it has the potential to mitigate the impact on physical monuments, thereby enhancing the overall appeal of destinations (Almeida, 2018; 2024).

Therefore, although previous studies have investigated the impact of digital technologies on the preservation of historical and cultural heritage (Carmigniani et al., 2011; Berryman, 2012; Arena et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2024), there are still gaps in the understanding of the use of AR in tourist destinations, and the literature lacks a more in-depth analysis of its role in strengthening the territorial brand of these destinations.

Subsequent to this introduction, the article presents a theoretical review of territorial brand and AR, followed by the methodology used, analysis of the results and final considerations.

Theoretical framework

2.1 Territorial brand in metaverse tourism

The concept of the territorial brand in metaverse tourism is emerging as a contemporary approach to destination branding. The metaverse territorial brand, a concept proposed by Almeida (2024), integrates physical and virtual elements in an immersive digital space, extending the identity of real territories into the metaverse. This approach is exemplified by Seoul's metaverse, which uses territorial brand strategies to marketing the city, enhance its reputation and implement urban revitalisation projects, and local government itself to deliver public services in the metaverse (Almeida, 2023).

Sousa and Vasconcelos (2018) posit that the physical territorial brand plays an instrumental role in attracting visitors and increasing a destination's competitiveness by leveraging elements of its territorial identity. Its creation has been shown to significantly influence consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions in tourism contexts (Sousa et al., 2017). Almeida (2024) further extends the dynamics of the physical territorial brand to the "metaverse territorial brand", albeit with certain limitations.

Almeida (2024) posits that the territorial brand, physical or metaversal, encompasses a variety of classifications, with three types forming its foundation: the visual brand (logo), the verbal brand (slogan), the discursive brand (speech), and the mixed brand (involving two or more types).

These studies underscore the significance of strategic territorial brand in immersive physical and virtual environments to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of a destination in the evolving tourism marketing landscape. It is noteworthy that Almeida's (2023, 2024) studies are the only ones to present the concept of "metaverse territorial brand", thereby underscoring a significant lacuna in interdisciplinary literature, of which tourism is a constituent. However, given the equal pioneering nature of this concept, this lacuna is deemed justifiable, and this study also contributes to filling this gap.

2.1 Digital technologies: Augmented Reality in metaverse tourism

The implementation of AR began to take place in an experimental capacity during the 1960s. The first documented instance of AR was the creation of Ivan Sutherland, a computer scientist who developed the "Sword of Damocles" in 1968. This system comprised a helmet with an optical display that projected simple graphics onto the real environment. Subsequent to this, during the 1990s, the technology began to be applied in more practical contexts. In 1992, Tom Caudell, a Boeing researcher, coined the term 'augmented reality' to describe a system that helped workers assemble aircraft by overlaying digital information (Caudell, 1992). The 2010s witnessed the advent of AR, propelled by the advancements in smartphones and devices such as Google Glass (2013) and applications like Pokémon GO (2016). The technology has since been employed in a variety of domains, including tourism, education and marketing (Mohammed-Amin, 2010; Liao & Iliadis, 2021; Malta et al., 2023). However, the application of AR in the tourism sector only commenced in the 2000s, and it has undergone substantial evolution in recent years, as evidenced in Table 1.

Table 4. AR phases

Period	**Categories**	**Description of phases**
2000–2010	First applicatio	**2009:** Experiments with digital tourist guides began - for example, the Layar app allowed tourists to point their cell phones at monuments and

	ns in tourism	receive historical information in real time (Kečkeš Tomičić, 2017; Kharat et al., 2024).
2010–2016	Expansion of AR in tourism	**2011:** Implementing AR in museums - experiments such as the Smithsonian's interactive guides have initiated the use of digital content to enrich exhibitions.
		2013: Tourist destinations such as Paris and Rome have started using AR to digitally reconstruct historic ruins, making it possible to visualize monuments in their original state.
		2015: Theme park attractions, exemplified by Disney's innovations, have incorporated digital animations integrated into the real environment.
		(Kečkeš Tomičić, 2017).
2016–2021	Smart tourism and immersive experiences	**2016:** Expansion of the use of AR with initiatives such as Google Arts & Culture, which has enabled virtual visits to museums and galleries around the world.
		2018: Hotels and airlines have begun to adopt AR to improve the customer experience, allowing tourists to view rooms and destinations in advance.
		2020: During the COVID-19 pandemic, AR has consolidated its role in virtual tourism, offering immersive experiences in destinations that are difficult to access physically.
		(Park & Stangl, 2020; Gretzel, 2021).
2022–2025	Metaverse and Regenerative Tourism	**2022:** Expansion of AR experiences aimed at sustainable tourism - museums and archaeological sites adopt technology to recreate immersive narratives without physical impact.
		2023: Large cities are beginning to adopt digital city branding strategies through AR, creating interactive maps and personalized experiences for visitors.
		2024–2025: Projection of a fusion between the metaverse and tourism, allowing travelers to explore destinations virtually through interactions with holograms and AR devices.
		(Gretzel, 2021; Almeida, 2023a,b).

It is evident that the tourism industry has adopted augmented reality (AR) to enhance experiences, making them more interactive, educational, and sustainable. This development signifies an advancement in immersive interaction over time. The integration of augmented reality (AR) in various forms, including digital guides, immersive tours, historical reconstructions, and metaverse integration, is a testament to its transformative impact on the tourism sector. The territorial brand constitutes a significant component of this landscape, underscoring the interconnection between tourism, technology, and regional identity. The timeline in Table 1 indicates that the tourism industry began to leverage this technology from the 2000s onwards, due to three primary factors: technological advancements, the digitization of tourist information, and new demands from travelers for interactive experiences.

Research methodology

This qualitative research employs the case study method, focusing on the Pyramids of Giza in relation to Egypt's territorial brand. The present study employed a documentary research approach, leveraging a range of secondary sources, including academic articles, reports on the implementation of AR technology in the Pyramids of Egypt, the AR platform utilized in the Pyramids of Giza, internet-based media releases, and videos showcasing the application of this technology in a cultural heritage setting (Table 2).

Table 5. Source of evidence for the study

Access links	
Digital Giza (2025). Giza 3D.	https://giza-web2.rc.fas.harvard.edu/giza3d/
Farrag, H. M. (2021). Augmented Reality in Tourist Guidance, 389-405.	https://aafu.journals.ekb.eg/article_258531_d2558e414d76e00e74bb204101d8b8b4.pdf
Giza Project (2011). Giza Project.	https://digitalhumanities.fas.harvard.edu/project/giza-project/
Giza Project (2012). Bringing the Giza Pyramids to Life.	https://digitalhumanities.fas.harvard.edu/bringing-the-giza-pyramids-to-life/
LGFL (s.d.). Augmented Reality Resources.	https://ancientegypt.lgfl.net/augmented-reality-resources

MFA Boston (s.d.). The Giza Archives.	http://www.gizapyramids.org

Bardin's (2011) content analysis was employed to systematically evaluate the collected data, with particular attention given to the criteria of relevance, timeliness, and quality. Each document was meticulously reviewed and annotated to identify relevant passages, which were subsequently coded using the aforementioned research technique.

Giza Pyramid Case

The Pyramids of Giza, situated on the Giza plateau, on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt, are iconic monuments of ancient Egyptian civilization and represent the sole remaining Wonder of the Ancient World. The complex consists of three primary pyramids: Cheops (Khufu), Chephren (Khafre), and Miquerinos (Menkaure). In addition to these pyramids, the complex includes numerous smaller tombs, funerary temples, and the iconic Great Sphinx. The construction of these monumental structures is attributed to the IV Dynasty of the Old Kingdom, circa 2580–2510 b.C. These monumental tombs served as the final resting places for the pharaohs of that era.

With the advancement of digital technologies, initiatives such as Harvard University's "Giza Project" are dedicated to the extensive digitization of the archaeological site of Giza. This international nonprofit project aims to collect, curate, and present the archaeological record of the pyramids and surrounding areas. Through digital archaeology, the project has consolidated one of the largest digital archives on Giza, integrating data from several global institutions. This data includes 3D models, excavation photographs, maps, architectural plans, and archaeologists' field diaries (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Augmented Reality of the Pyramids of Giza

Giza Project (2012).

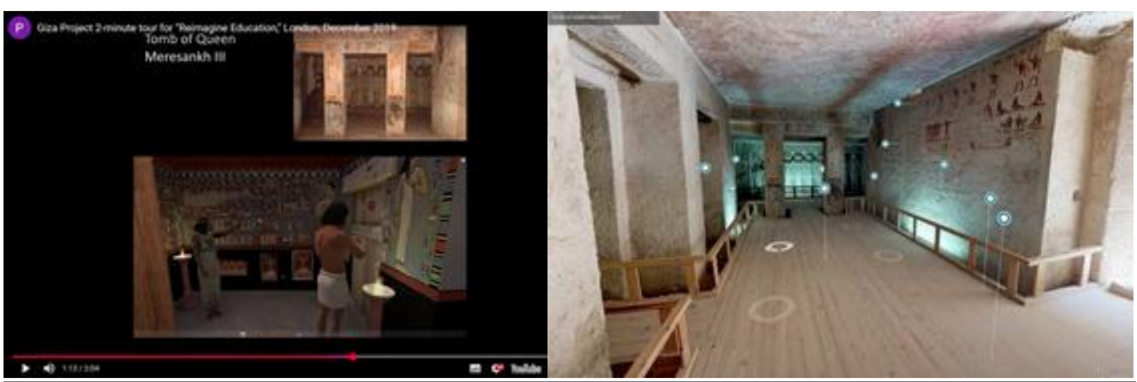
The "Digital Giza" platform allows users to explore detailed three-dimensional reconstructions of the Giza plateau, offering an immersive and educational experience of the archaeological site (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Project Digital Giza

Digital Giza (2025).

Augmented reality (AR) has been employed as a cutting-edge medium to enhance comprehension and engagement with the cultural heritage of the Pyramids of Giza. Visitors are able to access supplementary information regarding the pyramids, interact with virtual replicas of sculptures and hieroglyphs, and participate in interactive exhibitions through the use of mobile devices and specialized applications. A notable example was an exhibition held at the pyramids in 2022, which incorporated sculptures and installations that could be explored through AR filters available on Instagram. This innovative approach allowed visitors direct interaction with the works and extended navigation through the exhibition. These augmented reality applications offer a more immersive educational experience, enabling users to virtually traverse the thoroughfares of ancient temples and palaces, thereby immersing themselves in the quotidian life of Ancient Egypt (Figure 3).

Figure 3. AR applications in the Pyramids of Giza



Giza Project 2 (2019).

The integration of digitization and augmented reality technologies has been demonstrated to serve a dual purpose: it preserves and documents the archaeological heritage, while also broadening public access and understanding of the Pyramids of Giza. These technologies offer new perspectives and interactive experiences for scholars and history buffs.

Results and discussion

The application of AR at the Pyramids of Giza fulfills five functions: 1) it provides an immersive and educational experience for tourists; 2) it helps preserve the heritage by preventing physical damage to the site; 3) it increases global access, allowing tourists from anywhere in the world to explore the history and culture in a more sustainable and interactive way; and 4) it strengthens the territorial identity, extending the territorial brand; and 5) it broadens the recognition of the environmental footprint, generating more sustainable awareness and good practices. Consequently, a five-category framework emerges, delineating immersive and interactive experiences, preservation, democratization of access, territorial brand, and sustainable awareness.

It is important to acknowledge that the initial category, immersive and interactive experiences in tourism destinations, such as the Pyramids of Giza, is not a recent development. This technology has been utilized since the 2000s, and it underwent significant growth in the 2010s with the proliferation of mobile devices and AR applications in the tourism industry.

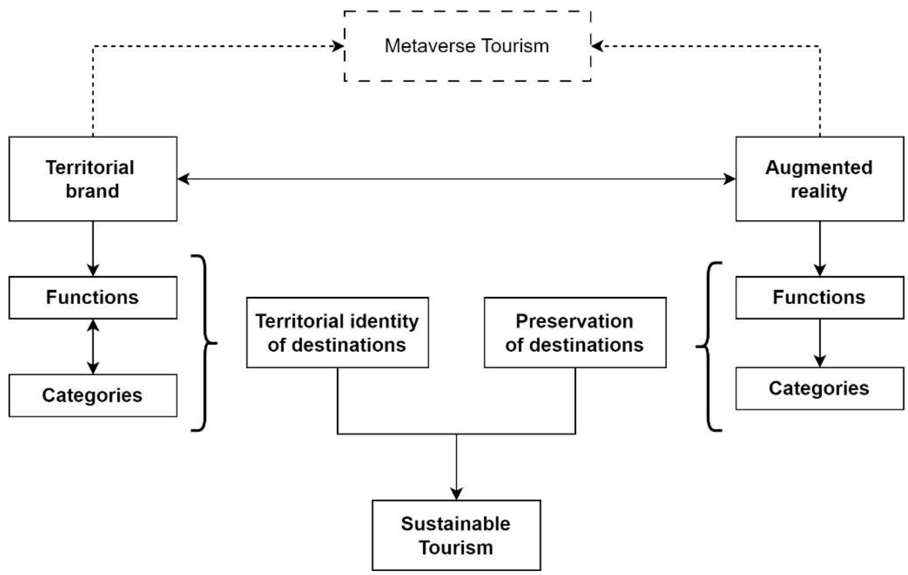
In the domain of preservation, the utilization of augmented reality (AR) has emerged as a pivotal strategy for safeguarding historical and cultural heritage sites, thereby obviating the necessity for physical interaction with these structures. This benefit has garnered significant attention within the tourism sector, where it is widely regarded as a crucial element in promoting the conservation of destinations. The efficacy of this technology in preserving destinations has garnered significant recognition, as articulated by Stankov et al. (2024). These scholars underscore the significance of digitizing heritage assets to mitigate physical deterioration.

In the domain of democratization of access, AR has emerged as a notable entity, particularly in its capacity to facilitate unprecedented global access, especially to archaeological sites with tourist potential. The advent of digital platforms has profoundly augmented the cultural and educational reach of these destinations, enabling tourists from across the globe to explore the pyramids and their historical significance. In the context of increasing globalization and digitalization, emerging technologies have played a pivotal role in enhancing tourism accessibility, thereby providing individuals who are unable to visit Egypt with the opportunity to engage with the local history and culture through virtual means.

With respect to the concept of territorial brand, immersive digital technologies can strengthen the identity and perception of destinations, in line with Almeida's studies (2018, 2023, 2024). This concept is also aligned with city branding and place branding, which have been integrated into digital strategies since the 2010s. However, in the 2020s, driven by the demands of the digital age and the need for more sustainable practices resulting from the pressures of the pandemic COVID-19, tourism is undergoing a digital transformation. Moreover, the advent of dynamic historical experiences has been shown to enhance visitor interest and comprehension, thereby expanding the educational scope of these sites. The synergy among these points of contact serves to reinforce the discourse surrounding the territorial brand, thereby contributing to the unique appeal of the destination for visitors.

Meanwhile, immersive digital technologies also play an important role in strengthening the territorial brand of the Pyramids of Giza, helping to promote sustainable tourism. Through the integration of interactive digital components into the site, Egypt's territorial brand is reinforced, enabling tourists to establish a more profound and memorable connection with the heritage. The increasing digitization of cultural heritage has emerged as a strategy employed to fortify the territorial identity and global recognition of destinations such as the pyramids (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Relations between territorial brand and AR



Source: Authors.

As illustrated inFigure 4, both the territorial brand and the RA fulfill distinct functions and categories, contributing to the establishment of a destination's unique identity and the conservation of its heritage. Consequently, this paradigm fosters the emergence of sustainable tourism, the dissemination of best practices, and, by extension, the promotion of environmental education.

According to Almeida (2024), the utilization of immersive and digital technologies constitutes an innovative approach to promoting a territorial brand, as it enhances the visibility and authenticity of the locale in the digital era, concurrently fostering more sustainable tourism practices and reducing the destination's socio-environmental impact.

The findings of this study lend support to the notion that digital technologies, such as AR, serve as strategic instruments capable of enhancing the tourist experience while ensuring the responsible and sustainable preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage. This contributes not only to the tourism sector but also to the reinforcement of the regional brand of the Pyramids of Giza and Egypt. However, it should be noted that this technology is not universally accessible, both for those who implement it at the destination and for those who use it. This is due to its reliance on cutting-edge technology, which consequently results in higher costs. Additionally, Almeida (2024) has noted that the emergence of technology is contingent upon specific forms of literacy. The lack of familiarity with its application can result in a lack of proficiency in the metaverse. Consequently, the mere implementation of technology in destinations is insufficient; there is also a necessity to educate tourists in its use and underscore its importance. This may become more evident to the younger generations, such as Beta, who have been born into the era of digital immersion.

Conclusion

The integration of digital technologies, including augmented reality (AR) and three-dimensional modeling, within the context of cultural tourism, particularly in the context of the Pyramids of Giza, has been demonstrated to be an innovative and alternative approach to the sustainable preservation of historical heritage. Concurrently, it has been demonstrated to engender a tourist experience that is both enriching and accessible, while concurrently promoting the discursive territorial brands of the destination and the country.

The objective was achieved by investigating the potential of digital technologies, particularly augmented reality (AR), in preserving and promoting the historical heritage of the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt and its associated territorial brand. In this regard, AR fulfills multiple roles, which are, in essence, strategies employed by destinations to ensure their environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability. The territorial brand of the Pyramids in Egypt and that of the country are both highlighted through emerging technologies such as AR, as they increase the visibility of these destinations on the global tourism scene.

It is important to acknowledge the historical progression of AR, which provides a contextual foundation justifying the present utilization of these technologies in the tourism sector. This historical evolution underscores the manner in which technological advancements have transformed, thereby enabling immersive experiences that are now applicable to the preservation and promotion of historical heritage. Moreover, the integration of the concept of territorial brand serves to enrich the proposed research. In a context where the identity of a tourist destination is of increasing importance, the use of digital technologies enhances the visitor experience and strengthens the image and global reputation of the heritage site. This multidimensional perspective, which unites technology with the construction and promotion of territorial identity, represents an innovative and current contribution to the literature on cultural and digital tourism. From a scientific point of view, integrating the timeline of AR in tourism with the analysis of territorial brand has also enabled an interdisciplinary approach to understanding how digital technologies can promote more sustainable tourism practices and, at the same time, strengthen a destination's cultural identity, and by extension its territorial brand.

The findings of this study suggest that AR plays a pivotal role in mitigating the adverse effects of overtourism by preserving the integrity of historical monuments. However, additional notable functions include the provision of immersive and interactive experiences, the preservation of local heritage, the democratization of access, the reinforcement of the destination's territorial brand, and the promotion of sustainable awareness. The underlying rationale for these multifaceted benefits is twofold: 1) The necessity for strategies that make destinations distinctive and appealing, and, 2) the imperative to promote more conscious sustainable practices for the destination and the planet.

The theoretical implication is to deepen AR in tourist destinations with a territorial brand, which is still a gap in the literature. From a social perspective, the study underscores the significance of leveraging technology to safeguard the historical and cultural heritage of destinations. Practically speaking, the study's findings can be of benefit to a wide range of stakeholders, including public policy planners, academics, students, marketing and cultural heritage professionals, among others.

The present study is subject to certain limitations. Firstly, it investigates only one destination that is a cultural heritage site at a global level. However, subsequent research endeavors may involve a comparative analysis of diverse destinations across various geographical and cultural scales, incorporating both sites with and without this particular heritage feature.

It can be concluded that digital technologies, particularly AR, have been used to preserve and promote the historical heritage of the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, including for tourism purposes. This initiative exemplifies a growing concern regarding the social and environmental impact, as well as the carbon footprint, of global tourist destinations. Moreover, the integration of AR in tourist destinations serves to activate the destination's territorial brand, thereby aligning with the national brand of the country.

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Evaluation of Interpersonal Interaction, FOMO and Flow Experience in Virtual Museum Visit Behavior on the Axis of S-O-R Paradigm

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Abstract

Purpose: The digital transformation experienced in the tourism industry also causes the transformation of the stimuli (S) that motivate tourist behavior, and this also differentiates the process (organism-O) and reactions (response-R). This research aims to determine the role of flow experience in the effect of interpersonal interaction and fear of missing out (FOMO), which are stimuli for tourists' virtual museum visit behavior, on visit intention. It is aimed to discuss the research results in the context of the S-O-R paradigm. Thus, tips are provided to guide the digital transformation strategies and policies of tourism businesses.

Study design/methodology/approach: Survey method was used in the research. Through the data obtained from the survey, it was tried to determine the role of flow experience in the effect of interpersonal interaction and FOMO variables on virtual museum visiting behavior on the axis of the S-O-R paradigm. The research model was tested with the structural equation modeling method.

Results: According to the research results, it has been determined that FOMO and interpersonal interaction are effective on virtual museum visit behavior. It has been observed that flow experience has a significant role in this effect. In line with the results obtained, various strategy suggestions were presented to tourism marketers in directing tourists to virtual museum visit behavior.

Originality/value: The S-O-R paradigm is the basis for creating behavior, and it is important to determine the change in stimuli with the digitalization process. It is important to identify new variables in the organismal process and reveal their effects on behavior. Revealing the variables that affect the behavior of visiting virtual museums, which are prominent in the tourism industry that is rapidly undergoing digital transformation, may provide guiding clues for other tourism services. In this context, the research has original value and has a unique value in terms of methodology.

Keywords Interpersonal interaction, FOMO, Flow experience, Virtual museum, Digital transformation in tourism

Introduction

In research and theories developed within the framework of environmental psychology and consumer behavior, consumer behavior is generally considered as action-reaction, input-output

(I+O). These theories are criticized for not taking into account the mental processes of individuals (Zhang and Benyoucef, 2016). There is an interaction between the physical environment and human experiences and behaviors (Gürkaynak, 1988: 1). In behavioral studies in the field of psychology and marketing, it has become necessary to take into account the internal processes of the consumer rather than just input and output. Therefore, contemporary models such as the S-O-R paradigm, which expresses a more developed and sophisticated structure of the I+O approach, are used. Contemporary models such as the S-O-R paradigm, unlike I+O models, try to explain this aspect of the behavioral process by focusing on internal, cognitive organism (O) factors rather than input or output factors (Jacoby, 2002: 51-52).

The foundation of the S-O-R paradigm is based on environmental psychology. It is a theoretical model that tries to explain the impact of environmental factors on consumer behavior. According to this paradigm, stimulus (S) affects individuals' cognitive evaluations (O), resulting in approach or avoidance behaviors (R). In other words, individuals are stimulated positively or negatively by external stimuli in the environment, and a mental evaluation process occurs as a result of the stimulus effect. Following the mental process, the individual shows approach or avoidance behaviors (Floh and Madlberger, 2013). In the paradigm, stimulus (S) refers to environmental stimuli, organism (O) refers to the mental or emotional process, and response (R) refers to reactions and consumer decisions (Bakırtaş, 2013a: 47). The model of this approach was first discussed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), who revised it to include the mental process of the individual. Originally considered a psychology theory, the S-O-R paradigm has become popular in the field of consumer behavior over time (Wu and Li, 2018).

With the development and rapid diversification of technology, consumers are curious about all the behaviors of other consumers regarding what they buy, where they go, what they do, and they follow them, especially on social media. Wondering what other individuals are doing and the fear of missing out are expressed by the concept of FOMO (Wortham, 2011). This curiosity and the fear of missing developments have become among the important stimuli affecting consumer behavior. The basis of this curiosity and fear is based on the reference groups factor that affects consumer behavior (Koç, 2022) and is activated by word of mouth communication, which was conceptualized in the 1950s (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008). In other words, it is possible to explain this stimulus process with the concept of interpersonal interaction (Tkaczyk, 2015), which is expressed as meeting the expectations of others, obtaining information about the product/service by observing the behavior of others, and gathering ideas from them effectively. When the virtual museums subject to the research are considered as developing technology products, FOMO and interpersonal interaction factors in digital environments can be evaluated as virtual museum visit intention stimuli. On the other hand, considering that the virtual museum product uses the metaphor of "a flow that carries and carries away without effort" (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2005), it offers visitors a "flow experience", a subjective state in which they experience so much that they forget about time, fatigue and everything except the activity itself during the visit. From this point of view, it appears as an emotional and mental process element in the behavioral process of the museum visitor. Visiting intention of virtual museums is a reaction element as a behavioral outcome. In this research, FOMO and interpersonal interaction were considered as stimuli in the formation of museum visitors' visiting behavior response, and the mental and emotional phase was handled with the flow experience. Thus, the theoretical infrastructure was constructed in terms of the S-O-R paradigm.

Methodology

In the research, interpersonal interaction and FOMO variables were considered as stimuli in the virtual museum visit behavior on the axis of the S-O-R paradigm, and flow experience was designed as an organismic variable. In line with the purpose of the research, the research model was designed to determine the role of flow experience in the effect of interpersonal interaction and FOMO on the visit intention variable, which is determined as the consumer response variable. Research data was obtained through survey technique and convenience sampling, one of the primary data collection methods. The research survey included scale questions regarding the variables in the model, and the participants were given a few minutes of virtual museum visit experience before the survey was administered. Through the data obtained, the research model and hypotheses were tested through the structural equation model, and the effects between the variables were determined and discussed. The research model is shown in Figure 1.

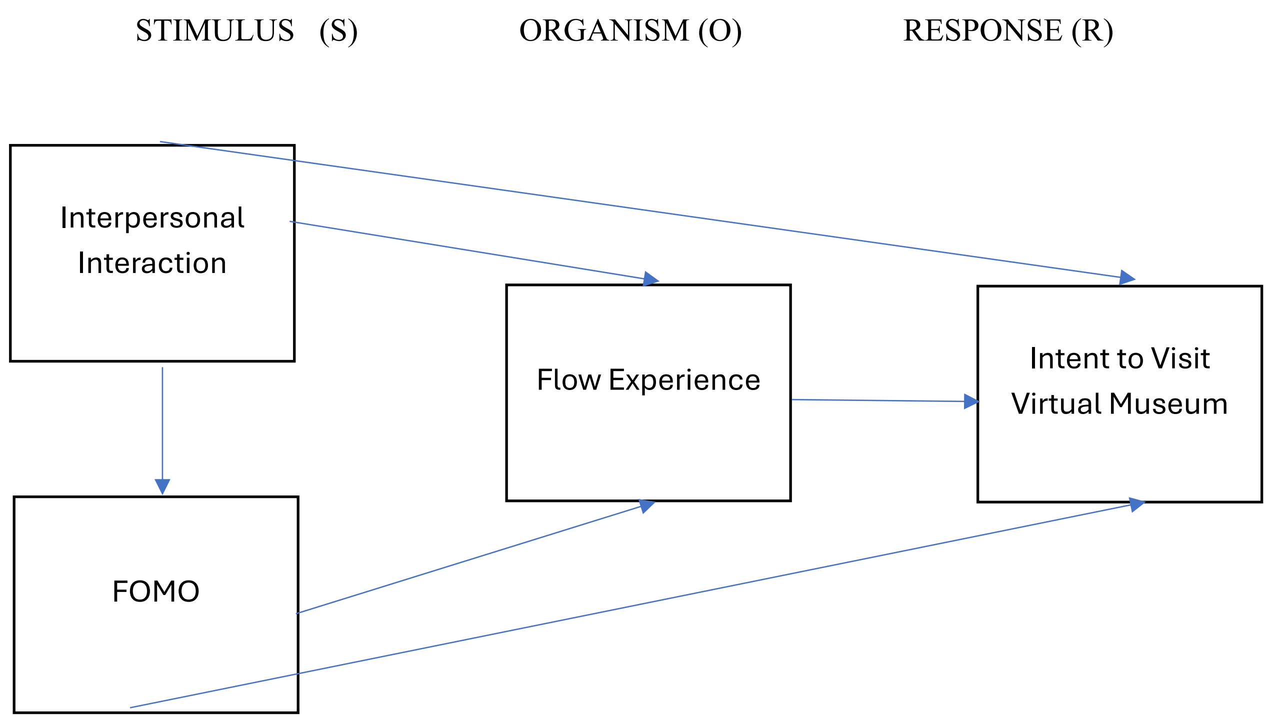

Figure.1 Research Model

H1: Flow experience has a mediating role in the effect of interpersonal interaction and fomo on intention to visit virtual museums.

Results

According to the results obtained from the analysis of the research data, it has been determined that interpersonal interaction in virtual museum visit behavior has an effect on the fear of missing out (FOMO). Interpersonal interaction and FOMO have a direct impact on visit intention. It has been determined that flow experience has both a direct effect on visit intention and a mediating role in the effect of interpersonal interaction and FOMO on visit intention. Based on this, suggestions have been made for tourism marketing practitioners to create strategies and policies by using interpersonal interaction and FOMO in creating intentions for virtual museum visits. On the other hand, strategy suggestions are presented for creating an effective flow experience.

Conclusion

Virtual museums, which are one of the well-known applications in the tourism industry of the digital transformation occurring in all industries in the world, are important in many respects. They offer a 3D experience to tourists who cannot physically reach museums. However, in order to prevent the historical and specific value of one of the most important features from being damaged, there are virtual museums at the entrance of many open-air museums. In this way, the original texture of the museums is preserved and the visiting experience is offered. In this study, it has been revealed that FOMO caused by digitalization and social media and increased interpersonal interaction stimuli have a direct effect on the intention to visit virtual museums. It has been found that it is important for tourism marketing practitioners to effectively use FOMO and interpersonal interaction in directing virtual museum visits. This result is expected to be important in the virtual museum product, as in all other digitalizing industries. On the other hand, it was determined that flow experience had a significant mediating effect as an element of the cognitive and emotional process of the S-O-R paradigm. Thus, it seems that S-O-R, a well-established paradigm, is a paradigm that future researchers can use and obtain original findings in determining consumer behavior related to digital innovations.

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Digital Evolution of Heritage Tourism: Exploring Locals' and Tourists' Perspectives on the Site Visiting Experience through Next-Gen Apps

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the motivations and experiences of Tunisian and tourist visitors to the Carthage archaeological site, focusing on the "Dourb'ia" mobile application and its role in enhancing cultural tourism.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: Qualitative research through semi-structured interviews with 14 Tunisian and 16 tourist visitors. Thematic analysis identified key factors affecting app use and desired improvements.

Results: Visitors are motivated by curiosity and historical interest, but face challenges like lack of signage and technical issues. Both groups are interested in the app but concerns about data usage and app performance hinder adoption. Improvements suggested including enhanced features, usability, and new content.

Originality/Value: This study offers insights into how mobile apps can improve cultural tourism experiences, with actionable recommendations for the "Dourb'ia" app to better serve visitors and support sustainable tourism.

Keywords heritage tourism, cultural tourism, mobile app, tourist

Introduction

Heritage tourism, a specific branch of cultural tourism, encompasses both natural and cultural elements ensuring an ongoing value for knowledge completion, with archaeological sites now valued as major tourism resources (Du Cluzeau, 2013; Santa-Cruz et al., 2017 ; Yi et al.2024).

Technological advances such as mobile apps are transforming visitors' interaction with heritage, but further research is needed to fully understand their needs (Tscheu & Buhalis, 2016 ; Sigala, 2018; He et al., 2018; Srinivasan et al., 2024).

This exploratory qualitative study, conducted through in-depth interviews with two groups of tourists (local and foreign), explores their perspectives on the impact of mobile applications on cultural and heritage tourism experiences, with a particular focus on the "Dourb'ia" application.

Cultural tourism, defined as visits motivated by a destination's cultural products and aesthetic or historical values, relies on heritage elements such as historic monuments and cultural theme parks (Silberberg, 1995; Santa-Cruz et al., 2017; Muzaini & Minca, 2018; Marlina al., 2024 ; Zakaria et al., 2024).

However, this complex sector faces the challenge of balancing heritage perspectives with tourism needs (Hausmann, 2007) while adressing global challenges like sustainability (Suryani, 2024).

Technological advances, such as tourism apps, offer new interactive experiences for users and help promote cultural heritage, influencing the decisions of potential tourists (Lerario et al., 2017 ; Srinivasan et al., 2024). These applications facilitate two-way communication, promoting sustainable and intelligent tourism that enhances the territorial reputation of destinations (Corallo et al., 2018 ; Kusumanegara et al.,2024).

Concisely, cultural tourism is evolving to meet tourists' growing demand for meaning and learning, while information and communication technologies are playing a crucial role in the promotion and preservation of cultural heritage worldwide (Gavalas and Kenteris, 2011; Chen et al., 2012; Ismagilova et al., 2015; Srinivasan et al., 2024).

Methodology

In 2018, Carthage attracted 300,000 visitors and, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979, continues to draw nearly a million visitors annually. A 2012 UN report recommended enhancing the site's tourism coherence by introducing thematic or chronological itineraries. The "Dourb'ia" mobile app, developed by Tunisian engineers, aims to promote sustainable cultural tourism at Carthage by offering an innovative visitor experience with real-time GPS and multimedia content. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (ODD4, ODD8, ODD9, and ODD11). A qualitative study, using semi-structured interviews, explores the perceptions and expectations regarding the app of two different samples: Tunisian and foreign visitors. The study, featuring 14 Tunisian and 16 foreign participants, investigates topics such as perceptions of the site, app usage intentions, motivations, obstacles, and desired functionalities.

Results

The results of semi-structured interviews with Tunisian visitors to the Carthage archaeological site are presented as follows:

Theme 1: Motivations of Tunisians for Visiting the Carthage Archaeological Site

Tunisians visit Carthage out of personal curiosity, a desire for discovery and entertainment, as well as invitations from friends or media recommendations, with professional or academic reasons being less common. The challenges they face highlight the need for investment in conservation, interpretation, and services to improve satisfaction and understanding. Tunisians are flexible about using tour guides; they value the enrichment guides provide but also appreciate the availability of information for a more independent visit.

Theme 2: Use of Mobile Applications by Tunisians During the Visit

Mobile applications enhance the cultural tourism experience for Tunisians by facilitating navigation and providing relevant information. Key benefits include geolocation, Google Maps navigation, sharing experiences, and promoting cultural heritage tourism on social media.

Theme 3: Tunisians' Intentions to Use the "Dourb'ia" Application—Motivations and Obstacles

Tunisians are motivated to use the "Dourb'ia" app for its attractive tours, rich historical content, and user-friendly interface. However, obstacles include the app's speed, reliability, ergonomics, and issues related to mobile data charges.

Theme 4: Needs of Tunisian Visitors for the "Dourb'ia" App

Tunisians prioritize features like maps, visuals, photos, tours, and information on distances and travel times. They also suggest adding a quiz, bike or scooter rental info, and a clear, user-friendly interface. For content, they prefer audio commentary, followed by video explanations, and textual information last. Recommendations for app improvements include adding QR codes, an iOS version, and interactive features. For promotion, they suggest targeting history enthusiasts through TV ads, influencers, and collaborating with the Ministry of Tourism.

The results of semi-structured interviews with tourist visitors to the Carthage archaeological site as follows:

Theme 1: Perspectives of Tourist Visitors to the Carthage Archaeological Site

Tourists visit Carthage driven by personal curiosity, group travel, recommendations, and an interest in history and archaeology. Challenges they encounter include insufficient signage, limited access (e.g., museum closures), lack of information, no Wi-Fi, and dissatisfaction with some tour guides. Tourists have mixed attitudes toward tour guides—some are interested, others prefer self-guiding or using alternative information sources.

Theme 2: Use of Mobile Applications During Tourist Visits

Tourists frequently use mobile applications like Google, Maps, Safari, and Tripadvisor. They value these apps for easy access to information, geolocation, independence, and the personal enrichment they offer through educational content.

Theme 3: Tourists' Intentions to Use the Application—Motivations and Obstacles

Tourists are motivated to use the "Dourb'ia" app by its self-guiding tours, ease of use, and quality information. However, obstacles include payment requirements, concerns over personal data usage, mobile data charges, and technical limitations of the app.

Theme 4: Needs of Tourist Visitors for the "Dourb'ia" App

Tourists seek detailed maps, a comprehensive list of archaeological sites, clear navigation, and easy-to-use interfaces. They prefer information in 3D format, audio commentary while exploring the site, text, video, and a combination of 3D maps with audio or image-based information.

Conclusion

In summary, this exploratory qualitative study played a key role in gathering valuable data on the opinions, perspectives, and expectations of Tunisian and tourist visitors to the Carthage archaeological site. The results have provided insights into visitors' needs and identified potential avenues of improvement for the experience, namely the personalization of tour itineraries using artificial intelligence techniques such as optimization methods to propose the optimal tour, or deep learning algorithms to recommend the right tour for each profile.

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The Role of International Students' Social Media Posts in Türkiye's Tourism Marketing

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the role of international students in Türkiye in promoting tourism through social media.

Study design/methodology/approach: Using a qualitative case study approach, Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 international students in Türkiye.

Results: The results showed that international students actively use social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, to share their experiences about culture, tourist attractions, and cuisine in Türkiye. These posts influence their audiences, such as family and friends, by increasing their interest in visiting Türkiye. The students act as unofficial cultural ambassadors, promoting both popular and lesser-known destinations.

Originality/value: The study highlights the potential of social media as an effective tourism marketing tool through international students' personal narratives and informal sharing.

Keywords Social media, Tourism marketing, International student.

Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of international students have come to Türkiye to continue their education, where the number has been rising every year. According to the Higher Education Institution, in the 2013-2014 the number of international students enrolled in Türkiye was around 48 thousand, there were approximately 154 thousand international students enrolled in the 2018-2019 (Türel, 2021, p. 74) and by 2022, Türkiye had over 300 thousand international students from 198 countries (Yükseköğretim Kurulu, 2022). This growth is attributed to various factors, including Türkiye's robust higher education system, government scholarships, and its positioning as a bridge between Europe and Asia (Lewis & Lüküslü, 2024, p. 2-3).

In addition to their academic pursuits, international students have increasingly become influential in promoting Türkiye's tourism. International students are highly likely to suggest the country where they studied to others as a tourist destination to their families and friends (Amaro et al., 2019, p. 96). The results of research conducted by Amaro et al., show that international students can play an important role in promoting tourism. They can be considered as ambassadors because they play a role in recommending the country where they live to their friends and family. In this digital age, international students in Türkiye represent a unique demographic, with their ability to leverage social media platforms to share their experiences and perceptions of Turkish culture, landscapes, and landmarks. Their posts whether on Instagram, facebook, or relatable forms of content that can influence potential tourists' decisions. This phenomenon has drawn attention to the role of international students in promoting destinations and enhancing a country's image through personal narratives and visual content. Social media plays an important role in providing new and creative approaches to communication, information dissemination and information sharing (Hussain et al., 2024, p. 2). It has been confirmed by various studies that tourism-related posts on social media motivate people to visit the shared or recommended destination (Coronel, 2023; Hussain et al., 2024; Rakuten Marketing, 2019; Bastrygina et al., 2024). Tourists need reliable information to make travel decisions and are increasingly turning to information-oriented content (Hussain et al., 2024, p. 1). Foreign students who post and create content on social media are a reliable source of information for their friends and families, as well as an important figure who can provide more information on curious topics. International students are a diverse group of individuals who, despite temporarily residing in the country, have developed a deeper connection with the local culture and surroundings. Weaver (2003) stated that international students have an impact and a lasting influence on the tourism industry as they spend money on education and travel within the destination (Kim & Scott-Halsell, 2020, p. 2-3). Moreover, during their stay, they act as advocates by introducing and promoting the destination to their friends and family (Gardiner et al., 2013; Kim & Scott-Halsell, 2020, p. 2-3). Therefore, the research aims to examine the impact of the presence and activities of international students in Türkiye on the perception and interest towards Türkiye. The focus is on how students act as cultural ambassadors and informal marketing tools to strengthen the image of Türkiye as a tourism destination. How students' personal experiences in Türkiye and their social media posts influence their friends, family and social circles and the role of these experiences in promoting Türkiye as a tourism destination are explored.

Methodology

In the study, it is aimed to reveal the impact of the posts made by foreign university students about Türkiye on Türkiye's tourism marketing through social media tools. In this context, the research was designed as a case study from qualitative research designs. In qualitative case studies, it is possible to investigate factors such as environment, individuals, events or processes related to one or more situations in depth with a holistic approach (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011, p. 77). The population of the study consists of foreign students who are in Türkiye to study at university. Since it was not possible to reach the entire population, sampling was used. Snowball sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to determine the sample. This sampling method involves asking the interviewees from whom the most information about the researched subject can be obtained and reaching new interviewees because of the answers received (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011, p. 111). The sample of the research consists of 15 foreign students who agreed to participate in the research. In line with the interviews, the number of people interviewed was limited to fifteen people when the answers started to repeat (Creswell, 2018). Interview method was used as a data collection method because it is an effective and efficient method and is frequently used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 130). The interviews were conducted between 15 December 2024 and 15 January 2025. A semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool. The interview form created by the researchers was examined by two academicians and the questions were finalized. In the interview form, there are seven questions about the posts made by foreign university students about Türkiye on social media tools and six questions to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants.

The interviews were recorded with a voice recorder with the permission of the participants and transferred to Maxqda qualitative analysis software by the authors. The data were analyzed and visualized using Maxqda software. The responses received from the participants were meticulously analyzed, interpreted and codes were determined, and then these codes were placed under the relevant themes. Codes and themes were determined by inductive method. The relationships between codes and themes were analyzed using code-subcode relationship analysis and code map analysis.

Results

As a result of this study, the findings regarding interviews conducted with 15 people are summarized. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the interviewees. The participants had diverse educational backgrounds, with 5 enrolled in undergraduate programs, 9 in postgraduate programs, and 1 pursuing a doctoral degree. The participants came from various academic disciplines. The most represented disciplines were Psychology and Islamic Sciences, with 3 participants each. Regarding nationality, the participants represented a wide range of countries. The largest group was from Palestine 4 participants, followed by Afghanistan 2 participants. The remaining participants were from Mauritania, Ukraine, Gambia, Somalia, Mexico, Thailand, Indonesia, Ecuador, and Morocco, with 1 participant from each country. The diversity in educational background, field of study, and nationality provided a rich variety of perspectives in this study. By representing students from different countries, the sample was not focussed on a particular cultural or academic group. This diversity enabled a more in-depth analysis, particularly in understanding their views on the research topic.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Interviewees (n:15)

Variables		**f**
Gender	Female	13
	Male	2
Age Group	18-25 age range	13
	26 years and older	2
Education Status	Undergraduate	5
	Postgraduate	9
	Doctorate	1
Major Area of Study	Psychology	3
	Geological Engineering	1

	Aquaculture	2
	Islamic Sciences	3
	Pharmacy	1
	Bussines Administration	1
	Nurse	1
	Educational Management	1
	Tourism Management	1
	Physics	1
Country of Origin	Mauritania	1
	Palestine	4
	Ukraine	1
	Afghanistan	2
	Gambia	1
	Somalia	1
	Mexica	1
	Thailand	1
	Indonesia	1
	Ecuador	1
	Morocco	1

The participants were first asked about their use of social media tools and which tools they use, and the responses are summarized in Table 2. From the interviews, it was found that almost all participants actively used social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google, and Pinterest. Among these, Instagram, Facebook, and Google were the most frequently used platforms, especially for sharing visual content. One of the important indicators of the effectiveness of social media posts is the number of followers (Kıran, Yılmaz & Emre, 2019). The number of followers of the participants ranged from a minimum of 1,209 to a maximum of 5,339. Another indicator is the number of likes and comments. The number of likes that participants receive on their posts is at least 35 and at most 1,414. These figures provide information about the interaction rate of the posts.

Table 2. Interviewees' Use of Social Media Tools

Code System	I-1	I-2	I-3	I-4	I-5	I-6	I-7	I-8	I-9	I-10	I-11	I-12	I-13	I-14	I-15	SUM
Social Media Use																0
Facebook	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■		■	13
Instagram	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	15
Twitter		■	■		■	■		■		■	■			■		8
Google	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	15
Foursquare																0
Linkedin	■	■	■		■			■			■	■		■	■	9
Vine																0
Pinterest	■		■		■	■		■	■	■			■	■		9
MySpace																0
SUM	5	5	6	3	6	5	3	6	4	5	5	3	4	5	4	69

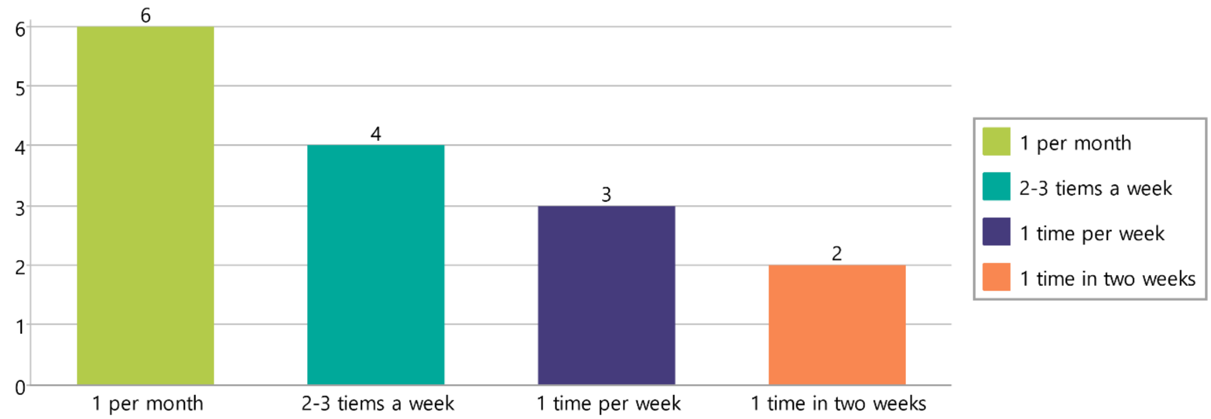
Instagram and Google are the social media platforms most frequently used by the participants. This is followed by Facebook, Linkedin, Pinterest and Twitter (Table 3).

Table 3. Frequency of Using Social Media Tools

Social Media Tools	**Sometimes**	**Medium Frequency**	**Frequently**	**Always**	**Total**
Instagram	-	-	2	13	15
Google	2	-	3	10	15
Facebook	6	4	1	2	13
Linkedin	5	3	1	-	9
Pinterest	5	-	3	1	9
Twitter	6	-	2	-	8

All of the participants stated that they shared tourism-themed posts from Türkiye on social media platforms. Some participants regularly posted tourism-themed photos, including local attractions and Turkish cuisine. These posts were shared with varying frequencies, ranging from several times a week to once a month (Table 4).

Table 4. Sharing Frequency



The participants visited various cities in Türkiye, including Istanbul, Ankara, Gaziantep, Kayseri, Nevşehir, Mersin, Adana, Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa, and Mardin. Their experiences in these cities enriched the content they shared on social media, further enhancing Türkiye's tourism promotion reach (Table 5). The participants posted the most from Gaziantep (13), Istanbul, Ankara, Nevşehir/Kapadokya (12) and Adana (9) respectively. Posts from big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and touristic regions such as Nevşehir/Capadocia are important for the promotion and image of the country. However, it is also observed that intensive travelling and sharing was made for cities such as Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa and Mardin, which are located in the Southeastern Anatolia Region of Türkiye and are relatively less well-known abroad. It is thought that the posts made for the promotion of these provinces have an important potential.

Table 5. Cities in Türkiye Visited and Shared by the Interviewees

Code System	I-1	I-2	I-3	I-4	I-5	I-6	I-7	I-8	I-9	I-10	I-11	I-12	I-13	I-14	I-15	SUM
Cities Visited and Shared in Turkey																0
Mersin	■	■			■		■	■	■		■	■			■	9
Erzincan							■									1
Niğde							■		■							2
Erzurum							■									1
Trabzon						■										1
Konya					■	■				■						3
Kastamonu					■											1
Çorum					■											1
Bursa				■		■				■						3
Eskişehir			■													1
Sakarya			■													1
Aydın			■													1
İzmir			■			■	■						■	■	■	6
Antalya			■			■										2
Adana	■		■	■	■		■				■	■	■		■	9
Ankara	■		■	■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■		■	■	12
Diyarbakır	■	■				■		■				■	■			6
Şanlurfa	■	■	■			■		■				■	■			7
Mardin	■	■				■		■				■	■			6
Nevşehir/Kapadokya	■	■	■			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		12
Kayseri/Erciyes	■				■					■		■				4
İstanbul	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■		■	■	12
Gaziantep	■	■	■	■		■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	13
Σ SUM	10	7	10	5	8	12	9	7	6	7	5	10	7	5	6	114

The participants' social media posts often received positive responses from their audience, such as likes, emojis, and comments from friends and family. Many participants reported that their posts elicited curiosity about Türkiye. The relevant data are summarized in Table 6. Comments on participants' social media posts about Türkiye were grouped under 2 themes, considering the purpose of "getting to know the place shared" or "travelling to the place shared". Six codes for travelling and six codes forgetting to know the place were identified. The most common message was to get more information about Türkiye (14 comments). The second (12 comments) is about the city of the place in the posts. This is followed by comments about how beautiful the place is and what are the procedures to visit Türkiye. In 9 comments to the posts, it was stated that a visit to Türkiye was planned. For example, I-1 stated that her friends were curious about the visa application process for visiting Türkiye after seeing her posts on social media. I-14 mentioned that people frequently asked about the location of her shared photos or, if she posted about a restaurant, they would inquire about its name. Similarly, I-4 shared that after posting pictures from Bursa, one of his friends decided to visit the city.

Table 6. Reactions to Posts About Türkiye

Code System	I-1	I-2	I-3	I-4	I-5	I-6	I-7	I-8	I-9	I-10	I-11	I-12	I-13	I-14	I-15	SUM
Reactions to Posts																0
Reactions for travel purposes																0
What are the ticket prices?											■					1
How can i get to İstanbul?							■					■	■			3
How can i get to Türkiye?							■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	8
I'm planning to visit Türkiye.				■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■		■	9
What the procedures?	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■			11
How can i get the visa?	■	■		■	■	■	■		■				■			8
Reactions to recognise																0
Where is the most famous place in Türkiye.										■	■	■	■	■		5
It's a very beautiful place.				■	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	11
Can you tell me more about Türkiye?	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	14
Is it for study or tourism?	■	■														2
What are you doing there?	■	■	■		■	■										5
Where is this place?	■	■	■		■			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12
Σ SUM	6	5	3	5	7	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	9	5	5	89

All participants believed that the photos they shared on social media had a positive impact on promoting Turkish tourism. They felt that their posts helped spark curiosity among their friends and family, eventually motivating them to travel to Türkiye.

I-5 expressed, "Some of my friends and my family ask me where this place is. And they said these places are so nice, and they want to visit Türkiye. They also asked me how I could get the visa. So, I think I promoted Türkiye; also, I share good pictures."

I-11 explained that her social media posts influenced Turkish tourism promotion, noting that when she shared photos of Cappadocia, her relatives asked about ticket prices and other details and eventually visited the site for their holidays.

Interviewers 3, 9, 10, and 11 emphasized that their posts introduced lesser-known Turkish destinations to their audiences, showcasing the rich variety of attractions Türkiye offers. This demonstrates that the participants' social media posts not only influenced their audience's perceptions of Türkiye but also sparked interest in visiting the country. The responses of some of the interviewees are given in Figure 1.

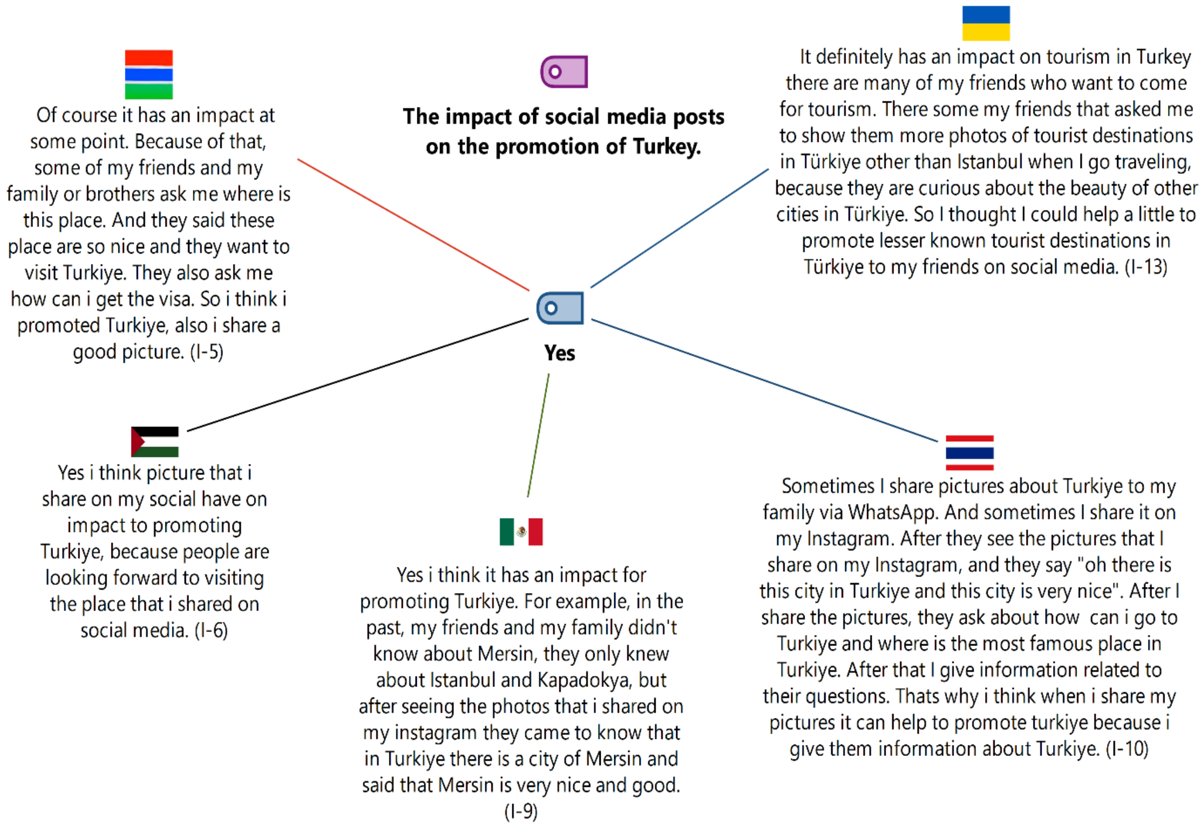


Figure 1. Participants' opinions on the impact of social media posts on the promotion of Türkiye.

Conclusion

This study examines the significant role of international students as cultural ambassadors and unofficial marketing agents in promoting Turkish tourism through social media. International students living in Türkiye have first-hand experience with the country's culture, traditions, and natural beauty, which they actively share through platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Their posts cover a wide range of content, from popular tourist attractions to lesser-known destinations, as well as local cuisine and cultural traditions. The impact of these activities is not only limited to their audiences, such as family and friends, but also to their wider social networks. Many of the audiences responded positively, asking questions about locations, visas, and travel details, indicating the success of the posts in arousing their curiosity about Türkiye and interest in visiting Türkiye. Some of them even decided to travel to Türkiye after being inspired by this content.

These findings suggest that some international students are not only consumers of tourism experiences but also producers of content with promotional value. The authentic experiences they share create a positive image of Türkiye as an attractive tourism destination and extend the reach of promotion. Moreover, their content has the potential to support tourism diversification efforts in Türkiye by helping to promote lesser-known destinations. This study also confirms the importance of social media as a powerful tool for tourism promotion, especially through authentic and engaging personal narratives.

Based on the research results, some suggestions can be developed for sector stakeholders. Accommodation enterprises can prepare special accommodation campaigns or discounted prices for special days for foreign students and encourage them to share their social media tags. They can also offer special experiences to students during their accommodation and ensure that these are shared on social media. Tourism agencies can organise student-oriented tours or they can analyse foreign students' interest in tourism and create special tours in this direction. They can co-operate with students who frequently use social media or have popular social media accounts and encourage them to share their posts. They can offer them guidance services to ensure that they produce quality content. It will be beneficial for local governments to follow student-friendly city policies in terms of promotion of destinations. They can create social and cultural venues as well as organise attractive events, excursions and campaigns to ensure that foreign students have a more comfortable and enjoyable time in the city. Foreign students may be offered discounts on public transport and cultural attractions, taking into account their longer stay in the city and in contrast to tourists. They can provide free or discounted entry to museums and historical sites. They can offer free Turkish language courses or cultural activities such as cuisine, handicrafts, etc. to facilitate their adaptation to Turkish culture. They can offer multilingual websites or mobile applications that provide information about transport, health, accommodation and entertainment in the city. Local governments can promote their cities as an international student destination by encouraging foreign students to share their experiences in the city through social media. They can reward students who share the best photos or vlogs with various themes related to the promotion of the city.

Finally, the effect of foreign students' social media posts on the promotion of Türkiye can be investigated using quantitative methods with more participants. Detailed analyses can be made on the interactions of the posts.

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The Relationship Between Tourism and Technology: Digitization in Sustainable Cultural Tourism - A Study on Virtual Tours

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the impact of digitalization on sustainable cultural tourism, focusing on the contributions of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and digital marketing tools in preserving and promoting cultural heritage.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study established a research framework by conducting a literature review within the context of culture and technology interaction. Additionally, data were gathered from various platforms, including websites, academic sources, and mobile applications. Rogers' (1995) Diffusion of Innovations Theory was used to analyze the adoption processes of virtual tours. Data were collected through the case study method and analyzed using content analysis. The study examined participant reviews shared on TripAdvisor as virtual tours gained popularity during the pandemic. Through content analysis, this study aims to evaluate participants' perspectives on virtual tours in Japan, assessing their impact on tourism perceptions and identifying prominent cultural values.

Results*:* The findings highlight digitalization's positive effects on environmental sustainability and accessibility, while cautioning against the potential loss of cultural richness due to excessive digital use. Participants appreciated the digital experience of Japanese culture during COVID-19, expressed interest in physical visits, and recommended the tours to others. Some participants stated that virtual tours are a better alternative to in-person tours and that they learned new cultural information.

***Originality/value*:** The study underscores the role of digital technologies in preserving cultural values and enhancing tourist experiences, emphasizing the need for responsible and sustainable use. Although this study is preliminary due to the limited review sample, it offers valuable insights for future research.

Keywords Digitalization, sustainability, cultural tourism, virtual tours.

Introduction

Digitization is driving profound transformations within the tourism sector, enhancing both travel experiences and supporting environmental sustainability Technologies like online booking systems, mobile applications, and digital marketing strategies streamline travel processes and enhance business efficiency (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Sustainable cultural tourism, which seeks to preserve both natural and cultural heritage, significantly benefits from these technological advancements. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) enable visitors to explore cultural heritage sites without being physically present (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). However, excessive reliance on digitization may erode cultural richness and traditional practices (Ünal & Koçak, 2023).

This study explores the relationship between tourism and technology, focusing on the effects of digitization on sustainable cultural tourism. Drawing upon Rogers' (1995) Diffusion of Innovations Theory, this research examines how individuals adopt or reject virtual tours. The research problem is defined as “What are the perceived characteristics that stand out in the experiences of individuals who participate in virtual tours?” The findings indicate that virtual tours in Japan have a positive impact on tourists, emphasizing factors such as personalized experiences and the engagement of interactive guides. Moreover, participants perceived virtual tours as an alternative tourism model, often finding them as effective as, or even superior to, physical tours. This perspective suggests that digitization is shaping new tourism perceptions, where virtual experiences are not merely substitutes but viable alternatives to traditional travel.

Methodology

The COVID-19 pandemic led tourism providers to offer virtual tours via digital platforms (Dybsand, 2022). This study employs the Descriptive Case Study Content Analysis method to analyze TripAdvisor reviews of virtual tours in Japan offered by Japanese travel agencies. No comprehensive research has specifically focused on virtual tours in Japan. Additionally, while previous studies have primarily analyzed reviews from the Airbnb platform, this research examines reviews of virtual tours related to Japan on TripAdvisor. To identify relevant reviews, a filtering process was conducted using keywords such as 'virtual,' 'online,' and 'digital' in the search bar. As a result of this process, 300 reviews that were definitively related to virtual tours were obtained for evaluation.

The top 5 virtual tours with the highest participation and their respective participant numbers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Most Participated Japan Virtual Tours Based on TripAdvisor Reviews

Rank	***Online Experience Name & Travel Agency Name***	***Number of Reviews for the Relevant Tour***
1	Kyoto Zen Garden Zen Mind - Virtual (X Travel Agency)	30
2	Kyoto Virtual Tour (Y Travel Agency)	28
3	[Virtual Tour] Tokyo Highlights (Z Travel Agency)	25
4	Tokyo Virtual Tour (Y Travel Agency)	24
5	*Tokyo Online: Virtual Experience in Shibuya and Shinjuku with a Local Expert (W Travel Agency)*	*21*

Given the data limitations and time constraints, this study has been designed as a pioneering research effort. Since the study focuses on cultural tourism experiences, a purposive sampling method was employed, selecting 47 reviews from X Travel Agency, which has the highest participation in cultural virtual tours. During the data collection, reviews in different languages were translated into English using Google Translate.

Conceptual Framework

The use of technology in the tourism sector has been revolutionary. The increased accessibility, efficiency, and personalization of travel experiences highlight the contributions of technology to the tourism industry. Features such as online booking systems, mobile applications, and digital tools facilitate the travel process for individuals (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Additionally, applications like data analytics and artificial intelligence systematically analyze tourist behaviors, offering more impactful and beneficial services to both businesses and tourists (Gretzel et al., 2006). Digitization plays a crucial role in the development of sustainable tourism practices. Examples of digitization, such as smart city applications and mobile apps, help prevent issues like overtourism that can harm the environment (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies offer unique experiences to explorers, potentially altering their visit preferences. For instance, a visitor exploring the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam through virtual reality may be influenced by their experience when considering a visit to the Efes Experience Museum in İzmir, Turkey. Such digital experiences can significantly impact tourists' destination choices. On the other hand, a visitor using augmented reality to explore the British Museum might also be influenced when discovering Göbeklitepe with the same technological tools. Yaralı & Baloğlu (2023) suggest that VR and AR applications may minimize physical visits to destinations. However, considering the responsibilities and challenges posed by digitization, excessive digitalization may lead to the neglect of cultural riches and the dilution of traditions (Sigala, 2018). Therefore, the use of technology in the tourism sector should be managed carefully and aligned with sustainability principles. Yaralı & Baloğlu (2023) emphasize that digitization emerges as an important tool in achieving sustainability goals. For example, tourism businesses enhance customer satisfaction by adopting digital technologies. Online booking platforms can be exemplified as a significant sustainability measure to prevent paper waste. Furthermore, destination promotion conducted through social media and digital marketing strategies plays a critical role. Digitization significantly supports sustainable tourism practices. Many digital experiences, especially smart city applications, also assist in the preservation of natural and cultural heritage (Bertot et al., 2010). In Groningen, the Netherlands, smart technology is used to increase efficiency in waste management. The trash bins in the city have the ability to send messages when they are full. As a result, garbage trucks are only directed to full bins, preventing unnecessary trips. Through this system, the municipality of Groningen significantly reduces labor and fuel costs (Ayyıldız & Ayyıldız, 2020; Digital Age, 2025). In this context, it can be understood that digitization supports economic sustainability through efficient resource use, local economic support, job creation, long-term profitability, innovation, and competitiveness. Yoo et al. (2017) defined sustainability in the tourism industry as a dual concept. On the one hand, tourism provides economic gains while preserving natural and cultural values. On the other hand, tourism can pose threats to sustainability by negatively impacting natural ecosystems. Given that the primary concern in sustainability is the survival threats to the ecosystems on which humanity depends, it becomes inevitable for individuals and societies to change their consumption and production behaviors. The tourism industry is introducing gamification and smart tourism to change tourist behavior in favor of sustainability. Buhalis & Amaranggana (2014) stated that the rapid development of technology is making organizations and communities smarter. The concept of Smart Tourism Destinations (STD) directly influences the development of smart tourism tools. In recent years, technology has facilitated the emergence of innovations that have revolutionize the tourism sector (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Smart tourism applications are used in a variety of ways to enhance the travel experience, customer satisfaction, and improve business efficiency. These applications aim to enhance customer experience and provide more accessible services by using technologies such as data analytics, mobile applications, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things (IoT) (Zengin & Bayhan, 2023: 427). Smart tourism applications analyze user preferences to offer more personalized recommendations (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). For example, internationally recognized five-star hotels operating in many countries exemplify this. When a tourist stays at a hotel in Turkey, their preferences are recorded and visible in the system when they visit another hotel. This can be seen as an example of providing a better tourism experience. Tourism businesses can improve their services by analyzing customer data and, identifying which services are in higher demand and where improvements are needed. Smart applications do not stop at these examples; various mobile applications can also be cited as examples of smart tourism applications. For instance, TripAdvisor allows users to share their experiences (TripAdvisor, 2023), Google Maps provides navigation (Google, 2023), and Airbnb directly meets accommodation needs in selected destinations (Airbnb, 2023). The relationship between culture and sustainability is critically important for preserving social identity and values. Cultural heritage reflects the identity and history of a society, while sustainability helps in the preservation of these values and their transmission to future generations. Thus, no nation will lose its identity. Protecting the cultural experience of local people not only enhances social solidarity but also supports cultural diversity (World Bank, 1999: 6). Furthermore, sustainable tourism practices contribute to the preservation of cultural values while promoting local cultures (Açıcı et al., 2017). At this point, it is essential to highlight the role of digitization in the preservation of cultural heritage and its sustainability for future generations. Digitization plays a significant role in the processes of preserving and promoting cultural heritage. Digital technologies contribute to the documentation of cultural heritage and make it always accessible (UNESCO, 2025). The effects of digitization on the tourism sector are clearly visible. The integration of digital technologies into the tourism sector has become an important tool in promoting natural and cultural heritage tourism. Digital platforms, websites, social media channels, and mobile applications have facilitated the global recognition of cultural and natural elements (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). On the other hand, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) applications provide impressive and innovative experiences that allow visitors to explore places without being physically present (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). This situation has enabled access to even hard-to-reach destinations. Visitors can easily access and explore destinations that are at risk of being forgotten (Çolakoğlu & Samancı, 2024). Therefore, minimizing physical visits to destinations plays an important role in ensuring the healthy progression of the destination life cycle and sustainability. This relationship between culture and sustainability also affects the adaptation process of local communities to digitization. Digital platforms may have been beneficial for the adaptation process of the local people. For example, local merchants, artisans, and artists can present their products globally thanks to digital marketing tools.

Technological developments before the digital age made it difficult for tourists to obtain information about a destination and form a mental image without directly experiencing it. During this period, tourists usually relied on brochures, face-to-face communication, and other traditional information sources to learn about the destination (Aksoy & Baş, 2021). Today, with the widespread use of digital technologies, consumers are increasingly participating in activities taking place in virtual environments, placing more importance on concepts such as sustainability, collaboration, and peer-to-peer sharing. This change significantly affects the tourism sector. In particular, there has been an observable increase in interest in online experiences such as virtual tours, virtual reality, augmented reality applications, and virtual museums (Uca & Karahan, 2022). Before the technology age, it was nearly impossible to offer consumers the opportunity to experience a tourist product in the tourism sector. However, today, virtual reality environments created with video and photo content contribute significantly to individuals developing mental images of destinations. In particular, virtual tours allow users to gather detailed information and experience destinations before traveling, thereby helping shape their preferences (Cho et al., 2002). In this environment, where technological developments transform individuals' perception worlds, Baudrillard (2013) argues that reality is transformed through media, and this transformation is replaced by an artificial reality that has lost its meaning. At the core of this transformation lies the influence of the culture industry (Künüçen & Samur, 2021: 39). In this context, one of the major innovations brought about by contemporary technologies is virtual and augmented reality. Virtual Reality (VR) is an immersive media experience that allows users to feel as if they are present in a designed or reality-based environment and interact with it (Künüçen & Samur, 2021: 40). Augmented Reality (AR) is a technology system that allows digital materials to be projected onto the physical world (Sumardani et al., 2020: 14). These systems are divided into two categories according to their technological infrastructure: Location-based AR Systems: These systems determine the user's location by using data from GPS, RFID, and sensors and add virtual data on top of the real image. It is used in fields such as education, tourism, architecture, and geography (İçten & Bal, 2017: 115). Image-based AR Systems: These systems analyze elements such as images, sounds, or movements used as markers and add virtual content to specific points (İçten & Bal, 2017: 115). Mixed Reality (MR) is a process that integrates virtual and augmented reality applications, covering a broad spectrum from the physical world to the virtual environment (Künüçen & Samur, 2021: 50). Extended Reality (XR) is a collection of immersive technologies that combines virtual, augmented, and mixed reality. A more recent development, XR offers users compelling experiences where both the virtual and real worlds merge (Künüçen & Samur, 2021: 51).

Results

The data were analyzed using a deductive approach, guided by the themes and sub-themes established by Uca & Karahan (2022). Additionally, during the analysis process, an inductive approach was also applied, resulting in the identification of new sub-themes. These newly identified sub-themes were then categorized under the most relevant theme headings. The identified themes and sub-themes, along with their frequency counts, are presented in Table 2, where the newly emerged sub-themes are highlighted in bold.

Table 2. Themes and Sub-Themes for Online Virtual Tour Experiences

Personalized Experience	**Travel Planning**	**Satisfaction**	**Exploration of Different Places**	**Behavioral Intentions**
Guide's Attitude (22)	Information Provision (23)	Great Experience (45)	*Exploring Local Culture (12)*	Recommendation Intentions (32)
Personalized Service (8)	Receiving Tips (2)	Fun Experience (28)	Exploring Unknown Places (11)	Visit Intentions (11)
Group Activity (11)	Desire to Travel (10)	Guide's Characteristics (47)	Exploring Places Related to	Revisit Intentions (15)

			Interests (25)
		Interactive Experience (23)	**Exploring Local Religion (15)**
		Perceived Adequacy (22)	

Source: The criteria for virtual tour experiences listed in the table were adapted from Uca and Karahan (2022) with additional sub-themes developed by the authors.

The table below, Table 3, presents the themes and sub-themes identified through specific codes, along with examples of participant quotes. In the table, the sub-themes that emerged inductively during the analysis by the authors are highlighted in bold. The main themes and other sub-themes were analyzed using a deductive approach, by referencing Uca & Karahan (2022). However, since predefined codes were not available in Uca and Karahan's (2022) study, which served as a reference for the themes and sub-themes, the codes were identified by the authors during the analysis process and are highlighted in bold

Table 3. Virtual Tour Experience: Themes, Sub-Themes, Codes and Example Participant Quotes

Themes	***Sub-Themes***	***Codes***	***Participant’s Direct Quotes***
Personalized Experience	Guide’s Attitude	**A friendly and engaged approach to personalization.**	*"[Guide’s name] is such a soothing guide. He is relaxed and fun. "*
	Personalized Service	**Tailored guidance based on participants' interests, offering flexible experience in a comfortable environment.**	*"[Guide’s name]’s tours feel very personal, as if he is guiding just for you."*
	Group Activity	**A group experience promoting social interaction, allowing participants to network with family members or new people during the tour.**	*"The discussion after the tour was engaging, and everyone shared their thoughts."*

Travel Planning	Information Provision	**Detailed explanations and the opportunity to learn new information.**	*"We learned so much about the depth of the Japanese Zen Architecture."*
	Receiving Tips	**Offering unique tips for tourist trips.**	*"[Guide's name] gave great recommendations on where to visit in Kyoto in person."*
	Desire to Travel	**Increasing interest in physically visiting the destination.**	*"This tour made me want to visit Kyoto in person even more!"*
Satisfaction	Great Experience	**An experience that exceeds the participants expectations.**	*"This was an absolutely wonderful experience!"*
	Fun Experience	**Immersive and enjoyable content and experience.**	*"I had so much fun!"[Guide's name]'s storytelling makes the tour immersive."*
	Guide's Characteristics	**Knowledge level and engaging narration.**	*"[Guide's name]'s knowledge and passion make this tour extraordinary."*
	Interactive Experience	**Active communication with the guide and group, Participating as if physically present.**	*"I loved how we could interact and ask questions throughout the tour."*
	Perceived Adequacy	**As good as in-person tours, Better than in-person tours, Without the disadvantages of physical tours in virtual ones.**	*"In some ways it was even better than a direct tour because first of all – there were no crowds, and explaining Kyoto's topography and using the garden's map gave a nice framework."*
Exploration of Different Places	Exploring the Local Culture	**Gaining awareness of cultural heritage and Learning about the local culture.**	*"[Guide's name]'s explanations of Kyoto's cultural heritage were eye-opening."*
	Exploring Unknown Places	**Visiting new, previously undiscovered spots for the first time.**	*"We visited a hidden Zen garden that I had never heard of before."*
	Exploring Places Related to Interests	**Exploring new locations that appeal to the participants' interests.**	*"The temple tour was fascinating, exactly what I was looking for!"*

	Exploring Local Religion	**Learning about the influence of religions on culture and discovering local religious practices.**	*"I learned so much about the connection between Zen Buddhism and Japanese gardens."*
Behavioral Intentions	Recommendation Intentions	**Participants' intention to recommend the tour to others.**	*"I would recommend this tour to anyone interested in Japan."*
	Visit Intentions	**Increased desire to physically visit the destination.**	*"I plan to visit Kyoto soon after this experience."*
	Revisit Intentions	**Interest in taking another tour with the same platform or guide.**	*"This is my second tour with [Guide's name], and I cannot wait for the next one!"*

Source: Themes and sub-themes adapted from Uca & Karahan (2022), with additional sub-themes and codes developed by the authors.

Conclusion

The analysis of participant feedback revealed a largely positive response to virtual guided tours, with many participants rating their experience highly (5/5). This suggests that the novelty of virtual tours has been widely accepted by the majority of participants. The most frequently expressed feedback under the satisfaction theme points to positive opinions about the experience, aligning with the findings of Uca and Karahan (2022). Participants noted that virtual tours had fewer distractions than physical tours. One participant remarked, *"In some ways, it was even better than an in-person tour because there were no crowds,"* indicating that virtual tours offer a more focused and comfortable learning environment.

Additionally, many participants mentioned that the virtual tours closely resembled the experience of being physically present, highlighting the immersive nature of the virtual tours. One participant stated, *"Although it's a virtual tour, it almost felt like I was at the temple itself."* These comments underscore the technological advancements that make virtual tours a viable alternative to traditional travel. Furthermore, participants gained insights into cultural and religious practices, demonstrating that virtual tours can serve as an educational tool, offering participants the opportunity to engage with local traditions and history remotely. Remote activities that eliminate the need for travel offer significant potential in reducing environmental impacts and supporting sustainable tourism (Gössling et al., 2020). In this context, by removing physical barriers, virtual tours can make cultural experiences accessible to a broader audience, further supporting sustainability goals. Factors such as supporting local economies and the efficient use of resources are key elements that enhance the success of sustainable tourism (Yoo et al., 2017). However, excessive digitization poses a risk of cultural alienation (Avcı & Topçu, 2020). Therefore, a balanced approach is crucial. Ultimately, digitalization presents significant opportunities for sustainable cultural tourism. Tourism stakeholders must actively use technology to protect cultural heritage and achieve sustainability goals, ensuring the careful management of digital tools. Moreover, participants noted that virtual tours are effective in discovering local culture, thus promoting cultural sustainability without negatively affecting the destinations. One participant reflected, *"It has allowed me to experience Kyoto and the Japanese environment from the comfort of my home!"* This reinforces the idea that virtual tours can contribute to both cultural and environmental sustainability by allowing individuals to explore destinations without physically visiting them.

Therefore, it is argued that the technology behind these virtual tours should be further developed, not only as a crisis response tool but also as a valuable alternative form of tourism. The careful management and development of these digital tools can help ensure the protection of cultural heritage and foster sustainable tourism. Future research could examine how virtual tours impact travel decisions across different cultural contexts and how emerging technologies can further enhance these experiences. Additionally, studies using mixed methods, such as focus group interviews with individuals who have experienced virtual tours, could provide a deeper understanding of participant experiences and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of virtual tourism on travel behaviors and perceptions.

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An Examination of the Impact of Virtual Museum Experiences on Offline Visit Intention in the Context of the Experience Economy

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Abstract

Purpose: Technology is changing the way visitors experience museums, and virtual reality (VR) is leading this transformation in both visitor experience and museum marketing. In this context, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of a pre-visit VR experience on offline museum visit intentions.

Study design/methodology/approach: In the context of experience economy and flow theory, this study examines the effect of the VR museum experience on offline visit intentions utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM). In this study, an experimental design was adopted in which participants experienced a 10-minute VR demonstration and were then asked to participate in a questionnaire about their VR experiences. A self-administered questionnaire was developed as the data collection instrument for this study. All measures were adapted from existing literature. All the measurement items for the constructs were assessed using a five-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Results: After ensuring the reliability and validity criteria for the SEM model, the path coefficients were examined. As a result, the most effective experience economy dimension across all dimensions of flow experience was found to be aesthetics. In addition, escapism was found to be effective only on telepresence, while education was found to be effective on focus attention and temporal distortion, and entertainment was found to be effective on telepresence and temporal distortion. In addition, flow experience was found to have an effect on satisfaction, which in turn affects offline visit intentions. Moreover, the most effective flow experience dimension on satisfaction is telepresence.

Originality/value: It is noted that studies on VR in the literature are still at an early stage, and theory-based approaches are scarce among these studies. In addition, there are very few studies that focus on the VR experience in museum marketing. In this regard, this study contributes to the field of VR museum marketing and provides a theory-based approach to understanding the impact of participants' VR experiences on museum visits.

Keywords VR Museum Experience, Experience Economy, Flow Theory

Introduction

The rapid evolution of technology has significantly transformed the way cultural and historical institutions, such as museums, engage with their audiences (Genc et al., 2023). Among these technological advancements, virtual reality (VR) has emerged as a powerful tool, reshaping both the visitor experience and the marketing strategies of museums (Lee and Kim, 2021). VR offers immersive, interactive, and engaging experiences that can enhance visitors' understanding and appreciation of museum exhibits (Lee et al., 2020). However, as museums increasingly adopt VR technologies, a critical question arises: How do virtual museum experiences influence visitors' intentions to visit the physical museum? This study seeks to address this question by examining the impact of pre-visit VR experiences on offline museum visit intentions, framed within the context of the experience economy and flow theory.

The experience economy, as conceptualized by Pine and Gilmore (1998), identifies four key dimensions of consumer experiences: education, entertainment, aesthetics, and escapism. These dimensions provide a useful framework for understanding how VR experiences can create value for museum visitors. For instance, VR can educate visitors about historical artifacts, entertain them through interactive storytelling, immerse them in aesthetically rich environments, and offer escapism by transporting them to different times and places (Leopardi et al., 2021). Additionally, flow theory, which describes a state of deep engagement and immersion, is particularly relevant to VR experiences. Flow theory comprises three sub-dimensions: telepresence (the feeling of being physically present in a virtual environment), temporal distortion (the loss of track of time), and focused attention (complete absorption in the activity) (An et al., 2021). These dimensions help explain how VR experiences can captivate users and influence their subsequent behaviors, such as their intention to visit the physical museum.

Despite the growing interest in VR applications in museums, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding theory-based approaches to understanding the impact of VR experiences on visitor behavior (Wei, 2019). Most existing studies focus on the technical aspects of VR or its potential as a standalone attraction, rather than its role in enhancing the overall museum experience and driving offline visits (Lee et al., 2020; Leopardi et al., 2021). This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how the dimensions of the experience economy and flow theory interact to shape visitors' intentions to visit a museum after experiencing a VR demonstration. By adopting an experimental design and utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM), this study provides empirical insights into the relationship between VR experiences and offline visit intentions, offering valuable implications for museum marketing and visitor engagement strategies.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impacts of VR simulation on the intention to visit a museum. For this purpose, the participants were shown a VR simulation of a museum. After experiencing VR, participants completed the questionnaire which was designed to measure the participants' experience with VR simulation face to face.

A structural equation model was developed (Figure 1) in the context of experience economy and flow theory, to test the effect of VR on offline visit intention by using Amos statistical software. It is recommended that the sample size in covariance-based structural equation models be at least 10 times the number of items in the measurement model (Byrne, 2016). The questionnaire of the research consists of 21 items, indicating that the minimum sample size requirement has been met by 226 participants.

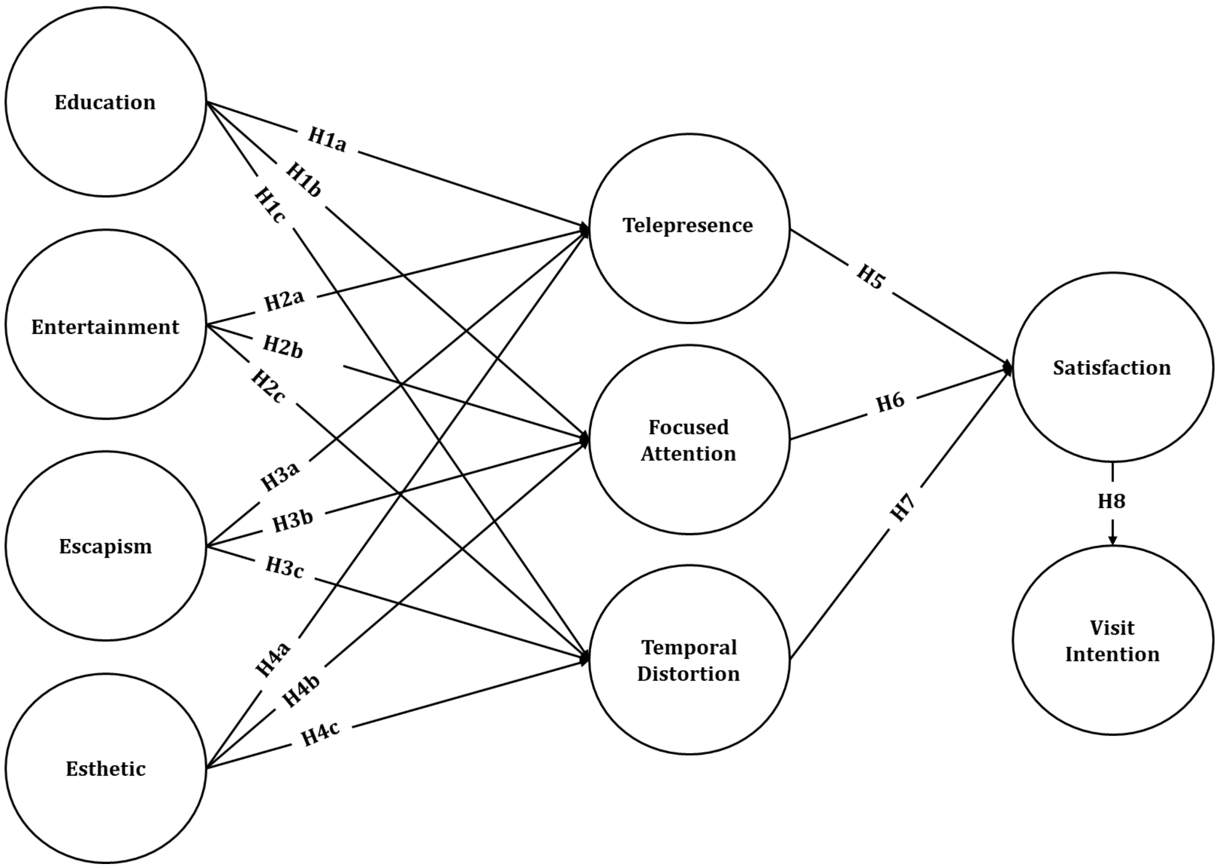

Figure 1 Research Model

A self-administered questionnaire was developed as the data collection instrument for this study. All measures were adapted from existing scales in the relevant literature. Temporal distortion, telepresence, focus attention, and satisfaction scales were obtained from An et al. (2021). Education, entertainment, aesthetics, and escapism, which Pine and Gilmore (1998) developed as the "experience economy" was obtained from Leopardi et al., 2021. The visit intention scale was obtained from Lee et al. (2020). All the measurement items for the constructs were assessed using a five-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Results

The findings of this study reveal significant insights into the impact of VR experiences on offline museum visit intentions, as mediated by the dimensions of the experience economy and flow theory. After ensuring the reliability and validity of the SEM model, the path coefficients were examined to assess the relationships between the constructs. The results highlight the central role of aesthetics as the most influential dimension of the experience economy across all dimensions of flow experience. Aesthetics, which refers to the visual and sensory appeal of the VR environment, was found to strongly enhance telepresence, temporal distortion, and focused attention. This suggests that visually captivating VR experiences are particularly effective in immersing users and fostering a sense of presence in the virtual environment.

Table 3 :Structural parameter estimates and goodness-of-fit indices.

Path	Std.	t-value	SE	P	Results
H1a: Education → Telepresence	-0,077	-1,207	,065	0,227	Rejected
H1b: Education → Focus Attention	0,276	4,024	,075	0,000	Supporte
H1c: Education → Temporal Distortion	0,191	2,694	,083	0,007	Supporte
H2a: Entertainment → Telepresence	0,184	2,648	,070	0,008	Supporte
H2b: Entertainment → Focus Attention	0,095	1,297	,079	0,195	Rejected
H2c: Entertainment → Temporal	0,300	3,862	,090	0,000	Supporte
H3a: Escapism → Telepresence	0,355	2,950	,144	0,003	Supporte
H3b: Escapism → Focus Attention	-0,028	-,225	,159	0,822	Rejected
H3c: Escapism → Temporal Distortion	0,050	,386	,179	0,699	Rejected
H4a: Esthetic → Telepresence	0,366	5,310	,099	0,000	Supporte
H4b: Esthetic → Focus Attention	0,577	6,162	,114	0,000	Supporte
H4c: Esthetic → Temporal Distortion	0,466	3,882	,122	0,000	Supporte
H5: Telepresence → Satisfaction	0,392	5,614	,062	0,000	Supporte
H6: Focus Attention → Satisfaction	0,365	5,669	,053	0,000	Supporte
H7: Temporal Distortion → Satisfaction	0,248	4,037	,047	0,000	Supporte
H8: Satisfaction → Visit Intention	0,685	11,151	,073	0,000	Supporte

Notes: X^2 =917,612; d.f. = 380; X^2/d.f. = 2,415; GFI = 0,819; CFI = 0,930; NFI = 0,889; TLI

In addition to aesthetics, the other dimensions of the experience economy also exhibited significant effects on specific aspects of the flow experience. Escapism, which involves the feeling of being transported to another world, was found to positively influence telepresence. This indicates that VR experiences that offer a sense of escape are more likely to make users feel physically present in the virtual environment. Education, on the other hand, was found to enhance focused attention and temporal distortion, suggesting that informative VR experiences can deeply engage users and make them lose track of time. Entertainment, which includes interactive and enjoyable elements, was found to positively affect both telepresence and temporal distortion, further underscoring the importance of engaging and enjoyable content in VR experiences.

The study also examined the relationship between flow experience and satisfaction, as well as the subsequent impact on offline visit intentions. The results indicate that flow experience significantly influences satisfaction, with telepresence emerging as the most impactful dimension. This suggests that the feeling of being physically present in the virtual environment is a key driver of user satisfaction. In turn, satisfaction was found to have a strong positive effect on offline visit intentions, highlighting the importance of creating satisfying VR experiences to encourage physical museum visits.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that VR experiences, when designed to align with the dimensions of the experience economy and flow theory, can effectively enhance user engagement and satisfaction, ultimately driving intentions to visit the physical museum. These results provide empirical support for the use of VR as a strategic tool in museum marketing and visitor engagement.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on VR applications in museums by providing a theory-based approach to understanding the impact of VR experiences on offline visit intentions. By integrating the experience economy and flow theory, the study offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing how different dimensions of VR experiences influence user engagement and behavior. The findings highlight the importance of aesthetics, escapism, education, and entertainment in creating immersive and satisfying VR experiences, as well as the critical role of telepresence, temporal distortion, and focused attention in fostering flow states.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study have important implications for museum professionals and marketers. Museums seeking to leverage VR technology should prioritize the design of visually appealing and immersive experiences that align with the dimensions of the experience economy. Additionally, incorporating educational and entertaining elements can enhance user engagement and satisfaction, ultimately driving intentions to visit the physical museum. By understanding the interplay between VR experiences and offline visit intentions, museums can develop more effective marketing strategies and enhance their overall visitor engagement.

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations. The experimental design involved a relatively short VR demonstration, which may not fully capture the long-term effects of VR experiences on visitor behavior. Future research could explore the impact of longer or repeated VR experiences, as well as the role of individual differences, such as prior knowledge or interest in museums, in shaping the outcomes. Additionally, the study focused on a specific cultural context, and further research is needed to examine the generalizability of the findings across different types of museums and cultural settings.

In conclusion, this study underscores the potential of VR as a transformative tool in museum marketing and visitor engagement. By creating immersive, satisfying, and engaging VR experiences, museums can not only enhance the visitor experience but also drive offline visit intentions, ensuring the continued relevance and vitality of these cultural institutions in the digital age.

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The Impact of Generative AI on the Tourism and Hospitality Industry: In-Depth Insights into Customer Experiences and Industry Transformation

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the transformative impact of Generative AI (Gen AI) on the tourism and hospitality industry. It aims to synthesise existing research, identify trends and challenges, and provide a framework to guide future studies and practical implementations.

Study design/methodology/approach: A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted using the SPAR-4-SLR protocol. The process involved assembling, arranging, and assessing data while analysing theories, contexts, characteristics, and methods (TCCM). The Web of Science database was used, resulting in a review of 71 papers.

Results: The findings highlight trends in Gen AI applications, such as enhancing customer personalisation and improving operational efficiency, while addressing challenges like trust and ethical issues. The review also identifies gaps in research across underexplored regions and critical topics.

Originality/value: This study is the first research to integrate the SPAR-4-SLR protocol and TCCM framework to analyse the role of Generative AI in tourism and hospitality. By combining these methodologies, it provides a unified framework that offers both theoretical and practical insights. Additionally, the use of bibliometric analysis enhances the study by mapping the intellectual structure and identifying emerging trends, helping researchers and practitioners navigate the opportunities and challenges posed by Generative AI in this sector.

Keywords Generative Artificial Intelligence Generative AI (GenAI) Hospitality Tourism TCCM SPAR-4-SLR

Introduction

Background of this systematic review

Generative AI (Gen AI), such as ChatGPT, is transforming the tourism and hospitality industry by revolutionising customer experiences and business operations (Mich & Garigliano, 2023). These tools enhance efficiency, personalisation, and satisfaction across various stages of the customer journey, including pre-trip planning, en-route assistance, and post-trip sharing (Wong et al., 2023). For instance, Gen AI enables the creation of high-quality marketing content for social media, websites, and email campaigns (Carvalho & Ivanov, 2023). In addition, it facilitates the analysis of vast datasets like booking records and customer feedback to uncover behavioral trends and emerging patterns (Paul et al., 2023). By delivering tailored recommendations and real-time support, these technologies elevate customer satisfaction and boost productivity in the industry (Gursoy et al., 2023). However, despite these advantages, significant challenges persist. For example, integrating Gen AI into existing IT systems requires robust architectural development (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Moreover, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of AI-generated travel recommendations is critical, as inaccuracies can erode user trust and necessitate time-consuming cross-verification with other sources (Li & Lee, 2024). If users encounter inaccurate travel recommendations from ChatGPT, it can undermine their trust in the service. This loss of trust may discourage them from relying on ChatGPT for future travel advice and reduce their willingness to engage in travel-related activities, ultimately impacting their overall experience and satisfaction with the tool (Ali et al., 2023).

Consequently, these complexities underscore the dual nature of Gen AI in the tourism and hospitality industry. While it offers unprecedented opportunities to enhance customer experience and streamline business operations, it also presents challenges that must be addressed to ensure its successful adoption and long-term trustworthiness. To navigate these challenges and capitalize on the potential of Gen AI, a comprehensive and systematic exploration of its impacts is essential. Given the recognised importance of Gen AI in the tourism and hospitality industry, existing studies have yet to systematically explore its transformative potential and associated challenges. This gap raises three critical research questions that guide this study:

RQ1. What do we know about the impact of Gen AI on customer experiences and business transformation in the tourism and hospitality industry? **RQ2.** How do we know about the impact of Gen AI on customer experience and business transformation in this sector? **RQ3.** Where should future research be headed to deepen the understanding of the opportunities and challenges posed by Gen AI in tourism and hospitality?

Contributions of this systematic review

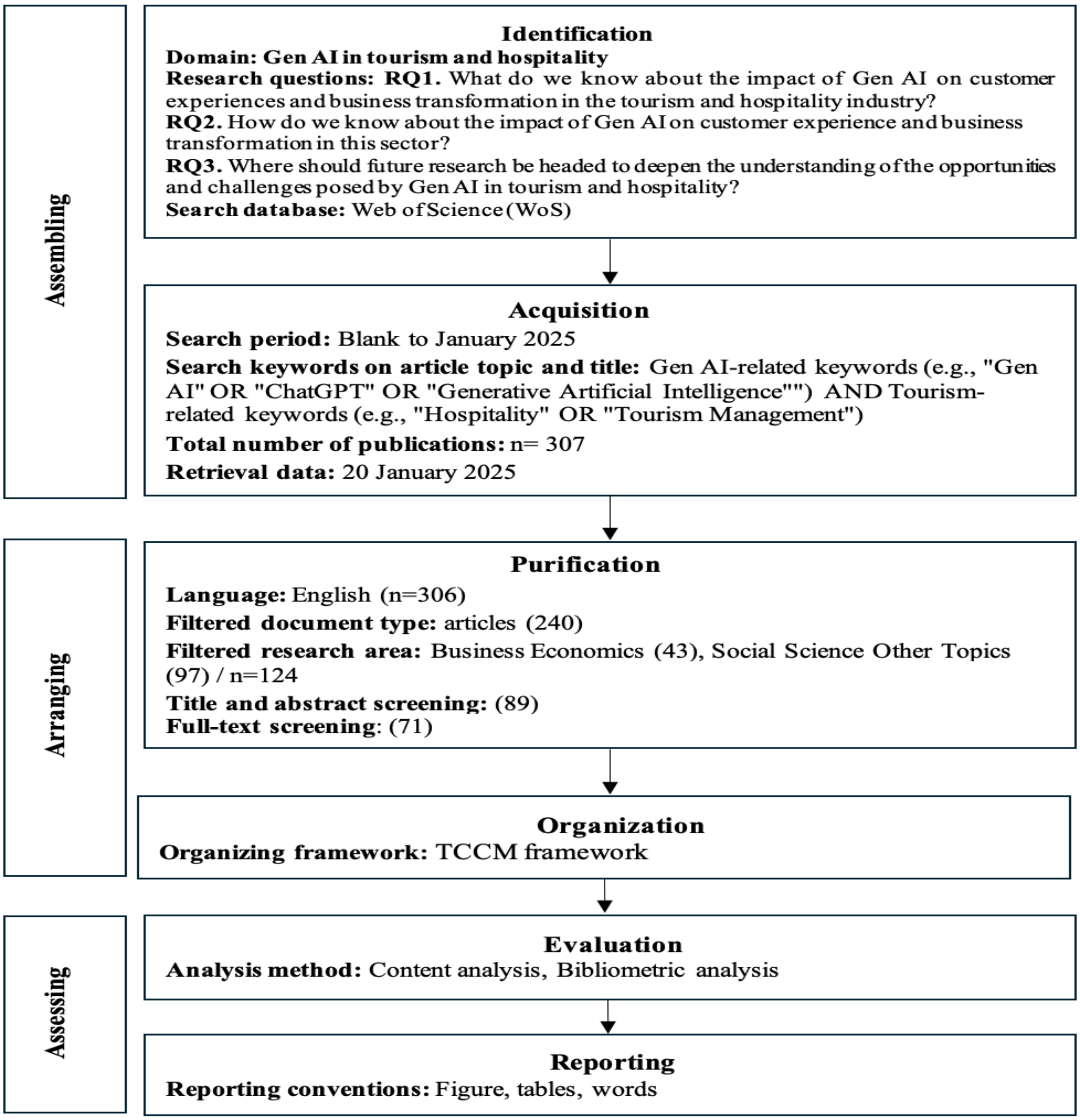
This systematic review makes three significant contributions to the growing body of research on Gen AI in the tourism and hospitality industry. First, although research on the use of ChatGPT and Gen AI in this sector is increasing (Carvalho & Ivanov, 2024; Gursoy et al., 2023), significant gaps remain in understanding its impacts across specific contexts and addressing sector-specific challenges (Sigala et al., 2024). This review focuses on Gen AI, providing a comprehensive synthesis of its transformative role in tourism and hospitality. Second, prior reviews have primarily relied on bibliometric analyses (e.g., García-Madurga et al., 2023), while older systematic reviews (e.g., Dang & Nguyen, 2023) were limited to studies published up to 2021 or 2022. These approaches fail to capture the rapid advancements in Gen AI research in recent years. This review extends the analysis to include the latest developments and emerging trends, ensuring an up-to-date and thorough examination of Gen AI's role in the field. Third, this study adopts TCCM framework (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019). Unlike previous reviews, which relied on narrative or traditional systematic methods, this approach systematically explores theories, contexts, characteristics, and methods related to Gen AI. By doing so, it offers a holistic understanding of the opportunities and challenges posed by Gen AI, providing valuable insights for future research and practical applications in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Methodology

Systematic review protocol

This study follows a systematic literature review (SLR) protocol to examine the impact of Gen AI on the tourism and hospitality industry. The review process follows the SPAR-4-SLR framework (Paul et al., 2021), which is structured into three key stages: Assembling, Arranging, and Assessing. In the assembling stage, the Web of Science (WoS) database was chosen for its high-quality indexing standards. A comprehensive search was conducted using carefully selected keywords related to Gen AI (e.g., "Generative AI," "ChatGPT") and tourism (e.g., "Hospitality," "Smart Tourism"). This search spanned publications available up to January 2025 and initially retrieved 307 articles. Moving to the arranging stage, the retrieved articles were refined through a series of filters. These filters included language (English, 306), document type (articles, 240), and research area (Business Economics and Social Science Other Topics). This rigorous refinement process narrowed the selection to 124 articles. Then, screening of titles and abstracts reduced the pool to 89 articles, with 71 papers finally selected for full-text analysis. Lastly, in the assessing stage, for examining theories, contexts, characteristics, and methods (TCCM) framework was applied to structure the analysis (Figures 1 and 2). Bibliometric and content analysis methods were systematically employed to evaluate the selected studies, ensuring a comprehensive and insightful understanding of the research landscape.

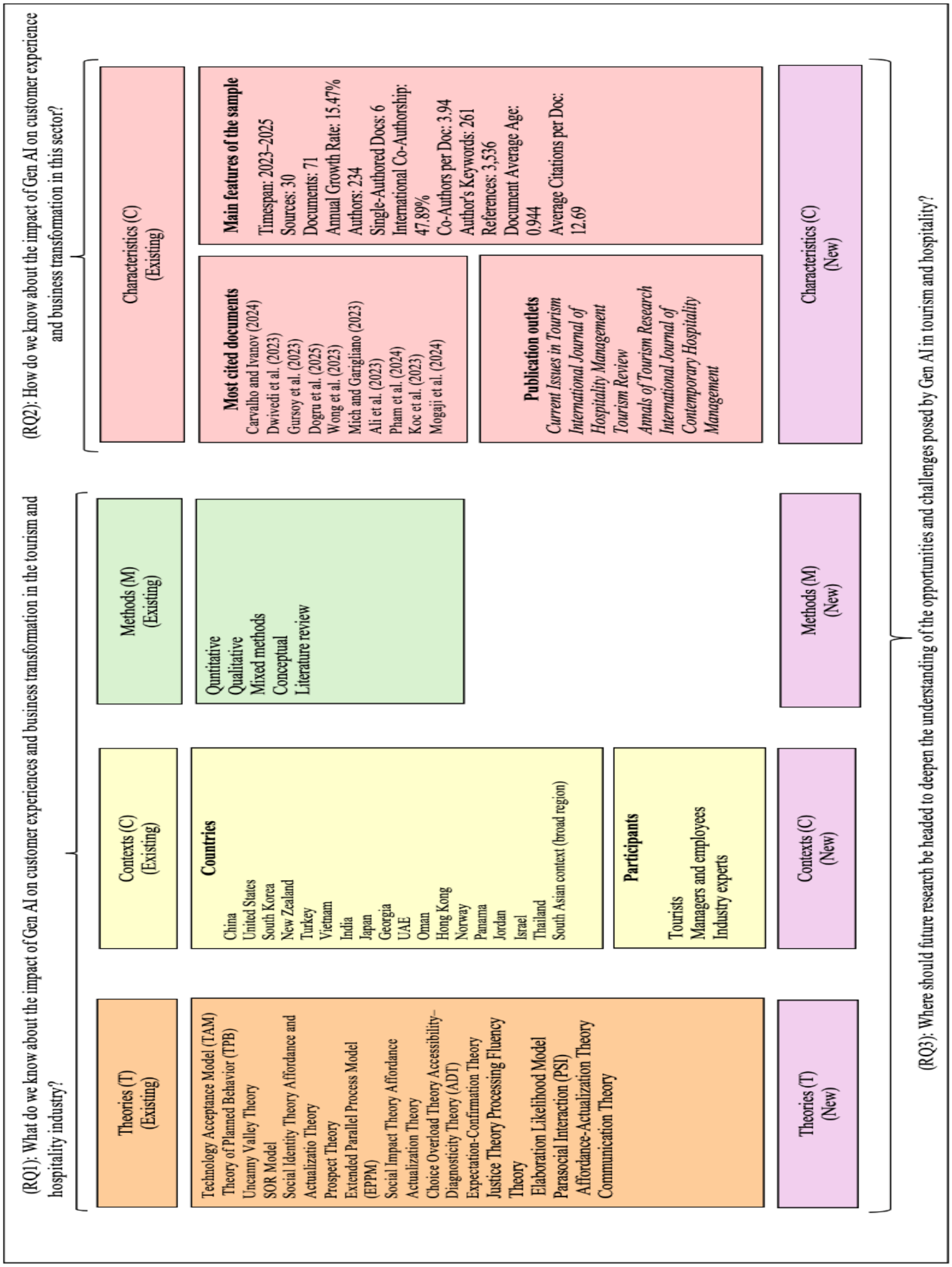
Figure 1 Article selection procedure using SPAR-4-SLR protocol.



Results

What do we know about the impact of Gen AI on customer experiences and business transformation in the tourism and hospitality industry? **(RQ1)**

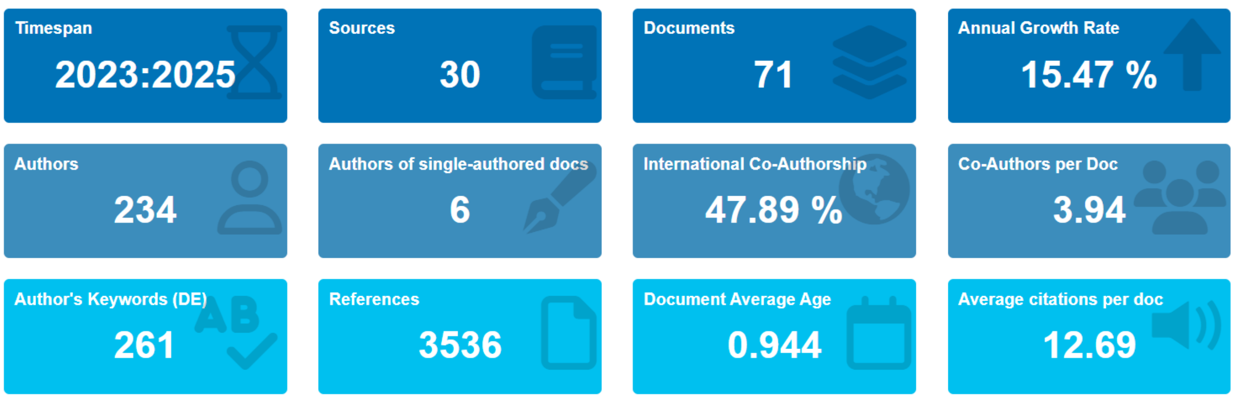
Figure 2. The TCCM framework adapted from Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019)



Overview of the research field

A bibliometric performance analysis highlights key aspects of research on Gen AI in the tourism and hospitality industry (Figure 3). The analysis covers the period from 2023 to 2025 and includes 71 documents authored by 234 researchers. On average, each document has 3.94 co-authors, with 47.89% of publications involving international collaborations. The research field shows a strong annual growth rate of 15.47%, reflecting its rapid expansion. Each document has an average citation rate of 12.69, indicating significant academic influence.

Figure 3. Main features of the sample.



Source: Biblioshiny

Journal publication outlets and most cited papers

Table 1 highlights the key journals contributing to Gen AI research in tourism and hospitality, with *Current Issues in Tourism* and *International Journal of Hospitality Management* leading with 8 articles each, followed by *Tourism Review* (5 articles) and several others with 4 or fewer contributions. Table 2 shows ten most cited articles in this field.

Table 1. List of journals included in our study.

Sources	Articles	Percentage of the total (%)
Current Issues in Tourism	8	11%
International Journal of Hospitality Management	8	11%
Tourism Review	5	7%
Annals of Tourism Research	4	6%

International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	4	6%
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	4	6%
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	4	6%
Journal of Travel Research	4	6%
Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research	3	4%
Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	3	4%
International Journal of Tourism Research	2	3%
Tourism and Hospitality Research	2	3%
Tourism Management	2	3%
Tourism Recreation Research	2	3%

Note: Journals with more than one paper are listed.

Table 2. The ten most-cited studies.

Authors	Journal	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
Carvalho and Ivanov (2024)	*Tourism Review*	149	74.50	14.40
Dwivedi et al. (2023)	*International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*	121	60.50	11.69
Gursoy et al. (2023)	*Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*	93	31.00	3.20
Dogru et al. (2025)	*Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*	70	70.00	10.47
Wong et al. (2023)	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	66	22.00	2.27

Mich and Garigliano (2023)	*Information Technology & Tourism*	51	17.00	1.75
Ali et al. (2023)	*International Journal of Hospitality Management*	31	10.33	1.07
Pham et al. (2024)	*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*	28	14.00	2.71
Koc et al. (2023)	*Technology in Society*	26	8.67	0.89
Mogaji et al. (2024)	*International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*	24	12.00	2.32

Source: Authors

How do we know about the impact of Gen AI on customer experience and business transformation in this sector? **(RQ2)**

Theoretical setting of selected publications

According to the data, a total of 37 out of 71 papers incorporated theoretical foundations, while 34 papers did not explicitly use a theory. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) emerged as the most frequently applied framework (7 papers), highlighting its dominance in AI-driven tourism research. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) followed, appearing in 3 studies, reflecting its relevance in understanding user adoption and decision-making. Other notable theories, including the Uncanny Valley Theory, (SOR) Model, Social Identity Theory, and Affordance and Actualization Theory, were each used twice. The remaining 27 theories and frameworks were each employed in a single study, demonstrating a diverse but fragmented theoretical landscape (Table 3).

Table 3. Prominent theories and frameworks in AI-driven tourism and hospitality research

Theory	Articles (Count)
Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	7
Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	3
Uncanny Valley Theory	2
(SOR) Model	2

Social Identity Theory	2
Affordance and Actualization Theory	2

Note: Only theories cited in more than one study are included in this table.

Where should future research be headed to deepen the understanding of the opportunities and challenges posed by Gen AI in tourism and hospitality? **(RQ3)**

The TCCM analysis reveals that the majority of studies adopt empirical methodologies, with limited conceptual research. Most studies focus on tourists as the primary population, while fewer examine hotel managers, employees, or industry experts. It highlights a gap for future research. Regarding theoretical frameworks, there is a lack of robust theoretical foundations, suggesting the need for more integrative models. In terms of context, studies are predominantly conducted in Asia and North America, with limited exploration of other regions.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the impact of Generative AI on the tourism and hospitality industry, shedding light on emerging trends, opportunities, and challenges. By systematically reviewing 71 papers using the SPAR-4-SLR protocol (Paul et al., 2021), it ensures methodological rigor and transparency. The integration of the TCCM framework (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019) facilitates a structured analysis of theories, contexts, characteristics, and methods, offering a holistic understanding of the field. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first systematic literature review to exclusively focus on Generative AI in tourism and hospitality, uniquely combining bibliometric analysis with the SPAR-4-SLR protocol and the TCCM framework. This study not only provides valuable insights but also identifies critical research gaps, guiding future exploration in this transformative domain.

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Sustainable Tourism Revolution: Empowering Visionaries and Inspiring Global Change through integrating the SDGs into Curriculum Using AI-empowered tools

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Abstract

Purpose: This conceptual working paper aims to explore how tourism can be leveraged to promote and disseminate SDG awareness among students, and communities, turning them into sustainability ambassadors, and to incorporate SDG-focused education into tourism-related university courses, cultivating a new generation of sustainable tourism professionals. A global network of sustainability-conscious professionals can be created by embedding SDGs and sustainability principles into tourism academic programs using Gen AI tools like ChatGPT, Elicit and Consensus.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study employs case studies of exemplary sustainable tourism showcasing effective integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the curriculum. The analysis of tourism education curricula will help to evaluate how SDGs and AI tools can be used and integrated more effectively.

Results: The study has some expected outcomes such as a comprehensive framework for embedding SDGs and AI into tourism education, promoting sustainability; increased awareness among academics and students about sustainable development, leading to behavioral shifts towards responsible tourism and sustainability advocacy; enhanced cross-cultural dialogues that strengthen global commitment to sustainability through tourism and AI-driven educational tools; policy recommendations for integrating sustainability into tourism development, management strategies, and educational curricula.

Originality/value: This multi-purpose paper highlights the rarely mentioned the role of Generative AI tools and the rapid advancements in AI in revolutionizing sustainable tourism by enhancing immersive experiences, optimizing sustainability strategies, and facilitating cross-cultural learning.

Keywords AI tools, curriculum, sustainability, SDGs, sustainable tourism

Introduction

Sustainable tourism is vital in achieving the SDGs by balancing economic growth, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation. The tourism sector, with its extensive reach and influence, can serve as an effective medium for promoting sustainability. At the same time, embedding the SDGs in tourism-related academic curricula ensures that future tourism professionals are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to drive sustainable tourism initiatives (Singh et al.,2024). The rapid evolution of Generative AI has further broadened opportunities for transforming tourism into an engine of sustainability, providing innovative solutions for destination management, educational experiences, and traveler engagement. This proposal outlines strategies to incorporate the SDGs within tourism academic programs by leveraging AI to enhance sustainability education and practices.

Methodology

This study employs a multi-faceted approach and consists some key components: 1- Case studies of exemplary sustainable tourism showcasing effective integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) int the curriculum. 2-Surveys and interviews with academic and students to evaluate their awareness and willingness to advocate for sustainability following exposure to sustainable tourism education. 3- Analysis of tourism education curricula to evaluate how SDGs and AI can be integrated more effectively. 4-Exploration of AI-driven solutions for sustainable tourism management and their effectiveness in encouraging eco-friendly travel choices.

Results

The study has multi expected outcomes: 1.A comprehensive framework for embedding SDGs and AI into tourism education, promoting sustainability.2.Increased awareness among academics and students about sustainable development, leading to behavioural shifts towards responsible tourism and sustainability advocacy.3.Enhanced cross-cultural dialogues that strengthen global commitment to sustainability through tourism and AI-driven educational tools.4.Policy recommendations for integrating sustainability into tourism development, management strategies, and educational curricula.5.Practical insights and early results from pilot initiatives on SDG-integrated tourism education and AI-powered sustainability strategies.

Conclusion

The study is expected to advocate for a paradigm shift in which tourism benefits from sustainable practices and actively contributes to the dissemination and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) worldwide. Through education and AI tools integration, we can ensure that future tourism leaders are equipped to champion sustainability criteria in their careers and communities, making tourism a transformative force for a more responsible future.

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A Bibliometric Analysis of Artificial Intelligence in Tourism Literature

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to analyze the role and impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in tourism literature through a bibliometric analysis, identifying key research clusters and emerging trends. By examining AI applications, this research provides insights into theoretical and practical contributions while outlining future research directions.

Study design/methodology/approach: A bibliometric analysis was conducted using Scopus-indexed publications on AI in tourism. The dataset included 817 articles, 30 books, and 230 book chapters, totaling 1,077 publications. The analysis was performed using VOSviewer, a widely used tool for mapping co-occurrence networks and identifying research clusters.

Results: The analysis identified six main research clusters in AI-related tourism literature: (1) service technologies including chatbots and service robots; (2) sentiment analysis and social media using deep learning; (3) machine learning applications in forecasting and revenue management; (4) AI and smart tourism integration; (5) virtual experiences and the metaverse; (6) AI in the sharing economy. These findings reflect the growing diversity of AI research in tourism, accompanied by increasing scholarly attention across a wide range of thematic areas.

Originality/value: This study offers a structured overview of AI research in tourism through bibliometric mapping of over 1,000 publications. By combining methodological and thematic insights, the study contributes to a clearer understanding of current trends and future research directions in the field.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Deep Learning, Tourism, Bibliometric

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI), with its introduction and the ability to reshape our daily lives (Kong et al., 2023), has demonstrated a transformative impact across various sectors, including finance, technology, science, medicine, education, and increasingly tourism (Castillo-Martínez et al., 2024). AI functions as an umbrella term encompassing various subfields such as Machine Learning (ML), Deep Learning (DL) and Generative AI (GenAI) (Alom et al., 2019); all of which have drawn increasing scholarly interest in tourism and hospitality research. Within the tourism ecosystem, the implementation of AI technologies in tourism has repeatedly proven to create value on multiple levels for stakeholders, including businesses, managements, operators, suppliers, employees, consumers, policymakers, and smart destinations (Kılıçhan & Yılmaz, 2020).

In this context, the literature underscores the expanding use of AI technologies across applications ranging from chatbots and robotics to virtual and augmented reality. AI-driven techniques such as clustering, classification, predictive analytics, neural networks, and deep learning have become increasingly prominent in applied tourism research (Doborjeh et al., 2022). Beyond these technical applications, AI research in tourism can also be analyzed through broader lenses, such as AI technologies, technology acceptance, consumer perception, and emerging trends, offering a multidisciplinary perspective on its impact (Kong et al., 2023). These diverse approaches reveal AI's capacity to drive innovation, personalization, and operational efficiency across the tourism value chain (Elisa Sousa et al., 2024).

AI research in tourism has evolved over time and can be categorized into three distinct stages. The initial phase was characterized by a focus on methodological applications, particularly the use of AI techniques such as neural networks, fuzzy logic, and decision trees for forecasting and optimization. The exploratory phase broadened this scope, incorporating service robots, AI-enabled predictive systems, and applications aimed at enhancing the customer experience. The development phase, accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, witnessed a surge in research centered on intelligent recommendation systems, personalization tools, and sentiment analysis powered by generative AI (Kong et al., 2023). This evolution reflects an increasing emphasis on digital transformation and innovation within the sector.

Beyond its evolution, AI research in tourism has also diversified thematically, encompassing a wide range of subject areas and application domains. This thematic expansion is reflected in a wide array of studies across different domains of tourism and hospitality. For instance, Pillai & Sivathanu (2020) researched the adoption of AI-based chatbots in tourism and hospitality, while Saputra et al. (2024) introduced a typology of service robots tailored to tourism and hospitality contexts. Expanding the digital scope, Kaur et al. (2024) examined the integration of social media and AI in shaping the digital landscape of tourism, and Tuomi (2023) explored the implications of AI-generated content on tourism marketing strategies. In a related stream, Mariani (2019) provided valuable insights into the utilization of big data and analytics in tourism, and Go et al. (2020) examined consumer acceptance of advanced machine learning-driven robotic systems.

In parallel, other scholars have focused on the forecasting and strategic potential of AI in tourism. Claveria et al. (2015) examined how AI tools contribute to the development of smart tourism, emphasizing system intelligence and destination optimization. Complementing these approaches, Gajdošík & Marciš (2019) explored AI tools for smart tourism development; Tsaih & Hsu (2018) offered a conceptual framework for the integration of AI into smart tourism ecosystems. These studies collectively demonstrate the multidimensional nature of AI research in tourism, underscoring its methodological diversity and thematic richness. Rather than being fragmented, this body of literature reflects a dynamic and expanding academic field—one that necessitates comprehensive mapping and critical synthesis. This study aims to address that need by systematically identifying major trends, research clusters, and intellectual contributions within AI-related tourism scholarship.

Building on this foundation, the present study employs a bibliometric analysis to systematically investigate the academic landscape of AI in tourism. By identifying key research clusters, dominant themes, and emerging trends, this study aims to structure the current body of knowledge and provide guidance for future scholarship on AI-driven transformation in tourism, hospitality, and travel.

Methodology

Within the scope of this comprehensive research study, scientific articles, books, and book chapters that examine the relationship between artificial intelligence and the fields of tourism and hospitality were thoroughly analyzed. The findings from this analysis were then meticulously evaluated through the application of a bibliometric analysis technique. Bibliometric analysis, which is recognized as a systematic methodology, employs advanced computer assistance to explore a specific subject or domain, thereby encompassing all relevant publications in order to effectively determine significant research contributions, identify important authors within the field, and shows the interconnections that exist among them. The application of this analytical approach has witnessed a significant increase in popularity, particularly due to the recent advancements in sophisticated databases and computational tools that have emerged in the academic landscape. This particular method of analysis proves to be exceedingly advantageous when it comes to searching big quantities of unstructured data, as it allows for the interpretation of such data, the tracking of the progressive evolution of cumulative scientific understanding over time, and the effective visualization of the resulting outcomes as highlighted by Donthu et al. in their 2021 publication.

In this research, the Scopus database was selected as the primary source for retrieving relevant academic publications due to its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature and its advanced filtering capabilities. Scopus proved exceptionally valuable in identifying pertinent studies focusing on artificial intelligence in tourism and hospitality. To ensure a focused and high-quality dataset, a careful search strategy was employed. This included the application of specific inclusion criteria—limiting the scope to journals with “tourism”, “hospitality” or “travel” explicitly stated in their titles, which allowed for the isolation of domain-specific publications most relevant to the field. In addition, the search criteria were further refined to include publications that featured the keywords "artificial intelligence", "deep learning", "machine learning", or "generative artificial intelligence" within their titles, abstracts, or keywords.

This methodological approach ensured a targeted investigation of the scholarly discourse surrounding the use and implications of AI technologies in tourism and hospitality settings. The objective was to capture not only the breadth but also the depth of the academic dialogue on these technologies, by focusing on high-impact and directly relevant studies. The final dataset, comprising 1,077 publications consisting of 817 articles, 30 books, and 230 book chapters, reflects a robust body of literature that has emerged over the years, showing both the growing importance and diversification of AI applications in these sectors.

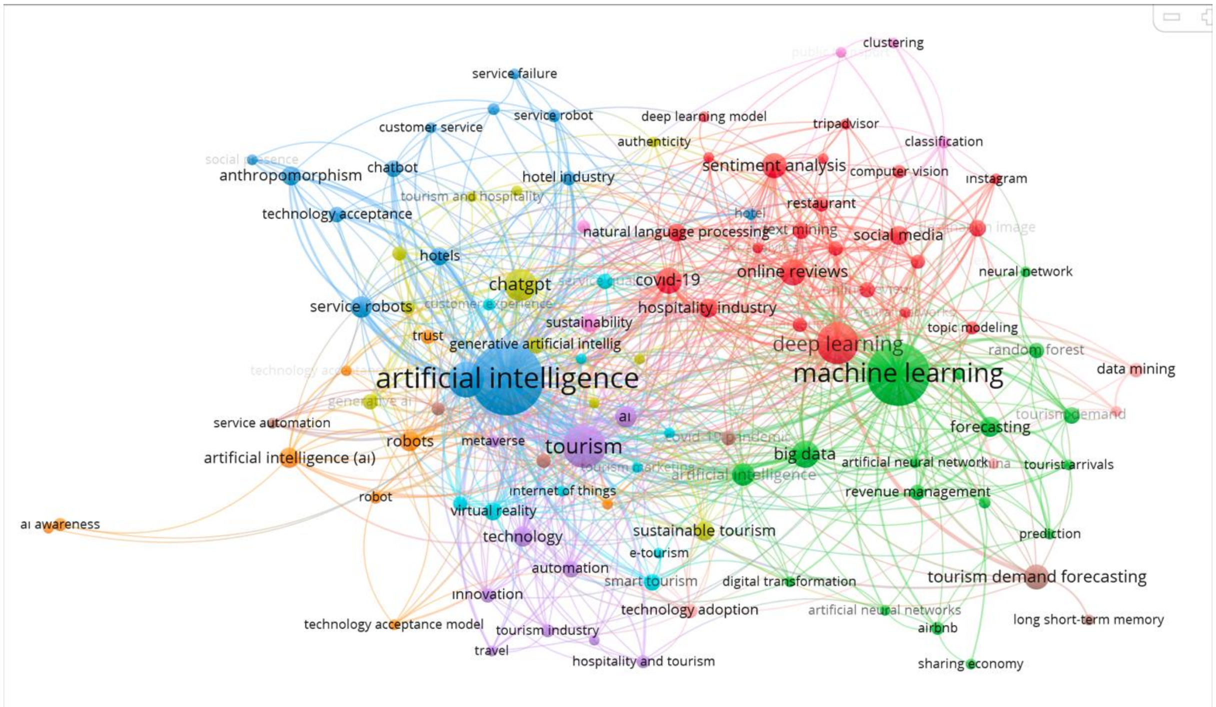
To analyze and visualize the collected data, the study employed VOSviewer, a well-established software tool widely recognized for its effectiveness in conducting bibliometric analyses and generating network-based visual maps. This tool facilitated the identification of keyword co-occurrences, thematic clusters, and intellectual linkages among the retrieved publications. As a result, the analysis offers a clear overview of the dominant research themes, emerging trends, and structural patterns within the body of literature on AI in tourism and hospitality. The combination of Scopus's powerful search infrastructure and VOSviewer's analytical capabilities enabled a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the academic landscape in this rapidly evolving area.

Results

The bibliometric analysis thoroughly describes a variety of distinct research trends that exist at the fascinating intersection of the rapidly advancing fields of artificial intelligence and tourism, thereby highlighting and emphasizing the increasing role that AI-driven technologies play in shaping and transforming the dynamics of the industry as a whole. The findings reached from this analysis clearly indicate a significant and growing academic interest in the various applications of artificial intelligence, which include areas such as machine learning, sentiment analysis, service automation, and predictive analytics, thereby revealing an expanding area of scientific research. Moreover, the recent emergence of new areas of work, including not only metaverse and generative AI, but also the crisis management leveraging AI, strongly suggests that the field of AI is not only expanding its horizons far beyond traditional applications as we know them, but is also increasingly integrating more including, innovative and strategically important uses of this transformative and exciting technology that continues to change our world. The clustering of keywords observed during this research serves to further illustrate and highlight the complex interconnected pathways of various research areas, thus reflecting the influences of both fast technological advancements and the ever-evolving expectations of consumers in today's highly competitive and fast-paced market environment.

In the next part of this comprehensive analysis, we will explore these identified clusters in the map (Figure 1.) in detail and systematically summarize their main themes, implications and important contributions to the existing literature in this fast evolving and dynamic field of study.

Figure 1. Cluster Map



Blue Cluster: AI, Chatbots, and Service Robots in Tourism

This cluster focuses on the role of AI-driven service technologies, including chatbots, service robots, and virtual assistants, in tourism and hospitality. Key themes such as **anthropomorphism**, **trust**, **customer service**, and **technology acceptance** highlight research on how consumers perceive and interact with AI-driven systems. The topic of **service failure** also appears, indicating studies on customer dissatisfaction and recovery strategies when AI-powered services fail to meet expectations. For example, hotels implementing humanoid robots to enhance guest experiences and streamline operations.

Red Cluster: Sentiment Analysis, Online Reviews, and Social Media

This cluster revolves around **sentiment analysis**, **deep learning**, **text mining**, and **social media**, reflecting studies that use AI to analyze consumer feedback and online reviews in the tourism and hospitality industry. Keywords such as **"Instagram"**, **"TripAdvisor"**, and **"restaurant"** suggest that research in this domain frequently involves user-generated content from review platforms and social networks. The inclusion of **"COVID-19"** indicates that AI was leveraged to analyze consumer sentiments and behavioral shifts during the pandemic. AI models analyzing TripAdvisor reviews to predict customer satisfaction and recommend improvements for hotels and restaurants.

Green Cluster: Machine Learning, Big Data, and Forecasting

This cluster represents AI applications in **machine learning**, **forecasting**, and **big data**, particularly in predicting trends such as **tourism demand forecasting**, **revenue management**, and **tourist arrivals**. Topics like **artificial neural networks**, **random forest**, and **long short-term memory** suggest that advanced machine learning models are used for predictive analytics in tourism. This research is crucial for destination planning, dynamic pricing strategies, and crisis management. AI-powered revenue management systems predicting hotel occupancy rates and adjusting room prices dynamically.

Yellow Cluster: General AI Concepts, Robotics, and the Metaverse

This cluster is centered around broader AI-related topics, including **artificial intelligence**, **robots**, **service automation**, and **generative AI**. The presence of **metaverse** suggests an emerging interest in AI-driven virtual tourism experiences. **Technology acceptance model** appears in this cluster, indicating research into consumer adoption and behavioral responses toward AI-based innovations. Virtual reality (VR) experiences powered by AI that allow users to explore destinations before booking trips.

Purple Cluster: Smart Tourism, IoT, and Digital Transformation

This cluster focuses on the role of **smart tourism**, **technology adoption**, **digital transformation**, and **e-tourism** in reshaping the tourism industry. The inclusion of **Internet of Things (IoT)** suggests research into interconnected devices that enhance visitor experiences, such as AI-powered recommendation systems and smart city applications for tourism. For example, AI-driven smart city applications providing real-time personalized travel recommendations based on visitor preferences.

Brown Cluster: AI and the Sharing Economy

This smaller but significant cluster highlights AI's role in the **sharing economy**, with keywords such as **Airbnb**, **prediction**, and **tourism demand forecasting**. This suggests studies focusing on how AI is used to optimize peer-to-peer accommodation platforms, predict demand, and enhance user experiences. AI-based pricing models on Airbnb that dynamically adjust rental prices based on demand and competitor analysis.

The map (Figure 1.) illustrates that AI in tourism research spans multiple interconnected domains, from consumer interaction with AI-driven technologies to predictive analytics, digital transformation, and sustainable tourism initiatives. While sentiment analysis and machine learning dominate data-driven approaches, emerging topics like the **metaverse, generative AI, and crisis management with AI** indicate the evolving landscape of AI applications in tourism.

Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the intersection between **artificial intelligence (AI) and tourism**, highlighting key research trends and emerging themes in the field. The keyword co-occurrence map reveals that **AI-related technologies**, particularly **machine learning (ML), deep learning (DL), sentiment analysis, and service automation**, have gained significant traction in tourism research. These technologies are being applied to various aspects of the industry, including **customer service, demand forecasting, marketing analytics, and operational efficiency**.

One of the most prominent themes identified in the analysis is the **role of AI in enhancing customer interactions**. Keywords such as **"chatbot," "service robots," "trust," and "technology acceptance"** suggest that researchers are particularly interested in how AI-powered services are perceived by consumers and how these technologies can improve service experiences. The presence of **"anthropomorphism"** as a key term indicates a growing interest in making AI-powered interactions more human-like, which can influence customer trust and satisfaction. Another critical theme is the **use of AI and big data for predictive analytics and decision-making**. Concepts like **"tourism demand forecasting," "revenue management," "big data," and "machine learning"** highlight how AI is being used to optimize business strategies. By leveraging AI-powered predictive models, tourism businesses can anticipate traveler behavior, manage dynamic pricing strategies, and allocate resources more effectively.

The role of **social media and sentiment analysis** is also a key area of focus in the literature. The connections between **"online reviews," "social media," and "deep learning"** emphasize how AI is increasingly being utilized to analyze customer feedback, monitor brand reputation, and personalize marketing efforts. Platforms such as **TripAdvisor and Instagram** play a crucial role in influencing traveler decisions, and AI-driven sentiment analysis helps businesses understand consumer preferences and tailor their offerings accordingly. Additionally, **the emergence of AI in sustainable tourism and smart tourism** is a developing area. The links between **"sustainability," "smart tourism," and "technology adoption"** suggest that AI is being explored as a tool to enhance sustainable tourism practices. AI applications such as **energy-efficient resource management, smart destination planning, and eco-friendly tourism recommendations** have the potential to minimize environmental impact while improving operational efficiency.

Overall, the findings show us that **AI is not just a technological advancement but a fundamental shift in how tourism operates**, influencing **service automation, marketing, forecasting, and consumer engagement**. While AI presents numerous opportunities for efficiency and innovation, challenges related to **trust, ethical considerations, and technology adoption** remain important areas for further investigation.

Based on the current trends identified in this analysis, several directions for future research can be suggested. One critical area is the ethical considerations surrounding AI and its impact on consumer trust, privacy concerns, and algorithmic biases, which can influence the adoption of AI-driven services in tourism. Additionally, AI's role in sustainable tourism presents an opportunity for further exploration, particularly in optimizing energy consumption, managing tourist flows, and reducing environmental footprints. Another promising avenue for research is the integration of AI with emerging technologies such as the metaverse, virtual reality, and the Internet of Things (IoT), as their combined effects on traveler experiences remain largely unexplored. Furthermore, AI's potential in crisis management, including its ability to predict and mitigate tourism-related crises such as pandemics and natural disasters, warrants greater attention due to its significant practical implications. Lastly, cultural and regional differences in AI adoption represent an important area for comparative studies, as varying consumer perceptions and behaviors across different demographics could shape the success and limitations of AI applications in tourism. As AI continues to evolve, its role in the tourism industry is expected to grow even further, introducing new opportunities and challenges. To fully harness AI's potential, future research should adopt an interdisciplinary approach, integrating technological advancements with insights from consumer behavior and policy frameworks.

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AI-Powered Customer Purchasing Decision: Investigating Tech-Related Factors in the Turkish Airline Market

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Abstract

Purpose: This quantitative study examines how AI technology-related factors and exposure influence customer purchasing decisions in the Turkish airline market.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Utilizing an online survey of 150 respondents, the study employs correlation and regression analyses to test two primary hypotheses: (H1) AI tech-related factors positively impact purchasing decisions and (H2) AI exposure moderates this relationship. *Results:* Results indicate a strong positive direct effect of AI-related factors on purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0.799$, $p < 0.001$), while increased AI exposure significantly enhances this relationship (interaction $\beta = 0.562$, $p < 0.001$).

Originality/Value: The study contributes to the literature by integrating the moderating role of AI exposure within the context of airline marketing, providing practical insights for digital strategy and customer engagement in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Keywords:
Artificial Intelligence, Purchasing Decisions, Airline Marketing, AI Exposure, Customer Engagement

Introduction

In today's digital era, artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed service delivery and consumer interactions across industries. The airline market, facing increasing competition and evolving customer expectations, stands to benefit substantially from AI innovations. However, despite the recognized benefits, a notable gap exists in understanding how AI technology-related factors, along with varying degrees of consumer exposure to AI, shape purchasing decisions (Lukanova and Ilieva, 2019; Statista, 2020). This study addresses this gap by exploring the influence of AI on customer decision-making processes in the Turkish airline market.

The research problem centers on the dual impact of AI functionalities (e.g., chatbots, dynamic pricing) and AI exposure in driving consumer behavior. While previous studies have separately analyzed technological capabilities (Tang et al., 2020; Liu-Thompkins et al., 2022) or customer adoption of digital tools (Cheng and Jiang, 2021), few have investigated their interactive effect. The study's objectives are to (1) assess the direct impact of AI tech-related factors on purchasing decisions, (2) examine the moderating role of AI exposure, and (3) compare these findings with existing literature to identify novel contributions.

The hypotheses are as follows:

H1: AI tech-related factors have a positive and significant impact on AI-powered customer purchasing decisions.
H2: AI exposure positively moderates the impact of AI tech-related factors on purchasing decisions.

These propositions form the basis of the research model depicted in Figure 1 of the original submission and are tested through robust quantitative methods.(See the Figure 1)

Table 1: Respondents Demographics (n=150)

Total Participants	%
Gender	
Male	54
Female	46
Marial Status	
Married	38
Single	62
Age range	
20 and below	10
21-30	58
31-40	16.7
41-50	12
50 and above	3.3
Academic Degree	
Diploma	45.3
BSc	48

MSc	5.3
Phd	1.3
Nationality	
Türkiye	96
United Kingdom	1.3
Others	2.7
Annual Level Income (Currency is Turkish Lira)	
200.000 TL and below	49.3
200.000-500.000 TL	29.3
500.000 TL and above	21.3
Years of Experience	
1 year and less	20.7
1-5	28
5-10	21.3
10 years and more	30

Table 1 presents the demographic breakdown of the sample, ensuring representativeness (Lee, 2023; Cortes, 2024).

Methodology

A quantitative research design was implemented to obtain precise measurements of consumer perceptions regarding AI in airline services. An online survey was developed using previously validated items (Lee, 2023; Cortes, 2024) to capture data on demographics, experiences with AI-powered features, and purchasing behaviors. The sample comprised 150 respondents, ensuring adequate statistical power to generalize the findings to the broader Turkish market.

The survey instrument comprised a total of 17 questions, divided into the following sections:

1. **Demographics:** Questions on gender, age, marital status, academic degree, nationality, annual income (in Turkish Lira), and years of experience.
2. **AI Tech-Related Factors (AIT):** Items measuring aspects such as ease of use, perceived competence of chatbots, and the effectiveness of dynamic pricing systems (e.g., "AI

technology simplifies airline operations by enhancing ease of use"). Responses were captured on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree).

3. **AI Exposure (AIE):** Items assessing the frequency of interactions with AI-powered devices and the level of familiarity with AI in daily life (e.g., "I frequently use AI for shopping").

4. **Purchasing Decisions (PD):** Questions gauging the likelihood of using AI-powered chat apps to book airline tickets (e.g., "I am willing to make flight bookings using AI-powered chat apps").

The survey was distributed online to 150 respondents, ensuring adequate statistical power for generalizing findings to the broader Turkish market. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analyses to examine both direct and moderated effects. Ethical protocols were strictly observed, ensuring participant anonymity and data confidentiality, in line with Bournemouth University's guidelines.

The survey instrument measured AI tech-related factors (e.g., ease of use, perceived competence of chatbots) and AI exposure (frequency of interactions with AI devices) using a five-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analyses to examine both direct and moderated effects. Ethical protocols were strictly observed, ensuring participant anonymity and data confidentiality, in line with Bournemouth University's guidelines.

Figure 1: The Proposed Model of AI-Powered Customer Purchasing Decision (This figure briefly illustrates the conceptual framework where AI tech-related factors directly influence purchasing decisions, with AI exposure moderating this relationship.

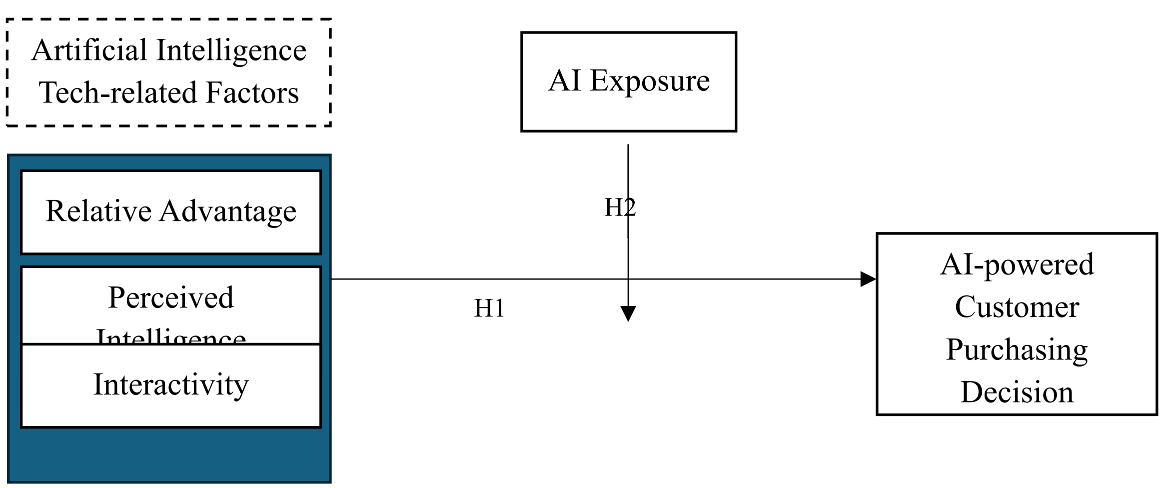

Figure 1. The Proposed Model of AI-Powered Customer Purchasing Decision

Results

The descriptive analysis indicated that respondents are predominantly young, technologically adept, and largely from Turkiye. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed strong positive relationships among AIT, AIE, and PD ($r = 0.799$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Regression analyses confirmed that AI tech-related factors significantly drive purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0.799$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, the moderation analysis demonstrated that increased AI exposure strengthens the impact of AI tech-related factors on purchasing decisions, with a significant interaction effect ($\beta = 0.562$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H2 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019; Rodgers, 2020).

Table 2. Participant Responses to AI Technology, Exposure, and Purchasing Decisions.

Questions	%
AIT-1. AI technology simplifies airline operations by enhancing ease of use.	
Strongly Disagree	
Disagree	6.0
Neutral	5.3
Agree	16.7
Strongly Agree	22
Totally	50
	100
AIT-2. AI technology offers convenience in managing airline operations.	
Strongly Disagree	
Disagree	4.0
Neutral	6.7
Agree	14.7
Strongly Agree	24.0
Totally	50.7
	100
AIT-3. AI technology enables traveller's to access information from anywhere during their air travel.	
Strongly Disagree	3.3
Disagree	7.3
Neutral	12
Agree	26.7
Strongly Agree	50.7
Totally	100

AIT-4. AI technology provides access to a wide range of airline-specific products and services.	
Strongly Disagree	4.7
Disagree	5.3
Neutral	14.7
Agree	25.3
Strongly Agree	50.0
Totally	100
AIT-5. I perceive chatbots as competent.	
Strongly Disagree	8.0
Disagree	8.7
Neutral	26.0
Agree	25.3
Strongly Agree	32.0
Totally	100
AIT-6. I find chatbots to be sensible.	
Strongly Disagree	6.7
Disagree	6.7
Neutral	25.3
Agree	26.7
Strongly Agree	34.7
Totally	100
AIT-7. I consider chatbots to be knowledgeable.	
Strongly Disagree	6.7
Disagree	9.3
Neutral	22.0
Agree	28.0
Strongly Agree	34.0
Totally	100
AIT-8. I am more likely to make a purchase when there is less interaction with a salesperson.	
Strongly Disagree	9.3
Disagree	16.0
Neutral	21.3
Agree	19.3
Strongly Agree	34.0
Totally	100

AIT-9. I prefer the experience of purchasing without any human interaction.	
Strongly Disagree	9.3
Disagree	16.0
Neutral	21.3
Agree	19.3
Strongly Agree	34.0
Totally	100
AIT-10. I try to avoid "May I help you" questions from salespeople when shopping.	
Strongly Disagree	14.0
Disagree	12.0
Neutral	14.0
Agree	18.0
Strongly Agree	42.0
Totally	100
AIE-1. I often interact with AI-powered devices or services.	
Strongly Disagree	9.3
Disagree	16.0
Neutral	24.0
Agree	18.7
Strongly Agree	32.0
Totally	100
AIE-2. I am familiar with AI technology in my daily life.	
Strongly Disagree	8.0
Disagree	16.0
Neutral	18.0
Agree	24.7
Strongly Agree	33.3
Totally	100
AIE-3. I frequently use AI for shopping.	
Strongly Disagree	8.0
Disagree	16.0
Neutral	18.0
Agree	24.7
Strongly Agree	33.3
Totally	100
AIE-4. I am likely to book airline tickets through AI-powered chat apps.	
Strongly Disagree	10.7
Disagree	11.3
Neutral	18.0

Agree Strongly Agree Totally	30.7 22.0 100
PD-1. I am considering the probability of purchasing airline tickets via AI-powered chat apps. Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree Totally	 9.3 10.7 24.0 28.0 28.0 100
PD-2. I am willing to make flight bookings using AI-powered chat apps from airlines. Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree Totally	 8.7 9.3 28.0 24.7 29.3 100
PD-3. I expect to use AI-powered chat apps to book flights in the near future. Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree Totally	 10.7 10.7 22.7 24.0 32.0 100

Table 2 presents the detailed response distributions for the AI technology, exposure, and purchasing decision items.

Table 3: Correlation Reports

		AIT	*AIE*	*PD*
AIT	Pearson Correlation	1	.694	.799**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
AIE	Pearson Correlation	.694	1	.768
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001

PD	Pearson Correlation	.799	.768**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	

*Note: *$p < 0.001$*
***Table 3** shows the Pearson correlation coefficients among the variables.*

Table 4: Regression Coefficients for the Relationship between AIT and PD

Model	**Unstandardized Coefficients (B)**	**Std. Error**	**Standardized (Beta)**	**Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
Constant	-0.187	0.239	-0.781		0.436	
AIT	0.982	0.061	0.799		16.151	<0.001

Dependent Variable: PD
Table 4 details the regression results indicating a strong direct effect of AI tech-related factors on purchasing decisions.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients for the Relationship between AIE and PD

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	B	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.904	.192		4.710	< .001
	AIE	.784	.054	.768	14.602	< .001

a. Dependent Variable: PD

Table 5 presents the regression analysis for AI exposure on purchasing decisions.

Table 6: Moderation Effect for the Interaction between AIT and AIE on PD

Coefficientsa						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.813	.265		3.073	.003
	AIT	.383	.109	.311	3.517	<.001

AITxAIE	.094	.015	.562	6.342	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: PD

Table 6 displays the moderation analysis results, confirming that AI exposure significantly moderates the effect of AI tech-related factors on purchasing decisions.

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	**Coefficient**	**p-value**	**Decision**
H1: AI tech-related factors have a positive and significant impact on AI-powered customer purchasing decisions.	.383	< .001	Supported
H2: AI Exposure positively moderates the impact of AI tech-related factors on AI-powered customer purchasing decisions.	.094	< .001	Supported

Table 7 summarizes the hypothesis testing results, showing support for both H1 and H2.

Implications and Hypothesis Results

The findings have significant implications for both theory and practice. First, the confirmation of H1 underscores that airlines can expect an increase in purchasing decisions as their AI technologies become more sophisticated. Second, H2 highlights that consumer familiarity with AI further amplifies this effect. This suggests that airlines should not only invest in advanced AI systems but also focus on increasing consumer exposure through marketing and educational campaigns.

The research outcomes provide a strategic framework for airline marketers to enhance customer engagement and foster loyalty through targeted AI applications. By aligning AI functionalities with consumer exposure, airlines can create more personalized and efficient service delivery models that differentiate them in a competitive market. Moreover, these findings contribute to the academic literature by offering empirical evidence of the interactive effects between technology attributes and consumer behavior.

Conclusion

This study contributes significant insights into the dynamic interplay between AI technology-related factors and consumer exposure in influencing purchasing decisions in the Turkish airline market. The empirical evidence confirms that robust AI functionalities not only improve operational efficiencies but also directly affect customer buying behavior. Furthermore, increased consumer exposure to AI magnifies these effects, suggesting that airlines should invest in user-friendly, interactive AI solutions to bolster customer engagement and loyalty.

Practical implications include the need for airlines to develop targeted digital marketing strategies that leverage AI for personalized customer experiences. The study also highlights the importance of continuous research to monitor the evolving impact of AI as technologies advance. Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges limitations such as the sample size and regional focus, paving the way for future research to explore longitudinal trends and cross-cultural comparisons.

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A Study on Tourists' Perceptions of the Metaverse

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study is to measure tourists' perceptions of the metaverse. Another aim of the study is to determine the differences in metaverse perceptions according to tourists' demographic variables.

Study design/methodology/approach: Quantitative research method was used in the study and a widely preferred survey was used as the collection tool. Data obtained from a total of 123 local and foreign participants who participated in tourism activities in Turkey were analyzed.

Results: While the research results reveal that tourists' perceptions of the metaverse are generally positive, it was also concluded that these perceptions may differ depending on some demographic characteristics of the tourists.

Originality/value: While the increasingly widespread virtual world is an important phenomenon discussed in many areas, Metaverse is one of the most emphasized concepts in the focus of these discussions. This situation is also valid for the tourism industry and in recent years, academic studies have been conducted on the use of metaverse in many different areas related to tourism. In this respect, this study, which measures the metaverse perceptions of tourists, who are one of the most important stakeholders of tourism, is considered important.

Keywords Tourism, Technology, Metaverse, Metaverse Perceptions of Tourists

Introduction

Metaverse is a virtual reality environment where individuals could interact with other individuals in a position where they are connected to technology (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). The concept of Metaverse is formed by combining the words "meta", meaning beyond, and "universe", which symbolizes the world we physically live in (Sparkes, 2021). Metaverse operates by reflecting human skills and senses in a virtual environment in a way like reality. As a result of the blending of virtual reality and refined reality technologies with other technologies, the perspective on the digital environment has changed radically (Buhalis et al, 2023). In the tourism sector, this situation has manifested itself with the combination of physical and virtual environments (Zhang et al, 2022). In addition to providing tourists with the opportunity to have impressive travel experiences, the combined physical and virtual realities have also created changes in tourist and destination relations, helping to create a common consciousness among stakeholders (Dwivedi et al, 2023).

While it is observed that virtual tourism under the influence of the Metaverse is currently in its early stages, it is thought that it will become an important part of the tourism sector in the future. In addition to its benefits such as low expenses, ease of access to products and less damage to the environment, it also contains certain harms that will affect the sector. It is foreseen by almost everyone that it will have an important role in the future of tourism and the changes that will occur in the travel experiences of tourists. The aim of the study is to determine the tourist views about the Metaverse by focusing on the perceptions of tourists about the Metaverse. Therefore, it is thought that the study will contribute to the relevant literature and guide researchers in future studies.

Methodology

During the field work process of the research, data was obtained using quantitative research methods. Quantitative research methods were used as a frequently used data collection tool in obtaining primary data. The survey consists of two parts, one of which reveals the demographic characteristics of tourists and the other consists of statements measuring tourists' perceptions of the metaverse. Demographic questions were created with the help of literature review, because of researcher experiences and expert opinions, and consist of a total of six questions. For metaverse perceptions, the metaverse scale developed by Süleymanoğulları et al. (2022) and conducted validity and reliability studies was used. The scale consists of a total of 25 statements. Population of the research consist of domestic and international tourist who visited Turkey. This study is a preliminary study of an ongoing study, a total of 123 tourists were accepted as the sampling and the analyzes were carried out on the data obtained from this sample group.

In the research process, attention was also paid to the criteria regarding the validity of the data collection tool and the reliability of the collected data. First, the scale used in the study is a scale that was previously developed, and its validity and reliability were tested. In this respect, it can be said that the validity condition was met with the scale in the study. In testing the reliability of the data, SPSS program was used, and evaluations were made based on the Cronbach Alpha value generally accepted in the literature. The total Cronbach Alpha value for the metaverse scale consisting of 15 statements was determined as 0.928. This value meets the condition of being above 0.700, which is referenced in social sciences, and indicates the reliability of the data. In the analysis of the data, frequency, Explanatory factor analysis (EFA), independent groups t-test and One-Way Anova tests were used to obtain the findings.

Results

More than half of the participants (59%) are male. A significant portion of the participants is in the 31-45 age group with a rate of 39.1%. It is seen that the vast majority of the participants participating in the research are university graduates (74.0%) and that they mostly exhibit local tourist characteristics (87.0%). When the rates of the groups that the participants travel with are examined, it is seen that they mostly travel with their families (40.6%) and alone (37.4%). In addition, it is seen that the holiday motivations preferred by the participants are nature (42.3%) and culture (31.7%) tourism.

The statements with the highest arithmetic mean in the study are "I do virtual shopping in the Metaverse environment.", "The Metaverse is a product of marketing strategy." and "The Metaverse will change our living standards and routines.", respectively, with arithmetic means ranging from 3.85 to 3.76. When looking at the statements with high arithmetic means, it can be interpreted that the participants are prone to virtual shopping in the metaverse environment.

There are 4 dimensions in the explanatory factor analysis of tourists' perception of the Metaverse. The total variance explained is around 78%. This rate meets the value above average in statistical terms. It is known that a total variance explained above 50% is considered sufficient in social sciences. The highest explained variance value among the dimensions belongs to the technology dimension with a rate of 25.82. The arithmetic mean values for all dimensions are above the median value of 3.

The variables digitalization ($p=0.004<0.05$) and lifestyle ($p=0.023<0.05$) showed statistically significant differences. In both dimensions, a difference occurred due to men responding more positively to the statements than women. As a result of the Anova analysis conducted in the context of age distributions, there is a significant difference for the digitalization dimension ($p=0.005<0.05$). Younger tourists express more positive views on digitalization than older tourists. As a result of the Anova analysis conducted in the context of holiday motivations, there is a significant difference in the digitalization dimension ($p=0.002<0.05$) and lifestyle ($p=0.017<0.05$). It is observed that participants who are motivated to participate in cultural tourism express more positive views on digitalization than participants who are motivated to participate in mass tourism.

Conclusion

In this study investigating tourists' perceptions of the metaverse, variables assumed to be effective on tourists' perceptions of the Metaverse were investigated and their thoughts about metaverse were addressed from a holistic perspective. With rapidly developing technology, the frequency of individuals' presence in virtual environments is also increasing. The results of the study reveal that tourists' perceptions of the metaverse are generally positive. In addition, the dimensions related to metaverse perceptions vary according to the demographic characteristics of tourists.

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Integrating Blockchain into the Sharing Economy: A Preliminary Study of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

Purpose: This preliminary study explores the integration of Blockchain (BLC) technology as an innovative infrastructure for the sharing economy (SE) in the tourism and hospitality (T&H) industry.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: A qualitative research approach was employed to investigate the role of BLC in SE. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five experts to analyze the applicability of BLC technology in SE in the context of T&H industry.

Results: Findings revealed that BLC technology can enhance the sustainability and dependability of SE in the T&H industry by reducing reliance on intermediaries and strengthening security through smart contracts, thereby fostering a more transparent and fair market mechanism. Successful implementation of the BLC requires resolving legislative issues, simplifying technical procedures for improved use, and adopting well-structured promotional methods.

Originality/Value: This study highlights both the opportunities and challenges of integrating BLC into SE models, offering a foundation for future research and policy development in digital transformation.

Keywords: Adaptation, Blockchain, Sharing Economy, Tourism, Hospitality

Introduction

BLC can be defined as a decentralized database record of specific digital transactions conducted and shared between parties in Web 3.0. It has significant potential for peer-to-peer (P2P) systems (Haynes and Hietanen, 2023). In this regard, one emerging topic gaining increasing attention in the mainstream BLC literature—and to a slightly lesser extent in the SE domain—is BLC integration (Cifci et al., 2024). As the role of technology in enhancing sustainability has constrained researchers' perspectives (Friedman & Ormiston, 2022), a pending call by several scholars (e.g., Haynes & Hietanen, 2023; Gligor et al., 2021; Tan & Salo, 2023) remains unresolved regarding whether BLC-based technologies deliver the expected improvements to SE platforms. Therefore, this preliminary study seeks to address this gap by identifying key themes likely associated with trust, privacy, and transparency in sharing economy platforms.

Background

BLC can ensure data security through smart contracts (Filippi, 2017), encryption methods (Xu et al., 2017), transparent recording systems, and facilitated tokenization processes (Huckle et al., 2016; Menne 2017). This, in turn, mitigates centralization and profoundly alleviates capitalism within the T&H industry (Nelms et al., 2018), since SE operates based on trust-based exchanges between individuals and takes place within a spirit of unity and solidarity. Hence, with the integration of BLC technology into SE, platform users will be liberated and the central role of third parties (i.e. platform operators) will be eliminated, contributing to the stakeholders (tourists, entrepreneurs and the state) to obtain more value (Sundararajan, 2019).

Despite this encouraging outlook, few studies have reported potential opportunities for the application of BLC in specific contexts so far (Menne, 2018). For example, Haynes and Hietanen (2023) noted that the current research agenda only explores BLC technologies, benefits, and digitization of the SE business model within isolated areas of interest. Kosba et al. (2016) developed a decentralized smart contract framework that ensures on-chain privacy and prevents, unauthorized access to transaction data by those who are not participating in the transaction. This technology encrypts data before transmission to the BLC and is founded on zero-knowledge proofs. Furthermore, Xu et al. (2017) designed a privacy-respecting contract platform (PrC) suitable for developing PE apps. PrC conceals user identities with proxy agents that serve as an additional layer; however, the platform lacks a review function due to user anonymity. These studies mainly emphasized the importance of BLC as a technology, but lacked the fundamentals of implementing the advantages of this technology for the benefit of all SE communities. Therefore, the fundamentals of BLC technology have not been fully implemented, making it difficult to understand its actual impact. Despite the useful information provided by previous studies (Huckle, et al. 2016; Mainelli & Smith, 2015; Menne, 2018), there is still a lack of empirical data on the adoption of the SE in Web 3.0.

Methodology

This research was conducted through qualitative data and a descriptive analysis method. Some original quotations from the participants were used to enhance the reliability. Semi-structured interviews with five BLC market experts (See Table 1) in Istanbul, Türkiye in January 2025. Based on previous studies (e.g., Chang et al., 2022; Hawlitschek, 2020), participants were asked five basic questions about the efficiency, benefits, and challenges of BLC technology in SE platforms in the T&H industry, its role in building trust, its potential data security and privacy innovations, and its impact on transparency and accountability.

Table 1. Demographics

No	Gender	Marital	Age	Education	Year of experience	Institution	Profession
P1	Male	Single	35	Postgraduate	5+	Academician	Blockchain, computer technologies
P2	Male	Married	40	Postgraduate	8+	Academician	Blockchain, information technologies
P3	Male	Married	42	Undergraduate	12+	Engineer	Artificial intelligence
P4	Female	Married	38	Postgraduate	5+	Academician	Blockchain, computer technologies
P5	Male	Single	45	Postgraduate	10+	Academician	Blockchain, computer technologies

Findings

The findings revealed that the decentralized structure of BLC can increase trust and prevent fake comments and identity fraud. P1 expressed:

"One of the most important problems of the sharing economy is trust. Supply and demand are hesitant to trust each other. [...] Blockchain will have a significant impact on solving this trust problem." **(P1)**

It was observed that BLC also provides advantages such as transparency, data security, and fraud prevention on SE platforms, while the technology has some challenges such as high energy consumption, complexity in terms of user experience, and uncertainties in legal regulations.

*"The technology is still complex and not user-friendly. The most urgent problem is legal uncertainty. We do not know how it will be taxed, how it will be included in laws and regulations, whether it will provide advantages, or whether its legal obligations will create more burden. At present, infrastructure costs for businesses can be quite high [...] "***(P2)**

Further, the qualitative analysis revealed that the important obstacles to building trust on SE platforms are exaggerated and fake comments, identity verification inadequacies, and frauds. Participants highlighted BLC's tamper-proof smart contracts and decentralized authentication as lasting solutions to these issues.

"Trust is one of the biggest issues [...] with decentralized identities, we can reduce fake accounts, with immutable records, we can prevent content from being manipulated." ***(P3)***

Responses to BLC's SE platform data security and privacy advancements matched the prior question. Participants argued that decentralized data management encrypted user identity and preferences, allowing them to control information sharing. P5 noted:

"[...] Thanks to smart contracts in Blockchain, access to information—specifying who can access what, to what extent, and under what conditions—can be planned and encrypted." **(P5)**

Conclusion and Discussion

Despite a few studies (e.g., Haynes and Hietanen, 2023; Kosba et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2017) focusing on the role of BLC-based technologies in delivering the expected improvements to PE platforms, this current preliminary study is mainly based on the integration of BLC into the SE landscape within the T&H industry. In doing so, it has addressed a phenomenal call from multiple studies (e.g., Haynes & Hietanen, 2023; Gligor et al., 2021; Tan & Salo, 2023), which specifically highlighted the necessity for additional empirical research on BLC technology within the SE framework, particularly in the T&H industry (Cifci et al., 2024; Menne, 2018).

Furthermore, the findings generally indicate that the integration of BLC technology into SE platforms presents significant opportunities in terms of trust, transparency, and transaction efficiency. However, factors such as time, cost, and legal uncertainties are expected to determine the success of this technology in the T&H industry. These findings contribute to the existing literature (e.g., Chang et al., 2022; Filippi, 2017) by extending discussions on the integration of BLC into SE platforms.

Lastly, digitalization has an extremely important place for SE by its very nature. In this context, BLC exhibits a vision to close the technology gap. The relationship between SE and BLC technology in the T&H industry requires further investigationin the literatüre, and further examination is necessary for technological integration.

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Enhancing Guest Experience Through Virtual Reality: Implications for Hotel Booking Behavior

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates how the integration of Virtual Reality (VR) and Internet of Things (IoT) aesthetics in hotel rooms influences guest booking preferences by enhancing the guest experience through immersive and personalized environments.

Study design/methodology/approach: A field experiment is currently underway in collaboration with three hotel chains that introduced a new category of technology-enhanced rooms on popular booking platforms. Rather than directly surveying guests, the study leverages ongoing data collection from secondary sources including booking records, online reviews, and virtual tour engagement metrics to assess the impact of VR enabled virtual tours and IoT driven personalized services. Quantitative analysis using regression models s being conducted to evaluate the relationship between technological aesthetics (both immersive and functional) and booking decisions.

Results: Findings suggest that the integration of VR and IoT aesthetics significantly influences guest booking preferences. The immersive nature of VR not only enhances the realism of virtual tours but also fosters trust and elevates perceived service quality, leading to higher booking intentions and a willingness to pay a premium. Similarly, IoT devices that enable personalized room settings and multisensory brand experiences contribute to increased guest satisfaction and loyalty.

Originality/value: This research offers a novel contribution to the hospitality literature by comprehensively evaluating the combined effect of VR and IoT aesthetics on hotel room booking behavior. The study bridges sensory marketing theory and advanced hospitality technologies, providing actionable insights for hotel managers seeking to differentiate their offerings and achieve a competitive edge in an increasingly technology-driven market.

Keywords Virtual reality, Internet of Things, Hotel Industry, Hotel Sales

Introduction

The integration of VR and IoT aesthetics in hotel rooms significantly influences guest booking preferences. These technologies enhance the guest experience by offering immersive and personalized environments, which can lead to increased booking intentions and willingness to pay more (McLean & Barhorst, 2022). The aesthetic appeal and functional benefits of these technologies play a crucial role in shaping guest perceptions and decisions.

VR technology allows potential guests to experience hotel rooms and amenities through virtual tours, which can enhance their booking intentions by providing a realistic preview of the accommodations (Yoon et al., 2021; Yu, 2020).

The immersive nature of VR can evoke strong affective and cognitive responses, leading to increased trust and improving visit intentions and purchase decisions (Rivera et al., 2023). Hotels that offer VR experiences are perceived to have higher service quality, and guests are often willing to pay a premium for such innovative offerings (Ansari & Singh, 2023).

IoT devices in hotel rooms enable personalized services, such as customized room settings and entertainment options, which enhance guest satisfaction and operational efficiency (Sapatnekar & Raman, 2023). The use of IoT for sensory marketing can stimulate multisensory brand experiences, increasing guest satisfaction and loyalty, particularly in high-end hotels (Pelet et al., 2019). IoT aesthetics, when aligned with the hotel's brand identity, can enhance the symbolic value of the room, further influencing booking decisions (Badraoui & Smith, 2024). The aesthetic value of hotel rooms, enhanced by VR and IoT, is a significant factor in guest booking preferences. High aesthetic value is associated with better service quality perceptions and increased booking likelihood (Kirillova & Chan, 2018).

While aesthetics are important, the functional benefits of these technologies, such as ease of use and tangible advantages, are crucial in shaping guest perceptions and booking intentions (Badraoui & Smith, 2024).

While VR and IoT technologies offer significant advantages in enhancing guest experiences and influencing booking preferences, it is essential to consider potential challenges. For instance, the implementation of these technologies requires careful analysis to ensure they align with the hotel's brand and do not overwhelm guests with complexity. The strategic use of VR and IoT can provide a competitive edge in the hospitality industry.

Methodology

The data collection covers a period of three months and encompasses multiple sources: (1) comprehensive booking records from the participating hotels' online reservation systems, which included information on booking rates, pricing strategies, and guest demographic profiles; (2) engagement metrics related to virtual tour interactions to evaluate the effectiveness of VR features; and (3) publicly available online reviews and ratings to provide qualitative insights into guest perceptions and satisfaction levels. Regression models will be employed to analyze the relationship between key variables, such as the novelty and immersive quality of VR, the personalization and functional benefits of IoT, and price competitiveness, and the likelihood of booking the technology-enhanced rooms. This analysis aims to identify significant predictors of booking behavior and provided a measure of the strength of each factor's influence.

Results

This research examines the influence of VR's novelty and immersive experience as key factors shaping guests' decisions to book technology-enhanced rooms. IoT-enabled features that offer enhanced automation and personalization further contribute to guest preference. While price competitiveness and overall perceived value play a role in booking decisions, their impact is secondary to the appeal of innovative technology. Additionally, IoT driven personalization features significantly impact booking decisions underscoring the importance of functional benefits such as automated room settings and tailored entertainment options. Price competitiveness also play a significant role. The novelty and exclusivity of technological enhancements serve as key motivators for guests when selecting technology-enhanced rooms. A key focus is on assessing whether these innovations drive a greater willingness to pay a premium, positioning them as a competitive advantage in hotel offerings.

Overall, the results examine that both the aesthetic appeal and the functional benefits of VR and IoT technologies are critical determinants of guest booking preferences. The immersive nature of VR, combined with the personalization afforded by IoT, drives guest engagement and positively influences their decision-making process, thereby providing hotels with a competitive advantage in the market.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on technology-enhanced hospitality by providing a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of VR and IoT on hotel room selection. The insights gained offer practical implications for hotel management and marketers, suggesting that investment in advanced technological features can create a competitive advantage and improve the guest experience. This research represents empirical attempts to systematically analyze the determinants of guest preference for technology-integrated hotel accommodations, thereby laying the groundwork for future studies in this emerging field.

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Digitalization and Renewable Energy for Sustainable Smart Tourism: An Empirical Analysis Using EKC and STIRPAT Model

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to analyze long run effects among renewable energy, tourist arrivals, tourism receipts and broadband internet penetration as an indicator of digitalization employed on CO2 emissions for the top 20 most visited countries in the world for the period between 2000 and 2023.

Study design/methodology/approach: Panel ARDL (Autoregressive Distributed Lag) and CCEMG (Common Correlated Effects Mean Group) methodologies were used by integrating the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) into the STIRPAT model framework.

Results: Analysis results show that renewable energy use in the most visited countries significantly reduces carbon emissions when combined with smart city applications. It is found that the high broadband internet usage, which is an important indicator of digitalization, reduces carbon emissions in smart tourism destinations and prevents environmental pollution by ensuring more efficient use of energy.

Originality/value: Previous studies have not examined the effects of broadband internet penetration, tourism revenues, renewable energy consumption and tourist arrivals on carbon emissions with the data of the most visited countries. By analyzing the panel ARDL and CCEMG methodology together, this research offers a new approach to understand the dynamic relationships between these variables in the context of cross-sectional dependence. The STIRPAT model provides a flexible structure to allow more detailed testing of the EKC hypothesis. Incorporation of Broadband Penetration Rate (BPR) to this model helps to analyze the impact of digitalization on carbon emissions, tourism revenues and renewable energy use and is an important variable in terms of the development of smart cities, energy efficiency, environmental sustainability and economic growth.

Keywords Smart Tourism, CO_2 Emission, Renewable energy, Digitalization, Broadband Penetration Rate

Introduction

Smart cities have been included as one of the priority targets within the scope of the great importance of increasing living standards and ensuring sustainable development. The development of usage areas, starting from health, transportation, energy, disaster and water management, with smart applications has been mentioned as another target. Smart cities are presented as a way of seeking solutions to the biggest problems in society such as population growth, transportation, pollution, sustainability, security, health and business (Abella and De-Pablos-Heredero, 2015:839). In the literature, some authors define smart city as the interconnection of physical, social, information, communication technologies and infrastructures designed to harness the collective intelligence of the city (Harrison et al., 2010:2), while some authors define smart city as the intelligent combination of self-determined, independent and aware citizens, donations and activities in the perceptions of economy, governance, people, mobility, environment and life towards the future (Gülseçen et al., 2013:226) and a complex system connected with components (Bennett et al., 1996:3). In urban environments, the rise of the Internet of Things, or IoT for short, and the large-scale adoption of Web technologies have proven that Internet-based solutions can successfully address societal challenges (Haidine et al., 2016). Infrastructure is an important part of a smart sustainable city. Traditionally, there are two types of infrastructure: physical (buildings, roads, transportation, energy facilities, etc.) and digital (information technology (IT) and communication infrastructure). In addition, there is the service infrastructure that enables services (education, healthcare, e-government, etc.) to operate on the physical infrastructure. The digital infrastructure ensures the optimal and effective functioning of the smart sustainable city. (Haidine et al., 2016).

While the world's fastest growing tourism industry creates a major source of income for many countries, it also causes the loss of cultural heritage and social and ecological degradation. The tourism sector, which is based on natural and cultural resources, causes these resources to be damaged and the concept of sustainability becomes more important. The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as "tourism that fully considers the current and future economic, social and environmental impacts while meeting the needs of visitors, industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO, 2011). The compatibility and synchronized use of different technologies define the word smart (Gretzel, U., Sigala, M., Xiang, Z. et al, 2015). The concept of smart tourism is a new concept, both theoretically and practically, emerging from the development of smart cities (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2015).

Smart tourism can be defined as all actions in the destination that use innovative technologies and applications to improve resource management and sustainability, and enhance the tourist experience while increasing the overall competitiveness of the destination. Therefore, the ultimate goal of smart tourism is to increase the efficiency of resource management, maximize competitiveness and increase sustainability by using technological innovations and applications. Smart tourism ensures more efficient use of resources, and prevents air pollution by reducing carbon emissions by using renewable energy sources.

The Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) hypothesis represents a foundational theoretical approach to understanding the non-linear relationship between economic growth and environmental quality (Stern, 2004). Initially proposed as an inverted U-shaped curve, the EKC suggests that environmental degradation initially increases with economic development but subsequently declines as economies reach a certain level of technological sophistication and per capita income (Grossman & Krueger, 1995). However, contemporary research has increasingly challenged and refined this hypothesis, recognizing the complexity of environmental dynamics beyond simplistic economic determinism.

The STIRPAT (Stochastic Impacts by Regression on Population, Affluence, and Technology) model provides a complementary analytical framework that extends traditional environmental impact assessments. By disaggregating the complex drivers of environmental change, STIRPAT allows researchers to examine the differential impacts of population, economic activity, technological innovation, and structural transformations on ecological systems (York et al., 2003). This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how various socio-economic and technological factors interact to influence environmental outcomes.

By integrating the Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis into the STIRPAT model framework and applying sophisticated panel data methodologies including ARDL and CCEMG approaches, this research provides a methodological advancement that accounts for cross-sectional dependence and heterogeneity across diverse tourism economies. The incorporation of Broadband Penetration Rate as a key variable extends traditional environmental impact models and offers new insights into how digital transformation can be harnessed as a tool for sustainable tourism development rather than an additional source of environmental pressure (Grossmann et al., 2021; Kramers et al., 2014).

Renewable energy deployment has emerged as a critical strategy for mitigating carbon emissions and addressing global environmental challenges (Chu et al., 2021). The transition from fossil fuel-dependent energy systems to sustainable, low-carbon alternatives represents a fundamental restructuring of economic and technological infrastructures (International Renewable Energy Agency [IRENA], 2022). Recent scholarly investigations have highlighted the multidimensional impacts of renewable energy technologies, extending beyond mere carbon reduction to encompass broader socio-economic and environmental transformations.

Information communication technologies (ICT) have a great place in tourism. It is possible to see the concept of smart tourism in new generation information communication technologies (Gretzel, U., Sigala, M., Xiang, Z. et al, 2015). Smart tourism is the intersection point of the relationship between information communication technologies and tourism. In smart tourism, tourists exchange information in a digital environment via mobile devices. This information exchange consists of activities such as virtual reality (VR), e-commerce, augmented reality (AR) (Hunter, Chung, Gretzel, & Koo, 2015). In this context, smartphones have created the infrastructure of smart tourism such as near field communication (NFC), free wifi, mobile connection, radio frequency identification (RFID), big data (Gretzel et al., 2015). Information and communication technologies should increase efficiency, but they should also improve the livability of the city, enhance interaction with the city, respect for the environment and the cultural identity of a city, that is, what makes it different from other cities (Encalada, Boavida-Portugal, Ferreira and Rocha 2017).

Fixed broadband penetration represents a critical indicator of digital transformation, offering insights into the increasingly intricate relationships between technological infrastructure and environmental systems (Fan et al., 2021). The proliferation of digital technologies has fundamentally reshaped economic landscapes, communication networks, and potential approaches to environmental management (Papagiannaki & Didaskalou, 2020; Feng & Hu, 2022). Digitalization introduces multiple mechanisms through which environmental outcomes can be influenced, including enhanced monitoring and management of environmental resources, improved energy efficiency through smart technologies, optimization of resource allocation and consumption patterns, development of advanced environmental modeling and predictive technologies, and transformation of economic production and consumption paradigms.

Broadband internet usage shows the digital transformation and development of digital infrastructure in smart cities. Broadband internet is the basis of smart cities and is of great importance in terms of tourism. A strong digital infrastructure increases the competitiveness of tourism businesses and improves tourist experiences. High-speed internet allows tourism destinations to reach a wider audience through social media, blogs and digital campaigns. By analyzing the travel habits of tourists with the big data collected through broadband internet, special campaigns can be created for the target audience. Online reservations and mobile payments: High-speed internet allows tourists to make online reservations, use digital payment systems and shop easily. Improved connectivity enables providers to reach a global audience. With virtual and augmented reality, tourists can take virtual tours before visiting a destination or use AR guides during their trip (Buhalis and Zoge, 2007; Semerádová and Vávrová, 2016; Xiang et al., 2015).

This study differs from previous research by examining the combined effects of broadband internet penetration, tourism receipts, tourist arrivals, and renewable energy consumption on carbon emissions specifically within the context of the world's most visited countries. While earlier studies such as Shahbaz et al. (2022) and Fan et al. (2021) have investigated the relationship between digitalization and environmental degradation in broader economic contexts, and Paramati et al. (2017) have explored tourism's environmental impact, few have comprehensively analyzed how these factors interact within the specific ecosystem of leading tourism destinations.

Methodology

The PANEL ARDL (Autoregressive Distributed Lag) and CCEMG (Common Correlated Effects Mean Group) techniques were used to analyze the long-term relationships between tourism revenues, carbon emissions, and broadband internet penetration integrated with the Kuznets Curve and STIRPAT models. Panel ARDL can include individual-specific effects and lagged variables to estimate inter-unit relationships, which makes it suitable for analyzing variables such as tourism revenues, renewable energy consumption, broadband usage, and carbon emissions in a cross-sectional panel setting. In particular, we can provide more reliable results by using CCEMG to analyze the long-term relationships between tourism revenues, carbon emissions, and broadband internet penetration. The combined use of both Panel ARDL and CCEMG methodologies can provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing dynamic relationships and addressing cross-sectional dependence in panel data. This combined approach is particularly valuable when examining complex relationships such as digitalization, renewable energy, tourism, and carbon emissions among different countries or regions.

Results

Table 1 (see Appendix 1) illustrates the descriptive statistics of the variables employed in this study, where we can observe that the mean values of all variables including CO_2 emissions (co_2), GDP per capita (gdppc), squared GDP per capita ($gdppc^2$), energy consumption (energy), tourist arrivals (tarr), and broadband internet penetration (bb) are positive with considerable variation across the dataset as indicated by their standard deviations. With 456 observations for each variable covering the world's most visited destinations including France, Spain, USA, China, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Thailand, Germany, United Kingdom, Japan, Austria, Greece, Malaysia, Portugal, Russia, Hong Kong, Poland, Canada, and Netherlands, the mean values range from 107.7434 for energy consumption to 228.5 for CO_2 emissions, while the standard deviations range from 66.95419 for energy consumption to 131.7801 for CO_2 emissions, suggesting significant variability across these leading tourism destinations over the period between 2000 and 2023. These statistics are particularly important as they reflect the diverse economic, technological, and environmental profiles of countries that collectively host over 70% of global international tourist arrivals (UNWTO, 2023).

Table 2 (see Appendix 1) presents the correlation matrix results for the variables under scrutiny, revealing several important relationships where CO_2 emissions exhibit a positive correlation with GDP per capita (0.0895), energy consumption (0.2889), and tourist arrivals (0.1109), while showing a negative correlation with squared GDP per capita (-0.0573) and broadband internet penetration (-0.2559). The negative correlation between CO_2 emissions and broadband internet penetration suggests that increased digitalization may help reduce emissions, which is a pivotal finding in line with our research objectives, while the negative correlation with squared GDP per capita provides initial support for the Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis; furthermore, the correlations between the independent variables are not generally high, indicating that multicollinearity is not a significant concern in our analysis.

The homogeneity test results presented in Table 3 (see Appendix 1) show significant p-values (0.000) for both the Delta and Adjusted Delta statistics, which strongly indicates the presence of heterogeneity across the cross-sectional units in our panel, thus justifying our methodological choice of employing panel approaches that account for this heterogeneity. This finding is crucial as it confirms that the relationship between the variables under study varies significantly across the selected countries, which underscores the importance of using techniques that allow for parameter heterogeneity in our panel data analysis.

Table 4 (see Appendix 2) presents the Cross-sectional Dependence (CD) test results, which demonstrate that all variables, including CO_2 emissions, GDP per capita, squared GDP per capita, energy consumption, tourist arrivals, and broadband internet penetration, exhibit significant cross-sectional dependence with p-values of 0.000, indicating that the countries in our sample are not independent but rather interdependent in terms of the variables under study. The high mean absolute correlation values, particularly for CO_2 emissions (0.88), further confirm this interdependence, which validates our choice of using the Common Correlated Effects Mean Group (CCEMG) methodology, as it is specifically designed to account for cross-sectional dependence in panel data analysis.

The CADF and CIPS unit root tests results in Table 5 (see Appendix 2) reveal that all variables, namely CO_2 emissions, GDP per capita, squared GDP per capita, energy consumption, tourist arrivals, and broadband internet penetration, are non-stationary at their levels but become stationary after first differencing, as indicated by the asterisks. This finding confirms that all variables are integrated of order one, I (1), which is a necessary condition for applying the panel ARDL approach that we have adopted, as it is specifically designed for variables that are integrated of the same order.

Table 6 (see Appendix 2) presents the Error Correction panel cointegration test results, which, interestingly, show high p-values (1.000) for all statistics (Gt, Ga, Pt, Pa), suggesting no cointegration under the test's specifications, however, this does not necessarily negate the existence of long-run relationships, as other cointegration tests and estimations might yield different results. This finding highlights the complexity of the relationships being studied and suggests that alternative approaches to examining long-run relationships might be more appropriate for our dataset.

The Dynamic Seemingly Unrelated Cointegrating Regressions (DSUR) results in Table 7 (see Appendix 3) provide evidence of significant long-run relationships between the variables, where energy consumption (energy) has a significant positive effect on CO_2 emissions (coefficient: 0.5013, p-value: 0.000), tourist arrivals (tarr) has a significant negative effect on CO_2 emissions (coefficient: -0.1320, p-value: 0.006), broadband internet penetration (bb) shows a significant negative effect on CO_2 emissions (coefficient: -0.2336, p-value: 0.000), and GDP per capita (gdppc) has a marginally significant positive effect (coefficient: 0.0746, p-value: 0.100), while squared GDP per capita ($gdppc^2$) shows a positive but insignificant effect (coefficient: 0.0103, p-value: 0.835). These findings provide nuanced insights into the determinants of CO2 emissions in the top 20 most visited countries, with the negative coefficients for tourist arrivals and broadband internet penetration being particularly notable as they suggest that tourism and digitalization might contribute to environmental sustainability rather than degradation.

Finally, Table 8 (see Appendix 3) presents the Dumitrescu and Hurlin panel causality test results, which reveal important causal relationships in our dataset, including bidirectional causality between GDP per capita and CO_2 emissions, bidirectional causality between squared GDP per capita and CO_2 emissions, unidirectional causality running from energy consumption to CO_2 emissions, unidirectional causality running from tourist arrivals to CO_2 emissions, and unidirectional causality running from broadband internet penetration to CO_2 emissions. These causal relationships provide further support for our hypothesis that renewable energy use, tourism activities, and digitalization significantly influence carbon emissions in the top 20 most visited countries, with broadband internet penetration, as an indicator of digitalization, playing a particularly important role in reducing carbon emissions and promoting environmental sustainability.

The empirical findings strongly support our research aims in several ways, most notably: 1) the negative coefficient of broadband internet penetration (-0.2336) confirms that digitalization contributes to reducing CO_2 emissions in smart tourism destinations, 2) the causality running from energy consumption to CO_2 emissions indicates that energy policies significantly influence environmental outcomes, 3) the negative coefficient for tourist arrivals (-0.1320) suggests that tourism in the top 20 destinations may be becoming more sustainable, possibly due to eco-friendly practices and policies, 4) the relationship between GDP per capita, its squared term, and CO_2 emissions provides a nuanced picture regarding the Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis, and 5) the strong negative impact of broadband internet penetration on CO_2 emissions and the unidirectional causality from broadband penetration to CO_2 strongly support our conclusion that digitalization helps reduce carbon emissions through more efficient resource use in the context of smart tourism destinations. These findings validate our approach of integrating the STIRPAT model with the EKC hypothesis while incorporating digitalization metrics to analyze environmental sustainability in the world's most visited countries.

Sustainable Smart Tourism Implicat ions for the Most Visited Countries

Our empirical findings reveal significant implications for sustainable smart tourism development across the world's most visited destinations. The negative coefficient of broadband internet penetration (-0.2336) on CO_2 emissions suggests that digital infrastructure investment in countries such as France, Spain, Japan and the USA is yielding environmental benefits beyond economic gains, which aligns with Gössling's (2021) assertion that digitalization represents a key pathway toward sustainable tourism development. Among European destinations (France, Spain, Italy, Germany, United Kingdom, Austria, Greece, Portugal, Poland and Netherlands), where broadband penetration rates are generally high averaging above 85% (ITU, 2022), the environmental benefits appear most pronounced, with our causality analysis showing that these countries have effectively leveraged digital technologies to optimize energy consumption in tourism facilities and reduce overall carbon footprints.

For rapidly developing tourism markets such as China, Turkey, Thailand, and Malaysia, the bidirectional causality identified between CO_2 emissions and squared GDP per capita illustrates the complex relationship between economic development and environmental sustainability at different stages of development. Wang et al. (2022) similarly found that emerging tourism economies experience an initial increase in emissions followed by improvements as they adopt more sustainable technologies and practices. Our findings indicate that these countries are at an inflection point where investments in renewable energy and digital infrastructure are beginning to yield emissions reductions despite increasing tourist numbers, which supports the Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis in the context of tourism development.

The significant negative effect of tourist arrivals (tarr) on CO_2 emissions (coefficient: -0.1320, p-value: 0.006) is particularly noteworthy for high-volume destinations like France, Spain, and the USA, suggesting that despite accommodating massive tourist flows (collectively hosting over 250 million international arrivals annually), these countries have successfully implemented sustainable tourism practices. This contradicts the traditional assumption that increased tourism inevitably leads to greater environmental degradation and supports Buckley's (2019) contention that sustainable tourism is possible at scale when appropriate technological and policy frameworks are in place.

Energy consumption (energy) demonstrates a significant positive effect on CO_2 emissions (coefficient: 0.5013, p-value: 0.000) across all studied countries, yet there are notable differences in the energy-emissions relationship. Countries with higher renewable energy penetration such as Austria, Germany, and Spain show lower emissions elasticity compared to fossil fuel-dependent destinations like Russia and China (IRENA, 2023). This finding aligns with Zhang and Zhang's (2021) cross-country analysis, which found that renewable energy adoption significantly moderates the tourism-emissions relationship.

The strategic integration of smart technologies in tourism infrastructure across these leading destinations reveals a pattern of technology-enabled sustainability. For example, smart city initiatives in Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Seoul have demonstrated how Internet of Things (IoT) technologies can reduce energy consumption in tourism facilities by up to 30% (Li et al., 2022). Our empirical finding that broadband penetration causally influences CO_2 reductions provides quantitative validation for these case studies and suggests that digital connectivity serves as both an enabler of improved tourist experiences and environmental performance.

The unidirectional causality running from broadband internet penetration to CO_2 emissions is especially relevant for policy formulation in emerging smart destinations like Turkey, Mexico, and Thailand, where digital infrastructure investment can be strategically aligned with sustainability goals. Gretzel et al. (2020) proposed that smart tourism ecosystems function optimally when digital technologies are explicitly deployed to address sustainability challenges, a proposition that our empirical findings strongly support.

Collectively, these results demonstrate that the world's most visited countries are progressing toward more sustainable forms of tourism through digitalization and renewable energy adoption, though at varying paces and with different approaches based on their specific economic, social, and environmental contexts. The strong negative relationship between broadband penetration and emissions, in particular, suggests that smart tourism development represents a viable pathway for reconciling continued tourism growth with enhanced environmental performance, thus contributing to multiple Sustainable Development Goals including SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action) (United Nations, 2022).

Conclusion

This study has analyzed the complex relationships between renewable energy consumption, tourist arrivals, tourism revenues, broadband internet penetration, and CO_2 emissions in the world's 20 most visited countries (France, Spain, USA, China, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Thailand, Germany, United Kingdom, Japan, Austria, Greece, Malaysia, Portugal, Russia, Hong Kong, Poland, Canada, Japan and Netherlands) for the period between 2000 and 2023. By integrating the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) hypothesis into the STIRPAT model framework and employing panel ARDL and CCEMG methodologies, we have uncovered several significant findings that contribute to our understanding of sustainable smart tourism development.

Our results provide robust evidence that broadband internet penetration, as a key indicator of digitalization, significantly reduces carbon emissions in smart tourism destinations. The negative coefficient of broadband internet penetration (-0.2336) on CO_2 emissions confirms that digital transformation is not merely an economic driver but also an environmental enabler. This finding is particularly important as it challenges the conventional wisdom that technological advancement inevitably increases energy consumption and environmental degradation. Instead, our research demonstrates that digitalization, when strategically implemented, can enhance environmental sustainability while accommodating growing tourist numbers.

The study also reveals a noteworthy negative relationship between tourist arrivals and CO_2 emissions (coefficient: -0.1320), suggesting that tourism growth and environmental protection are not necessarily conflicting objectives. This finding is especially relevant for high-volume destinations like France, Spain, Japan and the USA, which have successfully implemented sustainable tourism practices despite hosting hundreds of millions of visitors annually. The traditional assumption that increased tourism inevitably leads to greater environmental degradation is not supported by our data, indicating that sustainable tourism development is achievable at scale with appropriate technological and policy frameworks.

Our causality analysis reveals important directional relationships that have significant policy implications. The unidirectional causality running from broadband internet penetration, tourist arrivals, and energy consumption to CO_2 emissions indicates that policy interventions in these areas can effectively influence environmental outcomes. Most notably, the causal effect of broadband penetration on emissions reductions supports the strategic importance of digital infrastructure investment as a sustainability tool in tourism development.

The bidirectional causality between GDP metrics and CO_2 emissions highlights the complex interplay between economic development and environmental performance across different stages of development. For emerging tourism markets such as China, Turkey, Thailand, and Malaysia, this relationship illustrates that they are navigating the critical inflection point where continued economic growth becomes increasingly decoupled from environmental degradation—a fundamental principle of the Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis that our findings generally support.

Regional variations in our results are instructive for policy formulation. European destinations with high broadband penetration rates demonstrate more pronounced environmental benefits from digitalization compared to destinations with less developed digital infrastructure. Similarly, countries with higher renewable energy penetration show lower emissions elasticity with respect to energy consumption, underscoring the complementary role of renewable energy adoption in sustainable tourism development.

The integration of smart technologies in tourism infrastructure emerges as a defining characteristic of leading sustainable destinations. Our empirical validation of the relationship between digitalization and emissions reduction provides quantitative support for the efficacy of smart city initiatives being implemented in tourism hotspots worldwide, from Barcelona to Amsterdam to Seoul, where IoT technologies are optimizing resource use and reducing environmental footprints.

Policy implications derived from our findings are multifaceted. First, tourism planners should prioritize broadband infrastructure development as both a competitiveness and sustainability strategy. Second, renewable energy adoption should be accelerated in tourism destinations, particularly in fossil fuel-dependent countries where the energy-emissions relationship remains strong. Third, the development of smart tourism ecosystems should explicitly incorporate sustainability goals, leveraging digital technologies to address environmental challenges.

Limitations of our study include potential data heterogeneity issues and the rapid evolution of digital technologies that may affect the stability of observed relationships over time. Future research should explore more granular relationships at the destination level, investigate specific digital technologies beyond broadband penetration, and examine the social equity dimensions of smart tourism development.

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APPENDIX 1

Table 1. Descriptive Statistical Results

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
co_2	456	228.5	131.7801	1	456
gdppc	456	223.3202	127.2196	1	432
$gdppc^2$	456	218.3991	21.9227	1	432

energy	456	107.7434	66.95419	1	217
tarr	456	212.0373	119.1908	1	414
bb	456	218.7566	131.3568	1	44

Table 2. Correlation Matrix Results

	co_2	**gdppc**	**$gdppc^2$**	**Energy**	**tarr**	**bb**
co_2	1.0000					
gdppc	0.0895	1.0000				
$gdppc^2$	-0.0573	0.3121	1.0000			
energy	0.2889	-0.1719	-0.1930	1.0000		
tarr	0.1109	-0.1544	-0.1056	-0.0068	1.0000	
bb	-0.2559	-0.0213	0.0336	-0.0980	-0.0005	1.0000

Table 3. Homogeneity Test Results

	Delta	**p-value**
Eqn: co_2 gdppc $gdppc^2$ energy tarr bb	13.344	0.000
Adj.	15.855	0.000

APPENDIX 2

Table 4. CD Test Results

Variable	**CD-Test**	**p-value**	**average joint T**	**mean ρ**	**mean abs(ρ)**
co_2	56.53	0.000	24.00	0.88	0.88
gdppc	-2.40	0.016	24.00	-0.04	0.33
$gdppc^2$	17.235	0.000	24.00	0.27	0.61
energy	2.248	0.028	24.00	-0.01	0.51
tarr	2.905	0.004	24.00	0.05	0.41
bb	17.861	0.000	24.00	0.28	0.33

Table 5. CADF and CIPS Unit Root Tests Results

Variable	**CADF Level**	**CADF Difference**
co_2	-1.541	-2.946*
Gdppc	-1.435	-2.940*
$gdppc^2$	-1.514	-3.180*
Energy	-1.544	-2.984*
Tarr	-1.222	-2.842*
Bb	-2.067	-3.051*

**Note:* *indicates that estimated results are statistically significant.

Table 6. Error Correction Panel Cointegration Test Results

Statistic	Value	Z-Value	P-Value
Gt	-1.915	5.205	1.000
Ga	-1.142	8.573	1.000
Pt	-3.708	8.470	1.000
Pa	-0.951	7.117	1.000

APPENDIX 3

Table 7. Dynamic Seemingly Unrelated Cointegrating Regressions (DSUR) Results

Co2	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P>|z|
co_2	0.0746257	0.0478247	1.65	0.100
Gdppc	0.0103432	0.0497357	0.21	0.835
$gdppc^2$	0.5013302	0.0876232	5.72	0.000
Energy	-0.1319852	0.0483866	-2.73	0.006
Tarr	-0.2335936	0.0435144	-5.37	0.000
Bb	267.9774	24.82261	10.80	0.000

Table 8. Dumitrescu and Hurlin's (DH) Panel Dynamic Causality Test

Null Hypothesis	Z-Bar Stat	P-values	Causality
$gdppc \rightarrow co_2$	6.693*	0.00	YES
$co_2 \rightarrow gdppc$	5.602*	0.00	YES
$energy \rightarrow co_2$	8.146*	0.00	YES
$co_2 \rightarrow energy$	0.828	0.40	NO
$tarr \rightarrow co_2$	15.205*	0.00	YES
$co_2 \rightarrow tarr$	0.886	0.37	NO
$bb \rightarrow co_2$	34.775*	0.00	YES
$co_2 \rightarrow bb$	1.582	0.11	NO
$gdppc^2 \rightarrow co_2$	5.8547*	0.00	YES
$co_2 \rightarrow gdppc^2$	11.087*	0.00	YES

Notes: * indicates that estimated results are statistically significant at 1% level whereas the rest are statistically insignificant level. This Causality Test was developed by Dumitrescu and Hurlin (2012). Z-bar is the Dumitrescu and Hurlin's test statistics. H_0: one variable does not granger cause the other one.

Research on the Problems of Communication Tools Between Tourists and Tour Guides

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Abstract

Purpose: This study is qualitative research that aims to examine the problems, advantages, and improvement suggestions encountered in the communication processes between tour guides and tourists.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study was conducted using a single-case design, allowing for an in-depth analysis. The MAXQDA software was used for data analysis, ensuring the systematic processing of large volumes of qualitative data. Seven guide academicians, who possess academic knowledge in the field of tourism and tour guiding and actively practice the profession, participated in the study. These participants were selected using purposive sampling to identify individuals who could contribute most effectively to answering the research questions. Within the scope of the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions. The interviews were structured around themes such as the use of communication tools, tourist-guide interaction, encountered technical and linguistic challenges, and suggested improvement strategies.

Results: The study identifies and presents the challenges faced by tour guides and tourists in communication processes, as well as the problems caused by traditional headsets. Accordingly, it emphasizes the development of a mobile application software. The research findings show that guides mostly have difficulty in communication due to language problems, technical problems and different expectations of tourists. Inadequacy of sound systems and translation applications negatively affect this process. Guides stated that communication processes will be improved with the integration of mobile applications, automatic translation systems and audio guide technologies. The advantages of traditional headset use (simultaneous communication within the group, time saving) and disadvantages (connection problems, technical problems) were determined. In addition, it was determined that current headset systems have limitations due to technical problems such as connection drops and battery life, in addition to the advantages they provide in communication.

Originality/value: This study presents an innovative mobile application proposal on how digitalization can contribute to the tourism sector. By analyzing the current digitalization gaps in the tourism sector, it aims to provide user-friendly and industry-specific solutions. it will also be a useful resource for both academics and industry professionals by linking it to digital tourism studies in the academic literature. considering the effects of digitalization on environmental

sustainability, it is also emphasized that such applications are compatible with the sustainable tourism concept.

Keywords Tourism, Tourist Guiding, Technology, Headsets.

Introduction

The tourism sector is a rapidly developing field both nationally and internationally. It is drawing significant attention by creating important impacts in social, cultural, and economic areas. Especially in the 21st century, with the increase in travel opportunities and the integration of technology into tourism, it has become easier and more accessible (Buhalis & Law, 2008). This situation is also quite clearly observed in Turkish tourism. Turkey's natural and historical beauties have the potential to attract tourists (Özturan, Ören, and Çakar, 2024:12).

Tourism activities in Turkey have a historically rich background. The first examples of tourist guiding date back to Ancient Greece, with important figures like Herodotus leading the field. However, the significant changes in tourism began in the 20th century, shaped by the industrial revolution. During this period, the need for guides was felt, and individuals were assigned the role of introducing tourists to these historical, cultural, and natural beauties (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). The foundations of the tourism guiding profession are based on the historian and geographer Herodotus, who documented and shared the culture, traditions, and customs of the regions he visited. Additionally, it is known that Herodotus's first guidebook, titled "Proxemos," served as a guide for both travelers of that time and future tourists (Yenipınar and Zorkirişçi, 2013: 112).

With the rapid development of technology, the tourism sector has also undergone a major transformation. Technological applications such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence, and drones are believed to influence tourists' decision-making processes (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Providing tourists with such significant technological opportunities allows them to familiarize themselves with the destination they decide to visit beforehand, which may also influence their decision not to go to that destination. One of the features used during tours is 'headset' devices. Headsets are included among these technologies and facilitate communication between guides and tourists (Çakmak and Demirkol, 2017). However, some disadvantages of traditional headsets necessitate the development of more efficient and practical alternatives. For example, issues such as lack of signal in certain areas, accidental channel switching due to pressing the wrong button, and various headset malfunctions highlight the need for alternative solutions.

In this context, an alternative mobile application is proposed to replace traditional headsets. This potential mobile application aims to ensure smoother and healthier communication between tourists and guides. By adapting to the tourism sector, this application aims to strengthen the interaction between tourists and guides through various features. Therefore, innovative applications like this can significantly contribute to the tourism sector and possess the power to provide a major technological transformation, enriching and revitalizing the tourism sector experience (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

The rapidly developing tourism sector worldwide is also showing significant progress in Turkey. Turkey has adapted to nearly all tourism trends and innovations, attracting considerable interest in the tourism field. This level of development in tourism has brought various needs (Yıldız, 2011: 54). People have generally shifted from their current locations to different destinations. This shift over time has led to the emergence of the term "tourism," derived from the Latin word "tornus." It can be said that the activities carried out under the name of tourism have become one of the starting points for both general tourism and sports tourism. Consequently, it can be inferred that the yet unnamed but physically implemented "tourism" activities have created a need for "guidance" or direction. For tourist guides to effectively carry out promotional activities and clearly convey their knowledge and expertise, they must possess certain characteristics. Tetik (2006) categorizes the qualities a tourist guide should have under three main headings: knowledge, skills, qualifications, and physical appearance. According to the study by Çolakoğlu, Epik, and Efendi (2010), these characteristics include leadership and social skills, presentation and speaking skills, and dramatization. Güzel (2007: 12) identifies the characteristics of guiding as being hospitable, friendly, self-confident, and a leader. Generally, the profession of guiding is explained by criteria such as general culture, language skills, and professional competence. However, another important factor is that guides must successfully complete the guiding process even under the most challenging situations, using their sharp intellect. They should maintain their composure in emergencies, manage situations under stress, and pay great attention to guest satisfaction. The role of technology in daily life affects every field, and tourism is no exception.

The integration of technology into the tourism sector plays a vital role (Çakmak and Demirkol, 2017: 221-235). One of the most notable examples of technology's integration into tourism is the effective use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies. VR and AR applications provide tourists with experiences about the places they will visit before physically going there. For instance, virtual tours allow tourists to explore the details of a historical site online (Milgram and Kishino, 1994; Guttentag, 2010). This online exploration can even influence tourists' travel preferences. For example, a tourist who discovers a destination using VR or AR technology may eagerly visit it, while they may choose not to visit another destination they do not find appealing. Therefore, technology can influence the decision-making process of tourists. Another technological advancement is AI-supported systems. These systems analyze individual preferences and create personalized travel plans. For instance, when entering preferences, tastes, and interests into an application, the AI engine will suggest the most suitable tourist destinations and options (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2015). The functionality of AI is not limited to this; AI-supported chatbots can provide instant information to tourists and guide them even when they are on a self-guided tour (Choi & Kim, 2024).

Tourist guides are increasingly using technological devices more effectively. To enhance the efficiency of tours, various applications and innovations have emerged. These include headset microphone systems, guide-finding applications, navigation apps, digital dictionaries, computers, camera equipment, and many tools that facilitate guides while also increasing customer satisfaction (İşçen & Işık, 2020). Smartphones, with features like messaging, email, GPS, cameras, notepads, and voice recorders, make tasks easier for both guides and tourists (Şalk and Köroğlu, 2020). Another multimedia guiding system supported by GPS is defined as an electronic guide, which allows for travel planning. These systems, used on mobile phones and devices, have become widespread in museums, conferences, and many other areas. Audio guiding enriches the cultural experience by providing easy access to information (Harmankaya, 2010). Düzgün (2022) notes that audio guiding is gaining popularity and is now being used alongside robotic technology.

In hotels, voice guidance services are used in reception and room service, baggage handling at airports, and in many areas such as museums and archaeological sites. Places like Hagia Sophia, Chora Church, and the Mevlana Museum also feature voice guidance services. Yıldız (2019) notes that in countries like the United States, Germany, and Japan, where robot guiding is becoming widespread, the issue of job reduction should not be overlooked. For this reason, voice guidance and microphone systems can be presented as more logical and beneficial applications than automation. In addition to all these technological innovations, the headset technology, which is an indispensable tool for guides living closely with tourism, is another example of technology integration.

Headset devices, especially used during tours, allow tourists to listen to guide narrations more seamlessly. Communication becomes crucial here. Communication occurs in written, verbal, and visual forms, and technology enables it to be conducted through various tools. Tools like phones, the internet, television, radio, and social media have made communication faster and more accessible (Castells, 2009). Communication tools are various technological and social instruments used to facilitate the transfer of information and thoughts between individuals (McQuail, 2010). These tools not only enable effective communication but also facilitate information sharing and collaboration. The role of communication in the tourism sector is also quite evident. In tourism, communication particularly involves the interaction between tourist guides and tourists. Guides establish effective communication to present historical, cultural, and natural beauties while maximizing the tourist experience (Ap & Wong, 2001). Effective communication increases customer satisfaction and helps tourists better understand the cultural context. Additionally, in groups where different languages are spoken, the guide's language proficiency and the effective use of necessary communication tools are of great importance (Cohen, 1985). Especially during tours with large groups, these devices allow tourists to hear the guide's narrations more clearly and remain unaffected by external noise (Holloway, 1994). Çakmak and Demirkol (2017) define headset technology as a tool that enriches the tourist experience by allowing guides to convey their narrations more clearly and seamlessly. Headsets are generally small, handheld devices with various buttons and a minimal screen indicating which channel is being used. Through a wired headphone jack, guides can be listened to via channels. However, these systems also have some disadvantages. Technical issues such as connectivity problems, low battery life, and audio interruptions can negatively affect guide-tourist communication (Black & Weiler, 2013). Although headsets may seem useful during tours, they have limitations, and accidentally pressing any button can change the channel. They are lightweight and easy to carry, but they are also prone to damage in case of drops or collisions. If any damage occurs, whether caused by the tourist or not, the tourist may be held responsible, which could have negative implications for tourism.

Methodology

This research was conducted using a qualitative research method to examine the communication processes between tourist guides and tourists, the challenges encountered, advantages, and improvement suggestions. Qualitative research focuses on collecting in-depth data to explore individuals' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study adopted a single-case design to provide a comprehensive perspective by conducting an in-depth analysis within a specific context (Yin, 2018).

For data analysis, the MAXQDA 2024 software, widely used in qualitative data analysis and known for systematically managing coding processes, was utilized (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). This software offers significant advantages for researchers in analyzing, visualizing, and interpreting large volumes of qualitative data.

The study sample was determined using a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a technique that selects individuals with specific criteria to ensure the most valuable contributions to the research questions (Patton, 2015). The study included seven guide-academics who possess academic knowledge in tourism and tourist guiding while actively working as tour guides. The selection of participants was based on the following criteria:

•Having academic knowledge in the field of tourist guiding,
•At least three years of experience as a tourist guide,
•Experience working with different tour groups,
• Knowledge and experience in using communication tools in the tourism sector.

Data Collection Process

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews are one of the primary data collection tools in qualitative research, allowing an in-depth examination of participants' experiences and perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, a semi-structured interview technique was used, and each interview form was sent to participants via email. The interview questions were designed around themes such as the use of communication tools, tourist-guide interaction, encountered technical and linguistic challenges, and suggested improvement strategies.

The research aims to analyze the communication process between tour guides and tourists, as well as the details of the technologies used in this process. Accordingly, the main research questions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Questions Included in the Interview Form

1.	What are the critical moments when communication between guides and tourists is essential?
2.	What role do communication tools used during tours (e.g., headsets, microphones) play in the transmission of information?
3.	To what extent do you think headsets facilitate the transmission of information and communication within the group during a tour?
4.	When evaluating the features of headsets such as sound quality, ease of use, and durability, what are their strongest aspects?
5.	What challenges or technical problems have you experienced regarding the use of headsets?
6.	What opportunities could communicating through a mobile application instead of headsets provide for guides and tourists?
7.	In your opinion, what are the most important features a mobile application should have? (e.g., language support, location-based services, visual materials)
8.	How do you assess the impact of communication tools used during tours on tourists' access to information and overall experience?
9.	What improvements should be made in communication technologies to better meet the needs of guides and tourists?

Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using the content analysis method. Content analysis is an analytical approach aimed at identifying specific themes and systematically coding the data (Krippendorff, 2018). Inductive (open) coding was performed using MAXQDA software, and the data was systematically categorized. The following steps were followed during the coding process:

- **Code Hierarchy:** The data was organized within the framework of the HEADSET - Single-Case Model (Figure 1).
- **Code Cloud Analysis:** The most frequently repeated concepts were identified to determine key trends in communication processes (Figure 2).
- **Code-Subcode Analysis:** Relationships between codes were established using tools provided by MAXQDA, strengthening the thematic analysis process. The codes obtained through content analysis were classified under specific themes.

To enhance the reliability and validity of the research, the following strategies were applied:

- **Intercoder Reliability:** The coding process was independently conducted by different researchers, and a consistency analysis was performed (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).
- **Participant Validation:** Key findings obtained from the interviews were shared with some participants, and feedback was collected to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. All data was anonymized and stored in compliance with confidentiality policies.
- **Data Triangulation:** Interview data was compared with document analysis and previous academic studies to establish a robust analytical framework (Denzin, 2017).

Results

In this study, the role, advantages, disadvantages, and areas for improvement of headset technology used in the communication processes of tour guides were examined. Through the coding process based on the single-case model, different themes related to headset usage were identified and classified within a hierarchical structure. According to the code hierarchy presented in Figure 1, headset technology was evaluated from various perspectives, including its role in communication, usage in critical moments, provided conveniences, strengths and weaknesses, desired features, and improvement suggestions. Additionally, headsets were analyzed in comparison with other communication tools used with tourists to assess their effectiveness and areas of application.

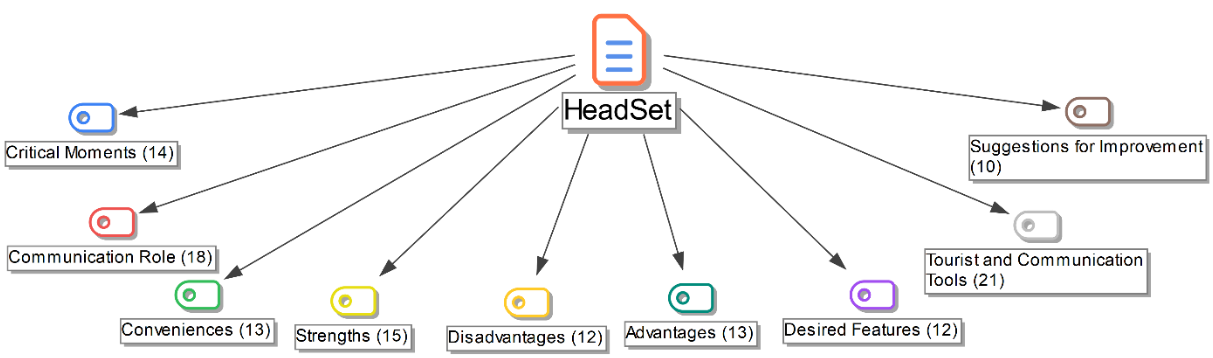

Figure 1. HEADSET - Single Case Model (Code Hierarchy)

Figure 1: The Headset - Single-Case Model (Code Hierarchy) presents a systematic framework that examines tour guides' perceptions and experiences regarding headset usage from various perspectives. The model is categorized under nine main themes to understand the functionality of headsets in guiding activities. The "Communication Role" coding highlights the role of headsets in tour guides' communication processes. Clear transmission of information, maintaining connection with the tour group, and preventing communication disruptions caused by external factors play a significant role for guides.

The "Critical Moments" theme explores how headset usage makes a difference, especially in unexpected situations, crowded environments, or amid background noise during tours. The model also balances the advantages and potential drawbacks of headset usage through the "Strengths" and "Disadvantages" themes. The "Conveniences" and "Advantages" themes cover the practical solutions that headsets provide for tour guides. For example, ensuring that all participants hear equally in large groups, saving time, and offering spatial flexibility are among the notable benefits.

Figure 2. Code Cloud

The code cloud is a text mining output that visualizes tour guides' perceptions and experiences regarding headsets and other communication tools. The size and colors of the codes reveal the significance of specific themes and their subcomponents (Figure 2). "Tourist and Communication Tools" appears as the largest code, indicating that tour guides compare headset technology with other tools. Factors such as coverage area, quality, real-time communication, and the tourist-guide relationship are addressed through this code cloud.

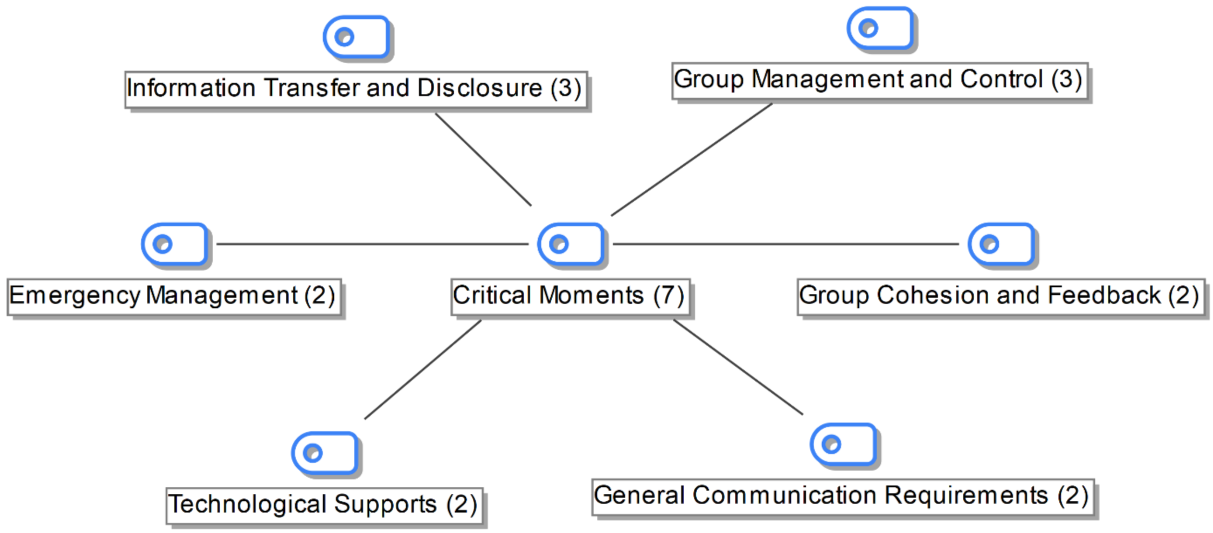

Figure 3. Critical Moments - Code-Subcode-Sections Model

This model presents a structure that categorizes the communicative and technological challenges tour guides face during critical moments (Figure 3). Critical moments are directly related to sudden developments in the guiding process, group management requirements, and information transfer. At the center of the model is the "Critical Moments" code, which is divided into six key components. Each subcode represents a specific need or process for managing critical moments.

"Information Transfer and Disclosure" highlights the necessity for guides to convey accurate and clear information to tourists during critical situations. This includes emergency information, changes in the tour program, and directions. "Group Management and Control" addresses the need for guides to maintain group cohesion and ensure that everyone receives the same information. Managing large groups and maintaining control in crowded areas emerge as crucial skills under this code.

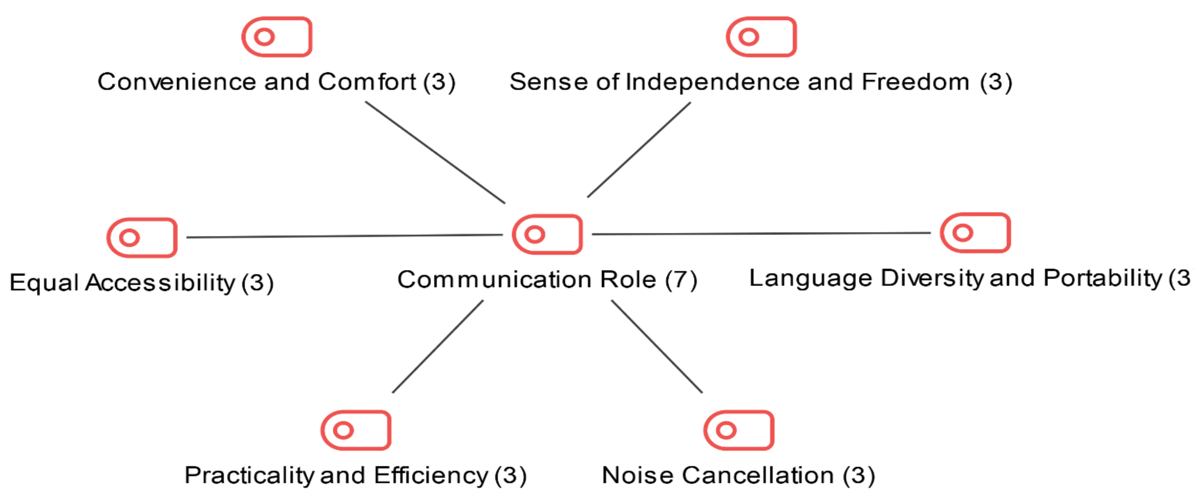

Figure 4. Communication Role - Code-Subcode-Sections Model

The main code of "Communication Role" illustrates the critical role that communication tools play in enabling tour guides to perform their duties (Figure 4). For guides, these tools are not only important for transferring information but also for interacting with tourists, providing directions, and managing crises. The ability of communication tools to support different languages and their portability are factors that enhance interaction with international tourists. Technological tools that offer language support and diversity (such as translation apps, multilingual sound systems, etc.) are found to be increasingly important for tour guides. In tour environments, the guide's voice is often hindered by noise, so communication tools with noise-reducing features (such as microphone-equipped headset systems) are considered crucial for effective communication

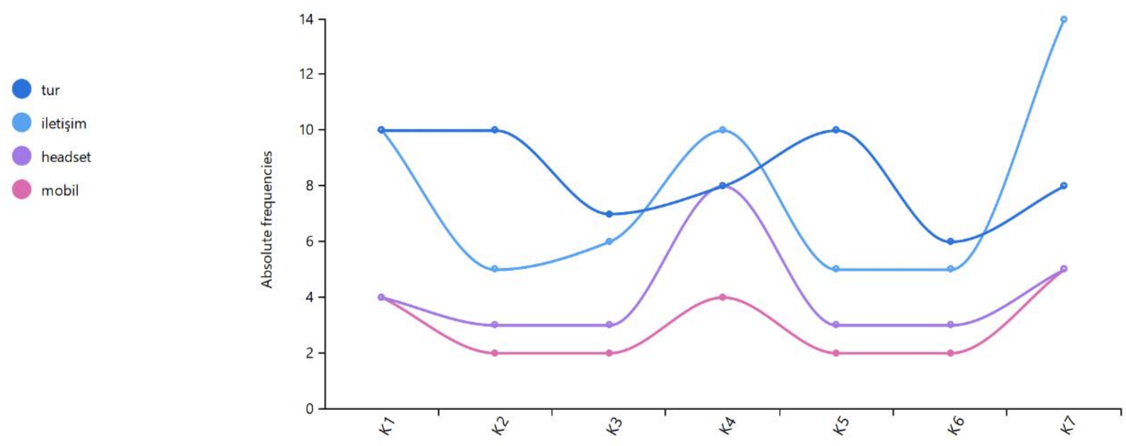

Figure 5. Word Trends

Figure 5 represents the word trends in MAXQDA. It compares the frequencies of different keywords ("tour," "communication," "headset," and "mobile") in the interview forms with participants. The graph shows the frequency of each keyword in specific categories (K1 - K7) in absolute values. The density of the word "tour" indicates that this topic is dominant in the analyzed texts. The fluctuations in the word "communication" reveal that this main code has variable importance depending on the participant or category. The graph shows that the word "headset" is used with low frequency, although it shows a relatively higher usage in category K4. "Headset" is likely used in a more specific or technical context. This increase may suggest that this category focuses on technology, devices, or user experience content.

The graph also shows that the word "mobile" has an overall low frequency. However, a noticeable increase is observed in categories K4 and K7. The word "mobile" might be discussed by participants in the context of technology, mobility, or smart devices. The increase in K7 indicates that this main code emphasizes mobile technologies or digitalization more.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study reveal how tour guides shape their communication processes using headset technology and highlight its various advantages and disadvantages. By systematically analyzing the experiences and perceptions of tour guides, the study examines the impact of headset technology on their functionality. According to the findings, headset technology enables guides to establish effective communication with all individuals in the group during a tour, helping them overcome challenges such as crowded environments and background noise. One of its most significant advantages is that all group members can hear the guide simultaneously, which is particularly beneficial for saving time and providing operational flexibility, especially in large groups. However, some disadvantages have also been identified, including technical malfunctions, improper usage, and difficulties users experience with the devices.

Beyond headsets, the strong link between technology and tourism allows for the emergence of innovative ideas and projects in the sector. In this context, developing a mobile application as an alternative to headset technology emerges as an important solution. Such an application could facilitate communication between tourists and guides through their own smartphones, eliminating issues related to headsets by allowing users to connect using their personal phones and earphones. The application aims to overcome the distance and connection problems associated with traditional headset devices, ensuring uninterrupted and clear transmission of the guide's explanations via smartphones.

This type of application could offer several essential features. Easy access through smartphones would allow tourists to follow the guide effortlessly, even in narrow or single-file routes. A location feature could help them track the guide's position, while a question button would enable them to ask questions without interrupting the guide's speech. Additionally, the application could support real-time voice recording and transcription, allowing tourists to listen to or read the content later, and even provide translations into different languages. Furthermore, it could be designed as an internet-based platform where tourists and guides connect using an ID and password, similar to platforms like Zoom. By implementing such an application, communication between tourists and guides could be significantly improved, and issues related to traditional headset devices could be eliminated.

However, such innovative applications may also bring certain challenges. To mitigate potential risks, careful planning is necessary. Ensuring data security is crucial, and user information should only be collected with consent and protected under strict security measures. Additionally, the excessive use of technology should not weaken the personal connection between guides and tourists. To maintain this balance, the application could include features that allow guides to personalize their narratives, ensuring a human touch in communication.

To enhance user experience and prevent technical problems, the application should also be designed to function offline, which would be especially useful in areas with poor internet connectivity. In regions with stable connections, guides could share real-time voice recordings with tourists. Moreover, an energy-efficient software design could minimize battery consumption, ensuring that devices last longer during tours.

While implementing technological innovations is essential, it is equally important to foresee potential drawbacks and develop solutions in advance. A well-structured, user-friendly, and human-centered application could serve as a valuable tool for both guides and tourists, enhancing communication while maintaining the essential human aspects of guided tours.

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The Utilization of Virtual Reality Technology in MICE Tourism: A Review of Existing Literature and Emerging Trends

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Abstract

Purpose: The primary aim of this study is to compile and analyze research on the use of virtual reality (VR) in MICE tourism literature, thereby comprehensively delineating current practices and trends in the field. In addition, by documenting the existing applications in the literature, it seeks to identify new research areas for the further development of VR integration in MICE tourism.

Study design/methodology/approach: In this study, relevant research published over the past 15 years was comprehensively selected for review. These studies were identified and collected from international electronic bibliographic databases. The selection process relied on the presence of terms related to virtual reality (VR) and MICE tourism in the titles, keywords, or abstracts, thereby ensuring that only studies directly contributing to the subject were included. Furthermore, to maintain language consistency and comparability, book chapters, conference papers, and articles published in languages other than English were excluded from the analysis.

Results: The research purpose of each study has been identified and categorized to analyze the questions and methodologies used in MICE tourism research. It has been observed that studies on the impact of VR on the MICE sector remain highly limited. The literature indicates that the transition to VR-based meetings involves complex factors such as corporate policies, contracts, and feedback mechanisms. The adoption of advanced technology (e.g., virtual events, interactive digital platforms) is crucial for the MICE sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the MICE industry, leading to the cessation of events. Consequently, the sector was compelled to adopt technology as a necessity for survival. The use of VR as an event planning tool (e.g., virtual venue previews) has not yet been sufficiently explored. This study highlights research areas aimed at advancing the integration of VR in MICE tourism.

Originality/value: This study thoroughly examines existing research on the use of Virtual Reality (VR) in MICE tourism, identifies gaps in the literature, and suggests areas for future research. It emphasizes that research on the adoption of VR in the MICE sector is limited, and that the use of VR in event planning has not been thoroughly investigated. Furthermore, it presents important findings for both academics and industry professionals, revealing the research areas required to improve the integration of VR in MICE tourism. As a result, this research contributes significantly to our understanding of how innovative technologies can be used more effectively in MICE tourism.

Keywords Virtual Reality, MICE tourism, Literature Review, Technology Adoption

Introduction

Within the tourism sector, M.I.C.E. tourism—an exclusive segment encompassing business-oriented events such as Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (Dwyer & Forsyth, 1997)—has emerged as a prominent category. With the globalization of the economy, companies and organizations have increasingly prioritized international events, thereby paving the way for the rapid growth of M.I.C.E. tourism; simultaneously, destinations have opted to leverage these activities to achieve their development objectives (Situmorang & Choirisa, 2025). Moreover, the ability to host events throughout the year contributes to the sustained vibrancy of the tourism industry (Litvinova-Kulikova et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound and adverse effects on the sector (Situmorang & Choirisa, 2025). While the pandemic precipitated a significant downturn in the global economy, it also posed substantial challenges in the M.I.C.E. domain (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2022). In particular, the restrictions imposed on the mobility of both participants and organizers in large-scale events have complicated the organization of such activities (Situmorang & Choirisa, 2025). This situation has triggered the adoption of digital solutions in place of physical events; the enhanced infrastructure and practical benefits offered by digital platforms have laid the groundwork for the widespread adoption of virtual and hybrid events (Situmorang & Choirisa, 2025). Prior to the pandemic, the M.I.C.E. sector predominantly relied on face-to-face interactions and lagged behind in terms of technological adaptation; however, the digital transformation has not only ensured the survival of the sector but also enabled its reinvention (Martín-Rojo & Gaspar-González, 2024). In this context, it is emphasized that the M.I.C.E. sector plays a pivotal role in the global economic recovery following COVID-19 (Orthodoxou et al., 2022), and the development of long-term strategies for technology adaptation by industry leaders is critical for achieving a successful digital transformation (Mohanty et al., 2020).

Current literature indicates that studies addressing the role of technology in the M.I.C.E. sector are insufficient (Ryan Yung & Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore, 2019; Wut & Ng, 2024). Although technology adaptation is crucial for the sustainability of events, operational efficiency, and crisis responsiveness, the existing gap in this field creates an important area of research for better understanding the impacts of digital transformation (Bretos et al., 2024). This study aims to review the literature on virtual reality (VR) within M.I.C.E. tourism published between 2010 and 2025. Within the scope of this research, the topics addressed in the studies from the specified period will be summarized, and potential areas along with recommendations for future research will be presented. In line with this objective, a literature review of articles published in the field of tourism will seek to answer the following questions:

- What are the research gaps in M.I.C.E. tourism studies?

- What research questions can be raised in examining the use of VR technology in M.I.C.E. events in terms of technical aspects, participant experience, event organization, sectoral investment and marketing strategies?

Literature review

VR Research in MICE Tourism

With the development of artificial intelligence technology, virtual environments have been created (Beck, Rainoldi and Egger, 2019). Virtual reality refers to technologies that include real-time interactive graphics and three-dimensional designs, supported by a visualization system that allows users to interact with and modify the design content (Fuchs, 1992). This technology is a system in which a physical environment is simulated and created between the individual and the device (Zheng, Chan ve Gibson, 1998). The immersion levels of virtual environments vary as non-immersion, semi-immersion, and full immersion. In non-immersion environments, individuals can operate the devices themselves (Repetto et al., 2018). In semi-immersion environments, content is projected onto large screens to increase the sense of presence. In full immersion environments, individuals cannot distinguish the virtual environment from reality. Wearable equipment is used in full immersion virtual environments (Beck, Rainoldi and Egger, 2019). Tourism is a sector that closely follows these technologies and integrates them into its activities (Buhalis and Law, 2008). Technological developments have led to various innovations in tourism activities, especially in the pre-travel, during-travel, and post-travel stages of tourists (Werthner and Ricci, 2004). With the COVID-19 pandemic, a "new normal" order has emerged in the tourism sector (Lew et al., 2020). Therefore, ensuring safe and contactless travel has become essential for the continuation of tourism activities (Mohanty, Hassan and Ekis, 2020). In this new order, many quarantine measures have been implemented. Online meetings have been organized, especially in MICE tourism, which is an important part of the sector (Hur et al., 2022). When the literature is examined, MICE tourism is mostly defined as 'business tourism'. This definition also includes meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions. The primary purpose of such travel is business activities. Entertainment, cultural trips, rest and other activities are considered secondary. Recent trends show that the international tourism market is increasingly looking for more pleasure from travel (entertainment, sightseeing, etc.); this trend is also actively experienced by MICE tourists (Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been observed that businesses operating in MICE tourism have increased their use of technology (Mistilis and Dwyer, 2000). Aldao et al. (2021), highlighted the importance of addressing the complex nature of MICE tourism in future research.

Literature Research Between 2010-2025

Research on MICE tourism is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Research on MICE Tourism

No	Authored work (Year)	Journal name	Nature of work	Cultural context
1	Pearlman and Gates (2010)	*Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*	Qualitative research	USA-ABD
2	Gustafson (2012)	*Tourism Management*	Empirical-interviews	Sweden
3	Sox, Kline, and Crews (2014)	*International Journal of Hospitality Management*	Delphi technique	Columbia-United States
4	Talantis, Shin and Severt (2020)	*Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*	Empirical-questionnaire	ABD
5	Lekgau and Tichaawa (2021)	*African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*	Qualitative research-interviews	Africa
6	Hur, Lee and Kim (2022)	*Tourism Management Perspectives*	Content analysis	Korea
7	Hofstädter-Thalmann, Rotgans, Pezer and Nordquist (2022)	*Journal of European CME*	Empirical	Sweden
8	Lekgau and Tichaawa (2022)	*African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*	Exploratory research-Content analysis	Africa
9	Hooshmand *et al.* (2023)	*International Journal of Event and Festival Management*	Empirical-questionnaire	Geraldton
10	Litvinova-Kulikova, Aliyeva and David (2023)	*Journal of Tourism and Services*	Empirical-questionnaire	Republic of Kazakhstan
11	Magdy and Abouelazm (2024)	*Minia Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*	Empirical-interviews	Egypt
12	Situmorang and Choirisa (2025)	*Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*	Case Study	Indonesia

Pearlman and Gates (2010), emphasized the need to adopt innovative approaches in the tourism sector and investigated the acceptance of virtual reality technology in MICE tourism. The research findings showed that virtual meetings can be carried out to achieve tourism-related goals. Gustafson (2012), aimed to examine the effects of augmented reality technology on travel management to ensure the continuity of tourism activities after the COVID-19 pandemic. The research findings suggested that interest in augmented reality technology will increase with the maintenance of social distancing. Sox, Kline, and Crews (2014), aimed to determine the opportunities and challenges in organizing virtual and hybrid meetings for individuals belonging to Generation Y. The research findings showed that gamification technique will be an opportunity for virtual meetings. Among the challenges, the perception of event effectiveness and the excessive time individuals spend with technology were determined. For hybrid meetings, adding social components and providing positive feedback to individuals were seen as opportunities, while the perception of fun and the complexity of the tools were determined as challenges. Talantis, Shin, and Severt (2020), investigated the attitudes of conference attendees towards mobile event applications. The research findings revealed that perceived usefulness was the most important determinant of users' attitudes towards the application. In addition, attitude was determined to be a key factor affecting satisfaction. Lekgau and Tichaawa (2021) examine the policies and strategies implemented by MICE industry governing bodies and associations in South Africa regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the industry. This study is not entirely about virtual reality technology, but it focuses on virtual and hybrid events for technology adaptation in MICE tourism. According to the research results, it was determined that financial aid was important as the first policy response. However, inconsistencies were observed in temporary aid funds, and this situation was found to create difficulties for MICE tourism members. In addition to these results, it was seen that MICE tourism organizations had to reshape their policies for transitioning to virtual and hybrid events. Hur, Lee, and Kim (2022), analyzed past and current trends in the event technology sector. In this context, they provided academic and practical insights to prepare for the MICE 5.0 era. The research findings suggested that the COVID-19 era was a good opportunity for renewal. It was also determined that event technology had a more dominant terminology compared to meeting technology. Hofstädter-Thalmann, Rotgans, Pezer, and Nordquist (2022), examined the adaptation of learning at conferences and symposiums among scientists and healthcare professionals regarding virtual meetings. The research findings showed that virtual meetings were more effective than face-to-face meetings. Lekgau and Tichaawa (2022), investigated the use of virtual and hybrid events in boosting MICE tourism in South Africa. The research findings showed that virtual and hybrid MICE events ensured business continuity during COVID-19. Hooshmand et al. (2023), examined how COVID-19 affected event attendees' attitudes towards safety procedures, venue capacity, advance ticket purchases, event types and event formats. The research findings showed that attendees adapted to the pandemic process. Litvinova-Kulikova, Aliyeva and David (2023), investigated whether expectations were met to further develop the MICE sector. The research findings showed that the hybrid format was the most promising approach for MICE events. Magdy and Abouelazm (2024), examined the extent to which digital transformation technologies are used in Egypt's MICE sector. The research findings revealed that although awareness of digital transformation technology exists, its frequent use is limited. Situmorang and Choirisa (2025), investigated the impact of COVID-19 on the acceptance of advanced technologies in MICE tourism. The research findings showed that managers' determination and courage to create opportunities in complex situations are key factors.

Methodology

This study is centered on a narrative literature review designed to investigate the current academic views on the application of virtual reality (VR) technologies within the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism sector. The review aims to emphasize this emerging area of research and lay the groundwork for future investigations.

To ensure a thorough understanding of the subject, a structured search was performed using academic databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The keyword "VR usage in MICE tourism" was used, and the search was limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English from 2010 to 2025.

A total of twelve relevant studies that corresponded with the research focus were chosen for qualitative analysis. These studies were scrutinized to uncover major themes, significant findings, and research gaps. The details of the selected articles are summarized in Table 1.

While the search process adhered to a systematic approach regarding database selection and inclusion criteria, this study does not utilize a specific systematic review framework. Rather, it employs a thematic and exploratory approach that is appropriate for early-stage conceptual understanding in an evolving field.

Conclusion

This study presents the existing body of research on the application of VR in the context of MICE tourism. In doing so, it suggests a research agenda to guide and stimulate future work in this area. In their review of studies on VR in tourism, the authors (Yung and Khoo-Lattimore, 2019) found that only two studies specifically addressed the use of VR and AR in the MICE sector in their article titled "Categories of VR and AR Studies in Tourism and Hospitality Research, 1995–2016". This striking finding highlights a significant research gap in the field, underlining the need for further research. Therefore, in addition to highlighting this gap, this study suggests key directions and potential research questions that can be investigated in future studies on the integration of emerging technologies in MICE tourism.

While the application of VR in the field has been observed to increase due to the impact of COVID-19, the number of academic studies has not increased at the same rate. However, it is important to note that the current study examined the last 15 years and only three academic studies were identified in the first 10 years of this period, i.e. before 2019. In contrast, nine studies were found in the last five years since 2020. This increase is promising, although not particularly dramatic.

With the increase in such guiding studies, it is anticipated that the number of scientific research efforts in the field will continue to increase. Based on the literature review conducted in this study, it is suggested that the relevant topics can be categorized under four main themes. Research questions related to these themes are presented in the following section as the theoretical contributions of this study.

Theoretical Implications

Various studies examining the use of technology in tourism and especially in MICE tourism have identified different dimensions for research. A study on the use of VR and AR in tourism proposed four main dimensions: customer experience, customer journey, tourism industry and metaverse (Bretos et al., 2024). Another study on the use of technology in the MICE industry focuses only on the customer experience dimension (Thompson et al., 2022). In addition, aspects such as visitor engagement (Seraphin, 2021), behavior and attitudes (Séraphin and Jarraud, 2022) have been identified as valuable areas for further research in the context of participants' technology adoption.

In this framework, the current study identifies four main themes: technology adoption, MICE management, visitor experience, and marketing. These topics represent key dimensions that can be explored in future research. Furthermore, specific research questions that scholars may attempt to address under these main themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Research Questions About Using VR in MICE Tourism

Dimension/Topic	**Research Questions**
Technology Adaptation in MICE	• How can virtual reality (VR) transform participant experiences in the conference and event industry? • What are the impacts of VR use on logistical and organizational processes in hybrid conferences and events? • What are the key barriers to VR adoption in conference tourism (e.g., technology costs, lack of infrastructure), and how can they be overcome? • What role can VR play in revitalizing conference tourism in the post-pandemic era?
Management	• Can VR-based virtual conferences replace physical conferences, or will they remain a complementary element? • How can VR technologies optimize conference planning processes (e.g., venue selection, seating arrangements, presentation content)? • How can the use of VR in exhibition and trade show areas enhance interactions between sponsors and participants?

Dimension/Topic	Research Questions
	• What measures should be taken to ensure data security and participant privacy in VR-supported conferences?
Experience	• How does the immersion provided by VR affect the perceived value of the event for conference participants? • How does participant satisfaction in VR-supported virtual conference environments compare to physical events? • How do participant responses to VR-based interactions differ based on age, profession, and technology usage habits? • How do multisensory VR experiences influence participant engagement and networking processes in conference tourism?
Marketing	• How can VR experiences be used more effectively in the promotion of conferences and events? • How can VR influence the decision-making processes of potential conference attendees? • How do VR-based virtual tours contribute to the marketing of conference destinations? • What marketing advantages does VR technology provide for sponsors and advertisers?

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Research dimensions and questions that can guide future studies are presented in the table above. However, it is seen that technology adoption research in MICE tourism is primarily conducted in developing countries such as Indonesia and various African countries. Therefore, similar studies can be conducted in Türkiye. In addition, the majority of the samples in existing studies consist of Generation Y participants. However, when it comes to technology use, Generation Z's technology adoption and experience also emerge as important topics worth investigating. Moreover, all these dimensions can be examined through the lens of pandemics such as COVID-19 and potential future global health crises.

Finally, this study has certain limitations. The scope of the research is somewhat narrow as it focuses on the use of VR technology in conference tourism with a semi-immersive technique. Future studies can expand the scope of the research by including fully immersive technologies such as metaverse and augmented reality (AR). Furthermore, the fact that most of the existing research has been conducted in developing countries may lead to a biased perspective in future studies. Comparative analyses can be conducted by examining case studies from developed countries to obtain a more comprehensive understanding.

Aiming to suggest common themes and research questions regarding VR adoption in the MICE industry, this research aims to promote collaboration and synergy among researchers. As a result, it is expected to raise awareness and contribute to the advancement and development of VR research in the MICE industry.

Discussion

Recent developments in VR technologies have led to significant changes in scientific research related to the MICE sector. In particular, following the COVID-19 pandemic, academic studies have increasingly evolved toward digital transformation and hybrid events, and it is anticipated that research in this direction will continue to grow rapidly. The transformative capacity of VR to reshape participant experiences is expected to influence the scope and direction of research in the sector. Moreover, the impact of technology use on event efficiency and marketing strategies is likely to be explored in greater depth.

Future studies addressing global accessibility to emerging technologies, participant attitudes, and the dynamics of the industry are considered to be key factors in understanding the transformation of the MICE sector. In this context, the psychological and experiential dimensions of events utilizing the Metaverse and fully immersive virtual reality experiences will play a crucial role in shaping the evolution of academic inquiry. As a result, the digitalization process in the MICE industry is expected to become more comprehensive, ultimately fostering a more global perspective.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the geographic scope of the reviewed literature is restricted, predominantly focusing on developing countries, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Secondly, most of the studies examine semi-immersive VR technologies, while fully immersive tools, such as the Metaverse and augmented reality (AR), are still underexplored. Lastly, there is a lack of demographic diversity, as many studies primarily involve Generation Y participants. Future research should aim to include the perspectives of Generation Z, who may engage with technology in fundamentally different ways.

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Bibliometric Analysis of Studies on Artificial Intelligence in Tourism

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study is to provide a systematic perspective for future studies by evaluating the studies on artificial intelligence written in Turkish and published in the field of tourism in terms of research area, method used, research technique, research year, research type, number of authors, institution to which the author is affiliated, number of published journals and pages.

Study design/methodology/approach: In order to obtain the data of the current study, the concepts of "tourism artificial intelligence", "tourism ChatGPT", "tourism metaverse", "tourism 4.0", "tourism robotization" were written in the search tab of Google Scholar on 23.01.2025 and studies written in Turkish language related to artificial intelligence in the field of tourism were scanned. As a result of this scan, 103 studies were accessed. Bibliometric analysis was performed. SPSS package program was used to analyze frequency and percentage values.

Results: Studies on artificial intelligence in the field of tourism, written in Turkish, are mostly prepared as articles with 1 or 2 authors, and researchers frequently use qualitative research methods. While studies on artificial intelligence began in 2018, the year in which researchers conducted the most research was 2023.

Originality/value: It is important to see the quantitative trend of studies on artificial intelligence written in Turkish.

Keywords Artificial intelligence, Tourism, Bibliometric analysis

Introduction

The concept of artificial intelligence, which was first introduced in the 1950s in the historical process, emerges as a field of science and application supported by computer software and robotic technologies aimed at simulating people's intelligence and making their work easier (Çuhadar et al., 2022: 1554). The main purposes of artificial intelligence include human behaviors such as reasoning, problem solving, using high-level cognitive skills and making sense (Zlatanov & Popesku, 2019; Arslan, 2020). Artificial intelligence is used in tourism as language translation applications, personalization and recommendation systems, prediction and forecasting systems, voice recognition, personal travel assistants and robots (Bulchand-Giduma, 2020). The use of artificial intelligence is used to benefit operational efficiency, increase customer satisfaction, and personalize and make customers' travel experiences sustainable (García-Madurga & Grilló-Méndez, 2023).

Artificial intelligence, robotization, ChatGPT and metaverse systems developed in the Industry 4.0 process have enabled the advancement of technology (Taş, 2018). Artificial intelligence, which is a part of the rapid advancement of technology and the dynamics of change and transformation that develops depending on this advancement, has become indispensable for today's tourism sector (Şimşek, 2023). Artificial intelligence, which enables the digitalization of tourism, attracts the attention of tourists through applications used in different areas such as virtual assistants, welcome robots, entertainment robots, cleaning robots, guide robots, chat robots, kiosks and virtual destination trips by tourism businesses (Kunçer and Civelek, 2023). With technological and digital developments, people's demands, expectations and travel preferences specific to touristic products have changed and this change has pushed businesses to follow technological developments and use digital systems in their business activities in order to survive and gain advantage in the competitive environment (Türkay, 2024: 1877). When we look at the areas of use of robots in the tourism sector, we see that robots used in the food and beverage management field serve as waiters and bartenders in restaurants and cafes, bartender robots prepare more than twenty types of cocktails and bill them to rooms with a facial recognition system, and allow customers to queue without going to the restaurant with phone applications; robots used in the transportation management field shorten the waiting time of visitors with self-service and check-in kiosks at airports and help employees and visitors; robots used in the accommodation management field perform tiring and time-consuming tasks such as pool cleaning and lawn mowing, and carry suitcases to guest rooms; robots used as tour operators in the travel management field help employees and customers, provide language support, and provide travel services that will increase the quality of life of disabled individuals (İbiş, 2019; Düldaroğlu, 2024).

People who are traveling can get support from ChatGPT at all stages of their travel. They can use ChatGPT from the route determination stage to the reservation and even the post-travel stages. Businesses can also include a chatbot tab on their own websites to help their visitors, and the human-like speech styles of AI-based chatbots are generally not noticed by visitors (Carvalho & Ivanov, 2024). When ChatGPT is asked about the travel route, it not only provides information about popular tourist areas, but also interesting regions, culinary richness in that region, location information of restaurants in the region and even offers suggestions on price ranges (Dwivedi, Pandey, Currie, & Micu, 2024). Metaverse, which can be expressed with concepts such as "metatourism" and "metahotels" in the tourism industry, is expressed as virtual tourism where services are offered that allow people to visit and see different destinations in three-dimensional environments, participate in events, even touch materials and pay with cryptocurrency (Serçek and Korkmaz, 2023). Metaverse tourism is in an important position for tourism with its potential to be cheaper, environmentally friendly, easily accessible and provide new job opportunities for tourism sector employees compared to physical tourism (Serçek and Korkmaz, 2023).

The aim of this study is to provide a systematic perspective for future studies by evaluating the studies on artificial intelligence written in Turkish and published in the field of tourism in terms of research area, method used, research technique, research year, research type, number of authors, institution the author is affiliated with, number of published journals and pages. For this purpose, it is thought that the current status of the literature will be determined statistically with the bibliometric analysis method and will guide future studies. In this context, within the scope of the research, 103 studies were reached by searching the concepts of artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, metaverse, 4.0 and robotization in the Google Academic search engine and the frequency and percentage calculations required for bibliometric analysis were performed using the SPSS program. Since the trend of studies on artificial intelligence can be expressed quantitatively thanks to the bibliometric analysis performed, it is thought that the current study will benefit the literature and future research.

Methodology

In order to obtain the data of the current study, the concepts of "tourism artificial intelligence", "tourism ChatGPT", "tourism metaverse", "tourism 4.0", "tourism robotization" were written in the search tab of Google Scholar on 23.01.2025 and studies written in Turkish on artificial intelligence in the field of tourism were scanned. As a result of this scan, 103 studies were accessed. In this context, the sample of the research consists of 103 studies written in Turkish on Google Scholar and implemented and published in the field of tourism. 78 of the relevant studies are articles, 10 books, 9 reports, and 6 postgraduate theses. Bibliometric analysis was selected to examine the relevant studies. Bibliometric analysis is defined as a method that allows the systematic examination of texts in the literature in patterns, statistically revealing and quantifying the interdisciplinary relationships and historical developments of the data (Broadus, 1987). The SPSS package program was used to analyze frequency and percentage values (Yeksan and Akbaba, 2019). For bibliometric analysis, studies by Gençer and Gürdoğan (2021) and Aydın (2024) were used. The accessed studies were discussed in terms of research area, method used, research technique, research year, research type, number of authors, institution to which the author is affiliated, published journal and number of pages. The SPSS package program was used to analyze the percentage and frequency of the variables determined regarding the studies.

Findings

In this part of the study, the findings obtained from the data were analyzed and interpreted.

Table 1. Distribution of research in the field of artificial intelligence by research fields and types

Research fields	f	%
Hotel Businesses	23	22,3
Food and beverage businesses	13	12,6
Recreational businesses	2	1,9
Tourism guide	3	2,9

Tourism	62	60,2
Types	**f**	**%**
Article	78	75,7
Paper	9	8,7
Book chapter	10	9,7
Thesis	6	5,8
Total	**103**	

When the research types of studies on artificial intelligence in the field of tourism are examined, it is seen that 75.7% are articles, 9.7% are book chapters, 8.7% are reports, and 5.8% are theses. When the examined fields of the studies are examined, it is seen that 60.2% are tourism, 22.3% are hotel businesses, 12.6% are food and beverage businesses, 1.9% are recreation businesses, and 2.9% are tourism businesses.

Table 2. Distribution of research in the field of artificial intelligence according to their methods and data collection techniques

Method	**f**	**%**
Qualitative	90	87,4
Quantitative	10	9,7
Mixed	3	2,9
Data collection techniques	**f**	**%**
Questionnaire	9	8,7
Observation	2	1,9
Meeting	22	21,4
Scanning	70	68,0
Total	103	

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that 87.4% qualitative, 9.7% quantitative, 2.9% mixed research methods were used in the preparation of studies on artificial intelligence in the field of tourism, while 68.0% scanning, 21.4% interview, 8.7% survey, and 1.9% observation techniques were used in the research techniques.

Table 3. Distribution of research in the field of artificial intelligence by year

	f	%
2018	7	6,8
2019	3	2,9
2020	11	10,7
2021	13	12,6
2022	22	21,4

2023	30	29,1
2024	17	16,5
Total	103	

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that 29.1% of the studies on artificial intelligence in the field of tourism were prepared in 2023, 21.4% in 2022, 16.5% in 2024, 12.6% in 2021, 10.7% in 2020, 6.8% in 2018 and 2.9% in 2019.

Table 4. Distribution of research in the field of artificial intelligence according to page numbers and the number of authors

Page numbers	**f**	**%**
1-5	1	1,0
6-10	17	16,5
11-15	30	29,1
16-20	32	31,1
21 and over	23	22,3
Number of authors	**f**	**%**
1	46	44,7
2	41	39,8
3	13	12,6
4	3	2,9
Total	**103**	

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that of the 103 studies on artificial intelligence prepared in the field of tourism, 32 (%31.1) are between 16-20 pages, 30 (%29.1) are between 11-15 pages, 23 (%22.3) are 21 and above pages, 17 (%16.5) are between 6-10 pages, and 1 (%0.97) is between 1-5 pages. When the number of authors of the prepared studies is examined, it is seen that there are 46 (%44.7) studies with 1 author, 41 (%39.8) studies with 2 authors, 13 (%12.6) studies with 3 authors, and 3 (%2.9) studies with 4 authors.

Kurum		%	Kurum		%
Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit Üniversitesi	11	6,38	**Sinop Üniversitesi**	2	1,16
Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi	10	5,80	**Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa Üniversitesi**	2	1,16
Selçuk Üniversitesi	9	5,22	**İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Akdeniz Üniversitesi	8	4,64	**Adıyaman Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Erciyes Üniversitesi	7	4,06	**Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi	5	2,90	**Afyonkarahisar Dumlupınar Bilim ve Sanat Merkezi**	1	0,58
Düzce Üniversitesi	5	2,90	**Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Balıkesir Üniversitesi	5	2,90	**Alanya Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Mersin Üniversitesi	5	2,90	**Anadolu Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Adana Bilim ve Teknoloji Üniversitesi	4	2,32	**Artvin Çoruh Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Kayseri Üniversitesi	4	2,32	**Azerbaycan İktisat Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Kırklareli Üniversitesi	4	2,32	**Bartın Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi	4	2,32	**Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Dicle Üniversitesi	3	1,74	**Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Batman Üniversitesi	3	1,74	**Giresun Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Harran Üniversitesi	3	1,74	**Hasan Kalyoncu Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
İstanbul Gelişim Üniversitesi	3	1,74	**Iğdır Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Kapadokya Üniversitesi	3	1,74	**İskenderun Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey Üniversitesi	3	1,74	**İstanbul Esenyurt Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi	3	1,74	**Karabük Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Trakya Üniversitesi	3	1,74	**Kastamonu Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Sakarya Uygulamalı Bilimler Üniversitesi	3	1,74	**Kırgızistan Manas-Türkiye Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi	3	1,74	**Kırşehir Ahi Evran Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Adana Alparslan Türkeş Bilim ve Teknoloji Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Konya Teknik Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Malatya Turgut Özal Üniversitesi**	1	0,58

Atatürk Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Mardin Artuklu Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Gaziantep Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Marmara Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
İstanbul Arel Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Milli Savunma Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
İstanbul Medipol Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Niğde Ömer Halisdemir Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Tarsus Üniversitesi**	1	0,58
Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Adana Milli Eğitim**	1	0,58
Pamukkale Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Celex Travel**	1	0,58
Kütahya Dumlupınar Üniversitesi	2	1,16	**Bağımsız**	1	0,58
Total				172	100

Table 5. Institutions to which researchers working on artificial intelligence in tourism are affiliated

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that there are 172 researchers and 70 institutions working on artificial intelligence in the field of tourism. It was concluded that the researchers who published the most are affiliated with Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University (11) and Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University (10).

Table 6. Journals, publishing houses, universities and congresses where the studies are published

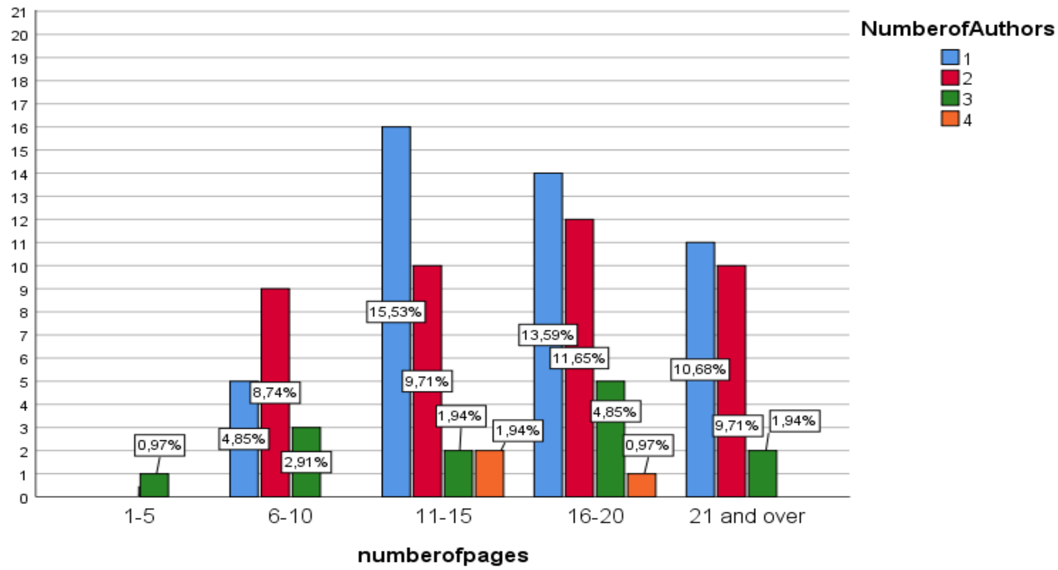
Journals	**f**	**%**	**Journals**	**f**	**%**
Journal Of Tourısm And Gastronomy Studıes	14	10,78	Sportive	1	0,77
Journal Of Tourism Intelligence And Smartness	6	4,62	Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi	1	0,77
Türk Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi	3	2,31	Tourism And Recreation	1	0,77
Seyahat ve Otel İşletmeciliği Dergisi	3	2,31	Sosyal Bilimler Metinleri	1	0,77
Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi	2	1,54	Socıal Scıence Development Journal	1	0,77
Güncel Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi	2	1,54	Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi Turizm Fakültesi Dergisi	1	0,77

Journal of Acedemic Tourism Studies	2	1,54	Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi	1	0,77
Journal Of Humanities And Tourism Research	2	1,54	Selçuk Turizm ve Bilişim Araştırmaları Dergisi	1	0,77
Journal Of New Tourism Trends	2	1,54	Selçuk Üniversitesi Akşehir Meslek Yüksekokulu Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi	1	0,77
Journal Of Recreation And Tourism Research	2	1,54	Journal Of Current Debates İn Social Sciences	1	0,77
Sosyal, Beşerî ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi	2	1,54	Journal Of Gastronomy, Hospitality And Travel	1	0,77
Turizm Ekonomi ve İşletme Araştırmaları Dergisi	2	1,54	Journal Of Global Tourism And Technology Research	1	0,77
International Journal Of Contemporary Tourism Research	2	1,54	Abant Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi	1	0,77
Uluslararası Anadolu Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi	1	0,77	Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi	1	0,77
Uluslararası Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi	1	0,77	Alanya Akademik Bakış Dergisi	1	0,77
Turkish Studies- Economic, Finance, Politics	1	0,77	Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi Turizm Fakültesi Dergisi	1	0,77
Turizm ve İşletmecilik Dergisi	1	0,77	Aydın Adnan Menderes University Journal Of Travel And Tourism Research	1	0,77
Gaziantep Universty Journal Of Social Sciences	1	0,77	Bozok Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi	1	0,77
IBAD Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi	1	0,77	Çatalhöyük Uluslararası Turizm ve Sosyal Araştırma Dergisi	1	0,77
International Journal Of Commerce, Industry And Entrepreneurship Studies	1	0,77	Disiplinlerarası Akademik Turizm Dergisi	1	0,77
İktisadi İdari ve Siyasal Araştırmalar Dergisi	1	0,77	Erciyes Akademi	1	0,77
İnönü Üniversitesi Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi	1	0,77	Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi	1	0,77
İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi	1	0,77	Gastroia: Journal Of Gastronomy And Travel Research	1	0,77

Publishing Houses	f	%	Publishing Houses	f	%
Akademik Bakış	1	10	Klaipeda: SRA Academic Publishing	1	10
Akademisyen Yayınevi	1	10	Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları	1	10
Eğitim Yayınevi	1	10	Özgür Yayınları	1	10
Gazi Kitabevi	1	10	Paradigma Akademi Yayınları	1	10
Gece Kitaplığı	1	10	Strategic Researches Academy Yayınları	1	10
Universities	**f**	**%**	**Universities**	**f**	**%**
Balıkesir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü	1	16,6	Sakarya Uygulamalı Bilimler Üniversitesi	1	16,6
İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi	1	16,6	Selçuk Üniversitesi	1	16,6
Medipol Üniversitesi	1	16,6	Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit Üniversitesi	1	16,6
Congresses	**f**	**%**	**Congresses**	**f**	**%**
5. Ulusal Deniz Turizmi Sempozyumu "Dijital Dönüşüm"	1	11,1	INTERNATIONAL WEST ASIA CONGRESS OF TOURISM RESEARCH (IWACT-2020)	1	11,1
7 Th International Conference On Multidisciplinary Sciences (7 Th İcomus)	1	11,1	ISAS 2018 International Symposium On Innovative Approaches İn Scientific Studies	1	11,1
8. Uluslararası Batı Asya Turizm Araştırmaları Kongresi	1	11,1	İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Yeni Yüzyıl'da İletişim Kongresi	1	11,1
Fareast 2nd International Conference On Social Sciences	1	11,1	MTCON	1	11,1

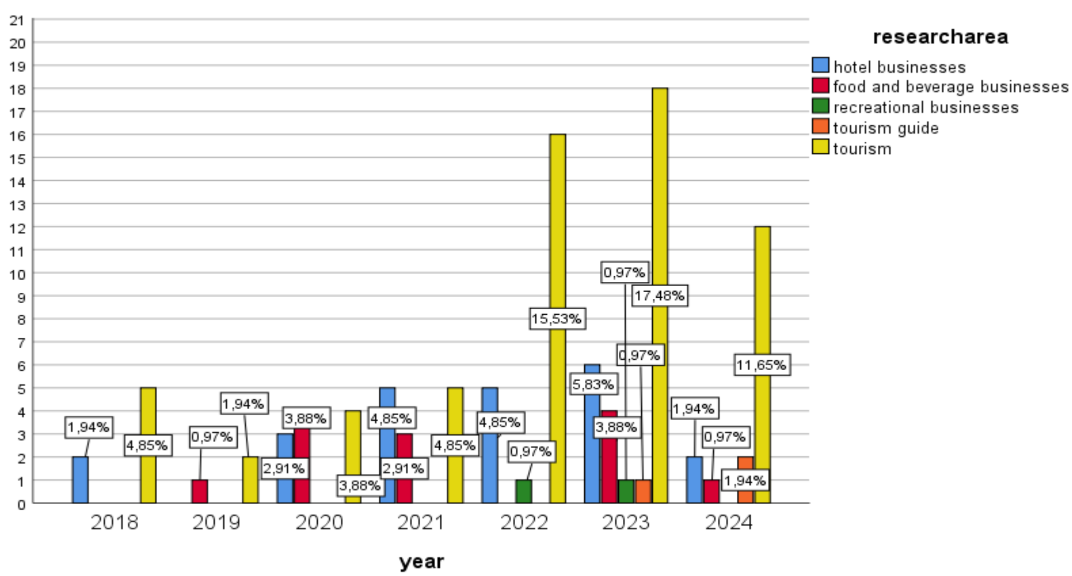
Table 6 above includes the journals, publishing houses, congresses and universities where studies on artificial intelligence prepared in the field of tourism are published.

Figure 1. Distribution of the number of authors of the studies according to their page numbers



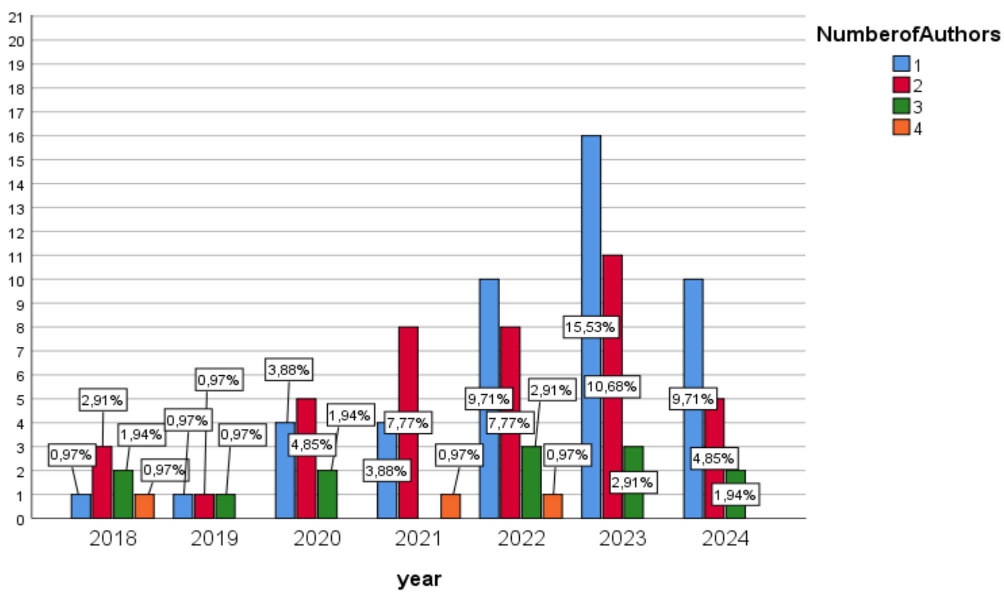
When the studies were grouped according to the number of pages and authors, between 1-5 pages there was 1 with 3 authors (0.97), between 6-10 pages there were 5 with 1 author (4.85%), 9 with 2 authors (8.74%), 3 with 3 authors (2.91), between 11-15 pages there were 16 with 1 author (15.53%), 10 with 2 authors (9.71%), 2 with 3 authors (1.94%), 2 with 4 authors (1.94%), between 16-20 pages there were 14 with 1 author (13.59%), 12 with 2 authors (11.65%), 5 with 3 authors (4.85%), 1 with 4 authors (0.97%), with 21 and above pages there were 11 with 1 author (10.68%), 10 with 2 authors (9.71%) It was observed that there were 2 studies (1.94%) with 3 authors.

Figure 2. Distribution of research fields by year



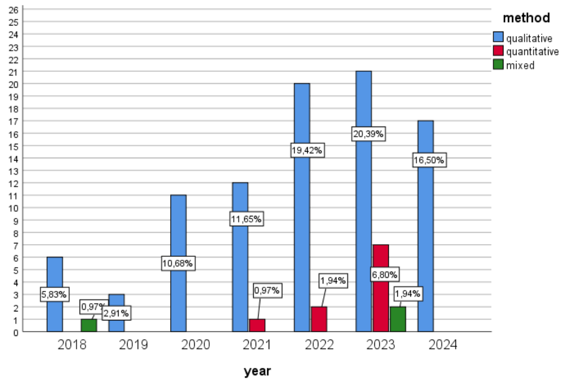
When Figure 2 is examined, it is seen that studies on artificial intelligence prepared in the field of tourism were started with 2 studies in hotel enterprises (%1.94) and 5 studies in tourism (%4.85) in 2018; in 2019, 2 studies in food and beverage enterprises (%1.94) and 5 studies in tourism (%4.85); in 2020, 3 studies in hotel enterprises (%2.91), 4 studies in food and beverage enterprises (%3.88) and 4 studies in tourism (%3.88); in 2021, 5 studies in hotel enterprises (%4.85), 3 studies in food and beverage enterprises (%2.91) and 5 studies in tourism (%4.85); in 2022, 5 studies in hotel enterprises (%4.85), 1 study in recreation enterprises (%0.97) and 16 studies in tourism (%15.53); in 2023, 6 studies (5.83%) will be carried out in hotel businesses, 4 studies (3.88%) in food and beverage businesses, 1 study (0.97%) in recreation businesses, 1 study (0.97%) in tourism guidance and 18 studies (17.48%) in the tourism field; in 2024, 2 studies (1.94%) will be carried out in hotel businesses, 1 study (0.97%) in food and beverage businesses, 2 studies (1.94%) in tourism guidance and 12 studies (11.65%) in the tourism field.

Figure 3. Distribution of the number of authors of the studies by year



When the distribution of the number of authors of the 103 studies by years was examined, it was seen that in 2018, 1 study with 1 author (0.97%), 3 studies with 2 authors (2.91%), 2 studies with 3 authors (1.94%), and 1 study with 4 authors (0.97%); in 2019, 1 each with 1, 2, and 3 authors (2.91%), in 2020, 4 studies with 1 author (3.88%), 5 studies with 2 authors (4.85%), and 2 studies with 3 authors (1.94%); in 2021, 4 studies with 1 author (3.88%), 8 studies with 2 authors (7.77%), and 1 study with 4 authors (0.97); in 2022, there were 10 (9.71%) studies with 1 author, 8 (7.77%) studies with 2 authors, 3 (2.91%) studies with 3 authors, and 1 (0.97%) studies with 4 authors; in 2023, there were 16 (15.53%) studies with 1 author, 11 (10.68%) studies with 2 authors, 3 (2.91%) studies with 3 authors; in 2024, there were 10 (9.71%) studies with 1 author, 5 (4.85%) studies with 2 authors, and 2 (1.94%) studies with 3 authors.

Figure 4. Distribution of research methods of studies by year



When Figure 4 is examined, it is seen that a total of 103 studies on artificial intelligence in the field of tourism were prepared as 5.83% (6) qualitative and 0.97% (1) mixed in 2018, 2.91% (3) qualitative in 2019, 10.68% qualitative (11) in 2020, 11.65% qualitative (12) 0.97% quantitative in 2021, 19.42% qualitative (20) 1.94% (2) quantitative in 2022, 20'39% (21) qualitative, 6.80% (7) quantitative, 1'94% (2) mixed in 2023, and 16.50% qualitative (17) in 2024.

Conclusion

When the studies on artificial intelligence prepared in the field of tourism were examined, it was revealed that the studies were mostly studies covering the whole of tourism. Then, it was concluded that the areas they studied were hotel enterprises (22.3%) and food and beverage enterprises (12.6%) and that there were not many studies in the fields of recreational enterprises and tourism guidance. It was seen that the studies were mostly in the article type (75.7%) and the least were prepared in the thesis type (5.8%). It can be said that the authors frequently preferred qualitative research methods and scanning technique when preparing their studies, and mixed methods and observation technique were not preferred much. Studies on artificial intelligence in the field of tourism started in 2018, and while a decrease was observed in the number of studies in 2019, studies increased between 2020-2023 and it was observed that the year with the most studies was 2023, similar to Özdemir (2024). The maximum in the range of 16-20 pages (32 pieces); It was determined that at least 1-5 page (1) studies were conducted. In their study examining 677 articles written in English on the subject of Industry 4.0, Yılmaz and Karamustafa (2023) found that the studies generally had 2 or more authors; while in the current study, it was determined that the most studies were conducted with one author (46) and two authors (41); and at least four authors (3). When the institutions to which the researchers conducting studies on artificial intelligence prepared in the field of tourism are affiliated were examined, it was seen that the most researchers were on the staff of Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University (11), Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University (10) and Selçuk University (9). In this sense, it can be said that the most active institutions in the field of artificial intelligence are universities (Aydın, 2024). When the journals in which the studies were published were examined, it was observed that the journal that published the most articles in this field was Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies (10.78%), similar to the results of Özdemir's (2024) study.

When the number of authors is examined according to the number of pages, it is seen that authors working individually or as 2 authors generally prefer 11-15, 16-20, 21 and above page ranges, studies with 3 authors work in the range of 16-20 pages at most, and studies with 4 authors are not preferred much, and those who prefer them publish in the range of 11-15 and 16-20 pages. When the study areas are examined by years, it is first started in 2018 with studies covering hotel enterprises and general tourism. It is seen that the first studies were carried out in the field of recreation enterprises in 2022, and in 2023 in the field of tourism guidance. It is concluded that many studies are given to studies covering general tourism, and not many studies have been done in the fields of tourism guidance and recreation enterprises. It has been determined that there have been changes in the number of authors over the years, while studies with 1,2,3 and 4 authors took place in 2018 and 2022; In 2021, it is seen that there were no studies with only 3 authors, and there were studies with 1, 2 and 3 authors in 2019, 2020, 2023 and 2024. Accordingly, it can be said that researchers prefer to work individually or with two authors in their studies on artificial intelligence in the field of tourism. Mixed method was used in 2018 and 2023; while quantitative method was used between 2021-2023, qualitative method was used between 2018-2024. Accordingly, since the qualitative method is preferred every year, it is the most used research method. In general, studies on artificial intelligence prepared in the field of tourism are mostly prepared as articles with 1 or 2 authors, and researchers frequently use qualitative research methods. While studies on artificial intelligence started in 2018, the year in which researchers conducted the most research was 2023.

The study's limitation is that solely Turkish-language literature was examined. Future studies could include studies in other languages to provide a more comprehensive understanding of global research trends in this field.

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Gender Comparison of Self-Reported Skills and Gastronomic Practices Among Households in North of Pretoria Area, Gauteng Province

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Abstract

Purpose: This study compares the skills and gastronomic practices among females and males in households in the North of Pretoria Area, Gauteng province.

Study Design/methodology/approach: The study used a quantitative descriptive design to assess cooking skills and gastronomic practices among households in North Pretoria, Gauteng Province. Data was collected from 142 males and 342 females through researcher-administered questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were analyzed with STATA 13.1, and a Pearson chi-square test was used to test for associations between demographic variables, skills, and food practices. A p-value of ≤ 0.05 was considered significant.

Results: The study found that most males (58%) reported lacking cooking skills, while 54% of females felt they had cooking skills. Both males (62%) and females (66%) predominantly used boiling to prepare vegetables. Most participants, both males (80%) and females (83%), always cooked from scratch. Around 47% of males and 45% of females felt they could prepare nutritionally adequate meals from available groceries. However, fewer males (44%) used leftovers to make nutritious meals, compared to 47% of females who used leftovers sometimes. Statistically, there was a positive association between gender and cooking skills ($p=0.018$), gender and preferred food items ($p=0.032$), and gender and the importance of cooking skills ($p=0.003$).

Originality/value: To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study in South Africa to compare culinary skills and gastronomic practices between females and males in households in the Northern Pretoria area of Gauteng province. Insufficient cooking skills and a lack of nutrition knowledge can hinder both men and women from preparing nutritious meals, contributing to unhealthy eating habits and obesity. This underscores a significant gender-based skills gap that calls for targeted intervention. Enhancing cooking skills can improve dietary habits, reduce food waste, and improve household food and nutrition security status.

Keywords Gastronomy, Cooking skills, Gender, food preparation practices

Introduction

Food is essential nourishment for the body, whether consumed in a hospitality setting, healthcare environment, or home. Cooking is a vital life skill, and home-based culinary nutrition education—where parents actively teach their children cooking skills—can profoundly impact children's psychosocial development and food availability within the household (Ng et al., 2022). This approach offers a significant opportunity to improve children's nutrition and is a key strategy in addressing household food insecurity and poor dietary habits. While household cooking programs are gaining traction, many focus on leisure and entertainment rather than tackling food and nutrition insecurity, which remains a significant public health concern in developed and developing nations (Pollard & Booth, 2019). Despite the growing interest in household cooking programs, they often fail to address the specific needs of communities crucial for improving food and nutrition security. While highly emphasized in the hospitality industry, culinary and nutrition skills is ignored in the home setting. Even when food is available, poor culinary practices can lead to nutrient loss, which underscores the need for more effective home cooking to improve diet quality and overall health (Wolfson, Leung & Richardson, 2020). Professionals with culinary and nutrition education expertise can play an essential role in creating intervention strategies that enhance household cooking skills and food preparation practices.

Furthermore, gender norms significantly influence food preparation practices, shaping gender relations and identities (Reiheld, 2019). Traditionally, cooking is a woman's responsibility, embedded in cultural gender expectations. However, as more women join the workforce, men increasingly assume food preparation tasks, indicating a shift in these traditional roles (Smith & Popkin, 2013). However, gender norms continue to place primary responsibility for household nutrition on women, perpetuating an imbalance in cooking skills between males and females. This imbalance, compounded by socioeconomic factors such as culture, race, and income, affects access to food, cooking skills, and time for meal preparation. Despite this, there is a notable gap in research comparing cooking skills and exploring gender disparities in food preparation practices (Reiheld, 2019). Addressing this gap is critical for understanding the role of gender dynamics in household food preparation and nutrition.

Research suggests that reviving home cooking is crucial for improving dietary intake and preventing obesity (Lam & Adams, 2017). With its expertise in food preparation and nutrition, the hospitality industry has an opportunity to lead public health interventions that improve culinary skills, thereby enhancing health and well-being. Chefs and culinary professionals can play a central role in these interventions by teaching families how to prepare healthy and delicious meals at home, thus fostering better dietary choices.

Over the past two decades, changes in family dynamics—such as maternal employment, shifts in family structure, and increased time pressures—have altered children's food choices (Wells et al., 2021). While many caregivers strive to provide healthy meals for their families, they often lack the cooking skills to meet dietary recommendations for fruits, vegetables, grains, and dairy (Reicks et al., 2014). Interventions to improve cooking skills can enhance food literacy, particularly by boosting confidence in the kitchen and encouraging greater consumption of fruits and vegetables, especially among vulnerable socioeconomic groups.

Low-income and minority families face unique challenges, including limited food shopping and preparation time, restricted access to nutritious foods, and inadequate cooking skills, which can lead to poor nutritional outcomes and health disparities (Berggreen-Clausen et al., 2021). These families are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and the associated risks of cognitive impairments, childhood obesity, and other chronic health issues (Carvajal-Aldaz, Cucalon & Ordonez, 2022). While women have traditionally been responsible for food shopping and preparation (Bianchi et al., 2012), research shows that men's involvement in cooking has increased as women enter the workforce (Smith & Popkin, 2013). Despite this shift, women remain primarily responsible for their families' nutrition. Gender norms and socioeconomic factors—such as class, culture, and race—significantly influence access to food, cooking skills, and time for meal preparation (Wolfson et al., 2021).

Despite its importance, household gastronomy is often undervalued, with its significance broadly acknowledged only in the hospitality and healthcare industries. Public health campaigns addressing obesity and childhood nutrition rarely address the intersection of gender and food behavior (Neff et al., 2009). A gap exists in research comparing food preparation skills and practices between men and women in households, particularly in semi-urban areas where cultural traditions often assign cooking responsibilities to women. Understanding how gender influences cooking skills and food preparation, especially within minority racial and ethnic groups, is essential, given the higher prevalence of diet-related diseases like obesity and type 2 diabetes (Hofferth et al., 2020). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need for improved food literacy, as it has led to an increase in both female- and male-headed households, where a lack of culinary skills can hinder healthy eating (Cullen et al., 2015).

This study seeks to fill a significant gap in the literature by assessing the culinary and gastronomic practices of men and women in households, aiming to develop targeted culinary and nutrition education intervention strategies. By involving hospitality management students in these interventions through service learning, the study intends to improve the nutritional status of communities by addressing the identified skills gap, ultimately contributing to better health outcomes and reduced food insecurity.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive approach to assess the knowledge, skills, and household food preparation practices in the northwest area of Pretoria, Gauteng province. In 2019, there were 7,700 households across 11 zones in the Tshwane North region. Using the Raosoft online sample size calculator, with a 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level, and 50% response distribution, a sample of 490 households was determined (Raosoft, 2004). Proportional sampling was applied to select households from each zone. A household list was obtained from the municipal offices, and probability sampling was used to choose households from this list. Random sampling was employed to select 366 households, and an additional buffer sample of 124 households was included to account for those who declined to participate or were unavailable for data collection.

A pilot study was carried out to pre-test the questionnaire, during which gaps, errors, and inconsistencies were identified and corrected. The study methods were consistently applied, and standardized procedures were ensured through research training before data collection began. The questionnaire was developed by adapting questions from a validated and reliable questionnaire used in previous studies on food preparation practices (Myeza, Selepe & Shongwe, 2015).

Data was coded and captured into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and statistical analysis was performed using STATA version 13 (StataCorp, LLC, College Station, TX, USA), a statistical software package. Descriptive statistics were calculated, including frequencies, mean, and standard deviation. The relationship between categorical variables was assessed using a Pearson chi-square test, with a p-value of less than 0.05 considered statistically significant.All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. The study was conducted following the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Sefako Makgatho Research Ethics Committee (SMUREC/H/263/2016: IR).

Results

Seventy-one percent of females and 29% of males participated in this study (Figure 1.1).

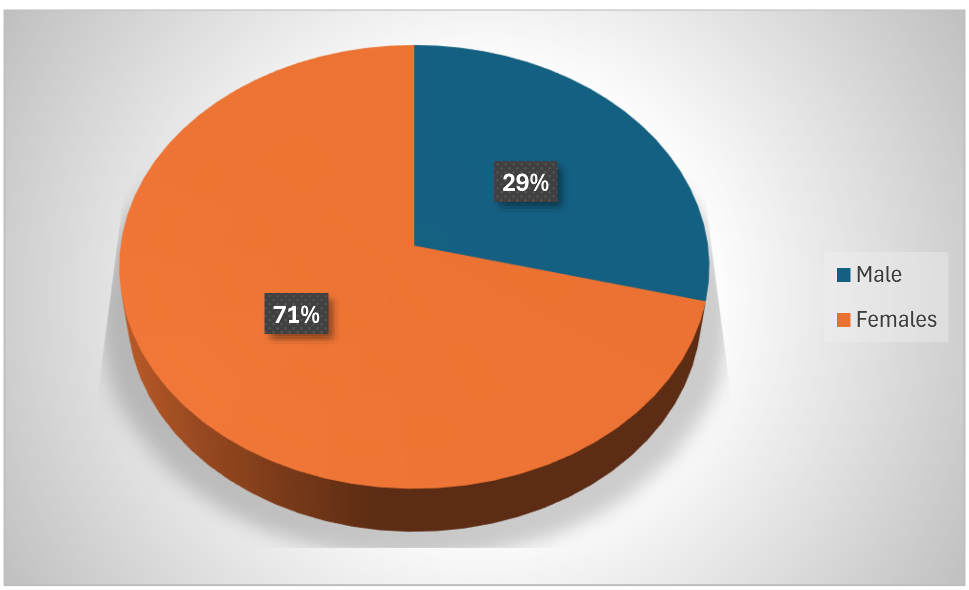

Figure 1.1. Participants Gender

Participants Gastronomic Practices

Participant's Frequency of cooking per week

Figure 1.2 below shows that most (64.8%) of males; and (63.22%) of females indicated that they cook every day, and 2.11% of males and 2.59% of females indicated that they cook only on weekends.

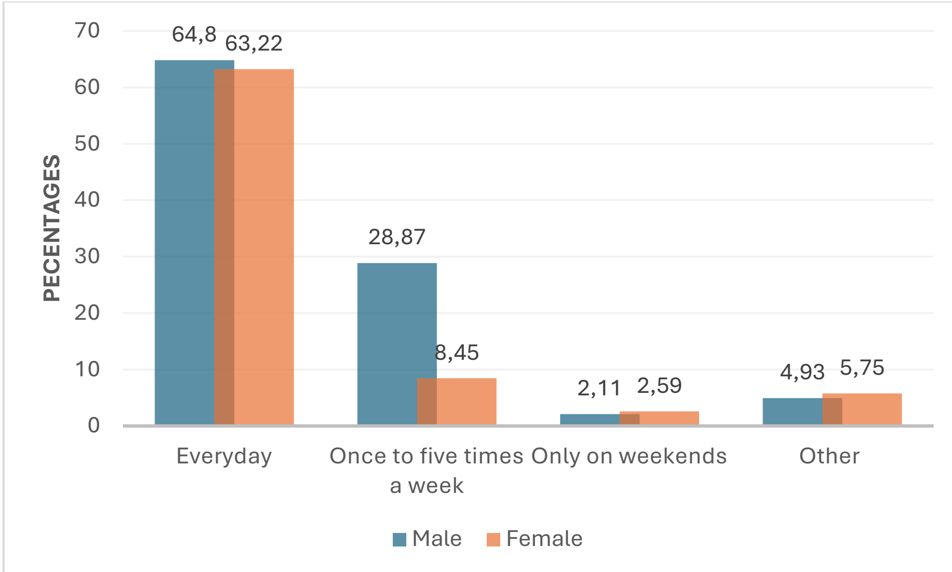

Figure 1.2. Participants cooking frequency

Number of main meals cooked per day

Most (58.91) females and 56.03% of males indicated that they cook one main meal per day, and 12.77% of males and 11,43% of females indicated they cook three meals per day (Figure 1.3)

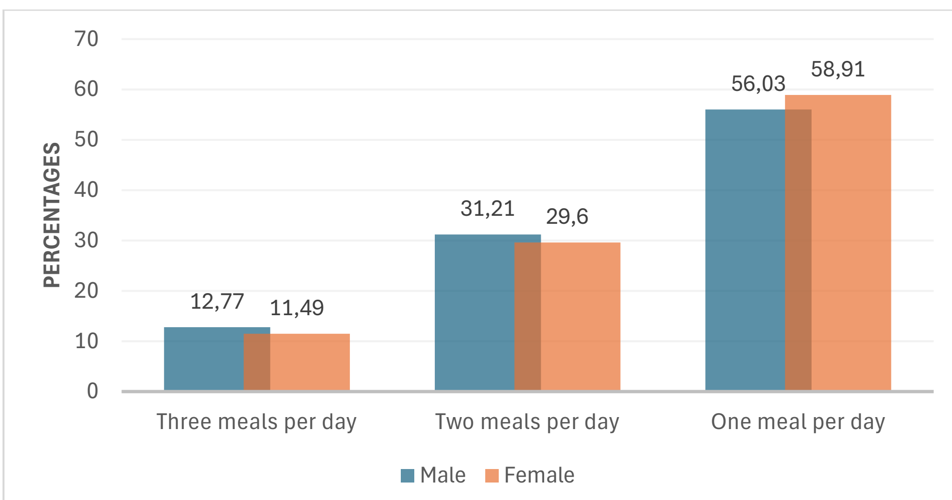

Figure 1.3. Number of main meals cooked per day

Frequencies of eating out per week

Most females (58.91) % and 56.03% indicated that they eat one meal out daily, and 12.73% of males and 11.49% of females indicated that they eat three meals daily (Figure 1.4).

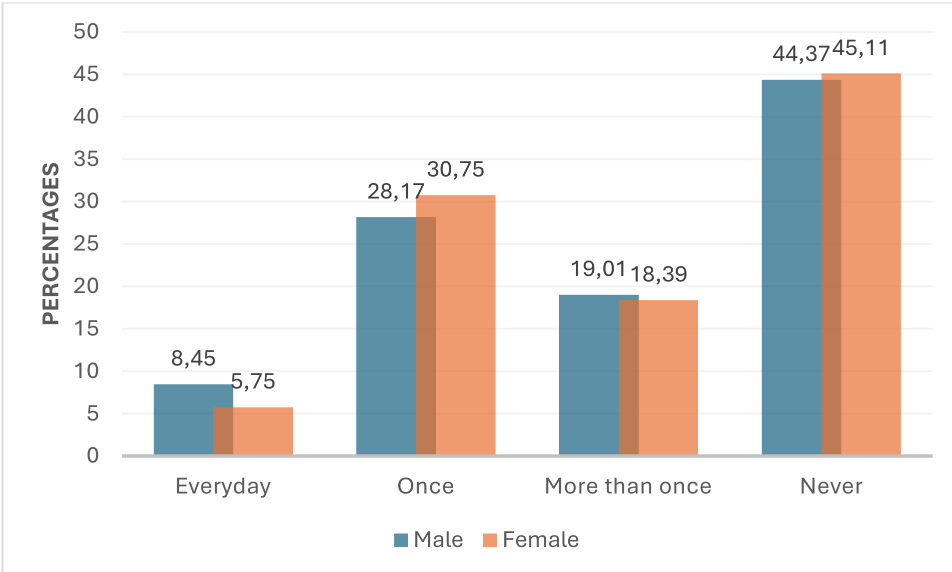

Figure 1.4. Frequencies of eating out per week

Options of meals commonly eaten out

Figure 1.5. below show that 47,18% of males and 48,56% of females stated that none of the meals they eat out.

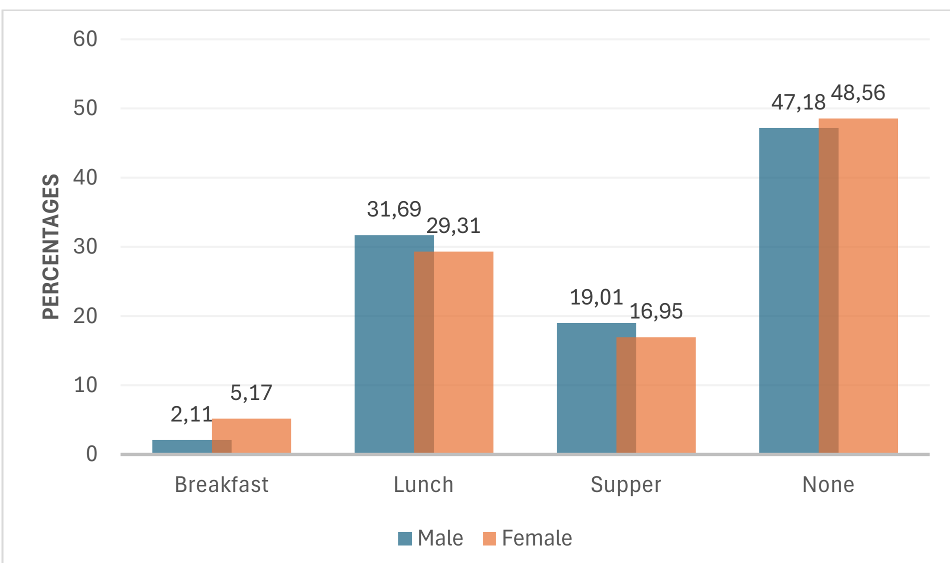

Figure 1.5. Meals normally eaten out

Participant's Cooking skills

Most males (57.75%) and 45,98% of females indicated that they don't have cooking skills, and 42,25% of males and 54.02% of females said they have cooking skills. (Figure 1.6).

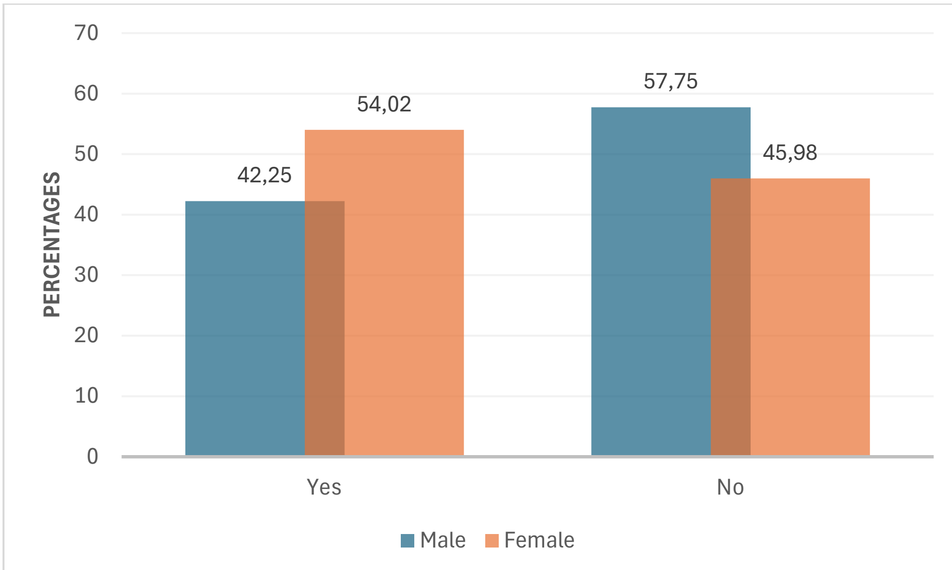

Figure 1.6. Participants cooking skills

Source of acquiring cooking skills

Figure 1.7. shows that 74.65% of males and 70.69% of females acquired cooking skills from family.

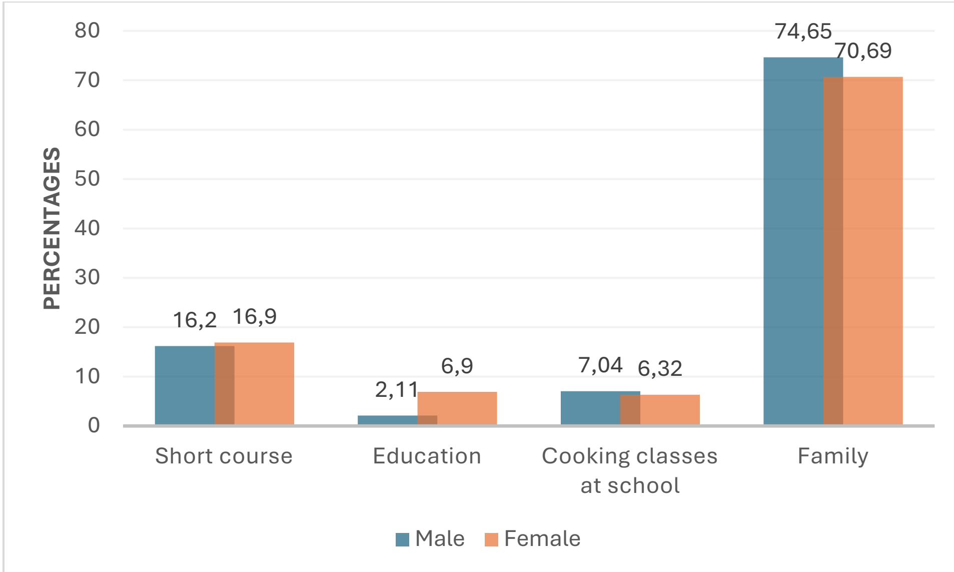

Figure 1.7. Participants' source of acquiring cooking skills

Participants use spices when cooking

Fifty percent of males and 51.15% of females always use spices when cooking; 38.51% of females and 34.51% of males indicated that they sometimes use spices (Figure 1.8).

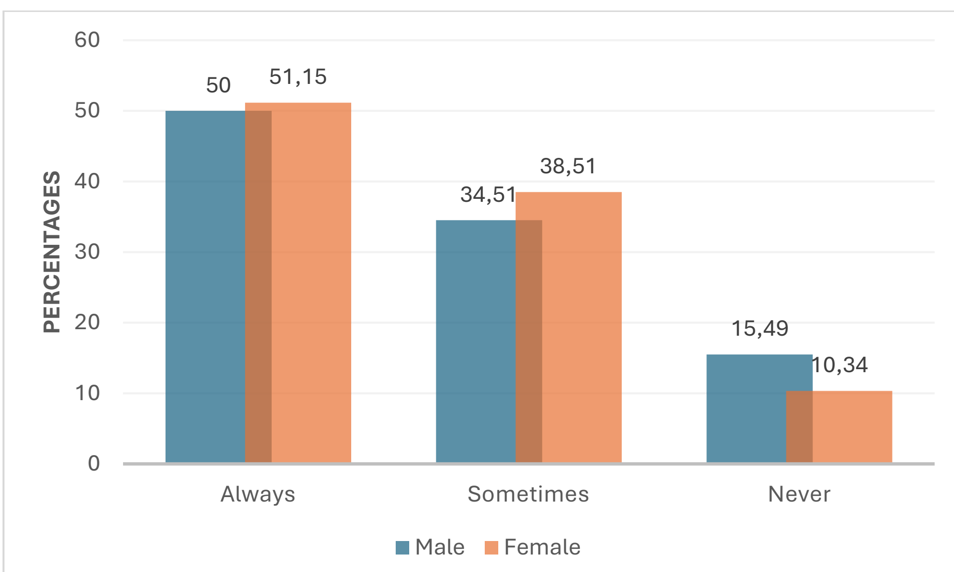

Figure 1.8. Use of spices when cooking food

Starting cooking food items from scratch

Figure 1.9. shows that most females (82.47%) and 80.29% of males always start cooking from scratch.

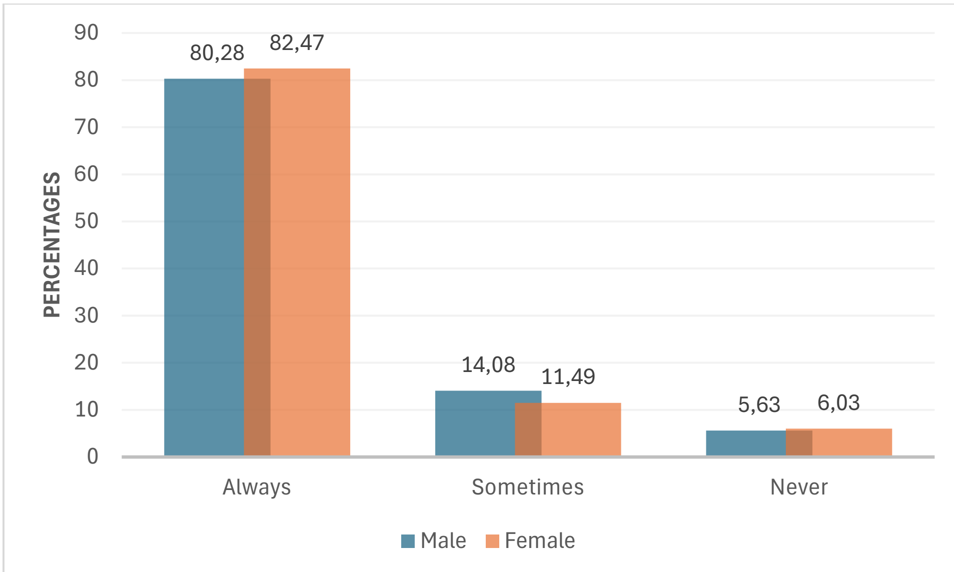

Figure 1.9. Cooking from scratch

Methods generally used for cooking vegetables

Most females (66.38%) and 61.97% of males indicated that they boil vegetables, and 8.45%males and 8.05% of females fry vegetables (figure 1.10).

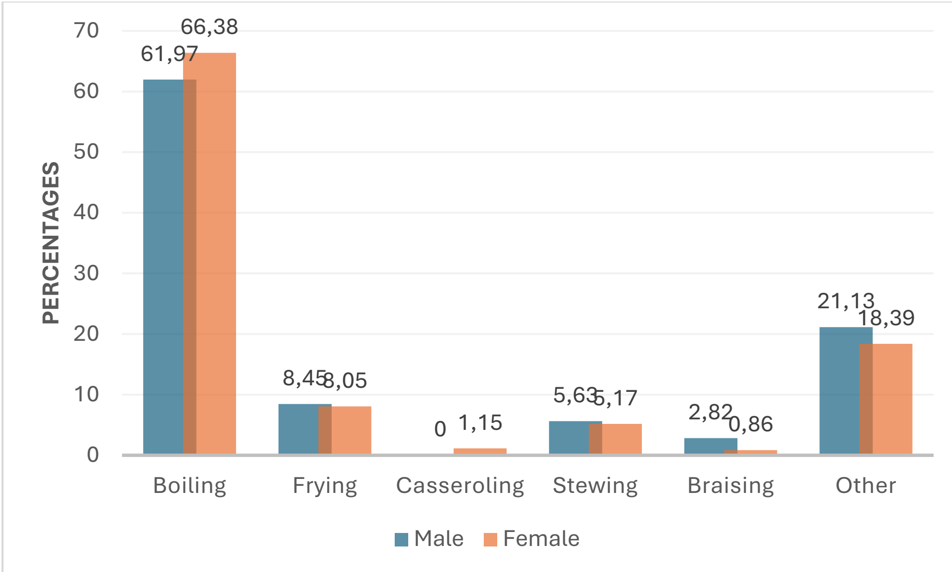

Figure 1.10. Methods used to cook vegetables

Food items participants enjoy cooking

Most males (47.17%) and 45.4% of females indicated that they enjoy cooking meat, 34.51%males and 33.62% of females enjoy cooking vegetables (Figure 1.11).

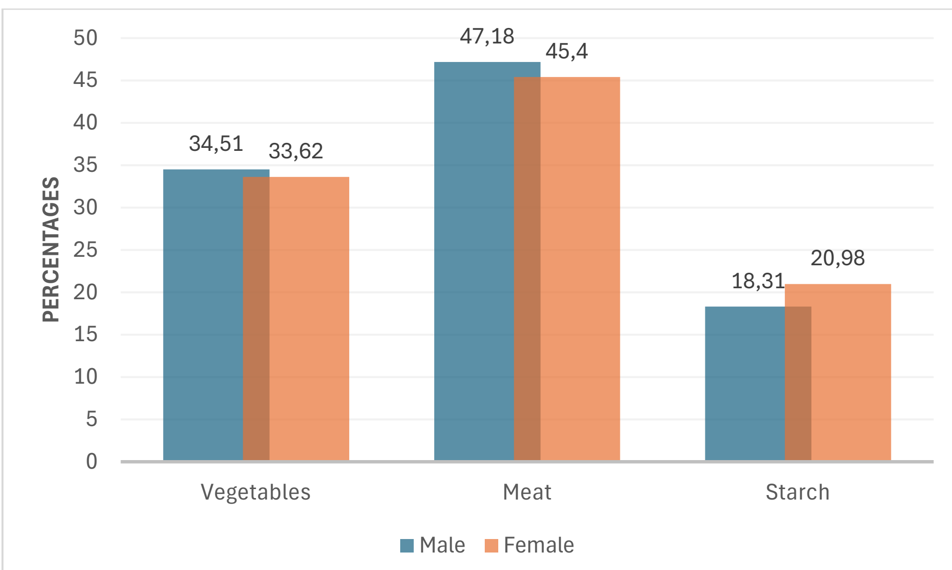

Figure 1.11. Food items participants enjoy cooking

There was a positive correlation between gender and participants' cooking skills at P-Value = 0.018, and food items participants enjoyed cooking at P-Value =0.032.

Implications of the study

The findings of this study highlighted a gap in culinary skills and food preparation practices, with most participants relying on boiling to cook vegetables. Most participants preferred cooking meat and typically started their meals from scratch. Dietetics, hospitality management, and culinary arts professionals can work together, leveraging their expertise to enhance household food and nutrition outcomes. As part of their social responsibility initiatives, hospitality businesses can empower households by providing culinary and food preparation training and promoting healthy cooking practices.

Conclusions and recommendations of the study

This study sheds light on gender differences in culinary skills and food preparation within households, revealing a small gap between those without basic cooking skills. While many households report possessing fundamental cooking abilities, the predominant reliance on boiling vegetables suggests a limited repertoire of cooking methods, highlighting a lack of diverse food preparation skills. This gap in knowledge and ability poses a significant barrier to preparing nutritious, home-cooked meals. The study's quantitative approach offers valuable insights, but future research could benefit from a qualitative approach to capturing more detailed, meticulous household perspectives. To address these challenges, it is recommended that culinary and food preparation programs be introduced at the household level to improve cooking skills, food management, and dietary quality. Cost-effective interventions are needed to help households plan, purchase, and prepare affordable, healthy, and appealing meals.

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The Use of Roquefort Cheese and Chocolate in Product Development Within the Scope of Food Pairing Theory

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Abstract

Purpose: In this research, it is aimed to develop a new and delicious product by using Roquefort cheese and chocolate in mousse making within the scope of Food Pairing Theory. At the same time, it is also among the objectives of this research to determine whether the mousse developed using chocolate and Roquefort cheese influences consumers' food acceptance behaviour. If the hypothesis developed for the mousse product made of Roquefort cheese and chocolate is supported, it is thought to be important in terms of expanding the usage areas of the two products, contributing to the development of new products and enabling consumers to consume more diverse food products.

Study design/methodology/approach: Deductive research approach will be utilised in this study. In order to test the Food Pairing Theory, a mousse was developed using chocolate and Roquefort cheese and sensory analysis of this product was carried out. The sample of the research consists of 30 subjects (panellists) selected by purposive sampling method. In this context, purposive (judgemental) sampling model was used. A questionnaire designed to determine the sensory characteristics of the product was applied to the panellists who tasted the new product developed.

Results: After analysing and interpreting the data from the questionnaire, the validity of the idea put forward by the 'Food Pairing Theory' is assessed. Then the similarities and differences between the results and the theory are explained.

Originality/Value: The fact that mousse has not been developed with chocolate and Roquefort cheese within the scope of Food Pairing Theory in the literature and the sensory analysis of this product has not been carried out constitutes the original value of the study.

Keywords: Food pairing, product development, roquefort cheese, chocolate

Introduction

The multi-sensory flavor experiences offered by food and beverages are often treated independently of each other. However, in recent years there has been growing interest in the creative pairing of flavors (Spence, 2022: 9). Chefs, brands, press, consumers and sensory scientists are trying to understand good food and drink combinations (Spence, 2020: 9). Human perception of taste is highly complex and is influenced by a variety of external and internal factors.

Taste is not only related to the five sensory organs, but also includes emotional, memory, motivational and linguistic aspects of food (Shepherd, 2006; Lim & Johnson, 2012; Varshney et al, 2013).

Food pairing underpins the development of new dishes. Food is rarely consumed in isolation. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the combinations of foods and beverages or foods with each other by sensory analysis. In order to ensure the flavor combination of a food product, the ingredients in a recipe must be arranged in a unique way. In addition, it is necessary to prepare a dish that will adapt to the combination of food products with each other (Galmarini, 2020: 1).

The hypothesis of the Food Pairing Theory is that 'the more common taste components of two foods, the better they will be in harmony together'. This hypothesis argues that 80% of the flavor of food is based on how our nose perceives volatile aromatic components (De Klepper, 2011: 55). Food Pairing Theory has both attracted the attention of chefs and increased the interest of scientists in various disciplines to work in relation to different culinary cultures (Al-Razgan, 2021: 1).

In this research, a study will be carried out to determine the flavor of chocolate mousse with Roquefort cheese to be produced within the scope of Food Pairing Theory. The reason for using Roquefort cheese and chocolate in the research is that the number of common flavor components of the two food products is 73. For this reason, a sample recipe of chocolate mousse with Roquefort cheese was created in the research. After making the chocolate mousse with Roquefort cheese, the panelists will have a tasting and data will be obtained as a result of sensory analysis.

The origins of food Pairing date back to ancient Greece and ancient Rome. In these periods, people matched foods according to their taste, flavor and texture. Salty foods were paired with bitter tasting foods and sweet foods were paired with sour tasting foods. In the Middle Ages, spices used in culinary practices in Europe were widely used to add various flavors to dishes and new dishes were made by combining them with other flavors (Doğan & Değerli, 2023: 1).

Throughout history, the preparation, cooking and preparation of meals have been carried out by trial and error. Scientists have adopted the experimental method when studying the chemical structure of food to learn more about the components and their interactions. With the development of computer technologies, the field of food science has also developed rapidly and has become a quantitative research field (Al-Razgan, 2021: 1). The development of data-driven systems has led food and beverage businesses to create new recipes, taking into account the diversity of talented chefs, cultural cuisines and personal food preferences (Makinei & Hazarika, 2022: 1038).

One of the most prominent quantitative types of research in food science is the work on Food Pairing Theory, which has received increasing attention since it was popularised by celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal in 1992. This hypothesis claims that foods that share many common flavor compounds taste delicious together (Al-Razgan, 2021: 1). In addition, cuisines belonging to different cultures show diversity. Cultural culinary diversity raises the question of whether there are general patterns that determine the combinations of foods used in foods or principles that transcend the recipes of foods (Ahn et al., 2011: 1). Understanding consumers' perceptions, expectations and attitudes is also important for the successful development of food products (Makinei & Hazarika, 2022: 1038).

However, not all flavor combinations are accepted worldwide as they are largely based on cultural habits. Ahn et al. (2011) investigated the influence of culture in their study and found that the rules following food pairing are different across cultures. In general, they found that both Western and European cuisines use ingredients with similar flavor combinations, while East Asian cuisines do the opposite. Jain et al. (2015) noted that different regional Indian cuisines have 'negative' food pairing patterns: This means that the higher the flavor sharing between two ingredients in Indian recipes, the lower the co-occurrence rate in that cuisine (Arellano-Covarrubias et al., 2022 :1).

According to Food Pairing Theory, flavor is mostly determined by volatile aromatic compounds rather than mouthfeel. Regardless of the basic flavors (salty, sweet, bitter, sour or umami), a successful food combination occurs when volatile aromatic compounds are consumed together. For example, chocolate and Roquefort cheese will create a good combination as they share at least 73 flavor compounds (Galmarini, 2020).

In recent years, data mining and network analysis methods have been applied to analyse large-scale publicly available data on the chemistry of foods. The application of this technology and the advancement of information technologies have led to the accumulation of extensive food-related data. Large-scale data analyses combining machine learning and network analysis have enabled conclusions to be drawn on food choices and habits, playing an important role in people's perceptions of food perception and consumption (Makinei & Hazarika, 2022 :1038).

METHOD

Research Design and Hypotheses

In this study, 'sensory analysis' technique was used to determine the opinions of the participants about the 'Roquefort Chocolate Mousse Dessert' developed according to the Food Pairing Theory. Within the scope of the sensory analysis study, firstly, the relationships between the variables of 'smell', 'taste', "sweetness", 'general impression' and 'food acceptance behaviour' for the newly developed Roquefort Chocolate Mousse product were determined. By checking the correlations between the relevant variables, it was tried to determine the suitability of the newly developed product in the context of Food Pairing Theory. In the next stage, a simple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the effect of the participants' perceptions of 'general impression' of the developed product on 'food acceptance behaviour'.

The main and sub-hypotheses of the research created within the scope of the study are as follows:

H1: There is a significant relationship between the sensory evaluation criteria for Roccorus Chocolate Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H1a: There is a significant relationship between taste perception and odour perception for Roquefort Chocolate Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H1b: There is a significant relationship between taste perception and sweetness evaluation of Chocolate Roquefort Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H1c: There is a significant relationship between taste perception and overall impression evaluation of Chocolate Roquefort Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H1d: There is a significant relationship between taste perception and food acceptance behaviour towards Chocolate Roquefort Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H1e: There is a significant relationship between odour perception and sweetness evaluation for the Roquefort Chocolate Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H1f: There is a significant relationship between the odour perception and the overall impression evaluation of the Roquefort Chocolate Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H1g: There is a significant relationship between odour perception and food acceptance behaviour towards Roquefort Chocolate Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H1h: There is a significant relationship between sweetness evaluation and overall impression evaluation for the Roquefort Chocolate Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H1i: There is a significant relationship between sweetness evaluation and food acceptance behaviour towards the Chocolate Roquefort Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H1i: There is a significant relationship between overall impression evaluation and food acceptance behaviour towards the Chocolate Roquefort Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory.

H2: Participants' overall impression of the Chocolate Roquefort Mousse dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory affects their food acceptance behaviour.

Sample of the Study

Considering the generally accepted sample sizes in the literature (Özen & Gül, 2007: 416; Onoğur & Elmacı, 2019: 31), 30 subjects (panelists) selected by the "purposive sampling method", one of the non-random sampling methods, were included in the study. In accordance with the purpose of the study, 30 subjects from Kocaeli University Faculty of Tourism, Gastronomy and Culinary Arts students and lecturers were included in the study and the sample was formed.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the opinions of the participants about the "Chocolate Mousse Dessert with Roquefort" developed according to the Food Pairing Theory were determined in the context of sensory analysis criteria and then the effect of their general impressions of the newly developed product on their food acceptance behaviors was measured.

Within the scope of the research, "Food Acceptance Behavior Scale" was used. This scale was developed by Schutz (1965) and consists of 8 items and one dimension. In addition, in the question form directed to the panelists, statements were presented to measure their sensory analysis evaluations of the "Chocolate Mousse Dessert with Roquefort" developed according to the Food Pairing Theory. A 5-point rating scale was used for the "smell" and "taste" evaluations of each of the ingredients of the developed product, namely roquefort, chocolate, cream and gelatin (1-Not at all....5-Very Present). The criteria of "sweetness" and "general impression" were also directed to the participants in the form of general evaluation with a 5-point rating scale. In this section, there are also food acceptance behavior questions to be answered after the experiment (8 questions in total).

SPSS 23.0 statistical program was used in the process of evaluating the research data. Before starting the analysis, the coding of the data obtained was done and the data were made ready for analysis. In the analysis of the data obtained, "Descriptive Analysis (Percentage and Frequency Distribution, Median)", "Correlation Analysis" was used to determine the relationships between variables and "Simple Linear Regression Analysis" was used to measure the effect of general impression of the product on food acceptance behaviors. The "compute" process was applied to collect the scale items under the relevant dimensions to determine the participants' approach to new foods and food acceptance behaviors.

Preparation of Experimental Tools, Environment and Participants

Within the scope of the research, research has been carried out to select the product that can be developed with Food Pairing Theory. The ingredients to be used in the research are shown in Table 1. Since the flavor of a mousse made with chocolate and Roquefort cheese will be determined in the research, the following recipe was applied to avoid overuse of other ingredients. Otherwise, it was thought that if a product with more ingredients was developed, the difference between the flavors of chocolate and Roquefort cheese would not be understood. Therefore, a mousse was made with only four ingredients (cream, chocolate, leaf gelatin, Roquefort cheese).

Table 1. Chocolate and Roquefort Cheese Mousse

Ingredient	Quantity
Cream	2.7 kg
Chocolate	1.5 kg
Gelatine Sheets	21 pcs.
Roquefort Cheese	0.5 kg

According to Food Pairing Theory, flavor is mostly determined by volatile aromatic compounds rather than mouthfeel. For example, chocolate and Roquefort cheese will create a good combination as they share at least 73 flavor compounds (Galmarini, 2020). Due to the high number of flavor compounds shared by chocolate and Roquefort cheese, a Mousse was prepared using these two products in the research. In addition, gelatin and cream were used to increase the consistency of the mousse.

FINDINGS AND ASSESSMENT

Descriptive Analyses for Variables

The table below shows the findings regarding the "smell" and "taste" evaluations of roquefort, chocolate, cream and gelatin substances according to sensory analysis criteria.

Table 2. "Smell" and "Taste" Evaluations of Roquefort, Chocolate, Cream and Gelatin Ingredients

Criteria	None		Absent		Neither Present Nor Absent		Present		Very Present		TOTAL		Median
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Roquefort Smell	6	20,0	10	33,3	4	13,3	7	23,3	3	10,0	30	100,0	2,00
Chocolate Smell	0	0,0	3	10,0	3	10,0	15	50,0	9	30,0	30	100,0	4,00
Cream Smell	3	10,0	8	26,7	9	30,0	7	23,3	3	10,0	30	100,0	3,00
Gelatin Smell	24	80,0	2	6,7	2	6,7	1	3,3	1	3,3	30	100,0	1,00

Roquefort Taste	8	26,7	5	16,7	6	20,0	7	23,3	4	13,3	30	100,0	3,00
Chocolate Taste	0	0,0	1	3,3	2	6,7	12	40,0	15	50,0	30	100,0	4,50
Cream Taste	1	3,3	1	3,3	11	36,7	14	46,7	3	10,0	30	100,0	4,00
Gelatin Taste	20	66,7	7	23,3	2	6,7	1	3,3	0	0,0	30	100,0	1,00

When the responses of the participants to the questionnaire are examined, it is seen that the rate of participants who marked the smell of roquefort as "absent" in the Roquefort Chocolate Mousse product is higher than the other options with 33%. The chocolate smell in the product was marked as "present" by 50% of the participants and "very present" by 30% of the participants, while there was no participant who marked the "none" option. When the responses regarding the smell of cream are analyzed, it is seen that 30% of the participants chose the option "neither present nor absent" and 26.7% of the participants chose "absent" as the second option. It is seen that "none" and "very present" options are the answers with the least number of responses with 10% each in the answers related to cream smell. When the responses regarding the gelatin smell are analyzed, it is seen that the majority of the participants, 80%, chose the "none" option and accordingly, they did not smell gelatin smell from the product.

When a general evaluation is made regarding the smells of the ingredients in the Roquefort Chocolate Mousse product, it is seen that 50% of the participants chose "present" and 30% chose "very present" for the chocolate smell, and therefore 80% of the participants smell chocolate smell from the product. Compared to the evaluations of the participants regarding the smells of other ingredients, it can be interpreted that chocolate smell is more dominant. According to the responses regarding the smell of gelatin in the product, it is seen that 80% of the participants selected "none" and 6.7% selected "absent", thus 86.7% of the participants did not smell gelatin smell from the product. Compared to the evaluations of the participants regarding the smells of other ingredients, it can be interpreted that gelatin smell is perceived less. When the taste feature is analyzed, it is seen that there are no participants who do not taste chocolate. Out of 30 participants, 50% (15 people) rated chocolate taste as "very present" and 40% (12 people) rated chocolate taste as "present". Although 23.3% (7 people) of the participants evaluated the expression "there is" in the perception of roquefort taste, 26.7% (8 people) of the participants stated "none". In the perception of cream flavor, although the expression "present" was evaluated as 46.7% (14 people), 36.7% (11 people) of the participants stated "neither there is nor there is". The participants predominantly evaluated it as "none" and "absent". When a general evaluation of the taste of the ingredients in the Roquefort Chocolate Mousse product is made, it is seen that 40% of the participants chose "present" and 50% chose "very present", thus 90% of the participants tasted chocolate. Compared to the participants' evaluations of the flavors of the other ingredients, it can be interpreted that the chocolate taste is felt intensely. The gelatin taste was perceived less when compared to the other ingredients.

Table 3. below shows the findings regarding the participants' evaluations of "sweetness" and "general impression".

Table 3. "Sweetness" and "Overall Impression" Evaluations

Criteria	**Very Bad**		**Bad**		**Neither Bad nor Good**		**Good**		**Very Good**		**TOTAL**		**Median**
	f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	
Sweetness	0	0,0	2	6,7	12	40,0	12	40,0	4	13,3	30	100,0	4,00
Overall impression	0	0,0	1	3,3	5	16,7	11	36,7	13	43,3	30	100,0	4,00

When the sweetness level of the Roquefort Chocolate Mousse product prepared within the scope of the study was analyzed, it was seen that 40% of the participants chose "good", 40% chose "neither good nor bad". While none of the participants chose the "very bad" option, only 6.7% of the participants chose the "bad" option. Based on the rates, it is seen that the participants indicated that the sweetness level of the product has an average value. When the answers regarding the general acceptability of the Roquefort Chocolate Mousse product are analyzed, it is seen that the participants chose "very good" with 43.3% and "good" with 36.7%, so the general impression of the product is positive with 80%.

Findings on Correlations Between Variables

Correlation analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses proposed within the scope of the research. Correlation analysis is a method that reveals the magnitude, direction and importance of the relationship between two variables (Özdamar, 2004: 537). Since the research was conducted with 30 participants, it does not meet the conditions of normal distribution. Therefore, Spearman correlation coefficient was used instead of Pearson correlation coefficient in the evaluation of the findings. The correlations showing the relationships between the variables subject to the research are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation Analysis Results between Variables

Variables	**Smell**	**Flavor**	**Sweetness**	**Overall Impression**	**Food Acceptance**
Smell	1				

Flavor	**,780***	**1**			
Sweetness	,288	,132	**1**		
Overall Impression	,061	,105	**,417***	**1**	
Food Acceptance	,090	-,049	,198	**,646***	**1**

* The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Spearman rank correlation is interpreted as Pearson correlation coefficient. The correlation value between two variables shows that there is a very weak relationship between 0.00-0.25, a weak relationship between 026-0.49, a moderate relationship between 0.50-0.69, a high relationship between 0.70-0.89 and a very high relationship between 0.90-1.00 (Sungur, 2010: 116). When the relationships between the variables are examined, the relationship between smell perception and taste perception, the relationship between overall impression evaluation and sweetness evaluation, and the relationship between overall impression evaluation and food acceptance behavior are significant at $p<.01$ level. As can be seen from the table, all of these relationships are positive and strong. Among the variables analyzed, the relationship between taste perception and smell perception is stronger than the other variables. When these relationships are analyzed, alternative hypotheses (H1a, H1h and H1i) are accepted and null hypotheses are rejected in three of the sub-hypotheses under the main hypothesis H1. In H1b, H1c, H1d, H1e, H1f, H1g and H1i, the null hypotheses were accepted and the alternative hypotheses were rejected.

Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis on the Effect of Panelists' General Impressions of Chocolate Roquefort Mousse on Food Acceptance Behaviors

The results of regression analyses applied at 95% confidence interval to determine the effect of panelists' general impressions of "Chocolate Roquefort Mousse Dessert" developed according to the Food Pairing Theory on their food acceptance behaviors are given in the table below.

Table 5. General Impression - Food Acceptance Behavior Model Summary

Model	**R**	**R^2**
1	,705[a]	,497

Independent variable: general impression

Dependent variable: food acceptance behavior

The value to be examined in Table 5 is the R2 value. According to this result, it is seen that the independent variable "general impression" explains 49.7% of the variance of the dependent variable "food acceptance behavior". In other words, it is understood that food acceptance behavior is shaped by 49.7% depending on this variable. The estimated values of the coefficients in the model and their t values are given in the table below.

Table 6. General Impression - Food Acceptance Behavior Model Coefficients Table

Model	B	t	p
1 (Stable)	,960	1,854	,074
Food Acceptance Behavior	,636	5,257	**,000***

p>0.05 not significant; p<0.05 significant*; reliability: 95

It is seen that the relationship between the general impression variable and food acceptance behavior is significant at p<0.05 level. Based on these findings, it can be said that panelists' general impression of the Chocolate Mousse with Roquefort dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory has a significant contribution on their food acceptance behavior.

Regression equation for the effect of the independent variable of general impression on the dependent variable of food acceptance behavior;

Y (Food Acceptance Behavior) = 0.960 + 0.636*(General Impression).

As can be seen from the table, a positive increase of 1 unit in the overall impression of the Chocolate Mousse with Roquefort dessert developed according to the Food Pairing Theory will increase the food acceptance behavior by 0.636 units. When this relationship is analyzed, H2 hypothesis formed for the related variables is supported.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, it was aimed to evaluate the Roquefort Chocolate Mousse dessert, which was created by combining Roquefort cheese and chocolate within the scope of Food Pairing Theory, by sensory analysis method. The following conclusions were reached in line with the findings obtained as a result of the panelists' evaluations:

- **Overall Impression and Acceptability:** The majority of the participants had a positive overall impression of the Chocolate Roquefort Mousse dessert and found it acceptable.
- **Taste Profile:** Chocolate flavor was the most dominant flavor perceived by the participants. The taste of Roquefort was not perceived by a significant proportion of the participants, while it was felt by a certain proportion.
- **Smell Perception:** Chocolate smell was the most predominant odor, while roquefort smell was not perceived at all by one third of the participants. It was concluded that the gelatin smell was not perceived to a great extent.

- **Sweetness Evaluation:** Participants generally rated the level of sweetness as neutral or good, not overly sweet or insufficiently sweet.
- **Relationships Between Variables:** The relationship between taste perception and smell perception, the relationship between overall impression and sweetness evaluation, and the relationship between overall impression and food acceptance behavior were significant and strong. These findings are consistent with the main hypothesis of Food Pairing Theory.

The findings of the study largely overlap with previous studies mentioned in the theoretical framework. Brown et al. (2019) reported that chocolate was perceived as the dominant flavor in chocolate and cheese combinations. The results of this study similarly show that chocolate is perceived as the dominant flavor. Smith and Jones (2020) reported that sweet and umami combinations are positively accepted by certain consumer groups. Similarly, this study reveals that the majority of the participants found Roquefort Chocolate Mousse dessert acceptable. Johnson et al. (2021) stated in their study that sweet-salty combinations can be perceived as balanced in certain proportions. In this study, the sweetness level was generally evaluated as neutral or good, which is consistent with the previous literature. Chen et al. (2022) found a strong relationship between taste perception and acceptability. The findings of this study also show that taste perception has an impact on general acceptance. White & Black (2018) reported that strong cheese odors are not always perceived as dominant in sweet products. In this study, it was found that the smell of Roquefort was not perceived by some participants. Based on the research findings, theoretical and practical recommendations are presented as follows:

- **Improvement of Product Formulation:** Changes can be made in ingredient ratios or processing methods to make the Roquefort cheese flavor more pronounced.
- **Target Audience Analysis:** Consumer preferences should be analyzed in more detail by conducting a more comprehensive study with consumers with different tastes.
- **Alternative Taste Trials:** New recipes can be developed by creating different combinations with other dessert ingredients compatible with Roquefort cheese.
- **Marketing Strategies:** It may be useful to promote the product especially to consumer groups that are gourmet and open to trying innovative flavors.
- **Expanding Sensory Analysis Studies:** More general results can be obtained by including participants with different age groups and cultural backgrounds in the study.

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Do olive-oil tourists and olive-oil day-trippers behave the same in a destination?

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to identify behavioral differences between olive-oil tourists and olive-oil day-trippers in the same destination.

Study design/methodology/approach: A comparative approach was adopted in this study designed with quantitative research methods. After a thorough review of the literature on the topic, four main hypotheses are put forward regarding the differences between olive oil tourists and excursionists in relation to the characteristics of travel, appreciation of the destination and olive-oil tourism events, willingness to recommend and/or repeat olive oil tourism activities, and olive-oil consumption patterns.

Results: The paper is based on preliminary results from a more comprehensive study that is currently underway. Four main hypotheses regarding the differences in travel characteristics, assessment of the destination and olive oil tourism experiences, intention to recommend and/or repeat olive oil tourism activities and olive oil consumption habits between olive oil tourists and excursionists were tested through comparative analysis. Preliminary results of the study which indicate the several differences between olive oil tourists and excursionists will be presented and discussed in the conference sessions.

Originality/value: This study provides valuable insights into the distinct behaviors of olive oil tourists versus day-trippers, helping to refine targeted marketing strategies for olive oil tourism. By highlighting the differences in travel habits and consumption patterns, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer segmentation in this niche tourism sector. Moreover, the study's findings may provide guidance on the mitigation of adverse socio-economic repercussions of climate change, particularly in rural regions and among olive producers, through the incorporation of olive-oil tourism.

Keywords: Olive-oil tourist, olive-oil day-trippers, behavior, tourism destination, Spain

Introduction

The need for diversification of the economy and the search for alternative sources of income has become an issue in rural areas for reasons such as accelerating industrialization, developments in agricultural technologies and the decline in traditional rural incomes (Andereck and Vogt, 2000). Moreover, it is imperative for the tourism sector to acknowledge the repercussions of climate change, as its consequences may encompass alterations to sea levels and vegetation, shifts in ecological life, and modifications to precipitation patterns. It is posited that the ramifications of climate change on tourism may be characterised by seasonal fluctuations in tourism patterns, a diminution in the number of visitors to destinations with elevated visitor numbers, and the ascent of novel "popular" destinations with the potential to exert a profound influence on the tourism sector (Agnew and Viner, 2001). Within this paradigm, the diversification of tourism and the emergence of nature-friendly and sustainable tourism activities in rural areas, guided by principles that extend beyond the conventional '3s' of sea, sand, and sun, are assuming increasing significance, thereby transcending the boundaries of mass tourism.

Rural tourism is one of the most prominent sectors for ensuring sustainable rural development (Pulido-Fernández and Cárdenas-García, 2011; Wang et al., 2016). The concept of agricultural tourism, a prominent form of rural tourism is delineated as the commercial facilitation of tourism services. It offers visitors the opportunity to engage with agricultural practices and products inherint within the region (Weaver and Fennell, 1997). This symbiotic commercial environment, wherein agriculture and tourism are integrated, is a hallmark of this tourism niche. Among agritourism activities, olive oil tourism stands out as a type of tourism that supports the sustainable use of natural resources and can generate positive environmental effects while minimizing negative environmental effects.

Olive oil tourism includes a variety of activities such as visiting olive oil mills and museums, olive oil tasting, shopping for olive products, services provided by olive farms where tourists can rest, work and stay, eating in restaurants serving special olive products, and attending fairs and festivals (Murgado et al., 2011). It therefore has great potential for olive oil producers who wish to enrich their economic activities by combining the cultivation and marketing of this gastronomic product with a range of activities linked to their culture (Casado-Montilla et al., 2025). However, it is imperative to exercise caution in the context of rural tourism exploitation and touristification. These measures are of paramount importance in ensuring the preservation of the integrity and equilibrium of the tourist experience (Yang et al., 2021). In this regard, it is essential to implement measures that ensure the preservation and equilibrium of olive oil tourism. Nevertheless, as asserted by Pulido-Fernández, and Cárdenas-García (2011), in order to facilitate the sustainable growth of a rural tourism strategy that is considerate of local identity, mindful of the environment, and oriented towards local advancement, it is imperative to undertake a thorough examination of several key issues. These include the tourism demand, the behaviour of tourist flows, as well as the divergences amongst various stakeholders.

As olives and olive oil are much more than just food and olive tourism have many different characteristics, the perceptions and behaviours of olive tourism participants in relation to the olive tourism experience may differ. After a thorough review of the literature on the topic, four major hypotheses are put forward regarding the differences between olive oil tourists and excursionists in terms of travel characteristics, appreciation of the destination and olive oil tourism events, willingness to recommend and/or repeat olive oil tourism activities, and olive oil consumption patterns.

Methodology

This study aims to identify behavioral differences between olive oil tourists and excursionists. A comparative approach was adopted in this study designed with quantitative research methods. The study employed a quantitative research method, a decision that was influenced by several factors, including the size of the sample examined, the presence of multiple hypotheses, and the priority of objectivity (Gürbüz and Şahin, 2018). The survey technique was utilised to collect data in the most expeditious, economical and effective manner from a sample distributed over a wide geography (Hall, 2015).

The research data was gathered via structured questionnaire which is consisted of six parts. The participants were first asked about various aspects of travel and their experience of olive oil tourism, and then asked to evaluate the opportunities offered by olive oil tourism. The third part is dedicated to the evaluation of the destination where they enjoyed the olive oil tourism offer, while the fourth part is about the expenditure on the day of the visit. Then a series of questions are asked about the participants' olive oil consumption habits, and finally the questionnaire is completed with questions about their socio-demographic characteristics. The field study was conducted between January and November 2024 in two regions of southern Spain. A total of 406 data were collected in different oil mills which offer olive oil tourism products and services.

Results

Prior to the analysis of the research data, a test for normality was performed. Since the variables do not follow a normal distribution, non-parametric methods will be used to test the hypotheses formulated in this research. In the case of quantitative variables, the Mann-Whitney U test will be used, which is suitable for comparing the distributions of two independent groups and guarantees reliable and robust results (Bergmann, Ludbrook, and Spooren, 2000). On the other hand, for qualitative variables, the chi-square test will be applied, which allows evaluating whether there are significant differences in the proportions between the groups analyzed (Bono et al., 2017). The results of the aforementioned analysis will show whether there are behavioral differences between olive-oil tourists and olive-oil day-trippers in the same destination. The results will be presented and discussed at the conference.

Conclusion

Tourism is a significant contributor to human-induced climate change and conversely, it is vulnerable to its impacts, affecting both supply and demand aspects and travel. Rural tourism in general and olive oil tourism in particular has a great capacity to generate additional income, create employment and promote the values of local culture. Whilst the prevailing practices within the tourism sector appear to be aligned with the objectives of economic sustainability and continuous growth, the feasibility and the associated costs of achieving these goals within a designated timeframe are subjects that are open to debate. In this context, it is also necessary to take into account the effects of climate change, which will generally have negative effects on the tourism system (Aall, Hall, and Groven, 2016; Demiroğlu ve Ülgen, 2018).

This study is an important step in understanding the behavioural differences between olive oil tourists and day trippers in the same destination. Although not yet completed, this empirical study, which involves the analysis of data collected from olive oil tourists and day trippers, is original and contributes to the literature because it empirically examines the differences between tourist and day tripper behaviour within the context of olive oil tourism. It is expected that the results of the study will help to develop strategic recommendations for the olive oil tourism sector. In particular, it is recommended that olive oil tourism businesses take these differences into account in order to tailor marketing and event planning to their target audiences. In addition, future analysis will provide a better understanding of the long-term behaviour of olive oil tourists and day-trippers.

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Enhancing the Street Food Experience: Introducing Baklava as an International Sweet on Thailand's Street Food

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the feasibility of integrating baklava, a traditional Turkish dessert, into Thailand's street food landscape. By evaluating Thai consumers' sensory perceptions, the research aims to identify critical factors influencing the acceptance of international desserts in local culinary contexts.

Study design/methodology/approach: A mixed-methods research design was adopted, incorporating a quantitative sensory evaluation survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews. Fifty students from the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management program at Mahasarakham University participated in sensory assessments of baklava, evaluating its color, aroma, texture, taste, and overall satisfaction. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical methods, while qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis.

Results: Participants demonstrated high levels of satisfaction with baklava's color, aroma, and taste. However, concerns were noted regarding its excessive sweetness and textural inconsistencies, with some perceiving it as greasy or dry. Qualitative findings indicated that reducing sweetness levels and enhancing freshness could improve consumer acceptance. Additionally, pairing baklava with complementary beverages, such as tea, was suggested to enhance its appeal.

Originality/Value: This study offers valuable insights into the integration of international desserts within local street food markets. By aligning baklava with Thai consumer preferences, street food vendors and culinary professionals can expand offerings and enrich the street food experience. The findings contribute to broader discussions on global food adaptation and consumer-driven culinary innovation.

Keywords: Street Food experience, International Dessert, Sensory Evaluation, Consumer Satisfaction

Introduction

The Thai Street food industry is renowned for its rich diversity, showcasing a blend of cultural influences worldwide. Thailand's street food is considered to be part of the local way of life where people can eat on the site or take away; hence, it provides a wide range of food choices, normally with rice and with other popular dishes consumed by the locals (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019). In recent years, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has launched a secondary city campaign to promote locality in different parts of Thailand (TAT Intelligent Centre, n.d.). This campaign works on three main concepts: local experience (locality), future challenge (growth), and connecting (pathway from the main tourist destination to other parts of Thailand and neighboring countries). Thailand's street food celebrates its distinctive flavors and textures and emphasizes taste, quality, and hygiene. Thai street food is special in local and international culinary scenes (Chompupor et al., 2024). These street food attributes seem a usual experience for tourists visiting Thailand's main destinations. In contrast, the second city destination street food experiences will likely serve predominantly local consumers. Subsequently, introducing international food items in local street food can enhance the food experience for both Thai and international tourists in the secondary city.

Baklava is a dense, sweet pastry made of very thin layers of phyllo dough filled with chopped nuts and sweetened with syrup or honey (Akkaya & Koc, 2017; Güldemir, 2022). As indicated by Akkaya & Koc (2017), the name "baklava" comes from the word "bahlahu," which means bundle. Nowadays, most baklava is manufactured by hand in modern manufacturing facilities. Its ingredients include wheat flour, wheat starch, ghee (clarified butter), eggs, salt, sugar, water, and pistachios or other nuts (walnuts, pistachios, or almonds) (Acar & Koksel, 2023). Baklava is a dessert widely recognized for its origins in Turkey. It is also consumed in other countries, including Azerbaijan, known as bahlahu; in Armenia, it is called baklava; and in the Netherlands, it is made in Greek and Turkish restaurants (Akkay & Koc, 2017). In Thailand, by googling online search, baklava revealed that it is available at a particular Turkish café located in Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, and through online purchases. Thus, introducing Turkish baklava to Thai street food desserts can connect Thai locals to international visitors and make it more accessible to baklava consumers in Thailand. Furthermore, baklava's sweet syrup and flaky pastry provide a distinct sensory experience; its appeal differs across various demographic groups (Acar & Koksel, 2023). Hence, Thai people are familiar with their street food dessert selections that have a unique balance of sweet and savory profiles, yet when it comes to how sweet baklava is acceptable to the Thais, it can be questionable because taste preferences can significantly impact overall consumers satisfaction (Siregar et al, 2022). In addition, previous street food research in Thailand paid attention to street food attributes as a whole experience (Chavarria & Phakdee-auksorn, 2017) and limited investigation on the taste of the food. Subsequently, it is essential to conduct further investigation of food taste based on human sensory perspectives.

The current study, therefore intended to explore baklava sensory attributes perceived by local Thai consumer perspectives. It was expected that the findings would provide the framework for introducing baklava to Thailand's street food; establish a cross-cultural and culinary boundary, and provide valuable recommendations for enhancing dessert recipes in diverse contexts.

Methodology

The research employed a mixed-methods approach to gain deeper insights, starting with a survey and followed by semi-structured interviews. Conducted at Mahasarakham University, a prominent educational hub in northeastern Thailand with over 41,000 students (QS Top University, 2023), the study focused on fifty second-year students enrolled in the Culinary and Hospitality Management program. These students, who had prior experience and a strong interest in dessert preparation and evaluation, voluntarily participated. Understanding these preferences is particularly important for culinary arts students, who will play a key role in the future innovation and refinement of dessert offerings. Their specialized flavor and texture sensitivity training positions them as ideal participants for a study exploring these cross-cultural dessert preferences. Insights gained from this research could help bridge cultural and culinary boundaries, providing valuable recommendations for enhancing dessert recipes in diverse contexts. The populations were asked to try original Baklava made from Turkey using Turkish ingredients. According to the method of Meilgaard et al. (1999), the panelists were first instructed to visually evaluate the sample of Baklava for their overall liking of color and were asked to taste the Baklava .Degree of liking in color, smell, texture, taste and overall acceptance of the Baklava was evaluated using a 9-point hedonic scale where 1=dislike extremely, 2=dislike very much, 3=dislike moderately, 4=dislike slightly, 5=neither like nor dislike, 6 =like slightly, 7=like moderately, 8=like very much, and 9=like extremely .Then, we started to ask to give feedback on the survey before the unstructured interviews were conducted afterward. The initial phase involved a sensory analysis of Baklava to evaluate participants' sensory perceptions of the dessert, examining key attributes such as color, aroma, texture, and taste. The survey also included questions about overall satisfaction and open-ended prompts to explore reasons for disliking the dessert. Standard statistical methods were employed to analyze the survey data.

The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews to gain more detailed insights into participants' attitudes toward Baklava. The interviews explored their sensory experiences, suggestions for improvement, and the influence of cultural factors on their preferences. The interview data underwent thematic analysis, highlighting key themes related to sweetness, texture, flavor, and overall satisfaction. NVivo software (V.12) was employed to facilitate the transcription of interview data into MS Word to aid in the analysis. The software's functionality allowed for data comparison among different groups, identification of patterns, and easier visualization of both raw and coded data. Thematic analysis was further enhanced by incorporating direct quotations from participants to illustrate their socially constructed knowledge (Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie, 2019). This coding process helped identify common patterns and unique insights, enriching the understanding of participants' sensory experiences. Of the 50 participants, 36 were female, and 14 were male, revealing an unequal gender distribution. This imbalance could be attributed to the gender bias in the overall student population within the program, which was 83% female for this cohort. Notably, the 17 men in this study represented 72% of the male students in that year group. Participants were mostly between 18 and 20, and all institutional ethical requirements, including informed consent, were strictly followed. A detailed description of the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' characteristics

Participants' characteristics	N = 50(%)
Sex	
Female	36 (72%)
Male	14 (28%)
Mean Age (range)	18-20

Results

Quantitative Sensory Analysis

The response to stimuli after consuming food or food products is measured through sensory evaluation (Mihafu et al., 2020). Sensory evaluation involves the analysis of how food products are perceived through the panelists' senses, primarily taste, smell, sight, touch, and hearing (Ruiz-Capillas & Herrero, 2021). This evaluation provides critical feedback on product quality and consumer perception. Sensory characteristics refer to the attributes of a food product that can be perceived through the human senses such as aroma, appearance, and texture (Moskowitz & Krieger, 1993; Meilgaard et al., 1999). These characteristics significantly impact the street food experience and play a vital role in shaping a consumer's perception and enjoyment of food (Tournier et al., 2007). According to Meilgaard et al. (1999), the characteristics of a food item are usually perceived as follows: 1) appearance, including color, size, shape, and surface texture, influences expectations and the willingness to try a product. 2) Odor/aroma, as the sense of smell is critical in determining a food's quality and flavor. 3) Additionally, taste, involving the detection of sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and umami, directly affects satisfaction. 4) Texture, the physical properties of food, is experienced through mouthfeel, with terms such as crunchy, creamy, or chewy often used to describe it. 5) Flavor, a more complex combination of taste, aroma, and mouthfeel, adds depth to the experience. 6) Lastly, even sound, such as the crunch of foods, can enhance the sensory experience, subtly influencing consumer perception.

The present study emphasizes the importance of sensory attributes in creating a memorable consumer experience. For baklava, optimizing its visual appeal (e.g., golden, crispy layers), aroma (e.g., nutty and sweet), and texture (e.g., flaky and crunchy) may enhance the overall enjoyment and attract street food enthusiasts. Sensory evaluation provides insights into whether the new food product will be well-received by assessing these characteristics. This is vital for successfully introducing baklava and ensuring it appeals to Thai street food enthusiasts.

Several types of sensory evaluation methods are used to examine food characteristics, one of the most common being the 9-point hedonic scale. This scale is widely used to assess consumer preference and food acceptability globally, making it a key tool in sensory analysis since it provides a simple and effective way to measure the degree of liking or disliking (the scale ranging from "like extremely" to "dislike extremely") for a food product (Lim, 2011). It has been reported that the scale's structure does not significantly affect results; moreover, it generates ordinal data and is favored for its simplicity, ease of use, and ability to be employed across diverse populations without extensive training (Lim, 2011; Peryam & Girardot,1952; Peryam & Pilgrim,1957). By applying this sensory evaluation method, baklava could be carefully adjusted to suit local preferences in Thailand's street food culture, enhancing its overall appeal.

Color attribute

The findings from the survey regarding the color of Baklava are shown in Figure 1. The results highlighted that most participants were satisfied with the color, with 14 participants (28%) rating their satisfaction at levels 9 (like extremely). Additionally, 11 participants (22%) expressed similar satisfaction levels 7 (like moderately) and 8 (like very much). Conversely, only 1 participant (2%) reported the lowest satisfaction levels at levels 3 (dislike moderately) and 4 (dislike slightly). These findings suggest that most participants were pleased with the color of the baklava, with the majority giving high satisfaction ratings and very few expressing dissatisfaction. In addition, the findings also show that most participants were pleased with the color of the baklava, as reflected by the high satisfaction ratings, with very few expressing dissatisfaction. This indicates that the baklava's color met most participants' expectations.

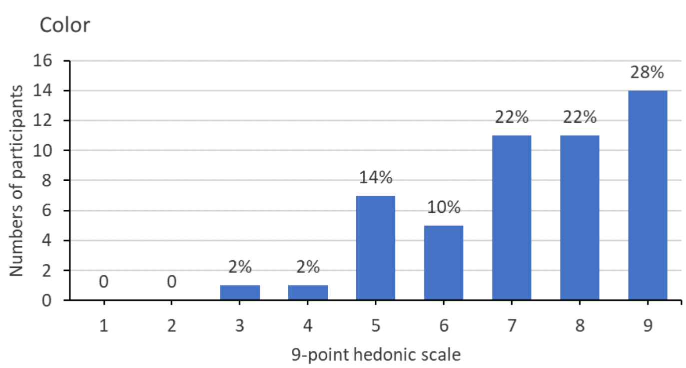

Figure 1: Quantitative findings on color score

Smell attribute

As shown in Figure 2, it illustrates the survey results on participants' satisfaction with the smell of Baklava. Interestingly, the majority of respondents, 15 participants (30%), rated their satisfaction at a level of 7. This is closely followed by those who expressed high satisfaction, with 14 participants (28%) rating the smell at 9. Additionally, 7 participants (14%) rated their satisfaction at levels 5 and 6. These results suggest that the baklava's smell was well-received by most participants, with a strong majority reporting high to very high satisfaction and only a smaller group showing moderate satisfaction.

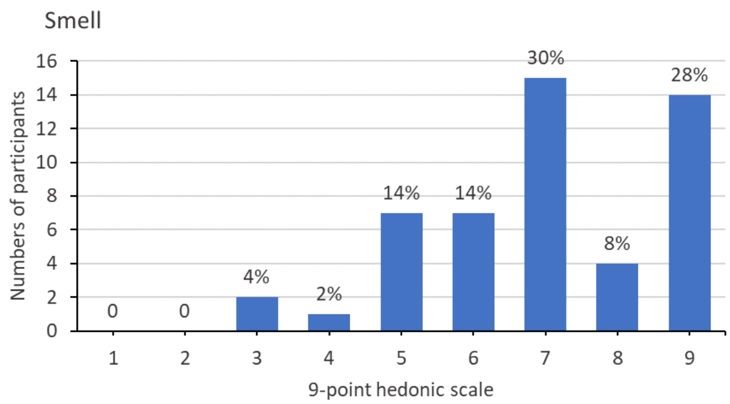

Figure 2: Quantitative findings on smell score

Texture attribute

The results regarding the satisfaction level with Baklava's texture are fascinating (Figure 3). The highest satisfaction was observed at level 6, with 13 participants (26%) rating it at this level, followed closely by level 7, rated by 11 participants (22%). Surprisingly, 3 participants expressed dissatisfaction with the texture, giving it low ratings of 1, 2, and 3. These results show that while most participants had a moderate to high level of satisfaction with the texture of the baklava, a small portion expressed dissatisfaction, which could warrant further exploration into texture preferences.

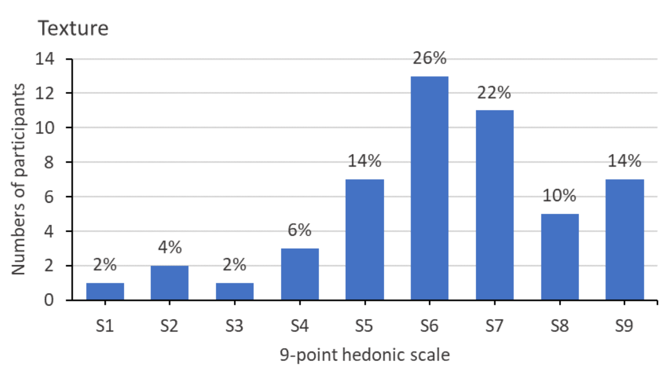

Figure 3: Quantitative findings on texture score

Taste attribute

The findings on participants' satisfaction with the taste of Baklava are presented in Figure 4. The majority of respondents, 13 participants (26%), rated their satisfaction at level 7. An additional 10 participants (20%) indicated a higher level of satisfaction, rating it at level 8. In contrast, only 1 participant (2%) rated the taste at a low level of 2. These findings suggest that most participants perceived the baklava's taste positively, with higher satisfaction levels prevailing, while dissatisfaction was rare.

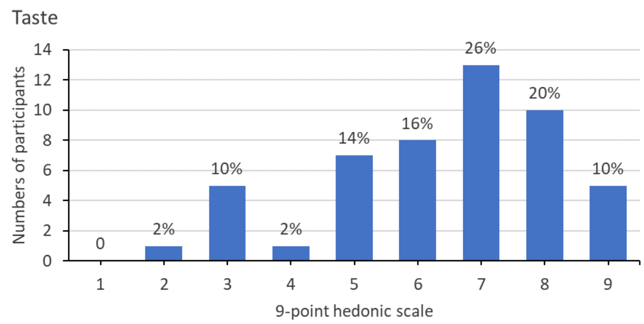

Figure 4: Quantitative findings on taste score

Overall satisfaction

The final question of the survey asked participants to rate their overall satisfaction as presented in Figure 5. The results revealed a positive response, with most participants reporting high satisfaction. The key findings are Level 8 Satisfaction: 13 participants (26%) rated their overall satisfaction at level 8, indicating a strong positive experience. Level 7 Satisfaction: 12 participants (24%) rated their satisfaction at level 7, showing a slightly lower but still positive sentiment. Level 5 Satisfaction: 9 participants (18%) rated their satisfaction at level 5, reflecting a neutral or moderately satisfied experience.These results indicate that most participants were satisfied, with 50% rating their experience at levels 7 or 8—the relatively lower satisfaction scores at level 5 highlight the need for further investigation into areas of improvement.

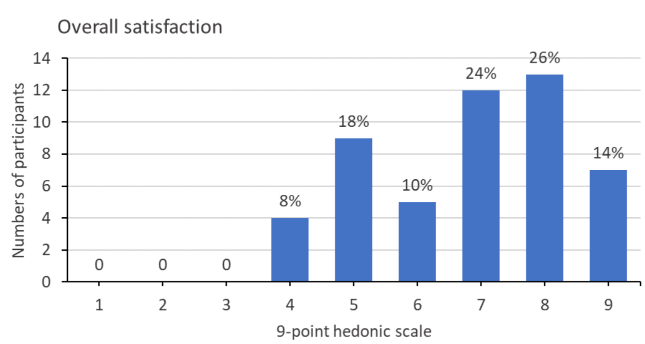

Figure 5: Quantitative findings on overall satisfaction score

Qualitative findings

The qualitative feedback provided nuanced insights regarding the dessert's sweetness, texture, flavor, freshness, and pairing potential.

A dominant theme in the feedback was the dessert's overwhelming sweetness. Many respondents suggested that reducing the sweetness would enhance overall enjoyment, aligning with current trends favoring more balanced sweetness levels in desserts. The texture of the baklava received mixed reviews. Some respondents praised the crisp top layer, while others criticized it for being greasy, too thick, or dry. This opinion divergence suggests that refining the texture could broaden its appeal to a larger audience. The flavor of the baklava elicited varied reactions. While some respondents described it as delicious and fragrant, with pleasant notes of butter and peanuts, others felt it lacked uniqueness compared to common street foods like fried dough with sweetened condensed milk. A distinct flavor profile could set the dessert apart and elevate its appeal. For freshness, several participants mentioned that the dessert could benefit from increased freshness, identifying it as crucial to perceived quality. Freshness impacts taste and texture; addressing this could further enhance consumer satisfaction.

Interestingly, some respondents noted that pairing the dessert with tea improved their overall experience. This suggests that offering baklava with complementary beverages could elevate the enjoyment of the dessert.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer a detailed analysis of participants' satisfaction with various sensory aspects of baklava, including color, smell, texture, taste, and overall satisfaction. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the research provides valuable insights into future culinary professionals' preferences while identifying improvement areas to align with contemporary expectations.

A mixed-methods approach was employed for data collection. In the first phase, a quantitative survey was created using Google Forms to assess participants' sensory satisfaction with baklava. This survey focused on key sensory attributes such as color, smell, texture, taste, and overall satisfaction. The results indicated that participants were generally satisfied with baklava across these sensory dimensions. A qualitative phase was conducted following the survey to investigate participants' attitudes toward baklava. Participants shared their opinions and experiences through individual interviews, providing more nuanced feedback. While overall satisfaction was strong, the qualitative findings revealed that some participants felt baklava's texture and flavor complexity could be improved. This combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches provides a well-rounded understanding of participants' sensory preferences and highlights specific areas—such as texture and flavor—that may benefit from further refinement. The study's insights offer practical guidance for culinary professionals seeking to enhance traditional dessert offerings to meet evolving consumer tastes.

For practical implications, these findings offer valuable insights for street food vendors, culinary educators, and food developers. For street food vendors, particularly in the context of baklava and Thai street food desserts, the feedback highlights the importance of balancing sweetness, refining texture, and ensuring freshness to meet consumer expectations better. For culinary educators and food developers, these insights can guide future refinement of dessert recipes to appeal to evolving consumer tastes.

The research provides valuable insights for future culinary professionals, offering a deeper understanding of navigating traditional dessert-making while adapting to modern preferences. The suggestions for improving sweetness levels, texture, and flavor uniqueness are particularly useful. These insights will help guide efforts to create desserts that cater to a broader audience while preserving cultural authenticity.

Conclusion

Overall, this research indicates that while most participants were satisfied with the baklava, particularly in terms of color, smell, and taste, there are clear areas for improvement. Factors such as reducing sweetness, enhancing freshness, and refining texture could significantly enhance consumer enjoyment. These findings offer guidance for improving dessert offerings and valuable insights for culinary professionals in training. By aligning traditional desserts with contemporary consumer preferences, there is substantial potential to enhance satisfaction and foster a deeper appreciation for culinary traditions within modern contexts.

Acknowledgement

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Exploring Root Vegetable-Derived Nitrate as a Natural Alternative in Ham Products

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Abstract

Purpose: The modern food industry increasingly focuses on developing health-conscious products to meet the rising demand for safe and sustainable food choices. Processed meat products like ham often contain synthetic nitrate as a preservative and color stabilizer. However, excessive consumption of synthetic nitrate has raised health concerns. This study investigates the potential of root vegetable-derived nitrate as a natural alternative in pork ham production.

Study design/methodology/approach: The research involved analyzing nitrate content in three root vegetables: yam (*Dioscorea alata* L.), cassava (*Manihot esculenta* (L.) Crantz), and taro (*Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott), to identify the most suitable source for application in ham production. The study then developed a ham formulation using vegetable-derived nitrate and compared it with conventional formulations containing synthetic nitrate regarding physicochemical and sensory properties.

Results: Results showed that yam contained the highest nitrate levels and could effectively replace synthetic nitrate in ham production without significant differences in consumer preference ($p \leq 0.05$), though it did impact product color.

Originality/value: These findings highlight the potential of root vegetables as a natural source of nitrate in processed meat, aligning with the growing trend of wellness gastronomy, which emphasizes natural ingredients and sustainable food processing. The insights gained from this research can be applied in the development of health-focused culinary offerings within the tourism industry.

Keywords Root vegetable nitrate, ham, natural preservative, food tourism, sustainability.

Introduction

Synthetic nitrates are commonly used in processed meats but pose health risks due to potential nitrosamine formation (Shakil et al., 2022). While natural sources like radishes have been studied (Uddin et al., 2021), this study is the first to apply yam, taro, and cassava to local Southeast Asian root vegetables as nitrate alternatives in ham. This approach supports clean-label innovation, promotes local ingredients, and aligns with wellness tourism trends focused on natural and health-promoting foods.

Methodology

1. **Sample preparation and nitrate Analysis**

Three root vegetables were cleaned, sliced (1 cm), tray-dried, ground, and analyzed. Color was measured using an UltraScan VIS spectrophotometer, and nitrate content was determined via the Brucine colorimetric method.

2. **Pork Ham Product Development**

The vegetable with the highest nitrate content was used as a natural curing agent in ham. Products were evaluated for physical (color, texture), chemical (nitrate, moisture, aw), and sensory properties.

Results

Table 1: Nitrate content and color values of root vegetables

Sample	L* (Lightness)	a* (Redness)	b* (Yellowness)^{ns}	Nitrate (ppm)
Yam	83.77 ± 6.22^{b}	2.81 ± 0.40^{b}	9.78 ± 1.96	28.05 ± 8.96^{a}
Taro	83.77 ± 6.22^{b}	3.44 ± 0.32^{b}	9.36 ± 0.06	2.29 ± 0.41^{b}
Cassava	95.21 ± 0.21^{a}	15.20 ± 1.92^{a}	8.22 ± 0.06	6.41 ± 0.90^{b}

Values are presented as mean ± standard deviation. Different superscript letters within the same column indicate significant differences at the 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$).

Yam showed the highest nitrate content (28.05 ± 8.96 ppm), significantly higher than cassava and taro ($p < 0.05$), consistent with previous findings on nitrate accumulation in potatoes (Elrys et al., 2018). Although cassava had the highest lightness (L*) and redness (a*) values, yam's nitrate content and acceptable color support its use as a natural curing agent.

Table 2 Physicochemical and textural properties of ham

Parameters	Formula 1 (No nitrate)	Formula 2 (Synthetic nitrate)	Formula 3 (Root vegetable nitrate)
Water activity (aw)	0.18 ± 0.00^{a}	0.12 ± 0.00^{b}	0.20 ± 0.04^{a}
Moisture content (%)	63.51 ± 1.05^{b}	66.40 ± 1.70^{a}	65.18 ± 0.42^{ab}
L* (Lightness)	65.41 ± 1.35^{b}	63.60 ± 0.56^{b}	67.25 ± 2.63^{a}
a* (Redness)	6.47 ± 0.07^{b}	6.73 ± 0.45^{b}	8.52 ± 0.87^{a}

b* (Yellowness)	9.68 ± 0.16^{b}	9.75 ± 0.20^{b}	13.35 ± 1.38^{a}
Nitrate content (ppm)^{ns}	0.18 ± 0.00	0.20 ± 0.00	0.25 ± 0.00
Firmness (kJ Force)	3.96 ± 0.93^{b}	6.55 ± 1.60^{a}	5.41 ± 1.40^{ab}
Toughness (kg·sec)	19.08 ± 3.26^{b}	29.19 ± 6.73^{a}	20.98 ± 5.32^{b}

Values are presented as mean ± standard deviation. Different superscript letters within the same column indicate significant differences at the 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$).

Ham with root-derived nitrate (Formula 3) showed color, texture, and moisture similar to the synthetic nitrate formula. Its higher redness and nitrate level support its use as a natural curing agent, in line with studies on plant-based nitrates improving meat color and quality (Munekata et al., 2021).

Table 3: Sensory evaluation scores of ham

Sample	Color^{ns}	Aroma^{ns}	Taste^{ns}	Texture^{ns}	Overall Liking^{ns}
Formula 1 (No nitrate)	6.96 ± 1.14	6.58 ± 1.54	6.78 ± 1.57	6.62 ± 1.23	6.62 ± 1.37
Formula 2 (Synthetic nitrate)	7.31 ± 1.25	7.06 ± 1.30	7.20 ± 1.54	7.10 ± 1.23	7.03 ± 1.45
Formula 3 (Root vegetable nitrate)	7.12 ± 1.42	7.06 ± 1.55	7.10 ± 1.71	7.20 ± 1.08	7.41 ± 1.32

Values are expressed as mean ± standard deviation. ns indicates no statistically significant difference among samples at $p > 0.05$.

Sensory evaluation showed no significant differences ($p > 0.05$) among ham formulations. Formula 3 (root vegetable nitrate) had the highest texture and overall liking scores, supporting its consumer acceptability. This aligns with prior studies showing that natural curing agents can match the sensory quality of conventional products (Sridhar & Roy, 2023).

Conclusion

This study showed that yam-derived nitrate can effectively replace synthetic nitrate in pork ham without affecting quality. The ham maintained similar moisture, texture, and sensory acceptance, with improved color. These findings support the use of natural nitrate in clean-label meat products and promote innovation in health-conscious foods aligned with wellness tourism and sustainable gastronomy.

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The Ability to Gastronomy Tourism Activities of Lam Pao Dam, Kalasin Province and Impact on Tourists' loyalty in the Online Platform.

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Abstract

The study aimed to analyze the management of food tourism activities, tourist aesthetics, and marketing communication at Lam Pao Dam, Kalasin Province. Data was gathered through a questionnaire from 123 Thai tourists who had visited the area during 2023-2024. Analysis was conducted using the G*Power 3.1 software, employing percentages, means, standard deviations, Pearson's product momentum, and multiple regression analysis. Results indicated that tourists rated aesthetics highest ($\bar{x}$= = 4.21, SD = 0.59), followed by marketing communication ($\bar{x}$= = 4.04, SD = 0.67), and management of food tourism activities ($\bar{x}$= 3.95, SD = 0.65). Independent variables influencing Thai tourists' loyalty online at Lam Pao Dam, Kalasin Province, were also rated high ($\bar{x}$= = 4.08, SD = 0.76) at a significance level of 0.05. The findings can enhance comprehension of factors impacting tourist loyalty online, facilitating the creation of more engaging experiences, andleading to positive reviews and recommendations. This study has the potential to elevate Lam Pao Dam and Kalasin Province as captivating destinations in the food tourism sector, attracting both local and international tourists. Increased interest and tourist influx can boost revenue for local communities through tourism expenditures, supporting local enterprises.

Keywords Gastronomy Tourism Management Capability, Marketing Communication, Tourist Loyalty, Lam Pao Dam, Kalasin Province.

Introduction

The National Tourism Development Plan No. 3 (2023–2027) envisions Thailand's tourism industry as value-driven, adaptive, sustainable, and inclusive. It focuses on strengthening the industry and turning challenges into opportunities for growth (National Tourism Development Plan No. 3, 2023–2027).

To achieve this vision, the national strategy integrates tourism with broader economic development, supported by a strong economy, infrastructure, natural resources, and a skilled workforce. This will help Thailand gain a competitive edge and ensure stable, sustainable tourism growth (Phuri Choonkajorn, 2017).

As part of this plan, provinces like Kalasin have developed their own tourism strategies to manage the industry. Kalasin, located in northeastern Thailand, is historically significant with rich cultural heritage. The province is divided into 18 districts and features diverse geography, with the Phu

Phan mountain range in the north and rolling hills in the center (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2017).

One major attraction is Lam Pao Dam, an earth-fill dam that creates twin reservoirs for flood control, irrigation, and fish breeding. It also serves as a popular recreational destination with Hat Dok Kaeo Beach (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2017).

The dam's biodiversity supports local livelihoods and cultural traditions. Research identifies 20 fish species, many of which are made into local delicacies like fermented fish (pla som) and pickled fish (pla ra) (Keerawit Phetchajul & Kanjana Kulwittit, 2017).

Lam Pao Dam is now a popular site for water-based tourism, with nearby restaurants certified under the Safety and Health Administration (SHA) standard (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2017).

This research explores the potential of gastronomic tourism at Lam Pao Dam and its impact on Thai tourists' online loyalty. It aims to create new tourism opportunities, stimulate the local economy, and support the growth of related industries.

Methodology

1. Population and Sample

The population for this research consists of Thai tourists who visited Kalasin Province and had experience visiting Lam Pao Dam during 2023–2024, totaling 1,400,480 people (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2024). For sample selection, the researcher defined the sample group as Thai tourists who had visited Kalasin Province and experienced Lam Pao Dam during this period. The researcher used the G*Power 3.1 program (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) to determine the sample size, setting the effect size at 0.15 for chi-square testing. This aligns with international standards, where an effect size of 0.1 indicates a small effect, 0.3 indicates a medium effect, and 0.5 indicates a large effect, with a statistical significance level of 0.05. The power of the test was set at 0. 95(Hair, Ortinau, & Harrison, 2010), and the degrees of freedom (df) were calculated as 96, using the formula df = NI(NI + 1)/2, where NI represents the observable variable, which in this case is equal to 3. Based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines, the required sample size for this study was determined to be 123. The researcher employed convenience sampling, which closely resembles random sampling. Participants eligible for the study were Thai tourists who had visited Kalasin Province and Lam Pao Dam during 2023–2024.

For data collection, the researcher designed an online questionnaire using Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed online, targeting Thai tourists who had experience visiting Lam Pao Dam and voluntarily agreed to participate. Data collection took place in August 2024, with some responses gathered through online surveys via Google Forms. The survey link was shared through social media platforms such as Line and Facebook, specifically targeting groups related to culinary tourism. The researcher reviewed the collected data, eliminating incomplete responses, while complete questionnaires proceeded to the analysis stage.

The statistical methods used for data analysis included descriptive statistics, such as percentages, means, and standard deviations, to summarize general data from the questionnaire. Additionally, Pearson correlation coefficients and multiple regression analysis using the Enter method were applied, with a statistical significance level set at 0.05. The final dataset, consisting of complete responses from the sample group, was analyzed using statistical software.

2. Research Tools

This research is a quantitative study that utilizes a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire consists of four sections:

Section 1: General information about the respondents, including gender, age, education level, and occupation.

Section 2: Opinions on the management of food tourism activities, the aesthetic experiences of tourists, and the marketing communication of Lam Pao Dam in Kalasin Province, presented using a rating scale.

Section 3: Opinions on the loyalty of Thai tourists in the online sphere regarding Lam Pao Dam in Kalasin Province, also measured using a rating scale.

Section 4: Open-ended questions that allow respondents to provide additional comments and suggestions.

3. Data Analysis

The researcher collected and verified the completeness of the questionnaires before analyzing the data using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to analyze demographic data. The relationships between independent variables were examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient, while multiple regression analysis was conducted using the Enter method to determine the influence of variables. Additionally, the researcher selected relevant independent variables for developing the regression equation by evaluating the Sig. value of the F statistic for the overall equation and the t statistic for each independent variable. Statistical significance was assessed at $\alpha = 0.05$(Sig. value < 0.05).

Results

Part 1: General Information of Respondents

The research findings indicate that most respondents are female, numbering 75, accounting for 61%, followed by 32 males, accounting for 26%, and LGBTQ+ individuals numbering 16, accounting for 16%, respectively. The age group of most respondents is between 21-30 years, with 75 individuals accounting for 61%, followed by those under 20 years, numbering 47, accounting for 38.2%, and the age group of 31-40 years, with 1 person accounting for 0.8%, respectively. For education levels, most respondents have a bachelor’s degree, numbering 109, accounting for 88.6%, followed by those with education below bachelor’s level, numbering 10, accounting for 8.1%, and those with education above bachelor’s level, totaling 4, accounting for 4%, respectively. Most respondents are students, totaling 108, accounting for 87.8%, followed by employees in private organizations numbering 10, accounting for 8.1%, and self-employed individuals totaling 5, accounting for 4.1%, respectively.

Part 2: Levels of Opinion about the Ability to Manage Food Tourism Activities, Aesthetics of Tourists, and Marketing Communication of Lam Pao Dam in Kalasin Province

The study found that the level of opinion regarding the ability to manage food tourism activities, ranked from highest to lowest by component, indicates that this tourist attraction can create stories in activities at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.11, S.D.=0.79). Next, this tourist activity considers the readiness of tourists, ensuring physical and mental preparedness and participation readiness at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.09, S.D.=0.77). Next, the safety considerations of this tourist attraction are high, preparing safety measures for tourism activities while considering factors of safety for life and property, and assistance to tourists during activities at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.07, S.D.=0.82). Next is the activities and environment within the community, with Lam Pao Dam utilizing community tourism resources to create activities that align with the identity and culture of the community at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.02, S.D.=0.84). Following this is the ability to accommodate tourists, encompassing the capacity to handle the number of tourists per tourism activity and sufficient personnel to serve tourists during activities at a high level ($\bar{x}$=3.86, S.D.=0.89) Next is the timing for organizing activities suitable for the duration of tourists' stay, which can be classified as short-term, medium-term, and long-term, or categorized by the duration of the days, such as a 7-day, 15-day, or 30-day stay, being at a high level ($\bar{x}$=3.79, S.D.=0.91). The final sequence is the daily routines at the Lam Pao dam tourist area, where tourism activities are clearly organized, being at a high level ($\bar{x}$=3.73, S.D.=0.83) respectively.

The level of opinion regarding the aesthetics of tourists, arranged from high to low by each component, found that the management of local wisdom knowledge shows the local food culture at the highest level ($\bar{x}$=4.35, S.D.=0.71). Next, the activities organized have the identity of local food at the highest level ($\bar{x}$=4.28, S.D.=0.76). Following that, this tourist attraction brings happiness to you in your leisure travel at the highest level ($\bar{x}$=4.24, S.D.=0.80). Next is the management of the tourist attraction, landscape, and environment being appropriate at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.20, S.D.=0.76). Finally, the management of food service facilities for tourists is at a high level ($\bar{x}$=3.97, S.D.=0.85) respectively.

The level of opinion regarding marketing communication, arranged from high to low by each component, found that the service providers at this tourist attraction can provide information better than you can find from the internet or various media, being at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.17, S.D.=0.72). Next, the service providers at this tourist attraction have an influence on your travel decisions at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.03, S.D.=0.93). Following that, you are informed about the attractions of the Lam Pao dam in Kalasin Province through public relations, which helps you create a good memory at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.02, S.D.=0.90). Next, you are made aware of the attractions of the Lam Pao dam in Kalasin Province through advertising media such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, signs, advertisements, and the internet at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.00, S.D.=0.93). Lastly, the promotional food-related activities have an impact on your decision-making to visit the Lam Pao dam in Kalasin Province at a high level ($\bar{x}$=3.96, S.D.=1.00) respectively.

Chapter 3 Level of opinion regarding the loyalty of Thai tourists online to the Lam Pao dam in Kalasin Province. The study found that the level of opinion regarding the loyalty of Thai tourists online to the Lam Pao dam in Kalasin Province, arranged from high to low, found that the willingness to spend in this tourist attraction is at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.17, S.D.=0.88). Next, recommending this tourist location to others is at a high level ($\bar{x}$=4.15, S.D.=0.90). Finally, the intention to return to visit the Lam Pao dam in Kalasin Province is at a high level ($\bar{x}$=3.93, S.D.=0.90) respectively. As shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Level of opinion regarding the ability to manage food tourism activities, aesthetics of tourists, marketing communication, and loyalty of Thai tourists online to the Lam Pao dam in Kalasin Province.

variable	$\bar{x}$	**S.D.**	**Result**
1. The ability to manage food-related tourism activities. (x_Ability)			
1.1 This tourist attraction can create stories through activities.	4.11	0.79	มาก
1.2 The activities at this tourist attraction take into account the tourists' preparedness, considering their physical, mental, and emotional readiness to participate in the activities.	4.09	0.77	มาก
1.3 The activities at this tourist attraction prioritize safety by preparing safety measures for the tourism activities, including considering safety factors for life, property, and providing assistance to tourists during the activities.	4.07	0.82	มาก
1.4 The activities and the environment within the community at the Lam Pao Dam tourism site utilize community tourism resources to create	4.02	0.84	มาก

variable	$\overline{x}$	**S.D.**	**Result**
activities that align with the community's identity and culture.			
1.5 The activities at this tourist attraction consider the ability to accommodate tourists, including the capacity to handle the number of tourists per activity and the availability of personnel to serve tourists during the activities.	3.86	0.89	มาก
1.6 The timing of the activities should be appropriate for the tourists' length of stay, which can be categorized into short, medium, and long periods, or by the duration of days, such as 7 days, 15 days, or 30 days.	3.79	0.91	มาก
1. 7The daily routines in the Lam Pao Dam tourism area clearly include organized tourism activities.	3.73	0.83	มาก
Total (x_Ability)	**3.95**	**0.65**	**มาก**
2. The aesthetics of tourists.			
2.1 Knowledge management of local wisdom is demonstrated, showcasing the local food culture.	4.35	0.71	มากที่สุด
2.2 The organized activities reflect the identity of the local food.	4.28	0.76	มากที่สุด
2.3 This tourist attraction brings you joy and relaxation during your visit.	4.24	0.80	มากที่สุด
2.4 The management of the tourist site, landscape, and environment is appropriately carried out.	4.20	0.76	มาก
2.5 Facilities for food services are provided to tourists in an organized manner.	3.97	0.85	มาก
Total)x_ Aesthetics)	**4.21**	**0.59**	**มากที่สุด**
3. Marketing communication.			

variable	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Result
3.1 Service providers at this tourist attraction can provide better information than what you find online or through other media sources.	4.17	0.72	มาก
3.2 Service providers at this tourist attraction have an influence on your travel decision-making.	4.03	0.93	มาก
3.3 You have learned about the Lam Pao Dam tourist site in Kalasin Province through public relations, which helped you form a positive recognition.	4.02	0.90	มาก
3.4 You have received information about the Lam Pao Dam tourist site in Kalasin Province through advertising media such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, signage, and the internet.	4.00	0.93	มาก
3.5 Food-related promotional activities like discounts, deals, and giveaways have an impact on your decision to visit the Lam Pao Dam in Kalasin Province.	3.96	1.00	มาก
Total)x_MarCom)	**4.04**	**0.67**	**มาก**
4. Tourist Loyalty of Thai Tourists in the Online Platform of Lam Pao Dam, Kalasin Province			
4.1 Willing to spend on all expenses incurred at this tourist attraction.	4.17	0.88	มาก
4.2 Will recommend this tourist attraction to others.	4.15	0.90	มาก
4.3 Intends to return for repeat visits to the Lam Pao Dam in Kalasin Province.	3.93	0.90	มาก
Total (Loyalty)	**4.08**	**0.76**	**มาก**

Chapter 4: The Ability to Manage Food Tourism Activities, Tourist Aesthetics, and Marketing Communication Impacting the Loyalty of Thai Tourists in the Online Platform at Lam Pao Dam, Kalasin Province

Based on the analysis of the ability to manage tourism activities, tourist aesthetics, and marketing communication impacting the loyalty of Thai tourists in the online world at Lam Pao Dam, Kalasin Province, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis

variable	**B**	**SE**	**Beta**	**VIF**	**t-statistic**	**p-value**
The ability to manage food-related tourism activities (x_ability).	0.485	0.138	0.416	4.200	3.521	0.001*
The aesthetics of tourists)x_ Aesthetics)	0.060	0.164	0.047	4.834	0.370	0.712
Marketing communication (x_MarCom)	0.430	0.099	0.382	2.345	4.332	0.000*
Constant value	**0.177**	**0.319**			**0.556**	**0.580**

Multiple R =.778^{C} R Square = .605 Adjusted R Square = .595 Std. Error = .48155 Durbin-Watson 2.323

*There is statistical significance at the 0. 05level.

From Table 2, the analysis results show that the multiple correlation coefficient (Multiple R) is .778, the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.605, the adjusted coefficient of determination (Adjusted R Square) is 0.595, and the standard error in the decision-making (Standard Error) is 0.48155. Therefore, it can be explained from the hypothesis testing of the research as follows

1. The ability to organize food tourism activities has a statistically significant positive relationship with the loyalty of Thai tourists online at Lam Phao Dam, Kalasin Province at the level of 0.05, with an estimated coefficient of 0.485. This indicates that if the ability to organize food tourism activities increases, the loyalty of Thai tourists online at Lam Phao Dam, Kalasin Province will increase by 0.485 points, holding other variables constant.

2. The aesthetics of tourists has no statistically significant relationship with the loyalty of Thai tourists online at Lam Phao Dam, Kalasin Province, with an estimated coefficient of 0.060. The p-value=0.712 indicates that if the aesthetics of tourists do not affect the loyalty of Thai tourists online at Lam Phao Dam, Kalasin Province, holding other variables constant.

3. Marketing communication has a statistically significant positive relationship with the loyalty of Thai tourists online at Lam Phao Dam, Kalasin Province at the level of 0.05, with an estimated coefficient of 0.430. This indicates that if the expertise aspect increases, the attitudes of followers on the online platform YouTube will increase by 0.430 points, holding other variables constant.

Therefore, the researcher concludes from the results of the aforementioned research that the ability to manage tourism activities, the aesthetics of tourists, and marketing communication that influence the loyalty of Thai tourists online at Lam Phao Dam, Kalasin Province account for 59.5% (adjusted R2=0.595). If considering the independence of each error term (Durbin-Watson), there is no problem with the correlation between the error terms (autocorrelation). From the table, the Durbin-Watson value is 2.323, which lies between the values of 1.5 – 2.5, indicating that the independent variables used in the test are not correlated. Additionally, the relationship between independent variables was checked, and if greater than 0.75. Conversely, when considering the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor), all variables have a VIF value of no less than 10, thus no multicollinearity problem exists among the independent variables. This is consistent with the statistical condition check of the VIF values, which should be less than 10 (Wuttichai Arakphochong and Prasopchai Pasunont).2556) Represents the relationship between all independent variables that can lead to the analysis of causal relationships according to the conditions of multiple regression equations.

Conclusion

The research on the capability of food tourism activities of the Lam Pao Dam in Kalasin Province on the loyalty of online tourists can be discussed as follows.

The analysis of food tourism, aesthetics, and marketing communication at Lam Pao Dam in Kalasin Province showed high satisfaction in all areas. Tourists rated the management of local food culture and activities promoting food identity most positively, along with the site's environment, facilities, and leisure offerings.

Aesthetically, the focus was on local food culture management, food activities, tourist attractions, and the landscape, with food services also receiving high marks.

In marketing communication, Lam Pao Dam's service providers were more effective than online or media sources in delivering information and influencing decisions. Public relations and advertising boosted recognition, with food promotions affecting tourists' choices.

The link between food tourism management and marketing communication impacted tourist loyalty, highlighting the importance of preparedness and safety. This supports Patthaporn Panyuri (2015) on the value of memorable food experiences and aligns with Wiroj Thepbuddha (2015) and Raksant Viwatthasinuam (2015) on the importance of credibility and engaging content.

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The Characteristics of The Sustainable Turkish Restaurant with The Michelin Green Star and The Gault & Millau Awards

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Abstract

Purpose: The present study investigates the sustainable restaurants in Türkiye that have been awarded Michelin and Gault & Millau guides.

Study design/methodology/approach: Document analysis was selected as the qualitative method of choice for the evaluation of data pertaining to the sustainable restaurants criteria. The websites of restaurants that had received awards from the Michelin and Gault & Millau guides were selected as a source of data. A web content analysis was implemented under the three titles of food procurement, preparation and presentation.

Results: The implementation of a website content analysis revealed that the selection of local food was highlighted by restaurant chefs, with the local food either being sourced from local producers or being part of the restaurant's farm-to-table initiative.

Originality/value: This study has been undertaken to enhance consumer and restaurant awareness of sustainable practices. It has been achieved by implementing sustainable practices in high-profile Turkish restaurants that have been awarded prestigious accolades.

Keywords sustainability, sustainable restaurants, Turkish sustainable restaurants, Michelin green star, Gault & Millau sustainable reward.

Introduction

The advent of climate change, the Strategy for Sustainable Development for 2030, and unexpected scenarios such as the pandemic of coronaviruses, earthquakes, or natural disasters have precipitated societal transformations. These upheavals have engendered an elevated sensitivity among societies towards global environmental and social concerns. Consequently, companies and businesses have progressively initiated the incorporation of sustainable objectives into their management practices and daily operations. The hospitality industry has been equally affected by this trend towards sustainable development, with consumers becoming more aware of issues such as healthy diets, food origins, sustainable agriculture, waste, gender equity, labour rights, energy and water efficiency, and sustainable supply chains. The contemporary restaurant industry has been significantly influenced by the growing significance of sustainability, encompassing economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Reputable associations and rankings, including the

Michelin Guide (Michelin Guide, 2022) and Gault & Millau (Cumhur & Altaş, 2024), annually honour restaurants that demonstrate the utmost in sustainable practices within the food industry. In addition, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the Green Restaurant Association (GRA) and the Sustainable Restaurant Association (SRA) offer certification (Öztürk, 2024). The implementation of sustainable practices, rewarded or certificated by NGOs, has the potential to promote fair food systems and foster the development of resilient communities and consumer trust at national and international levels. Furthermore, the recognition of the sustainable practices also has the capacity to transform the societal dimension of the communities beyond the dining out at the sustainable restaurants.

An analysis of the sustainability dimensions practised in restaurants reveals that the environmental sustainability dimension encompasses not only the recognition of carbon emission levels in transportation, packaging and storage, but also the adaptation of fair agricultural harvesting, food security and biodiversity conservation, as recognised by consumers (Batat, 2020). The recognition of the environmental aspects of sustainability fosters the conservation of food, as well as cuisine, culture, culinary history and geography, healthy lifestyle trends in the social dimension (Mruseik et al., 2021; Gazzola et al.,2024). These benefits also lead to the development of new tourism forms, such as gastronomy tourism, food tourism and special interest tourism. This enhancement of tourism products, manifesting in the form of festivals and events, serves to augment the attractiveness of destinations. (Huang & Hall, 2023). Consequently, this development has the indirect effect of fostering economic resilience among enterprises, small farms and diversifications. This study examines the sustainable restaurants recognized and honoured by Michelin green star or Gault & Millau guide in Türkiye and sustainable practices in these restaurants.

Methodology

Document analysis, a qualitative research method, was utilised as the research method, with secondary data collected as the data collection method. The study constitutes a case study, a qualitative research design. Initially, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to inform the research, followed by an analysis of the official websites of Gault & Millau and Michelin Guide to identify the restaurants that had received awards. Furthermore, the restaurants' websites were examined for their sustainability practices definition. The sustainable practices are classified under three main themes named as: food procurement, food preparation and food presentation (Huang et al., 2023). The relevant websites were then analysed for content between 3–6 January 2024.

Results

A total of 12 sustainable restaurants located in Türkiye and awarded by either Michelin or Gault & Millau were the subject of an evaluation under three titles with subtitles relating to food procurement, preparation and presentation. The results of the evaluation revealed that the sustainable restaurants primarily focused on the locality of food products and the fair harvesting and sustainable preparation techniques employed. However, only a limited number of restaurants incorporated social and cultural sustainability into their menus, and only one of these was a vegetarian fine dining establishment. The evaluation results are presented in Table 1. Web content analysis further revealed that a few restaurants have not disclosed their sustainability awards on their websites, and a few others only share information related to sustainability actions on social media accounts. It was also noted that a few restaurants had not created a website, and in some cases, no information about sustainability was available on websites.

Table 1. The sustainable practices of Michelin green star and Gault & Millau restaurants (n=12)

Categories	**Sustainable Practices**	**Definition (collected information from the websites and social media accounts of the restaurants)**	**n**	**%**
Food Procurement	Local food	Are the foods locally produced?	10	83.33
	Local producers	Is there any mention from local producers?	9	75.00
	Restaurant's farm	Is there any mention from restaurant gardens or farms?	8	66.67
	Mention "organic"	Are the food served in the restaurant "organic"?	5	41.67
	Animal welfare	Is there any information related to the animal welfare?	6	50.00
	Sustainable seafood	Is there any information related to the sustainable seafood?	6	50.00
Food Preparation	Energy use	Is there any mention related to the energy saving?	6	50.00
	Save energy	Is there any mention from energy conservation practices?	5	41.67
	Save water	Is there any mention from water conservation practices?	6	50.00
	Efficient building	Is there any mention from environmentally friendly?	6	50.00
	Food Waste	Is there any practice to reduce the food waste?	6	50.00
	Nose-to-tail eating	Is there any mention nose-to-tail or root-to-leaf eating?	6	50.00
Food presentation	Sustainable menu	Is there any mention related to the environmentally friendly menu labelled with sustainability-related elements?	7	58.33

	Vegetarian menu	Is there any vegetarian and vegan dishes or specific menus?	3	25.00
	Sustainable labels	Is there any sustainable label on the menu?	7	58.33
	Community outreach	Is there any mention related to the practice that supports community?	8	66.67
	Sustainability achievement	Is there any mention related to the sustainable achievements?	5	41.67
	Sustainability statement	Is there any display related to the sustainability rewards?	8	66.67
	Sustainability awards	Does the restaurant display the sustainability rewards?	9	75.00

Conclusion

The relationship between sustainability and the contemporary food system, as well as the environmental sustainability of practices within the restaurant and foodservice industry, has been focus of extensive research (Maynard et al., 2020). Existing literature on sustainable restaurants has begun to concentrate on the sustainability practices implemented in these establishments. The extant literature suggests that environmental dimensions have received greater attention than social and economic dimensions have received greater attention than social and economic dimensions (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). However, the studies concerning sustainable rewarded restaurants from prestigious organizations, such as Michelin guide have only recently begun to appear in the literature (Bonfanti et al., 2025; Gazzola et al., 2024; Kiatkawsin & Sutherland, 2020). The extant literature indicates that the sustainable restaurants are primarely priorites on environmental practices that are implemented within their operational model (Öztürk, 2024). However, research on sustainable rewarded restaurants within the Turkish context remains comparatively limited (Akay et al., 2023). The present study was designed to enhance the extant literature related to the sustainable rewarded restaurants in Turkey. The results of the study demonstrated that high profile restaurants and local restaurants support the sustainability have the capacity to influence the other restaurants and consumers on sustainability, indicating economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions of the sustainability. This study also offers definitions of sustainable practices employed in these restaurants. However, the implementation of the sustainable practices related to the zero waste, nose-to-tail or root-to-leaf was not evident on their websites. As an ambassador of the sustainable restaurants in Turkey, the award-winning restaurants can announce their practices for consumers who can also apply the similar practices in their home kitchen.

The present study is not without its limitations. Primarily, the content analysis was conducted exclusively using data from the websites of the restaurants, the Michelin Guide and the Gault &

Millau guides. It is acknowledged that some of the restaurants do not possess a website or any information related to sustainability practices. In the interest of future studies, it is recommended that an interview method qualitative study be implemented to collect more accurate data. Secondly, the evaluation criteria obtained from the study of Huang et al. (2023) were defined under the three titles. Following the interviews, a thematic analysis should be performed and compared.

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The Role of Women Entrepreneurs in Sustainable Gastronomy: Sinop Example

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Abstract

Purpose: This research, which was conducted to determine the contributions and advantages of women entrepreneurs and women cooperatives to the destination region, aims to emphasize the importance of women entrepreneurs and women cooperatives. It is aimed to determine the role of women cooperatives and women entrepreneurs in ensuring the local economy and sustainable development in the destination branding process. In addition, it is expected that this research will contribute to the clarification of the values that affect the entrepreneurial behavior of women entrepreneurs, to make definite judgments on how women's entrepreneurship perception is shaped, and to the determination of entrepreneurial roles.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study used a quantitative research method and utilized the survey technique. The research data were obtained from the responses to the survey form applied to women entrepreneurs and women's cooperatives operating in Sinop province. In this context, the findings of the study were obtained as a result of interviews conducted with 33 women registered in the Sinop Chamber of Tradesmen and Craftsmen and the Sinop Chamber of Commerce and Industry. As a result of the responses to the survey questions, the added value of women entrepreneurs and women's cooperatives in the formation of the brand image of Sinop province, the added value of women entrepreneurs to the region in terms of the benefits and advantages they provide to regional development were examined.

Results: As a result of the answers given to the survey questions, it was concluded that the number of women's cooperatives and women entrepreneurs should be increased in the formation of the brand image of Sinop Province. It is also thought that women's cooperatives should be encouraged more.

Originality/value: The fact that women's cooperatives are engaged in gastronomy and GI entrepreneurship provides opportunities for small-scale and local products to be prepared by the enterprises. As a result, it is seen that it makes a great contribution to the field of sustainable gastronomy. In the literature on the subject, there are not many studies directly addressing the impact of women entrepreneurs and women's cooperatives on sustainable gastronomy. However, it is seen that there are some studies on the role of women entrepreneurs and local people in alternative tourism types. In terms of the benefits and advantages provided to regional development in the formation of the brand image of Sinop Province, the added value of women entrepreneurs to the region was examined and it was concluded that the number of women cooperatives and women entrepreneurs should be increased. It is also thought that women cooperatives should be encouraged more.

Keywords: Women's Cooperatives, Women Entrepreneurs, Sinop, Destination Image, Brand Value

Introduction

Today, entrepreneurship has gained different dimensions and meanings with technological, economic and scientific developments as well as women's participation. Within this dimension, entrepreneurship plays a role in increasing the level of economic and social development and has begun to contribute to the emergence of women's cooperatives through women's entrepreneurship. The ultimate goal of all countries and target regions is to improve economic development and growth through entrepreneurship. Therefore, ensuring the most rational and efficient use of the country's existing resources, geographically marked products, local products and local products is seen as the most basic principle in achieving this goal (Perktaş, 2014). In this context, the active participation of women entrepreneurs and women's cooperatives in target regions has a great impact on economic growth, society, destination image and branding process, employment and welfare. Because women's superior success and patience, entrepreneurial spirit, competitive power, productivity, meticulous and disciplined progress reveal their power to make a difference from product production to supply, packaging and marketing. It is known that sustainable growth and development are among the goals that all countries want to achieve, and that investing in human resources, especially in women with high entrepreneurial spirit, is seen as the most important key point in directing them to business life and production (Çabuk, 2015). In this case, it is seen that women take an active role in women's cooperatives as a means of creating suitable work areas for themselves, showing their labor in the process of highlighting local and regional products in target regions, and providing income for their families. However, although some of the women entrepreneurs want to take part in business life, it is seen that they encounter many difficulties in the process of becoming women entrepreneurs. It is possible to say that as a result of these difficulties and obstacles, the added value to be provided to the country and the local economy will weaken (Arıkan, 2016). The formation process of the brand image of our country's economy and target regions reflects a constantly evolving profile balance. It is anticipated that the increase in the number of women with entrepreneurial and production determination spirit and the establishment of women's cooperatives by existing women entrepreneurs who are successful in their business will contribute to the increase in business areas and regional expansion, a strong social change, the promotion of geographically indicated and local products in the destination region, the more effective formation of the destination brand and image, and therefore the revitalization of the economy (Çabuk, 2015).

Methodology

The universe of the study was accepted as Sinop province. The sample of the study consisted of women's cooperatives and entrepreneurs operating in Sinop province. Quantitative research method was used in the study. In this context, a survey was applied to women entrepreneurs and cooperatives in order to collect data. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the relevant literature and previous studies were taken into consideration while determining the questions in the survey form. After determining the questions constituting the survey, a pilot application was conducted with 25 women and 32 entrepreneurs in order to increase the reliability of the answers given to the surveys and to measure the understandability of the questions. As a result of the pilot application, the questions that were considered to be incomplete and incomprehensible were corrected and the survey form was finalized. The survey form consisted of three sections; the first section included questions on demographic characteristics. The second section included questions on the measurement of the impact of sustainable gastronomy on women's entrepreneurship and women's cooperatives in Sinop province, and the effects of participation according to entrepreneurship type and entrepreneurial expressions. In the third section of the survey form, an open-ended question was included and answers were sought for 2 questions. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used within the scope of the study. The analysis of the information obtained through data collection tools in the research was carried out in a computer environment using the SPSS 26 package program.

Findings and discussion

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics		**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Marital Status	Single	10	30,3
	Married	23	69,7
Age	18-25 Between Age	4	12,1
	26-45 Between Age	17	51,5
	45-60 Between Age	10	30,3
	61 Age and Above	2	6,1
Number of Children	0 (none)	8	24,2
	1-2	21	63,7
	3-4	4	12,1
	5 and above	-	-
Education status	Literate	-	-
	Primary-secondary school	4	12,1
	High School	10	30,3
	License	17	51,5
	Postgraduate	2	6,1

Your income	Gelir yok 0-25.000 TL 25.001-50.000 TL 50.001-75.000 TL 75.001 and above	- 9 11 12 1	- 27,3 33,3 36,4 3,0
	Total	33	100

Looking at the demographic information table of the participants, it is seen that the majority of the participants (69.7%) are married according to their marital status. According to their age status, it is understood that women entrepreneurs are gathered in the 26-60 age range (81.8%). There are only 2 women entrepreneurs aged 61 and over and the number of young women entrepreneurs is 8. When the answers given by women to the number of children are analyzed, it is seen that 24.2% of them have no children, 63.7% have 1-2 children and 12.1% have 3-4 children. According to their education level, 51.5% of them are undergraduate graduates and 30.3% are high school graduates. It is also noteworthy that there are two women entrepreneurs with postgraduate education. When income status was asked; it was determined that 36.4% of the women entrepreneurs had an income between 50,001-75,000 TL, 33.3% between 25,001-50,000 TL and 27.3% between 0-25,000 TL. The rate of those with an income of 75,001 and above is 3%

Table 2. According to entrepreneurship status

Statements		**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Were you working before you became an entrepreneur?	Yes No.	25 8	75,8 24,2
Did you benefit from vocational training opportunities?	Yes No.	23 10	69,7 30,3
What are your reason(s) for becoming an entrepreneur?	Economic necessity Family encouragement Love working life Poor conditions of paid work Willingness to work independently Spouse/family does not allow paid work Social prestige Spouse after the death of the husband/father Pioneering women producing at home	9 2 9 3 8 1 - - 1	27,3 6,1 27,3 9,1 24,2 3,0 - - 3,0

Who made the decision to work as an entrepreneur?	Myself My wife My family	27 4 2	81,8 12,1 6,1
What are the means by which you obtain your capital?	Personal family savings Credit support from banks Borrowing money Heritage Other partner(s)	9 18 5 - 1	27,3 54,5 15,2 - 3,0
		33	100

To the question "Were you working before becoming an entrepreneur?" 75.8% of the women entrepreneurs answered yes, while 24.2% answered no. To the question "Did you benefit from vocational training opportunities?" 69.7% of the participants answered yes, while 30.3% said no. Entrepreneurs gave different answers to the question "What are your reason(s) for becoming an entrepreneur?". 27.3% of the entrepreneurs gave the answers of economic obligations and liking working life, while 24.2% expressed the desire to work independently. When asked who made the decision to become an entrepreneur, the majority (81.8%) answered "myself". Regarding the question of where they obtained their capital, 54.5% stated that they received credit support from banks, 27.3% stated that they benefited from personal family savings, and 15.2% stated that they created capital by borrowing.

Table 3. Open-ended Responses on Women Entrepreneurs and Cooperatives

İfadeler	
What are the problems you faced while starting your business?	1. Lack of information 2. Financial constraints, where to invest 3. Financial difficulties and lack of respect from people 4. Financial difficulty, customer creation process 5. Financial difficulties 6. Economic problems 7. None. 8. Not recognizing working life 9. Apathy and not being taken seriously 10. Inadequate facilities, financial difficulties 11. Inability to find long-term employees and bureaucratic work at the workplace. 12. Economic and psychological problems. Insecurity 13. Financial difficulties 14. Customer attraction 15. Lack of experience

	16. Capital creation, high costs. 17. I did not experience any problems 18. Of course we faced financial difficulties, support loans for women etc. 19. Economic conditions 20. Financial problems 21. Being a believer only in myself with financial problems 22. State procedure, economic difficulties and lack of employees 23. Economic conditions, inability to find a job 24. Financial difficulties 25. Economic and crises 26. Financial inadequacies due to livelihood problems 27. Economic conditions of the country 28. Financial inadequacies, capital problems 29. Procedures were too many, I did not have sufficient economic means 30. Expensive and unemployment 31. Capital 32. The biggest problem is capital. 33. Being a woman
What are the advantages of being a woman entrepreneur?	1. Economic freedom 2. Government support 3. Being independent, standing on your feet 4. Independence and free work 5. To gain economic freedom for a woman by standing on my own feet and trying to live without depending on anyone. To be an example for my children 6. Economic freedom 7. Provides self-confidence 8. I gained economic freedom 9. Socialize 10. People's respect for you 11. Positive approach of the people and institutions you are in contact with, banks' support in terms of credit 12. Independence and freedom, sense of achievement 13. Loans provided by the government and banks 14. Ability to think more strategically 15. To be loved and respected 16. I don't think there are enough incentive advantages in our country. I didn't see any advantages other than the campaigns in some banks. 17. Standing on my own feet makes me more eager to work 18. I have not personally seen any advantages.

	19. Not many advantages. 20. Socialization and freedom 21. Trust 22. Support provided by the government 23. Work independently 24. No advantage, unfortunately 25. No advantage 26. Credit support 27. Women's vision 28. Loans granted by the government 29. There was no difference 30. Entrepreneurship and ease in banking 31. Customer reputation 32. Economic freedom and socialization 33. Insecurity because I am a woman

When women entrepreneurs were asked about the problems they experienced in the process of establishing their businesses, they generally expressed financial and economic problems. While 23 participants expressed economic and financial problems, 2 participants stated that they did not experience any problems. Other problems are; being a woman, insecurity, inability to find staff, bureaucratic affairs, indifference, inexperience and lack of knowledge. When asked about the advantages of being a woman entrepreneur, 4 participants stated that there were no advantages. The other participants stated that it provides economic freedom, gives the opportunity to work independently, provides convenience in loans and banks, receives government support, gives respect and trust, and provides socialization.

Table 4. Entrepreneurship Statements

Statements		**Sayı (n)**	**Yüzde (%)**
Women's entrepreneurship is a good model for improving the quality of life of local people.	Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided I agree. Absolutely agree	1 - 1 3 28	3,0 - 3,0 9,1 84,9
I'm pleased that women's entrepreneurship is sensitive to history, culture and the environment.	Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided I agree. Absolutely agree	- - 2 10 21	- - 6,0 30,3 63,7

I think Sinop's local identity will come to the forefront thanks to women entrepreneurship.	Strongly disagree	-	-
	Disagree	1	3,0
	Undecided	5	15,2
	I agree.	5	15,2
	Absolutely agree	22	66,6
Women's entrepreneurship is sensitive to nature and the environment within the scope of zero waste.	Strongly disagree	1	3,0
	Disagree	4	12,1
	Undecided	8	24,2
	I agree.	6	18,2
	Absolutely agree	14	42,5
Women's entrepreneurship increases the income level of local people.	Strongly disagree	-	-
	Disagree	1	3,0
	Undecided	5	15,2
	I agree.	10	30,3
	Absolutely agree	17	51,5
Women's entrepreneurship supports the opening of sectors that produce food according to traditional methods.	Strongly disagree	1	3,0
	Disagree	-	-
	Undecided	4	12,1
	I agree.	10	30,3
	Absolutely agree	18	54,6
Women's entrepreneurship ensures the continuity/transmission of local products to future generations.	Strongly disagree	1	3,0
	Disagree	-	-
	Undecided	1	3,0
	I agree.	10	30,3
	Absolutely agree	21	63,7
Women entrepreneurship has a direct impact on the promotion of gastronomy values in the province.	Strongly disagree	1	3,0
	Disagree	-	-
	Undecided	3	9,1
	I agree.	8	24,2
	Absolutely agree	21	63,7
Thanks to women entrepreneurship, Sinop is more preferred by conscious visitors.	Strongly disagree	1	3,0
	Disagree	2	6,1
	Undecided	7	21,2
	I agree.	11	33,3
	Absolutely agree	12	36,4
Women's entrepreneurship plays an important role in the branding of important places.	Strongly disagree	-	-
	Disagree	2	6,1
	Undecided	9	27,3
	I agree.	8	24,2

	Absolutely agree	14	42,4
Women's entrepreneurship has little impact on the development of sightseeing in the province.	Strongly disagree	7	21,2
	Disagree	5	15,2
	Undecided	11	33,3
	I agree.	3	9,1
	Absolutely agree	7	21,2
	Total	33	100

Regarding the question "Women's entrepreneurship is a good model for improving the quality of life of local people", a large portion of the participants (84.9%) strongly agreed, while 63.7% of the participants strongly agreed with the question "I am satisfied that women's entrepreneurship is sensitive to history, culture and environment". "I think that Sinop's local identity will come to the forefront thanks to women entrepreneurship." To the question "Women entrepreneurship is sensitive to nature and the environment within the scope of zero waste", 66.6% of the participants strongly agreed. ", 42.5% of the participants strongly agreed. 51.5% of the respondents strongly agree with the question "Women entrepreneurship increases the income level of local people" and 54.6% of the respondents strongly agree with the question "Women entrepreneurship supports the opening of sectors that produce food according to traditional methods." Similarly, 63.7% of the respondents strongly agree with the questions "Women entrepreneurship ensures the continuity/transfer of local products to future generations" and "Women entrepreneurship is directly effective in promoting gastronomy values in the province". While 36.4% strongly agreed with the question "Thanks to women entrepreneurship, Sinop is preferred more by conscious visitors.", 42.4% strongly agreed with the question "Women entrepreneurship plays an important role in the branding of important places." To the question "Women entrepreneurship does not have much effect on the development of places to visit and see in the province", 33.3% of the respondents answered "I am undecided".

Conclusions and recommendations

Developing the identified impact factors and producing effective solutions to the obstacles can help more women engage in entrepreneurial activities in the future, thus contributing to the promotion of local and geographically indicated products in Sinop and our country, the development of sustainable gastronomy, the branding of Sinop products, economic development and the reduction of unemployment rates. In line with the information obtained, in order to encourage women to become entrepreneurs, it is necessary to provide educational opportunities only for women along with financial support and to make policies, practices and regulations that will "reduce the workload of women at home". It is important to address the problem of access to finance for women entrepreneurs, to create new investment vehicles to increase the funding provided to women entrepreneurs, to develop new financial products for entrepreneurs with family care responsibilities, to expand networks focused on connecting women entrepreneurs and to expand mentoring initiatives to ensure that women entrepreneurs receive the coaching they need to scale. Turkey is one of the countries with the lowest rates of women entrepreneurs. There are many compelling and hindering reasons for women to enter business life in Turkey. These include limited access to capital and technology, inadequate networks and information resources, limited access to information, business ownership and development, legal and policy barriers and business reconciliation, and family issues and concerns. Removing the obstacles to women becoming entrepreneurs requires determined and consistent policies. Considering that the construction of a strong society is possible through the empowerment of women, it is thought that women's participation in markets, access to credit and financial support should be encouraged through mechanisms such as financial support, considering the continuing role of women in the family, coordination should be ensured among institutions that provide support to women, and qualified policies and support rates for women entrepreneurs should be increased. When developing policies to increase women's participation in the workforce, the low level of education should be taken into account and policies that encourage and support women's entrepreneurship should be developed accordingly.

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Marketıng of street foods ın Türkiye and around the world

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the role of street foods in Türkiye's gastronomic culture and examines the marketing strategies used to promote them both domestically and internationally. The research focuses on how digital marketing and urban planning can enhance the sustainability and visibility of street food culture.

Study design/methodology/approach: A qualitative research design based on secondary data was employed. Academic articles, industry reports, and case studies were analyzed to identify key themes related to the economic and cultural role of street foods, their marketing strategies (e.g., social media, festivals, and food trucks), and the challenges they face, particularly in hygiene and regulation. Comparative analysis was conducted to highlight differences and similarities between Türkiye and other countries.

Results: Findings show that social media and video blogs significantly promote street foods. In developed countries, street foods are successfully integrated into gastronomic tourism, while Türkiye requires structured marketing strategies, hygiene regulations, and designated street food zones to enhance its sector's international reputation.

Originality/value: The study contributes to the growing literature on street foods by presenting Türkiye's position within the global street food industry and proposing innovative marketing solutions, such as hygiene certification, permanent gastronomic zones, and the expansion of food trucks. Recognizing Türkiye's culinary heritage and aligning it with global trends can strengthen its competitive advantage in gastronomic tourism.

Keywords Street food, Marketing, Tourism

Introduction

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, street food is defined as "food and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors in streets and other public spaces for immediate consumption or later consumption without further processing or preparation." This definition also includes fresh fruits and vegetables sold outside authorized commercial areas (Contreras et al., 2020). Tourists visiting a region may prioritize gastronomy while engaging in food and beverage activities, particularly to experience local foods and beverages and to understand the culinary culture of that region. In this context, gastronomy tourism is defined as a tourism activity aimed at tasting rare and high-quality food and beverages unique to a region and enjoying this experience (Uzkesici & Gürdal, 2024).

Street food is widespread around the world; however, it carries a strong connection to the region where it is found due to being prepared with local ingredients, thus often meeting traceability standards. One of the most distinctive features of street food is the artisanal nature of the preparation process, which is crafted by hand using original or adapted tools. This authenticity makes street food unique and differentiates it by reflecting the identity of the destination (Privitera & Nesci, 2015). Street food is also appealing to tourists as it showcases and preserves the distinctive food culture of a region or country. As a result, street foods contribute to the local economy while providing visitors an opportunity to experience the local culture. They have a positive impact on local economies and ecosystems, as they are often traditional and made from locally sourced ingredients. Street food plays a significant role in meeting the food demands of urban dwellers in many cities and towns of developing countries. Notable examples include hot dogs in New York, kebabs in Istanbul, panelle in Palermo, and sauerkraut in Germany (Contreras et al., 2020). It is known that some people travel long distances to experience certain street foods. This is driven not only by the desire to taste the street foods themselves but also to explore the cultural experiences associated with them (Yayla, 2021).

Street food serves various purposes, such as reinterpreting old traditions, reviving lost or forgotten dishes, and bringing the cuisines of rural or hard-to-reach areas to light. It acts as a tool for social interaction and a means to reach younger generations in a new way. Today, street food is more than just a trend; it is a part of the culture of the latest generation. It is a necessity for those seeking cheaper meals during times of crisis and a flexible option that can meet the need for quick consumption. Furthermore, it offers the opportunity to discover new flavors, allowing people to become familiar with places they have never known before. It combines the sense of exploring ethnic flavors with the excitement of living like a tourist (Privitera & Nesci, 2015).

Street Foods and Fast-Food Chains

Street foods hold an important place in the tourism industry of many countries. Unlike fast food, which provides quick consumption and easy accessibility in restaurant-style settings, street foods are typically offered at street stalls, mobile vendors, or small food kiosks. Street food often provides an opportunity to experience a countries or region's cultural cuisine quickly and economically, offering a general impression of the region's gastronomy (Praesri et al., 2022).

Although fast food and street food share similarities in terms of quick consumption, they differ in their methods of operation, commercial goals, and ethical approaches. Fast food and corporate food companies are designed to be offered at the same or similar standards everywhere, with the goal of minimizing costs as much as possible. The purpose of this system is to provide consistent taste and quality worldwide. In contrast, street food involves a creative and careful preparation process and aims to make each dish unique. Even at the same stall, one can encounter different flavors and distinctive presentations. Street food, by treating food as a craft product, offers consumers authentic, local, and diverse flavors. With these characteristics, street food can be considered a reflection of local culture and culinary heritage (Bellia et al., 2016).

Fast food restaurants typically hire young workers on part-time contracts, and these employees perform various tasks such as food preparation, cashier duties, and cleaning. In this system, the workforce is generally versatile and based on standard processes. On the other hand, street food requires craftsmanship, and the workers in this field are often experienced and older, known as "street food masters." Another significant difference between fast food restaurants and street food is their investment requirements. Fast food restaurants require a large capital investment, while street food can usually be operated at a much lower cost. Street food vendors can often carry out their work using a vehicle or a stall, which can provide an opportunity for many entrepreneurs (Bellia et al., 2016).

Street Foods Around the World

One of the most important characteristics of street foods is their authenticity. This authenticity attracts tourists to the region where the flavor originates, contributing to the local economy. The uniqueness of street foods is defined by the ingredients used, regional traditions, preparation and consumption habits, and beliefs. In large countries like India and China, street foods show significant variations from region to region (Göller, 2023). Street foods have become a major attraction in places where local flavors and gastronomic traditions are highlighted, especially for attracting tourists. The growing interest in high-quality and traditional street foods has led to an increase in gastronomic events that allow tourists to experience local culture in a more authentic way. For instance, the number of street food events has seen a significant rise in recent years. According to information from channels like *streetfood.it*, *streeatfoodtruckfestival.com*, and *foodtruckfest.it*, the number of events increased from 9 in 2013 to 55 by 2017. Events like the Food Truck Fest attract 15,000 visitors, while larger festivals like Streetfood.it and the International Street Food Parade can draw up to 100,000 visitors (Alfiero et al., 2019). By 2023, the International Street Food Festival had achieved great success throughout Italy, hosting a total of 12 million visitors (Comune di Ferrara, 2024). In 2024, the festival continues across Italy with 150 different stops (ILT Quotidiano, 2024).

In 2013, more than 40,000 businesses in Italy, including fixed stalls, street vendors, and bars, provided over 12 million Italians with products that are protected by designation of origin, geographical indications, and traditional foods, contributing an estimated 13 billion euros to the economy. This figure represents a significant contribution to Italy's national GDP. In the culture of street food, Italian culinary products are not only recognized within Italy but are also among the most popular and beloved flavors worldwide (Bellia et al., 2016). The European Union's new regulations, which will come into effect in 2024, aim to strengthen protections for Italy's geographically indicated products. Products with PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) and PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) status will be protected across all areas, including digital content. This reform aims to increase the total economic value of geographical indications. Currently, the value of protected products across the EU exceeds 80 billion euros, and this system holds great significance for Italian cuisine (Italian Food News, 2024).

Street food is beloved worldwide and has many fans. In fact, at the 2015 Milan World Expo, the area dedicated to street food became one of the most visited places. Such events serve as a reference both for the development of traditional street flavors and for establishing new tourist activity models based on the cultural and gastronomic traditions of a specific region (Bellia et al., 2016).

In the Philippines, street food is not only a source of quick meals but also a way of life deeply connected to the country's geography and culture. Street food holds great significance as a reflection of cultural heritage and social interactions, and it is considered an inseparable part of daily life. Fun conversations with the vendors allow Filipinos to engage more with street food (Unga, 2022).

In Mexico, especially in large cities like Mexico City and Guadalajara, dining out has become a daily necessity for the majority of city dwellers. The work pace, long distances that need to be covered daily, and urban infrastructure make eating out a requirement. Additionally, dining out is seen as a social activity that strengthens relationships. As a result, street food culture allows people to transform public spaces into places with new meanings. Street food vendors and consumers alike appropriate public spaces, making them their own dining areas, thus imbuing these locations with fresh significance. For example, a park or garden on the street can become a dining area for a group of young people, turning into a defining feature of their identity. Another dimension of "eating out" can be explained by the thought "We eat like this because we are Mexicans," reflecting how food culture mirrors the identity of a society (Bouafou et al., 2021).

In Thailand, street food is used as a tool to promote both the economy and tourism. Therefore, Thailand has adopted policies aimed at improving the quality of street food, organizing street food stalls, and restructuring the environment to prevent problems on sidewalks. Additionally, efforts are being made to strengthen the country's identity through street food culture (Praesri et al., 2022). In the Congo, the habit of dining out carries different social meanings depending on the socio-economic classes of families. In this context, street food serves as an affordable way for low-income individuals to eat, while for wealthier city dwellers, it represents an opportunity to experience flavors from different cuisines, escape the challenges of city life, explore global cuisines, and enjoy themselves (Bouafou et al., 2021). Street food represents both the values of local identities and reflects the importance of global influences. For example, the popularity of street food from Eastern cuisines in Western countries serves as an example of this interaction (Sgroi et al., 2022).

Marketing of Street Food Worldwide

There are several factors to consider in the marketing of street food worldwide. For example, the presence of specific street food routes makes it easier for tourists to navigate and access these offerings. These street food markets, which typically operate permanently, are popular spots for foreign tourists visiting the area. In recent years, food trucks have gained increasing popularity, representing a viable business opportunity not only for entrepreneurs eager to run their own businesses but also for chefs. An entrepreneur looking to start this business can consider food trucks as a more cost-effective alternative to opening a traditional restaurant.

Night Markets: In many countries in Asia and Africa, street food markets are not only a part of daily life but also a significant attraction for tourists. Particularly in the night markets of China, Thailand, and Taiwan, the experience of food by tourists has become a key recommendation from both official and private tourism entities (Ballı, 2016). These food markets, especially in Asian countries, are often organized along specific routes. Such routes are easily accessible to both foreign and local tourists. Furthermore, since these routes are concentrated in certain areas, they are easier to monitor and regulate from a health perspective. Night markets, reflecting the style and culture of the region, are considered tourist attractions for both local and foreign visitors. Due to their proximity to residential areas and ease of access, they have become increasingly popular as a way to attract customers (Abitiria, 2023).

Some night markets, particularly those in villages or small towns, offer local flavors, exotic plants, and fruits sourced from surrounding areas. Night markets also contribute to combating unemployment. Individuals without jobs can earn income by working in these markets. These markets are seen as hubs for entrepreneurship, offering significant income opportunities for those seeking to start their own businesses (Mazlan et al., 2017). Tourist Night Markets, which reflect local culture and traditions, serve as places where tourists can experience cultural traditions through shopping. Therefore, studying the behaviors of tourists while shopping at Tourist Night Markets is considered crucial for understanding the authentic cultural experience (Hsieh and Chang, 2006).

In Taiwan, the vendors at night markets are mostly family-run businesses that engage in small-scale entrepreneurship using local resources. Moreover, they are legally protected; vendors are required to have valid licenses and are obligated to pay taxes. The vendors at Tourist Night Markets are monitored and regulated by the management committees of each market. This structure ensures a market management system that is in line with Taiwan's local cultural values while also being legally and economically sustainable (Hsieh and Chang, 2006).

Food Trucks: Food trucks, a trend that began in the 1940s, initially parked at specific outdoor gathering places where people met and sat. The idea for food trucks emerged when a bankrupt restaurant owner, having lost his restaurant, decided to use his mobile vehicle to sell sandwiches as a way to rebuild his life. He renovated his vehicle to include a grill inside for preparing the sandwiches (Fahlevi et al., 2019).

In recent years, food trucks, a growing category of street food, have become increasingly popular and are now considered very fashionable (Hawk, 2013). Unlike fixed-location cafes and restaurants, food trucks operate based on the availability of parking spaces in various parts of the city. This allows them to provide services at different locations on different days of the week and times of day. The changing location information is often shared through social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook. Food truck owners actively use social media to continuously update their daily menus and location details (Kowalczyk, 2024). In recent years, food trucks have expanded their offerings to include a wide variety of foods, such as appetizers, sandwiches, and desserts (Fahlevi et al., 2019).

In urban areas with a dense service sector, particularly cities like New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, food trucks have become a central part of the gastronomic culture. These trucks provide workers with fresh, on-site prepared healthy meals daily, and their prices are competitive with those offered at cafes and restaurants. The development of food truck networks has made them more competitive with chains like McDonald's and KFC, as they are not affected by the high rental costs of fixed establishments. While food trucks are widespread in the United States, they have also gained popularity in Europe and play an important role in spreading various national cuisines (Kowalczyk, 2024).

In the street food and food truck sectors, there are numerous examples of young entrepreneurs aiming for higher profits by entering the field. It has been observed that the business plan in the street food sector serves as a valuable guide for strategic and operational management (Bellia et al., 2016).

Food Vlogs: Food vlogs have become an increasingly popular niche in the vlog world, offering a wide range of content related to food. The popularity of food vloggers creates a unique attraction that appeals to both food enthusiasts and vlog followers. In these vlogs, vloggers provide detailed reviews of the foods they try, organizing these contents into video formats and sharing them on platforms like YouTube. Viewers can make food choices easier by considering the vloggers' recommendations, which may increase their interest in different foods. Additionally, the comment section below the vlogs offers a platform for viewers to share their own experiences and feedback, helping one another navigate food choices.

Videos uploaded on YouTube and other social media platforms generate income for vloggers based on viewership, making food vlogs not only an entertaining and informative content source but also a revenue model for the vloggers (Vita et al., 2021). According to Maderazo et al. (2024), the credibility of food vlogs on social media is a significant factor influencing consumers' restaurant choices. The attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise of vloggers make them more favored by audiences. Producing high-quality content, being authentic, and having extensive experience are factors that enhance this credibility. Additionally, key factors that influence consumers' restaurant choices include food texture, quality, taste, practical packaging, clean preparation, and satisfying, diverse options. All these factors shape consumer preferences for restaurants.

Demong et al. (2020) examined the factors affecting the success of street food vendors and found that individual factors are the most influential. Among the individual factors, diligence, friendliness, and interest in the job are important, while communication and marketing skills also enhance success. Organizational factors, such as early preparation and sufficient workforce, rank second. Environmental factors include elements like the business environment, transportation, strategic location, and the use of technology. The support from public authorities was found to have a lesser impact on success compared to the other factors.

Michelin star rating is the highest restaurant rating standard approved by global authorities and gourmets. Since the 1900s, it has been associated with the finest dining experiences. In 2016, for the first time, a street food vendor in Singapore received a Michelin star. This rating demonstrates that street food is now recognized as a gastronomic resource and holds culinary value equivalent to that of a restaurant (Irigüler & Öztürk, 2016).

In Türkiye, during times when restaurants were limited, street vendors played a significant role in meeting the need for quick and on-the-go meals in public spaces where people gathered (Bayraktar & Zencir, 2019). One of the key factors behind the development of Turkish food culture is the interaction between the culinary traditions of different regions of the country, as well as the mutual influence of the cooking traditions of various ethnic groups living in Türkiye (Girgin et al., 2017). Throughout the history from the Ottoman period to the present day, street food has played a vital role. Some areas where both Turkish citizens and those from other ethnic backgrounds sell street food are also places where social interactions take place and relationships are formed (Kargiglioğlu, 2021).

Türkiye has a distinctive street food culture enriched with seasonal diversity. Examples such as balık ekmek (fish sandwich), simit (sesame-crusted bread), döner, kokoreç, kebab, and midye dolma (stuffed mussels) are just a few of the street foods in Türkiye. This rich street food culture also draws from the flavor differences between regions. Many regions in Türkiye have their own unique street foods (Ballı, 2016). Cities like Gaziantep, Hatay, Adana, and İzmir, which stand out in the field of gastronomy, hold a prominent place when it comes to street foods. Moreover, with its deep historical background, Istanbul is considered a central hub for street food culture in Türkiye (Göller, 2023).

Street foods in Istanbul meet both the local population's economic and practical food needs and provide an attractive alternative for tourists. With their variety and availability at nearly every street corner, these foods play a significant role in shaping the city's culinary culture. The street foods that have become synonymous with Istanbul's food culture are prepared and sold at distinctive stalls, reflecting a broad culinary spectrum from Europe to Anatolia. Additionally, street food festivals contribute to the promotion and preservation of this culture (Demir et al., 2018).

In a study by Yıldırım and Albayrak (2019) on how tourists evaluate Istanbul's street food, it was found that a large portion of participants were already familiar with Istanbul's street foods prior to their visit. The information was primarily sourced from reference groups or platforms such as social media, YouTube, and the internet. Therefore, increasing the presence of İstanbul street foods in promotional films and on social media could enhance their promotion and encourage more people to try these dishes.

The UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy Network serves as a highly effective marketing tool for cities. This network allows cities to promote themselves through a creative lens, combining their strongest artistic areas with their history, art, traditions, cultural heritage, and tourism potential. It provides an opportunity to offer new experiences to both visitors and locals (Taştan and İflazoğlu, 2018).

Gaziantep's selection as Türkiye's first City of Gastronomy by UNESCO was influenced by several factors, including the transmission of recipes across generations, the use of seasonal and high-quality ingredients, and the balanced blending of spices, all of which contribute to the meticulous preparation of its dishes. Additionally, the incorporation of diverse cooking techniques and the unique flavors of locally produced natural products have played a significant role in the success of Gaziantep's cuisine (Şahin and Baysal, 2022).

Hatay cuisine boasts a rich culinary culture with approximately 600 types of dishes. Declared a "City of Gastronomy" by UNESCO in 2017, Hatay has become an increasingly popular tourism destination. The region's cuisine reflects its cultural richness and has developed through its diverse influences. Religious beliefs, rituals, the physical environment, climate, economic and social structures, as well as cultural heritage, have been instrumental in shaping Hatay's culinary identity. The region's historical background and cultural interactions have made its cuisine both rich and complex (Doğan and Yılmaz, 2022).

Afyonkarahisar, another UNESCO City of Gastronomy, joined the UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy Network as the most recent member from Türkiye. Its central geographical location gives it a strong gastronomic identity, making it a hub for food culture. As a key transit point for travelers, it provides opportunities for the city to promote its culinary culture, generate tourism revenue, and create a destination for gastronomic tourists. The Afyonkarahisar Municipality has produced UNESCO Gastronomy City-themed souvenir coins as part of its strategy to promote the city's culinary identity. These certified souvenir coins are considered an interesting and effective strategy in supporting the city's gastronomic marketing (Duran and Uygur, 2022).

Adana and its surrounding area are significant gastronomic tourism regions in Türkiye, known for their distinctive food culture and rich street food offerings. The region is part of the "Eastern Mediterranean and Southeastern Beliefs and Gastronomy Tourism Axis," stretching from Tarsus to Mardin (Ballı, 2016). Adana is one of Türkiye's major gastronomic tourism hubs, with its cuisine particularly highlighted by kebabs, liver, şırdan (stuffed sheep's stomach), and şalgam (fermented turnip juice), which are nationally recognized flavors. However, many local dishes have not gained enough international recognition, and they remain relatively unknown outside the province (Oğuz, 2020).

İzmir, on the other hand, offers a unique blend of Aegean, Mediterranean, and Anatolian cuisines, boasting a rich food culture. As part of gastronomic tourism, local delicacies, wines, festivals, tasting events, and vineyard tours are among the activities that attract tourists. Events like the Alaçatı Herb Festival, Mandarina Festival, and Urla Artichoke Festival are examples of cultural celebrations that highlight the region's gastronomy (Çakmak, 2022).

Street food plays a crucial role in terms of regional culture, destination promotion, and sustainability; however, literature reviews indicate that the subject has not received sufficient attention due to reasons such as informal work and resistance to modernization (Altunbağ and Yılmaz, 2019). The Ministry of Health determines the list of products that can be sold through mobile vehicles, while vendor licenses are regulated by municipalities. Unauthorized vendors, however, continue to sell, especially outside business hours, to avoid obtaining permits and paying fees. Some municipalities have completely banned mobile vendors within their boundaries (İrigüler and Öztürk, 2016). A study conducted by Bayraktar and Zencir in 2019 on street vendors in Izmir highlighted issues such as seasonal difficulties, low incomes, and the obligation to pay rent to the municipality. Additionally, problems with local authorities (municipal inspectors) were identified. However, it was also noted that some vendors enjoy their work as they are their own bosses.

Although street food plays an important role in meeting people's food needs, there are also health risks associated with such foods. Even when vendors adhere to proper food handling practices, these risks are not entirely eliminated (Menes et al., 2019). There are shortcomings in food hygiene and safety practices in street food sectors across countries, making street food a public health risk. To ensure that both tourists and locals can confidently turn to street food, public authorities need to implement regulations to raise hygiene and safety standards. Providing basic food safety training to vendors and improving tourism sector hygiene, safety, and marketing strategies will enable the sector to capitalize on its potential. Additionally, directing street vendors to centers with access to water and electricity could be a good option for creating a healthier environment (İrigüler and Öztürk, 2016). Tourism, street food, and food safety are closely related. When these elements come together, they positively influence the destination's performance and image for both visitors and locals. Offering safe and high-quality street food can contribute to tourists' more favorable evaluations of the destination and increase interest in the region (Bellia et al., 2016). In a study by Özkaya and Ceylan (2022) on the reasons and concerns related to street food consumption in Istanbul, they emphasized that street food vendors must be strictly monitored for food safety. The study revealed that the participants' greatest concerns about street food were the lack of hygiene and food safety. Bektarım et al. (2019) found that, in their study on the frequency of street food consumption, the preference for street food decreases as age, income, and education levels increase. They observed that individuals in this group, having more disposable income, could afford other food and beverage options and were more knowledgeable and selective about gastronomy, which influenced their choices.

Methods

This study is based on literature review. This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the marketing strategies and cultural significance of street foods in Türkiye and globally. The focus is on examining how street foods contribute to tourism, local economies, and cultural heritage. Secondary data, including academic articles, reports, and case studies, have been analyzed to support the findings. Key themes include the economic role of street foods, their marketing approaches (e.g., social media and festivals), cultural representation, and health-related challenges. Comparative analysis was also conducted to highlight similarities and differences between Türkiye and other countries regarding street food practices. As this research is based on secondary data, no direct interaction with participants was required. All sources used were appropriately cited to ensure academic integrity.

Conclusion

Street food is a value that can bring together many people from different backgrounds and cultures. Street foods are typically foods that are sold on the streets, in marketplaces, or at outdoor events, and are easy to consume quickly. These foods become attractive to both locals and tourists by reflecting the local culture and culinary traditions. Street foods are known for their low costs, accessibility, and unique flavors. Additionally, they offer an opportunity to explore and experience the local culinary culture of the region.
This study has explored the meaning of street food in different countries and the marketing tools for street food. Various methods of marketing street food have been identified. For example, social media plays a significant role in promoting street food. Vlogs posted on social media platforms help reach a larger audience. Also, interesting photos and videos shared on popular social media accounts play a crucial role in helping vendors gain recognition. Establishing "street food zones" is an effective method, particularly in attracting foreign visitors to the region. These areas not only provide tourists with an easily accessible route but also offer a chance to showcase the local culinary diversity together.

Türkiye is a country with a rich and diverse culture, particularly in terms of gastronomy. Historically, the lands of Anatolia have hosted many different civilizations, which has led to a very rich culinary culture. Each region has developed a unique culinary culture with its own ingredients, cooking techniques, and varieties of dishes. This diversity presents Türkiye's culinary culture not only as a food tradition but also as a history, culture, and way of life.

Several innovative steps can be taken for Türkiye to better market its street foods:

1. When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that vendors working in the field of street food are often not sufficient in terms of hygiene and sanitation, and many studies on this issue have been conducted in both local and foreign sources. One of the biggest concerns of consumers is hygiene and food safety. Public authorities could provide hygiene training to vendors and implement labeling systems such as "Clean Street Kitchen" as a practice to

help improve street food. This could be a beneficial application to help advance the street food sector.

2. Establishing specific "street food zones" for tourists to explore street foods is an important factor, especially in attracting foreign visitors. These types of zones offer tourists an easily accessible route and help promote the richness of the regional cuisine in one location. Asian countries have developed in this regard. Having vendors located together offers the opportunity to implement hygiene and health standards more easily. In Türkiye, such gastronomic zones are typically created temporarily through specific festivals and events, but making them permanent could benefit tourism. Implementing such areas in Türkiye, as seen in Asian countries, could make street foods more organized, accessible, and popular. It could create a major attraction for both locals and tourists while breathing new life into Türkiye's gastronomic culture. Türkiye has a rich culinary culture. Regional dishes, along with their stories and historical backgrounds, can be positioned as cultural heritage elements. Vendors can attract tourists' attention by sharing the origins, stories, and regional connections of their products more frequently.

3. Street food festivals held in many parts of the world help local dishes become more easily recognized. Nearly every region in Türkiye has dishes that reflect different culinary cultures. Street food festivals, particularly in large cities, can help make Türkiye's gastronomic culture more accessible.
4. Innovative presentations and packaging solutions can be used to make street foods more attractive. For example, creative packaging and aesthetic presentations that catch the consumer's eye can make street foods more unique.
5. Food trucks, which have become increasingly popular in recent times, are a type of business preferred by both entrepreneurs and chefs. Since Türkiye is a touristically developed country, this business could be implemented in tourist-heavy regions like Antalya and Bodrum, where tourism is intense.

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Evaluation of the Gastronomic Image of Türkiye Presented through Gastronomy.GoTürkiye

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Abstract

Purpose: The research aims to evaluate the gastronomic image context on the Gastronomy.GoTürkiye website, which is Türkiye's global promotion platform. Understanding and evaluating the image of Turkish gastronomy, which is expressed as one of the most important attractive elements of the Turkish destination, has been one of the main motivations of this study.

Study design/methodology/approach: The research was designed with a qualitative research methodology. Document analysis method was used to obtain data in the research prepared on the basis of a case study design. Descriptive analysis method was used to analyze the data. This analysis method was preferred because it was based on a previously established conceptual model.

Results: The research findings have shown that the holistic gastronomic image of Türkiye is conveyed through the Gastronomy.GoTürkiye web page within the context of traditional and new trends. In addition, it has been understood that the gastronomic image of Türkiye is generally presented with various distinguishable characteristics of Turkish cuisine.

Originality/value: The research can be seen as valuable in terms of addressing the concept of gastronomic image through a destination in the context of the country. In addition, Türkiye's strong and unique gastronomic tourism potential and resources have inspired this research. It is important to evaluate the gastronomic image of Türkiye, a destination with a rich culinary culture, in various contexts in order to strengthen its presence in the field of gastronomy.

Keywords Food Image, Gastronomic Image, Turkish Cuisine, GoTürkiye

Introduction

Gastronomy tourism is seen as an important element that reflects the identity and cultural heritage of destinations (Lin et al., 2021). It is stated that gastronomic experiences obtained in the context of gastronomy tourism positively affect the overall experience of tourists in a destination and that these gastronomic experiences strengthen the destination image (Aydın et al., 2022). Gastronomic image is seen as an important concept for understanding the links between tourism and gastronomy. Gastronomic image emerges from the perception of a destination's food culture, local cuisine and gastronomic experiences and significantly influences tourists' decisions to visit destinations (Duarte, 2016; Marine-Roig et al., 2024). Gastronomy events and local cuisine culture in destinations enrich visitors' experiences and strengthen the brand image of the region (Gupta &

Sharma, 2024; Lin et al., 2021). Understanding and sometimes measuring gastronomic image can now also be done through social media tools or online platforms. Food photos shared on Instagram, one of the most important examples in this context, play an important role in the creation of gastronomic image (Casales-Garcia et al., 2023; Marine-Roig et al., 2019).

Unique gastronomic assets are still seen as one of the most important advantages of destinations, used to eliminate the challenges of competition, the structure of which is changing day by day. The fact that destinations seek various ways to show their unique, local and authentic gastronomic resources brings along efforts to create different promotional resources. Previous studies show that gastronomic image has a positive impact on tourists' behavioral intentions and customer satisfaction (Onat & Güneren, 2024). Therefore, it is important to evaluate and construct the gastronomic image presented through various theoretical and practical studies. In this context, the research examines how Türkiye presents a holistic gastronomic image within the scope of global promotional tools. Within the scope of the research findings, it was understood that the gastronomic image of Türkiye is represented by local, authentic, diverse and traditional contexts and products.

Methodology

This study aims to evaluate the gastronomic image presented on the GoTürkiye web page, which plays an important role in the international promotion of Türkiye and is stated to be the visual symbol of all tourism promotion activities. A qualitative methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was adopted in the research. The research was designed as a case study, which is one of the qualitative research designs. Case studies are considered as the in-depth examination and description of a specific system with boundaries (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). For this purpose, the study is based on the food image attributes developed by Mohamed et al. (2021). The conceptual model of food image attributes developed by Mohamed et al. (2021) is shown in Figure 1. with its basic elements.

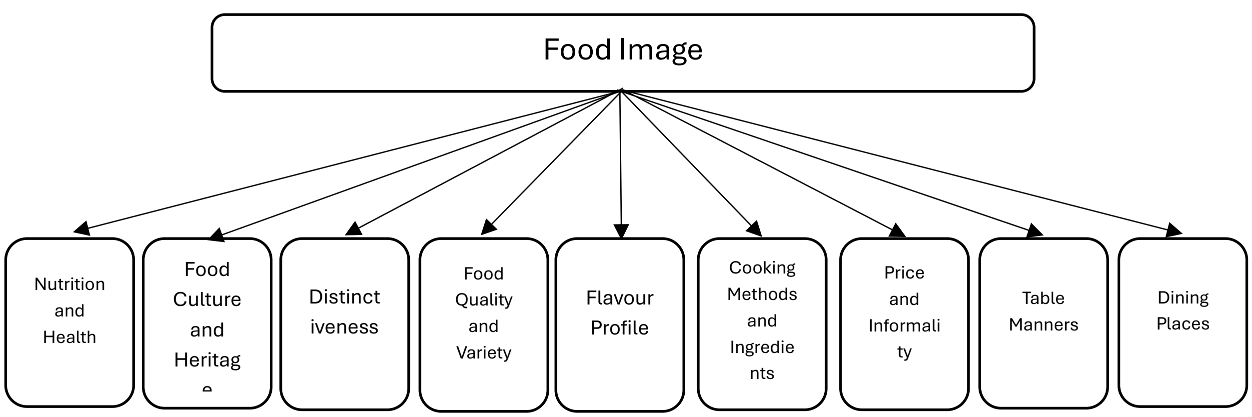

Figure 1. Food Image Attributes (Mohamed et al., 2021)

Research data were collected through document analysis. Document analysis is a method that can be defined as the collection, review and analysis of various documents as the primary source of research data. Documents and information obtained from electronic sources on the Internet have become a major source of data collection for research (Seyidoğlu, 2020). Since the food image dimensions developed by Mohamed et al. (2021) were taken as a basis, the content under the headings of Deliciously Türkiye destinations, Deliciously Türkiye experiences, and blog on the Gastronomi.GoTürkiye web page were evaluated by descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis is used in studies in which the conceptual structure of the research is clearly established in advance. Through descriptive analysis, data are summarized and interpreted under a predetermined framework and themes under this framework (Altunışık et al., 2007; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Results

The data on the web pages used to obtain the research data are shown in Table 1. These pages were handled as electronic documents and their contents were analyzed. In the context of the research, open coding, axis coding and selective coding were performed on the texts under 7 subheadings under the heading Deliciously Türkiye destinations, 7 subheadings under the heading Deliciously Türkiye experiences and 46 subheadings under the heading blog on the Gastronomy.GoTürkiye website, and the data were organized under predetermined categories and themes. Two videos under the title GoTürkiyetv were not included in the study because they were videos without words. All headings except the GoTürkiyetv were used in the research.

Table 1. Data on Web Pages Used in the Document Analysis Process

Web Page Headings	Subheadings on the Web Page	Examples of the Coding Process
Deliciously Türkiye destinations	**Marmara**	*"You can find all sorts of <u>local and international restaurants,</u> <u>traditional and fusion recipes</u>, talented chefs, and exciting gastronomy adventures in İstanbul."*
	Turkish Riviera	*"Dishes often include a <u>variety of vegetables, legumes, and grains, as well as olive oil, herbs, and spices.</u> <u>Seafood</u> is also a <u>common ingredient</u> in Mediterranean Turkish cuisine, along with meat dishes such as kebabs and stews."*
	Turkaegean tastes along Coast of Happiness	*"The Aegean is Türkiye's answer to vegans and vegetarians, as you can find the most <u>vegetarian-friendly dishes</u> in this region. It is booming with vegetable-based platters featuring plenty of <u>olive oil produced</u> in the region."*
	Black Sea	*"The land is not suitable for farming; hence the most commonly consumed products include <u>corn, anchovies,</u>*

		savoury cabbages, tea, cheeses, butter and a breakfast speciality called Kuymak."
	Eastern Anatolia	*"The cuisine is heavily influenced by the nomadic lifestyle of the region's mountainous territory, and many dishes are designed to be easily transported and stored."*
	Southeastern Anatolia	*"Southeastern Anatolian cuisine is a unique blend of different cultures and traditions and it is particularly famous for its unique blend of spices, herbs, and flavors."*
	Central Anatolia	*"In Konya, you can experience the Mevlevi cuisine at its best, especially during the week of Şeb-i Arus, when the death of Rumi is commemorated each year."*
Deliciously Türkiye experiences	**Turkish Cuisine**	*"Turkish cuisine has three essential features: traditional, healthy, and zero waste."*
	Delicious Routes	*"In the chilly climes of Eastern Türkiye, Kars stands as a bastion of cheese-making. This route introduces travellers to the artisanal cheese varieties that have shaped the local culture."*
	Top Restaurants & Chefs	*"Türkiye's restaurant scene has garnered international acclaim with MICHELIN-starred establishments and Gault & Millau awarded restaurants dotting its culinary map."*
	Turkish Wines	*"Discover one of the oldest viticulture destinations in the world!"*
	Gourmet Shopping	*"Turkish cuisine draws its strength from fresh, locally grown, organic, and high-quality ingredients and produce."*
	UNESCO Gastronomy Cities	*"It has a diverse gastronomic heritage at all its four corners; however, some cities stand out the most with their traditional, unique, and delicious recipes that make you crave more."*
	Turkish Breakfast	*"Designed to be social, shared, and savoured, Turkish breakfast consists of many small plates, both sweet and savoury, accompanied by bread and graced with çay (Turkish black tea) served in traditional tulip-shaped glass cups."*

blog	**Turkish Cuisine in The Heat of Summer**	*"Ice cream is one of the most popular and delicious treats of summer. Loved by people of all ages, this delicacy forms an important part of the dessert culture with its history dating back to centuries ago and a great host of varieties."*
	4 Awesome Turkish Cheeses Everyone Needs to Know	*"People begin eating cheese early in the morning over breakfast, where typically anywhere between 1-3 types of cheeses are consumed."*
	Turkish Bread Culture	*"Bread is made in a wide variety of ways and differs from region to region within Türkiye."*
	4 Amazing Turkish Herbal Teas and Their Benefits!	*"A tea culture these broad drinks so much more than just black tea – Türkiye's herbal teas are also some of the best in the world!"*
	List of The Types of Turkish Kebabs	*"Essentially it's a way of lumping a number of varieties of meat dishes together."*
	5 Most Popular Fish in Turkish Cuisine	"Türkiye is the right place to try some exquisite flavours."
	6 Must Try Traditional Turkish Drinks	*"Drinking coffee after a good meal plays a huge role in Turkish tradition."*
	10 Most Popular Spices in Turkish Cuisine	*"Details such as the combinations of ingredients used in cooking, cooking techniques and indispensable cooking sauces make Turkish dishes to be liked by everyone."*
	Indulge That Sweet Tooth with Every Kind of Baklava You Can Imagine!	*"Here, baklava is hardly a single food item but incorporates many different flavors and everyone will have their favorite that tastes best to them."*
	16 Foods You Have to Try on Your Trip to Türkiye	*"Lokum is often flavored with rosewater, the delicate, sweet fragrance once cherished by Ottoman chefs but now surviving in just a handful of desserts, like güllaç."*
	Just for The Coffee Gourmets Out There: Types of Turkish Coffees!	*"When visiting friends and family in Türkiye, Turkish coffee is always part of every occasion and will always be offered when you enter someone's home."*
	The Real Story of Sweets Beyond Baklava	*"First of all, the family of desserts is much richer than just these two."*

7 Vegetarian Turkish Dishes	*"Turkish cooking is actually very heavily vegetarian. There is a plethora of dishes that showcase the delicious, fresh, seasonal produce so widely available in Türkiye."*
9 Best Turkish Yoghurt Dishes	*"Yoghurt is an integral part of Turkish cuisine. Visitors are often astounded at just how prevalent it is, from breakfast, lunch and dinner, hot or cold, the love is strong."*
Turkish Olives and Olive Oils	*"With deep historical, cultural and manufacturing roots, it makes sense that Turkish cuisine is often built around the humble olive."*
Tea as a Symbol of Common Life and Culture in Anatolia	*"When you visit a house in Anatolia, the first thing you will be served is tea."*
More Than Kebabs: 5 Turkish Dishes That Vegans Will Love	*"One of the things that makes Turkish cuisine so great is the extent to which it's seasonal."*
Roaming the Lands Where It All Started	*"Today, Türkiye holds a unique position in being one of the most archaic wine destinations."*
5 Turkish Winter Drinks You Can Enjoy	*"Salep is made with a white powder obtained by drying and pulverizing the tubers of endemic Anatolian orchids."*
Aegean Herbs in Turkish Cuisine	*"These herbs are unique to the Aegean region and are used for their distinct taste in the kitchen and traditional health and medicinal benefits."*
İstanbul: A Gastronomy Capital	*"Türkiye has a huge gastronomic heritage thanks to the multicultural character of Ottoman and Byzantine Empires, as well as the rich and varied geographic characteristics and culinary traditions of each and every region in the country."*
İstanbul is the New Cool: Shopping at Its Best	*"Often considered as one of the world's biggest tourist attractions, the graceful Grand Bazaar offers a unique shopping experience."*
The Delicious Starters	*"In Turkish cuisine, traditional "çorba" (soup) is an indispensable and delicious way of warming up in winter."*

	Top Seasonal Fruits to Try in Türkiye	*"Türkiye has excellent climatic and ecological conditions, which result in a large bounty of tasty Turkish fruits!"*
	Top Turkish Olive Oil Dishes	*"Olive oil has been an essential part of the Mediterranean agriculture, trade, and gastronomy since the 4500s BCE."*
	Rediscovering Turkish cuisine in Antakya, Hatay	*"The city is blessed with thyme-scented mountains, shores with a refreshing breeze, and plains covered with fragrant lemon, orange, olive, fig groves, and vineyards."*
	Feel the Power: Turkish Dried Fruits	*"With the country ranking first in the world in terms of dried fruit production and exportation, it's inevitable to talk about Turkish cuisine without mentioning its love of all dried nuts and fruits."*
	5 Honey Varieties from Türkiye	*"A miracle of bees, honey is a valuable food with high nutritional value, enjoyed by everyone from seven to seventy in every region of Türkiye with its addictive taste!"*
	Tips on How to Make Turkish Tea	*"Drinking Turkish tea in the traditional, tulip-shaped, glass has already become a way of life for Turkish people!"*
	10 Iconic Street Foods in Türkiye	*"Simit can be found in beautiful, glass-covered carts all across Türkiye, and also on massive trays balanced atop traveling sellers' heads."*
	Aegean Herbs in Turkish Cuisine	*"These herbs are unique to the Aegean region and are used for their distinct taste in the kitchen and traditional health and medicinal benefits."*
	The Health Benefits of Turkish Cuisine	*"Turkish cuisine is inherently healthy and highly seasonal, with many dishes being built around the multitude of fresh produce available."*
	What's All A Part of a Traditional Turkish Breakfast?	*"It's filling, giving you the energy, you need, but light, so you're not weighed down all day like some other popular breakfasts we could name (***cough. English breakfast. Cough***).*
	5 Grape Harvesting Festivals Held Across Türkiye	*"In these festivals, where delicious tables are set, and various competitions are organized, vineyards and production areas are visited, and viticulture is introduced to all enthusiasts."*

	Rich Seafood Culture of the Turkish Peninsula	*"Surrounded by sea on three sides and home to large rivers, streams and lakes, this peninsula hides a different taste in every corner!"*
	7 GI-Certified Turkish Products	*"Türkiye possesses a wide variety of local products spread all over the country, some of which are GI-Certified and well-known worldwide."*
	Rediscovering Türkiye's Aegean Vineyard Routes	*"The TurkAegean is full of small towns where visitors can go on grape harvest tours, experience for themselves the region's grape harvesting traditions, taste high-quality wines, and dine at local restaurants that serve their own brands of authentic wine."*
	Gastro Routes: The Mediterranean Region	*"In Türkiye, the Mediterranean features some of the most delicious local ingredients."*
	Turkaegean generosity along the coast of happiness	*"Today, Turkish vineyards produce several wine varieties with local grapes of Anatolia by using their valuable knowledge and significant experience passing through generations."*
	A Taste of the Turkish Riviera	*"Endemic grape varieties and traditional recipes also abound in this Turkish province of significance at the foot of the mighty Taurus Mountains."*
	5 Börek Recipes to Try at Home	*"Today, every region of Türkiye has its own variety of this tasty snack."*
	An Epicurean Journey into Anatolia	*"As a bridge between Asia and Europe, Türkiye is a melting pot of cultures and its variety of local cuisines is unmatched."*
	Turkaegean Flavors: Gastro Cities Unveiled	*"Whether luxury fine dining or a no-frills experience in a seaside village, the this Turkaegean experience has it all."*
	5 Turkish Breakfast Dishes to Try	*"The most common type of Turkish breakfast a visitor to Türkiye would eat is serpme kahvaltı, translating to "breakfast spread", as the shared plates spread from each end of the table to be tasted leisurely."*
	Artichokes in Turkish Food Culture	*"When artichokes start showing up in the markets and street stalls, it means spring has arrived."*
	Quench Your Cravings: What	*"As a cultural melting pot, İstanbul has the most pleasant culinary scene to influence all its visitors."*

	and Where to Eat in İstanbul		

After coding the texts in the document, the stage of organizing the data obtained was started. In order to obtain the findings of the research, a framework for data analysis was first created based on the conceptual model used. Thus, it was determined under which themes the data obtained would be organized. At this stage, the data were associated with a meaningful and consistent approach. In the next stage, the previously organized data were identified. Finally, preparations for the correct interpretation of the findings were completed by explaining and associating the defined data (Table 2.).

Table 2. Findings of the Descriptive Analysis Process

Web Page Heading	Themes	Categories	Codes
Deliciously Türkiye destinations, Deliciously Türkiye experiences, blog	**Nutrition and Health**	**Healthy Food Options** **Fresh Ingredients** **Balanced Nutrition**	Fresh seafood, Vegan and vegetarian Aegean cuisine, Traditional, healthy and zero-waste Turkish cuisine, Seasonal cuisine culture
Deliciously Türkiye destinations, Deliciously Türkiye experiences, blog	**Food Culture and Heritage**	**Vintage/Old Recipes** **Authentic Foods** **Colourful Backgrounds** **Locally Focused**	Thracian cuisine, Rich agricultural lands, Hatay cuisine, Local and international grape production (Narince, Urla Karası, Chardonnay and Merlot etc.), Ancient wheat varieties (Siyez and Iza etc.), Mevlevi cuisine, Mediterranean cuisine, Aegean cuisine,

			Traditional food recipes
Deliciously Türkiye destinations, blog	**Distinctiveness**	**Unique Foods** **Unfamiliar Combinations** **Special Seasoning and Smells**	Local wine production, Viticulture, Traditional bread culture (Vakfıkebir, Lavaş etc.), Southeastern Anatolian cuisine is a unique blend of different cultures and traditions, Foods with spices, Presence of endemic species, Multicultural background, Climatic and ecological diversity, GI-Certified foods
Deliciously Türkiye destinations, Deliciously Türkiye experiences, blog	**Food Quality and Variety**	**Tasty/Flavourful Foods** **Large Variety of Options** **Rich/Strong Tastes**	Vegetable dishes with olive oil, Rich variety of local cheeses, Rich variety of local spices, Tea culture, Dessert culture, Local animal breeds (such as cattle, sheep), Menu variety, Artisanal cuisine culture
Deliciously Türkiye destinations, Deliciously Türkiye experiences, blog	**Flavour Profile**	**Lots of Different Spices** **Herby and Natural Flavours**	Mediterranean Turkish cuisine, Dishes containing meat, Dishes containing dairy,

		Complex Flavours	Dishes containing fruit, Dishes containing vegetables, Characteristic products, Wine-cheese-dried meat pairings, Turkish cuisine spices
Deliciously Türkiye destinations, Deliciously Türkiye experiences, blog	**Cooking Methods and Ingredients**	**Special Cooking Methods** **Novel Combinations of Ingredients** **Complicated Cooking Methods**	Dishes containing high quality vegetables, meat, fruit, olive and olive oil, Traditional and fusion recipes in restaurants, Sustainable cooking and food preparation techniques, Organic ingredients, Healthy cooking methods such as steaming, boiling or baking
Deliciously Türkiye destinations, Deliciously Türkiye experiences, blog	**Price and Informality**	**Street Foods** **Easy to Eat** **Affordable Prices**	Endemic and wild herbs produced and sold by local women, Homemade meals, Gourmet shopping, Turkish street foods, Turkish local markets, Historical bazaars
Deliciously Türkiye destinations, Deliciously Türkiye experiences, blog	**Table Manners**	**Sharing Style of Dining** **Special Eating Utensils**	Nomadic lifestyle effects, Fine-dining Turkish cuisine with modern presentation styles, Turkish breakfast, Hospitality,

			Eating as a social activity, Turkish coffee ritual, Traditional tea glass
Deliciously Türkiye destinations, Deliciously Türkiye experiences, blog	**Dining Places**	**Cultural Decoration** **Lively/Comfortable Atmosphere**	Local and international restaurants in İstanbul, MICHELIN starred restaurants, Gault & Millau restaurants, Esnaf Lokantaları, Gastronomy Routes, Gastrocities

The categories and themes under which the findings of the research are organized were created in line with the underlying conceptual model. Then, the codings obtained from the contents on the Gastronomy.GoTürkiye web page were grouped under these categories and themes. According to the research findings, the gastronomic image of Türkiye on the Gastronomy.GoTürkiye website can be expressed under the themes of nutrition and health, food culture and heritage, distinctiveness, food quality and variety, flavour profiles, cooking techniques and ingredients, price, table manners and dining places. In addition, within the scope of the research findings, it can be stated that Türkiye's gastronomic image emerges with contexts such as traditional recipes, eating together, healthy and fresh products, unique foods, rich and strong flavors, and authentic cooking techniques.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that gastronomic image is an important element of a destination that enhances its touristic attractiveness, reflects its cultural identity and enriches visitors' experiences. The local culinary culture in the destination and the promotional tools used in this context play a critical role in the formation and strengthening of this image.

It is stated that various information on the destinations' websites is important to create an indirect experience. Therefore, websites have the power to directly affect the perceived gastronomic image of a destination (Horng & Tsai, 2010). For these reasons, official tourism websites have been considered as one of the most used channels to describe gastronomy in a destination (Lepp et al., 2011; Okumuş et al., 2007). In this respect, it can be concluded that the general inferences obtained by examining the Gastronomy.GoTürkiye website are in the same direction as the studies in the literature. Previous research has indicated that the gastronomic image is shaped around some basic elements such as attractive gastronomic elements, agricultural products, unique gastronomic heritage, gastronomic products and dishes that offer cultural experiences, and the environment (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014; Lee & Arcodia, 2011). Research findings, in line with the literature, have shown that Türkiye's gastronomic image emerges with basic dimensions such as food culture and heritage, distinctiveness, food quality and diversity, and areas where food is consumed. Moreover, it is thought that the Gastronomy.GoTürkiye web page is a very comprehensive and characteristic promotional page and can serve as a practical example for other destinations.

This research has been handled with a qualitative research approach in the context of a holistic evaluation of the gastronomic image. It can be suggested that a comprehensive concept such as gastronomic image be examined with more complex and multifaceted studies.

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Telemedicine as a Tool for Enhancing Emergency Response in Tourism-Heavy Areas of Northern Ontario

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Abstract

Purpose: Northern Ontario is a vast region generating approximately $1.5 billion in annual tourism revenue, according to Destination Northern Ontario statistics. However, emergency healthcare delivery in tourism-heavy areas remains a significant challenge due to geographic remoteness and limited healthcare resources (Soltane et al., 2024). The region's diverse tourist activities attract nature enthusiasts, adventure seekers, and cultural tourists, further amplifying the need for efficient emergency response mechanisms. Telemedicine presents a viable solution to enhance emergency response capabilities in these areas (Ezeamii et al., 2024). This study examines the role of telemedicine in improving emergency medical response in Northern Ontario's tourism-driven regions, focusing on accessibility, efficiency, and patient outcomes.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: A literature review of Google Scholar and PubMed was conducted as the research method.

Results: Findings indicate that telemedicine significantly reduces emergency response times, decreases the need for patient transfers, and enhances the quality of care in remote areas (Sharifi et al., 2022). Key barriers to implementation include technological infrastructure limitations and insufficient provider training (Hafner et al., 2022).

Originality/Value: Telemedicine is a promising tool for addressing healthcare challenges in remote, tourism-heavy regions. Policy recommendations include investments in digital health infrastructure and training programs for emergency responders to optimize implementation and effectiveness (Anawade et al., 2022).

Keywords: Telemedicine, Emergency Response, Rural Healthcare, Tourism, Northern Ontario.

Introduction

Northern Ontario is a vast and geographically diverse region generating approximately $1.5 billion annually in tourism revenue (Destination Northern Ontario, 2023). The region attracts thousands of visitors each year, drawn by its rich natural landscapes, outdoor adventure opportunities, and cultural heritage. However, providing timely and effective emergency medical care in tourism-heavy areas remains a significant challenge due to geographic remoteness, limited healthcare facilities, and shortages of specialized medical professionals (Hafner et al., 2022). Access to emergency healthcare is crucial in remote locations where long distances to the nearest hospital or trauma center can delay critical medical interventions (Ezeamii et al., 2024). Tourists engaging in high-risk outdoor activities such as hiking, boating, and snowmobiling may require urgent medical attention, further straining the region's healthcare infrastructure (Hafner et al., 2022). Traditional emergency response models often struggle to meet these demands, leading to increased response times and higher rates of patient transfers to urban hospitals (Sharifi et al., 2022).

Telemedicine has emerged as a promising solution to enhance emergency medical response in rural and remote settings. By leveraging digital communication technologies, telemedicine allows local healthcare providers and emergency responders to connect with specialists in real-time, improving diagnosis accuracy, treatment efficiency, and overall patient outcomes. Studies have shown that telemedicine can reduce emergency response times, decrease unnecessary hospital transfers, and improve coordination between rural and urban healthcare providers (Jong et al., 2019). Despite its potential, the implementation of telemedicine faces several challenges, including limited internet connectivity, high infrastructure costs, and a lack of specialized training for first responders (Sharifi et al., 2022).

This study explores the role of telemedicine in addressing emergency healthcare challenges in Northern Ontario's tourism-driven regions. By analyzing existing literature and case studies, the research evaluates telemedicine's impact on accessibility, efficiency, and patient outcomes. Additionally, it highlights key barriers to implementation and offers policy recommendations to optimize telemedicine adoption in emergency medical services.

Methodology

This study employs a literature review approach to examine the role of telemedicine in improving emergency response in tourism-heavy areas of Northern Ontario. The research synthesizes findings from peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and case studies that explore telemedicine's impact on emergency response times, patient transfers, diagnosis accuracy, provider coordination, and patient outcomes.

Relevant literature was identified through systematic searches of academic databases such as PubMed and Google Scholar using search terms including 'telemedicine,' 'healthcare,' 'rural emergency response,' 'tourism healthcare challenges,' and 'Northern Ontario.' The search strategy was refined using Boolean operators and advanced search filters to enhance relevance. Additional references were gathered by screening bibliographies of selected studies to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant research. The screening process involved removing duplicates and irrelevant studies based on their titles and abstracts. Two independent researchers conducted the initial screening to minimize bias and ensure reliability in study selection. Full-text reviews were then conducted to assess studies against predefined inclusion criteria.

Studies meeting the inclusion criteria were synthesized to identify common themes, trends, and gaps in the literature. Data extraction focused on study design, key findings, telemedicine applications, and reported barriers to implementation. A qualitative synthesis of the results was performed to assess the collective evidence on telemedicine's impact on response times, patient transfers, provider coordination, and patient survival rates.

Results

Findings suggest that telemedicine significantly enhances emergency response efficiency. According to Sharifi et al. (2022), the implementation of telemedicine reduced average emergency response times by 30% in remote areas. Enhanced coordination, optimized resource allocation, and advanced communication technologies played a key role in this improvement. Moreover, virtual consultations and specialized training for rural providers led to a 40% decrease in patient transfers to urban hospitals, demonstrating improved local capacity to manage complex cases.

Additional findings highlight improved coordination between local healthcare providers and specialized medical professionals in urban centers. This collaboration facilitated quicker consultations, more accurate diagnoses, and better management of complex cases without requiring unnecessary transfers. Real-time specialist consultations significantly improved the accuracy of diagnoses and treatment effectiveness in remote areas.

Key challenges include inconsistent internet connectivity, high costs, and a shortage of specialized training for first responders. Limited access to reliable digital infrastructure hindered real-time specialist consultations, while financial constraints posed challenges in scaling telemedicine initiatives.

Conclusion

Telemedicine has the potential to transform emergency healthcare delivery in Northern Ontario's tourism-heavy areas. While the technology enhances efficiency and accessibility, its successful implementation requires investment in infrastructure and specialized training for emergency responders. To fully leverage telemedicine as an emergency response tool, the following policy recommendations should be considered:

- **Infrastructure Investment:** Expand broadband and mobile network coverage in remote areas to support real-time telemedicine consultations.
- **Training Programs:** Develop standardized telemedicine training courses for emergency responders and healthcare providers.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between government agencies, healthcare providers, and technology companies.
- **Regulatory Support:** Establish policies ensuring telemedicine services meet medical standards and integrate with emergency response frameworks.

- **Research and Evaluation:** Conduct ongoing studies to assess the long-term effectiveness of telemedicine in remote healthcare settings.

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Exploring the experiences of informal caregivers in medical tourism, and available support systems in the hospitality system: A critical reflection paper

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Abstract

Purpose: Medical tourism refers to the practice of individuals travelling outside of their home country to obtain privately-paid medical treatment. Patients travelling abroad are often accompanied by caregiver-companions– friends and family that join them for the travelling. Recent accounts on the experiences of caregiver-companions highlights a range of challenges faced by this group, including informal medical care, logistics of travelling, and more. Caregiver burden is defined as the extent to which caregiving has had a negative impact on the companion's mental, physical, social, financial, and spiritual health. This study examines a key gap in the literature by exploring caregiver burden among caregiver-companions of medical tourists and evaluating the support systems available to them within the hospitality sector.

***Method**:* Research articles published from January 1st, 2000 to February 2025 were identified. The search strategy consisted of the following keywords "caregiver" OR "companion" OR "caregiver-companion" AND "medical tourism" OR "health tourism" OR "Health travel". A critical analysis was performed to explore the theoretical and practical implications of this topic. Articles published in the designated time period and reported in English were included.

***Results**:* Several studies report on the experiences of caregiver-companions in medical tourism. Semi-structured interviews with informal caregivers identified how this population can avoid caregiver burden. Participants recommended to avoid identifiable risks, anticipate the needs of medical tourists, become familiar with the logistics and timeline of travelling, and take practical measures to protect one's health. This identifies areas of improvement for the hospitality sector, as caregivers would benefit from additional information and support on available support systems.

Originality: The challenges experienced by caregiver-companions in medical tourism, highlights key areas of improvement for the hospitality sector, to accommodate this vulnerable population.

Keywords: Medical tourism, informal caregiver, caregiver burden

Introduction

Medical tourism, the practice of travelling outside of one's home country for medical treatment, has become more popular among patients (Leggat, 2015). In 2017, an estimated 14-16 million people travelled abroad for medical tourism (Dalen & Alpert, 2019). This may be due to rising healthcare costs in certain regions, long wait times, and pursuing specialized treatment available only in specific countries (Sarwar et al., 2015). This global trend has caused an increase in medical tourists to frequently travel to other countries, with their families and friends to provide support (Crooks et al., 2017). Caregiver-companions refer to family and friends of medical tourists who accompany them throughout the treatment journey (Crooks et al., 2017). While there has been significant research on the experience of patients with medical tourism, far less attention has been given to the caregiver-companions. These individuals assume significant responsibilities by taking care of the patient, while navigating unfamiliar healthcare systems and facilities (Casey et al., 2013).

The physical, emotional, and mental stress that informal caregivers experience whilst caring for the patient is described as caregiver burden (Liu et al., 2020). Previous research explains that caregiver burden is a public health concern as the adverse effects can decrease quality of life and mental health of both the patient and the caregiver (Grubic et al., 2024). To alleviate caregiver burnout several countries have implemented policies to support the health of caregiver-companions. For example, the Canadian government has provided caregivers with the option to leave paid work, recognizing their needs as public health issues (Crooks et al., 2017). Therefore, the caregiver burden of medical tourists is an important topic, as these individuals face additional challenges including language barrier, financial strain, and more.

Methodology

Peer-reviewed articles on caregiver burden in medical tourism were identified through a search of PubMed and Google Scholar. The search was restricted to publications from January 1st, 2000 to February 2025, ensuring a wide range of perspectives are included. The search strategy included the following keywords: "caregiver" OR "companion" OR "caregiver-companion" AND "medical tourism" OR "health tourism" OR "Health travel". Articles written in English and relating to the mentioned key words are included, while articles outside of the time-period are excluded. A critical analysis of the topic was conducted to understand the theoretical and practical implications of caregiver burned, and areas of improvement for the tourism industry.

Results

Despite going to another country, informal caregivers play a critical role in supporting the medical needs of patients. A qualitative study by Casey et al. conducted 20 interviews with 21 International Patient Coordinator (IPCs), who work at destination facilities (Casey et al., 2013). The IPCS commonly observed three key roles undertaken by informal caregivers, including "knowledge broker", "companion", and "navigator". Participants highlighted that caregivers often facilitate the communication of knowledge between facility staff and the patient. This is mainly done through inquiry, clarification, translation, and retention, as caregivers ask questions on behalf of the patient (Casey et al., 2013). The IPCs clarify that caregivers are suitable to communicate on behalf of the patients, saying "when you're in that position [as a patient] you're ill, you're in bed…you don't remember it". Furthermore, caregivers act as "companions" by creating a feeling of safety and security for the patient (Casey et al., 2013). Participants reported that informal caregivers provide "emotional support", explaining that this is something "medical tourism companies cannot offer". Similarly, it is explained that caregivers provide hands-on-care, including mobility and everyday tasks of the patient. Finally, caregivers act as "navigators" through managing the geographical and cultural landscape, to reach the correct destination, obtain the appropriate documentation, and verify the information. Similarly, this is consistent with the findings of a qualitative study by Whitmore et al. evaluating the experiences of 20 informal caregivers in medical tourism (Whitmore et al., 2015). Several participants continued to care for the patient's needs during the trip, despite the additional challenges. The authors note that one participant related to the different standards of healthcare, such as different versions of "handicapped or wheelchair toilet" (Whitmore et al., 2015).

While informal caregivers of medical tourists clearly play a crucial role in their care and treatment, this burden leads to their feelings of stress. A qualitative study by Crooks et al. conducted interviews with 20 participants, being the caregiver-companions of medical tourists (Crooks et al., 2017). Participants mentioned not having enough information about relevant aspects of their travel, brings stress and other "negative outcomes". They further explained that caregiver-companions require a complete understanding of their responsibilities, to lessen their worries (Crooks et al., 2017). The authors mentioned that as some participants lacked the skills or time to learn about medical tourism, they became vulnerable to potential safety and other risks. This includes exposure to contaminated environments, disposing of medical waste without protocol, and poor security patrols in the clinic (Crooks et al., 2017). These findings are consistent with Casey et al., as the authors found that caregivers are likely to be exposed to several risks. The participants noted that caregivers are under significant pressure and stress, as they worry about the outcome of the procedure (Casey et al., 2013). Furthermore, IPCs explained that companions face safety risks, such as being robbed, taken advantage of financially, getting lost in the city, or drinking contaminated water (Casey et al., 2013). Similarly, a qualitative study by Margolis et al. evaluated the psychological experiences of caregivers travelling for medical care of their child (Margolis et al., 2014). The authors noted that 91% of the families experience financial strain, due to the costs of travel and leaving work. All (100%) of the families explained language barrier to be a burden in communicating in a medical setting. Other challenges included parenting an ill-child (77%), emotional burden (77%), and parenting separated children (73%).

The experiences of informal caregivers can inform valuable recommendations for the medical tourism industry, helping support this over-looked community (Adams et al., 2017; Tomej et al., 2017). While not directly focused on medical tourism, a study by Tomej et al. explores the travel information needs of informal carers of dementia patients (Tomej et al., 2017). This aligns with previous studies on experiences of caregivers in medical tourism. Tomej et al. suggests addressing these gaps by offering resources on personal accounts from past medical tourists and clear guidance on travel conditions to the destination (Tomej et al., 2017).

Conclusion

The findings of this review highlight the burden faced by caregiver-companions of medical tourists, emphasizing their role in patient care, managing travel logistics, and ensuring the well-being of the patient. However, informal caregivers face significant stress and worry throughout this journey, and are exposed to several health risks. This identifies areas for improvement in the hospitality system, to support the mental and physical health of informal caregivers. It is recommended for medical tourism companies to provide additional education information to caregivers, and accommodate for disabilities of patients (Crooks et al., 2017; Whitmore et al., 2015)

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Reevaluating the Concept of Medical Tourism in Health Tourism: An Analysis of Graduate Studies in Turkey

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines graduate theses on medical tourism in Turkey (2008–2024) to identify academic contributions, research trends, and gaps in the field.

Methodology: A systematic review of 110 theses was conducted using YÖKTEZ's search tool. Data were analyzed through content analysis (MAXQDA 2024), categorizing research by disciplines, methodologies, and thematic focus. A word cloud analysis identified key terms and variables.

Results: Medical tourism research has grown since 2014, peaking in 2022. Tourism management, health management, and business administration dominate the field. Studies primarily use surveys, qualitative analyses, and interviews, focusing on service quality, patient satisfaction, and marketing. Despite Turkey's strong medical tourism sector, policy development, international accreditation, and sustainability remain underexplored.

Originality/Value: This study provides the first comprehensive review of Turkish graduate theses on medical tourism, offering localized insights. It highlights the need for more doctoral research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and studies on sustainability and regulatory frameworks to enhance Turkey's global competitiveness.

Keywords: Health Tourism, Medical Tourism, Systematic Review

Introduction

As life expectancy increases and individuals seek to enhance their quality of life, health tourism has emerged as a significant global trend. No longer limited to leisure, travelers now seek wellness services such as diet, physical care, relaxation, healthy nutrition, and mental training (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001).

A sub concept of health tourism, medical tourism involves crossing national borders for clinical treatments and medical interventions, distinguishing it from wellness-oriented health tourism. While medical tourism takes place in hospitals and clinics and relies on pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and surgeries, health tourism occurs in non-medical facilities like hotels, spas, and retreats, focusing on natural therapies and therapeutic treatments (Dökme, Parlayan & Yağar, 2017).

Key drivers of medical tourism include rising healthcare costs, demand for faster and more affordable treatments, access to internationally accredited services, and advancements in medical technology. Additionally, telemedicine, artificial intelligence, and virtual communication have expanded access to medical expertise, further accelerating the sector's growth (Omidi, Pooya, Bastam & Hosein Zadeh, 2022).

Turkey has positioned itself as a major medical tourism destination due to its affordable, high-quality healthcare, advanced infrastructure, and strategic location. Given its increasing role on the international stage, analyzing academic research in Turkey is essential to understanding the sector's development.

This study focuses on graduate theses, which offer in-depth analysis, rigorous evaluation, and insights into local trends. Unlike journal articles that emphasize global patterns, theses provide case studies and sector-specific applications, identifying unique national dynamics. By addressing underexplored topics, this research contributes to filling literature gaps and advancing academic discourse in medical tourism.

Methodology

The primary research question of this study is: "How do published graduate theses on medical tourism vary?" To address this, several sub-themes were defined, including universities, institutes, academic disciplines, degree levels, publication years, language, research areas, keywords, research approach, data collection methods, variables, analyzed elements, and findings.

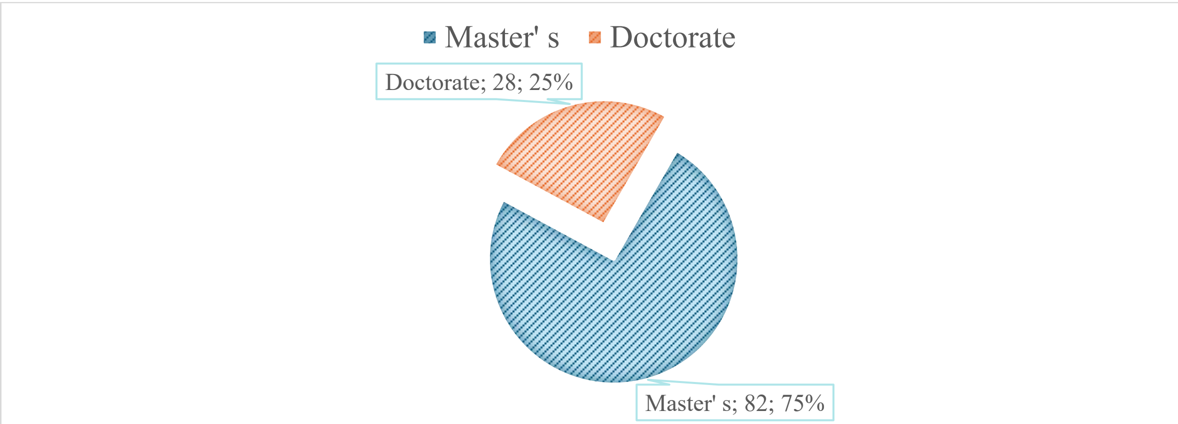
A systematic review was conducted using YÖKTEZ's search tool, limiting the search to Turkish-approved theses containing the term "medical tourism" in their titles, indexes, or keywords. The first Turkish graduate thesis on the topic was published in 2008, and the search covered all theses from 2008 to 2024, identifying 110 graduate theses.

The collected data underwent content analysis using the MAXQDA 2024 software, ensuring a systematic and comprehensive evaluation.

Results

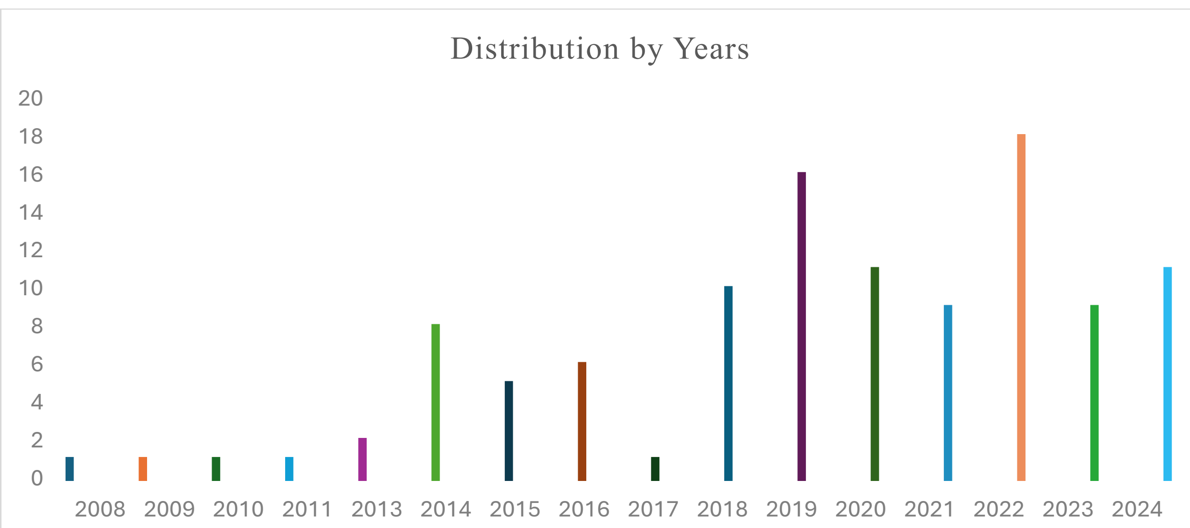
This section presents an analysis of theses conducted in the field of medical tourism between 2008 and 2024.

Table 1: Distribution by Types



The analysis of 82 master's theses and 28 doctoral dissertations shows that master's-level research is more extensive, while doctoral studies remain limited. Increasing doctoral research would strengthen the theoretical and methodological foundations of the field.

Table 2: Distribution by Years



When Table 2 is examined, it is observed that academic research on medical tourism has generally increased since 2014. This indicates a period in which medical tourism began to attract more attention both academically and within the sector, then the pandemic hit the world in 2022, when research on medical tourism reached its peak.

Table 3: Distribution by Universities

University	Doctorate	Master's	Total
Akdeniz University	2	4	6
Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University	1	2	3
Anadolu University	1	1	2
Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University	2	-	2
Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University	-	1	1
Atatürk University	-	2	2
Atılım University	1	1	2
Aydın Adnan Menderes University	1	5	6
Balıkesir University	2	4	6
Beykent University	1	3	4
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University	-	1	1
Çukurova University	1	-	1
Eastern Mediterranean University	-	1	1
Düzce University	1	3	4
Erciyes University	-	1	1
Erzurum Technical University	1	-	1
Eskişehir Osmangazi University	-	1	1
Gazi University	1	4	5
İbn Haldun University	-	1	1
İstanbul Arel University	-	1	1
İstanbul Aydın University	-	1	1
İstanbul Gelişim University	1	2	3
İstanbul Medipol University	1	2	3
İstanbul Okan University	-	1	1
İstanbul Technical University	1	-	1
İstanbul Commerce University	-	2	2
İstanbul University	-	5	5
İstanbul University-Cerrahpaşa	1	-	1
İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University	-	2	2
İzmir Katip Çelebi University	-	1	1
Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University	-	1	1
Kayseri University	1	1	2
Maltepe University	1	-	1
Marmara University	1	1	2
Mersin University	1	-	1
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University	-	1	1

Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University	1	-	1
Ondokuz Mayıs University	-	1	1
Ordu University	-	1	1
University of Health Sciences	1	-	1
Sakarya University of Applied Sciences	-	2	2
Sakarya University	-	3	3
Sivas Cumhuriyet University	-	5	5
Süleyman Demirel University	1	6	7
Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University	-	1	1
Toros University	-	1	1
Trakya University	-	3	3
Üsküdar University	2	-	2
Yalova University	-	1	1
Yıldız Technical University	-	1	1
Yüzüncü Yıl University	-	1	1
TOTAL	**28**	**82**	**110**

Table 4: Distribution by Institutes

Institute	**Doctorate**	**Master's**	**Total**
Institute Of Informatics	-	1	1
Institute Of Educational Sciences	-	2	2
Institute Of Science	1	1	2
Hamidiye Institute Of Health Sciences	1	-	1
Institute Of Business Administration	-	3	3
Graduate Education Institute	7	13	20
Institute Of Health Sciences	4	10	14
Institute Of Social Sciences	15	51	66
Overseas Institute	-	1	1
TOTAL	**28**	**82**	**110**

It is unsurprising that universities with tourism programs have produced most theses in the field. Additionally, as expected, most graduate research on medical tourism is conducted within Social Sciences institutes.

Table 5: Distribution by Academic Disciplines

Academic Discipline	Doctorate	Master's	Total
Public Administration Department	1	-	1
Geography Department	-	2	2
Interdisciplinary Health Tourism Department	-	2	2
Industrial Engineering Department	1	-	1
Economics Department	1	1	2
Business Administration Department	7	10	17
Business Management Department	-	2	2
Public Administration Department	-	1	1
Hotel Management Department	-	1	1
Health Sciences Department	1	-	1
Health Economics Department	-	1	1
Health Systems Engineering Department	-	1	1
Health Tourism Department	1	5	6
Health Tourism Management Department	-	4	4
Health Management Department	8	19	27
Health Management Science Department	-	1	1
Social Sciences Department	1	-	1
Tourism Management Department	4	19	23
Tourism Management Education Department	1	-	1
Tourism Management and Hospitality Department	2	9	11
Tourism and Hospitality Management Department	-	1	1
International Business and Trade Department	-	1	1
Management Information Systems Department	-	1	1
TOTAL	**28**	**81**	**109**

The Health Management Department ranks first in medical tourism research, followed by Tourism Management and Business Administration. As a multidisciplinary field integrating healthcare, economy, and tourism, medical tourism necessitates research in health management, tourism management, and economics to fully understand its dynamics.

Table 6: Distribution by Scientific Disciplines

Scientific Discipline	Doctorate	Master's	Total
Department Of Educational Sciences	-	2	2
Physical Geography Discipline	-	1	1
Hospital Management Discipline	1	1	2

Hospital And Healthcare Institutions Management Discipline	-	3	3
Business Administration Discipline	2	-	2
Business Management Discipline	1	1	2
Hotel Management Discipline	-	1	1
Healthcare Institutions Management Discipline	-	1	1
Healthcare Institutions Administration	1	-	1
Health Tourism Discipline	1	1	2
Health Management Discipline	-	3	3
Arts Management Discipline	1	-	1
Political Science And Public Administration Discipline	1	-	1
Tourism Management Discipline	3	1	4
TOTAL	**11**	**15**	**26**

Tourism management has produced the highest number of studies on medical tourism, reflecting the sector's direct connection to tourism. Health management and healthcare institutions management rank second, focusing on hospital management, international patient satisfaction, and quality management.

Educational sciences, hospital management, business administration, and health tourism follow, emphasizing education, business strategies, and health tourism management. Additionally, 84 theses adopt a general approach, indicating that medical tourism is a multidimensional and interdisciplinary field.

Table 7: Distribution by Sample Groups

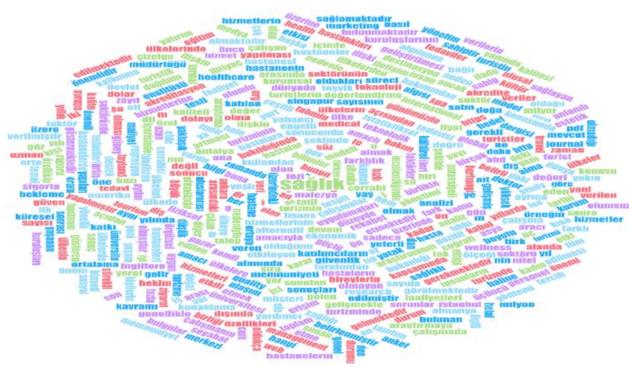
Domestic and Foreign Tourists
Hospitals (Public-Private)
Medical Centers
Healthcare Professionals
Hair Transplantation Centers
Relatives of Patients
Associations
Academics
Agencies
Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
Number of Specialist Physicians

The reliability and generalizability of research in medical tourism depend on robust samples and research methods. The systematic review reveals a diverse range of methodologies, including:

- Face-to-face interviews with domestic and foreign tourists, hospital patients, and hair transplant center clients to enhance service quality.
- Surveys target patients, healthcare professionals, and patient relatives to assess satisfaction, organizational commitment, medical tourism motivations, agencies' roles and factors influencing destination choices.
- SWOT analyses with industry executives to evaluate sectoral strengths and challenges.
- Systematic and historical reviews with agencies and NGOs to understand their effects on medical tourism.

These methods emphasize the sector's multidisciplinary nature, integrating perspectives from patients, healthcare providers, academics, and industry stakeholders. Figure 1 presents the most frequently used terms in the analyzed theses.

Figure 1: Word Cloud of Keywords Used



When examining Figure 1, it is observed that the most frequently used words are "health," "technology," "services," "contribution," "age," "income," "hospitals," "marketing," "insurance," "waiting," and "dollar".

Additionally, in both spatial and international dimensions, service delivery, tourist mobility, and patient satisfaction are emphasized.

References such as "Antalya," "Singapore," and "Germany" indicate global competition, while terms like "waiting" and "lack of trust" highlight both opportunities and challenges within the sector. The importance of technology and digitalization is underscored, while words like "dollar," "insurance," and "cost" reflect the financial dynamics of the field.

Figure 2: Word Cloud of Keywords

Figure 2 identifies "medical tourism" as the central theme, with key supporting topics including health tourism, marketing, patient experience, and incentives. Essential sectoral elements such as marketing strategies, patient satisfaction, and regional and global dynamics highlight competitiveness.Additionally, digitalization, artificial intelligence, and electronic communication highlight the transformative impact of technology whereas health tourism policies, incentives, and neoliberal frameworks underscore the sector’s economic and political contexts. Moreover, human resource management and clinical terminology emphasize the need for education and competency development in the sector.

Figure 3: Word Cloud of Variables Analyzed in Theses

Key concepts in health tourism include “Medical Tourism”, "Service Quality," "Medical Tourism Incentive Programs," "Opportunities," and "Insurance Companies," highlighting the sector’s dependence on service excellence and financial incentives. The emphasis on "Service Quality" and "Patient Satisfaction" underscores the importance of a patient-centered approach for the industry's sustainability. In strategic management, "SWOT Analysis" and "Opportunities and Threats" reflect the competitive landscape and planning efforts. Regarding international dynamics, adherence to global standards and the role of national accreditation organizations are essential. Regionally, references to "Izmir" and "Turkey's Role in Health Tourism" highlight the country's competitive position. However, environmental sustainability and "Carbon Footprint" remain underexplored and require further research. To support sectoral development, education and competency enhancement, particularly in foreign language proficiency and healthcare personnel training should be prioritized to improve workforce quality. Additionally, addressing the absence of national accreditation organizations is crucial for aligning with international standards.

Conclusion

This study highlights the growing academic interest in medical tourism in Turkey, with research surging since 2014 and peaking during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022. This trend reflects the sector's increasing significance, driven by globalization, digitalization, and demand for cost-effective healthcare. The dominance of tourism and health management disciplines reinforces medical tourism's interdisciplinary nature, integrating healthcare, economics, and service management. Universities with strong tourism programs produce the most research, indicating an industry-driven academic focus. Methodologically, surveys, qualitative analyses, and interviews dominate, emphasizing service quality, patient satisfaction, and strategic management. Keywords such as "cost," "insurance," and "marketing" highlight the financial and operational priorities of the sector.

Turkey has established itself as a key medical tourism hub, offering affordable, high-quality healthcare and strong infrastructure. However, critical gaps remain in policy development, international accreditation, and environmental sustainability. Expanding doctoral-level research and interdisciplinary collaborations will deepen theoretical insights. Future studies should focus on sustainability, digital patient services, and international benchmarking to ensure Turkey's continued competitiveness. As the field evolves, strengthening research in policy, sustainability, and strategic development will be essential for the sector's long-term success and ethical growth.

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The Role of French-Speaking Tour Guides as Cultural Mediators in Turkey: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine the role of French-speaking tour guides in Turkey as cultural mediators and assess how their linguistic competence enhances cultural interpretation and tourist satisfaction. By analyzing previous studies, the research explores how language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and guiding skills contribute to effective cultural transmission.

Methodology: The study employs a qualitative research approach based on literature review. The methodology includes content analysis and document analysis to systematically evaluate academic sources on tour guide, cultural interaction, and language competence. Sources such as scholarly articles, books, reports, and legal regulations on tour guiding in Turkey were analyzed to extract key themes. Content analysis was applied to categorize key concepts such as "Cultural mediation", "language proficiency" and "tourist satisfaction". Publications between 2000 and 2024 are considered. Studies were scanned in both English and Turkish languages. Data was collected between January and February 2024.

Results: The findings offer insights into the importance of continuous professional development and linguistic training for tour guides. Given the increasing number of French tourists visiting Turkey, the study underscores the need for highly skilled French-speaking tour guides. Enhancing language and cultural mediation skills will improve tourist satisfaction and strengthen Turkey's image as a cultural tourism destination.

Originality/Value: The findings offer insights into the importance of continuous professional development and linguistic training for tour guides. Given the increasing number of French tourists visiting Turkey, the study underscores the need for highly skilled French-speaking tour guides. Enhancing language and cultural mediation skills will improve tourist satisfaction and strengthen Turkey's image as a cultural tourism destination.

Keywords: Tour guiding, Cultural mediation, French-speaking tourists.

Introduction

Tour guides play a crucial role in cultural transmission, serving as intermediaries between tourists and local cultures. In Turkey, the presence of French-speaking tourists has increased significantly, necessitating highly skilled guides capable of facilitating cross-cultural interactions. This study examines the role of French-speaking tour guides as cultural mediators, focusing on how their linguistic competence and cultural knowledge enhance tourist experiences. Employing a qualitative research approach based on a systematic literature review, the study integrates content analysis and document analysis to critically evaluate existing academic works, including scholarly articles, books, legal regulations, and professional reports. The findings reveal that language proficiency, cultural interpretation, and interpersonal communication are key determinants of successful cultural mediation. By distinguishing itself from previous research that broadly examines tour guiding, this study emphasizes the specific case of French-speaking guides, providing valuable insights for stakeholders in the tourism industry.

As a result, by adopting a literature review approach, the research provides a systematic synthesis of academic perspectives on tour guiding, cultural mediation, and language competence.

Tour guides function as narrative constructors, shaping how visitors perceive a destination's cultural and historical context (Cohen, 1985; MacCannell, 1999). In his seminal work, Cohen (1985) identifies three core roles of tour guides:

- Information providers,
- Group leaders, and
- Cultural mediators.

Among these, the cultural mediator role is the most critical in cross-cultural tourism settings, as it involves interpreting cultural meanings and bridging the gap between visitors and local societies (Salazar, 2006). Holloway (1981) similarly asserts that modern tour guides are not just conveyors of facts but agents of cultural diplomacy, fostering deeper appreciation and engagement with local traditions.

In multi-lingual tourism contexts, cultural mediation becomes even more vital. Reisinger and Turner (2003) argue that effective cultural transmission depends not only on the content of the information but also on the way it is delivered, emphasizing the importance of empathy, cultural intelligence, and adaptive communication styles in tour guiding.

Language is both a tool of communication and a carrier of cultural values (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956). In tourism, linguistic competence is a prerequisite for effective cultural mediation, as guides must not only translate words but also interpret cultural contexts and nuances (Dann, 1996). The linguistic relativity hypothesis suggests that language shapes perception, meaning that a guide's ability to convey meaning accurately in a tourist's native language enhances the depth of cultural understanding (Whorf, 1956).

Several studies highlight the direct correlation between language proficiency and tourist satisfaction. A study by Reisinger and Turner (2003) found that over 80% of tourists preferred guided tours in their native language, as it allowed them to engage more deeply with the historical and cultural context. Similarly, research by Zhang and Chow (2004) on tourist experiences in Hong

Kong revealed that language barriers significantly reduced tourist engagement and satisfaction levels.

In the Turkish context, Şahin (2015) emphasizes that the limited number of fluent French-speaking tour guides negatively affects cultural transmission, leading to surface-level interpretations rather than deep cultural engagement. This gap underscores the need for professional language training programs for tour guides to improve both linguistic fluency and cross-cultural communication skills.

Research indicates that effective tour guides significantly enhance visitor experiences, fostering positive emotional connections with the destination (Wong & Lee, 2012).

A meta-analysis by Huang et al. (2010) found that tour guide performance accounts for approximately 40% of the overall tourist experience. The study highlighted three primary factors that contribute to satisfaction:

- Accuracy of historical and cultural information,
- Engagement and storytelling skills, and
- The ability to facilitate meaningful cultural exchanges.

Conversely, poor guiding services, especially those that fail to bridge language and cultural barriers, have been linked to negative destination perceptions and decreased likelihood of return visits (Zhang & Chow, 2004).

The study conducted by Kabakulak and Pelit (2022) revealed that when language proficiency and guide preference are considered, the least number of guiding services is provided in the French language in Turkey. Despite the total of 1131 French-speaking guides across Turkey, this number remains low compared to other languages (TUREB, 2025). The language barrier is one of the primary reasons for tour guides' preference among tourists. Tourists require a high level of language proficiency to communicate comfortably in the destination they travel to. However, the factors shaping the preference of French tourists for guides in their native language remain a subject of interest. Consequently, it is deemed crucial to determine the role of tour guides working in the French language as cultural mediators. The literature review of this study is expected to contribute to future research in this area. It is important to investigate the factors influencing the preferences of French tourists for tour guides in their native language and to explore the role of these guides as cultural mediators. This study aims to address this gap by examining the significance of cultural mediation in the context of French speaking tour guiding and language proficiency.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the role of French-speaking tour guides as cultural mediators in Turkey. The research employs a systematic literature review to critically evaluate scholarly sources, professional reports, and policy documents (Bowen, 2009). This methodological approach allows for an in-depth examination of existing knowledge on cultural mediation and language proficiency in tour guiding.

Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena such as cultural mediation in tourism (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unlike quantitative methods, which rely on numerical data, qualitative research seeks to understand underlying meanings, interpretations, and contextual factors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The literature review method is particularly relevant for this study because it synthesizes existing academic insights and provides a comprehensive understanding of theoretical and practical perspectives on the topic (Snyder, 2019).

This study relies on secondary data sources: Academic journal articles (indexed in Google Scholar, and TR Dizin), Theses and dissertations available in the YÖK National Thesis Center, Academic books on tour guiding, cultural communication and language studies and official documents: Laws, regulations and professional organization reports related to the tour guiding profession in Turkey.

Publications between 2000 and 2024 are considered. Studies were scanned in both English and Turkish languages. Data was collected between January and February 2024.

This study focused on research literature exploring the intersection of cultural mediation, tour guiding, and language proficiency, with a particular emphasis on tourism markets similar to Turkey that cater to French-speaking visitors. The search was limited to these specific keywords (cultural mediation, tour guiding, and language proficiency) and geographical contexts to ensure the relevance and applicability of the findings to the research objectives. In short, limitations of the study include research focusing on Turkey or similar tourism markets with French-speaking visitors.

Results

This section presents key findings derived from the systematic literature review. The results focus on three major themes: (1) the role of cultural mediation in tourism, (2) the critical importance of language proficiency, and (3) the necessity of professional training and development for French-speaking tour guides in Turkey.

The Role of Cultural Mediation in Tourism

One of the most critical findings from the literature review is that tour guides do not merely transfer historical facts but actively shape tourists' understanding of the destination through cultural interpretation (Cohen, 1985; MacCannell, 1999). The role of cultural mediation becomes even more pronounced when working with international tourists who have different cultural frames of reference (Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

A study conducted by Özdemir and Çavuş (2020) on 1,200 French-speaking tourists visiting Turkey found that 78% of respondents stated that the quality of cultural interpretation significantly affected their overall satisfaction. Furthermore, 65% of tourists highlighted that their perception of Turkish heritage was influenced by how guides framed historical narratives. These findings reinforce the argument that tour guides act as cultural translators rather than mere information providers.

Additionally, Holloway (1981) argues that the emotional connection between tourists and a destination is largely mediated through the guide’s storytelling abilities. In interviews with experienced French-speaking tour guides in Turkey, 73% of guides reported that their ability to connect historical narratives with contemporary cultural elements increased tourist engagement (Şahin, 2015). This supports the assertion that cultural mediation is an interactive and dynamic process rather than a one-way transmission of knowledge.

The Critical Role of Language Proficiency

Language proficiency is one of the defining factors in successful cultural mediation and tourist satisfaction. According to Reisinger and Turner (2003), language is not only a communication tool but also a carrier of cultural meanings and social norms.

A survey conducted by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2019) on foreign tourists’ satisfaction with tour guiding services found that:

- 84% of French-speaking tourists preferred guided tours conducted in their native language,
- 57% stated that they faced difficulties in understanding cultural explanations when guides were not fluent in French,
- 42% reported dissatisfaction with their tour experience due to linguistic misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

These statistics highlight the strong correlation between language proficiency and tourist satisfaction. Ap and Wong (2001) argue that effective communication enhances trust, reduces cultural misinterpretations, and increases tourists’ willingness to explore more aspects of the local culture. In contrast, language barriers often lead to cultural dissonance and decreased interest in the destination (Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

Moreover, qualitative studies on tour guiding in Turkey (Şahin, 2015; Özdemir & Çavuş, 2020) indicate that the limited number of fluent French-speaking guides negatively affects the quality of cultural experiences for French tourists. The scarcity of linguistically skilled guides has led to some tourism agencies using English-speaking guides instead, which diminishes the depth of cultural interpretation for French-speaking visitors.

The Need for Professional Training and Development

Another major finding is the insufficient number of professional French-speaking tour guides in Turkey and the lack of structured training programs tailored to their needs. The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2021) reports that out of 13,500 licensed tour guides in Turkey, only 7.2% are proficient in French, highlighting a significant gap in the industry.

A study by Şahin (2015) found that:

- 58% of French-speaking tourists stated that they struggled to find French-speaking tour guides during their visits to Turkey,
- 62% of guides reported that they received no formal training in cultural mediation or language-specific tour guide,
- 47% of French-speaking guides expressed the need for specialized workshops and professional development programs.

These findings suggest that investing in professional training programs is essential for enhancing the quality of tourism services for French-speaking visitors. Bowen (2009) argues that continuous education and language immersion programs are critical for improving tour guides' interpretative skills and cultural knowledge.

Furthermore, comparative studies with other tourism destinations reveal the best practices. For instance, in France, the government funds language-specialized training programs for tour guides, and in Morocco, the Ministry of Tourism offers annual certification programs for multilingual guides (Krippendorff, 2004). Implementing similar initiatives in Turkey could significantly improve the quality of guiding services for French-speaking tourists.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides a systematic examination of the role of French-speaking tour guides as cultural mediators in Turkey. The key findings reveal that:

1. Cultural mediation plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions, with tour guides acting as narrative architects who frame historical and cultural contexts.

2. Language proficiency is a fundamental factor in tourist satisfaction, with studies showing that fluency in French directly enhances engagement and understanding of Turkish culture.

3. There is a significant shortage of trained French-speaking tour guides in Turkey, and the current professional training programs do not sufficiently address the needs of this group.

Although the search scope was quite broad, the findings within the topic were quite limited. For this reason, the obtained findings were analyzed without using any statistical software. The study did not include a specific publication about the subject, but the contents of general tourism and tour guide research within the framework were examined in detail to obtain the data. This study highlights the critical role of French-speaking tour guides, but the lack the studies caused a general perspective on research.

For future research, it could benefit from empirical field studies involving direct interviews and participant observations with tour guides and tourists. Additionally, comparative studies with other non-English-speaking tourist groups could provide broader insights into multilingual tour guiding in Turkey.

By addressing these challenges and implementing strategic improvements, Turkey can enhance the experiences of French-speaking visitors, strengthen its cultural tourism appeal, and position itself as a leader in multilingual tourism services.

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UNESCO Listed Tea Cultures and Their Impact on Regional Tourism: Comparative Analyses of Türkiye, Azerbaijan, China, and East Frisia

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Abstract

Tea is one of the most popular beverages worldwide and a significant economic factor in tea-producing countries. Due to its cultural and social importance in tea-consuming nations, four tea cultures have been listed as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO: the East Frisian tea culture in 2016, followed by China, Türkiye, and Azerbaijan in 2022. The reasons for these listings include the social role of tea consumption, its cultural anchoring, and the pride expressed through the transmission of tea-related traditions across generations.

This paper examines the impact of the UNESCO listing on regional tea tourism development. Based on desk research, fieldwork, and a survey distributed to regional stakeholders, this study analyzes tourism markets along with the changes in the representation, narration and interpretation of tea culture after the UNESCO inscription.

As a pioneering research project, this paper examines the significance of the UNESCO designation and identifies its links to tourism growth related to tea tourism and tea culture. Results indicate a differentiated value of the UNESCO listing based on national or regional interpretation, an increase of tourist numbers, regional economic impacts, a better awareness, as well as a motivational boost for stakeholders, local populations, and tourists. This comparative analysis highlights the value of UNESCO listing in promoting tea-related tourism across continents.

Keywords: UNESCO world heritage, tea culture, tea tourism, destination management

Introduction

UNESCO lists intangible world heritage to preserve traditions, habits, and rituals. Interestingly, there are only a few listed cultures related to non-alcoholic beverages, only four of which relate to tea (Smith, 2024). However, tea is one of the most popular beverages in the world. In many tea-producing countries, this part of national agriculture contributes a significant share to the national income, underlining its importance as an economic factor. Similarly, in tea-consuming countries, this beverage holds substantial social and cultural significance (Artivira, 2024; Bohne, 2024b).

Worldwide, only four tea traditions have been listed as intangible world heritage by UNESCO: East Frisian tea culture (since 2016), followed by China, Türkiye, and Azerbaijan in 2022. The cultural background, deep ties to local populations and trade histories, colonialism, and regional/national pride contributed to these regions and their tea cultures being identified. Additionally, symbols such as unique teaware, sweetening rituals, or boiling techniques illustrate the holistic value of these tea cultures (Bohne, 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

Following these aspects, this paper examines the role and effects of UNESCO-listed tea cultures on regional tourism markets, including the number of visitors and tourists, awareness of the UNESCO title, and the impact on populations and stakeholders such as hotels, restaurants, attractions, and institutions (Bohne, 2022).

Methodology

This paper and conference contribution are based on desk research, an ethnographic fieldwork, a survey distributed to relevant stakeholders (DMOs), and expert interviews.

Results

The tea cultures of East Frisia, Azerbaijan, China, and Türkiye have been listed as 'world heritage sites,' contributing to the branding of these regions through a tea-centric identity, which is found in only a few parts of the world. Specific utensils, such as 'Dresmer blau' porcelain in East Frisia and tulip glasses in Türkiye and Azerbaijan, as well as the preparation of tea as a means of welcoming guests, holding gatherings, and showcasing hospitality, symbolize pride and sustainable cultural roots (Bauer, 2024; Klöver, 2024).

Tea and its culture are strong motives and very successful themes for initializing tourism as it has a positive connotation and is linked to cosy ceremonies and authentic events. Furthermore, the listing as "intangible cultural heritage" for the four presented tea cultures is a great success of joint activities of tourism, retail, culture, politics and lodging providers (Bohne, 2021; Jolliffe, 2022).

The tea-centric branding includes tea museums, tastings, routes, and education. Unique sweetening techniques and tea-related events reinforce the connection between the beverage and its cultural environment. Consequently, the regional tea habit becomes a brand representing high-quality, authentic services and products, as well as a social and economic anchor for society and the tourism industry. This demonstrates the successful use of tea as a branding element for regions and communities (Yildirim & Bohne, 2024; Jolliffe, 2022) as well as a source of cultural exchange and knowledge (Tan, 2024).

Consequently, this brand awareness of tea as national/regional beverage of choice is strengthening the importance of tea for the population but also as an instrument of holistic tourism development. Not only for tourists, but also for new inhabitants, the tea related habits and ceremonial traditions are used to make them familiar with the local/regional/national customs. This focus on "tea" as a bridging brand for authentic touristic services and products is underlining the value of these tea cultures as an economic anchor, and as an element of loyalisation for the tourism industry. As the people are committed intensively to their region and their tea culture it has the potential for establishing East Frisia, Azerbaijan, China, and Türkiye as unique regions/countries for Tea Tourism worldwide (Bohne, 2024a; Jolliffe, 2022).

Table 1: Ten Effects of Being Listed as UNESCO Intangible Heritage

Benefits	**Challenges**
Recognition of exceptional character, authenticity, uniqueness, and unrepeatability.	Increase in population, visitors, and tourists.
Protection of exceptional heritage.	Neglect of cultural-historical traditions and the natural environment.
Rising attraction for tourism.	Heritage becoming common and quotidian for locals and visitors.
Positioning as an international tourist destination.	Loss of identity and sense of belonging for local residents.
Increased investment and wealth generation.	Lowering the quality level of values and habits due to mass tourism.
Obligations to protect and conserve heritage through international agreements and legislation.	Difficulties adapting to contemporary developments.
Management plan requirements for preservation.	Commercial brands influencing public policies and marketing, sometimes supersede the value of the exceptional heritage.
Access to funding.	Misuse of funding.
The resulting prestige has the potential to improve the quality of life for residents and visitors.	Rising tourism leading to superficial interest in heritage.
Incentives for public policies and sustainable tourism.	New preferences of the heritage stakeholders can also change and damage the integrity of the tradition and habits.

(Source: Morales Tirado, 2022; Devika, 2023)

The UNESCO intangible heritage listing resulted in a significant increase in museum visitors, overnight tourists, and participants in tea-related courses and tastings. The ten UNESCO criteria for intangible heritage listing serve as a useful checklist for involving regional stakeholders, populations, and institutions. UNESCO's designation offers high-quality branding, emphasizing uniqueness and exceptional cultural pride (Yitao, 2024; Morales Tirado, 2022).

Conclusion

Being listed by UNESCO is a strategic advantage for destination marketing, underlining the high value of the listed culture. This paper demonstrates how beneficial the UNESCO listing was for the four tea cultures and highlights the positive effects tea-related tourism contributes to national growth and cultural pride (Marcus, 2021; Bohne, 2024a).

The UNESCO World Heritage listing highlights places of 'outstanding universal value to humanity.' This recognition emphasizes the cultural and natural significance of a site and promotes its preservation through increased attention and awareness. Therefore, the tea cultures are important examples for the concept of “Living culture” as an intangible heritage, which is used to initialize tourism. The aim is to develop a special leisure experience through cultural culinary customs, which also could be used for the destination marketing and labeling of the region, underlined by the heritage listing. (Hjalager & Richards, 2002)

The regional branding is also relevant for the visitor's decision to book a relevant event, e.g. a tea workshop or a tea ceremony or a baking event, so that the destination marketing should focus on the quality and the value of customs and their usibility for business models or at least for products and services (Hjalager & Richards, 2002).

Additionally, world heritage sites may receive financial assistance and expert advice from UNESCO and other organizations to support their conservation efforts. Especially in the tourism sector, this recognition attracts quality-oriented tourists, ultimately benefiting regional populations (Devika, 2023; Yildirim & Bohne, 2024).

As tea tourism is a niche within culinary tourism, the UNESCO listing supports efforts to raise awareness and connect tea plantations with tourism stakeholders. This facilitates the development of a sustainable, beneficial environment for tea-related regions (Almeida de Oliveira & Abrantes Baracho, 2024).

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Creative Tourism: An exploration in the heart of Isfahan as a case study

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Abstract

Purpose: This study evaluates Isfahan's potential for creative tourism within the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, aiming to identify challenges linking the city's literary and artistic sectors with tourism and to determine priority areas for sustainable investment.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative approach was adopted, using focused group discussions with experts in arts, literature, and urban design, complemented by questionnaires analyzed through thematic analysis and the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP). Forty tourism and cultural experts participated.

Findings: Four key challenges were identified: alienation of art and literature from everyday life, lack of cultural continuity, limited tolerance for creative diversity, and weak practical application. The AHP results indicated handicrafts and folk arts as the top priorities for sustainable investment.

Research limitations/implications: As a single-case study, findings may not be generalizable; comparative studies with other UNESCO Creative Cities are recommended.

Practical implications: The study highlights the need for targeted policies, improved funding, and collaboration among artists, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders.

Social implications: Creative tourism can enhance cultural participation, empower artists, and foster intercultural dialogue.

Originality/value: This study offers insight into integrating creativity, sustainability, and community engagement in historical city development

Keywords: Creative Tourism, Cultural Identity, UNESCO Creative Cities Network, Handicrafts, Music, Cinema, Sustainable Tourism

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of cultural tourism has evolved beyond traditional heritage tourism, leading to the emergence of creative tourism (Woods, 2011). While cultural tourism often focuses on visiting historical sites and tangible heritage, creative tourism engages tourists in interactive, immersive cultural experiences (OECD, 2014). Unlike passive cultural tourists, creative tourists participate in local artistic, literary, and craftsmanship activities, forming deeper connections with the host community (Duxbury & Richards, 2019). This approach fosters sustainable tourism development by promoting intangible cultural heritage, encouraging economic growth, and revitalizing local traditions (UNESCO, 2025).

Richards (2011) defines creative tourism as "tourism that offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in learning experiences characteristic of the destination." This definition emphasizes experiential learning, where tourists do not merely observe culture but actively contribute to it. For instance, rather than simply visiting a historic silk-weaving district, creative tourists may work with local artisans, fostering cultural exchange and preserving traditional knowledge (Bakas, 2017).

To develop a successful creative tourism strategy, a destination must integrate cultural assets into economic and social frameworks, ensuring their sustainability and accessibility (Ratten et al., 2017). This requires investment in cultural infrastructure, policies supporting local artists, and collaboration between tourism stakeholders (OECD, 2014). Additionally, creative tourism is increasingly recognized as a driver of urban regeneration, helping cities transform cultural industries into economic engines (UNESCO, 1997).

Isfahan, a UNESCO-listed city renowned for its crafts, folk arts, and literature, holds immense potential for creative tourism (UNESCO, 2025). Historically, it has been a center of artistic innovation, with Persian miniature painting, calligraphy, and architectural craftsmanship flourishing for centuries (Shafiei et al., 2014). However, recent decades have witnessed declining cultural production, inadequate policy support, and over-reliance on passive heritage tourism, leading to economic stagnation in the creative sectors (Movahedi, 2021). The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) identifies seven key domains for creative tourism development: music, cinema, crafts and folk arts, design, media arts, and gastronomy, which can serve as a framework for revitalizing Isfahan's cultural economy (UNWTO, 2016).

Despite its rich artistic history, Isfahan's creative tourism sector remains underdeveloped. Existing cultural tourism initiatives focus on historical landmarks rather than integrating contemporary artistic and literary practices into tourism experiences (Khajehzadeh et al., 2020). This study evaluates Isfahan's creative tourism potential within the UCCN framework, identifying key areas for investment and policy development. By emphasizing interactive, participatory tourism experiences, this approach seeks to enhance economic sustainability, empower local artists, and position Isfahan as a global creative tourism hub.

Methodology

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach. The data were collected through focused group discussions with experts in literature and arts in Isfahan, including handicrafts and traditional arts, music, literature, performing arts, urban design and architecture, and visual arts, as well as through a questionnaire. These experts were selected using purposive sampling. The data obtained from these discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis, and the challenges of each field were identified. In addition to these challenges, nine indicators were extracted, which served as the basis for designing an Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) questionnaire. 40 tourism experts completed this questionnaire, and the data collected were analyzed using Expert Choice software.

Research Questions:

1. What are the challenges in activating Isfahan's literary and artistic fields for creative tourism?

2. Which literary and artistic fields in Isfahan have the highest priority for creative tourism?

Table 1: Participants of Focused Group Discussions

Name	Field of Activity	Name	Field of Activity
Ali Khodaei	Writer	Naser Koshan	Writer and Theater Director
Heshmatollah Entekhab	Literary Researcher	Houshang Jamshidian	Writer
Hesamoddin Nabavi Nejad	Literature Researcher	Amir Safaei Pour	Writer and Theater Director
Shapour Behyian	Writer, Critic, Translator	Morteza Bakherdi	Architect
Hamidreza Emsaki	Literature Researcher	Ali Sajjadieh	Graphic Designer and University Lecturer
Siavash Golshiri	Writer	Alireza Arvahi	Art Critic and Researcher
Saeed Mazdak	Tar and Setar Player	Hossein Shojaei Manesh	Photographer and Lecturer
Mansour Ghorbani	Art Enthusiast	Rasoul Ebrahimi	Architect and Tourism Researcher
Mehrdad Jihouni	Musician and Founder of Music Museum	Ahmad Montazer	Architect and Lecturer
Morteza Ghasemi	Musician and Music Instructor	Mahmoud Darvish	Architect and Urban Planner
Behrang Koufgar	Tar Player and Instructor	Ehsan Maleki Pour	Urban Planner
Nabil Youssef Sheridavi	Daf Player and Music Researcher	Ali Shahabi Nejad	Urban Designer
Khalil Maleki	Ney Player and Founder of Honarkadeh Nava	Hossein Ghanouni	Urban Planner

Amrollah Ahmadjou	Director	Mojgan Ebrahimi	Architect
Pejman Nazarzadeh	Writer and Film Critic	Fathali Qashqaie Far	Carpet Studies Lecturer
Rasoul Enteshari	Documentary Filmmaker and Photographer	Gholamali Feyzollahi	Master of Minakari Art
Shohreh Sajjadieh	Cinema Lecturer and Documentary Filmmaker	Abbas Shirdeli	President of Handicrafts Union
Mr. Roozdar	Handicraft Artist	Mr. Fotovat	Handicraft Artist
Mr. Meshkat	Handicraft Artist	Mr. Vatani	Handicraft Artist
Mr. Mostahfizian	Handicraft Artist	Mr. Babaei	Handicraft Artist

Results

Challenges of Literary and Artistic Fields in Isfahan for Activation in Creative Tourism as the outcome of the focus group discussion.

After analysis, the challenges of the literary and cultural fields studied were categorized into one overarching concept and four organizing concepts. The specific challenges of each field will be discussed separately below.

Literary Tourism

Literature, as a reflection of a nation's creativity, has a weak global presence. Literary tourism, which includes visits to locations associated with writers and their works, could strengthen the position of literature but faces several challenges. The isolation of literature from other arts, such as music, theater, and architecture, has reduced its impact, even though many historical buildings have inspired literary works. Literature's dependence on local language and culture limits its accessibility, unlike Turkey, which has successfully capitalized on Rumi's legacy. The decline of literary gathering spaces in Isfahan, once hubs for cultural interaction, has weakened literature's role in society. Limited modernization and the shift from written to visual culture have further diminished literature's presence in daily life. Restrictive tourism policies, including censorship in publishing and limitations on literary events, have hindered literary tourism development. Additionally, the lack of investment in literary tourism infrastructure and missed opportunities for international collaborations have reduced the global influence of Persian literature.

Music and Tourism

Music has an intrinsic connection with tourism and plays a crucial role in cultural tourism, from European summer festivals to jazz events in North America. In today's globalized world, music transcends geographical boundaries, as seen with African music in Europe and Indonesian Gamelan ensembles in North America. Despite Iran's rich musical diversity, the country has failed to promote its music both domestically and internationally. Neglecting music-centered historical sites, such as Ali Qapu's Music Hall, limits opportunities for immersive cultural experiences. Social alienation from music has also reduced its presence in daily life, worsened by restrictions on public performances. Denial of music's role in society, including censorship and job insecurity for musicians, hampers creativity. The weak integration of music into urban spaces has led to the disappearance of traditional gathering spots like Khaju Bridge. Music's experiential nature offers opportunities for tourist engagement, such as hands-on instrument workshops. Finally, the need to democratize music spaces is critical, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility while respecting cultural sensitivities.

Cinema and Tourism

The relationship between cinema and tourism is mutual, as films can promote tourist attractions, and tourist sites can serve as cinematic locations. Cinema tourism, defined as attracting visitors through films and TV productions, is a global industry, but Iran has failed to utilize this potential effectively. The lack of visual storytelling for tourism has led to missed opportunities to showcase cultural heritage. Insularity in Esfahan's cinema prevents it from joining the global film network, unlike international projects that promote cities like Paris and Barcelona. Neglect of amateur cinema limits grassroots participation in tourism promotion. Ignoring Esfahan's cinematic landscape means its rich visual and architectural heritage remains underutilized. Weak interdisciplinary collaborations between filmmakers, architects, and artisans hinder industry growth. The lack of cinematic tourism infrastructure, such as film museums, further weakens this connection. Inadequate screening venues restrict access to quality cinema experiences for both locals and visitors.

Theater and Tourism

Theater, as a ritualistic art, has a strong connection with other artistic fields, making it a vital part of cultural tourism. Many global cities, such as Dublin and Chicago, owe their tourism appeal to unique theater venues. However, challenges exist in linking theater to tourism in Esfahan. Commercialization of theater due to financial constraints has led to low-quality productions. Traditional Iranian performances, such as Ta'zieh and Naqqali, face neglect due to a lack of academic training and preservation efforts. Strict regulations and censorship have weakened critical and original plays, leading to reliance on translated works, which hold little appeal for foreign tourists. Weak community engagement means people don’t feel a strong connection to theater. The absence of a central theater venue in Esfahan, despite its rich theatrical history, further isolates the art form. Additionally, underutilizing historical sites like Ali Qapu and Chehel Sotoun as theater venues misses an opportunity to blend performance with Esfahan’s cultural identity.

Visual Arts and Tourism

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Architecture, Urban Planning, and Tourism

Architecture plays a crucial role in tourism development, serving both as a necessity and an attraction. However, Esfahan faces challenges in integrating architecture and tourism. The decline of neighborhood-centered urban planning has weakened the city's social fabric, reducing its appeal to tourists. Fragmented urban narratives caused by unbalanced development have disrupted the city's historical continuity. Neglecting architectural heritage has led to a loss of identity, with foreign scholars often documenting Iranian architecture better than locals. Limited walkability prevents deep tourist engagement, as visitors mainly see isolated monuments rather than experiencing the city's urban spaces. Ignoring intangible heritage, such as traditional festivals and public events, reduces urban vibrancy. Overemphasis on historical monuments has prevented the creation of contemporary architectural landmarks that could attract tourists. The lack of innovative urban projects has stalled Esfahan's potential as a modern cultural destination. Superficial restoration efforts have erased the unique character of historical sites. Finally, excessive reliance on past heritage without fostering new architectural creativity has left Esfahan with a stagnant urban identity in the tourism industry.

Handicrafts and Tourism

Handicrafts, as an intangible cultural heritage, play a vital role in tourism. However, despite Esfahan's reputation in this field, several challenges hinder its integration with tourism. The lack of functionality in handicrafts has reduced their relevance in daily life, making them primarily decorative rather than practical. Failure to adapt to market demands has led to producing goods without considering consumer preferences. Neglecting the flexibility of handicrafts limits their potential in niche markets, despite their adaptability compared to mass production industries. The decline of traditional craftsmanship due to inadequate documentation and lack of transmission to younger generations threatens its survival. The exclusion of handicrafts from educational curricula has further weakened awareness and appreciation. The isolation of artisans has led to stagnation, as limited exposure to external influences prevents innovation. Lack of international collaborations restricts growth, despite the potential for global engagement through exhibitions and training programs. Insufficient integration of handicrafts with modern industries, such as fashion and interior design, limits their market expansion. Finally, poor government support and ineffective tourism policies have left artisans struggling to connect their craft with a sustainable tourism economy.

Table 2: Thematic Analysis

Overarching Theme	Organizing Themes	Basic Codes
Lack of connection between tourism and literary and artistic fields	Alienation of art and literature from daily life	Lack of literary gathering places
		Music-centered historical buildings
		Limited modernization in literature
		Absence of music in daily life
		Society's alienation from music
		Experience-oriented music
		Weak connection between the city and literary & artistic fields
		Decline of neighborhood-centric culture
		Limited opportunities for strolling
	Lack of cultural continuity	Fragmented narrative of the city
		Cultural opportunity loss
		Lack of documentation
		Overlooking the cinematic urban landscape
		Shortage of interdisciplinary interactions
		Past-oriented mindset
		The necessity of reviving traditional performances
		Overlooking architectural heritage
		Need for distinct identity-building
		Ignoring visual arts
		Endangered continuity of handicrafts
		Isolation of handicraft artists

	Limited tolerance	Rejection of tourism
		Denial of music
		Strict regulations in the theater
		The necessity of democratizing the musical space
	Limited application	Contextualization of literature
		Lack of visualization for tourism
		Overlooking the flexibility of handicrafts
		Non-functional handicrafts
		Absence of cinematic tourism infrastructure
		Ignoring visual arts in urban landscaping
		Lack of scientific foundations in literature
		Neglecting amateur cinema
		Self-contained cinema
		Need for trendsetting and wave-making
		Inefficiency of the cinema industry

Identifying Priority Areas

Based on discussions conducted in focused group meetings, artistic and literary fields must meet specific criteria to integrate with tourism effectively. These decision-making criteria determine which fields (decision-making options) hold the highest priority for connection with tourism. Several criteria were identified through these discussions, and participants were asked to select the most relevant and impactful ones. This process resulted in the extraction of nine key criteria, which are as follows:

- Enhancing Collective Engagement: The ability to unite people and strengthen human interactions and communication.
- Networking Capability: The ability to utilize the potential of other literary and artistic fields.
- Maximum Public and Administrative Acceptance: Being well-received by both the public and urban management authorities.
- Flexibility: The ability to create products based on audience demand.

- Universality: The ability to be understood beyond language and cultural barriers.
- Independence: The ability to maintain autonomy against pressures of customization and imposed directives.
- Experiential Engagement: The ability to be directly experienced by the audience.
- Creativity: The ability to apply new and innovative ideas in product development.
- Local Authenticity and Continuity: Deep-rooted connection with cultural heritage and historical continuity from past to present.
- Profitability: The ability to generate economic benefits.
- Weighting Decision Criteria
- At the initial stage, the decision-making criteria were weighed to determine their relative importance.

Table 3: Weighting of Decision Criteria

No.	Decision Criteria	Weight
1	Profitability	0.208
2	Experiential Engagement & Creativity	0.152
3	Local Authenticity & Continuity	0.113
4	Enhancing Collective Engagement	0.100
5	Universality	0.098
6	Flexibility	0.090
7	Independence	0.090
8	Networking Capability	0.076
9	Maximum Public and Administrative Acceptance	0.072
Total		1.000

- Based on the assigned weights, profitability emerged as the highest-priority criterion with a significant difference, scoring 0.208. This criterion ranked above experiential engagement and creativity, which weighted 0.152.
- Additionally, local authenticity & continuity (0.113) and enhancing collective engagement (0.100) ranked third and fourth, respectively. Universality, with a weight of 0.098, was the fifth most important criterion.
- Furthermore, flexibility and independence shared an equal weight of 0.090, placing them in the next priority tier. The lowest-ranked criteria were networking capability (0.076) and maximum public and administrative acceptance (0.072), positioned in the eighth and ninth places.

- Thus, profitability, experiential engagement & creativity, local authenticity & continuity, and enhancing collective engagement had the most significant influence in prioritizing decision-making

Conclusion:

This study aimed to identify the challenges faced by literary and artistic fields in integrating with creative tourism and to determine priority areas for investment, ultimately fostering a creative tourism approach in Isfahan. The findings indicate that the challenges of linking Isfahan's existing literary and artistic sectors with creative tourism can be categorized into four main issues: "Alienation of Art and Literature from Everyday Life," "Lack of Cultural Continuity," "Limited Tolerance," and "Limited Practical Application."

•The "Alienation of Art and Literature from Everyday Life" reflects the fact that the daily lives of Isfahan's residents are not intertwined with art and literature. In the past, leisure activities such as storytelling performances and epic recitations provided people with a deeper connection to literature and art. As a result, illiterate individuals often memorized Shahnameh or were familiar with musical structures. This challenge highlights that before establishing a link between literary and artistic fields and tourism, these sectors must first reconnect with everyday life.

•"Lack of Cultural Continuity" is another challenge in integrating art and literature with tourism. This issue refers to the gradual disappearance of valuable literary and artistic aspects of Isfahan, which, if left unaddressed, will deprive future generations of their cultural heritage.

•The next challenge, "Limited Tolerance," points to the perception held by some authorities in Isfahan that art and literature are not opportunities but threats. This outlook has created obstacles to the growth and development of these fields. Among the affected areas, music and theater face the greatest restrictions. Overcoming this challenge requires a shift in the perspective of local authorities, allowing different social and political groups to recognize these fields as opportunities for Isfahan's development rather than as points of contention.

•The final challenge, "Limited Practical Application," highlights the inability of these fields to establish a functional role within society. Due to their lack of practical integration, linking them with tourism becomes a complex and difficult task.

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Assessing the impacts on the delivery of Entrepreneurship Education within Tourism Programmes in UK Higher Education Institutions: Insights into Academic Staff Professional Identities & Organizational Culture.

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Abstract

Purpose: This research assesses how academic staff professional identities (PI) & organisational culture (OC) impact Entrepreneurship Education delivery (EED) within Tourism programmes at UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It specifically examines how PI typologies (work-based, student-based, self-based, skill-based) & OC types influence EED within tourism courses.

Study design/methodology/approach: A quantitative method employs validated instruments: PI Questionnaire (Abu-Alruz & Khasawneh, 2013), OC Assessment Instrument (Cameron & Quinn, 1999) & EED Assessment Instrument (Ruskovaara & Pihkala, 2014). Reflecting the typical location of tourism programmes within Business Schools (Tribe, 2015; Airey *et al.*, 2015), data collection via online surveys will target academic staff in UK HEI Business Schools using census & convenience sampling. Analysis methods include descriptive statistics, reliability testing, correlation & multiple linear regression.

Results: Although empirical data has yet to be collected, a pilot study is scheduled for May 2025 involving 30-50 academics at one institution. Literature suggests significant positive correlations between PI & effective EED (Smith *et al.*, 2022), highlighting adhocracy & clan OCs as particularly conducive (Gorzelany *et al.*, 2021; Chege *et al.*, 2022).

Originality/value: The study uniquely integrates PI & OC theories, offering insights to enhance EE practices within tourism education.

Keywords Entrepreneurship Education, Professional identity, Organisational Culture, Higher Education

Introduction

The integration of EE within HE is increasingly recognised as critical for preparing graduates with essential entrepreneurial mindsets & skills (Fayolle, Gailly & Lassas-Clerc, 2006; Wilson, 2008) required by dynamic industries such as tourism. This study recognises that EE should not be owned by a specific subject (Jones, Matlay & Maritz, 2012) & thus EE should be encouraged within tourism education. Tourism programmes face unique sector-specific challenges, such as rapidly changing consumer demands, environmental sustainability pressures & the necessity for constant innovation & adaptability (Martín-Navarro *et al.,* 2023; Kavya, 2021), making entrepreneurship particularly relevant within the curriculum. Addressing these challenges through tailored EE can significantly enhance students' employability & industry responsiveness. Moreover, insights into how PIs & OCs influence EED could directly inform curriculum development, guide the adoption of innovative pedagogical strategies & shape institutional policies aimed at fostering a more entrepreneurial educational environment.

Despite significant advances in EE scholarship, limited research has explored how academic staff PIs & OC specifically influence EE within educational contexts (Turner & Gianiodis, 2018, p.131; Wraae, Brush & Nikou, 2020). Existing literature emphasises that PI significantly affects educational approaches (Abu-Alruz & Khasawneh, 2013), while OC influences institutional capacity for innovation & entrepreneurial behaviour (Martins & Terblanche, 2003; Clark, 1998). However, the intersection of these factors remains underexplored. This research addresses this gap by examining the influence of HE academic staff's self-perceived PIs (work-based, student-based, self-based & skill-based) & the perceived OC (clan, adhocracy, market, hierarchy) on practical EED.

Research Aim: To examine how PI & OC influence EED in UK HEIs.

Research Objectives:

1) To investigate the impact of HE academic staff PI on EED
2) To examine the impact of HE OC has on EED

Research Questions:

1) How do those (HE academic staff) responsible for EE in UK based HEIs, perceive their own PIs, focusing on existing identity typologies e.g. work-based, student-based, self-based & skill-based?
2) How do HE academic staff perceive the OC of their institutions?
3) To what extent does PI & OC influence EED in UK based HEIs?

Hypothesis:

H1.1) Work-based identity is positively associated with EED.

H1.2) Student-based identity is positively associated with EED.

H1.3) Self-based identity is positively associated with EED.

H1.4) Skill-based identity is positively associated with EED.

H2) OC is positively associated with EED.

Conceptual Framework:

The premise of this research explores the topics of PI, OC & EED through the lenses of social cognitive, individual cognition & situated cognition theories. Ultimately, this research is exploring the relationship between how the PIs of academic staff members (individual cognition theory) & the OCs they work within at UK HEIs (situated cognition theory) impact their EED (behaviour, within social cognitive theory). An individual & the situation they are within, are key elements of Bandura's (1986) psychological based 'social cognitive theory' (see figure 1).

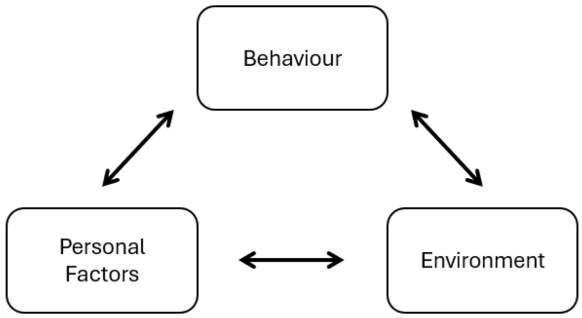

Figure 1 - Visual representation of Bandura's (1986) Social cognitive theory

Bandura's work focuses on how behavioural (e.g. actions & habits), personal (e.g. beliefs & self-efficacy) & environmental (e.g. social norms & physical surroundings) factors all affect learning, specifically exploring observational learning. However, this study adopts the overall concept of the theoretical framework as a model to further explore the factors of individuals (individual cognition through PI), their environments (situated cognition through OC) & behaviour (EED) (see figure 2).

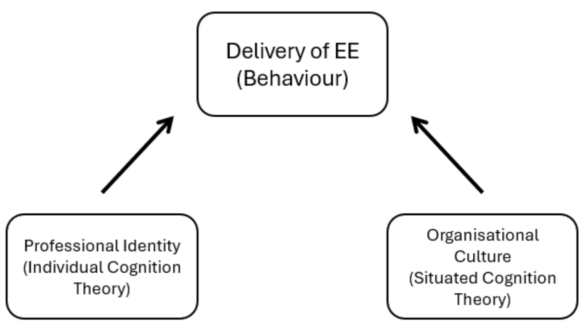

Figure 2 – Conceptual Framework

Methodology

The research employs a quantitative methodological approach utilising three validated assessment instruments. Firstly, the PIQ developed by Abu-Alruz & Khasawneh (2013) measures academic staff's PIs along four typologies: self-based, skill-based, work-based & student-based. The second instrument, the OCAI by Cameron & Quinn (1999), categorises OC into four types: clan, adhocracy, market & hierarchy. Lastly, the EED Assessment Instrument developed by Ruskovaara & Pihkala (2014) evaluates the frequency & methods of EED.

A cross-sectional, quantitative research design utilising online surveys will be created to target academic staff involved in tourism programmes across UK-based HEIs. Data collection will be facilitated through SurveyMonkey & leveraging professional contacts within the UK HE sector. Preliminary descriptive & inferential statistical analysis will be undertaken, including reliability testing (Cronbach’s alpha), correlation analysis & multiple linear regression to explore the relationships between PI, OC & EED.

Limitations: Despite its strengths, this methodology may be subject to limitations, including potential self-report biases, where respondents might portray their PIs or OC more positively. Additionally, although a census approach is being taken the use of convenience sampling could limit the generalisability of findings beyond the sampled institutions.

The study adopts a positivist & quantitative approach, as it aligns with the research aim of objectively testing hypotheses about the measurable relationships between PI, OC & EED through statistical methods such as correlation & regression. Alternative qualitative approaches like interpretivist, critical or pragmatic methodologies were considered but deemed unsuitable due to their subjective nature, limited generalisability & lack of quantitative rigour required for robust statistical validation.

Overall, this structured approach provides robust insights into how internal perceptions of identity & organisational environments can shape EE strategies & practices in tourism education.

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Hygiene Issues Faced by Tour Guides

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to investigate the hygiene-related issues faced by tour guides and the methods they use to resolve them.

Study design/methodology/approach: A qualitative research method, structured interviews, was used to gather data from 23 active tour guides in Turkey. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), to ensure sample diversity, tour guides working in various languages and regions of Turkey were selected using the convenience sampling method. The obtained data were analyzed using content analysis.

Results: The findings reveal that hygiene encompasses cleanliness, health, personal hygiene, environmental cleanliness, trust, comfort, and food hygiene. The hygiene issues faced by tour guides during tours were grouped under seven main themes: Rest facilities, accommodation, transportation, restaurants, restrooms at less frequently visited archaeological sites, tourists within their groups and other tourists. They resort to various methods to solve hygiene problems; however, it is also emphasized that some problems cannot be solved.

Originality/value: The study highlights the important role of tourist guides in ensuring hygiene during tours and addresses a gap in existing literature on the subject. The results aim to provide valuable insights for current and future tour guides, improving their ability to manage hygiene-related challenges and enhance the overall tourist experience.

Keywords: Hygiene issues, Tourist complaints, Tour Guide, Tours

Introduction

Hygiene issues are paramount in tourism industry, not only ensuring the well-being but also satisfaction of guests. Effective hygiene practices contribute to the comfort of guests, and play an important role in maintaining the reputation of tourism businesses and destinations. It also protects public health, make tourists feel safer and make tourism destinations more competitive. The World Economic Forum identifies health and hygiene as a key pillar of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index. (World Economic Forum, 2024). Tourism industry is a highly competitive and dynamic market where customers have easy access to online reviews and ratings. Therefore, maintaining hygiene and sanitation standards can make or break a business (fastercapital.com, 2025). Tourists may face various health risks while traveling, and these risks may vary depending on the type of trip and destination. Health risks can arise from factors such as weather conditions, availability of health services and products, food and water, sanitation and hygiene standards (www.who.int, 2025). Especially after the pandemic (COVID-19), hygiene measures have changed in all segments of tourism industry including hospitality, restaurants, and recreation (www.statista.com, 2025). This situation imposes great responsibilities on all tourism businesses and their employees and tour guides are one of them. Tourist guides are among front-line players of tourism industry who are in close contact with tourists. The observations and interventions of tour guides, as employees accompanying tourists in vehicles, archaeological sites, museums, restaurants, entertainment venues, and accommodations, are very effective in shaping the tourist's experience. Tour guides face many complaints, including hygiene-related issues, from tourists during their tours. Therefore, the ability of tour guides to manage complaints significantly impacts how tourists evaluate both the guides and the travel agency. When the literature on tourism and hygiene is examined some researches were found. Çakıroğlu and Uçar (2008) examined catering company employee's perception of hygiene; Poulston (2009) explored hospitality employees' views of the dissatisfactory hygiene factors; Şanlier et al., (2010) researched the hygiene perceptions of hotel kitchen employees; Jovanović et al., (2015) evaluated the importance of hygiene and health for tourism competitiveness; Konak (2022) addressed health and hygiene strategies for tourism promotion; Rasethuntsa (2022) discussed the effect of tourists' perception of hygiene-safety on travel intention. In the tourism sector, employees working in areas related to hygiene have mostly been focused on the service sector (kitchen, service, catering). However, there is no research addressing the hygiene issues faced by tourist guides. This study aims to reveal the hygiene issues faced by tour guides during tours and the methods they use to solve them. The following research questions were identified:

Q1: What does hygiene mean to you?

Q2: What kind of hygiene issues do you face on your tours?

Q3: How do you solve these hygiene issues?

Methodology

Qualitative research is an in-depth research that explores and elaborates the meaning of an event, issue or situation from the perspective of the participants and allows it to be analyzed holistically (Patton, 1990). Structured interview technique, one of the qualitative research methods, was used to collect data in the study. According to the Tourist Guides Association data for December 2024, there are 13,638 tourist guides in Turkey (www.tureb.org, 2024), and this is the population for this research. In qualitative research, the quality rather than the size of the sample is decisive (Baltacı, 2018). According to Patton (2002), there is no minimum or maximum number of participants. When the researcher realizes that the data obtained from the interview starts to repeat itself, he/she can terminate the interview. Structured interviews were conducted between October 2024 and December 2024 with 23 active tour guides. As suggested by Lincol and Guba (1985), interviews were conducted until the saturation point of the answers received. To ensure sample diversity, tour guides who work in different languages and regions of Turkey were selected. While some guides were interviewed face-to-face, due to time and cost constraints, others were reached via email, social media, or telephone. The data obtained through these interviews were coded, grouped, and divided into themes by the researcher.

Result

When the profile of the participants (Table 1) is analyzed, the oldest tourist guide is 70 years old, while the youngest is 26 years old. 10 of the tourist guides are female and 13 are male. The oldest tourist guide is 70 years old, while the youngest is 23. The most experienced guide has 40 years of experience, while the least experienced guide has 1 year of experience. They provide guiding services in English, Spanish, German, French, Chinese, Russian, Malay, Portuguese, and Turkish. The majority of tour guides have English as their primary or secondary language.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	Gender	Age	Experience	Service Language	Registered Tourist Guide Chamber
TG 1	Male	70	40	German	ARO
TG 2	Male	50	23	English	İZRO
TG 3	Male	30	3	Russian	ATRO
TG 4	Male	36	9	English	ATRO
TG 5	Male	55	30	Italian, Spanish	İRO
TG 6	Male	32	6	English	ŞURO
TG 7	Female	27	2	English/ Turkish	ATRO
TG 8	Female	31	8	Russian	ARO
TG 9	Male	65	34	English	ANDRO
TG 10	Female	44	23	Spanish / Portekizce	İZRO
TG 11	Male	26	3	English-Turkish	ATRO
TG 12	Male	49	28	English	İRO
TG 13	Female	35	9	Spanish / Portekizce	ATRO
TG 14	Male	52	30	English / Spanish	İRO
TG 15	Male	45	23	English	MUTRO
TG 16	Female	28	3	Malay/Chinese	ATRO
TG 17	Female	23	1	Spanish/ Turkish	ÇARO
TG 18	Female	58	35	French	NERO
TG 19	Female	35	10	English- Russian	ANDRO
TG 20	Male	33	8	English/ Spanish	ATRO
TG 21	Male	33	10	Chinese	İRO
TG 22	Female	40	15	English- Turkish	GARO
TG 23	Female	43	25	Chinese	İRO

Regarding the answer to the first question, under the main theme of "hygiene," the following subthemes were identified: cleanliness (n=18), health (n=11), personal hygiene (n=9), work environment/environmental cleanliness (n=7), trust and comfort (n=6), and food hygiene (n=4), in that order. Example expressions are as follows:

"Hygiene is essential for everyone on the tour to feel comfortable and safe. Cleanliness also brings trust." (TG20)

"It covers a wide range of areas, from personal cleaning to restrooms, vehicles, restaurants and hotels." (TG2)

"*First, personal hygiene comes to my mind. We are in close contact with tourists. The guide should pay attention to their appearance and personal hygiene." (TG12)*

The hygiene issues faced by tour guides during tours were grouped under seven main themes. It was found that most problems occur in rest facilities (n=15), followed by accommodation (n=10), transportation (n=10), restaurants (n=6), restrooms at less frequently visited archaeological sites (n=6), tourists within their groups (n=4), and other tourists (n=3) respectively. Restrooms in rest facilities and less frequently visited archaeological sites are considered both dirty and inadequate. Example expressions are as follows:

"The most common issue we face is the rest facilities. Generally, toilets are the lack of toilet kits soap, toilet paper, tissues) and dirty." (TG21).

"5 star hotels are generally good in terms of hygiene, but as the star decreases, problems start. I always carry my pıllowcase wıth me."(TG2-4).

"The tour bus may not be cleaned sufficiently, we may encounter situations such as dust, dirt and bad odors. I always check the vehicle before the tour starts, if there is a problem that can be solved at that moment, I ask the captain. When I see that the problem is too big, I call the travel agency and ask for a change of vehicle. As an important part of the tour is spent in the vehicle. (TG22)

"In the summer months, some of the food in the buffet smells bad. Apart from the smell, I worry that if they eat spoiled food, they might get food poisoning."(TG9)

"*There is a restroom issue at less frequently visited archaeological sites (such as the ancient city of Milet), and they are usually dirty. Toilet paper, soap, and paper towels are often insufficient or unavailable." (TG18).*

"Some tourists eat spicy smelly food in the vehicle, the vehicle smells very bad and this gives people headaches."

"There are other groups of tourists in the resting facilities and restaurants. Some do not wash their hands after using the restroom, some take food with their hands and some even eat with their hands."(TG3-15).

"There are complaints about the bad smell due to the captain smoking inside the car."(TG8)

Under the main theme of the solution methods of tourist guides, subthemes of speaking with the authorised person (n=15), changes (n=10), compensation (n=10), and no solution (n=4), warning (2) were identified.

"I usually try to solve the problem by first talking to the responsible person." (TG3)

"If the problem seems unsolvable, I immediately consider alternative options. Of course, this also comes with experience." (TG5)

"We can discuss the issue with the business manager and offer some compensations depending on the situation. If the problem is with the hotel, we might offer to change the room or provide an upgrade to a better room. If it's related to the restaurant, we could offer complimentary dessert or drinks. For issues with the tour, we might offer discounts on additional activities or a 'buy 5, get 1 free' deal."(TG10-23)

"Sometimes, even though there is an issue, we are unable to find a solution. However, I always report the situation to the agency."(TG21)

"I warn them not to eat nuts and smelly foods inside the vehicle." (TG4)

Discussion

Tour guides on their tours face hygiene issues caused by rest areas, accommodation, restaurants, less frequently visited archaeological sites, transportation, tourists, and other tourists. These results show similarities with previous studies. The previous studies concluded that the places where tour guides face the most problems are rest areas and public toilets on tourist attraction (Zorlu and Erkuş 2018; Büyüktepe et al, 2019; Sunarsa, and Andiani, 2019); accommodation (Çolakoğlu et al., 2009, Unur et al., 2010); transportation services (Pelit and Katırcıoğlu, 2018; Zorlu and Erkuş 2018), the other tourist (Efendi and Tandoğan, 2019; Kurt Dündar and Arslantürk, 2022).

When considering the solution methods of tour guides, it is observed that they initially take a solution-oriented approach, this also support the result of Aksoy and Yilmaz, 2022. Also they are trying to compensate in various ways (Bitner et al.,1990, Sparks and McColl-Kennedy, 2001, Akdu and Cengiz, 2020). However, in some situations, they are unable to find a solution (Tsaur and Lin, 2014).

According to the results of the research, the tour guide plays multiple roles in addressing hygiene issues, including those of an observer, crisis manager, moderator, mediator, and problem solver. They use various methods to resolve hygiene problems; however, it is also emphasized that some issues cannot be solved. Typically, they first attempt to address the problem by contacting the relevant authorities. If the issue is too significant to be fixed or is recurring, service providers can be changed, and alternatives can be considered. Depending on the severity of the issue, various compensations may be offered, such as upgrading the room, offering discounts on side activities, or providing drinks during dinner.

Based on the research findings, some recommendations have been made to tourist guides, travel agencies, and businesses. Hygiene is an important factor that directly affects the professionalism of tourist guides and the tourist experience. Guides' sensitivity to hygiene not only protects tourists' health but also enhances trust in the tourism sector. For this, it is important for tourist guides to have a high level of knowledge about hygiene. Tourist guides need to receive training on hygiene. This training may include basic health-related information as well as current practices in hygiene management. They should inform tourists about cleanliness and hygiene issues and provide guidance on health-related precautions to be taken. They should prefer clean and hygienic businesses (restaurants, hotels, and other facilities) during tours. The tourist guide should pay attention to personal hygiene. It is important for guides to dress neatly and cleanly. Guides should inform and direct tourists regarding environmental cleanliness in the areas visited (such as museums, archaeological sites, exhibitions, galleries, parks, forests, waterfalls, lakes, etc.). The number of resting facilities among tourist destinations should be increased and hygiene inspections should be conducted more strictly. Considering the complaints regarding tour bus staff and bus hygiene, travel agencies should increase bus inspections. And tourists should be informed about eating and drinking on the bus before the tour.

This research is confined to the perspectives of tourist guides. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize to other tourism employees. Future research may include the evaluations of other employees and tourists and local people.

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Gender-Related Problems Faced by Women Managers in Tourism and Work - Life Balance

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Abstract

Purpose: The primary aim of this study is to examine the work-life balance of female managers in the tourism industry and the gender-based challenges they encounter in their professional and personal lives. The research seeks to understand the impact of working hours, overtime, work-related communication outside office hours, business travel, and household responsibilities on their ability to maintain a balance between career and family life. Furthermore, the study identifies structural barriers, including gender discrimination in hiring, promotion, and workplace credibility, that hinder women's professional advancement and work-life integration.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with female managers working in the tourism sector. The participants shared their experiences regarding workload, overtime, work-related communication outside office hours, business travel, household responsibilities, and gender discrimination in career advancement. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key patterns and recurring issues.

Results: According to the findings, women in the tourism sector face work-life balance challenges, particularly due to long working hours, overtime, business travel, and childcare responsibilities. Spousal and family support plays a key role in career sustainability; while some women benefit from it, others experience stress due to unequal household responsibilities. Motherhood often leads to career interruptions or delayed family planning. Regarding gender discrimination, experiences vary—some report no issues, while others encounter hiring and promotion disadvantages or struggle to gain recognition from male colleagues.

Originality/value: This research is significant in that it contributes to the growing body of literature on gender disparities in leadership and provides insights into the specific work-life balance difficulties faced by women in a highly demanding sector. And also provides a sector-specific analysis of work-life balance challenges for female managers in tourism, highlighting the impact of irregular hours, work expectations, and gender biases on career progression. Unlike general studies, it explores the intersection of workplace demands and domestic responsibilities, offering practical insights for gender-inclusive policies and leadership development.

Keywords Work-life balance, Gender discrimination, Female Managers, Tourism

Introduction

Tourism has been a key driver of economic growth and employment, supporting both developed and developing economies. The sector's contribution to local economies through export revenues from international tourism further underscores its significance. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2024), international tourism revenues reached 1.5 trillion USD in 2023. In the same year, Turkey ranked as the 5th most visited country in the world, attracting 55 million international tourists, generating 54 billion USD in tourism revenue (TÜİK, 2024).

The vital role of tourism in the economy has drawn researchers' attention to the working conditions and challenges faced by employees in the sector. The industry has been identified as having one of the most stressful work environments. Studies suggest that feelings of burnout and high stress levels among tourism employees stem from factors such as excessive workload (O'Neill & Davis, 2011), time pressure (Hsieh, Apostolopoulos, & Sönmez, 2016; Lee & Krause, 2002), guest demands and complaints, and shift-based work (Singh & Sreenivasan, 2024). Additionally, the seasonal nature of the industry (Banki, Ismail, & Muhammad, 2016) and the prevalence of low-paid and low-status jobs (Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011) further contribute to employee dissatisfaction. These challenges are exacerbated by the labor-intensive nature of the tourism industry (Hofmann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2017). Moreover, tourism is not only labor-intensive but also a female-dominated sector (Cave & Kılıç, 2010, p. 283). According to UNWTO (2023), women make up 54% of the global tourism workforce. However, female employees remain concentrated in low-wage, seasonal, and precarious jobs. During times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, women in tourism faced additional hardships, including layoffs, wage reductions, and increased caregiving responsibilities. This indicates that women in the tourism sector not only contend with the structural challenges of the industry but also struggle with gender-related barriers, further complicating their professional advancement and job security.

It has been suggested that one of the major challenges faced by female employees is maintaining a work-life balance (Karakaş & Tezcan, 2019). Work-life balance has become an increasingly important issue, particularly due to the growing number of dual-career couples, working mothers with young children, higher educational attainment among women, and their increased financial independence (Cousins & Tang, 2004; Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000).

In the early years of women's participation in the workforce, traditional gender roles emphasized distinct expectations for men and women. Accordingly, work was considered primarily a male domain, whereas family and household responsibilities were seen as the natural duties of women (Gutek, Nakamura, & Nieva, 1981). From this perspective, work-life balance has been particularly examined in relation to women's struggle to balance professional and personal responsibilities. Based on Kahn's role conflict theory (1964), work-life balance has been defined as a form of intra-role conflict, wherein the pressures arising from work and family domains are, in some aspects, mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Although work-life balance is framed as a necessity for all employees, the primary focus has been on the pressures faced by working mothers. It has been emphasized that women experience significant stress when trying to fulfill workplace responsibilities while simultaneously managing family obligations, particularly childcare demands. This ongoing struggle underscores the need for concrete measures to support female employees in achieving a sustainable work-life balance (Barnett, 1999).

Concerns regarding work-life balance (WLB) are argued to stem from three main factors, the first being the increasing pressure and intensity of work. This pressure is suggested to be reinforced by various factors, including technological advancements, the growing necessity for immediate responsiveness, and the heightened emphasis on customer service, all of which contribute to the expectation of constant availability, thereby intensifying the workload for employees (Guest, 2002). These pressures are further exacerbated in service industries such as tourism and hospitality, where the fast-paced nature of the sector and its 24/7 operational demands impose additional burdens on employees, leading to a further deterioration of work-life balance (Deery & Jago, 2009).

This study aims to examine the challenges female managers face in maintaining work-life balance within the tourism sector and evaluate the impact of the industry's working conditions on female employees. Specifically, the study investigates how factors such as overtime, business travel, and the expectation of being available outside of official working hours affect female managers' personal lives and family responsibilities. Additionally, the research seeks to explore gender-based discrimination by examining whether female managers experience different treatment compared to their male counterparts, particularly in recruitment and promotion processes. By analyzing the intersection of work-life balance challenges and gender-based barriers, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by providing sector-specific insights into the experiences of female managers in tourism.

Based on these considerations, the research questions of this study have been formulated as follows:

1. Do female managers in the tourism sector experience work-life balance challenges?
2. If so, how do they cope with these challenges?
3. Have they encountered different treatment in their professional careers due to their gender?

Methodology

In this study, a phenomenological qualitative approach was used to explore female managers' work-life balance and gender-based challenges in tourism (Creswell, 2013). The research focused on four- and five-star hotels in Trabzon, a key destination in the Eastern Black Sea region, where there are seven five-star and twelve four-star hotels. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected based on having at least two years of experience in tourism and being married or having children. Ten female managers meeting these criteria were interviewed (Moustakas, 1994). Data were gathered via a semi-structured form with two parts: demographics and eleven questions about work-life balance, overtime, off-hours contact, travel, family responsibilities, and gender discrimination (Carvalho, 2017; Chen et al., 2021). Interviews took place between March 1 and April 1, 2024, both online and face-to-face, lasting about 45 minutes on average. Audio recordings were made with the participants' consent.

The interviews were thematically analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in line with a phenomenological approach. Transcripts were reviewed by two faculty members for reliability (Franklin et al., 2010) before being coded and visualized in MAXQDA. Direct quotes supported validity, while themes and codes were guided by both literature and participants' insights. The final themes were:

- Work-Life Balance and Challenges
- Work-Life Balance Strategies
- Motherhood, Career, and Gender Roles
- Gender-Based Barriers and Discrimination

Results

Table 1 summarizes participants' demographics and professional details, including age, education, roles, and tourism experience. Ages range from 28 to 58, and most hold a bachelor's or associate degree, with one having a graduate degree. Participants serve in managerial positions across SPA management, sales and marketing, quality management, accounting, and housekeeping. Their tourism experience spans 3 to 30 years, offering a broad view of female managers' challenges and strategies.

Table 1. Demographic and Professional Characteristics of Participants

Participant Code	Age	Education Level	Job Title	Tourism Experience (year)
P1	28	Bachelor's Degree	SPA Manager	4
P2	40	Associate Degree	Executive Housekeeper	17
P3	32	Bachelor's Degree	Sales and Marketing Chef	6
P4	58	Bachelor's Degree	Education Coordinator	30
P5	35	Graduate Degree	Quality Management Specialist Assistant	10
P6	35	Bachelor's Degree	Reservation and Revenue Manager Assistant	7
P7	48	Associate Degree	Executive Housekeeper	30
P8	30	Bachelor's Degree	Accounting Manager	3

P9	33	Bachelor's Degree	Accounting Chef	7
P10	37	Associate Degree	Executive Housekeeper	14

To explore work-life balance among female tourism managers, participants were asked about working hours and overtime. All reported working eight hours daily with 1.5 days off per week. One never worked overtime, eight occasionally did, and one only during summer.

Of those working overtime, six said it had no negative impact due to family support. One participant acknowledged disruptions in personal life but noted her spouse's understanding: *"Of course, it affects my personal life... Therefore, this situation does not cause problems between us."* (P3). Another stated: *"I stay for overtime, but it is not difficult for me because my mother is there to help. My husband's working hours are also long."* (P9).

Conversely, one participant cited emotional and physical strain: *"Especially during auditing processes... It creates a kind of identity conflict rather than just a physical burden."* (P5).

Another key question asked whether participants needed to travel for work, how frequently, and its effect on their personal life. Five reported traveling, four did not, and one previously traveled but no longer does. Of those who travel, four described it as beneficial for both personal and professional growth.

However, one participant shared that while travel is personally fulfilling, it creates family challenges: *"I travel every three to six months... while the issue is not directly work-related, it creates an emotional burden for me."* (P5).

Another participant, reflecting on pre-pandemic experiences, said: *"Before the pandemic, I traveled frequently... I never had to worry about them."* (P2).

Similarly, one participant highlighted the value of travel for professional development and noted no negative impact due to strong family support: *"The trade fairs we attend are professionally beneficial... we do not encounter any problems."* (P10).

Another question explored the extent of spousal support in household responsibilities. One participant said her spouse *"helps occasionally"* rather than sharing tasks equally, while another stated *"the responsibility for the household is on my husband."* Five participants reported *"sharing everything equally,"* and two said *"the entire burden of household responsibilities falls on me."*

A participant describing equal sharing noted a gradual increase in her spouse's involvement: *"My husband does everything with me—laundry, cooking, washing dishes. He started late, but his contribution increased over time as my own responsibilities grew."* (P4). Another emphasized the advantage of working in the same field: *"We share everything equally. This reduces the burden at home. Since we are in the same profession, we understand each other better."* (P6).

Conversely, one participant highlighted the lack of practical support: *"There is no real sharing. Playing with the child, yes—but when it comes to actual childcare and household chores, he does not help. The entire burden of the household is on me."* (P5).

Table 2 summarizes key challenges female managers face in achieving work-life balance. It outlines how working hours, overtime, and off-hour availability affect their lives—some view these demands as routine, while others see them as encroachments on personal space. Although business travel supports career advancement, it may also generate stress, particularly for mothers. The division of household labor and spousal support emerges as a major determinant, with equitable sharing easing the balance between work and family. Additionally, maintaining clear boundaries between professional and personal life is vital for reducing stress spillover. Lastly, family and extended support networks play a crucial role in helping women manage dual responsibilities.

Table 2. Work-Life Balance and Challenges

Main Theme	**Sub-theme**	**Description**
Work-Life Balance and Challenges	Working Hours and Overtime	Participants work eight hours a day, yet most engage in overtime, managing this challenge with spousal and family support.
	Availability Outside Working Hours	Most female managers are contacted outside working hours for job-related matters. While some normalize this as a professional necessity, others perceive it as an infringement on their private lives.
	Business Travel and Its Impact on Family	Although business travel is considered beneficial for career development, it can become a source of stress in family life, particularly for women with children.
	Household Division of Labor and Spousal Support	The majority of participants share household responsibilities equally with their spouses, which enables them to maintain a work-life balance.
	Efforts to Separate Work and Family Life	It is necessary to make an effort to protect one's family life from workplace stress.

	Family Support and Work-Life Balance	For achieving a balance between work and family life, spousal and extended family support emerges as a critical factor.

Participants were asked whether being a woman, motherhood, and childcare had negatively influenced their careers. Three reported taking a career break to care for their children, two noted that their husbands were opposed to their working, while three stated that motherhood had not hindered their professional development. One participant postponed motherhood due to career priorities.

Participant P7 described pausing her career due to childcare responsibilities and her husband's military postings: *"My husband traveled frequently... I was distanced from my profession."* (P7). Similarly, P10 highlighted spousal resistance as a barrier: *"My husband could not accept that I worked in a hotel... He could not accept the fact that I was earning my own money."* (P10).

In contrast, some participants emphasized the enabling role of family support. P2 managed to maintain her career with help from her mother and mother-in-law: *"I worked until the last 21 days of my pregnancy... they assisted for one year."* (P2). P8 shared a similar experience, while also revealing discrimination she faced during a job interview: *"My mother-in-law takes care of my child... constantly striving for recognition can be challenging."* (P8).

P6, who delayed motherhood for career reasons, expressed uncertainty about the future: *"I have been married for five years... My husband supports me in postponing our plans for having children."* (P6).

Table 3. Motherhood, Career, and Gender Roles

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Motherhood, Career, and Gender Roles	Childcare and Career Relationship	Women with children struggle to sustain their careers without adequate childcare support.
	Conflict Between Work and Motherhood	Mothers state that due to their workload, they are unable to spend sufficient time with their children, which leads to feelings of guilt.
	Postponing Parenthood	Some female managers indicate that they postpone having children in order to sustain their careers.
	Spousal Attitudes Towards Working Women	While some female managers report that their spouses support their careers, others express that they do not receive sufficient support from their partners.

In response to the question *"How does your family life affect your career development?"*, eight participants stated that their spouses supported them, while one noted a lack of spousal support negatively impacting her career. One participant also emphasized her mother's significant role in supporting her professional growth.

Participant P2 remarked: *"My husband is very supportive. Thanks to his support, I can focus on my work."* (P2). Likewise, P3 highlighted emotional and motivational support from her spouse: *"My husband supports me even more than I do myself... That's why I feel fortunate in this aspect."* (P3).

Regarding the question *"How do you maintain a balance between your family and work life?"*, four participants reported no major difficulties, two prioritized their careers, and two found achieving balance challenging.

P6 emphasized mutual support: *"I don't have much difficulty. We have always supported each other... Sometimes, my husband has a heavier workload, and at times, that bothers me."* (P6). P8 attributed balance to her husband's flexible schedule: *"My husband does not work within fixed hours... That's why I feel more at ease."* (P8). P10 noted clear boundaries between work and home: *"I can easily separate my work life from my personal life... I do not let personal problems affect my work."* (P10).

In contrast, P5 described the emotional toll of balancing motherhood and work: *"I am having a really hard time... I have to split myself into three different roles, and this division can be overwhelming at times."* (P5). Similarly, P4 shared the persistent burden of domestic tasks: *"It is really difficult... It is always a relentless tempo."* (P4).

Conversely, P3 expressed that work often supersedes her personal life, with blurred boundaries between the two: *"Some people finish work... My job and my social life have blended together, so I manage both simultaneously."* (P3).

Table 4 outlines key work-life balance strategies adopted by female managers in managing professional and personal responsibilities. It underscores the significance of spousal and family support, especially when flexible work arrangements are available. The importance of setting boundaries is also emphasized, as some participants deliberately separate work stress from their home lives. For mothers in particular, balancing dual roles often depends on effective time management. Additionally, the overlap between work and social life emerged as a theme, with some participants noting blurred lines between professional and personal spheres. Overall, the findings suggest that work-life balance depends on both individual coping strategies and supportive external structures.

Table 4. Work-Life Balance Strategies

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Work-Life Balance Strategies	Supportive Spouse and Family Role	Some participants stated that they were able to achieve a better work-life balance thanks to their spouses' flexible working hours.
	Separating Work and Private Life	Some female managers stated that they do not reflect work-related challenges onto their home life and do not bring personal problems into the workplace.
	Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities	Female managers with children stated that they struggle to fulfill both family and work responsibilities simultaneously and try to maintain balance through time management.
	Interconnection of Work and Social Life	Some participants stated that their professional and social circles overlap, and they develop social relationships with the people they work with.

Participants were asked whether they had experienced or witnessed gender-based exclusion in professional settings. Four reported no such experiences, while three observed or experienced positive discrimination.

P6 described her situation as follows: *"There may be positive discrimination. I feel that I am being supported in a positive way."* (P6). Similarly, P3 noted: *"There was positive discrimination. For example, when setting up a hall, I witnessed comments like 'You are a woman, don't carry those things.'"* (P3).

In contrast, two participants faced discriminatory restrictions during job applications related to marriage and pregnancy. P5 shared: *"I applied for a job, and they told me, 'You cannot get married for five years.' A female manager said this to me... the company wants to dictate it."* (P5).

One participant reported that male candidates were favored in hiring, while another, P7, expressed frustration over gender bias in promotions: *"When it comes to promotion, men are preferred... I feel disappointed and frustrated about this."* (P7).

Three participants mentioned not being taken seriously by male colleagues at certain stages of their careers. P5 recounted: *"When I go down to the warehouse to conduct inspections... once they recognize my authority, I suddenly become 'Ms. Betül' to them."* (P5). Similarly, P10 remarked: *"There is often an attitude of 'What does a woman know?'... their behavior makes me feel that they underestimate me simply because I am a woman."* (P10).

Table 5 synthesizes these findings, revealing gender-based barriers in hiring and promotion, particularly concerning pregnancy and marital status. It also highlights the struggle for recognition in male-dominated spaces, where some women initially face skepticism before gaining respect. Additionally, instances of positive discrimination reflect the nuanced and often contradictory dynamics of gender in the workplace, where women may simultaneously confront bias and receive preferential treatment based on societal expectations.

Table 5. Gender-Based Barriers and Discrimination

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Gender-Based Barriers and Discrimination	Gender Discrimination in Hiring and Promotion	Female managers stated that they experience disadvantages in hiring and promotion processes due to factors such as pregnancy and marriage.
	Competency Challenges and Struggles with Male Colleagues	Some female managers reported that they were initially not taken seriously by their male colleagues but eventually gained acceptance over time.
	Experiences of Positive Discrimination in Work Life	Some participants expressed that they experienced positive discrimination in the workplace due to being women.

Conclusion

This study examined the work-life balance and gender-based challenges experienced by female managers in the tourism sector, focusing on how these factors influence their career development and personal lives. The findings show that personal, familial, and institutional dynamics significantly affect women's ability to sustain work-life balance in managerial roles.

Participants reported working in environments that demand high flexibility regarding working hours and overtime. Although many did not perceive overtime as detrimental to their family life, the presence of spousal and familial support emerged as a key buffer. For mothers in particular, balancing professional duties with childcare posed considerable psychological and physical challenges.

The expectation of constant availability was largely normalized but also seen as contributing to blurred boundaries between professional and personal life, increasing stress. Business travel, while viewed as a career-enhancing opportunity, added further strain to family responsibilities.

In terms of household responsibilities, the findings revealed a strong reliance on spousal and extended family support. Nonetheless, some participants still carried a disproportionate share of domestic duties, negatively impacting their work performance and career advancement. These results underscore that women's professional success is influenced not only by individual competence, but also by the degree to which household responsibilities are equitably shared within the family.

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Investigating the Impact of Green Supplier Selection and Waste Reduction Practices on Organizational Citizenship Behavior for the Environment with Restaurant Ethical Attitudes as a Mediator

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Abstract

Purpose: This research was designed to draw the attention of chefs to promote environmental sustainability, selecting green supplier and practice of waste reduction. Therefore, this paper aims to empirically investigate the impact of green supplier selection and waste reduction practices on organizational citizenship behavior for the environment with restaurant ethical attitudes as a mediator within the sample of casual dining' chefs.

Study design/methodology/approach: From the perspective of stimulus–organism–response (SOR) theory, in this study a logical model of "green supplier selection and waste reduction practices (stimulus)–restaurant ethical attitudes (organism)– organizational citizenship behavior for the environment (response)" was developed. The proposed research model was empirically tested by using a survey of 476 chefs with the convenience sampling method from casual dining restaurants in Turkiye. Path analysis, using structural equation model was employed to estimate the hypothesized relations among the variables in this study.

Results: The analyses show that it highlights the direct role of green supplier selection and waste reduction practices in determining restaurant ethical attitudes and similarly, green supplier selection and waste reduction practices were found to have a positive and direct relationship with organizational citizenship behavior for the environment and lastly restaurant ethical attitudes have positive and direct relationships with organizational citizenship behavior for the environment. By introducing the restaurant ethical attitudes as a mediator, the effects of green supplier selection and waste reduction practices on organizational citizenship behavior for the environment were reduced with a significance level. As these mediation effects are all positive and significant, they have been categorized as the "complementary type" or "partial mediation", as suggested by Zhao, et al. (2010).

Originality/value: This paper provides a theoretical framework that academics and practitioners with a comprehensive perspective draw attention on to the environmental sustainability on what types of stimulus trigger in chefs' environmental behavior. While this research aims to reveal the relationships between variables within the framework of the conceptual model, it also aims to increase the awareness of restaurant businesses, especially chefs, about environmental sustainability.

Keywords Green Supplier Selection, Waste Reduction Practices, Organizational Citizenship Behavior for the Environment, Sustainable Environment, Restaurant Ethical Attitudes

Introduction

The restaurant industry is strategically important because it encompasses different stages of sustainability and connects various sustainability dimensions. Thus, restaurants are at the heart of these elements, and with their supplier selection and waste reduction practices have great influence on food production processes (Gössling & Hall, 2021) and environmental behavior of employees (Zacher, et al., 2023).

Green suppliers are eco-friendly suppliers who involves the adoption of sustainable practices across the whole of the food sourcing, processing, and distribution processes always with an emphasis on sustainability (Yong et al., 2024). Banaeian et al. (2015) emphasized that the restaurant industry should develop well designed supplier selection criteria for better environmental performance. Because supplier selection and cooperation with them directly or indirectly affect environmental performance. Waste reduction practices are one of the fundamental component for restaurant environmental practices Waste reduction can be ensured by using recycled materials and durable items rather than disposable products, using local produce in food preparation, limiting the number of menu items, ensuring plate and serving size are appropriate and strategies for reducing food and water waste (Tatàno et al., 2017; Kim & Hall, 2020). Shin and Cho (2023) mention that cooperative behaviors towards green suppliers and restaurant ethical attitudes will trigger employees' organizational citizenship behavior for the environment. Organizational citizenship behaviors for the environment support organizations' green development strategies by increasing the effectiveness of green management in organizations and ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of the environment (Liu et al., 2021).

In the context of environmentally focused behaviors, organizational citizenship behaviors that employees voluntarily engage in include making suggestions to improve the organization's environmental performance, trying to draw management's attention to potentially environmentally unfriendly activities, or willing to speak up when policies or rules do not contribute to the achievement of the organization's environmental goals. As employees perceive the company as supporting environmental efforts, their organizational citizenship behavior for the environment increases (Temminck, 2015).

Along with this, organizational culture has critical attributes such as attitudes, norms, cultures, values, and the behavior of people who work within a firm (Siawsh et al. 2021). At this point, organizational green culture becomes an environmental ideology that aims to promote sustainable ecological development (Chandra, et al., 2021) based on all the stage of production process in restaurants and draws attention with its reflection on employees (Paillé, et al., 2014). However, the environmental intent of employees is associated with the demonstration of green practices in an organization that had already been proven to positively influence an employee's ecological behavior (Okumus et al., 2019). About 2/3 of food in the sector of hospitality and foodservice operations is wasted in the kitchen, thus draws key role in environmental sustainability (Filimonau et al., 2020). Therefore, this study sought to explore how Green Supplier Selection and Waste Reduction Practices influenced Restaurant Ethical Attitudes and how in turn enhanced the Organizational Citizenship Behavior for the Environment by conducting structured interviews with chefs who work casual dining restaurant more than a year in Diyarbakir, Turkiye.

Based on the theoretical contributions and environmental sustainability needs, this paper can lead to an enrichment of the existing literature addressing sustainable restaurant management and environmental management policies. Finally, this study draws attention to sustainable chefs in restaurant management by referring to responsible production and consumption in line with the principles of sustainable development. Our conceptual model is presented in Fig. 1 below.

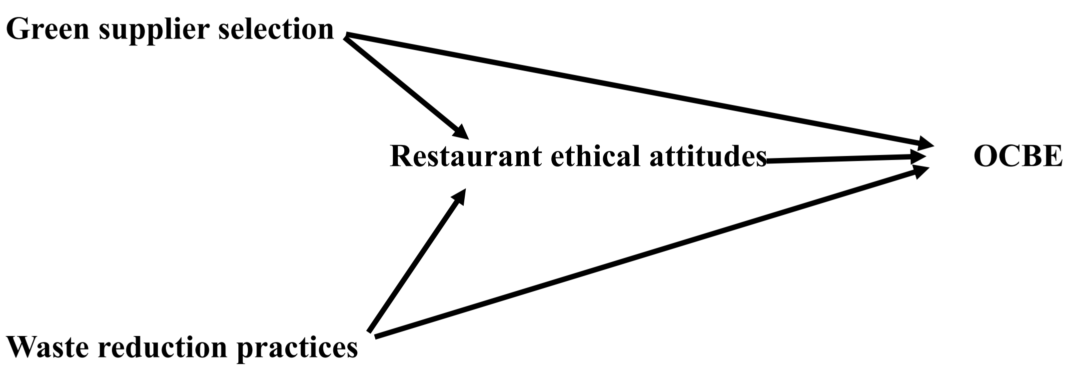

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Methodology

The proposed research model is empirically tested by using a survey of 476 chefs with the convenience sampling method from casual dining restaurants in Diyarbakir, Turkiye. Path analysis, using structural equation model (SEM) was used to estimate the hypothesized relations among the variables in the study. The analysis was performed by using the SPSS and AMOS 27 programs based on the SEM model. In this study, the approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was used. First, reliability and factor loadings were tested for each scale of the study. Goodness of fit values, convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model was verified. After acceptable convergent and discriminant validities were determined, the second step, testing the structural model, was carried out to reveal the relationships between the structures of the study.

Results

The results reveal that green supplier selection and waste reduction practices are significantly and positively related to organizational citizenship behavior for the environment (B= 0.243, $p<0.001$; B=0.096, $p<0.05$). Thus, *H1* and *H2* received support. Furthermore green supplier selection and waste reduction practices also had a significant positive influence on restaurant ethical attitudes (*B*= 0.325, p<0.001; *B*=0.308, p<0.001). Thus *H3* and *H4* received support. Lastly, as expected, restaurant ethical attitudes was significantly and positively related to organizational citizenship behavior for the environment (*B*= 0.305, p<0.001), and thus *H5* was supported. Table 1 exhibits the significance of the testing results encompassing the path coefficient, t-statistic, and the significance level of the analysis.

Table 1: Significance testing results of the structural model path coefficients

Hypotheses	Path coefficient	t-values	Results
Hypothesis 1: Green supplier selection positively and significantly affects organizational citizenship behavior for the environment	0.243	5.011	Supported
Hypothesis 2: Waste reduction practices positively and significantly affects organizational citizenship behavior for the environment	0.096	1.965	Supported
Hypothesis 3: Green supplier selection positively and significantly affects restaurant ethical attitudes.	0.325	6.075	Supported
Hypothesis 4: Waste reduction practices positively and significantly affects restaurant ethical attitudes.	0.308	5.708	Supported
Hypothesis 5: Restaurant ethical attitudes positively and significantly affects organizational citizenship behavior for the environment	0.305	5.141	Supported

To test mediation and classify its type on introducing the restaurant ethical attitudes as a mediator, then the effects of green supplier selection (c′ = 0.099, [Lower-Upper Bounds=0.054- 0.148]) and waste reduction practices (c′ = 0.094, [Lower-Upper Bounds=0.053-0.141]) on organizational citizenship behavior for the environment reduces, with significance level. As these mediation effects are all positive and significant, they have been categorized as the "complementary type" or "partial mediation", as suggested by Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010).

Finally, the results shows that the R-square (R^2) for the restaurant ethical attitudes is 0.288, which means that green supplier selection and waste reduction practices could affect the restaurant ethical attitudes by 29%. The R-square (R^2) for the on organizational citizenship behavior for the environment is 0.276, which means that other three variables in model could affect the organizational citizenship behavior for the environment by 28%.

Conclusion

This article presents a theoretical framework that provides a comprehensive perspective for academics and practitioners by drawing attention to environmental sustainability on what types of stimuli trigger the environmental behaviors of chefs in casual dining restaurants within the scope of stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory. The analyses show that it highlights the direct role of green supplier selection and waste reduction practices in determining restaurant ethical attitudes and similarly, green supplier selection and waste reduction practices were found to have a positive and direct relationship with organizational citizenship behavior for the environment and lastly restaurant ethical attitudes have positive and direct relationships with organizational citizenship behavior for the environment. Furthermore restaurant ethical attitudes partial mediates the relationship between green supplier selection and waste reduction practices on organizational citizenship behavior for the environment. To successfully develop chefs' environmental sustainability perceptions, the restaurants should provide sustainable practices such as green supplier selection and waste reduction. With such kinds of factors will have gained ethical attitudes and then have developed chefs' environmental behavior in casual dining restaurants.

Although this study offers important implications on employees, it has some limitations that need to be awareness for future studies. Although statistically common method variance test was performed, in terms of procedural strategy social desirability response bias may be mentioned for methodological limitations. From a methodological perspective, all strategies should be handled sensitively when it comes to detecting and limiting social desirability bias.

This study aims to raise awareness in restaurant businesses by drawing attention to responsible production among sustainable development principles. For future studies, it is recommended that two studies are conducted in which the modeling is from the perspective of both employees and customers within the scope of responsible consumption and production principles, and the results are examined in the same study in terms of two separate samples.

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Employees' food safety culture at selected meat processing plants in the Western Cape Province, South Africa

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Abstract

Purpose: The objective of the study was to explore the employee's food safety culture at selected meat processing plants in the Western Cape.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study was done using a cross-sectional quantitative, descriptive approach. The data was collected by the researcher using questionnaires. A convenience sampling was used to sample the meat processing plants, as well as the food handlers working in meat processing plants in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. The questionnaire survey was used to assess specific elements relevant to food safety within an organisation. This included an evaluation of employees' food safety attitude, food safety practices and elements relating to functionality of the food safety management system's performance.

Results: The study's results indicated that food handlers demonstrated satisfactory knowledge, attitude and practices related to food safety. Although there were various levels of knowledge which may require further improvement. Age and gender displayed a significant ($p < 0.05$) association with Food Safety Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices. A considerably positive correlation was noted ($p<0.05$) between food handlers, Food safety Attitudes and Food Safety Practices. Similarly, the relationship between Food safety Attitudes and Food Safety Practices was significant ($p < .05$) which indicates that culture influences food safety practices. Furthermore, the research further unveiled a positive association between food handlers' food safety attitude and practice. Nevertheless, no association was found between the level of knowledge relating to food safety and food handlers' practices ($p=-0.60$), nor between food safety knowledge and attitudes ($p=-0.98$). This study further revealed that the employees' attitudes and practices were positive, based on the impact on the behaviour of employees in food handling practice.

Originality/value: Overall, it is recommended that food handlers' elements relating to Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) are improved through the adoption of formal food safety training programs.

Keywords: Food safety culture, meat processing plants, Food safety knowledge, Food safety attitude, Food safety practice

Introduction

Globally and annually, millions of people fall sick and or lose their lives as a result of the consumption of unsafe food (WHO, 2011). Illnesses from food have been a concern for centuries with more outbreaks experienced, these illnesses are called foodborne diseases (Wagenberg, 2023; Gazu, et, al., 2023). Foodborne diseases in both developed and developing nations are often caused by food processors and regulators that are noncompliant with food safety regulations (Nyarugwe, Linnemann, & Luning 2020; Warmate & Onarinde, 2023). According to WHO (2022), Africa records the most incumbrance of foodborne illnesses, with a recorded one-third of the global impact, with Asia at the second position. Foodborne disease outbreak is a worldwide concern affecting both developing and developed countries (Glass et.al, 2019; Ramalwa, et.al, 2020; Gazu, et,al., 2023; Wagenberg, 2023; Naghavi, et,al., 2024). WHO reported that at least one in every ten people fall ill from the consumption of contaminated food annually, and 420 000 die, with approximately 30% of all foodborne deaths in children of ages under five years (WHO, 2015). However, the CDC approximates that one in six Americans, fall ill, which results to forty-eight million Americans of which 128 000 are hospitalized, and three thousand die of food-borne diseases annually in the United States (CDC, 2023). South Africa's NICD reported a total of 337 foodborne outbreaks from March 2018 to August 2020, 129 of the outbreaks were investigated which included 2932 cases, 319 hospital admissions and 20 deaths (Ramalwa, et.al, 2020). In a similar report, 327 foodborne diseases outbreaks were reported to NICD from the beginning of 2013 to the end of 2017 (Shoniwa, et, al, 2019). According to Ramalwa, et.al, (2020), that these statistics are from reported cases; however, the reporting system is not sufficiently followed by individuals, as these numbers could be higher. Bisholo, Ghuman, & Haffejee, (2018) agrees with this notion. Ramalwa, et.al, (2020), further indicates that foodborne illnesses are well underreported and therefore the available data is not a true reflection of the number of prevalent foodborne illness cases in South Africa. There is an understanding that there are more cases which are simply neither reported, nor investigated due to lack of public awareness and many individuals are quick to dismiss foodborne illness, especially if the symptoms are insignificant and dissipate in a few days.

The food manufacturing industry has, over the years, adopted measures to control and monitor food production. However, there has been a gap in how industry can incorporate organisational culture into food safety to ensure effectiveness of FSMSs (Manning, 2018; Jespersen, et, al, 2019;). The focus on food control has moved to risk-based thinking, and more preventative rather than reactive controls being recommended (Jespersen, Griffiths & Wallace, 2017; Svrčinová & Janout, 2018; Jespersen, et, al, 2019). While "food safety" focuses on the practices and procedures to ensure food is safe to consume, "food safety culture" encompasses the shared values, beliefs, and behaviors within an organization that prioritize and promote food safety. Hence, it is imperative that organisations address food safety issues by adjusting organisational culture. Powell, Jacob, and Chapman's (2011) study reported that food safety issues within industry need a good organisational culture. Good food safety culture will ensure that individuals will do what is right even when no-one is watching (Powell et al., 2011). Griffith et al. (2010) contend that employees can only be as sanitary as the organization thus the success or failure of food safety practices is extensively linked to the prevalence or effectiveness of food safety culture. The latter is one of the fundamental factors in ensuring effective food safety compliance (Svrčinová & Janout, 2018).

Methodology

The study was done using a cross-sectional quantitative, descriptive approach for data collection. In this study, information was collected through researcher administered paper-based questionnaires. This research's target population consisted of food handlers of selected meat processing plants in Western Cape, South Africa. A convenience sampling was used to sample the meat processing plants, as well as the food handlers working in meat processing plants in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. Six meat processing plants were sampled, of which twenty-five food handlers were sampled from each meat processing plant with a total of 150 food handlers. The self-administered questionnaire survey was used to assess specific elements relevant to food safety culture within an organisation. The researcher developed a questionnaire with information modified from previous studies (Bamford 2012); Gitau (2016) and Chan (2017). The research instruments consisted mostly of several closed questions for respondents, such as a three-point likert scale, and yes or no; true, false or I don't know scale. A validity and reliability test were conducted to assess the study's instruments by means of conducting duplicate questionnaire completion of the same instrument during the pilot and after which necessary adjustments were made to ensure reliability. The questionnaires were assessed based on face and content validity by a panel of experts with experience in food safety. About 150 questionnaires were distributed to various meat processing plants for the employees to complete. Then the respondents were given two days to complete the questionnaire during their break time from work or after their shift work. The researcher came back after two days to collect all the completed questionnaires, which took about 15–20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire response rate was 74% (111=n) from the 150 questionnaires distributed. The respondents were 18 years and above. Data was collected from May 2020 to March 2021. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data using tables.

Results

Demographic profile of food handlers

The food handlers' socio-demographic data were presented using numbers and percentages. The demographic profile of food handlers in Table 1 outlines those 111 food handlers, who responded in the study, of which the majority (64%) were females with almost half (49.5%) of the respondents belonging aged between 21 and 30 years. Regarding level of education among respondents, most of the respondents (55.9%) attended high school and about 39.6% of the respondents had work experience of between 1 - 3 years, in a meat processing industry and their job titles were job packers (28%) and general workers (28%) respectively. Regarding employment status, the majority (94.4%) of the respondents were employed permanently and the average hours worked per week were more than 40 hours each week (91%). Majority of respondents had attended training sessions (67%); however, the overwhelming majority (79.3%) did not possess a formal food safety certification. 67% of the food handlers indicated that they received job related training.

Regarding food handlers, a majority (67%), of the respondents received food safety on the job training; however, about 79.3% were not in possession of a formal food safety certification. The importance of training is not only for guiding food handlers on safe handling and preparation of food, but also in increasing as well as enhancing their food safety knowledge and attitudes (NietoMontenegro, Brown and La-Borde, 2008). These findings are in line with a study conducted by Nkhebenyane, and Lues, (2020). Formalised food safety training is about the relevant food handling and personal hygiene practices which are essential in food manufacturing. Consequently, management must comply with regulated policies relating to the provision of regular, formal training.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of 111 (n) food handlers

Characteristic		**Food Handlers**	
		(n)	**%**
Gender	Males	38	34.2
	Females	71	**64.0**
	No disclosure	2	1.8
Age group	18-20 years old	6	5.4
	21-30 years old	55	**49.5**
	31-40 years old	33	29.7
	41 - 50 and above	15	13.5
	51 - 60	2	1.8
Level of education	Lower than grade 12	35	31.5
	Grade 12	62	**55.9**
	College	7	6.3
	University	4	3.6
	Other	3	2.7
Work experience in meat industry	Less than a year	24	21.6
	1 to 3 years	44	**39.6**

	4 to 7 years	17	15.3
	8 to 12 years	7	6.3
	13 – 15 years	9	8.1
	Over 15 years	10	9.0
Job Title	General worker	32	**28.8**
	Packer	32	**28.8**
	Quality controller	7	6.3
	Supervisor	5	4.5
	Manager	6	5.4
	Receiving clerk	2	1.8
	Cashier	1	0.9
	Blockman/woman	5	5.1
	other	20	18.0
Employment status	Casual	4	3.7
	Temporary	2	1.9
	Permanent	101	**94.4**
Average hours worked per day	Less than 40 hours each week	5	4.5
	Temporary 40 hours each week	5	4.5
	More than 40 hours each week	101	**91.0**
Job training received	Yes	74	67
	No	37	33.0
Formal food safety certification	Yes	23	20.7
	No	88	**79.3**

Food safety attitudes and awareness for food handlers

Most of the respondents reflected a positive attitude on food safety and ultimately culture (Table 2). About 92.7% respondents agreed that they were sure what food safety was; 83.8% disagreed with the statement that nobody would to die from eating a contaminated meat processed product; 61.7% respondents agreed records are only kept for inspection purposes; 94.5% agreed that It was important to follow steps for hand washing; 83.3% disagreed that when washing hands, the order of steps does not affect the outcome; about 67.7% disagreed that the use of uniforms/ overalls should be optional; 77.7% disagreed that 'if I report an illness, I think I will lose my job'; 96.3% disagreed that the training related to food safety was a waste of time; 90.9% disagreed that the more years of experience one had, the less training one needed; 94.6% of respondents disagreed that only new employees should receive training; 88.1% of respondents disagreed that teamwork is not appropriate for their job, - it was better to work individually; 90.6% of respondents disagreed that supervisors should only have to observe the work of new personnel; 65.4% of respondents disagreed that having enemies at work would not affect food safety compliance; 50.5% disagreed that it was the supervisor's job to ensure there were no sick people working; 74.1% disagreed that they only needed to report illnesses when they believed it would affect work efficiency; 99.1% disagreed that If supervisors were not looking, they did not have to follow food safety rules 100%; 78.7% disagreed that workers were not allowed to question rules, while 77.9% disagreed that every manager gave consistent information regarding food safety; 74.3.% agreed that information regarding food safety rules and regulations should be appropriately and timeously provided by management; 72.5% agreed that their managers regularly gave suitable safe food handling instructions; 77.5% agreed that training as provided by management was sufficient to enhance their food safety practices; 81.6% agreed that their managers continuously observed employees to determine if they were handling food in a safe manner; 86.1% agreed to their manager's active involvement in ensuring safe practices during food handling; 79.8% agreed that management followed all food safety rules; 84.2% agreed that management was consistent amongst all personnel in enforcing food safety rules; 84.2% concurred that leadership possessed a clear understanding of risks related to with inappropriate food handling practices; 74.6% concurred that management would refrain from taking unnecessary food safety risks, even if they are regarded as small.

The findings are consistent with research done by Griffith, Livesey, and Clayton (2010), which indicated that beliefs and attitudes associated with food safety culture in a business entity are nearly dependant on governance and impetus as provided by leadership, nature of food safety communication given and the extent to which personnel trust their leadership. Sani and Siow (2014), further highlight that personnel's food safety attitudes and awareness are fundamental elements impacting food handling practices. Furthermore, these factors, when maintained can efficiently reduce hazards or illnesses attributed to food (Al-Shabib, & Mosilhey, 2016; Chi, Yan, Nan, Dong, et al. 2017). The responses for questions related to food handlers' attitudes are summarized in Table 4.4. Overall, results indicate positive attitudes and awareness on food safety culture, as most of the respondents indicated positive attitudes and awareness.

Comparable findings were reported by Al-Shabib and Mosilhey (2016), who discovered that more than 80% of respondents were aware of the prohibitions relating to handling food in the event of cuts on fingers and hands, and that wearing personal items such as jewellery could potentially result in contamination of the food. The Codex Alimentarius (2003) stated that ill personnel or personnel suspected of having illnesses transmissible through food, are not permitted to work in food handling premises.

Table 2: Evaluation of food safety attitudes of food handlers

Attitude	**Food handlers (111)**	
	Positive %	**Negative %**
I am sure what food safety is	Agree 92.7	Disagree 7.2
Nobody is going to die from eating a contaminated meat processed product	Disagree 83.8	Agree 16.8
Records are only kept for inspection purposes	Agree 61.7	Disagree 16.8
It is important to follow steps for hand washing	Agree 94.5	Disagree 5.6
When washing hands, the order of steps does not affect the outcome	Disagree 83.3	Agree 15.8
Uniform/ overall use should be optional	Disagree 67.7	Agree 34.9
If I report an illness, I think I will lose my job	Disagree 77.5	Agree 22.5
Training related to food safety are a waste of time	Disagree 96.3	Agree 3.6
The more years of experience you have, the less training you need to receive	Disagree 90.9	Agree 9.1
Only new employees should receive training	Disagree 94.6	Agree 5.4

Teamwork is not appropriate at my job, is better to work individually	Disagree 88.1	Agree 11.9
Supervisors should only have to observe the work of new personnel	Disagree 90.6	Agree 9.4
Having enemies at work will not affect food safety compliance	Disagree 65.4	Agree 34.6
It is the supervisor's job to make sure there are no sick people working	Disagree 50.5	Agree 49.5
I only need to report illnesses when I believe it will affect my work efficiency	Disagree 74.1	Agree 25.9
If supervisors are not looking, I don't have to follow food safety rules 100%	Disagree 99.1	Agree 0.9
Workers are not allowed to question rules	Disagree 78.7	Agree 21.3
All managers give consistent information about food safety	Agree 77.9	Disagree 22,1
Management provides adequate and timely information about current food safety rules and regulations	Agree 74.3	Disagree 25.7
My manager generally gives appropriate instructions on safe food handling	Agree 72.5	Disagree 27.3
Management provides adequate training to improve employees' food safety practices	Agree 77.5	Disagree 22.5
My manager always watches to see if employees are practicing safe food handling	Agree 81.6	Disagree 18.4
My manager is actively involved in making sure safe food handling is practiced	Agree 86.1	Disagree 13.8

Management follows all food safety rules	Agree	Disagree
	79.8	20.2
Management enforces food safety rules consistently with all employees	Agree	Disagree
	81.7	18.4
Management has a clear picture of the risks associated with improper food handling practices	Agree	Disagree
	84.2	15.9
Management will not take even a small risk when it comes to food safety	Agree	Disagree
	74.6	25.4

Food safety practice for food handlers

Table 3 shows a self-reporting food safety practice in a food manufacturing plant. Similar to the results based on knowledge, respondents demonstrated good performance on statements about practice, as the majority (95.4%) of respondents reported a positive food safety practice, as they agreed to hand washing regularly with detergent and running water, to help reduce bacteria that causes disease; respondents also agreed (82.1%) that respondents adhered to standard of practices (SOPs) as it is a crucial component of their job; respondents further agreed (93.6%) that it was necessary to wear personal protective equipment such as mop caps, to minimize the risk of cross contamination; they agreed (90%) that they should wear a plaster and glove whenever they (food handlers) had a cut; as well as agreed (88%) that food safety was part of their company's values and culture. The results indicated that food handlers belonging to meat processing plants showed positive practice (Ansari-Lari *et, al,* (2010).

The greater part of respondents also agreed (91.9%) that food handlers always had time for food safety; they agreed (84.8%) that complying to food safety (practices) was more important than getting the job done; they disagreed (64.4%) that food handlers defrost meat in water; more than half (51.1%) respondents agreed that they were familiar with HACCP; respondents also agreed (72%) that food handlers perceive the advantages of implementing a HACCP based system; they disagreed that food handlers did not always understand food safety; 82.5% respondents agreed that food handlers always understood food safety; however, 73.5% disagreed that respondents just followed food safety rules because it was required; and also disagreed (60%) that they followed food safety rules from time to time. Most of these results indicate a food safety practice by food handlers, which is contrary to results reported by Kunadu, Ofosu, Aboagye, and Sneed and Strohbehn, (2004) who reported poor food safety practices among food handlers.

Table 3: Food safety practice of food handlers (111)

Statement	Response	Food handlers	
		n	%
I wash hands regularly with soap and running water to help reduce bacteria that causes disease.	Agree	4.6	95.4
I always have time for food safety.	Agree	8.1	91.9
Complying to food safety is more important than getting the job done	Agree	23.3	84.8
I adhere to SOPs as an important part of my job.	Agree	17.9	82.1
I defrost meat in water.	Agree	35.6	64.4
I wear protective clothing such as hairnets, to reduce the risk of cross contamination.	Agree	102	93.6
I wear a plaster and glove whenever I have a cut.	Agree	10	90
Food safety is part of my company's values and culture	Agree	11.2	88
I have knowledge about HACCP	Agree	50	51.1
I can see the benefits of HACCP/food safety system	Agree	74	72
I always understand food safety	Agree	89	82.5
I just follow food safety rules because it's required	Agree	24	22.6
I follow food safety rules from time to time	Agree	37	36.6

Relationship between food safety knowledge, attitude, and practice

The Pearson product-moment correlation was used for establishing an association between food safety practice and attitude, which was statistically significant (r =. 455, n = 111, p = .005). The study shows that food handler's food safety is positively correlated with food safety attitude and practice (Table 4). This is consistent with study by Sani et al. (2014), which indicated the correlation between level of food safety practice and food handler attitude vis-à-vis food safety Additionally, to knowledge and food safety regulations, attitude is of great influence, in the reduction of the number of foodborne diseases, as good attitudes and knowledge impacts the maintenance of right food handling practices (Saniler, 2017). However, there was no association between food handlers' level of food safety knowledge and practices (p=-0.60), or between food safety knowledge and attitudes (p=-0.98) in this study. The finding is consistent with research (Clayton, Griffith & Peters, 2002; Pilling, Brannon & Shanklin, 2008 and Miroslava, Mustapha, Madaki, & Kächel, 2023), which reported that personnel who possess sufficient food safety knowledge hardly implement their expertise during food handling. Furthermore, food safety knowledge and attitude were not strongly related (Miroslava, Mustapha, Madaki, & Kächel, 2023). This is indicative of food handler practices being associated with food safety attitudes.

Table 4: Relationship between food safety knowledge, attitude, and practice

		FSK	FSP	FSA
FSK	Pearson Correlation	1	-.060	-.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.529	.305
	N	111	111	111
FSP	Pearson Correlation	-.060	1	.455**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.529		<,001
	N	111	111	111
FSA	Pearson Correlation	-.098	.455**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.305	<,001	
	N	111	111	111

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Food Safety Knowledge = FSK); Food Safety Practice = FSP; Food Safety Attitude = FSA

Conclusion

Food safety culture brings about change in many areas of the organization. It is acknowledged that having a positive food safety culture plays a critical role to meat processing plants. The food handlers of meat processing plants have strong and weak indicators of food safety culture. The Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) model adopted infers that food safety attitudes and practices of food handlers were satisfactory, however. There was significant association ($p < 0.05$) on age and gender of food handlers with Food Safety Knowledge (FSK), Food Safety Attitudes (FSA) and Food Safety Practice (FSP). Furthermore, a significant ($p < .05$) positive association was noted between the FSA and FSP of food handlers. However, the association between FSA and FSP was substantial ($p < .05$). The meat processing plants with diversified food safety training programs can improve the overall KAP of food handlers, which will reduce food safety threats, foodborne outbreaks as well as food recalls. It is recommended that these food safety culture factors affecting mindset and behaviour toward food safety in all spheres of the organisation are considered within meat processing plants. Therefore, future studies on the extent and type of relationship between these food safety elements with larger sample sizes will aid in improving food safety status in developing countries.

Practical implications

The results obtained in the study identified some gaps in meat processing plants, firstly the lack of formal food safety training. More efforts should be made to ensure employees of all groups receive formal food safety training. Secondly, there was a limited amount of research done from a South African perspective to understand and highlight factors affecting food safety culture. It is recommended that the overall, KAP attitudes of food handlers be improved by engaging meat processing plants into diverse food safety trainings and encouragements, which sequentially would abate food safety threats, food recalls, and reduce foodborne outbreaks. Since food safety knowledge and attitudes are closely interrelated, factors which affect mindset and behaviour toward food safety, are further explored by the meat processing plants to improve the perceptions of employees.

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Redefining Innovation in Hospitality: Exploring the Role of Entrepreneurial Leadership in Shaping Employees' Innovative Behavior Through the Lens of Creative Self-Efficacy

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Abstrat

Purpose: The hospitality industry thrives on constant innovation to meet ever-evolving customer demands. Entrepreneurial leadership (EL), characterized by vision, adaptability, and a proactive mindset, plays a critical role in fostering innovative behavior (IB) among employees. This paper investigates how EL influences IB in the hospitality sector and examines creative self-efficacy (CSE) as a mediating variable. The study aims to provide insights into how leaders can empower employees to generate novel ideas, improve service quality, and drive organizational success.

Study/design/methodology/approach: A quantitative research design was employed to test the hypothesized relationships between EL, IB, and CSE. Data were collected from 473 employees in the hospitality industry of China through a structured survey. The partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using Smart-PLS was applied to assess the direct and indirect effects of EL on IB via CSE.

Results: The findings demonstrate a significant positive relationship between EL and IB ($\beta = 0.305$, $p < 0.001$). EL was also found to positively influence CSE ($\beta = 0.444$, $p < 0.001$), which, in turn, significantly impacted IB ($\beta = 0.380$, $p < 0.01$). Mediation analysis revealed that CSE partially mediates the relationship between EL and IB, accounting for 16% of the total effect. These results highlight that entrepreneurial leaders not only directly foster innovative behavior but also enhance employees' confidence in their creative abilities, which subsequently drives innovation. Department-specific analysis indicated that CSE had a stronger mediating effect in frontline roles compared to back-office roles, emphasizing the role of customer interaction in stimulating creativity.

Originality/value: This study contributes to the literature by integrating EL and CSE as key drivers of IB in the hospitality sector. While prior research has explored leadership styles and innovation, limited studies focus on the mediating role of CSE in this dynamic. The findings provide actionable insights for managers seeking to cultivate a culture of innovation through entrepreneurial leadership. By understanding the pivotal role of CSE, leaders can implement targeted interventions

such as training and mentorship programs to enhance employees' creative confidence and innovation capabilities.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Leadership, Innovative Behavior, Creative Self-Efficacy, Hospitality Industry, Structural Equation Modeling

Introduction

The hospitality industry is undergoing rapid transformation due to technological advancements, changing customer expectations, and global competition (Tai et al., 2021; Hussein et al., 2024). In this dynamic environment, innovation is paramount to maintaining competitive advantage. Employees, as the frontline drivers of service delivery, play a critical role in implementing innovative practices. However, fostering IB requires leadership styles that inspire creativity and adaptability (Bagheri et al., 2022; Islam et al., 2024). Entrepreneurial leadership has emerged as a vital style for promoting innovation (Hoang et al., 2022). Defined by opportunity recognition, risk-taking, and proactiveness, EL aligns well with the demands of the hospitality industry (Akbari et al., 2021). Moreover, psychological constructs like creative self-efficacy, which reflects an individual's belief in their creative abilities, have been shown to influence IB (Ud din Khan et al., 2023). This study examines the interplay between EL, CSE, and IB, addressing the gap in understanding how entrepreneurial leaders impact employees' innovative contributions through CSE. The conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

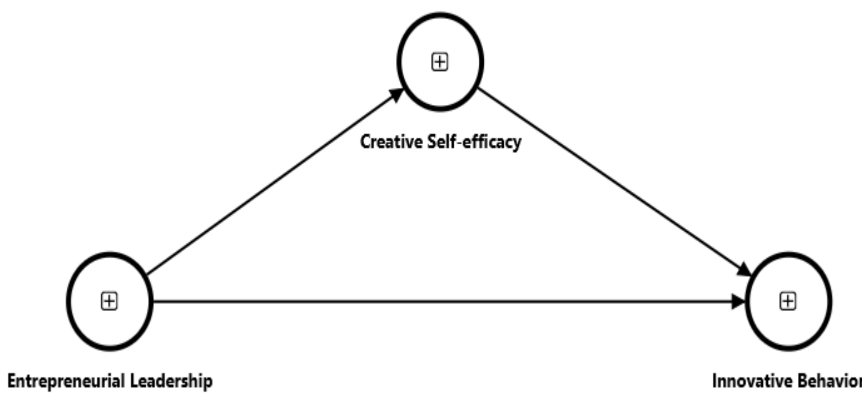

Figure 1 Conceptual model

Methodology

The study employs a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among EL, CSE, and IB. The hypothesized model posits EL as an independent variable, IB as the dependent variable, and CSE as a mediator. Participants were recruited from 20 mid-sized and large hospitality organizations from China. The stratified random sampling method ensured representation from key departments. Of the 550 questionnaires distributed, 473 responses were deemed valid, resulting in an 86.0% response rate. Moreover, entrepreneurial leadership was assessed using eight item scale and adapted from the study by (Li et al., 2024). A sample item was "My leader encourages me to think outside the box." Furthermore, innovative behavior was measured using the innovative work behavior six item scale from the study by (Ud din Khan et al., 2023). A sample item was "I frequently search for new methods to improve work processes." Additionally, creative self-efficacy was evaluated using six item scale from the study by (Ud din Khan et al., 2023). A sample item was "I believe I can effectively solve problems creatively." All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement. Lastly, the dataset was analyzed using Smart-PLS software 4.0. Preliminary analyses confirmed data normality, reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7), and validity (AVE > 0.5). Partial least squares-structural equation modeling was used to test the direct and mediating effects.

Results

The results of the PLS-SEM analysis are summarized as follows and also presented in Figure 1:

H1: EL positively influences IB ($\beta = 0.305$, $p < 0.001$).

H2: EL positively influences CSE ($\beta = 0.444$, $p < 0.001$).

H3: CSE positively influences IB ($\beta = 0.380$, $p < 0.001$).

H4: CSE mediates the relationship between EL and IB (indirect effect = 0.169, $p < 0.001$).

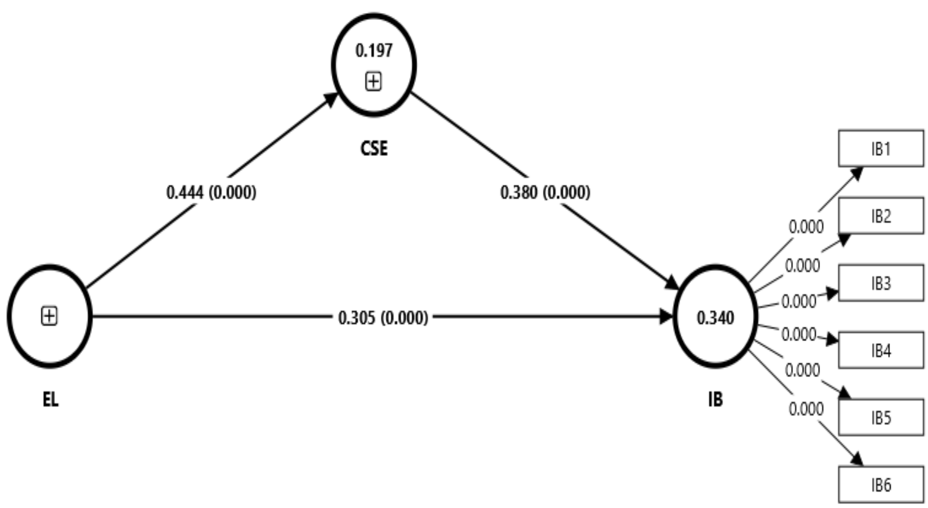

Figure 2 Structural model

Conclusion

This study underscores the critical role of EL in enhancing IB in the hospitality sector. By fostering a vision-oriented, proactive, and supportive environment, entrepreneurial leaders inspire employees to engage in creative problem-solving. CSE emerged as a key mediator, bridging the gap between leadership and innovation. Organizations should prioritize leadership development programs that emphasize entrepreneurial skills. Additionally, initiatives aimed at boosting CSE, such as workshops and recognition programs, can amplify employees' creative potential. Future studies should explore longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic interplay between leadership and innovation over time. Additionally, examining other mediating variables such as psychological safety or intrinsic motivation could provide deeper insights.

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The Effect Of Workplace Anxiety Of Tourism Employees On The Psychological Well-Being: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Abstract

Purpose: Purpose: The aim of the study is to reveal the effect of workplace anxiety of tourism employees on their psychological well-being through cross-cultural comparison. For this purpose, the study was carried out with employees of tourism sector businesses operating in England, Thailand and Turkey.

Study design/methodology/approach: Quantitative research method was adopted in the preparation of the study. Data obtained from 218 participants through the survey were analyzed and interpreted using SPSS statistical data analysis software. In addition to descriptive statistics, parametric tests were also applied to analyze the data.

Results: As a result of the analyses, it was determined that workplace anxiety affects psychological well-being. Significant differences were detected between the research variables and some demographic variables.

Originality/value: This study is the pilot study of our ongoing study. Our work continues on a wider platform, with the view that the study yields successful results, regardless of the possible problems we may encounter during the research process. The fact that the research is carried out on a variety of individuals ensures that the comprehensive research results.

Keywords Tourism, Workplace Anxiety, Psychological Well-Being

Introduction

It is stated that tourism is derived from the Latin word "tournus", which means turning, moving, going around. According to the definition of the "International Association of Scientific Tourism Experts (AIEST)", tourism is "the set of events and relationships arising from people's travels outside the places where they permanently reside and work and where they meet their usual needs, and their temporary accommodation by demanding goods and services generally produced by tourism enterprises". is defined. The tourism sector, which operates within this system, is the entire field of activities that meet the needs of tourists during their travels, from leaving their place of residence to returning to the same place (Akıncı, 2016: 5-6). Tourism businesses are labor intensive. The attitudes and behaviors of employees directly affect the quality of service and guest satisfaction. The tourism sector provides significant contributions to countries in social, cultural and economic terms. However, despite its positive effects, the tourism sector is one of the sectors most affected by negative consequences such as epidemics (COVID 19), economic crisis, terrorist attacks and war. Employees of accommodation, travel and airline companies operating in this sector are affected by these negative consequences and their anxiety levels may increase. In businesses where employees experience workplace anxiety and are not psychologically well, guest satisfaction will also be affected, and this will cause many negative effects on the business.

Anxiety is an emotional reaction to environmental and psychological events present in human nature. In other words, anxiety can be defined as a form of experience that is felt consciously, even though its source and beginning are not conscious, and accompanied by physiological changes such as sweating and turning pale. Anxiety is a state of worry and tension about the future. Waiting for an unknown and incomprehensible danger creates anxiety and tension in the person (Le Gall, 1999:7). Workplace anxiety is conceptualized as feelings of tension and anxiety related to the performance of work tasks. Work anxiety, which is affected by both individual differences and workplace characteristics, consists of a unique structure. Workplace anxiety is conceptually and empirically related to other types of anxiety, but is distinguished by many aspects. Workplace anxiety reflects general feelings of work-related anxiety that occur over time, as opposed to a situation-specific feature (McCarty, et al., 2016: 280). Workplace anxiety is affected by both individual differences and environmental factors (Cheng & McCarthy, 2018: 1).

Psychological well-being, on the other hand, is based on earlier clinical and adult developmental psychology theories that began with experimental studies in the 1980s and emphasized the individual's potential for self-actualization and a meaningful life when faced with difficulties (Telef, 2013: 374). Psychological well-being is conceptually different from important empirical indicators of subjective well-being such as happiness or life satisfaction (Diener, 1984: 547). In other words, a happy individual may not be psychologically well. Psychological well-being has been defined as managing existential challenges faced in life (such as maintaining meaningful goals, personal development, and establishing quality relationships with others). When the literature is examined, in line with the research limitations, it is seen that there are studies on psychological well-being (Diener, etc., 2009; Wright and Bonett, 2007) and workplace anxiety (McCarthy, etc.), whereas tourism employees' workplace anxiety (Yin, etc., 2023). It has been observed that there are a limited number of studies on examining psychological well-being (Zhang and Xiao, 2025) and the relationship between them. The aim of this study is to reveal the effect of workplace anxiety of tourism employees on their psychological well-being through cross-cultural comparison. Conducting the research for this purpose with tourism industry employees operating in different countries increases the importance of the study.

Methodology

Quantitative method was used in the research. The population of the research consists of tourism sector employees in England, Thailand and Turkey. The sample group of the research consists of 218 people working in accommodation, travel and airline companies in these countries. Data was collected using both online and face-to-face survey techniques between April and December 2024.

The survey form created to collect research data consists of two parts. While the first section contains personal information (gender, age, education level, marital status, monthly income, where he works, how many businesses he works in, years of working in this company, years of working in the total sector, job title, department, country of residence), the second section includes workplace information. It includes questions to reveal anxiety and psychological well-being. These scales were developed by McCarthy, et al. "Workplace anxiety" Scale used by Diener, et al. (2015). (2009) is the "psychological well-being" dimension of the well-being scale used. The expressions in both scales are in the form of a 5-point Likert ranging from (1) "Strongly disagree", (2) "Disagree", (3) "Undecided", (4) "Agree" and "Agree".

The data collected through the survey was analyzed and interpreted using the SPSS statistical data analysis software package. Since the data obtained showed a normal distribution, parametric tests were preferred. Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis was used to measure the reliability of the scales used in the research, and descriptive statistics were used for personal information. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the research variables, and linear regression analysis was used to determine the effects of the variables on each other.

The hypotheses tested in this research are as follows:

H1: There is a statistically significant difference between the participants' workplace anxiety and some demographic characteristics.

H2: There is a statistically significant difference between the participants' psychological well-being and some demographic characteristics.

H3: There is a positive relationship between participants' workplace anxiety and their psychological well-being.

H4: Participants' workplace anxiety positively affects their perceptions of their psychological well-being.

Results

This section contains the information obtained as a result of the data analysis of the research. Alpha (α) model (Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient) was used in the reliability analysis of the scales used. In the general validity and reliability analysis of the scales used in the research, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was found to be 0.81. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined as 0.96 for the Workplace Anxiety scale and 0.95 for the psychological well-being scale. Cronbach Alpha values show that the scales used in the research are quite reliable. Factor analysis was applied to test the construct validity of the scales used in the research. It was found that the scale with a total of 16 questions was two-dimensional and explained 77.991% of the total variance. The first factor explains 39.604% of the total variance, and the second factor explains 38.378% of the total variance. As a result of the post-rotation factor analysis, the factor loadings of the 8 questions that constitute the first factor (0.896, 0.894, 0.894, 0.882, 0.871, 0.868, 0.848, 0.726) and the psychological well-being questions (0.905, 0.897, 0.897, 0.879, 0.875, 0.859, 0.858, 0.840) factor loadings were found to vary between 0.726 and 0.905. Data regarding the personal information of participating in the research are shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Variables Table

Characteristics	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	122	56,0
	Male	96	44,0
Age	18-25	71	32,6
	26-35	54	24,8
	36-45	24	11,0
	46-55	25	11,5
	56 and over	41	20,2
Educational background	Primary education	40	18,3
	High school	120	55,0
	Associate Degree	35	16,1
	Licence	15	6,9
	Postgraduate	8	3,7
Marital Status	Married	108	49,5
	Single	110	50,5
Monthly Income	500 $ and below	38	17,4
	501 $ -1500 $	27	12,4
	1501 $ -2500 $	70	32,1
	2501 $ -3500 $	74	33,9
	3501 $ and above	9	4,1
Where you work	Hospitality	81	37,2
	Travel	91	41,7
	Airline	46	21,1
Years of Working in this Enterprise:	1-5	82	37,6
	6-10	96	44,0
	11-15	40	18,3
Your Total Working Years	1-5	64	29,4
	6-10	42	19,3
	11-15	65	29,8
	16-20	47	21,6
Your Job Title	General Manager/Asst.	3	1,4
	Department Manager/Asst.	15	6,9

	Chief/Asst.	66	30,3
	Staff	134	61,5
	Front Office	3	1,4
	Housekeeping	13	6,0
	Food & Beverage	57	26,1
Department	Sales & Marketing	128	58,7
	Kitchen	7	3,2
	Accounting	7	3,2
	Other	3	1,4
Distribution by Countries	England	72	33,0
	Thailand	73	33,5
	Turkey	73	33,5

It was found that 56% of the participants in the research were male, 44% were female, 32.6% were concentrated in the 18-25 age range, and 24.8% were concentrated in the 26-35 age range. It was found that 49.5% of the participants were married, 50.5% were single, 55% were high school graduates, 16.1% were associate degree graduates, and 66% earned between $1501 and $3500. In addition, 41.7% worked in travel businesses, 37.2% worked in accommodation businesses, 44.0% worked between 6-10 years in their business, 37.6% worked between 1-5 years, and the total working years were between 11-15 years. and subsequently it was found to intensify between 1-5 years. It was found that 61.5% of the participants were employees and 58.7% were sales & marketing department employees. When the participants were examined by country, it was found that the participants were England with 33.0%, Thailand with 33.5% and Türkiye with 33.5%. Data regarding the differences of research variables according to demographic variables are summarized below.

T-test was performed to determine whether the psychological well-being of the participants in the study differed according to demographic variables. It was determined that women ($x = 2.792$) and men ($x = 2.794$) who participated in the research had similar averages. It was found that there was a significant difference between the participants' gender and their psychological well-being ($t=0.009$, $p<0.05$, $p=0.001$). It was found that there was a significant difference between the participants' marital status and psychological well-being ($t=0.539$, $p<0.05$, $p=0.006$). Single ($x=2.830$) and married ($x=2.754$) individuals were found to have averages.

ANOVA analysis results showed that the participants' psychological well-being was affected by their age ($F = 0.573$, $p > 0.05$), educational status ($F = 1.539$, $p > 0.05$), place of employment ($F = 1.795$, $p > 0.05$), and workplace. working year ($F=1.238$, $p>0.05$), total working year ($F=1.694$, $p>0.05$), job title ($F=1.133$, $p>0.05$) was found to show no difference according to the department

(F=1.813, p>0.05). On the other hand, it was found that psychological well-being differed according to income level (F = 8.188, p < 0.05) and countries (F = 125.928, p < 0.05).

A multiple comparison test (Tukey) was conducted to find out which binary group the participants' monthly incomes and distributions by country and their psychological well-being came from. According to the analysis results, there is no significant difference between \$500 and below and \$501 -\$1500 (p=0.596), and between \$500 and below and \$1501 -\$2500 (p=0.072), but there is no significant difference between \$500 and below and \$2501 - There was a significant difference between those earning \$3500 and \$3501 and above (p=.000). When the averages of the participants by country are examined, it is revealed that the country with the highest psychological well-being is England (x = 3.630), and participants working in Turkey (x = 2.9726) have higher psychological well-being than Thailand (x = 1.788) took it out.

T-test was conducted to determine whether the workplace concerns of the participants in the study differed according to demographic variables. According to the analysis results, it was determined that there was a significant difference between the participants' gender and workplace anxiety (t=1.330, p<0.05, p=0.002), with the averages being women (x=3.277) and men (x=3.068). There was no significant difference between the participants' marital status and workplace anxiety (t = 1.786, p > 0.05, p = 739), and it was determined that the averages were single (x = 3.313) and married (x = 3.033).

ANOVA analysis results showed that participants' workplace concerns were affected by their education level (F = 2.250, p > 0.05), place of employment (F = 1.572, p > 0.05), years of working in this company (F = 1.316, p > 0.05), revealed that it did not differ according to the total working year (F = 2.338, p > 0.05). On the other hand, psychological well-being was found to vary according to age (F= 6, 108, p< 0.05), country (F=166.880, p< 0.05), monthly income (F=10.827, p<0.05), and job title. (F=8.428, p<0.05) was found to vary depending on the department (F= 5.660, p< 0.05). When the averages of the participants were examined by country, it was found that the country with the lowest workplace anxiety was England, followed by Türkiye and Thailand. A multiple comparison test (Tukey) was performed to find out which pairwise group the differences originated from. According to the analysis results, a significant difference was observed between participants aged 18-25 (x = 3.582) and participants aged 56 and over (x = 2.528). In addition, a significant difference was observed between the Department Manager (x=4.736), the employee (x=2.96) and the Chief/Assistant (x=3.33). In line with the analyzes carried out, H1 and H2 Hypotheses are accepted. Table 2 shows the job performance of the participants in the study. It shows the relationship between place anxiety and psychological well-being.

Tablo 2. Correlation Analysis

	N	x	Standard deviation	1	2	CA
1. Work Place	218	2,793	1,03993	1		.96

Anxiety						
2. Psikolojik Well-Being	218	3,178	1,16117	-.331** .000	1	.95

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In Table 2, it was determined that the average of Work Place Anxiety was (x = 2.793) and the average of Psychological Well-Being was (x = 3.178). (x = 3.623). Relationships between variables were examined using the Pearson correlation coefficient technique. There is a significant relationship between the research variables. There is a negative correlation (r= -.331, $p < 0.01$) between Work Place Anxiety and Psychological Well-Being variables. As job anxiety increases, psychological well-being decreases, or as job anxiety decreases, psychological well-being increases. The regression analysis findings of the research variables are shown in Table 3. In line with the analysis performed, the H3 hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3. Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Coefficient		T	F	R^2
		ß	S. error			
Psikolo Well-Being	Constant Value	4,212	.214	19,723	26,664	0.110
	Work Place Axiety	-,370	.072	-5,164		

In Table 3, the F value in the table (26.664) shows that the model is significant at all levels (Sig. = .000). It can be seen from the t-statistic values of the parameters that each variable included in the model is individually significant at the 5% significance level. Workplace concerns affecting their psychological well-being explained 11% (R2 = 0.11). In line with the analysis performed, the H4 hypothesis is rejected.

Conclusion

The importance given to tourism has increased day by day, as the tourism sector has an important place in the country's economy. Due to the structural feature of tourism businesses, the positive and negative emotions of their employees directly affect the quality of service and guest satisfaction. Despite its positive effects on countries, the tourism sector is one of the sectors most affected by negative consequences such as epidemics, economic crises, terrorist attacks and war. Employees of accommodation, travel and airline companies operating in this sector are affected by these negative consequences and their anxiety levels may increase. Analyzes were carried out revealing that research variables differ according to demographic variables. It was found that there was a significant difference between the psychological well-being of the participants and their gender, marital status, income level and country. It was found that the psychological well-being of the participants did not differ according to age, educational level, place of employment, years of working in the company, total working years, job title and department. It has been revealed that there is a significant difference between the workplace concerns of the participants according to their gender, age, country, monthly income, job title, and the department they work in, but there is no difference according to their marital status, education level, place of employment, years of working in this company, and total working years. The results of correlation and regression analyzes revealed that workplace anxiety affects psychological well-being. It is very important to evaluate these results obtained as a result of the research according to culture. It was revealed that the country with the highest psychological well-being of the participants according to the countries was England, and the participants working in Turkey had a higher psychological well-being than Thailand. According to countries, it was found that the country with the lowest workplace anxiety of the participants was England, followed by Turkey and Thailand. In the Human Development Index (HDI) included in the 2023-2024 Human Development Report (HDR) announced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Turkey ranks 45th among 193 countries, Thailand ranks 66th, and England ranks 15th. (Anonymous 1). UND Human Development Report supports the findings obtained as a result of the research. The findings of this study provide suggestions for tourism academics and managers. Since workforce is vital for the tourism industry, managers need to develop strategies to reduce their employees' workplace anxiety. Providing the expected service benefit will make a significant contribution to the development of the tourism sector, guest satisfaction and quality service. The successful results of this pilot study data have shown that it is appropriate to continue the ongoing research on a wider platform. It is thought that the results of the research will contribute to the relevant literature, as the research is conducted on employees from different cultures.

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Investigation of Information Sharing and Internal Crisis Communication in the context of the Sri Lankan Hospitality industry

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Abstract

Aim of study: This study examines the role of information sharing in enhancing internal crisis communication within Sri Lanka's hospitality industry, addressing a gap in existing research. While internal crisis management has received general attention, the specific dynamics of information sharing in hospitality organisations remain underexplored. Using Collaborative Governance Theory, the research investigates how hierarchical structures and stakeholder engagement influence crisis management effectiveness.

Methodology: A qualitative, interpretivist approach was adopted, with data collected through 36 semi-structured interviews with operational managers and front-line employees. Thematic and contextual analyses were employed to identify key challenges, including hierarchical barriers that limit front-line input, technological constraints, and inconsistent training.

Result: Findings highlight the need for inclusive practices, transparent communication, and shared decision-making to overcome these challenges and improve crisis response. By emphasising collaboration and engagement across all organisational levels, this study provides practical recommendations for enhancing internal crisis communication and contributes to the broader understanding of crisis management in the hospitality sector.

Keywords: internal crisis communication, information sharing, collaborative governance theory, hospitality industry

Introduction

Crisis communication encompasses various definitions, evolving significantly from traditional one-way approaches towards a more interactive, inclusive, and technology-driven methods, where authorities disseminated information to the public without feedback (Jin, 2023). In recent decades, the field has advanced, emphasising timely and accurate information sharing, stakeholder engagement, and fostering trust to enhance industrial reputation (Coombs, 2020; Seeger et al., 2023; Lai et al., 2020). Within the hospitality sector, crisis communication plays a crucial role in building trust, ensuring safety, and disseminating information during crises (Hu et al., 2021; Liu-Lastres et al., 2021).

The unpredictable nature of crises poses significant challenges to the hospitality industry, requiring timely and effective responses (Park, 2019). Advanced technological tools, though promising, can present difficulties for both organisations and tourists (Li et al., 2022). Additionally, crisis communication risks being misused to conceal mistakes or shift blame (Thielsch et al., 2021). While external stakeholders are often prioritised, internal stakeholders, such as employees, also require effective crisis communication (Opitz et al., 2018).

Information sharing is integral to decision-making, problem-solving, and collaboration across domains like security, supply chain management, and healthcare (Mohajan, 2019). However, complexities such as unclear or poor-quality information can hinder its effectiveness in crisis contexts (Hannibal et al., 2022; Bharosa et al., 2010).

A review of existing literature highlights a lack of empirical studies on the impacts of internal crisis management within hospitality organisations, particularly regarding information sharing among employees (Guzzo et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2020). This study addresses this gap by investigating how information sharing influences internal crisis communication, employing Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell et al., 2008). The proposed Collaborative Crisis Governance Theory (CCGT) emphasises stakeholder collaboration and consensus-oriented decision-making for effective crisis communication (Emerson et al., 2012; Sentanu et al., 2023).

Using a qualitative, interpretivist approach, this research explores the perceptions and experiences of hospitality employees, applying thematic and contextual analysis to uncover insights into effective internal crisis communication.

Methodology

This study adopts an interpretivist research paradigm, employing an inductive and qualitative approach. Data were collected through 36 semi-structured interviews with operational managers and front-line employees within Sri Lanka's hospitality industry. Investigating this topic is particularly important in the Sri Lankan context as the country has faced multiple crises, including the Easter Sunday attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability, and political unrest, all of which have significantly impacted the hospitality industry. These challenges highlight the critical need for effective information sharing and internal crisis communication to ensure business resilience, employee preparedness, and efficient crisis management. Participants were selected using self-selection, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques to ensure a diverse and representative sample.

The analysis process involved thematic analysis, contextual analysis, and memoing to explore patterns and themes within the data. Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), specifically NVivo, was utilised to enhance the organisation and interpretation of the qualitative data, ensuring a systematic approach to the analysis.

Data transcription was carried out through iterative and detailed readings to develop a deeper familiarity with the content. This process facilitated immersion, enabling a nuanced understanding of the data. Initial coding was conducted to generate key themes, followed by a comprehensive review to refine these themes further. The findings were subsequently contextualised within existing literature, providing a robust foundation for understanding internal crisis communication in the hospitality sector. This approach ensures the study's contributions align with and extend the current academic discourse.

Results

This study examines internal crisis communication in Sri Lanka's hospitality industry, drawing from participant feedback and existing literature. The findings highlight a centralised, hierarchical communication structure, where senior management dictates protocols, often excluding front-line employees from meaningful participation. While this approach facilitates rapid decision-making (Lee et al., 2017; Willem et al., 2009), it limits employee involvement, creating a disconnect that weakens crisis management effectiveness (Coombs, 2020; Kim, 2021).

Key challenges identified include delays in communication and lack of clarity, which reduce staff responsiveness and exacerbate crises. Literature underscores the importance of timely, transparent communication to prevent misinformation and ensure employee alignment (Bharosa et al., 2010; Obi et al., 2024). Additionally, technology plays a role in crisis communication, with tools like WhatsApp and email used to disseminate information. However, restrictions on mobile device use among front-line staff hinder real-time updates, exposing gaps between organisational policies and operational needs. Research highlights the potential of technology to enhance real-time feedback and information sharing (Graham, 2015; Malczewski, 2004).

The study also reveals inconsistencies in training delivery, leading to uneven crisis preparedness. Despite regular drills, lack of standardised training results in inconsistent responses (Kim, 2021; Shukla et al., 2023). Participants emphasised the importance of inclusive communication practices, employee engagement, and two-way dialogue to enhance situational awareness and problem-solving (Kim et al., 2020; Heide et al., 2018). However, implementing these in a hierarchical structure remains challenging.

Using Collaborative Governance Theory (CGT), the study highlights deficiencies in inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability. Front-line employees feel undervalued and excluded from decision-making, limiting their involvement in crisis communication. Addressing these gaps can foster more effective internal crisis communication. This research contributes to the literature by identifying centralisation, communication delays, technology underutilisation, and inconsistent training as key barriers. It offers practical recommendations for enhancing crisis strategies through transparent communication, technology integration, and decentralised decision-making (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023; Park et al., 2019; Shulga et al., 2024).

Conclusion

Crisis communication within the hospitality industry has significantly evolved, moving away from traditional one-way approaches towards more interactive, inclusive, and technology-driven methods. As displayed in Table 1, however, this study highlights persistent challenges in implementing effective internal communication strategies, particularly within the hierarchical structures of Sri Lanka's hospitality sector. Senior management's centralised decision-making, while enabling rapid responses, often excludes the perspectives of front-line employees, who are directly impacted by crises. This marginalisation reduces the effectiveness of crisis management and creates barriers to collaboration and problem-solving.

Table 1. Summary of the key features

Key Aspect	Details
Objective	To investigate the role of information sharing in enhancing internal crisis communication in the Sri Lankan hospitality industry.
Theoretical Framework	Collaborative Governance Theory (CGT), highlighting inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability.
Methodology	- Qualitative, interpretivist approach - 36 semi-structured interviews with operational managers and front-line employees. - Thematic and contextual analysis using NVivo software.
Findings: Key Challenges	- Centralised, hierarchical communication limits front-line input. - Technological restrictions hinder real-time information sharing. - Inconsistencies in training delivery led to uneven crisis preparedness.
Proposed Solutions	- Adoption of inclusive practices and shared decision-making processes. - Integration of technology for effective real-time communication. - Standardised, comprehensive training programmes.
Contribution to Literature	Offers new insights into internal crisis communication in the hospitality sector, addressing gaps in stakeholder engagement and technological integration.
Practical Implications	Decentralised communication, enhanced collaboration, and targeted training to improve crisis response effectiveness.

Through the lens of Collaborative Governance Theory (CGT), the study identifies critical gaps in stakeholder engagement, technological integration, and training consistency. Findings reveal that limited two-way communication, combined with technological restrictions—such as the prohibition of mobile devices during work—hinders real-time information sharing. While tools like WhatsApp and email are used, their effectiveness is compromised by organisational constraints, highlighting the need for practical adaptations in communication strategies.

Training delivery inconsistencies further exacerbate these challenges. Although regular drills are conducted, uneven implementation results in varying levels of preparedness among employees, undermining cohesive crisis responses. Inclusive practices, such as standardised and comprehensive training, are essential to addressing these disparities.

The proposed Collaborative Governance Theory framework emphasises inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability as pillars for improving internal crisis communication. By fostering shared decision-making processes and integrating technology effectively, organisations can bridge gaps in communication and empower front-line employees. These findings contribute both theoretically and practically, offering actionable recommendations for adopting more collaborative and resilient crisis communication strategies tailored to the unique dynamics of the hospitality industry.

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Leadership and Conflict Management at Five Stars Hotels

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines conflict dynamics in tourism institutions and explores effective management strategies to enhance organizational performance. It investigates the causes, types, and resolution methods of conflicts in the tourism sector, emphasizing leadership's role in shaping conflict outcomes.

Study design/methodology/approach: Literature reviews revealed that most studies used a quantitative method. Therefore, this research will use a qualitative method through interviews to get deep information about the tourism leadership at five-star hotels in Marmaris, Mugla as a case study.

Results: This study underscores the necessity of proactive conflict management in the hospitality industry. Internal staff conflicts are prevalent when employees believe they are being treated unfairly. Communication issues between departments, unclear expectations, and high-pressure situations contribute further to disagreements. Without proactive management, these triggers can accumulate, leading to a hostile work environment that affects both service quality and employee well-being. Additionally, industry stakeholders should consider implementing regular conflict management training to equip employees with the necessary skills to navigate workplace tensions effectively.

Originality/value: This research contributes to the field by integrating theoretical perspectives with practical conflict management applications in tourism organizations. Unlike general organizational studies, it focuses on the tourism sector's unique challenges, such as high labor intensity, cultural adaptability, and customer interactions. The findings offer actionable strategies for managers and policymakers, emphasizing the role of leadership in conflict resolution.

Keywords: Leadership, Conflict, Conflict Management, Tourism Management.

Introduction

A natural part of organizational dynamics, conflict is frequently seen as a barrier to productivity. However, when managed effectively, it can serve as a effective tool to help companies reach for innovation, collaboration, and growth. In tourism institutions, where interdependent roles and diverse stakeholder interactions are pivotal, conflict management emerges as a critical factor influencing organizational performance. Conflicts become beneficial when they are managed to turn them into opportunities. For disputes to become functional, they must be managed well. Non-functional disputes may result in a drop in company performance, but functional conflicts can encourage dynamism and creativity (Sepehri, Batman, Kıngır, & Arpaci, 2014). Tourism enterprises, described as dynamic systems comprising interconnected units, must navigate conflicts arising from resource allocation, operational discrepancies, and interpersonal differences (Türkoğlu, 2023). These challenges are exacerbated by the sector's unique characteristics, such as high labor intensity, direct customer interactions, and the necessity for cultural adaptability. Addressing conflicts effectively in such settings not only enhances organizational cohesion but also strengthens the resilience and competitiveness of tourism enterprises. The primary aim of this research is to analyze conflict dynamics within tourism institutions and propose practical strategies for effective conflict management. The research addresses critical questions, including: what are the main causes of conflict in tourism institutions? How do different types of conflict manifest in the tourism sector? And what are the most effective strategies for managing conflicts in tourism institutions? By addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on conflict management within organizational settings, with a specific focus on tourism. Its contributions are twofold: it bridges theoretical insights with practical applications and offers actionable guidelines for tourism managers and policymakers. By understanding the dynamics of conflict and implementing appropriate management strategies, tourism institutions can enhance organizational performance, improve employee relations, and foster sustainable growth in a competitive industry.

A perfect workplace offers empowering leadership founded on independence, self-reliance, and trust. Managers must understand how to foster cooperative attitudes and knowledge sharing among employees in order to do this. In order for the business to reap the benefits of employees supporting and assisting one another, they must also learn how to reduce harmful personal and task conflicts (Hon, 2012). According to Kang (2017), transformational and servant leadership influence innovation indirectly by guiding how conflicts are managed. Transformational leadership fosters innovation through cooperative and avoidance conflict strategies, while servant leadership does so through cooperative, avoidance, and competitive approaches. Notably, cooperative conflict management supports innovation, whereas avoidance strategies tend to hinder it. The results emphasize that leadership plays a crucial role in conflict resolution, with different styles shaping whether conflicts are addressed constructively or avoided, ultimately impacting team innovation (Kang, 2017). However, differentiated empowering leadership gives some employees more support and authority, while others feel overlooked, leading to relational conflict within the team. This conflict arises from feelings of anger, frustration, and distrust between favored and less favored members. As a result, employees who feel undervalued may hide knowledge to protect themselves and prevent others from gaining an advantage. Thus, relational conflict acts as a mediator between differentiated leadership and knowledge hiding, negatively impacting teamwork and collaboration (Lin, Zhang, Ng, & Zhong, 2020). Conflict drives leadership development by creating situations where individuals must step up to resolve disputes. On the other hand, effective conflict resolution requires legitimate, impartial, and communicative leadership. Leadership must balance diverse interests, facilitate dialogue, and adapt to different situations. A flexible, collaborative leadership structure enhances credibility and coordination in managing conflicts (Almeida, 2017).

Conflict concept has been studied through many years ago, but it only has been studied systematically in the twentieth century (Schellenberg, 1996). Some researchers believe that conflict carries within it many potentials that may be destructive or positive, encouraging development, improvement and innovation. Whereas the first concepts of conflict in the past were battle or fighting, and many people still hold this belief, the concept of conflict is accepted on a logical basis that includes within it the concept of constructive discussion in a positive way (Proksch, 2016; Bonacker, 2002; Schwarz, 2001). According to Thakore (2013), The conflict process is linked with perception and beliefs more than actual facts. This idea was mentioned before, through a researched conducted by Robbins (2005) which resulted to an explanation of the conflict as a process that occurs when someone believes that something that the first part cares about has been impacted by another party negatively. Along with that, some studies ensures that conflict is part of the social community and it serves as a mechanism to resolve disputes and prevent complete fragmentation, thereby maintaining a degree of cohesion (Thakore, 2013; Colser, 1964). According to Eren (2020), we can define the conflict inside an organization as events that happen inside the organization through team or individual work situation and affect the usual activities or interfere in it and it happen regularly due to the differences between individual's interests and abilities. Some researchers see that conflicts happen in an organization as a competition toward resources, positions, preferences, wants, authority and beliefs (Appelbaum, Abdallah, & Shapiro, 1999). On the same way, Thakore (2013) defines conflicts inside the organization as the conduct designed to prevent the attainment of some other person's aims, which also can happen through different groups of people competing to get the most of the resources in the cases of limited resources inside the organization. Rivers (Rivers, 2005) revealed that a conflict can be started simply just by the classification of (us and them) between groups which is called the social identity theory. And this can happen inside organizations through the construction of various functions or jobs (Lewis, French, & Steane, 1997). However, research reveals that there is no way to not have or to avoid conflict as long as organizations keep using team work because it is related to behavior and part of human's life as it can include competition, misunderstanding, flighting, negative behavior and aggression (Thakore, 2013). Accordingly, conflicts are part of human life and appear in various forms and environments. (Elgoibar, Euwema, & Munduate, 2017) believes that conflicts appear between people in several areas such as groups, organizations, home, work, friends, communities and even countries. Therefore, everyone needs to be aware of this issue and to understand and accept conflict as part of life and learn how to resolve conflict in a manner that suits each situation effectively. As seen by conflict unfolds through distinct phases, governed by its inherent dynamics. Initiating resolution efforts at an early stage substantially increases the likelihood of achieving a constructive outcome (Kruczek, Szromek, Walas, & Mazanek, 2024; Furlong, 2010).

Views on Conflict: Researchers have different views on conflict and there have been many conflicting views in previous research and literature. Verma (1998) mentioned that the view of conflict has varied greatly between the past and the present. First and oldest view about conflict is the traditional view which sees the conflict from a negative point of view as a bad thing and has a negative effect on the performance and it linked with avoidance as a solution. Then comes the behavioral (contemporary) view that is based on the idea that conflict according to the method used to resolve it can be positive or negative for the organization. This perspective school was described in other literature as human relation perspective and it support increasing goodwill and trust at the organization and neglecting conflict as much as possible (Thakore, 2013). On the other hand, other perspectives were mentioned in the literature which had more positive review. For instance, the interactionist perspective that support conflict arguing that it can increase performance, so it is beneficial to maintain a level of conflict to reach creativity at work (Verma, 1998). Moreover, researchers see that the healthy organization is the one where the employees are fighting openly and clearly for what they believe in even if this conflict included the employer or the manager himself (Townsend, 1985). And finally, the Integrationist perspective of conflict which argues that conflict should be viewed neutrally and some conflicts can be crucial element for the teamwork within the organization (De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997).

Reasons for conflicts: With the beginning of researchers' interest in the subject of conflict, researchers began to study the reasons that might lead to the development of conflicts in social life and organizations in particular. Researchers can have different perspectives on the reason of conflicts. For instance, Thakore (2013), sees that the main reason for a conflict inside an organization is that the functions aren't well explained for the employees. Thus, it is hard for the employees to understand their role correctly. Basically, it is more familiar for misunderstanding and miscommunication issues to be the reason for conflicts according to the literature (Ikeda, Modesto Veludo-de-Oliveira, & Cortez Campomar, 2005; Thakore, 2013). Indeed, there are many other reasons were mentioned in the literatures such as the focus on financial resources, promotion systems, differences in needs goals and perceptions between individuals, internal and external stress and pressure, and levels of interdependency between the employees which can affect trust among the organization (Capozzoli, 1995; Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995; Thakore, 2013). However, as technologies are the modern trend inside organizations. It can be seen that the main reason for conflicts in modern organizations are the continuous changes, employees' varieties, the increasing dependency on virtual teams, and the lack of face-to-face communication within the work (Kieliszek, 2019; Kilag, et al., 2024). It may seem that the most comprehensive and systematic studies that explained the reasons for conflicts in the organization are those explained by Eren (2020), which he summarized through the studies of researchers March & Simon (1958) in their book "Organizations". Eren has summarized the reasons behind organizational conflict into three main categories: interdependencies within organizations, divergent goals, and differences in perception. The first category, interdependencies, emphasizes the inherent tensions that arise when multiple individuals or departments must coordinate their actions to achieve organizational objectives. Limited resources frequently spark competition, as departments vie for the same financial, human, or material assets, such as when two teams must share a single support staff member. Timing issues, another facet of interdependencies, occur when delays in one department's activities disrupt the workflow of others, leading to bottlenecks and strained relations. Additionally, ambiguities in roles and responsibilities exacerbate conflicts, particularly when overlapping duties or poorly defined authority result in disputes over accountability or neglected tasks. The second category focuses on divergent goals, both at the individual and departmental levels. Resource dependency is a significant factor, as departments often compete for scarce resources to achieve their objectives, such as securing funding or staff. Competitive reward systems, while intended to drive performance, can inadvertently fuel unhealthy competition and feelings of resentment among employees, undermining collaboration. On an individual level, personal differences in values, cultural backgrounds, and career aspirations often result in conflicting priorities that hinder cohesion. Moreover, misalignment between departmental and organizational goals amplifies friction; for instance, a marketing department's focus on customer satisfaction may clash with a production team's emphasis on operational efficiency. Differences in perception represent the third category of conflict drivers. These perceptual disparities arise from how departments or individuals approach information sharing, decision-making, and task prioritization. Variances in knowledge autonomy, where departments develop specialized expertise, often create distinct perspectives on organizational challenges. Additionally, discrepancies in time horizons contribute to tension; operational teams may focus on immediate tasks, while senior management prioritizes long-term strategies. Misaligned departmental objectives further exacerbate conflicts, as distinct functional priorities, such as cost-cutting versus quality enhancement, lead to discord. Lastly, managerial styles vary across leaders, with differences in decision-making approaches and motivational strategies often causing confusion and resistance among team members.

Graph No.1: Reasons for conflict inside organizations. Adapted from (Eren, 2020).

Type of conflicts: As with the definition of conflict and its causes, researchers have differed in classifying the types of conflict. Some researchers have classified it based on horizontal and vertical functional hierarchy, some have classified it based on its sources, and others have classified it based on the people involved in the conflict. The diversity of classifications of conflict types is a result of the diversity of definitions of conflict itself. For example, Katz classification is related to the sources of conflicts. He divided conflicts into three main types which are structural, role and resources conflicts (Katz, 1964). The classifications by Eren (2020) and Thakore (2013) are very similar. Their classification focus on the parties that included in the conflict process. However, both had mentioned different points. For example, Thakore mentioned conflict within the person himself which he called "Intrapersonal conflict" and it can be one of the hardest conflicts inside the organization and it is related to the perceptions of goals, motivations and pressure. Secondly, they mentioned the conflict between individuals or "Interpersonal conflict" and it happens between different individuals due to the personal differences such as personalities and principles. On a wider range, researchers mentioned the conflict between different groups "Intergroup conflict" and it can happen among different departments due to the differences of functions. For example, some of the causes of this conflict can be time management between these different groups, planning process, and resources establishment (Thakore, 2013; Eren, 2020). It was also mentioned by

Thakore (2013) that conflict can happen inside the one group "Intragroup Conflict" which has two main types (task conflicts & relations conflicts). Finally, Conflicts between different organizations "Interorganizational Conflict" which happens usually because of competitions (Eren, 2020; Thakore, 2013).

Conflict Management: It is clear now that conflict happens at all businesses, for example it happens at a high pace at hotels in the tourism industry. Therefore, it is suggested to study the advantages and disadvantages of each conflict through analyzing the situation (Sepehri, Batman, Kıngır, & Arpaci, 2014). Despite the fact that conflict is considered negatively but if it was well managed it will help show the positive sides of conflicts according to Türkoğlu (2023). The right management of conflict can lead to reach more benefits, solidarity, unification of interests and strengthen the relations which on the long term can lead to rising knowledge and skills (Etele & Akunne, 2023). On the other hand, mismanagement of conflict can turn the conflict into a worse situation and it may include violence (Etele & Akunne, 2023). It also can lead to a wrong distribution of the resources & energy to the employees and create a negative communication between them which can finally lead to a big loss of chances within the work (Madalina, 2016). Therefore, the level of conflict inside an organization should be controlled to not get the boring phase of the work and at the same time to stop the fights and violence and this can't be done without having a balance of conflict and direct these conflicts toward the benefit of the organization (Akkirman, 1998). In his study, Akkirman (1998) focused on the importance of analyzing the conflict based on several points, including the parties to the conflict, their function, its causes, their relationships, and the results required by these parties. This analysis is important in order to choose the necessary strategies for managing the conflict. Eren (2020) later suggested several points to be researched in cases of conflict, containing eleven questions related to the causes of the conflict, the participants in it and their positions, how it developed, the type of solution and the number of possible solutions, who can play an effective role in resolving the conflict, or the possibility of resolving it internally, the work environment, and how to examine the effectiveness of the proposed solutions (Eren, 2020). However, Madalina (2016) claims that conflicts can't be managed using a particular method and that based on analyzing the situation, solution can be found to reach the most benefit for all parties and avoid losses. Moreover, Moore (2014) in his book "The mediation process: Practical strategies for resolving conflict" focused on the "wheel of conflict" analyzing process which focus on evaluation the following points:

- Information: whether the involved parties are able to correctly define the information or not.
- Relations: their emotional attitude or misunderstanding toward each other.
- Values: their different visions and positions.
- Structural: this one is related to legal rights and usage of resources.
- Interests: the superior attitude from one party toward the others.

Conflicts in the tourism industry: Conflicts happen in the tourism sector for many reasons, for example in his study Fallon (2001), he mentioned that tourism can be exposed to conflict in cases of competitions on resources among societies, governments, and companies and it can affect the whole tourism industry in the area of conflict. Conflict also can happen due to the high labor density, and the nature of tourism work positions which are usually one-to-one relationship jobs (Sepehri, Batman, Kıngır, & Arpaci, 2014). However, it is been explained that conflicts in the tourism industry usually happen between local residents and tourists, tourism representatives and local community, and less frequently between local authorities and residents or between the tourists themselves (Kruczek, Szromek, Walas, & Mazanek, 2024). Conflict management in the tourism field is more important than other fields, because it is always exposed to conflicts, and based on this, unsolved conflicts may have deadly consequences, while solved conflicts will lead to more creativity and quality (Türkoğlu, 2023). Therefore, it is important that the tourism jobs managers have the capability to analyze, interaction and make decision at the right time of conflicts inside tourism organizations which result into maintaining a balanced level of conflict, reduce emotion-based conflicts, and ensure the right of choice for the employees. And this only the way for the first steps toward a creative effective tourism business (Türkoğlu, 2023). As Conflict in the tourism industry Conflict Management in tourism was defined as the process of addressing discord, inconsistencies, and contradictions that lead to disputes in corporate settings by using information, processes, skills, and practical experiences in accordance with current situations (Sepehri, Batman, Kıngır, & Arpaci, 2014). It is also important to notice the differences among the conflict parties in order to solve it. Genç & Recepoğlu (2020, p. 1896) explain that employees' education levels, cultural backgrounds, lifestyles, skills, age groups, genders, and perception styles can contribute to conflicts within organizations. These differences may occasionally manifest as both internal and external conflicts. In hotel businesses, the large workforce and diverse individual characteristics make it crucial to identify the factors that escalate conflicts and to understand which conflict management strategies are favored by employees with specific traits. Göker and Sağsan (2019), in their research on hotel employees, revealed that demographic variables such as age, gender, education level, tenure in the profession and organization, department, and role significantly influence conflict management. Rather than reducing conflicts in hotel businesses, it is more effective to manage them with appropriate strategies implemented by skilled managers. Providing employee training, along with regular seminars and discussions on conflict, can guide employees in transforming conflicts into positive outcomes. This approach fosters business and organizational growth, enabling companies to excel in competitive environments. Therefore, applying the right conflict management strategies at the right time, place, and context is essential (Genç & Recepoğlu, 2020). In the cases of tourists related issues, it is important to use the agile tourism approach which includes quick adaption with the organizational culture, quick information collection about the market and adapting with tourist's individual needs (Kruczek, Szromek, Walas, & Mazanek, 2024). Research on tourism in the case study of turkey are a lot, however, not so many research has been done on the topic of conflict management in turkey. Despite the fact that turkey can be a good case study due to its high level of tourism activities and one of the least countries that faced recent threats in the political, economic, social, technological, environmental and geopolitical fields but still moved forward in the field of tourism (Asgary & Ozdemir, 2020). Moreover, countries with conflicts such as economical related conflicts may see tourism as the way to engage and develop their economy through international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to reach for a socio-economic recovery and peace (Novelli, Morgan, & Nibigira, 2012). Focusing more on the case of conflict related studies in the tourism field in Turkey, we see few research about the topic. Yirik, Ören, & Ekici (2015) studied organizational stress management and organizational burnout at luxurious hotels in Alanya, Turkey which has a strong relation with conflicts, and according to their study they found out that it is important to search for solutions, develop good relations between the managers and the employees. In a closer study, Caber and others (2019) analyzed conflict management during guided tours in Turkey. The study clarifies that tour guides' conflict management styles vary with experience, age, and education. Experienced guides tend to unify people, while younger, less experienced ones prefer setting rules. Over time, guides may become more tolerant, considering tourists' preferences for flexibility in conflict resolution. Sepehri, Batman, Kıngır, & Arpaci (2014) studied the conflict management strategies by interviewing senior executives at four and five hotels in Ankara, which revealed that conflicts happen on a wide range inside the hotel institutions.

Methodology: In this study, the semi-structured interview technique, one of the research methods, was employed. The questions included in the semi-structured interview form were developed after a review of the relevant literature. The initial question pool was sent to eight experts in the field for evaluation. Following their feedback and suggested revisions, the interview questions were finalized. The scope of the study was limited to five-star hotel enterprises located in the central area of Marmaris. There is a total of 14 such hotel enterprises in this area. The specific hotels were identified, and their management was contacted to inform them about the purpose and significance of the study. Appointments were scheduled with hotel managers at a convenient time. The research was conducted in March 2025. Out of the 14 hotel enterprises, nine participated in the study. Before the interviews commenced, permission was obtained from the participating managers to record the conversations, after which the interviews were recorded. The interviews lasted approximately 35 to 50 minutes. The recorded interviews were transcribed using Office 365 software. To analyze the data, the thematic analysis method was used in this study. This method is useful for organizing and describing the frames of the subject. It can also help with studying the different perspectives of multiple interviewees to generate unusual insights and opinions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In regard of the study questions, all the data were translated into English. Familiar data were divided and highlighted under codes. All data under the same code were gathered and then similarly coded data were collected under specific sub-themes and main themes. The revised data were used according to the study. In this study, it was followed the six steps of analyzing data with the thematic analysis method as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). All data were translated to English, transcribed, read multiple times to get familiarized with, summarized into codes, searched, and reviewed, divided into themes, and extracted results. The analysis was conducted in a manual way using a text processor and a spreadsheet software programs through highlighting similar data under similar colors. This method was chosen because it can explain the data and perspectives of participants under the umbrella of a conceptual or theoretical framework. It can also help to discover the gaps within the subject according to the data (Lochmiller, 2021).

Results

The results of this analysis explore the various types, causes, and consequences of workplace conflicts within the hospitality industry. Drawing from employee insights, the analysis identifies key patterns in conflict occurrences, focusing on the inevitability of disputes, their triggers, and their seasonal and departmental variations. Additionally, it examines the role of cultural and generational differences in workplace tensions and the methods used for conflict resolution. By evaluating both the positive and negative impacts of conflicts, this analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how conflicts shape employee experiences and operational efficiency in the hotel sector.

Conflict as an Inevitable Workplace Reality: Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of hotel operations due to the complex human interactions involved in service-oriented work. Employees frequently acknowledge that wherever people gather, disagreements will arise. This inevitability is heightened in the hospitality industry, where staff from different backgrounds must collaborate under high-pressure conditions. Many employees suggest that conflict is not necessarily negative but must be managed effectively to prevent workplace disruptions. One respondent stated, *"Wherever there are people, there will be conflict. Conflict is inevitable anyway."*

Triggers of Workplace Conflict: Conflicts in hotels arise from a variety of sources, including workload distribution, job stress, favoritism, and alcohol consumption. These include;

- **Workload Distribution and Job Stress:** Many employees report frustration with unfair task assignments and supervisors favoring certain individuals, leading to resentment. Additionally, employees note that competition among colleagues can lead to conflicts, particularly when promotions or rewards are at stake. One respondent highlighted this issue: *"Our types of conflicts are generally the management strategy I apply in the tourism sector... conflicts happen in order to get ahead of the other one who is successful."*

- **Guest Behavior and Alcohol Consumption** Alcohol consumption among guests is another common source of tension. Drunken guests often overstep boundaries, leading to conflicts between employees and customers and between tourists themselves. This is particularly common in hotels that cater to international tourists, where differing cultural expectations can escalate minor misunderstandings into major disputes.

Impact of Seasonal and Departmental Factors:

- **Peak Conflict Periods:** The intensity of workplace conflicts varies significantly with seasonal changes and departmental roles. Most employees agree that conflicts peak during high season, particularly in July and August, when staff members are overworked and the hotel is at full capacity. The combination of long hours, hot weather, and increased guest demands heightens workplace tensions. One interviewee stated, *"In the high season, conflicts increase... because the working friends get tired, and because the weather is getting hotter, they may no longer tolerate each other."*
- **Departments with Higher Conflict Rates:** Certain departments experience more conflict than others, especially those involving physically demanding roles such as housekeeping, kitchen, and food & beverage services. Employees in these departments often struggle with exhaustion and feel undervalued compared to those in guest-facing roles, contributing to further dissatisfaction. Workload discrepancies between departments, particularly in shared responsibilities like cleaning and maintenance, also create disputes. In contrast, reception and managerial roles tend to experience fewer conflicts, as these positions involve higher levels of education and problem-solving skills.

Types and Levels of Conflict

- **Interpersonal Conflicts:** Interpersonal conflicts occur between two or more employees due to personality differences, competition, or misunderstandings. These conflicts can be triggered by factors such as favoritism, communication issues, or differences in work ethics. Employees may feel undervalued when others receive preferential treatment, leading to resentment and disputes. One respondent noted, *"Personnel who are favored by their superiors put pressure on others and do not work."*
- **Departmental Conflicts:** Conflicts between different hotel departments are common, particularly when job responsibilities overlap or resources are limited. Housekeeping, kitchen, and food & beverage departments often clash over task distribution. For example, an employee reported, *"Whose responsibility is it to clean this place? Housekeeping (HK) or kitchen? HK says, 'I'm tired of cleaning this place constantly.'"*
- **Hierarchy-Based Conflicts:** Conflicts between supervisors and subordinates are rare but arise due to differences in expectations, perceived unfairness, or strict management styles. While some employees view their superiors as role models, others see them as oppressive figures, especially if communication is lacking. *"Maybe he may not agree with his superior. He may think differently about it,"* an employee shared, highlighting this issue.
- **Guest-Staff Conflicts:** Disagreements between guests and employees often stem from unmet service expectations, cultural misunderstandings, or guest behavior under the influence of alcohol. One respondent noted, *"We usually work with the British. They are*

fond of alcohol, and when they drink too much, they no longer obey the rules, causing unrest."

- **Cultural and Generational Conflicts:** Generational and cultural differences can lead to workplace tension, particularly between senior employees with traditional values and younger workers with modern approaches. This friction can affect team dynamics and operational efficiency. One interviewee mentioned, *"We see that there is a conflict between managers and employees born in the 1970s and 1980s and those born after 2000."* Generational conflicts are also common, particularly between older, experienced workers and younger employees with different attitudes toward work. Some employees see their job as a long-term career, while others treat it as temporary, leading to friction in work expectations and commitment levels.
- **Conflict Intensity Levels:** Conflicts in hotels range from minor disagreements to severe disputes. Low-level conflicts include misunderstandings and minor irritations, which can often be resolved through informal discussions. Moderate conflicts involve ongoing tensions that require managerial intervention. High-level conflicts, such as physical altercations or legal disputes, can severely impact the hotel's reputation and workforce stability, therefore they lead to layoff.

Influence of Cultural and Social Differences

- **Workers' Background Differences:** Cultural and generational differences among employees and guests are major sources of workplace conflict in the hotel industry. Many employees come from diverse regional backgrounds, leading to differences in communication styles, expectations, and work ethics. These variations can result in misunderstandings, particularly in high-pressure situations. One respondent noted, "*There is a difference in perspective. There is a difference in understanding ability, that is, there are conflicts for such reasons."*
- **Guest-Staff Cultural Clashes:** Additionally, cultural misunderstandings between guests and staff can create tensions, especially when behaviors that are normal in one culture are seen as inappropriate in another. For example, one respondent highlighted the issue of cultural differences in personal space, explaining that certain affectionate gestures common in one culture may be perceived as intrusive or inappropriate by guests from different backgrounds.

Methods of Conflict Resolution and Prevention

- **Management Intervention and Mediation:** Hotel managers employ various methods to resolve workplace conflicts, including mediation, employee training, and structured communication channels. One of the most common approaches is direct intervention by managers, where conflicting parties are encouraged to communicate and find a solution.

Respondents also highlight the importance of training programs that educate staff on conflict resolution techniques and stress management. One respondent emphasized this, stating: *"We provide training to our employees... how our employees treat guests, that is, everyone has their own private space. Employees should not violate this."*

- **Communication and Training Strategies:** Some hotels use digital tools, such as WhatsApp groups, to facilitate communication between departments and resolve issues quickly before they escalate. Regular staff meetings and performance evaluations also help to address potential conflicts in a structured manner. In cases where conflicts cannot be resolved internally, disciplinary actions or employee reassignment may be necessary. However, most respondents agree that fostering an open and supportive work environment is the best way to prevent conflicts from arising in the first place. Encouraging respect, fairness, and teamwork helps to create a positive workplace culture where disputes can be managed constructively.

Perceived Benefits and Drawbacks of Conflict

- **Positive Aspects of Conflict:** While conflicts are generally viewed as disruptive, some respondents recognize their potential benefits. Workplace disagreements can highlight inefficiencies, uncover hidden problems, and encourage management to address staff concerns. One respondent explained, *"Conflict sometimes gives good results. There is a problem somewhere, and when you don't listen to it, everything seems to be going normally. But if they tell us, we think about how we can solve it."*
- **Negative Consequences of Conflict:** However, the negative consequences of workplace conflicts are often more apparent. Frequent disputes reduce productivity, create a stressful work environment, and increase employee turnover. If conflicts escalate without resolution, they can harm a hotel's reputation, particularly if guests witness staff disagreements. In extreme cases, unresolved conflicts may lead to physical altercations or legal issues. To mitigate these risks, hotels must develop comprehensive conflict management policies that address both immediate disputes and underlying systemic issues. By doing so, they can transform workplace challenges into opportunities for improvement, ultimately enhancing both employee satisfaction and guest experiences.

Discussion

This study highlights the complexities of workplace conflict within the hospitality industry, particularly in hotel settings. Our findings align with existing literature on conflict management, while also bringing attention to industry-specific challenges that emerge due to the unique dynamics of hotel operations.

Understanding Conflict in Hospitality: Consistent with prior research (Thakore, 2013; De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997), our study confirms that conflict is an unavoidable aspect of organizational life, particularly in environments requiring high levels of teamwork and collaboration. Employees acknowledge that disagreements naturally arise in human interactions, but perspectives on conflict differ. While some employees see it as a driver for positive change and problem resolution, others believe it disrupts workplace harmony and productivity. This aligns with the integrationist perspective, which suggests that maintaining a balanced level of conflict can foster creativity and innovation (Verma, 1998). However, if mismanaged, conflict can escalate into stress and inefficiency, leading to decreased employee morale and higher turnover rates.

Causes of Workplace Conflict: Our findings reinforce the literature's emphasis on miscommunication, unclear role expectations, and resource competition as primary sources of workplace conflict (Thakore, 2013; Ikeda et al., 2005). However, industry-specific issues also play a crucial role. Employees cite favoritism, unfair task distribution, and competition over promotions as major sources of tension. Additionally, alcohol consumption among guests contributes significantly to workplace disputes, often exacerbating cultural misunderstandings between employees and customers.

Types of Conflict in Hotel Operations: Our research supports the classification of conflicts into structural, role-based, and resource-related disputes (Katz, 1964; Moore, 2014). Employees report that interdepartmental tensions are particularly pronounced in physically demanding roles such as housekeeping, kitchen, and food and beverage services. High-pressure work conditions, increased workloads during peak seasons, and generational differences further contribute to intragroup and intergroup conflicts. Senior employees often clash with younger workers over work ethics and expectations, reflecting relational conflicts described in existing literature (Lin et al., 2020). Furthermore, discrepancies in workload distribution across departments exacerbate structural conflicts, reinforcing the argument that organizational inefficiencies can escalate tensions (Thakore, 2013). One area where our findings did not strongly align with the literature is interorganizational conflict. The literature suggests that competition between different organizations can lead to disputes (Eren, 2020; Thakore, 2013), but our findings did not indicate that external business rivalry played a significant role in daily workplace conflicts within hotels. Instead, internal departmental conflicts were more frequently cited.

Approaches to Conflict Resolution: Both literature and our findings highlight the importance of effective conflict resolution strategies. Previous studies emphasize structured interventions such as job rotations, third-party mediation, and incentive-based cooperation (Moore, 2014). In practice, many hotel managers rely on direct intervention, facilitating open dialogue between conflicting parties. Although it is argued that the increasing dependency on virtual teams, and the lack of face-to-face communication within the work would lead to proliferation of conflicts (Kieliszek, 2019; Kilag, et al., 2024), our findings include the use of digital tools, such as WhatsApp groups, for real-time communication as a preventive measure against conflict escalation. However, the extent to which structured approaches-such as performance evaluations and regular staff training-are implemented varies across organizations. Encouragingly, employees acknowledge that constructive conflict resolution can improve workplace relations and enhance overall efficiency, echoing the arguments made by Türkoğlu (2023) and Etele & Akunne (2023).

Despite these similarities, certain conflict resolution strategies discussed in the literature were not widely observed in our findings. For example, higher-level conflict resolution approaches such as job rotations and third-party arbitration (Moore, 2014) were not mentioned by employees as common practices. This suggests that while theoretical frameworks emphasize structured interventions, the reality of hotel operations often relies on immediate, informal resolutions led by managers. One respondent said they have not enough time to deeply probe into the conflict and there are few rooms for positional changes in peak season.

Conflict in the Tourism Industry: Our findings confirm that conflict in the hospitality sector extends beyond employee disputes to encompass guest behavior and cultural tensions. Previous research (Kruczek et al., 2024) highlights conflicts between tourists and local residents, as well as tensions between tourism representatives and the local community. While our study focuses primarily on internal hotel conflicts, it supports the argument that high seasonal demand and employee burnout contribute significantly to workplace tensions (Yirik et al., 2015). The diversity of employees further complicates interpersonal relations, emphasizing the need for conflict management strategies tailored to multicultural work environments (Genç & Recepoğlu, 2020). One notable gap between literature and findings is the role of local authorities in tourism-related conflicts. While previous studies indicate that conflicts may arise between hotel management and local governing bodies over regulations and policies (Kruczek et al., 2024), our findings did not reflect such external tensions except for rare examples of disturbing high-volume music at nights. Instead, internal operational challenges and guest-related conflicts were more frequently highlighted by employees.

Conclusion

Conflicts range from minor disagreements to more significant workplace tensions. Some conflicts arise from simple miscommunications, while others stem from deeper systemic issues such as hierarchical power struggles or personal grievances. The hospitality industry, with its fast-paced and customer-driven nature, demands a high level of teamwork, making conflict resolution essential. While some believe that moderate conflict can foster improvements in work processes, others argue that it disrupts the peace of the workplace and reduces efficiency. The challenge for management is not eliminating conflict entirely but ensuring it does not escalate to the point of harming employee morale or guest satisfaction. This study underscores the necessity of proactive conflict management in the hospitality industry. Internal staff conflicts are prevalent when employees believe they are being treated unfairly. Communication issues between departments, unclear expectations, and high-pressure situations contribute further to disagreements. Without proactive management, these triggers can accumulate, leading to a hostile work environment that affects both service quality and employee well-being. Additionally, industry stakeholders should consider implementing regular conflict management training to equip employees with the necessary skills to navigate workplace tensions effectively. By acknowledging and addressing conflict constructively, hospitality organizations can create a more harmonious and productive work environment. Effective training and communication strategies are essential to navigate these differences and create a harmonious workplace. Addressing these seasonal and departmental challenges requires strategic staffing solutions and proactive conflict mitigation strategies.

While literature provides a strong foundation for understanding conflict sources, types, and resolution strategies, our findings highlight industry-specific nuances that require further exploration. The findings expand on previous research, suggesting that factors unique to the hospitality industry, such as guest behavior – especially under the effect of alcohol- and cultural diversity, should be integrated into broader discussions on workplace conflict. Future research should also examine the long-term effectiveness of digital communication tools and structured mediation techniques in reducing workplace conflicts.

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Does Personalization Help? Value Attitude Behavioral Model Approach in Budget Hotels

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Abstract

Purpose: Building on Value Attitude Behavioral Model, this study aims to investigate how consumption values impact behavioral intention through attitude and memorability.

Study design/methodology/approach: PLS-SEM approach was chosen due to its ability to handling complex structural model and robust results with small sample sizes. Data was collected from an online crowdsourcing website Prolific.com, with providing a preliminary screening question. 264 over 271 surveys were included in the analysis.

Results: This study aims to explain the role of personalization and consumption values (Functional, hedonic, social, and financial values) on creating memorable experience, positive attitude, and intention in the budget hotel context. Among the five main proposed hypothesis, only social value and attitude, and social value and memorability relationships were insignificant.

Originality/value: The findings strongly support that, functional value is not efficient under luxury context, where the prestige and social aspects are dominant. Likely, where the limited and tight budgets are the considerations, the social aspects become less important as functional and financial values become dominant. These findings reveal the need for extension of Value Attitude Behavioral Model, depending on the financial and economic status of the experience. On the other hand, the findings can be applied to small business operations, focusing on more functional and economic values rather than social value of the experience.

Keywords Budget Hotels, Social Value, Consumption Values, Memorability

Introduction

Almost half of the American workforce are employed in small businesses and these businesses represent 43.5% of USA's GDP. 33.2 million small business operate in the US and 99% of businesses are small businesses in the US (Melhorn et al., 2024). Hospitality and tourism industry is one of the top ten industries in small businesses in the US (Melhorn et al., 2024). Small businesses in the tourism industry, such as budget hotels, are vulnerable for any kind of threat as they are financially fragile (Abhari et al., 2022). On the other hand, they occupy a high number in the market; The global Budget Hotels market size is USD 284582.6 million in 2024. This number is expected to increase to USD 400436.2967 million by 2031 (Dharmadhikari, 2025). In order to deal with the threat despite this vulnerability, they are expected to upgrade and diversify their services (Abhari et al., 2022). The literature provides enough evidence on the impact of values on establishing memory and experience, which gradually impacts attitude and intention (e.g., Sihombing et al., 2024). Thus, building on Value Attitude Behavioral Model, this study tries to answer the following research question:

What is the impact of personalization and consumption values on creating positive attitude, memorable experience, and purchase intention in budget hotels as representation of small businesses?

By answering the research question, it is expected that,

Theoretically, Value Attitude Behavioral Model will be extended based on the experience style,

Practically, potential competitive advantage components will be revealed for small businesses including the budget hotels.

Value-Attitude-Behaviour Model

Proposed by Homer and Kahle (1988) The value-attitude-behavior (VAB) theory is a hierarchical model that was established in three phases. First, value of information is received as stimulus. Second, the importance of perceived value is evaluated, and attitude is formed. Lastly, based on the final judgement, overall response is formed. The information will affect the strength of the behavior (Erul et al., 2022). The theory has been recently utilized in various disciplines such as, to predict the impacts of values on political attitudes and behaviors, (Nazirova & Borbala, 2024), to understand the personal behaviors impact on e-shopping behavior (Jayawardhena, 2004), and in tourism such as pro-tourism behavior after COVID-19 case (Erul et al., 2022).

Personalization

Personalization has been considered a significant element in marketing and hospitality industry due to its ability to enhance customer satisfaction (Lei et al., 2024) and value co-creation (Aksoy et al., 2021). It is also recognized a successful strategy for businesses to provide service quality (Chandra et al., 2022). Recent studies demonstrates that personalization is not only significant for luxury or upscale hotels, but budget hotel customers also look for personalized service experience (Girija, Sharma & Kausal, 2023). In a recent study, Lei and Wang (2023) revealed that hoteliers consider personalization as a human touch rather than tangible asset or facilities of the accommodation and customers can benefit from personalization through convenience, flexibility, efficiency, emotional and social value. Therefore, following hypothesis were proposed.

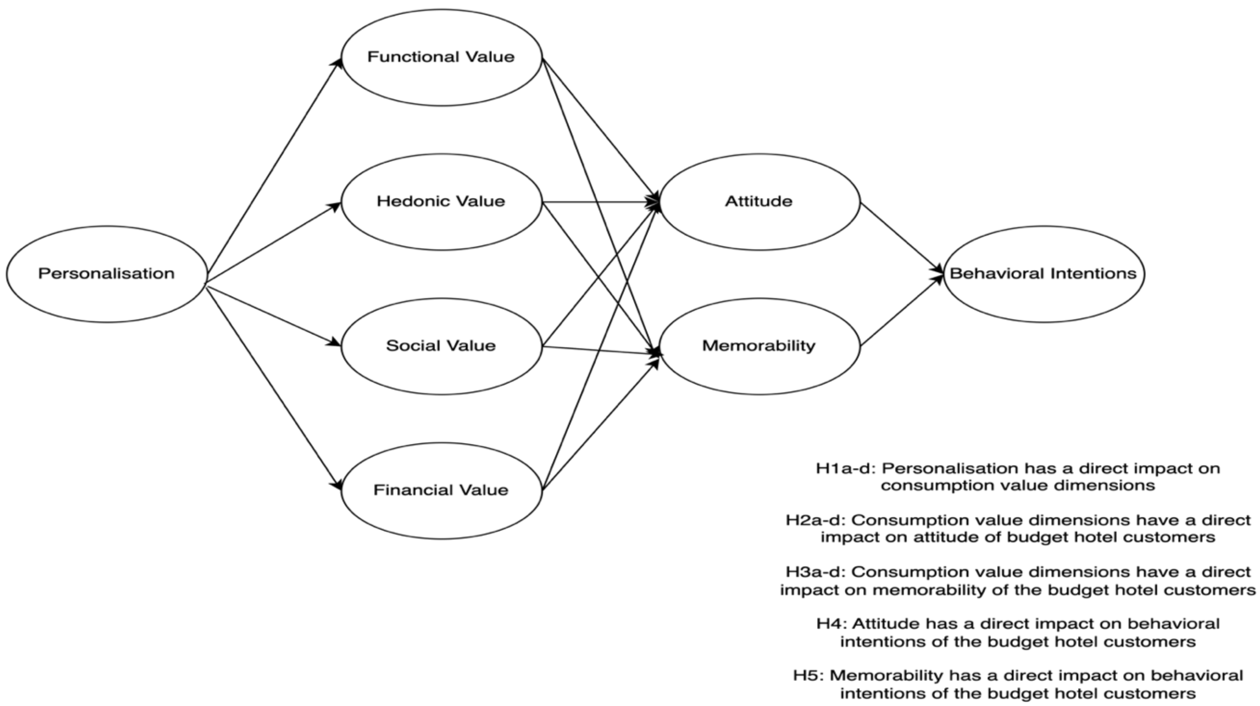
$H1_{a\text{-}d}$: Personalization in the budget hotel has a direct influence on perceived value dimensions (functional, social, hedonic, and financial).

Memorability

Memorability of an experience is considered the most significant outcome of a trip and source of information for future choices (Ye et al. 2021). Thus, it can be the outcome of various types of values and the antecedent of intention and attitudes. Values are strong predictors of memorable experiences, which impact satisfaction and revisit intention (e.g., Cheung et al., 2021). Thus, the next hypothesis is as follow:

$H2_{a\text{-}d}$: Perceived value dimensions (functional, social, hedonic, and financial) have a direct influence on memorable experience.

Building on the assumption and arguments of the Value Attitude Behavioral Model, the following model is proposed:



Methodology

Data collection and Analysis

Data was collected from an online crowdsourcing website Prolific.com, with providing a preliminary screening question to identify the type of the hotel participants stayed in the last year. The website was argued as a useful and trustworthy platform to collect data from the users (Peer et al. 2022). In total, 264 over 271 survey was included for analysis.

SPSS 29 and Smart-PLS 4.1.1.1 were utilized to analyse the data. Pls-SEM approach was chosen due to its ability to handling complex structural model and robust results with small sample sizes (Aybek & Karakaş, 2022). SPSS was used to extract demographic information of the data and test Common Method Variance (CMV) using Harman's single factor analysis (Podsakoff et al. 2012).

The result demonstrate that a single factor accounted %43 of the variance, therefore it can be concluded that the data were not subject to CMV. Smart-PLS was used to test structural model. First, measurement analysis was conducted to test validity and reliability, and structural model was tested for hypotheses.

Results

Demographic Findings

The demographic findings show that the majority of the participants are female (n=171) versus 87 male. Moreover, most participants are between 25-34 years old (n=99). Second participant group is 35-44 years (n=51), followed by 45-54 years old age group (n=46). Most participants have a college or university degree (n=166) and high school degree (n=59). Occupation groups are as follows; Professional (n=61), office worker (n=48), management and manual workers (n=31). Most participants stayed in a city center hotel (n=129), some stayed in city suburbs (n=43, or small towns (n=39). Majority of the participants stayed first time in the hotel (n=222) and got information regarding hotel from internet sites (n=196) or friends and relatives (n=57). The main purpose of participants were leisure / holiday (n=184, visiting friends and relatives (n=44) and business and MICE (n=28).

Measurement Analysis

The measurement model was evaluated by testing indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2022). Composite reliability scores range from 0.867 to 0.929 and Cronbach's Alpha scores range from 0.818 to 0.921. The results confirm indicator reliability. Most items factor loading scores were above 0.7, therefore confirms indicator reliability. One item from attitude scale was removed due to very low factor loading scores (x<0.40). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores are all above 0.5 threshold, therefore ensures convergent validity (Fornell & Lorcker, 1981). Heteroi-Monotrait scores (Henseler, 2015) and Farnell and Lorcker (1981). No problematic issue was detected; therefore, discriminant validity was ensured.

Table 4: Measurement Analysis

Construct	*Items*	*Loadings*	*Cronbach's Alpha*	*Composite Reliability*	*Average Variance Extracted*
Functional			0.916	0.917	0.751
	FUNC1	0,817			
	FUNC2	0,920			
	FUNC3	0,904			
	FUNC5	0,837			
	FUNC6	0,849			

Social Value			0.896	0.909	0.763
	SOC1	0,788			
	SOC2	0,876			
	SOC3	0,925			
	SOC4	0,901			
	SOC5	0,788			
Hedonic			0.892	0.905	0.648
	HEDO1	0,756			
	HEDO2	0,717			
	HEDO3	0,853			
	HEDO4	0,847			
	HEDO5	0,861			
	HEDO6	0,785			
Financial			0.909	0.911	0.846
	FİNA1	0,876			
	FİNA2	0,945			
	FİNA3	0,937			
Attitude			0.891	0.901	0.609
	ATT1	0,834			
	ATT2	0,807			
	ATT3	0,844			
	ATT4	0,839			
	ATT5	0,691			
	ATT6	0,766			
	ATT8	0,661			
Memorability			0.816	0.867	0.652
	MEM1	0,915			
	MEM2	0,908			
	MEM3	0,663			
	MEM4	0,712			
Behavioral intentions			0.921	0.929	0.863
	BEH1	0,941			
	BEH2	0,961			
	BEH3	0,884			
Personalization			0.885	0.897	0.812
	PER1	0,913			
	PER2	0,881			

	PER3	0,910			

Table 5: HTMT Scores

	ATT	BEH	FINA	FUNC	HEDO	MEMO	PERSO	SOCI
ATT								
BEH	0,785							
FINA	0,488	0,630						
FUNC	0,752	0,659	0,394					
HEDO	0,755	0,655	0,348	0,894				
MEMO	0,808	0,843	0,465	0,771	0,826			
PERSO	0,729	0,673	0,376	0,810	0,857	0,786		
SOCI	0,530	0,334	0,113	0,663	0,774	0,579	0,643	

Table 6: Farnell-Lorcker Scores

	ATT	BEH	FINA	FUNC	HEDO	MEMO	PERSO	SOCI
ATT	0,780							
BEH	0,723	0,929						
FINA	0,441	0,577	0,920					
FUNC	0,687	0,608	0,363	0,866				
HEDO	0,697	0,625	0,339	0,813	0,805			
MEMO	0,714	0,752	0,416	0,677	0,733	0,808		
PERSO	0,654	0,603	0,331	0,739	0,781	0,677	0,901	
SOCI	0,476	0,308	0,036	0,598	0,679	0,502	0,586	0,874

Structural Model Analysis

Structural model analysis begins with obtaining collinearity of indicator values (VIF). According to Hair et al. (2014), VIF values should be between 0.2 to 5. Our analysis demonstrates that VIF scores of the constructs ranges from 1 to 3.7, therefore no collinearity was indicated. Next, R^2 and Q^2 values were calculated and assessed model's explanatory and predictive ability of the constructs. The findings shows that financial value has no explanatory power due to low value (R^2= 0.110). Other construct values range from 0.344 to 0.653 showing from weak to medium explanatory power (Hair et al. 2017). Q^2 values ranged between 0.339 and 0.607 demonstrating weak and medium predictive power of the model (Hair et al. 2019). Similarly, financial value received very low scores (Q^2= 0. 098), demonstrating no predictive power.

The result of path analysis revealed that perceived social value has no significant effect on perceived attitude and memorability of the experience, therefore Hypothesis 2_b and 3_b were rejected. The rest of hypotheses were confirmed. There has been found significant effect on perceived personalization all costumer perceived value dimensions ($H1_{a-d}$). functional, hedonic and financial value have direct impact on perceived attitude and memorability of the experience ($H2_{a,\ c\ and\ d}$, $H3_{a,\ c,\ and\ d}$). Finally, attitude and memorability have both impact on behavioral intentions of budget hotel customers, therefore H4 and H5 were confirmed.

Table 4: Path Analysis

	Original sample (O)	**Standard deviation (STDEV)**	**T statistics (|O/STDEV|)**	**P values**
ATT -> BEH	0,386	0,066	5,835	0,000
FINA -> ATT	0,222	0,050	4,433	0,000
FINA -> MEMO	0,184	0,043	4,255	0,000
FUNC -> ATT	0,286	0,093	3,090	0,002
FUNC -> MEMO	0,183	0,081	2,247	0,025

HEDO -> ATT	0,353	0,079	4,448	0,000
HEDO -> MEMO	0,484	0,084	5,766	0,000
MEMO -> BEH	0,479	0,064	7,491	0,000
PERSO -> FINA	0,331	0,063	5,296	0,000
PERSO -> FUNC	0,739	0,027	27,020	0,000
PERSO -> HEDO	0,781	0,025	31,135	0,000
PERSO -> SOCI	0,586	0,040	14,830	0,000
SOCI -> ATT	0,048	0,070	0,697	0,486
SOCI -> MEMO	0,056	0,054	1,036	0,300

Conclusion

Among the proposed hypothesis, social values impact on attitude and memorability are found insignificant. Ranne (2021) found utilitarian element was not significant in the luxury fashion libraries context. This finding, which is financially on the other end of the spectrum, gives a strong justification to the insignificant relationship between social value and its relationship with attitude and memorability. This finding strongly supports that, utilitarian value is not functional under luxury context, where the prestige and social aspects are dominant. Likely, where the limited and tight budgets are the considerations, the social aspects become less important as functional and financial values become dominant. These findings reveal the need for extension of Value Attitude Behavioral Model, depending on the financial and economic status of the experience. on the other hand, the findings can be applied to small business operations, focusing on more functional and economic values rather than social value of the experience. Future studies, for this reason are strongly encouraged to test the model for diverse scale of operation in hospitality and tourism.

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Conflict between Satisfaction Based on Conspicuous Consumption and Consumer Regret in Travel Support Service Consumption and Repurchase Behavior

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Abstract

Purpose: Among the service product levels, the supporting service element is not related to the essence of the service, but is the services that the consumer consumes motivated by different stimuli. This research aims to evaluate the effects of conspicuous consumption and consumer regret on the purchase intention for supporting services such as food and beverage products during air travel, in terms of consumer satisfaction.

Study design/methodology/approach: Survey method was used in the research. Through the data obtained from the survey, it was tried to determine the role of consumer satisfaction in the effect of conspicuous consumption and consumer regret variables on consumer satisfaction and behavioral intentional. The research model was tested with the structural equation modeling method.

Findings: According to the research results, it has been determined that consumer regret and conspicuous consumption are effective on consumer satisfaction and behavioral intention. In line with the results obtained, various strategy suggestions were presented to tourism marketers in directing consumer to supporting services purchasing behavior.

Originality/value: In the service industry, a few decades ago, supportive services were offered free of charge to develop positive attitudes in consumers towards purchasing services. With the development of the service sector, supporting service products began to be offered for high fees (such as food services for short-term air travel). It is known that consumers continue to purchase these services but are also disturbed by the high fees. In this research, the effects and differences of conspicuous consumption and consumer regret conflict on satisfaction and repurchase behavior were examined when consumers purchased supporting service products during air travel. This research will provide important clues in explaining this contradictory consumption behavior and has an original and original value that will guide future research on similar situations.

Keywords: Conspicuous consumption, Consumer regret, Consumer satisfaction, Travel support service, Repurchase intention.

Introduction

Service product levels are considered in three basic dimensions: core service, facilitating service and supporting service. Core service expresses the essence of the service and its main benefit, and the facilitating service dimension mediates the purchase of the service in question. In other words, the use of a service depends on the existence of these two dimensions. However, the supportive service element is a dimension that increases the pleasure of the service and does not have a critical impact on the main benefit of the service (Kotler, 1991; Bahtışen et.al., 2016; Koç, 2019). At the beginning of the development of the service industry in the last century, many of the supporting services were provided free of charge or at very low fees. However, as consumers' loyalty and habit towards services increased, supporting services began to be offered for a fee or even at a higher fee. Food and beverage products that serve as supporting services for short distances during air travel, which are the subject of the research, are also included in this scope. It is noteworthy that supporting service products are demanded by consumers despite their high prices.

It is important to understand similar consumer behavior in supporting services across many industries. In this context, the concept of conspicuous consumption (O'Cass & McEwen, 2005: 27), which is expressed as the individual purchasing luxury products and services consumed in society in order to increase his prestige in society and trying to impress the people around him with the products and services he purchases and as a result satisfying his ego, is thought to be one of the important variables that will explain this situation. Today, conspicuous consumption is no longer based on economics and has become a social and cultural dimension. Consumption has become not only a means of meeting the security and physiological needs of individuals, but also an indicator that the individual displays as wealth in society, and conspicuous consumption has gained importance. People adopt the consumption patterns of the society to which they want to be seen as belonging and consume products and services with appropriate features (Gürer & Gürer, 2017: 1163; Özer & Dovganiuc, 2013: 61-62). Thus, individuals engage in conspicuous consumption to appear respected in society and to show their superiority, rather than expecting benefit from the products and services they purchase (Erkan, 2018: 43). Theoretical findings show that it is possible to explain repurchase behavior by paying high fees for supporting services with conspicuous consumption.

On the other hand, it is also known that consumers regret the products and services they purchased by paying high prices for conspicuous consumption. It is stated that regret and guilt are emotions arising from negative consequences for which the person is responsible (Zeelenberg & Breugelmans, 2008). Negative emotions and disappointments about not meeting expectations prevent making the same decision in the future (Wetzer et al., 2007; Bui et al., 2011; Cui & Niu, 2017). It is known that consumers who regret their purchasing decisions tend to engage in negative word-of-mouth behavior (Wu & Wang, 2017). It is known that consumers regret the high prices of supporting service products, including food and beverages, and engage in negative word-of-mouth communication during air travel. Despite this, it is an important issue to what extent their continued purchase of these service products can be explained by conspicuous consumption.

Methodology

In the research, conspicuous consumption and consumer regret variables were considered as consumer satisfaction in the travel support service repurchasing behavior. In line with the purpose of the research, the research model was designed to determine the role of consumer satisfaction in the effects of travel support services repurchasing according to conflict of conspicuous consumption and consumer regret variables. Research data was obtained through survey technique and convenience sampling, one of the primary data collection methods. The research survey included scale questions regarding the variables in the model. Through the data obtained, the research model and hypotheses were tested through the structural equation model, and the effects between the variables were determined and discussed. The research model is shown in Figure 1.

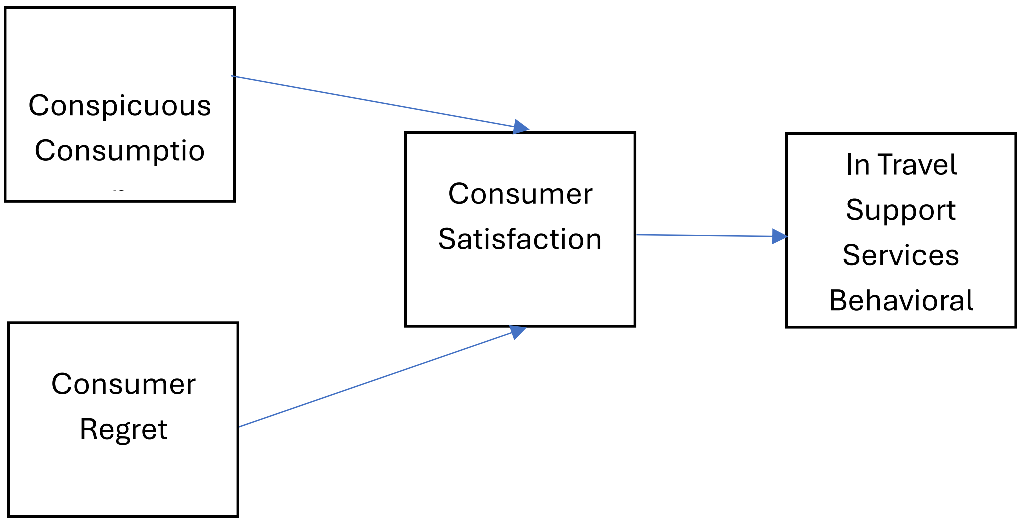

Figure.1 Research Model

H1: Consumer satisfaction has a mediating role in the effect of conspicuous consumption and consumer regret on travel support services behavioral intention.

In the service industry, a few decades ago, supportive services were offered free of charge to develop positive attitudes in consumers towards purchasing services. With the development of the service sector, supporting service products began to be offered for high fees (such as food services for short-term air travel). It is known that consumers continue to purchase these services but are also disturbed by the high fees. In this research, the effects and differences of conspicuous consumption and consumer regret conflict on satisfaction and repurchase behavior were examined when consumers purchased supporting service products during air travel. This research will provide important clues in explaining this contradictory consumption behavior and has an original and original value that will guide future research on similar situations.

Results

According to the results obtained from the research, it has been determined that consumers who purchase supporting service products during short-term air travels purchase them for ostentatious purposes and are satisfied. On the other hand, it has been determined that they regret the high prices paid for these products and that this negatively affects satisfaction. With all this, while consumer regret has a negative effect on repurchase behavior, demonstrative consumption desire positively affects repurchase intention. These results determined that consumers experienced conflict in their intention to purchase supportive services.

Conclusion

It has been determined that conspicuous consumption has a positive effect on consumer behavior towards purchasing services that support air travel during short distance trips and that consumer satisfaction has a mediating role. Likewise, consumer regret satisfaction has been found to negatively affect repurchase intention and consumer satisfaction has a mediating role. However, in the analysis of the whole model, it was determined that conspicuous consumption came to the fore. These results reveal that travel services marketing practitioners should develop strategies to resolve this conflict and offer offers to prevent regret. In future research, it is recommended to study the role of factors such as personality traits and personal values that motivate people to purchase supportive services for conspicuous consumption purposes despite this conflict.

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Extended Self in Tourism Studies

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the relationship between extended self and tourism by conducting a literature review.

Study design/methodology/approach: It is aimed to adress the relationship between tourism and extended self. The studies regarding the relationship between the extended self and tourism seem to be quite limited. Therefore, it is aimed to shed light on the subject through a narrative literature review.

Results: Travel and tourism are important areas that deepen our relationship with the things we own and enrich the way we express ourselves. When travelling, we not only see new places, but also interact with different cultures and attach different meanings to the things we own. The things we take to a destination for a holiday, the time we spend there, the experiences we have, become a part of our self. Especially in tourism, the things we carry affect the way we show our identity to others and the processes of redefining ourselves. For example, the clothes, cameras, personal care products or other tools we take with us while travelling become, in a way, an expression of our self. When travelling, individuals not only carry physical objects but also embark on a cultural journey with those objects. At the end of the trip, the souvenirs purchased or the souvenirs we obtain from the place of travel become a part of that experience and cause it to expand as a part of our self. Individuals redefine their selves, develop their identities and express them in a different way through the experiences they gain while travelling. As a result, objects acquired from travel experiences (souvenirs, photographs, tickets, etc.) expand and strengthen the self. These objects become symbols that shape individuals' sense of self, enabling past experiences to be remembered and personal meanings to deepen. Individuals create longer-lasting satisfaction and loyalty through experiences and objects that are in line with their identity. Objects of cultural or historical significance in the travelling destinations reinforce the individual's self-expression, and such experiences leave a more lasting impression when they are in harmony with the individual's self, and finally, the time spent in a hotel while travelling should be seen not only as a physical accommodation experience, but also as a form of expression in harmony with the individual's identity. Hotel experiences that are connected to the self, such as during holidays, build long-term customer loyalty and reinforce individuals' feelings of satisfaction.

Originality/value: This study contributes to the literature by focusing on the concept of extended self in tourism research and examining the relationship between travel and extended self in depth.

Keywords: Self, Extended Self, Identity, Tourism, Tour Guides

Introduction

The element of the self is basically what we have, what we possess and own. Our possessions define us in two different ways: We spend our lives with them and they surround us, so that we begin to see ourselves as part of what surrounds us rather than as part of what surrounds someone else, and we use things to bring out the me in us so that others can see us as we are. Possessions are seen as a means for both identity expression and identity transformation (Belk, 2013).

The concept of exended self is explained in the literature as the changes that occur in the self-perception of individuals in parallel with their experiences. This concept refers to the construction of an image that is different from their previous selves through new behaviours, habits, hobbies and the objects they buy or produce. It is also emphasised that as individuals age physiologically and gain experience, their self-perception evolves with this process. The changing identities of individuals over the years are defined as the extended self (Swann & Read, 1981). In the context of tourism and travel, the concept of extended self is shaped by the memories, and objects that symbolise these experiences. Photographs, videos, souvenirs, books and similar objects acquired during a touristic trip function as items that expand and enrich individuals' self-concept. These objects become a tool for remembering a past travel experience and deepening the personal meaning of this experience (Belk, 1988).

Experiences gained during travelling strengthen individuals' ties with both the past and the present. For example, a museum ticket embodies a moment of the trip, helping the individual to remember the emotional state and experience of that moment. Likewise, a work of art or a sculpture symbolises an individual's self-expression and identity by going beyond the current experiences (Yi et al., 2017). Such objects expand the boundaries of self-perception, as individuals recognise them not only as reminders of the past, but also as building blocks of their personal narratives and identities for the future. Souvenir objects acquired in tourism not only preserve the individual's personal memories, but also interact with the individual's memory. Visited places, places of historical significance and cultural heritage function as factors that shape the individual's identity. In this context, the extended self encompasses not only the inner world of the individual, but also the way of self-expression in a cultural, social and historical context. The reinforcement of travel experiences with objects of personal meaning allows individuals to develop a deeper understanding of the past and themselves (Heersmink, 2018).

Souvenirs, photographs, tickets, postcards or traditional handmade products purchased by individuals during the travel process become objects that individuals identify with their own selves. In this context, consumers (travellers) attribute value to such objects and accept them as a part of themselves. Feelings of ownership and attachment are especially evident in areas where personal experiences such as travelling are intense (Ahuvia, 2005). A souvenir acquired while travelling can be associated with the cultural or historical significance of the place visited and become a means of extending an individual's identity. As an example, a local work of art or a traditional craft product that a tourist buys from a particular region goes beyond being just an object and symbolises the experience, feelings and ties that person has experienced. These objects become meaningful and indispensable items that reshape individuals' sense of self (Kirk, 2019). This process is directly related to the expansion of the self, because an object acquired from travelling identifies the person not only with that moment, but also with the emotions experienced in that moment. For example, when a tourist visits a museum in a city and buys a souvenir from there, it can be considered as a result of not only a physical visit to the museum, but also the personal meaning of that experience. Such objects are integrated into the identity and life of the individual and become a part of it (Berger & Heath, 2007). The fact that individuals feel incomplete and uneasy in the absence of objects shows how strong the sense of ownership and self-identification is. In the context of tourism, the loss of objects acquired while travelling is not only the loss of that product, but also the loss of a personal meaning. This can create a sense of emptiness in the individual's life. The individual recognises these objects as a kind of identity confirmation and a concrete reflection of his/her past experiences. Therefore, objects acquired while travelling are not only a means of remembrance, but also symbolic items that ensure the continuity of self-perception and individual identity (Jusilla et al., 2015).

Services and experiences that individuals consume in connection with their identities can create longer-term satisfaction and loyalty. For example, if a tourist's preferred hotel brand or accommodation experience is aligned with their identity, they are less likely to be bored or alienated. An identity-related hotel experience goes beyond simply providing a physical accommodation service; it is directly linked to an individual's self-expression and sense of self (Chugani et al., 2015). When a tourist stays at a hotel brand that they identify with a particular culture, luxury, eco-friendly lifestyle or historical background, it creates a meaningful experience that is aligned with their identity. For example, an environmentally conscious individual may prefer to stay in a hotel that adopts a sustainable tourism approach. Such a hotel goes beyond being just an accommodation area and offers an experience that matches the identity of the individual. In this context, an identity-linked hotel experience increases the individual's loyalty to the hotel brand and the likelihood of getting bored with such an experience is further reduced. On the other hand, hotel experiences that are not linked to identity and do not mean anything to the individual may be forgotten or devalued more quickly. For example, if a standard and ordinary hotel does not carry any special meaning for the individual, the consumer may quickly get bored with this experience and repeat a similar accommodation experience in another hotel. Hotel experiences that are not associated with identity and self can be more easily forgotten or discarded because they are incompatible with the individual's need for self-expression. Hotel experiences that are aligned with individuals' sense of self affect not only during the holiday, but also long-term loyalty to the brand. A hotel brand that is identified with the individual's self not only provides the individual with a physical service, but also reinforces the sense of self and makes the individual's holiday experience a form of personal expression. In this context, the hotel experience functions as a means of identity and the travelling individual incorporates this experience into his/her self (Fastoso & Hector, 2020). As a result, products and services linked to the self in tourism and hospitality allow individuals to experience a longer-lasting sense of satisfaction and develop a stronger commitment to these experiences (Weiss & Johar, 2016).

Methodology

The studies on the relationship between the extended self and tourism are quite limited. Therefore, in this study, it is aimed to adress the gap in the field by exploring the relationship between tourism and the extended self. In order to deepen our understanding of the extended self in tourism studies, a narrative rewiev was conducted.

Results

According to Swann and Read (1981), the boundaries of a person are determined by the objects that belong to him/her and the unity of these objects constitutes the integrity of the individual. Objects acquired during travelling (souvenirs, photographs, tickets, etc.) become a part of one's identity and self. These objects concretize the past experiences of the person and make the abstract memories and emotions concrete. Memories of travelled places are not only physical objects, but also items that expand and deepen personal identity. Wheeler & Bechler (2021) state that the associations created by the objects owned or used make travel experiences meaningful. The objects we acquire while travelling often carry emotional and symbolic meanings beyond their physical properties. For example, a souvenir or a museum ticket that a tourist buys in a city becomes not only a physical object, but also a concrete reflection of a journey, a memory and even the emotional state at that moment. These objects are not only useful or ornamental, but also carry the meaning and memory of that moment. A photograph symbolises a particular moment of a trip, but it also recalls the emotions and personal experiences that remind us of that moment. Sometimes the objects owned by tourists are valuable only for their visual or aesthetic qualities, but often the symbolic meanings that these objects carry make them more special and meaningful. Tourism and travel experiences allow individuals to expand their selves, reshape their identities and deepen their relationships with objects to which they attach personal meanings. These objects become important tools for individuals to express their selves by forming psychological bonds and to express their inner worlds. Thus, tourism is not only a spatial mobility, but also a process in which individual identity and self-perception are structured and symbolically enriched (Tian & Belk, 2005).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the emotional attachment to these objects acquired during travel plays an important role in shaping personal identity and expanding the self. An individual's boundaries are defined by the objects they possess and these objects form a sense of personal integrity. Objects acquired while traveling contribute to the construction of identity by holding memories, emotions and experiences, extending the self. Objects such as souvenirs, photographs and tickets go beyond their physical properties and make a meaningful contribution to an individual's identity. It is emphasized that connections to these objects make travel experiences deeply meaningful, as they become symbols that link personal narratives and emotional states to specific moments. Ultimately, tourism is not only spatial mobility, but also a transformative process that allows individuals to reshape their identities, expand their selves, and form psychological bonds with the objects they acquire. These objects, enriched with symbolic and emotional meanings, become vehicles of self-expression and reflection that deepen the personal journey of travel and the individual's understanding of the world.

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The Role of Tourism Diplomacy on Destination Branding

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Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to theoretically clarify the relationship between tourism diplomacy and destination branding. In this respect, it first aims to clarify the terminology of tourism diplomacy, which has recently become a popular topic, and to provide new information about how it is carried out in practice. Then, it aims to clarify what destination branding represents regionally and nationally. Finally, it aims to define the possible link between tourism diplomacy and destination branding and to reveal their similarities and differences.

Study design/methodology/approach: The research examines the semantics between tourism diplomacy and destination branding in a theoretical framework. For this reason, firstly the concept of tourism diplomacy and then the concept of destination branding are tried to be clarified theoretically. Then, the theoretical semantics between tourism diplomacy and destination branding are tried to be revealed theoretically.

Results: The multi-channel structure of tourism diplomacy especially strengthens the attitude formed in the minds of the audience. In other words, tourism allows the audience to experience the attitude reflected. This strengthens the image of countries, regions or destinations individually or cumulatively.

Originality/value: This study theoretically reveals the relationship between tourism diplomacy, which is a new concept in relevant literature and has been analysed at a limited level, and destination branding. In the related literature, no research testing the correlation between both variables has been found yet.

Keywords: Tourism Diplomacy, Destination Branding, Nation Branding, Diplomatic Marketing

Introduction

Tourism diplomacy is one of the most important issues that have recently occupied the agenda of international relations. Tourism diplomacy is an important element for states to project their own brands and strengthen their destination brands. Destination branding is often confused in the literature with broader types of branding such as place branding (Papp-Váry, 2018) and nation branding. Past research has linked place branding (For example; Ginesta and de San Eugenio, 2021; Kim and Lee, 2021) and nation branding (For example; Dubinsky, 2019; Kaneva and Cassinger, 2022) with public diplomacy and examined them from an international relations perspective.

Methodology

In the related literature, while there is limited research that theoretically reveals the correlation between tourism diplomacy and destination branding, no empirical research has been found. Tourism diplomacy offers a systematic perspective especially for the branding of tourism destinations. In order to clarify this discussion, it is necessary to explain the correlation between tourism diplomacy and destination branding. In this respect, this relationship is tried to be explained theoretically.

Results

Tourism diplomacy acts as a bridge between the audience and the source (the values of the country receiving tourists). The multi-channel structure of tourism diplomacy brings together stakeholders that can fulfil this task. Therefore, tourism diplomacy is an important element in building a destination brand and strengthening the existing brand. Tourism diplomacy, with its structural aspect, provides the motivation to direct the target audience towards uniqueness, positive image and positive associations. Aesthetic and geographical attractions are important elements in tourism. However, these alone may not be the source of positive image and positive associations. The main reasons for this can be listed as peaceful environment in the destination, service quality, the approach of local people and tourism employees, crisis resolution methods of DMOs. Therefore, while tourism diplomacy primarily strengthens branding and tourist flows, destination, place and nation branding also strengthens increased tourist flows and provides unique gains such as "reputation" and "value" that cannot be measured with money and often cannot be bought by money. This allows nations and destinations to gain a competitive advantage.

Conclusion

Tourism diplomacy offers a systematic approach for both tourist-sending and tourist-receiving countries to promote themselves. The concept has a multi-channel structure as suggested by Li (2019), Sarı (2024), Sarı and Meydan Uygur (2024). The multi-channel structure of tourism diplomacy especially strengthens the attitude formed in the minds of the audience. In other words, tourism allows the audience to experience the attitude reflected. This strengthens the image of countries, regions or destinations individually or cumulatively. Especially social media is an important source of information for the international audience. Of course, propaganda and advertising activities constitute an important part of image and branding activities, but they do not cover all of them. For this reason, in addition to the official dimension of tourism diplomacy, semi-official (NGOs and companies carrying out international activities) and civilian dimensions are also directly effective in the branding of destinations.

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"Throw Out a Sprat to Catch a Mackerel": Analyzing the Benefits to Tour Operations Provided by Businesses

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Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to reveal the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations and the underlying reasons for providing benefits.

Study design/methodology/approach: Grounded theory methodology has been used in this research. Qualitative research has been conducted to achieve this aim. 17 business managers have been interviewed. The data have been analyzed using content analysis.

Results: The findings have revealed that the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations need to be grouped by considering beneficiaries: benefits to travel agencies, benefits to tour staff and benefits to the tour group. The benefits offered to beneficiaries have been themed as free service, refreshments, hosting, discount and tipping. The findings also reveal that the underlying reasons businesses provide services to tour operations are grouped into four themes: financial benefits, sustainable trade, business promotion and customer satisfaction.

Originality/value: This research sheds light on the nature of the social exchange relationship between tour operations and businesses.

Keywords: Tour operations, businesses, benefits, sustainable trade, grounded theory.

Introduction

"Throw out a sprat to catch a mackerel".

English idiom (See. Knowles, 2005).

Package tours have been one of the most popular types of travel since the 1950s (Albayrak et al., 2016). Package tours refer to an organized trip that includes elements such as accommodation, travel, tour guiding services, transportation, entertainment, food and beverage, and visits to tourist attractions. Package tours with a range of services, also include the interaction of tourists with local people and touristic products (Cetin & Yarcan, 2017). It is known that tourists on package tours receive services not only from travel agencies but also from local businesses. Whatever the tourist product experienced, it will be influenced by the physical environment as well as memories, stories and other tourists at the point of visit (Mossberg, 2007). Therefore, it can be said that the facilities offered by the businesses that provide services to tour groups in package tours are among the elements that tourists experience.

In the tourism sector, various businesses form the backbone of the tourism industry through their marketing activities (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007). For a business to be successful as a service provider, it is essential to know how to improve the experience conditions of its customers. While many successful businesses offer their products through a specific theme, different sectors also integrate by producing joint tourism products by utilizing each other's know-how (Mossberg, 2007). For example, in package tours, many activities such as transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, as well as visits to shopping spots such as carpets, leather and jewelry have become indispensable elements of the tours. Therefore, it is inevitable that the organizers of tour operations and touristic stores and businesses offering different services work in close contact (Acar, Karaosmanoğlu, & Şenbahar, 2020).

Services such as transportation, accommodation, food and beverage and guiding can be seen as the basic services of tour operations (İçöz, 2018). The actual producers of these services in package tours are accommodation, transportation, entertainment and food and beverage businesses. The sustainability of the services offered in businesses and the competitiveness of businesses are mainly based on customer satisfaction. This is because businesses offer these services through the interaction of employees with customers (Yılmaz, 2014). In light of this information, it is understood that businesses that provide various services to tour operations produce tourism products and create integration with tour operations.

In the literature, tour operations have been studied in terms of social interaction (Keskin Pulluk, & Sop, 2024), challenges (Cheng, Lien, & Chang, 2024), sustainability (Otoo, Senbeto, & Demssie, 2022; Richards & Font, 2019), destination image and customer expectations (Santos, 1998) and ecotourism (Higgins, 2001), nature-based tour operations (Kutzner, 2019). However, the reciprocal activities and interactions with various businesses that provide services in tour operations have been a neglected topic in the literature. Our research contributes to this gap in the literature.

It can be said that tour operators and travel agencies sustain the tourism sector through tour operations (Hasan et al., 2021). However, analyzing the benefits that businesses provide to tour operations has been a neglected research topic. In other words, it can be said that there is a significant research gap regarding the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations. This research aims to reveal the benefits offered by businesses to tour operations and the underlying reasons behind it. In this context, the data obtained from various businesses have been analyzed with content analysis method. In line with the purpose of the research, interviews have been conducted with 17 business managers providing services to tour groups. Accordingly, the research questions have been created as follows:

•What are the benefits offered by businesses serving to tour operations?

•What are the reasons for the businesses to provide various benefits to tour operations?

The results indicate that there is a movement of exchange between tour operations and businesses based on a mutually beneficial relationship. According to the findings, it is seen that the benefits offered by businesses to tour operations show diversification by considering beneficiaries: benefits for travel agencies, for tour staff and for the tour group. The results indicate that the research area is within the scope of social exchange theory. The findings are consistent with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). According to social exchange theory, the benefits are mutual and exchanged between the parties (Cook, 2015).

The research has both theoretical and practical contributions. It contributes to the literature in terms of revealing and categorizing the benefits offered by businesses to tour operations. It also provides useful insights into the provided benefits for travel agencies, tour staff and tour groups in tour operations. It can be recommended that businesses working with tour operations should provide discounts, free services and refreshments to travel agencies, tour staff and the tour group. According to findings, the benefits of beneficiaries have been listed in Table 2. Therefore, businesses can obtain financial benefits, sustainable trade, business promotion and customer satisfaction by giving these benefits to tour groups.

Literature Review

Tour operations are defined as a set of activities planned to be carried out on a specific route within a certain time frame and cost in order to meet the expectations of customers. Tour operations require planning for the preparation of the tour package and the way the tour is implemented in the field (Claravall, 2013; Demir, 2017). As a result of these plans, package tours are created as a product in which various holiday components (accommodation, transportation, food and beverage, entertainment, etc.) are sold at a single price (Sheldon, 1986).

Since various social interactions are established when individuals travel as a group (Foster, 1986; Cheng, Hong, & Liu, 2024), it can be said that tour groups build social interactions with businesses in tour operations. This is because it is inevitable for tourists to stay in hotels and shop at various points during a destination visit (Mossberg, 2007). The fact that tour groups visit carpet and leather shops (Acar, Karaosmanoğlu, & Şenbahar, 2020), souvenir sellers and shopping points such as pottery, jewelry, precious stones, and Turkish delight (Tanrısevdi & Akyurt Kurnaz, 2018; Akyurt Kurnaz & Tanrısevdi, 2020) makes social interactions between tourists and businesses inevitable. For that reason, the reciprocal activities and interactions with various businesses in tour operations are needed to be Enlighted.

Theoretical Framework

Social exchange theory argues that interactions in the social sphere take place in a cost-benefit context. One party can offer a benefit to the other party with the expectation of a benefit (Blau, 1964). One of the basic principles of social exchange theory is that it is based on trust and mutual commitments. Reciprocity refers to dependent exchanges, but these exchanges require a two-way transaction (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The actors involved in reciprocal exchanges can be groups, organizations or individuals (Molm, 1994). At the core of social exchange theory are reciprocal and rewarding relationships between the actors involved (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Since there may be an exchange relationship between tour operations and businesses, it is appropriate for this research to consider the social exchange theory. Some benefit expectations may underlie businesses' offering benefits to tour operations. In other words, the interaction between tour operations and businesses can be based on reciprocal commitments and the aim of providing benefits between the parties.

Method

Grounded theory methodology is used in this research. Although based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), it is predicted that there is an exchange of benefits between tour operations and businesses, the nature of the mutual benefit exchange is unknown. Therefore, it is appropriate to use grounded theory to explore the phenomenon in depth and theorize the phenomenon.

Glaser and Strauss (2006) suggested that a theory can be revealed from data systematically obtained from social research. Since this study has aimed to explore a phenomenon, it has been found appropriate to use the grounded theory research design, one of the qualitative research methods. Grounded theory is a research design that is uncovered throughout the research and the data source is people. In grounded theory, data are embedded in the events and qualitative data need to be collected to build theories. The collected data form the basis of the theory and the results are tried to be reached by analyzing the data (Bulduklu, 2019). Therefore, at this stage, data are subjected to content analysis (Kozak, 2018).

Due to the lack of literature, it cannot be said that the subject of the research is suitable for quantitative measurements. Therefore, qualitative method has been found appropriate as the method of the research. Two interview questions that could be easily understood by the participants have been identified. The data have been obtained from a total of 17 business managers who are volunteer. Therefore, the researcher has continued to reach out to businesses offering various services to tour groups in Burdur city and some other cities. The research has been conducted through face-to-face and online interviews.

The data collected from businesses have been diversified as accommodation, restaurant, café & restaurant, local product seller, textile store, roasted chickpea store and resting facility. It has been collected until the saturation. The concept of saturation has been mentioned by Glaser & Strauss (1967) as "theoretical saturation". This term refers to the point where further data collection does not reveal new information about a theoretical construct or contribute to the emerging grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Then, the data have been subjected to content analysis (Kozak, 2018). In the interpretation phase of the findings, the interview records have been transcribed by the researcher. The transcribed forms have been given sequence numbers as K1, K2, K3 etc. and made ready for content analysis.

As a result of the analysis, firstly, it has been found that the benefits offered by businesses providing services in tour operations are diversified in terms of the parties. Therefore, these benefits have been segmented according to the beneficiaries. Themes and categories have been identified under each beneficiary. The themes and categories are presented in the table (see Table 2). Secondly, the underlying reasons businesses provide services to tour operations are listed in themes and categories (see Table 3).

Data Analysis

The answers given to the research questions by the volunteer participants have been transcribed. Each interview form has been given a code number by the researcher. The data have been read carefully and subjected to content analysis. Content analysis enabled themes to be revealed in the data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). As a result of the analysis, firstly, it has been found that the benefits offered by businesses providing services in tour operations are diversified in terms of the parties. Therefore, these benefits have been segmented according to the beneficiaries. Themes and categories have been identified under each beneficiary. The themes and categories are presented in the table (see Table 2). Secondly, the underlying reasons businesses provide services to tour operations are listed in themes and categories (see Table 3).

In order to conduct the data analysis process in a valid and reliable manner, the criteria recommended in the relevant literature have been taken into consideration. The criteria related to the validity and reliability of the study have been detailed in line with Guba's (1981) and Shenton's (2004) study. Guba's (1981) model has been used in the reliability and validity process of this qualitative research study. In line with this model, the main criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability has been made and presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Criteria applied to ensure the validity and reliability of the study

Criteria	**Assessment of the Research Using the Criteria**
Credibility (Internal validity)	Obtaining the individual perspectives and experiences of the interviewees have provided rich data. The data have been collected from volunteer managers of the businesses. The participants have shared their views and experiences. The data collected and the themes obtained by the first author in the research have been cleared of biases by the second author reading all the data and themes.
Transferability (External validity)	In the research, the sampling has been conducted with the aim of maximizing the range of information obtained. In other words, various businesses serving to tour operations have been selected by diversity. Thus, the data have been enriched.
Dependability (Reliability)	The processes in study have been reported in detail so that a similar research could be repeated. Details on the data collection process have been presented. The findings obtained in the analysis have been listed in themes and categories and organized in a table.
Confirmability (Objectivity)	An audit has been made that each interpretation or information in the research is consistent with the data. This audit has been conducted by the

	second author during and after the data analysis. No inconsistencies have emerged during the audit. The findings of the study are not the result of the researcher's preferences, but of the experiences and opinions of the informants. In this way, the researcher's biases are kept out of the context.

Source: Validity and reliability criteria have been evaluated based on the studies of Guba (1981) and Shenton (2004).

Results

The participants of the study consist of 17 business managers (female=4, male=13) providing different services to tour groups. The first interview question answered by the participants is as follows:

Q1: As a business providing service to tour groups, what are your benefits to tour operations? Please explain by giving examples.

According to the data obtained, it is understood that some of the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations are for the travel agency and staff. These benefits are such as presenting gift products, offering food and beverages, offering discounted sales of products, providing free rooms, welcoming and seeing them off, and providing them with a safe and relaxing environment suitable for socializing. On the other hand, it is seen that some of the benefits are for the tour group. These benefits are such as offering treats of sales products to the tour group, offering drinks or appetizers before the meal and providing them with a safe, peaceful and comfortable atmosphere, offering products for sale with a certain discount, providing free city transportation to the tour group, offering live music service and supplying the tour group rooms with complimentary drinks.

According to these findings, it has been found appropriate to analyze the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations in view of beneficiaries: benefits for travel agencies, tour staff and tour group. Themes have been grouped as free service, refreshments, hosting, discount and tipping. Themes and categories are listed in the table (see Table 2).

Table 2: The benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations

Beneficiaries	**For Travel Agencies**	**For Tour Staff**	**For Tour Group**
Themes	**Free Service**	**Free Service**	**Free Service**
Categories	Free room allocation to the travel agency during tour stays, Gift products for the agency owner at the tour.	Gift products for tour staff.	Free city transportation for tour group, Live music for tour group.

			Providing complimentary drinks (water, tea, coffee, etc.) for tour group rooms.
Themes	**Refreshments**	**Refreshments**	**Refreshments**
Categories	Offering refreshments to the agency owner on the tour, Offering refreshments of sale products to the agency owner on the tour.	Offering refreshments to tour staff, Offering refreshments of sale products to tour staff.	Offering refreshments of sale products to the tour group, Offering drinks or pre-meal appetizers to the tour group.
Themes	**Hosting**	**Hosting**	**Hosting**
Categories	Welcoming and seeing off the agency owner at the tour, Providing a resting atmosphere, Providing a safe atmosphere, Providing a socializing atmosphere.	Welcoming and seeing off tour staff, Providing a resting atmosphere, Providing a safe atmosphere, Providing a socializing atmosphere.	Making the tour group feel comfortable, Providing a peaceful atmosphere for tour group, Providing a safe atmosphere for tour group, Providing hygienic toilet facilities to the tour group, Ensuring hygiene in food.
Themes	**Discount**	**Discount**	**Discount**
Categories	Offering discounts to the agency on tour accommodations, Offering discounts on sale of products to the agency owner at the tour.	Discounted sale of products to tour staff. **Tipping** Tipping tour captains.	Providing group discounts on the sale of products to the tour group.

The second interview question answered by the business managers providing service to tour groups is as follows:

Q2: As a business providing service to tour groups, what are the reasons you offer various benefits to tour operations? Please explain.

According to the data obtained, it has been found that the reasons of the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations are mainly related to providing financial benefits, making sales, creating a commercial atmosphere, promoting the business and ensuring the satisfaction and continuity of tour groups. Accordingly, the reasons of the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations have been analyzed under four themes. These themes are listed as financial benefits, sustainable trade, business promotion and customer satisfaction. Categories have formed the themes and have been listed in the table (see Table 3).

Table 3: Underlying reasons for business benefits to tour operations

Themes	**Financial Benefits**	**Sustainable Trade**	**Business Promotion**	**Customer Satisfaction**
Categories	Making sales, Revenue for the business, Creating a business cycle.	Revitalizing business trade, Creating a commercial atmosphere, Strengthening mutual communication with agencies, Establishing commercial trusted atmosphere, Sales in chain, More effective business planning, Ensuring the continuity of tours.	Advertising the business and its products, Desire to attract new businesses.	Ensuring the trust of the customer, Making customer and business relations intimate, Contributing to the smooth continuation and success of the tour.

Conclusion

This research aims to reveal the benefits offered by businesses to tour operations and the reasons underlying these benefits. Seventeen business managers, including two accommodation establishments, two local product sellers, six restaurants, two cafes & restaurants, two textile shops, two roasted chickpea shops, and one resting facility participated in the study. The data obtained through face-to-face and online interviews have been analyzed by content analysis.

The first research question "What are the benefits offered by businesses serving to tour operations?" has been sought. According to the findings, it is seen that the benefits offered by businesses to tour operations are grouped considering beneficiaries: benefits for travel agencies, for tour staff and for the tour group. The benefits for travel agencies are grouped into four themes: free service, refreshments, hosting and discount. Under the free service theme, the categories of free room allocation for travel agency during tour stays and giving gift products to the agency owner at the tour have been found. Under the refreshments theme, the categories of offering refreshments to the agency owner at the tour and offering refreshments of sales products have emerged. Under the hosting theme, the categories of welcoming and seeing off the agency owner at the tour, providing the agency owner with a resting, safe and socializing atmosphere have been found. Under the discount theme, the categories of offering discounts to the travel agency on tour stays and offering discounts on sale of product to the agency owner at the tour have emerged.

The benefits offered by businesses to tour staff in tour operations are grouped into five themes: free service, refreshments, hosting, discount and tipping. Under the free service theme, the category of gift products for tour staff has been obtained. Under the refreshments theme, the categories of offering refreshments and giving refreshments of sale products to tour staff have been found. Under the hosting theme, the categories of welcoming and seeing off tour staff, providing them a resting, safe and socializing atmosphere have emerged. Under the discount theme, the category of discounted sale of products to tour staff has been found. In the tipping theme, the category of the resting facility's giving tip to tour captains has been obtained.

The benefits offered by the businesses to the tour group in tour operations are grouped into four themes: free service, refreshments, hosting and discount. Under the free service theme, the categories have been found as accommodation businesses providing free city transportation, live music and complimentary drinks in tour group rooms. Under the refreshments theme, the categories of offering refreshments of sales products to the tour group and offering drinks or pre-meal appetizers to the group have emerged. Under the hosting theme, the categories have been found as making the tour group feel comfortable, providing a peaceful and safe atmosphere for the tour group, providing hygienic toilet facilities and hygiene in food. Under the discount theme, the category of providing group discounts on sale of products to the tour group has emerged. As it is understood from all these results, it is seen that businesses make various benefits and gestures to ensure the continuity of tour operations.

The second research question "What are the reasons for the businesses to provide various benefits to tour operations?" has been sought. When the findings have been analyzed, the themes of financial benefits, sustainable trade, business promotion and customer satisfaction have emerged as the reasons of the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations. Under the financial benefits theme, the categories such as making sales, revenue for the business and creating a business cycle have been obtained. Under the sustainable trade theme, the categories such as revitalizing business trade, creating a commercial atmosphere, strengthening mutual communication with agencies, establishing commercial trusted atmosphere, sales in chain, more effective business planning and ensuring the continuity of tours have emerged. Under the business promotion theme, the categories of advertising the business and its products, and the desire to attract new businesses have emerged. Under the customer satisfaction theme, the categories of ensuring the trust of the customer, making customer and business relations intimate, contributing to the smooth continuation and success of the tour have emerged. According to all these results, businesses aim to be preferred again by travel agencies in tour operations, to ensure the continuity of commercial relations, to ensure a trustworthy trade, to make relations with both agencies and customers more intimate, and to make a profit through tour groups. Therefore, it is revealed that businesses aim mutual benefits in tour operation processes and sales maximizing.

Another conclusion of this study is the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations should be analyzed according to the parties they benefit. According to findings, these benefits vary as benefits to travel agencies, tour staff (tour captain, travel agent staff at the tour, etc.) and tour group. For this reason, it has been found appropriate to analyze the beneficiaries separately.

Theorical Contribution

The theoretical and practical contributions of the research are presented respectively. This research contributes to the literature in terms of revealing and categorizing the benefits offered by businesses to tour operations. The second contribution of the research is to reveal the underlying reasons of the benefits offered by businesses to tour operations. Thirdly, this research confirms that the relationship between tour operations and businesses is based on the social exchange relationship. In this respect, the findings are consistent with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964).

Practical Implications

This research provides useful insights into the provided benefits for travel agencies, tour staff and tour groups in tour operations. It can be recommended that businesses working with tour operations should provide discounts, free services and refreshments to travel agencies, tour staff and the tour group in order to provide financial benefits, sustainable trade, business promotion and customer satisfaction. For example, the number of visitors to Türkiye is increasing significantly every year (Tursab, 2024). In 2023, Türkiye has been the 5th most visited country in the world (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Investment Office, 2024). Therefore, uncovering the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations and the underlying reasons for providing benefits will create value. The perspective of tourism businesses needs to be understood. As Sharma and Sarkar (2024) points out, sustainable tourism seeks to create long-term benefits for all stakeholders involved, including local residents, businesses, visitors and future generations.

It is understood that the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations are centered on creating a commercial atmosphere, being preferred again by travel agencies and customers, and the desire of sustainability in the services provided to tour groups. These benefits provide various clues to tourism stakeholders about the field practices in tour operations.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

In this study, the data have been collected from a sampling of 17 business managers. In future research, a wider and more diversified sampling of business managers will make a significant contribution to both enriching and confirming the data obtained in this study. In addition, it may be recommended to conduct scale development studies based on the theoretical basis of this research.

In future researches, a more diverse sampling can be created to include various businesses such as carpet sellers, souvenir sellers, and potters. As another option, a sampling can be formed based on a specific type of business. Finally, research can also be conducted on the experiences and opinions of various tourism stakeholders involved in tour operations regarding the benefits offered by businesses providing services to tour operations. In this context, the benefits offered by businesses to tour guides during tour operations can be examined in detail in future studies. This study, which is based on the relevant gap in the literature, can open the horizon for new research that allows us to examine the interaction of tour guides with businesses in tour operations in more detail.

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Pet-Friendly Tourism in Çeşme: Exploring Hotel Policies

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore hotel policies on pet-friendly accommodation and to reveal the specific acceptance policies in the case of Çeşme, Turkey.

Methodology: Both qualitative and quantitative studies are conducted to determine the pet policies of hotels in Çeşme. Descriptive statistics are adopted to determine the percentage of pet-accepting hotels whereas coding and categorization as qualitative analysis are provided for the identification of hotels pet accept policies.

Results: It was observed that common restrictions, such as weight limits and additional fees, highlight the challenges faced by pet owners. Nearly half of the hotels included in the data collection accept accommodation with pets, while acceptance rate is higher in boutique hotels compared to 4 and 5 star hotels. Most hotels do not identify themselves as pet-friendly hotels.

Originality/value: Although pet-friendly tourism is a modern phenomenon globally, hotel policies have not been examined yet in detail. It is thought that this study will contribute to the development of pet-friendly tourism by determining the current applications of hotels regarding pet policies.

Keywords: pet-friendly tourism, pet-friendly accommodation, hotel policies

Introduction

Pet-friendly tourism is one of the modern tourism trends in recent years (Mlakar and Korze, 2022). This can be seen as a reflection of the individualization paradigm in modern society and the strengthening of the deep emotional bond between pets and their owners (Hidalgo-Fernandez et al., 2023). As the bond between people and their pets strengthens, pet owners may tend to take their pets with them on their travels. This has triggered the expansion of pet-friendly tourism (Wei et al., 2023). Tourism businesses have developed new services for tourists traveling with their pets and it has become necessary to take a position according to the demand for pet friendly tourism. Pet-friendly tourism market has also turned into a growing sector with tourism providers offering services that encourage pet owners to spend more (Buhalis and Chan, 2023). In parallel, accommodation providers have developed a variety of services to respond to the needs of pet-friendly tourism. Since pet-friendly tourism is a prominent segment in the hospitality industry nowadays (Carr and Cohen, 2009), there is a need for specific rules and regulations for pet-friendly tourism stakeholders (Alves et al., 2022). Although researches related to pet-friendly tourism has increased in recent years, studies on pet-friendly accommodation are quite limited**.** Studies have generally focused on managerial aspects, tourists experiences and consumer behaviours. Iamamoto et al (2024) examined whether pet-friendly hotels provide competitive advantages. It was determined that pet-friendly hospitality practices provide customer loyalty and competitive advantage, but large hotel chains missed opportunities because they did not take these principles into account. Hwang and Ryu (2022) investigated the impact of dog-friendly hotel interior architecture on tourists with pet loss syndrome using deepfake technology. Mutti (2024) emphasised that bringing hotels and pet owners together with a digital bridge can improve service quality and contribute to digital transformation in the sector. Pruengpanyanont (2022) developed a budget-friendly pet-friendly hotel business plan that appeals to middle-income local tourists in Thailand. It has been determined that it is an investable, financially viable and appropriate business model for the needs of the target customer group. Lee and Lai (2021) proposed scale is measuring pet affection and aiming to examine the effect of this affection on pet hotel preference. Developed scale reveals significant effects on the hotel preferences of pet owners and can be used in marketing strategies. Some studies focus on several advantages for hotels related to pet-friendliness. Tourists may have a positive attitude towards pet-friendly hotels, pet owners' preference for pet-friendly hotels is largely driven by their personal values and their perceived control over their decisions (Zhang et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2024). There are also some studies exploring the pet policies of hotels. Similar to this study, Abdelhakim and Agwa (2023) studied at how hotels in Egypt deal with pets. They found that most pet services cost extra, and hotels need better pet rules. Koufodontis and Melissourgou (2024) made suggestions for hotels where people with and without pets stay together. They highlight that hotel managers should make fair and complete rules for pet-friendly stays.

As travelling with pets increases globally, hotels need to adapt to the expectations of pet-owning tourists. Despite the economic potential of pet-friendly accommodation, many hotels do not have clear policies, leading to inconsistencies in service delivery. Exploring these policies is important to improve standardisation and enhance guest experiences. Examining how tourism businesses integrate pet-friendly services and provide a more enjoyable experience for both pets and their owners is also a major area. (Türksoy, 2021; Taillon et al., 2015). Batıbeki and Eşitti (2021) reveals travellers' perspectives on pet-friendly travel and the challenges they face. Barriers to pet-friendly tourism make it difficult for tourists to travel with their pets (Gretzel and Hardy, 2015). Due to restrictions in tourism services, social reactions and limitations on travelling with pets, many travellers have a negative attitude towards travelling with pets (Dilek, 2016). Mlakar and Korze (2022) studies tourists' attitudes on pet-friendly hotels by examining the factors that tourists consider when planning a trip. Taillon et al. (2015) analyses the human-animal relationship in pet-friendly tourism, highlighting gaps in consumer purchasing behaviour towards pet-related travel services. Siam (2023) examined the factors affecting the decisions of tourists travelling with pets and the constraints they face. Demir and Demircioğlu (2021) extend the literature on hotels and pet-friendly approaches in Fethiye, Turkey case. They emphasised that hotels are sensitive to pet-friendly approaches in their case but the literature needs to be developed in this regard. Overall, in reference to the gap identified in the literature, this study aims to determine which policies hotels apply in accommodation with pets within the scope of pet-friendly tourism and under which conditions they accept pets. Knowing the practices of hotels will enable a clearer path to be drawn in pet-friendly tourism. Additionally, it will provide a framework for identifying potential barriers for tourists traveling with their pets. Çeşme, which was selected as the sample, has become a popular tourism destination in recent years. It also has strong potential for pet-friendly tourism development. While pet-friendly tourism is increasingly recognised globally, studies on this topic in Turkey are still limited. As one of the most visited countries in the world, Turkey offers an important opportunity for research in this field. Previously there was a study conducted on behalf of pet friendly tourism in Çeşme destination. Türksoy (2021) analysed how food and beverage facilities in Çeşme shape pet-friendly policies. Study reveals that some restaurants accept pets outdoors in response to consumer trends, but do not define themselves as pet-friendly. In this study, these approach will be developed by exploring the hotel policies related to pet-friendly accommodation in the case of Çeşme. This study broaden literature by exploring the hotel policies related to pet-friendly tourism. Study also supports development of Çeşme as a pet-friendly destination. Improving and standardizing pet-friendly services in tourism industy is important for attracting more pet-friendly tourists and meeting their needs. Understanding the specific policies of hotels for guests with pets is crucial to removing barriers.

Methodology

This study uses both quantitative and qualitative analyses to explore the pet-friendly accommodation policies of hotels in Çeşme and the specific acceptance conditions they have. Based on the research question of 'what are the policies of hotels in pet-friendly accommodation' adopted in the study, a combined methodological approach was used. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the percentage of hotels that accept pets and have explicit pet-friendly policies. This data was collected via a phone-based data collection method. Phone calls were conducted to collect data on whether the facility is pet-friendly, its policies, pet acceptance criteria, and whether it identifies itself as pet-friendly through social media channels. Other side qualitative findings were coded and categorized to highlight recurring themes (Miles et al., 2014). Sample was selected using a purposive sampling method focusing on accommodation establishments in Çeşme that best represent the destination's characteristics. Purposive sampling's ability is to focus on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research objectives, allowing for the collection of rich, detailed, and targeted data (Creswell, 2013). Sample was selected with the criteria of the top 50 most popular accommodations in Çeşme according to their rankings on Tripadvisor. In order to ensure sufficient tourist flow, only accommodations with at least 100 reviews were selected. Selection of the most popular establishments aims to capture those most aligned with Çeşme's reputation and appeal as a tourist destination. This method helps make sure the selected hotels are the ones tourists usually see. High review counts also support the assumption that these establishments have hosted a significant number of guests providing insights into visitor behaviors and preferences thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample. 50 hotels were identified with these criteria, of which 11 were 4 and 5 star hotels and 39 were boutique hotels, aligning with the general characteristics of Çeşme.

Results

Collected data analyzed in two separate sections. First, hotels were categorized as boutique or 4 and 5 star hotels and their pet accept rates were descriptively analyzed. Pet accept rates and pet-friendly rates are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequencies of Pet-Friendly Hotels

	Boutique Hotels	**4 -5 Star Hotels**	**Total**
Pet-Accept Rate	%56.41 (22 of 39)	%36.37 (4 of 11)	**%52 (26 of 50)**
Pet-Friendly Rate	%20.51 (8 of 39)	%0 (0 of 11)	**%16 (8 of 50)**

Analysis shows nearly half of the hotels in sample accept pets, with 52% (26 of 50 hotels). Boutique hotels have a higher pet-accept rate of 56.41% (22 of 39) compared to 4 and 5 star hotels which have an acceptance rate of 36.37% (4 of 11). These indicate boutique hotels are more likely to accommodate guests traveling with pets compared to 4 and 5 star hotels in this sample.

Pet-Friendly Rate is a criterion created to determine whether hotels define themselves as a pet-friendly business. This definition includes the use of the term 'pet friendly' on their websites or social media accounts. Hotels were asked whether they consider themselves pet-friendly or not and their answers were compared with their promotions on digital platforms. By analysing the data obtained, the harmony between the actual policies of the hotels and the image they present to the public was evaluated. This reveals some hotels accept pets but do not publicise this clearly. Results provide important findings for understanding the consistency between marketing strategies and actual practices. When considering pet-friendliness, only 16% of the hotels define themselves as "pet-friendly hotel" on social media or visible platforms.

In the second part, the pet acceptance policies of hotels were examined. Descriptive analysis was performed on the responses from 26 pet-accepting hotels out of the 50, and the coded data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Pet Acceptance Policies of Hotels

Theme	**Code**	**Code Description**
Pet Accept Policies	Weight Limitations (10)	Only under 10 or 5 kg pets are accepted.
	Extra Fee Implications (8)	Extra fee needed for pets.
	Pet-Dedicated Rooms (6)	Only accepted in specific rooms.
	Season Limits (5)	Only accepted in low seasons.
	Breed Rules (5)	Only specific pet breeds are accepted.
	Condition of Not Shedding Fur (3)	Only not shedding fur pets are accepted.
	Vaccination Card Necessity (3)	Fully vaccinated pets are allowed.
	Not Being Left Alone in the Room (2)	Only accepted with not being alone in the room.
	Deposit and Room Check (1)	Accepted with taking extra deposit, and room check after check out.

The analysis shows that despite allowing pets various restrictions are in place. The most common rules include weight restrictions (10 hotels) and surcharge requirements (8 hotels). This indicates that hotels generally classify pets under 10 kg as pets and limit accommodation. They also introduce an additional revenue strategy by charging extra fees and specialising the accommodation service. On the other hand, another finding is that pets are only allowed in certain rooms (6 hotels) or during low seasons (5 hotels). It reflects hotels' strategy to maintain occupancy rates with pets and minimize potential disturbances to other guests. Besides, hotels also impose various rules on the characteristics of pets and the responsibilities of guests. Accepting certain breeds (5 hotels) and allowing non-shedding animals (3 hotels) show that hotels pay attention to cleanliness and allergy issues. A vaccination card requirement (3 hotels) reflects health and safety priorities, while some hotels have rules such as not leaving pets unattended in the room (2 hotels) or checking the room after check-out with an additional deposit (1 hotel). These policies indicate that while hotels tend to be pet-friendly, they implement various measures to protect their property and ensure the comfort of other guests. At the same time, these practices can also be considered as a barrier for tourists travelling with their pets.

Conclusion

This study aims to determine the pet acceptance policies of hotels by taking the case of Çeşme. The findings reveal the basic practices about pet-friendly accommodation. When hotels' pet policies are analysed, it is seen that restrictions such as weight limitations, surcharges and acceptance during certain seasons are common. Some hotels only accept certain breeds or non-shedding animals. Conditions such as vaccination card request and additional deposits are applied as part of hygiene and safety measures. The findings showed that hotels adopt different approaches to pet acceptance and that there is no standardised practice. When the sample is evaluated in general, it is seen that only half of the hotels accept pets. This shows that accommodation options for pet owners are still limited. In addition, although some hotels accept pets, they do not clearly state this, which creates uncertainty for tourists. Additionally in the sample, boutique hotels accept pets more than 4-5 star hotels. Although hotels accept pets, many of them do not describe themselves as 'pet friendly hotels'. This inconsistency may affect tourists' decisions. Pet-friendly tourism supports the development of sustainable tourism. Creating pet-friendly destinations can increase the attractiveness of the destination. This is in line with the tourism strategies of the EU and Turkey.

Hotels need clearer and more transparent pet policies. Standardised rules can increase guest satisfaction. Restrictions such as surcharges and weight limits can influence travel preferences. Rules in this area can help hotels generate additional revenue and offer significant potential to increase their share of pet-friendly tourism. Pet-friendly tourism offers hotels an opportunity. Hotels can design tailored made services for tourists travelling with pets. Restaurants, parks and transport services also should adapt to this trend. Increasing the awareness of hotel managers can improve pet friendliness of hotels. Hotels that clearly define their pet policies can attract more customers. Digital marketing strategies should be in line with hotels' actual policies. The study is a preliminary study limited to 50 hotels. More comprehensive research is needed. However, considering the gap in the literature, it is important in terms of encouraging future studies. Pet policies also contribute to sustainability in tourism. Future research should compare different destinations and hotel types. More cooperation between policy makers and tourism stakeholders is needed. The findings will help to develop more efficient policies for pet-friendly tourism. In particular Çeşme has a potential as a pet-friendly destination. Further works will contribute to increasing the accessibility and inclusiveness of Çeşme for pet owners.

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A Participant Observation on Tourist-to-Tourist Interaction in a Guided Tour of the Black Sea Region

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the nature and consequences of tourist-to-tourist interactions during guided tours.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing the participant observation technique for data collection. Field data were collected during a guided tour of the Black Sea region, in which 41 adult Turkish tourists participated. The data were collected between September 7th and September 12th, 2022. The field notes were transcribed digitally, and their content was analyzed.

Results: The findings revealed that tourist-to-tourist interactions occur through themes such as criticizing or seeking support, calming others, sharing experiences and emotions, exchanging ideas, forming friendships, and fostering community. While often overlooked in tourism research, these dynamics are crucial to understanding how tourists influence each other's experiences during guided tours.

Originality/value: Despite growing interest in the social dynamics of tourism, previous research primarily focused on tourist-local and tourist-staff interactions, often overlooking the equally significant tourist-to-tourist interactions, particularly in guided tours. By employing participant observation as a methodological approach, this study provides a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of tourist-to-tourist interactions, contributing to the social interaction theory.

Keywords Tourist-to-tourist interactions, guided tours, social interaction theory, participant observation.

Introduction

Tourists often participate in tours, cruise travels, events, or festivals not only to spend time but also to interact with other tourists (Huang & Hsu, 2010; Packer & Ballantyne, 2011; Prebensen & Foss, 2011; Rihova et al., 2013). Within this environment, positive tourist-to-tourist interactions are interpreted as social exchanges between individuals (Jung et al., 2017). Studies confirm that such interactions are inevitable and impactful in destinations and service contexts, producing positive and negative consequences (Adam, 2021; Huang & Hsu, 2010; Loi & Pearce, 2015). For instance, tourists express dissatisfaction when encountering inappropriate behaviors from others, such as rudeness toward service personnel or fellow tourists (Loi & Pearce, 2012). Recent studies also highlight that tourist-to-tourist interactions contribute to creating positive tourism experiences

(Grove & Fisk, 1997; Han et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2022), increasing tourist satisfaction (Papathanassis, 2012; Sop et al., 2023; Wu, 2007), and bolstering destination image (Freire, 2006; Yang, 2016).

Based on the contributions of tourist-tourist interactions in increasing tourist satisfaction, bolstering destination image, and creating positive tourism experiences, tourist-tourist interaction studies in the literature have been reviewed. Tourist-tourist interaction has been analyzed on a cruise vacation (Huang & Hsu, 2010), pilgrims who completed the Route of Santiago (Millán, Garzon & Navarro, 2016), elderly consumers in local coffee shops (Altinay et al, 2019), festival experience (Cheng, Liu & Bi, 2021), in a hotel establishment offering all-inclusive service (Sop, Günaydın & Kozak, 2023), among customers of a recreational center participating in health/fitness classes (Jung, Yoo & Arnold, 2017). However, the composition and impact of the tourist-tourist relationship in guided group activities have received little attention (Lee, Boon, & McCarthy, 2021). Torres (2015) also points out that more research is needed to understand tourist-tourist interactions better within a tour group. The fact that there is intense interaction in tour operations (Yan & Ho, 2017) necessitates filling this research gap.

To reveal the dynamics in guided tours, which are recognized as highly interactive service environments where social bonds and conflicts are more likely to emerge, is needed (Yan & Ho, 2017; Keskin Pulluk & Sop, 2024; Zatori et al., 2018). Therefore, this study aims to explore the nature and consequences of tourist-to-tourist interactions during guided tours. Employing participant observation as a methodological approach provides a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of these interactions, contributing to the social interaction theory (Allport, 1954). The current study responds to the following research questions, building on this theoretical framework and the identified research gap:

RQ1: How do tourist-to-tourist interactions occur in guided tours?

RQ2: What are the consequences of tourist-to-tourist interactions in guided tours?

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing the participant observation technique for data collection. This technique allowed for the natural and unbiased observation of social interactions among tourists during guided tours. The first author collected field data during a guided tour of the Black Sea region between September 7 and September 12, 2022. The tour involved a group of 41 adult Turkish tourists. The first author participated in the tour in the role of a "tourist" and adopted a "complete participant" stance (Gold, 1958), focusing on tourist-to-tourist interactions to produce field notes. Throughout the tour, the researcher documented observations based on the physical settings and information gained through direct interactions and observations of other tourists. Since the research area was a tour bus setting, the first author could observe as many people as the capacity of the tour bus. As Seaton (2002) pointed out, the tour participants stayed the same and the observer was able to monitor them all.

Kawulich (2005) defines participant observation as a process in which researchers observe people's activities in a natural environment and participate in these activities to get knowledge. A guided

Black Sea tour, including Batumi destination, was purchased as a single-person accommodation tour by adopting the participant observation method. The tour departed from Ankara. The research was conducted under conditions where no one in the tour environment was aware of the researcher's identity as both tour guide and researcher. As Seaton (2002) suggested, field notes were written in a pocket diary in the order of day one, day two, day three, and day four. The researcher wrote notes on the pocket diary at points during the day when tourists would not pay attention and during breaks. After checking into the hotel every evening during the tour, the researcher detailed the field notes in the pocket diary.

After the tour was completed, the first author transcribed day-by-day pocket diary notes digitally. The observation notes and specified themes were shared with the second author. He read the observation data and themes and evaluated the first author's inferences about the events. In that way, peer debriefing prevented possible biases (Torres, 2015).

Results

The findings derived from the content analysis on participant observation notes reveal that tourist-to-tourist interactions in guided tours occur within the framework of the following themes, which can be interpreted as stimuli that trigger tourist interactions during guided tours. Brief explanations of these stimuli and their consequences on tourist-to-tourist interactions are provided below:

1. *Criticizing or seeking support*: When a tourist criticizes the tour personnel, service quality, or other tourists, the interaction is initiated if another tourist supports the criticism. This observation shows that critical comments can serve as a starting point for engaging with other tourists during the tour.
2. *Calming others*: Tourists who encounter issues or express frustration with the service are often calmed by other tourists. This process fosters verbal communication between the parties and helps maintain group morale, preventing a decline in the tour group's motivation.
3. *Overcoming feelings of unease*: When a tourist expresses discomfort or unease about a particular issue, it often prompts comments or actions from other tourists. Efforts to address the tourist's unease foster positive interactions within the group.
4. *Sharing experiences*: During the tour, particularly during free time, tourists share their personal experiences with others. Mutual sharing of experiences deepens interactions among tourists and helps break the monotony of the tour.
5. *Sharing emotions*: As tourists develop closer bonds with others in the group, they open up and verbally share their emotions. This emotional exchange creates a more intimate and personal interaction.
6. *Exchanging opinions*: During shopping activities on the tour, tourists converse about product features and prices. Discussions about the value of items allow tourists to share their opinions, fostering verbal interaction.
7. *Forming new friendships*: Some tourists demonstrate a desire to form friendships with others during the tour, aiming to create a pleasant social environment and bond with like-minded individuals. To achieve this, they exhibit positive behaviors and engage in friendly interactions, contributing to a positive social atmosphere within the group.

8. *Belonging to a community*: Tourists often perceive the tour group as a temporary community during the guided tour. This sense of belonging influences the nature and strength of interactions among tourists. For example, a tourist may follow the group's decision to tip the guide, even if she/he initially opposed it. Protective attitudes within the group can also emerge; for instance, when one tourist loses a belonging of hers/his, the entire group may come together to search for it and provide assistance.

Conclusion

Tourism provides fertile ground for interpersonal exchanges to mitigate prejudices and foster mutual understanding under appropriate conditions, supporting Allport's social interaction theory (1954). This study builds on this perspective, demonstrating that guided tours, as highly interactive environments, enable tourists to connect through shared experiences and emotions (Bai & Chang, 2023; Su & Wall, 2010; Torres, 2016). The results align with prior studies that emphasize the role of social interactions in shaping positive tourism experiences and enhancing satisfaction (Grove & Fisk, 1997; Yang, 2016). However, the themes of criticizing or seeking support, calming others, and overcoming feelings of unease are unique results of the observed tour. These results contribute to the literature on the dynamics of tourist-tourist interactions in guided tours.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that tour operators and guides can enhance the tourism experience by fostering environments conducive to positive tourist-to-tourist interactions. Designing activities that encourage collaboration and shared experiences deepen tourist interpersonal bonds, enriching the tour experience.

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Predictors of Net Promoter Scores (NPS) of recommending Istanbul as a historical, cultural, or vacation destination

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to assess the likelihood of recommending Istanbul as a historical, cultural, or vacation destination using the Net Promoter Score (NPS) and to explore the impact of demographics and trip behaviors on these scores.

Methodology: An online survey collected data from 398 international tourists who visited Istanbul in the past five years. Net Promoter Score (NPS) was calculated, and multinomial logistic regression was conducted using SPSS.

Results: The NPS scores varied by type of tourism, with cultural destination receiving the highest scores (NPS = 33.4), indicating a stronger likelihood of recommendations. The regression analysis identified significant predictors of NPS scores, including length of stay as a key factor across all tourism types, followed by demographic factors such as age and education.

Originality/value: This study fills a critical gap in the literature by applying NPS in measuring tourist satisfaction and loyalty, and by examining the differences in predictors among three types of destination NPS. It also demonstrates the practical application of NPS in destination image studies and offers actionable insights for tourism practitioners to address significant influencing factors and enhance Istanbul's appeal.

Keywords Net Promoter Score (NPS); Predictors; Perception; Cultural

Introduction

In 2023, Istanbul ranked as the most visited city in the world, attracting 20.2 million international tourists (Euromonitor International, 2023). Prior studies have examined the perceptions of Istanbul visitors, focusing on aspects such as brand personality (Sahin & Baloglu, 2011), differences in perceptions among source countries (Topsümer et al., 2012), and the role of translation in shaping destination image (Demirkol-Ertürk, 2013). However, these studies were conducted over a decade ago. Given the evolving demands and preferences of tourists, their perceptions may have shifted. Tourists' perceptions of Istanbul can be understood from three perspectives: cultural, historical, and vacation. Understanding which image aligns more closely with tourists' perceptions could be helpful for managing Istanbul's destination image. Therefore, there is a need to examine visitors' perceptions of Istanbul and their intention to recommend the city as a destination.

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) has received significant attention from both academics and practitioners since its introduction by Reichheld (2003). A key advantage of NPS is its ability to measure customer satisfaction and recommendation intentions simultaneously. As a single-item metric, NPS is regarded as one of the most effective methods for evaluating customer satisfaction and intention (de Haan et al. 2015). The standard NPS question asks respondents, "On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely is it that you would recommend [organization, product, service] to friends and family members?" Based on their responses, participants are categorized into three groups: Promoters (scores of 9-10), Passives (scores of 7-8), and Detractors (scores of 0-6). The NPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters. Although the effectiveness of the NPS metric is well-documented, its application in destination image studies has not been extensively explored. Pinar et al. (2024a) suggested that NPS could help develop effective strategies for entering international markets by increasing the likelihood of brand recommendations. A follow-up study found significant relationships between NPS and consumer demographics, emphasizing that understanding these demographics can be pivotal for enhancing NPS, driving recommendations, and ultimately increasing sales and profitability in international business (Pinar et al., 2024b).

Therefore, this study aims to calculate the likelihood of recommending Istanbul as a historical, cultural, or vacation destination using NPS. It also aims to examine the impact of demographics (gender, age, education, and life stage) and trip behaviors (prior visits to Istanbul, length of stay) of the three NPS.

Methodology

To achieve the research goal, the study conducted an online survey to collect data. The questionnaire was designed with three sections: 1) three single-item NPS questions about their likelihood of recommending Istanbul as a historical, cultural, or vacation destination; 2) two questions regarding their trip behaviors, such as prior visits to Istanbul and the length of stay; and 3) demographic information. The questionnaire was set up via Qualtrics and distributed through Prolific. Participants were required to be 18 years or older and to have visited Istanbul within the last five years. After screening and removing invalid responses, the final dataset included 398 valid respondents for further analysis. The NPS scores were calculated, and multinomial logistic regression was performed using SPSS.

Results

Table 1 presents the NPS for Istanbul as a destination, segmented by the type of tourism: historical, cultural, and vacation. The overall scores indicate that visitors are most likely to recommend Istanbul for its cultural attractions, followed by its historical sites and vacation experiences. The results also reveal that respondents with the following profile tend to give higher NPS scores: female, aged 35-44, married, and with a bachelor's degree.

The multinomial logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictors of NPS, with three NPS categories as the dependent variables, while treating demographics (gender, age, education, life stage) and trip behaviors (prior visits to Istanbul, length of stay) as independent variables (Table 2). The results indicate significant predictors for each category: age, education, and length of stay for the historical destination NPS; only length of stay for the cultural destination NPS; and gender, age, and length of stay for the vacation destination NPS. These findings reveal that length of stay is a crucial predictor for all NPS categories, followed by age. Furthermore, the results suggest that visitors' NPS scores increase with longer stays in Istanbul.

Table 1. Calculating three NPS scores among demographics

Demographics		**Historical NPS**	**Cultural NPS**	**Vacation NPS**
Overall		27.2	33.4	25.4
Gender	Male	17	24.6	12.8
	Female	34.8	40	34.8
Age	18-24	18.8	23.8	22.8
	25-34	28.2	35.6	28.2
	35-44	37	43.1	30.8
	>45	26.6	30	3.3
Life stage	Single	21.5	29.2	19.4
	Married	39.1	42.1	36.9
	Prefer not to disclose	16.6	27.7	22.2
Education	High school graduate or less	21.1	15.7	-2.6
	Some college, but no degree	10	20	12
	Associate or junior college degree	-17.7	0	-11.8
	Bachelor's degree	40.7	43.5	39.6
	Graduate degree	17.3	33.4	22.6
	Professional degree	30.8	35.9	25.6

Table 2. Multinomial logistic regression of three NPS categories

DV	**IVs**	**Sig.**	**DV**	**IVs**	**Sig.**	**DV**	**IVs**	**Sig.**
Historical NPS categories	Gender	.062	Cultural NPS categories	Gender	.301	Vacation NPS categories	Gender	.003
	Age	<.001		Age	.189		Age	.028
	Edu	.019		Edu	.229		Edu	.171

	Life stage	.566		Life stage	.188		Life stage	.341
	Prior visits	.617		Prior visits	.611		Prior visits	.363
	Length of stay	.005		Length of stay	.032		Length of stay	<.001

Conclusion

From the results, the NPS scores for recommending Istanbul as a historical and vacation destination are below 30, which are lower than the benchmark NPS for the tourism industry. In contrast, the cultural NPS is the highest at 33.4. Across all three tourism types, NPS scores are higher among the same demographic groups: females aged 35-44, married, with a bachelor's degree. The regression results reveal that length of stay is a crucial predictor for all three types of NPS, followed by age. This research provides theoretical contributions by confirming the applicability of NPS in destination management and by examining the differences in predictors among historical, cultural, and vacation destination NPS.

This research also offers practical implications for tourism practitioners in Istanbul. Given the high NPS scores for cultural destinations, tourism marketers should focus on promoting Istanbul's rich cultural heritage. Specific measures can be highlighting museums, historical and religious sites, and organizing cultural festivals to attract tourists interested in these aspects. In addition, the significance of stay length as a predictor of NPS across all destination types suggests that creating more engaging, longer-duration experiences could enhance visitor satisfaction and loyalty.

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The Impact of Unforgettable Restaurant Experiences on Guests' Satisfaction with Businesses and Their Intention to Revisit: A Comparison between Turkiye and the USA

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Abstract

Purpose: In the rapidly developing food and beverage sector, it has been observed that guests have recently demanded some changes in their requests and expectations such as interacting with the local and regional region that the restaurants they visit belong to, getting to know the local food culture and lifestyle, and wanting to have unique and unforgettable adventurous experiences. Knowing that ensuring the satisfaction of the guests is an important determinant in making them choose the businesses again and visit the destination region again, restaurants have started to try to offer unique and unforgettable experiences to the guests. The aim of this research is to examine the effect of unforgettable guest experiences on customer satisfaction and revisit intention in the context of adventure tourism.

Study design/methodology/approach: In this respect, food and beverage businesses providing services with artificial intelligence and augmented reality in Turkey and America represent the universe of the research. Quantitative research method was adopted in the research and survey technique was used as the data collection method. A total of 385 surveys were included in the research and were provided from participants who volunteered to participate. The collected data were evaluated by performing reliability, factor analysis and regression analysis.

Results: As a result of the analysis, it was observed that unforgettable restaurant experiences affected the satisfaction of the guests and aroused their curiosity and interest. Therefore, it was concluded that the intention of the guests to visit again was positively affected. It was seen that the research results supported the literature.

Originality/value: As a result of the research, the fact that the study measuring customer satisfaction and repeat visit effects on unforgettable experiences of augmented reality and artificial intelligence used in restaurants could not be included in the literature reveals the originality and importance of the study. In this context, at the end of the research, some suggestions were presented that are thought to be useful to restaurant managers, food and beverage businesses, sector representatives and researchers who will conduct future studies on this subject.

Keywords: Restaurant experience, Unforgettable Restaurant experience, Gastronomy 4.0, Customer Satisfaction,Repeat Visit Intention

Introduction

Restaurant experience is defined as the subjective mental state felt by guests before, during, and after the preparation of meals and the presentation of meals (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). With the increasing interest in unforgettable and impressive restaurant experiences that constitute the essence of the food and beverage industry and the intensification of competition, the interest in destination regions and the idea that food and beverage businesses should provide adventure tourism and gastronomy tourism experiences by offering unique and highly emotional experiences to their guests in order to increase their competitiveness have begun to gain more importance (Zhang et al., 2018). The degree of unforgettability of the experience, in other words, its memorability, which is an important issue for gastronomy experience, is seen as a primary and reliable source of information when deciding to visit a destination (Pine & Gilmore, 2013; Cornelisse, 2014). Another important factor affecting the decision to revisit and the choice of restaurant is ensuring guest satisfaction, which can be considered among the most important arguments of successful destination marketing (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In ensuring guest satisfaction, which can be expressed as the satisfaction that occurs as a result of comparing expectations and restaurant experiences before tasting the food by the guests, it is very important for businesses to follow guest expectations and possible changes (İlban et al., 2016; Yıldırım, 2005). Guest expectations can change every day, and tourists now want to have a unique, unforgettable dining experience instead of standard products. The decision to revisit can be defined as a result of guest satisfaction (Aksay, 2017).
When the tourism and gastronomy literature is examined, it can be said that studies on unforgettable tourism and guest experience, which is a very current and important subject, have intensified in recent years and more international studies have been encountered on the subject. In the literature review process conducted within the scope of the study, it is seen that there are studies that associate different subjects with unforgettable tourism experience, but there are not many studies on gastronomy and food and beverage businesses. Studies on scale development (Chandralal et al., 2015; Coudanaris, 2017; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Kim et al., 2012) and studies on revealing the foundations of unforgettable tourism experience (Cornelisse, 2018; Tung & Ritchie, 2011) are encountered. In addition, there are studies that address revisit intention under the title of behavioral intention (Ali et al., 2016; Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015; Kırtıl, 2019), as well as studies that associate unforgettable tourism experience with revisit intention (Aksay, 2017; Ali & Omar, 2014; Chen & Rahman, 2018; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Huang et al., 2019; Oh & Jeoung, 2007; Kahraman, 2019; Kim, 2009; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Mahdzar, 2015; Sthapit, 2013; Zhang et al., 2018). In addition, within the scope of the studies examined within the scope of the literature review, no study has been found that relates unforgettable restaurant experience to satisfaction alone, and no study has been found that evaluates unforgettable restaurant experience, satisfaction

and revisit intention together. The study concluded that there is a positive relationship between unforgettable restaurant experience and guests' sense of belonging to food and beverage businesses and destination brand personality; and there is a positive relationship between restaurant brand personality and satisfaction, restaurant sense of belonging and satisfaction, satisfaction and behavioral intention.

Methodology

The research uses the survey technique, one of the quantitative research methods. Within the scope of the research, a survey form was applied to guests who visited restaurants using artificial intelligence and augmented reality in both Turkey and the USA and who experienced an unforgettable restaurant experience at least once. The variables of the research consist of unforgettable restaurant experience (independent variable), customer satisfaction and revisit intention (dependent variables). The research model was created with the specified variables. Tourism studies in the literature on the subject were examined and the research model was proposed assuming that unforgettable restaurant experience affects customer satisfaction and revisit intention.
As a result of the literature review, the results of similar studies in tourism related to the subject were evaluated and hypotheses were created within the framework of the model in this study covering the variables of unforgettable restaurant experience, customer satisfaction and revisit intention. In this direction, first of all, studies on tourism experience that touched on the effect of unforgettable restaurant experience on customer satisfaction were evaluated. In the study conducted by Kim (2009) to examine the relationship between unforgettable tourism experience and behavioral intentions, it was revealed that unforgettable tourism experiences are an important element in determining tourists' satisfaction. In the study conducted by Gohary et al. (2018), which investigated the effect of tourists' unforgettable tourism experiences on destination satisfaction and revisit intention, it was determined that unforgettable tourism experience affects destination satisfaction. In addition, it was revealed in the study that destination satisfaction mediates the relationship between unforgettable tourism experience, positive word of mouth communication and revisit intentions. In the study conducted by Kırtıl (2019), the relationship between unforgettable tourism experience, destination brand personality, destination belonging, satisfaction and behavioral intention variables was examined. In the study, it was determined that the sense of belonging and brand personality formed as a result of unforgettable tourism experience provide satisfaction to tourists and that the satisfaction created positively affects the intention to revisit the destination. Based on the results of similar studies, hypotheses were created for unforgettable restaurant experiences.

Results

Customer satisfaction towards restaurants is important all over the world in guests' decisions to revisit a destination. In ensuring customer satisfaction in tourism, it is very important for restaurants to offer unique and unforgettable services both in Turkey and the United States. In recent years, it can be said that it has become mandatory for regional and local restaurants in destinations that want to gain competitive advantage in the increasingly competitive environment to offer high memorability and impressive experiences to their guests in parallel with the change in guest expectations. The basic structure of this research was developed in parallel with this idea. As a result of the analysis of the research hypotheses, three hypotheses (H1, H2 and H3) were accepted. In the first hypothesis (H1), it was determined that unforgettable restaurant experience affects satisfaction positively (β= 0.626 and p=0.000), and this result is consistent with the results of the studies in the literature (Kim, 2009; Kırtıl, 2019). For example; Gohary et al. (2018) In the study investigating the effects of tourists' unforgettable tourism experiences on destination satisfaction and revisit intention, it was found that unforgettable tourism experience affects destination satisfaction. In the second hypothesis (H2), it was found that unforgettable restaurant experience positively affects revisit intention (β= 0.559 and p=0.000), and this result is similar to the results of the studies in the literature (Aksay, 2017; Chen & Rahman, 2018; Demir, 2018; Gohary et al., 2018; Kim, 2009; Kim et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2018). For example; In the study conducted by Huang et al. (2019), it was revealed that unforgettable tourism experience positively affects revisit and recommendation intentions. In the study conducted by Aşık & Kutsynska (2019) in Ukraine, it was determined that the dimensions of unforgettable tourism experience greatly affect tourists' intention to revisit and recommend.

In the study conducted by Seyfi et al. (2019) to investigate unforgettable cultural tourism experiences, it was found that creating an unforgettable tourism experience for tourists will affect the revisit intention. Finally, in the third hypothesis (H3), it was found that customer satisfaction affects the revisit intention positively (β= 0.768 and p=0.000). It can be said that this result is consistent with the results of the studies in the literature (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Ali et al., 2016; Çetin, 2015; Kozak, 2001; Öztürk, 2019; Prayag et al., 2013; Seçilmiş, 2012; Sharma & Nayak 2018; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). For example; Ali & Omar (2014) examined tourists' satisfaction with Malaysian holiday hotels and their revisit intentions and found that tourist satisfaction has a positive effect on revisit intentions. As a result, it can be said that no study has been found in the literature review that examines the effects of unforgettable restaurant experiences on customer satisfaction and revisit intentions within the scope of adventure tourism and gastronomy tourism. It is thought that the study will fill an important gap in academic terms.

If we need to offer some suggestions for food and beverage businesses, country tourism representatives and sector leaders; when the positive effect of an unforgettable restaurant experience on satisfaction and revisit intentions is considered, the desire to visit tourism destinations should increase, restaurants offering more international services should be experienced and businesses offering local local services should follow technology closely. With the awareness that guests are now breaking away from the usual patterns in gastronomy tourism and adventure tourism and expecting products and services that are out of the ordinary, priority should be given to local and innovative technological resources in order to ensure guest satisfaction within the scope of adventure and gastronomy tourism and different digital environments should be offered for the interaction of guests and local people. In this sense, the rich gastronomy that Turkey and America have, new generation kitchen presentations, Michelin star restaurants, robot chefs, robot waiters, robot baristas, hologram and 3D animated tables, chairs and plates, restaurants and menus integrated with virtual reality glasses, etc. systems can be used. Since the experience includes personalization, personalized menus, memorable options and personalized digital services can be offered to guests, and differentiated events that can provide authentic experiences and maximize the experience. For example, the technologies in the menus in America can be integrated with the menu technologies in Turkey. In addition, Michelin-starred restaurant chefs can be provided with special events in different destinations to offer local flavors. If we need to offer some suggestions for researchers who will work on this subject; There are many restaurants with historical and cultural characteristics in Turkey and America. Studies can be conducted on the satisfaction of unforgettable tourism experiences and revisit intentions with cultural tourists visiting different destinations. A new study can be conducted using qualitative research methods. Unforgettable tourism experience research can be conducted for tourists in areas where cultural tourism is carried out, such as museums, historical and cultural venues, and archaeological sites.

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Family Travel Planning: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

Purpose: Family travel planning is important for both individuals and society. It is influenced by factors like family dynamics, budget management, and time management. The main goal of this study is to identify the challenges families face when planning trips. It also explores how these challenges can become opportunities. The study will examine how travel choices, budgets, and time limits affect family trip planning. Based on this, suggestions will be made to help families plan better trips.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: This research uses a qualitative approach to deeply understand how families plan their trips. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and surveys. Families will share their travel experiences, preferences, and challenges. The collected data will be analyzed using the thematic analysis method.

Results: The research shows that families encounter common challenges when planning trips, including budget constraints, time management, and meeting children's needs. However, these challenges can also have positive aspects. They encourage better communication, provide new experiences, and promote quality time together. Suggestions have been made to help families plan their trips more effectively.

Originality/value: This study adds to existing research on family travel planning. It provides a new perspective on the challenges families face and how these can become opportunities. It also offers practical ideas for the travel industry to develop family-friendly services. The study's unique value is in finding strategies to improve family travel experiences and make trips more meaningful.

Keywords Travel Planning, Family Dynamics, Family in Tourism

Introduction

Travel is an important activity that enhances the quality of life of individuals and families, supports cultural interaction and personal development. However, family travel planning is more complex than individual travel. Factors such as the age, interests, budget constraints and time management of family members can make travel planning a challenging process.

Family travel planning represents a multifaceted effort that balances the wants and needs of various family members and copes with a multitude of logistical challenges and opportunities. As families increasingly seek meaningful experiences together, the process of choosing destinations, accommodations and activities can be both exciting and daunting. On the one hand, families face obstacles such as budget constraints, different preferences among family members and the complexities of coordinating schedules. On the contrary, this planning phase offers unique opportunities for bonding and collaboration by encouraging a sense of common purpose among family members. Moreover, with the rise of digital resources, families now have access to a range of tools and platforms that can simplify planning and enhance the travel experience.

This study examines how family dynamics shape the travel experience, as well as the solutions offered by the travel industry for families. Not only does it reduce potential challenges associated with logistics such as planning, accommodations, and budgeting, it also fosters family bonding through shared adventures. The increasing complexity of travel options available today, which can often overwhelm families without a structured approach, highlights the importance of meticulous planning. Having a clear itinerary ensures that all members' interests are taken into account, allowing families to allocate time wisely and engage in meaningful activities. Additionally, as community challenges such as transportation accessibility arise, families must navigate these complexities to enhance their travel experiences.

1. Family Travel Planning Challenges

The complexity of family travel planning can present numerous challenges that can overshadow potential experiences. It is the diverse interests and needs of family members that can complicate destination selection and activity planning. With changing preferences, parents must balance their children's desire for adventure with their own interests, leading to potential conflicts and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, logistical challenges such as budgeting, scheduling, and securing suitable accommodations further complicate the planning process. Successful family travel planning requires not only careful consideration of these challenges, but also a proactive approach to creating enriching and enjoyable travel experiences (Wu, et al, 2021). We can summarize the potential challenges of family travel planning by grouping them as follows.

1.1. Reconciling Different Needs and Preferences

Family travel planning can become a complex process when different interests and preferences of different individuals come together. Each family member has different expectations, interests and travel preferences, which can make it difficult to create a common plan. This can affect the dynamics within the family and negatively affect the travel experience (Civelek, Civelek, 2023).

First of all, the presence of different age groups among family members is an important factor affecting travel preferences. For example, while children are generally looking for fun and adventure, parents may want a vacation focused on rest and relaxation. This difference can lead to conflicts in travel planning (Li, et al., 2024). In addition, some family members are more interested in cultural experiences, while others may prefer activities such as nature walks or beach vacations.

To overcome these difficulties, it is important to ensure open communication between family members. The ability of each individual to express their expectations and desires can help create a common plan. It is also necessary to show flexibility in order to achieve compromise among family members. For example, one day the child may focus on an activity they prefer, while the next day a plan may be made according to the parents’ wishes. The difficulties that families face in planning travel can be overcome by balancing the interests and preferences among individuals. Good communication and flexibility can increase harmony within the family and provide a more enjoyable travel experience (Obrador, 2012).

1.2. Budget Constraints

Family travel usually requires higher costs compared to individual travel. Expenses for accommodation, transportation, food and beverages, and activities can significantly strain the family budget. Especially during times of economic uncertainty, families may have to postpone or restrict their travel plans. Although travel is an important experience for family members, financial constraints can complicate this process. Family travel planning includes not only elements such as destination selection and accommodation, but also budget management (Alegre, et al., 2010).

Families' travel budgets are usually limited, and this poses a significant obstacle to travel planning. Families with children in particular face additional responsibilities such as education expenses, health expenses, and daily living expenses (Ottolini, et al., 2015). Therefore, a limited budget allocated for travel narrows down the destinations and accommodation options that families prefer. In addition, budget constraints affect families' travel dates and durations, reducing the flexibility of holiday plans. In addition to budget constraints, other challenges families face when planning a trip include time management, children's needs, and different expectations among family members. Having family members from different age groups makes it difficult to plan various activities during the trip, which can negatively affect the quality of the travel experience (McLynn, Speilberg, 1978). Budget constraints play an important role in family travel planning, limiting travel experiences. In order for families to overcome these challenges, they need to develop effective budget management and flexible planning strategies.

1.3. Time Management and Scheduling

One of the most obvious challenges in family travel planning is harmonizing the needs and expectations of different individuals. Each individual's travel preferences, interests, and time constraints vary. This can lead to conflicts among family members and make it difficult to create a travel plan. In addition, children's school calendars, parents' work schedules, and other social obligations are important factors in determining travel dates (Porta, et al., 2013).

Time management plays a critical role in family travel planning. Elements such as preparations, reservations, and budget planning that need to be made before the trip require effective time management (Schänzel, Yeoman, 2015). The time constraints that families face during this process often negatively affect the quality of the planning. Therefore, developing time management strategies during travel planning can make the process more efficient and stress-free. The difficulties in family travel planning are important factors to consider in terms of time management and scheduling. Developing effective strategies for families to overcome these challenges will both improve their travel experiences and strengthen relationships within the family (Allen, 2009).

1.4. Health and Safety Concerns

While travel offers both an enjoyable and educational experience for families, it also comes with various risks and uncertainties. Global health crises, especially in recent years, have become an important factor affecting families' travel decisions. One of the biggest challenges for families in travel planning is assessing health risks. Factors such as the quality of health services in the region they are traveling to, the prevalence of infectious diseases, and vaccination requirements directly affect families' travel decisions. Families with children, in particular, are more cautious by considering their children's health status and shape their travel plans accordingly (Țuclea, et al., 2020).

In addition, security concerns also play an important role in families' travel planning. Factors such as terrorism, crime rates, and natural disasters are among the factors families consider when choosing destinations to travel. Families, along with their desire to have a safe holiday, conduct detailed research and take precautions such as travel insurance to avoid possible dangers. Health and safety concerns are important factors that complicate the decision-making process when planning a family's trip. In order for families to overcome these difficulties, it is important for them to have access to accurate information and receive support from reliable sources. Detailed planning before the trip plays a critical role in protecting both the health and safety of families (Neumann, 2006).

2. Opportunities for Family Travel Planning

Family travel planning is an important process that shapes not only the logistics processes but also the interaction and holiday experience between family members. When planned correctly, travel can turn into opportunities that strengthen family ties, provide new cultural experiences and offer relaxing moments (Culbert, Renshaw, 1972). Early booking discounts, family-friendly accommodation options and holiday opportunities surrounded by nature are among the elements that make families' holiday process more economical and enjoyable. The tourism sector can make these opportunities more accessible by offering customized services for families' demands.

2.1. Solutions Offered by the Travel Industry

The travel industry offers various solutions to meet the needs of families. Family-friendly hotels, kids' clubs, family packages and flexible reservation options make it easier for families to plan their travels (Arıkan, Öztürk, 2018). In addition, digital platforms and mobile applications make travel planning more accessible and personalized. Families' motivations for traveling consist of elements such as gaining experience, strengthening ties and getting to know new cultures. The travel industry is developing various innovative solutions to meet these needs (Lehto, et al., 2009).

Taking into account the needs of individuals in different age groups is one of the most important stages of the travel process. In this context, the travel industry makes the travel experience more accessible and enjoyable by offering customized packages for the needs of families. For example, applications such as family-friendly hotels, special activities for children and family discounts play an important role in families' travel planning. In addition, the development of digital technologies provides great convenience in families' travel planning. (Whittington, 2014). Mobile applications and web platforms allow families to organize their travels more effectively. These platforms allow users to find options that suit their budget, adjust travel dates flexibly and obtain necessary information before traveling (Peattie, Moutinho, 2000).

2.2. Strengthening Family Communication and Bonding

Travel is an important activity that increases interaction among family members, provides common experiences and strengthens emotional bonds. When families travel together, it not only helps them discover new places but also deepens communication between individuals (Kousis, 1989). The travel planning process requires cooperation and communication among family members. When family members exchange ideas about travel routes, accommodations and activities, it encourages everyone to participate. This process allows individuals to express their own opinions and respect the opinions of others. Thus, communication skills within the family develop and a stronger understanding is formed between individuals (Durko, Petrick, 2013).

In addition, shared experiences during travel create lasting memories among family members. These memories strengthen family ties and establish an emotional bond between individuals. Difficulties encountered during travel improve the ability of family members to find solutions together and increase the sense of solidarity. Such experiences reinforce trust within the family and increase the commitment of individuals to each other. Family travel planning is not only a physical journey, but also a process that strengthens communication and ties within the family. In this context, families considering travel as an opportunity will provide significant benefits both individually and socially (Lehto, et al., 2009).

2.3. Cultural Discovery and Education

Travel allows individuals to interact with different cultures, while also contributing to the enrichment of educational experiences. Family travel planning is an important tool that supports the learning processes of children and parents together. Family travels offer the opportunity to experience cultural diversity. Visits to different geographies allow family members to learn about local traditions, languages, and lifestyles. Such interactions help children develop social skills such as empathy and tolerance, while also increasing their cultural awareness. For example, a family can travel to a different country and discover the history, art, and cuisine of that country on site. Such experiences increase children's motivation to learn and contribute to the concreteification of abstract knowledge (Wu, et al., 2021). From an educational perspective, travel offers families opportunities for their children to understand the subjects in the school curriculum more deeply.

Places such as museums, historical sites and natural parks are rich resources that support children's learning processes. By visiting these places, families can provide their children with practical information in areas such as history, science and art. In addition, group activities during travel contribute to the development of cooperation and communication skills. This process contributes to the social and academic development of individuals, while also becoming an experience that strengthens family ties (Pan, Shang, 2023).

2.4. New Experiences and Memories

Travel increases the quality of time spent together by increasing interaction between family members. Families' opening up to different geographies and cultures allows for new experiences. During this process, family members have the opportunity to discover new places and meet different cultural practices and lifestyles. Such experiences broaden individuals' worldviews while also reinforcing communication and solidarity within the family. Family travel is also of great importance in terms of creating memories. Experiences experienced during travel create shared memories among family members. These memories strengthen family ties and become valuable stories that can be passed on to future generations. In addition, experiences gained during travel contribute to the personal development of individuals, helping to increase self-confidence and social skills (Gustafsson, et al., 2020).

Families' travel planning provides opportunities to acquire new experiences and create memories, making significant contributions to the social and cultural development of individuals and families. In this context, travel is more than just a trip; it is a process that strengthens relationships within families and allows individuals to discover themselves.

Methodology

Family travel planning is a complex process that affects individuals' and groups' dynamics, preferences, and decision-making. Because of this, qualitative research methods are a good approach to gain a deeper understanding. The study will use methods like semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to collect data. Semi-structured interviews will allow participants to share their personal experiences and views about the travel planning process. Focus group discussions will offer a chance to observe the interaction of different family dynamics and the exchange of ideas within the group. Participants will be selected from families with different socio-economic backgrounds, ensuring a range of perspectives is gathered.

Data will be analyzed using content analysis. The collected data will be categorized by themes, and the relationships between challenges and opportunities in family travel planning will be explored. During this process, main themes and sub-themes will be identified based on participants' statements and experiences. This will provide a deep understanding of family travel planning. As a result, this qualitative research will make an important contribution to understanding the challenges and opportunities in family travel planning. It will also help guide future travel planning strategies.

The data obtained through semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were used for the research on the travel planning of the families in question. Focus group interviews are a method that derives its origin from social psychology and communication theories. This technique, which is widely used in market research, is also preferred for preliminary research studies in social sciences. Although it can be applied together with one-on-one interviews and surveys, it is actually one of the most systematic data collection methods. The comprehensive data obtained from focus group interviews provide a solid basis for one-on-one interviews and surveys (Kitzinger, 1995).

A qualitative case study method was used, which allows for in-depth examination and understanding of families' travel planning processes in their natural contexts. Since travel planning is a complex process that develops in interaction with individuals' personal preferences, family dynamics and environmental factors, the qualitative research method was primarily preferred in this study. The qualitative method makes it possible to systematically and thoroughly address travel processes and the lives of families in these processes in their natural environments. In addition, a specific case study is examined in qualitative research to reveal the effectiveness of a process, the reasons for its success or failure, or to evaluate the travel planning habits of a specific group from the perspective of individuals. In this context, since each family has its own dynamics and travel planning preferences, the travel planning process of a specific family group was examined in detail as a case study in this study.

Study Group

In focus group studies, determining the participants and creating the group composition in accordance with the objectives of the research is of great importance. In addition to selecting the participants purposefully in a way that will provide the most comprehensive and rich data on the subject of the study, the groups should consist of individuals with similar experiences and demographic characteristics in order to have a homogeneous structure (Akar, Akçay, 2024).

In this direction, in this study aimed at examining the travel planning processes of families, families with different demographic and socio-economic characteristics were reached in order to determine the participants who will take part in the focus groups. Information was provided about the purpose and process of the study through various communication channels, and families who wanted to participate voluntarily were contacted. Later, demographic information was collected from the families that contacted the researchers, and considering that they may have different needs, experiences and preferences in the travel planning process, groups were created by considering criteria such as families with and without children and household income levels. In this context, 4 different focus groups, each consisting of 10 people, were determined in the study. The participants who constituted the study group consisted of parents ranging in age from 30 to 55, and individuals from different family structures were represented in the group.

Data Collection

In this study, which adopted a qualitative research approach, data were obtained through focus group interviews in which families participated voluntarily regarding their travel planning processes. Focus groups are considered as special groups in terms of their purpose, structure, size and participant composition, and provide researchers with comprehensive, detailed and in-depth data. Such groups consist of 6 to 10 people with certain characteristics and similar experiences, and evaluate a specific topic, process or application by discussing it interactively with a moderator(s) (Tuncer, Kamçı, 2024).

Accordingly, in this study, which aims to understand the perspectives and experiences of families regarding their travel planning processes, it is anticipated that rich and high-quality data can be obtained through focus group interviews. In this context, a semi-structured interview guide was prepared, primarily by taking into account the studies conducted in the relevant field and the research questions. This guide includes structured and unstructured questions, and allows participants to respond freely at some stages while being guided at others. While preparing the guide, as emphasized in the literature on focus group interviews, care was taken to arrange the questions from general to specific and in order of importance. In this direction, the interview guide was created to include opening, introduction, transition, main (basic) and closing questions (Tuncer, Kamçı, 2024). In addition, a pilot focus group interview was conducted with individuals from different family structures in order to test the validity of the interview guide. As a result of the pilot study, minor changes were made to the wording of the questions in line with the feedback of the participants and the final version of the guide was created.

Data Analysis

The data obtained as a result of four focus group interviews, each of which lasted an average of 50 minutes and was audio-recorded with the permission of the participants, were examined using the content analysis technique. This analysis method, which includes a controlled interpretation process, includes coding, which is the process of naming meaningful sections of the data by reviewing them multiple times, and the classification of codes related to each other under categories and themes by re-evaluating the coded data.

In this context, first of all, the transcripts of the audio-recorded focus group interviews were prepared. It is of great importance that the notes taken by the moderators during the interviews are combined with the data transcripts in a consistent manner, otherwise there is a risk of data loss. For this reason, the moderators prepared the data transcripts together and integrated the notes they took during the interviews into the transcripts (Çokluk, et al., 2011).

The data set was reviewed multiple times by taking into account the research questions and the questions in the interview form and coding and categorization processes were carried out. In this process, the 'triangulation' technique, one of the important techniques used to ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research, was used. This technique, which has different types such as theoretical triangulation, researcher triangulation, data triangulation and methodological triangulation, ensures that the reliability of the study is increased by addressing research questions from different perspectives. In this study, the researcher triangulation technique was applied (Şener, et al., 2016).

In this context, the data of one of the focus group interviews were analyzed by two independent academicians other than the researchers. The analyses of the academicians and the researchers were compared and the agreement percentage was calculated in order to determine the similarities between the obtained codings. As a result, the agreement percentage between the codings was found to be 92%, which showed that the codings made by the researchers were reliable.

In addition, within the scope of validity and reliability, the statements that directly reflect the opinions of the participants were presented as direct quotes in the findings section and the participants were represented with a certain coding system. In order to reflect certain demographic characteristics while protecting the identity of the participants, an abbreviation was used as (Participant No / Family Structure / Age / Income Group). For example, coding as "(04/With Children/38/Medium)" indicates that the participant belongs to "Participant Number Four / Family with Children / 38 Years Old / Middle Income Group". This type of coding method allows for meaningful analysis of the data by preserving the characteristics of the participants anonymously.

Findings

Qualitative Data Analysis Findings on Family Travel Planning

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

No	**Family Type**	**Age**	**Income**	**No**	**Family Type**	**Age**	**Income**	**No**	**Family Type**	**Age**	**Income**	**No**	**Family Type**	**Age**	**Income**
01	With Children	35	Middle	11	With Children	42	Middle	21	Without Children	41	Middle	31	Extended Family	44	Middle
02	Without Children	28	High	12	With Children	38	Middle	22	With Children	35	Middle	32	With Children	41	Middle
03	Extended Family	45	Middle	13	With Children	44	Low	23	Without Children	26	High	33	Without Children	27	Middle
04	With Children	38	Low	14	Extended Family	57	Middle	24	With Children	29	Middle	34	With Children	61	High

No	Family Type	Age	Income	No	Family Type	Age	Income	No	Family Type	Age	Income	No	Family Type	Age	Income
05	Without Children	30	Middle	15	Without Children	27	Middle	25	With Children	43	Middle	35	Extended Family	35	Low
06	With Children	42	High	16	With Children	33	Middle	26	Extended Family	52	Middle	36	Without Children	38	Middle
07	Extended Family	50	Middle	17	With Children	41	Middle	27	With Children	36	High	37	With Children	36	Middle
08	With Children	33	Low	18	Extended Family	48	Middle	28	With Children	54	Middle	38	With Children	43	Middle
09	With Children	50	High	19	Without Children	32	Middle	21	With Children	31	Middle	39	With Children	29	Middle
10	With Children	44	Middle	20	With Children	37	High	22	With Children	42	Middle	40	With Children	32	Middle

The majority of the participants are from the middle income group and families with children are the majority. This situation shows that child-focused criteria can come to the fore in travel planning.

Table 2: Priority Criteria of Families in Travel Planning

Criteria	Number of Participants (1st Priority)	Number of Participants (2nd Priority)
Budget	16	12
Accommodation Options	2	3
Child-Friendly Activities	4	5
Ease of Transportation	14	8
Safety	4	10

Criteria	Number of Participants (1st Priority)	Number of Participants (2nd Priority)
Cultural Experiences	0	2

Child-friendly transportation convenience and budget are among the most important criteria. This shows that especially families with children prioritize economic and easily accessible elements in holiday selection.

Table 3: Preferred Destination Types

Destination Type	Number of Participants
Beach Vacation	18
Cultural Trip	4
Nature Vacation	9
Family Visit	3
Amusement Parks	4

Families mostly prefer nature holidays, and sea and nature holidays are among the popular options. This shows that environments that are close to nature and child-friendly attract the attention of families.

The study up to this stage has detailed the factors that are effective in families' travel planning. According to the findings, budget and ease of transportation are among the priority criteria of families. However, nature holidays and sea holidays stand out as the most preferred destination types. This data provides important information for travel agencies and businesses in the tourism sector. Developing holiday packages especially for the demands of families with children can be a great opportunity for the sector.

Table 4: Difficulties Families Face in Travel Planning (more than one can be selected)

Challenges	Number of Participants
High Costs	39
Transportation Issues	37

Challenges	Number of Participants
Difficulties of Traveling with Children	27
Limited Accommodation Alternatives	14
Safety Concerns	22
Limited Vacation Time	29

One of the most common challenges families face is high costs. In addition, the difficulties of traveling with children and safety concerns are also important issues. The need for child-friendly and affordable holiday options is particularly striking.

Table 5: Opportunities Evaluated by Families in Travel Planning (more than one can be selected)

Opportunities	Number of Participants
Early Booking Discounts	36
Family-Friendly Accommodation Options	28
Activities for Children	17
Public Transportation Availability	12
Nature-Based Vacation Options	26

Families consider early booking discounts and family-friendly accommodation options as a great advantage in travel planning. In addition, the opportunities offered by nature holidays and the presence of activities special for children are among the important factors that determine families' preferences. It should also be noted that alternatives that are low in terms of opportunity compared to other options will provide advantages for families' holiday experiences if they are developed.

According to the findings, budget-friendly holiday options, child-friendly activities and early booking opportunities offer significant advantages for families. However, factors such as high costs, transportation difficulties and security concerns stand out as factors that negatively affect travel experiences. The tourism sector can appeal to a wider audience by developing appropriate solutions for these needs of families. Future studies can offer more specific suggestions for the sector by examining the trends in travel planning of different income and age groups in more detail.

It is important to provide a flexible structure in the research so that participants can express their experiences and perceptions in the best way. The summaries of the feedback received from the focus group interviews conducted for this purpose are as follows.

The answers to the question "How do you approach travel planning with your family? Who influences the decision in this process?" are united in the following statements: "We usually make decisions together as family members, but sometimes we also take the children's wishes into consideration" and "My wife and I have the main say in planning, but the children's preferences are important to us."

The questions "Which factors are most important to you when traveling?" are highlighted as "Budget is always the most important factor we have to consider" and "Accommodation and ease of transportation are very important to us."

The questions "Have you encountered any difficulties in planning your family travel? What are these?" were answered as "Yes, it can be very difficult to find a place, especially during the holiday season" and "We sometimes remain indecisive due to differences of opinion."

"What is the role of technology in your family travel planning process? What tools or applications do you use?" The answers to the question are summarized as "We mostly use online travel sites; we also follow other people's experiences on social media.", "Thanks to mobile applications, everything is at our fingertips, this makes our job much easier." The answers to the question "When you return from a trip, how do you evaluate the experience? What lessons did you learn for your future trips?" are as follows: "We usually re-evaluate our experience; we think we could have planned some things better.", "We learn from our past trips that some places should not be visited without sufficient research."

Results

This study aims to determine the factors that shape families' travel preferences by examining the main challenges and opportunities in the travel planning process. The study was conducted to deeply understand families' travel experiences and to reveal the dynamics in this process. The findings include the obstacles that families face in travel planning as well as strategies to overcome these obstacles.

The findings revealed that the most important criteria in families' travel planning are budget, ease of transportation and child-friendly activities. When the types of destinations preferred by families are examined, it is seen that sea and nature holidays are among the most popular options. This situation shows that families tend to choose holiday alternatives that are close to nature, suitable for their children and economical.

The main challenges that families face in travel planning are determined as high costs, transportation problems and the difficulties of traveling with children. In addition, security concerns and limited holiday periods are among the factors that negatively affect families' travel experiences. On the other hand, early booking discounts, family-friendly accommodation options and holiday opportunities close to nature are seen as the greatest opportunities by families.

It was also determined that families make extensive use of technology in the travel planning process. Online travel sites, mobile applications and social media platforms play an effective role in families' decision-making process and shape their holiday choices. Participants' experiences show that they tend to make more conscious future travel plans by making evaluations after their holidays.

These findings offer important implications for businesses operating in the tourism sector. Travel agencies and the accommodation sector can better meet the expectations of families by developing child-friendly and budget-friendly holiday packages. In addition, increasing alternatives that provide ease of transportation and taking more precautions regarding security can make it easier for families to plan their travels. Future research can contribute to strategies that will be developed specifically for families by examining the travel preferences of different income and age groups in more detail.

In conclusion, the difficulties that families face in the travel planning process usually arise from factors such as time management, budget constraints and balancing the needs of different individuals. However, these difficulties also bring opportunities for families to spend time together, gain new experiences and strengthen their ties. The research emphasizes the importance of elements such as flexibility, communication and cooperation in order for families to develop more effective strategies in travel planning. It was also concluded that these dynamics should be taken into account in order for the travel industry to provide better services to the needs of families. In order to enrich the travel experiences of families and minimize the difficulties in this process, it is recommended that awareness and support mechanisms be developed at both individual and societal levels.

Conclusion

Family travel planning is a complex and dynamic process. The challenges faced during this process often come from factors like time management, budget limits, balancing the needs of different age groups, and travel preferences. However, these challenges also offer various opportunities for families. Strengthening communication between family members, having new experiences together, and engaging in cultural interactions are important advantages of travel.

As a result, families need to develop effective strategies to overcome the challenges they face in travel planning. Flexibility, open communication, and setting common goals during the planning phase can make the travel experience more enjoyable and meaningful.

Additionally, by using the opportunities technology provides, travel planning can become more efficient. In this context, families should be encouraged to overcome the challenges of travel planning and create unforgettable memories while spending quality time together.

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Neuroscience at the service of tourism marketing: a bibliometric study

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore recent developments in the application of neuroscience to tourism marketing. Given the increasing interest in neurotourism research, an updated method-based review can provide valuable insights and mapping of current trends.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: A bibliometric study was conducted as part of a systematic method-based review following the SPAR-4-SLR protocol. A structured query in the Scopus database led to an initial pool of 1,848 studies published since 2020 across various domains; 89 of these were evaluated as relevant with tourism marketing issues. Performance analysis (year-wise trends, top contributing countries and journals, neuroscientific methods) and science mapping were employed.

Results: Findings indicate a growing interest in neuroscience-based tourism research, especially since 2022. China leads in terms of the origin of contributors, followed by Spain, Australia, and the Netherlands. Most studies integrate neuroscientific with traditional methods while eye-tracking emerges as the most commonly used technique. Travel behavior, eye tracking, destination marketing, social media and virtual reality applications are the foci of researchers.

Originality/Value: The use of neuroscientific tools in tourism marketing is gaining traction, offering valuable insights for triangulation and interdisciplinary research. Increasing accessibility and affordability of such technologies are expected to further drive advancements in neurotourism studies.

Keywords neurotourism, neuromarketing, bibliometric study, tourism marketing

Introduction

Neuromarketing in tourism, also known as neurotourism, applies neuromarketing tools and methods to better understand tourist behavior and evaluate the effectiveness of marketing strategies. The increasing body of literature on neurotourism has not gone unnoticed by previous researchers. For example, several reviews have been conducted on eye-tracking research in tourism (Scott, Zhang, Le, & Moyle, 2017; Atabay & Güzeller, 2021; Savin, Fleșeriu, & Batrancea, 2022). Similarly, Li, Sung, Lin, & Mitas (2022) performed a methodological review of electrodermal activity measurements, while Walters, Jiang, & Li (2023) and Lei et al. (2024) provided systematic reviews on (neuro)physiological measurements in hospitality and tourism research. In the same stream, Lin et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of objective measurements, analyzing 100 articles published between 2013 and 2023. Additionally, comprehensive reviews of neurotourism research have been presented by Al-Nafjan, Aldayel, & Kharrat (2023) and Cardoso et al. (2024). To advance research progress in the field, Li, Chark, Bastiaansen, & Wood (2023) meta-reviewed nine neurotourism-related reviews.

Despite their great contribution in deciphering neurotourism research, the majority of these reviews extend until 2023, thus not portraying the considerable number of neurotourism studies published in 2024 and early 2025. In the post-pandemic period there has been significant growth in neurotourism research, with a particularly notable surge in studies during 2023–2024. This paper aims to systematically document this expansion, highlighting latest trends in neurotourism research published from 2020 until the beginning of 2025.

Methodology

This method-based review of neuroscience in the domain of tourism marketing follows the SPAR-4-SLR protocol (Paul et al., 2021), comprising three key phases: assembling, arranging, and assessing relevant literature. In the assembling phase, a search query was conducted in the Scopus database using relevant keywords. The search targeted article titles, abstracts, and keywords, with results restricted to publications in English within the subject areas of business, decision sciences, economics, social sciences, and neuroscience from 2020 onward. This process initially yielded 1,848 articles. In the phase of arranging, organization took place with the use of Excel to sort material; each study was then manually screened for relevance with tourism marketing, resulting in a final selection of 89 papers that met the inclusion criteria for this review. The phase of assessing included evaluation and reporting, resulting in graphs and Figures with the aid of Excel graphs, VOS viewer software and word-cloud creation tools.

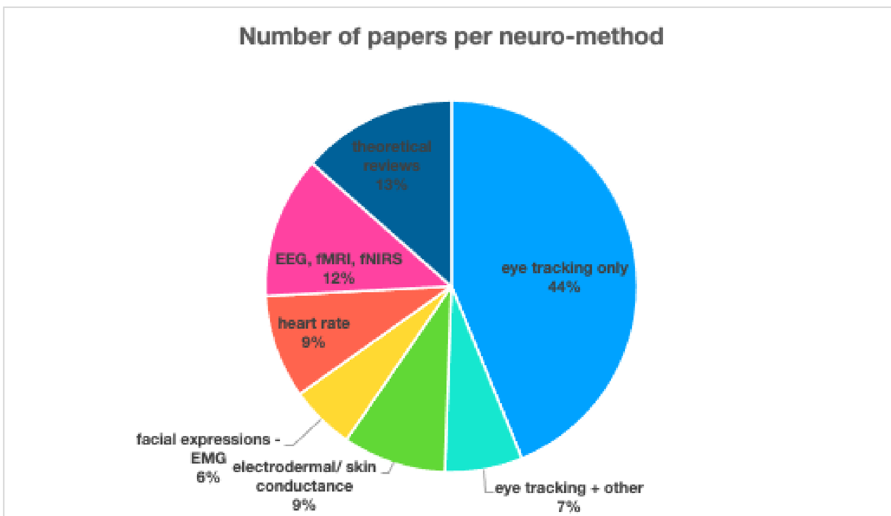
Results

Descriptive analysis shows that a significant increase in neuroscience-based tourism marketing studies was observed in 2024, with 31 papers published, i.e. accounting for more than one-third of the total publications during the examined 5-year period. This surge may be attributed, in part, to the easing of COVID-19-related restrictions, which had previously hindered neuroscientific research requiring laboratory facilities. Additionally, recent calls for papers in special issues of leading tourism and marketing journals have likely contributed to the growing interest in this research area. Theoretical papers—primarily literature reviews—account for 13% of the published neurotourism research, focusing on recent advancements in the application of specific neuroscientific methods in tourism. Another 35% employs only neuroscientific methods while the remaining 52% combine neuroscientific techniques with non-neuroscientific methods, most commonly integrating and comparing with self-reported measures from surveys. Regarding employed neuroscience tools and methodologies, eye-tracking emerges as the predominant choice, used in 44% of the examined studies. An additional number of studies employs eye-tracking along with other neuroscientific techniques (7%). Electrodermal activity (9%), heart rate measurements

(9%), and facial expression analysis (6%) are also among the frequently used methods as shown in Graph 1.

Based on first authors' geographic origins, China is the leading contributor to neurotourism research, accounting for 35 studies and 39.4%, followed by Spain (10.1%), Australia (6.7%), and the Netherlands (5.6%). Graph 2 shows the main countries of first authors' origins. Other countries include Italy, Brazil, Taiwan, Turkey, UK, Romania, Japan, Jordan, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mexico, Canada, Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, Indonesia, Israel, Peru, Poland, Portugal, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam. The most prominent publication outlets for neuroscientific research in the domain of tourism marketing include Tourism Management (9 papers), the Journal of Travel Research (9), the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research (9), the Annals of Tourism Research (8), and the Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research (6).

Graph 1: Number of neurotourism papers per method



Graph 2: Distribution of first authors' geographic origins

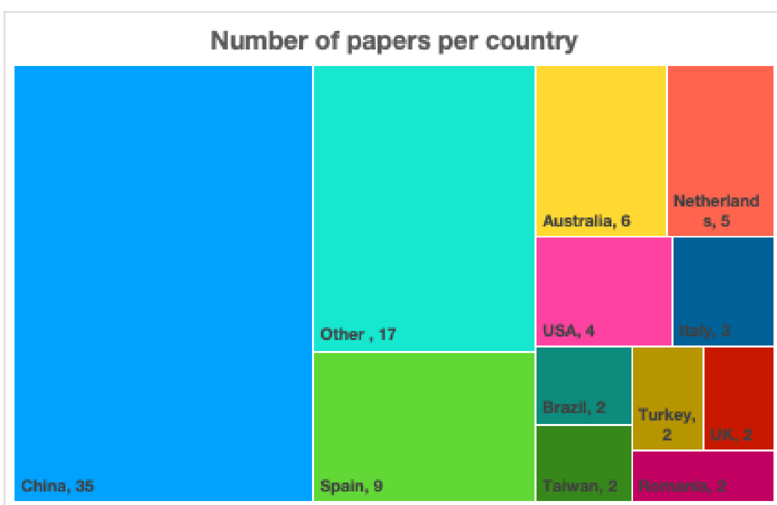
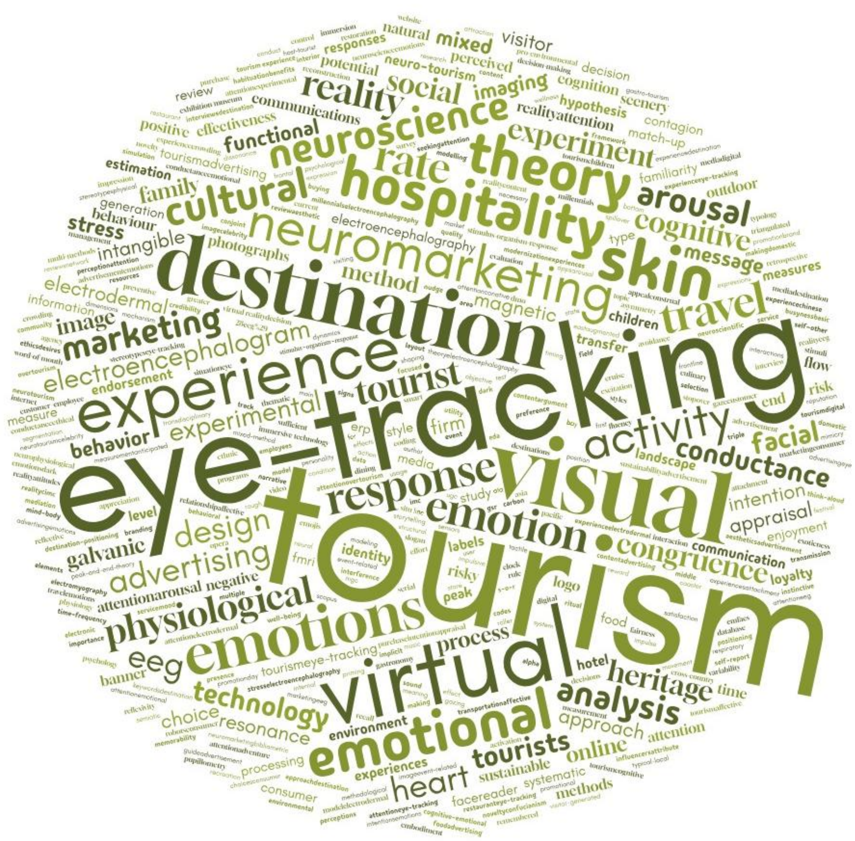


Figure 1 presents a word cloud generated from the keywords of the 89 studies. Moreover, Figure 2 shows keywords' network thus providing insights into the conceptual structure of the respective research.

Figure 1: Word cloud based on keywords (created from wordclouds.com)

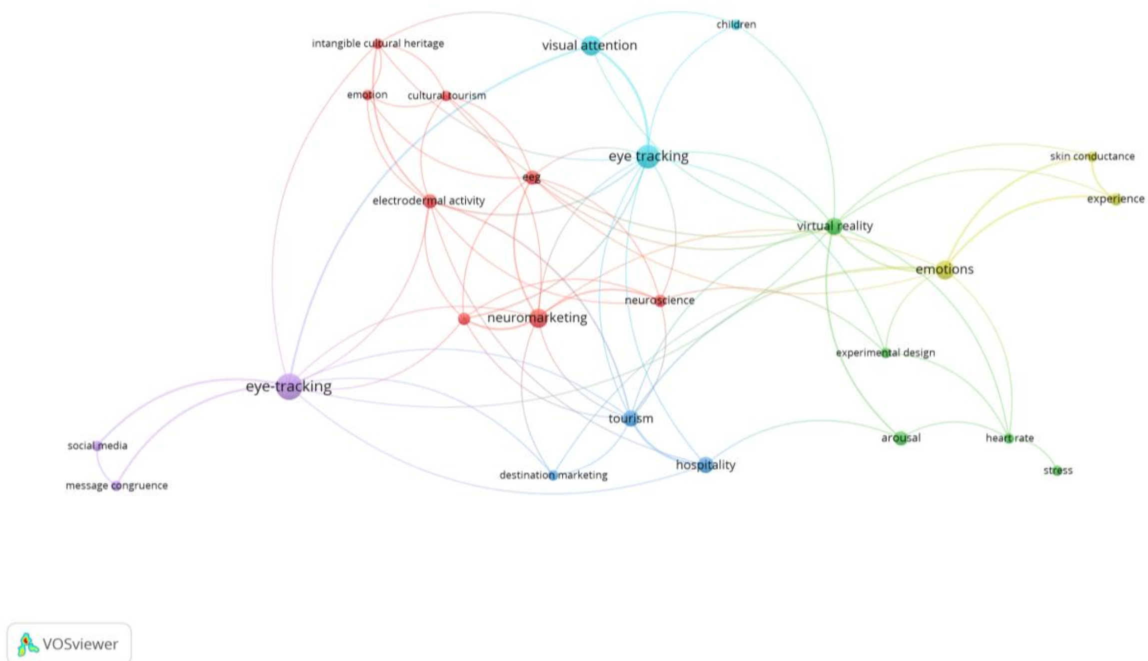


Conclusion

A significant increase in the number of neurotourism studies is noted for the period after 2022 with 2024 being a record year with 31 studies. Apart from the wider diffusion of these methods among tourism researchers and marketers, the recent surge in published studies could be also partially attributed to the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and the calls for research on neuroscience-based tourism and marketing studies in special issues of leading tourism journals. Eye-tracking has been one of the most popular tools used to capture visual attentions and evaluate human responses. The experimental approaches tested various aspects of social media stimuli, travel influencers, DMO, immersive experiences and advertising content, mainly aiming to test and explore further aspects of decision making, destination choice and travel intentions. As neuroscience tools and methods become more accessible and affordable—such as the commodification of wearable devices for physiological measurements and the use of eye-tracking software outside laboratory settings—the field is expected to expand further.

More importantly, this growth is likely to accelerate as tourism and marketing scholars increasingly recognize the potential of neuroscience tools to complement and triangulate findings based on traditional research methods. These tools offer profound insights into tourist behavior, mitigating biases associated with self-reported data and enabling the development of more effective marketing strategies and enhanced tourist experiences. The integration of neuroscience methods with emerging technologies and interdisciplinary approaches presents significant opportunities. Notable emerging trends and future directions include the incorporation of artificial intelligence (Al-Nafjan, Aldayel, & Kharrat, 2023) and the adoption of transdisciplinary approaches (Li, Chark, Bastiaansen, & Wood, 2023; Cardoso & Fraga, 2024).

Figure 2: Keywords network for neurotourism studies (created in VOS Viewer)



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Consumer Behavior and Consumer Well-being in Tourism and Hospitality

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Abstract

Purpose: This research evaluates what happens to total well-being when consumers participate in tourist and hospitality services. This study analyzes vital components such as decision-mediated systems and motivational factors with cultural elements to understand consumer engagement's effects on personal wellness.

Study design/methodology/approach: The research design combines quantitative methods with qualitative techniques to approach the study. Research data consists of survey responses obtained through main data collection efforts as well as secondary data acquired from academic literature and industry reports. (Cozzio et al., 2020). Quantitative analysis with regression analysis and ANOVA and structural equation modeling (SEM) examine data while qualitative data requires thematic and content analysis as extraction methods. (Kim & Hyun, 2021).

Results: The research explains how buying decisions together with cultural beliefs impact customer welfare while emphasizing sustainable travel measures. Data shows that transformable and experiential travel combined with technological advancements and ethical buying habits strongly influence customer contentment and life satisfaction.

Originality/value: The research adds to consumer behavior research in tourism by using well-being as a central analysis element. Through practical advice, the research helps industry stakeholders accomplish the enhancement of customer satisfaction by offering customized sustainable travel experiences.

Keywords : Consumer Behavior ,Tourism and Hospitality , Sustainable Tourism , Ethical Consumption , Travel Decision-Making , Guest Experience , Luxury Hospitality , Behavioral Nudging

Introduction

Consumers in the tourism and hospitality industry make multifaceted choices regarding their travel decisions and their choices of accommodation, dining, and leisure activities. Consumer behavior is an essential element for businesses operating in tourism and hospitality because it helps them develop specialized services that boost customer retention and corporate revenue growth. The expanding competition and fast growth within the global tourism sector require businesses to grasp the psychological social and cultural components that affect consumer decision-making. (Cohen & Prayag, 2014).

Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality Customers in tourism and hospitality make multiple decisions through processes that derive from their internal needs as well as external conditions. Customer selection of tourism and hospitality services alongside consumption and evaluation depends heavily upon motivation together with perception and learning abilities personality traits and internal attitudes. The behavior of consumers is substantially influenced by external elements that include cultural origins as well as social parameters together with financial circumstances and advances made through technology. (Dai, Wang, & Kirillova, 2022).

The adoption of online platforms together with social media changed consumer behavior related to information-seeking travel decision-making and option comparison. Experiential consumption represents the fundamental principle for analyzing consumer actions throughout the tourism and hospitality industries. Due to their ephemeral nature tourism and hospitality experiences present a personal connection that touches emotional states as well as cognitive variables and develops social interactions. (Dolnicar, 2020).

Tourism and hospitality consumer behaviors result from the combination effects of destination image along with service quality and pricing approaches and experience value determination. Travelers mostly base their evaluations and choices of tourism services on personal testimonies and online feedback with their previous trip experiences included. AI together with data analytics opens opportunities for businesses to track consumer preferences through their systems resulting in highly customized experiences that modify consumer choices.

Sport and Health Engage Consumers in Tourism through Hospitality Services Consumer well-being and hospitality include the satisfaction and happiness together with psychological advantages that consumers obtain from their travel encounters and hospitality services.

Consumer well-being encompasses more than financial rewards because it embraces three fundamental aspects emotional health, physical well-being, and social connections.

The positive nature of tourism encounters in hospitality leads to better mental health, produces stress relief, and builds social connections as well as cultural awareness among visitors. (Alemán Carreón et al., 2021).

Consumer satisfaction in the tourism and hospitality sectors becomes substantial because these sectors offer experiences that deliver essential psychological needs including relaxation together with self-discovery and social connection.

The wellness travel sector emerged as a popular trend in tourism because consumers seek vacations that combine spa services with yoga classes and health ingredients. Three essential variables that impact consumer well-being include the standards of service quality and the authenticity of experience alongside safety and security feelings.

Consumer welfare directly depends on these industries because they design experiences through which people achieve fulfillment. Developing enhanced service strategies depends heavily on knowing customer behavior patterns to deliver valuable experiences to customers. The research explores consumers' decision-motivational factors regarding their impact on life satisfaction within tourism hospitality operations.

Methodology

Design Researchers employ mixed approaches to study consumer reactions and well-being patterns in the tourism and hospitality industry. The research uses quantitative methods that combine survey interviews with statistical processes and qualitative methods that combine interview methods with thematic analysis.

Results

Data Collection Methods

Primary Data Collection Understanding satisfaction levels, sustainable practices, and user preferences is achieved by distributing surveys and questionnaires to hotel guests and hospitality service users as well as travelers. A stratified random sampling procedure guarantees the inclusion of various groups. Managers of hotel tourism operators and travel influencers participated in in-depth interviews that provided details about consumer health as well as market trends. Small groups of participants meet for discussions that evaluate the interaction between travel events and wellness outcomes. (Kim, Hyun, & Lee, 2020).

Secondary Data Collection The analysis includes scholarly articles about consumer actions and their well-being. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) together with hospitality market research firms reported valuable information. TripAdvisor along with Google Reviews and Booking.com provide online user reviews of consumers.

Data Analysis Methods The study employs quantitative statistical tools, including descriptive statistics, regression analysis, ANOVA, and SEM, to evaluate consumer preferences and well-being results. The research method uses thematic analysis for interviews, focus group data analysis, and sentiment analysis for classifying online consumer feedback. (Pinho, Nogueira, & Macedo, 2022).

Ethical Considerations Research participants get complete information about the study goals followed by the freedom to exit at any stage of the project. Anonymization techniques protect the privacy of provided data.

Limitations of the Study

• Potential bias in self-reported survey responses.

• Limited generalizability due to data collection within a specific geographical region.

• Constraints in longitudinal data collection due to time limitations.

Results

Consumer Well-Being in Tourism and Hospitality Tourists experience increased well-being through achieving their travel reasons alongside satisfactory services and pleasant experiences.

Impact of Tourism on Well-Being Tourism enables people to gain psychological and emotional advantages and physical advantages including stress management and personal development and life contentment.

Strategies to Enhance Consumer Well-Being Tourism operators should personalize services following what their customers want.

• Adoption of environmentally friendly practices.

Making touristic spaces culturally sensitive creates better comfort conditions for tourists' satisfaction.

The Rise of Experiential and Transformational Travel The core focus of experiential travel involves genuine cultural encounters yet transformational travel lets consumers build better themselves whilst experiencing holistic well-being.

The **Impact of Digitalization on Consumer Behavior** Convenient micro-stay facilities combined with AI technology along with virtual reality systems allow travelers to have personalized and enhanced trips. The Growing Importance of Sustainable and Responsible Tourism Sustainability brings together efforts to protect the environment and to involve local communities. The tourism industry adopts three main trends that include using eco-friendly accommodations and providing carbon offset programs together with slow travel practices.

Personalization and Hyper-Customization in Tourism Systematic analysis using AI alongside adjustable pricing strategies allows unique travel experiences that boost consumer happiness throughout their journey.

The Role of social media and Influencer Marketing Reports and recommendations made by digital reviewers and influencers steer travelers toward making their choices when it comes to tourism.

Challenges in Enhancing Consumer Well-Being Tourism-generated environmental deterioration and overpopulation need solutions which include setting visitor limits and directing people to new alternative locations. Curing digital fatigue happens when people take vacations that prohibit technology use because it helps prevent burnout. Flexible booking options create a sense of confidence among consumers because of current economic and political unpredictability. Travel providers must supply anxiety-free travel experiences through crisis management services to customers.

Key Technological Innovations in Tourism

• AI-driven travel assistants for real-time recommendations.

• VR/AR for immersive pre-travel experiences.

Through the Internet of Things, hotels can create personalized services. Conclusion Consumer choices together with their well-being outcomes need to be thoroughly understood by the tourism and hospitality industry. Organizations need to adopt customer satisfaction approaches as they enhance sustainability along with tailored travel solutions.

Conclusion

Accurate knowledge about how tourists and hospitality consumers behave, and experience well-being enables businesses to create enduring customer relationships that lead to business expansion. Consumer behavior in this industry is influenced by internal elements together with external elements such as psychological motivations and social cultural dynamics and technological developments. The rise of experiential consumption reveals what consumers need to know about decision-making processes because they pursue emotional and meaningful experiences along with products and services.

Consumer preferences and behaviors in the tourism and hospitality sectors are now shaped to a great extent by social media as well as peer reviews posted online. Companies that use data analytics combined with artificial intelligence to predict consumer requirements therefore establish more effective competitive advantages through personalized service delivery. The satisfaction of customers has become a vital component that affects their experiences in tourism and hospitality.

Travel experience brings three forms of fulfillment to people which include emotional fulfillment and social fulfillment alongside physical fulfillment. Traveling to positive locations combined with hospitality services produces mental health improvements along with stress reduction that leads to increased personal connections. Customers are showing rising interest in wellness travel experiences including spa treatments yoga retreats and health-centric journeys because of their focus on full-body wellness. Both safety measures, cultural sensitivity, and authentic service delivery practices work together to improve consumer satisfaction while contributing to their well-being.

Organizations that focus on consumers through a balanced strategy between profit-making and customer fulfillment achieve better success within contemporary tourism and hospitality markets. Companies that concentrate on building exceptional guest experiences while providing full-scale consumer service alongside eco-friendly and responsible business methods will improve client retention, boost their brand reputation, and serve both visitors and local communities positively.

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Do the hotel circular economy practices and green attributes influence the tourists' booking behaviour?

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Abstract

Purpose: The study analyses the role of the circular economy in the hotel room booking process, aiming to 1) identify the CE actions or practices and the green attributes the hotel industry can implement to help attract customers engaged in sustainable practices, and 2) assess their willingness to book and pay.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study uses an experimental online hotel booking simulation to identify the circular or green practices and attributes preferred by the different customer segments, to evaluate their impact on booking behaviour, and to identify those segments with stronger pro-circular behaviour. Data was collected from a sample of 340 participants.

Results: Specific segments, such as tourists that are travelling without children, those selecting higher star rating hotels and environmentally conscious individuals, exhibit a greater willingness to engage with circular economy (CE) practices in their booking preferences.

Originality/value: The research provides insights in four key areas: 1) It examines tourists' circular behaviour, emphasizing circular practices rooted in the 3Rs, expanding beyond the narrower 2R approaches. 2) It offers an in-depth customer segmentation analysis based on pro-circular and green attitudes. 3) It provides actionable insights for destination management organizations and hotel marketers to attract long-term sustainable demand in the online booking process.

Keywords Circular Economy, hotel, willingness to book, willingness to pay, segmentation

Introduction

The hospitality industry plays a crucial role in advancing sustainable development goals, yet there remains a gap in evidence regarding the role and importance of the Circular Economy (CE) in hotels, particularly during the online booking process. Applying CE practices in the hotel sector involves the active participation of multiple stakeholders, including hotel operators, suppliers, and consumers, fostering a collective move towards sustainability (De Grosbois, 2012). Moreover, these practices hold the potential to enhance the sector's environmental, social, and economic performance.

Previous literature indicates that consumers are willing to pay higher prices for green accommodation or to stay in hotels that incorporate environmentally friendly practices, demonstrating a clear alignment with sustainable consumption patterns (Han et al., 2011). Meanwhile, other studies highlight that the extra price customers are willing to pay for green hotels is related to their sociodemographic variables, highlighting the importance of segmenting customer preferences (Chen & Tung, 2014)

Despite this growing interest in sustainability, hotels do not include information or often fail to adequately communicate their eco-friendly attributes and/or CE practices during the online booking process, which is a critical touchpoint in the customer journey. This paper seeks to address this gap and generates new research on how information about the green attributes and CE practices implemented by hotels can influence the tourist booking behaviour.

In general, most hotel attributes and characteristics are unobservable and cannot be assessed as they are not sold individually; however, it is important to know how hotel eco-friendly attributes and circular measures influence the consumer online booking intentions and spending willingness. The study analyses the role of the circular economy in the hotel room booking process. The paper has two main objectives: 1) To identify the CE actions or practices and the green attributes the hotel industry can implement to help attract customers engaged in sustainable practices, and 2) to measure their willingness to book and pay.

Methodology

The research employs an online discrete choice experiment simulating an online hotel booking process with 3 groups. Participants are randomly assigned to one group: a first control group with no information on CE and green attributes included in the booking process, a second experimental group where hotels present a text description of eco-friendly attributes and circular measures; and a third experimental group where hotels additionally present in the online booking process a video tour highlighting all green attributes and CE practices (Table 1).

Table 1. Experimental groups features.

Experiment Outcomes				
Experimental groups	*Description*	*Common Room Characteristics*		*Green attributes and CE practices*
Control Group	No green and CE attributes	STANDARD ROOM: 30m2 max. 4 people	Wifi	
			Flat screen TV	

			Air conditioning & heating	
Experiment 1	Green and CE attributes: Text description	Guests will find them ideal for both work and leisure	Desk	Plenty of natural light
				Low energy LED lighting
			Tea and coffee maker	Smart air-conditioning/heating & lighting
				App monitoring consumption per room
				Furniture/parquet flooring sourced from sustainably managed forests
			Towels	Compostable capsule tea and coffee maker set
				Bottle of filtered water & biodegradable straws
			Hairdryer	Natural care and toiletry products dispensed in bulk
				Reusable containers
Experiment 2	Green and CE attributes: Video tour	It also has a sofa that can be used as a comfortable double bed.	Swimming pool	Water-efficient bathroom fixtures
				Swimming pool with an ecological chlorine system
				Native plants & Irrigation system using greywater
				Solar panels minimizing non-renewable energy use
			24h-Reception	Bar-restaurant with local and seasonal products
				Organic products
				Fixed menus to minimize food waste
			Bar-restaurant with the finest products	Minimum use of single-use packaging
				Bicycles available for guests
				Charging stations available for electric vehicles

We recreate a situation that is not really happening where tourists are randomly assigned to one of three groups designed. It is a choice behaviour experiment as different choices such as booking or not booking at a fixed price are offered to the 3 groups**.** Potential customers can identify the hotel's green attributes and CE practices before booking and then, decide if they will book and pay. This experiment enables us first to identify the circular or green practices and attributes preferred by the different customer segments and to evaluate the impact on their booking behaviour, and second, to identify those market segments with stronger pro-circular behaviour. A sample of 340 persons was collected through the online experiment gathering information on customer preferences, segmentation, and booking intentions (see Tables 2-3 for sample profile).

Table 2. Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

Sociodemographic characteristics of participants		
Woman		54.7%
Age		34
Residence	Balearic Islands	53.8%
	Rest of Spain	13.6%
	Rest of EU	8.2%
	Non-EU	24.4%
Level of education	Higher	61.8%
	Vocational training	18.2%
Occupation	Student	38.5%
	Employee	42.9%
	Self-employed	10.3%
	Other	8.3%
Annual Trips		3.5

Table 3. Booking choices outcomes

Experiment Outcomes	Obs.	Bookings [R]	WtP Night/Pers.	WtP [R] Night/Pers.	Hotel choice characteristics: Nights	Hotel stars	Hotel Stars 2-3*	Hotel Stars 4-5*	Adults Room	Child. Room	Board choice Breakf.	Half	Full	Room Views	Free Cancel.
Control Group	100	63.6%	€ 55.33	€ 58.49	4.7	3.8	24.7%	73.0%	2.2	0.5	44.9%	4.5%	7.9%	39.3%	42.7%
Experiment 1	105	62.4%	€ 58.11	€ 56.68	4.7	3.6	39.7%	60.3%	2.2	0.6	42.9%	9.5%	4.8%	27.0%	42.9%
Experiment 2	135	68.7%	€ 58.02	€ 55.76	4.7	3.7	27.9%	70.6%	2.5	0.5	39.7%	8.8%	5.9%	29.4%	47.1%
TOTAL	340	68.7%	€ 58.60	€ 56.85	4.7	3.7	30.6%	68.1%	2.3	0.5	42.2%	7.8%	6.1%	31.6%	44.5%

We measure the consumer behaviour with both, demand function estimations and hedonic pricing modelling, we want to test the effect of the introduction of eco-friendly attributes and circular practices in the hotel booking process. It is checked if these measures/attributes have any effect on the consumer booking intentions and spending willingness, and if they can be used to attract a more inelastic demand compared with the lack of sustainable measures during the booking process. The estimations are compared with the outcomes obtained with the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Results

This paper explores how the inclusion of information about green attributes and CE practices in online booking platforms influences tourists' booking behaviour and willingness to pay. The study identifies preferred circular practices and segments of travellers more inclined to engage with sustainable accommodations. Preliminary findings indicate that tourists are increasingly mindful of hotels' sustainability credentials (Table 4).

Table 4. Importance of implementing sustainable and CE measures in hotels

Tourists' Perception of the Importance of Hotel CE Practices (Rated from 1: Completely Disagree to 5: Completely Agree):	**Average global scores**	**% variability of scores among groups**		
		Control Gr.	**Exp. 1**	**Exp. 2**
Implementing water-saving measures	4.04	-1.0%	-5.1%	2.7%
Implementing energy-saving measures	4.14	-0.9%	-3.2%	0.5%
Reducing/avoiding the use of single-use or disposable products	4.06	-0.5%	-5.5%	2.3%
Establishing a waste management and recycling policy	4.18	-0.1%	-5.4%	0.8%
Using environmentally friendly or green products	4.02	-0.3%	-4.6%	0.0%
Employing trained staff in circular economy and environmental sustainability	3.87	-0.5%	-3.9%	0.8%

Specific segments, such as tourists that are travelling without children, those selecting higher star rating hotels and environmentally conscious individuals, exhibit a greater willingness to engage with CE practices in their booking preferences. In fact, the level of awareness of the environmental problems significantly increases the willingness to pay for circular or green hotels (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. Regression of hedonic pricing estimations

Price/(Person-Night) (*Ln*) (*Hedonic Pricing*)										
Independent var.			Common var.		Control group		Experiment 1		Experiment 2	
			Coeff.	Prob.	Coeff.	Prob.	Coeff.	Prob.	Coeff.	Prob.
Constant					2.94	****	2.26	****	2.86	****
BOOKING (R)					-0.09	***	-0.04		-0.11	***
Pricing variables	Nights (*1-10*)				0.07		0.01		0.00	
	Star rating (*1-5*)				0.04	****	0.03	****	0.04	****
	Board var. (*dummies*)	Breakf.			0.05		0.04		0.08	*
		Half			0.11		0.12		-0.18	**
		Full			-0.02		-0.17		0.05	
	Room Views (*dummy*)				-0.02		0.02		-0.09	*
	Free Cancel. (*dummy*)				0.04		0.06		0.05	
	Discount Num. of Nights (*%*)				0.02		0.02		0.01	
	Discount Num. of People (%)				0.00		0.01		0.00	
	Adults (num 1-4)				0.00		0.01		0.00	
	Children (num 0-3)				0.00		0.01		0.02	
	Booking Horizon (Ln)				0.03	*	0.04	*	-0.02	
Trip characteristics	Booking Channel (dummy)	OTA			-0.07		0.02		0.00	
		H. Web			-0.05		0.04		-0.06	
	Trip Season (dummies)	Spring			-0.06		-0.05		0.10	
		Summer			-0.04		-0.02		0.08	
		Winter			-0.11	**	-0.07		0.09	
	Trip distance (5 groups)				0.00		0.00		0.01	*
	Trip payment (*0-100%*)				0.04	*	0.00		0.03	
Sociodemograph. information	Age (16-99) (*Ln*)				-0.03		0.27	****	0.05	
	Level of knowledge of sustainability/CE (dummies)	Something			0.05		-0.06		0.11	*
		A lot			0.05		-0.06		0.14	**
	Number of trips/year (*Ln*)				0.05	**	0.02		0.04	
	ATTITUDE (EA)				0.00		0.00		0.01	*

TPB Constructs (*1-5*) *1-desagree ... 5-agree*	CE BEHAVIOR (CEb)				0.00		0.00		0.00	
	PCB				0.00		0.01		-0.01	
	HOTEL CE POLICY (HP)				0.00		0.00		-0.01	
	LOYALTY+INTENTION (ItB+Ly)				0.00		0.00		0.01	*
Other common variables	Cultural tourism (dummy)		0.05	*						
	Business tourism (*dummy*)		0.04							
	Nature tourism (dummy)		0.03							
	Woman (dummy)		-0.01							
	Residence (*dummies*) *C.base=Spain*	Balearic	0.06							
		EU	0.02							
		R. world	0.05							
	Level of Education (*dummies*)	Higher Ed.	0.12							
		Secondary & Vocat. Train.	0.11							
	Occupation (dummies)	Student	0.07	**						
		Retired	0.07	*						
		Workers	0.10							

*** Significant at a 0.2 level; ** significant at a 0.1 level; *** significant at a 0.05 level; **** significant at a 0.01 level.**

Table 6. MNL estimations

NIGHTS BOOKED (*MNL*)

Independent var.			Common var.		Control group		Experiment 1		Experiment 2	
			Coeff.	Prob.	Coeff.	Prob.	Coeff.	Prob.	Coeff.	Prob.
Constant			1.07							
PRICE (*Ln*)					**-0.69**	***	**-1.15**	***	**-0.82**	***
Pricing variables	Star rating (1-5)				0.04	**	0.01		0.06	**
	Board var. (*dummies*)	Breakf.			-0.06		-0.17		0.33	*
		Half			-0.24		0.15		0.71	*
		Full			0.48		-0.18		0.60	*
	Room Views (*dummy*)				0.39	***	-0.1		0.13	
	Free Cancel. (*dummy*)				0.08		0.35	**	0.22	
	Discount Num. of Nights (%)				**-0.25**	****	**-0.33**	****	**-0.14**	****
	Discount Num. of People (%)				0.01		0.00		0.00	
	Adults (num 1-4)				0.00		0.00		0.01	
	Children (num 0-3)				0.02		-0.12		-0.09	
	Booking Horizon (Ln)				0.1		0.14		-0.04	
Trip characteristics	Booking Channel (dummy)	OTA			-0.34		-0.01		-0.41	*
		H. Web			-0.39	*	-0.17		0.17	
		Spring			0.09		0.62	**	0.83	***

	Trip Season (dummies)	Summer			-0.03		0.38		0.59	**
		Winter			-0.07		0.07		0.37	
	Trip distance (5 groups)				-0.02		-0.02		0.01	
	Trip payment (*0-100%*)				0.22	**	-0.05		0.07	
Sociodemograph. information	Age (16-99) (*Ln*)				-0.28		0.66	**	-0.18	
	Level of knowledge of sustainability/ CE (dummies)	Something			0.13		0.22		0.14	
		A lot			0.11		-0.34		-0.2	
	Number of trips/year (*Ln*)				0.12		-0.3	***	0.2	*
TPB Constructs (*1-5*) *1-desagree ... 5-agree*	ATTITUDE (EA)				-0.01		-0.02		0.02	
	CE BEHAVIOR (CEb)				0.04	**	-0.01		0.04	*
	PCB				0.01		0.07	**	-0.04	
	HOTEL CE POLICY (HP)				-0.01		-0.06	**	-0.04	
	LOYALTY+INTENTION (ItB+Ly)				0.01		0.04		0.06	***
Other common variables	Cultural tourism (dummy)		0.00							
	Business tourism (*dummy*)		0.46	*						
	Nature tourism (dummy)		-0.08							
	Woman (dummy)		-0.11							
	Residence (*dummies*) *C.base=Spain*	Balearic	-0.44	*						
		EU	-0.69	****						

		R. world	-0.41	**	
	Level of education (*dummies*)	Higher Ed.	1.16	***	
		Secondary & Vocat. Train.	1.45	***	
	Occupation (dummies)	Student	0.02		
		Retired	0.09		
		Workers	0.87	***	

*** Significant at a 0.2 level; ** significant at a 0.1 level; *** significant at a 0.05 level; **** significant at a 0.01 level.**

Conclusion

The study analyses the role of CE in the hotel room booking process and adds significant value to research on circular and eco-friendly behaviour among tourists booking hotels online. This study sheds light on the critical role of CE practices and green attributes in shaping tourists' booking behaviour and willingness to pay. The research provides insights in four key areas: 1) It examines tourists' circular behaviour, emphasizing circular practices rooted in the 3R principle (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle), covering a broader range of initiatives than 2R studies (Reduce and Recycle). 2) It identifies specific tourist segments exhibiting stronger pro-circular behaviours and a greater willingness to book hotels implementing circular practices, providing a comprehensive analysis of customer segmentation based on pro-circular and green attitudes. 3) It identifies how green attributes and hotel circular practices affects their willingness to pay and to book a hotel, and their willingness to book more nights. 4) Finally, it provides actionable insights for destination management organizations and hotel marketers to attract long-term sustainable demand in the online booking process.

The research also highlights the significant impact of transparent communication regarding green attributes and CE practices on customer trust and perceived value. Hotels that clearly showcase their sustainability initiatives during the online booking process are better positioned to attract sustainability-conscious customers, enhance their competitive edge, and contribute to broader sustainable tourism objectives.

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Performance Measurement of Environmental Sustainability Indicators: The Case of Turkish Airlines

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Abstract

Purpose: Environmental sustainability can be defined as ensuring the continuity of natural resources by avoiding environmental harm and utilizing all renewable and non-renewable resources efficiently and effectively. According to UNWTO 2023 data, it is observed that 58% of global travel and 70% of travel in Turkey is carried out via air transportation. In this context, the sustainable use of existing resources in a way that does not deprive future generations of environmental benefits is a critical issue for airline companies.

Study design/methodology/approach: This study analyzes the environmental sustainability indicators included in Turkish Airlines' 2023 Corporate Sustainability Report, evaluated under 10 headings, using the ENTROPY and EDAS methods. The Entropy method is a technique used to measure the amount of useful information derived from existing data, explaining the highest or lowest level of uncertainty (Wu, 2011; Kaya & Öztel, 2018). On the other hand, the EDAS method facilitates the selection of the best alternative by ranking the options' numerical values (Ulutaş & Karaköy, 2019). In other words, it identifies the optimal result by maximizing the positive distance value and minimizing the negative distance value (Kiracı & Bakır, 2018).

Results: The weight coefficients used for ranking Turkish Airlines' environmental performance between 2019 and 2023 were calculated using the ENTROPY method. As a result, it was determined that the "*Amount of Waste Disposed*" (0.57544) had the highest weight coefficient. Other significant coefficients were identified as "*Total Water Withdrawal*" (0.13543) and "*Electricity Usage Per Employee*" (0.12663). According to the EDAS method results, 2020 was the most successful year for environmental performance for Turkish Airlines, while 2023 was the least successful year.

Originality/value: Considering the direct and indirect impacts of airline companies' environmental sustainability performance on the tourism sector, this study is significant in determining the years and sub-themes in which Turkish Airlines has been more or less successful in environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Turkish Airlines, Environmental Sustainability Indicators, ENTROPY, EDAS

Introduction

Air transportation has become an increasingly preferred mode of travel due to advancements in technology, the rapid growth of global tourism, the desire to reach destinations quickly and comfortably, and the availability of cost-effective flight options. The widespread accessibility of global travel and the expansion of low-cost carriers have made tourism more attainable and appealing to a broader population (Dobruszkes et al., 2019). Moreover, the growth of transportation networks, the expansion of airline fleets, and the diversification of flight options have significantly contributed to the development of the tourism industry (Sun et al., 2020). The increase in flight frequencies has directly and indirectly boosted tourism expenditures, further highlighting the strong economic interdependence between air transportation and the tourism sector (Zhang & Findlay, 2021).

Although air transportation offers convenience, comfort, and time savings, and initiatives such as eco-friendly aircraft and green flight programs are being implemented (Gössling et al., 2019), it remains one of the most debated topics regarding its environmental impacts. Issues such as energy consumption, carbon emissions, and waste management necessitate airlines adopting a sustainability-centered approach to their operations.

Sustainability has emerged as a critical concept in modern times, reflecting humanity's efforts to safeguard its existence and ensure continuity. While often regarded as a paradigm shift aimed at minimizing the negative environmental impacts of economic development, sustainability encompasses the continuous evaluation of the economic, environmental, and social impacts of companies, the fundamental pillars of the economy. John Elkington emphasized this perspective through the Triple Bottom Line approach, asserting that businesses must focus on economic profit and assess their environmental and social impacts (Elkington, 1997). In this context, sustainability for businesses extends beyond preserving natural resources; it also involves adherence to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria through good governance practices and creating long-term value.

In today's business environment, enterprises, regardless of sector, are expected to be sensitive to environmental issues. They are responsible for integrating environmental considerations into their business strategies and long-term plans (Atay & Dilek, 2013, p. 204). In other words, companies must implement management practices and operational strategies to reduce their impact on nature. Environmental sustainability, in this context, can be defined as ensuring the continuity of natural resources (Tüm, 2014, p. 64), using all renewable and non-renewable resources efficiently and effectively, and avoiding actions that harm the environment (Çankaya & Sezen, 2015, p. 114).

The implementation of environmental sustainability practices provides multifaceted benefits to businesses. For instance, such practices enhance customer loyalty, positively influence brand image and financial performance, strengthen market position, reduce operational costs, and increase market value (Orsato, 2006; Epstein, 2008).

To effectively ensure environmental sustainability within businesses, several measures must be taken. These include establishing systems to minimize natural resource usage, prioritizing renewable resources in production inputs, implementing robust waste management systems, and utilizing renewable energy sources. Moldan et al. (2012, p. 6) outline several principles critical to achieving success in environmental sustainability, including:

- Promoting recycling,
- Preparing sustainability reports with continuous improvement in performance indicators,
- Enhancing social and environmental quality of life,
- Preventing the release of pollutants and environmentally hazardous substances,
- Rational utilization of natural resources,
- Adopting a sustainable approach to natural resource management,
- Exercising sensitivity in the use of non-renewable resources and
- Respecting biodiversity.

A literature review reveals that airline companies' sustainability indicators have been measured using various methods. For instance, Kaffash et al. (2024) investigated how nine airline companies' financial performance and technical efficiency affect environmental sustainability through data envelopment analysis and fixed-effects panel regression. Similarly, Rençber (2023) examined the corporate sustainability performance of Turkish Airlines—the only airline listed in the Borsa Istanbul Sustainability 25 Index—by analyzing its economic, social, and environmental dimensions using the Entropy and TOPSIS methods. Barutçu and Çolakoğlu, on the other hand, analyzed the current status of CO_2 and greenhouse gas emissions of Turkish Airlines, AJet, Pegasus, and SunExpress and evaluated these companies' future projections regarding this issue.

The environmental sustainability performance of airline companies is a crucial issue, as it directly and indirectly affects the tourism sector. The environmental pressures created by intensive flights to tourism destinations necessitate a collective effort from all stakeholders, particularly airlines. Considering that natural resources, landscapes, biodiversity, and climate are the primary inputs of tourism, this study focuses on identifying Turkish Airlines' environmental sustainability performance rankings over five years from 2019 to 2023. This forms the starting point of the research.

Methodology

In this study, the environmental sustainability indicators presented in Turkish Airlines 2023 sustainability report were examined, and the values for 10 environmental performance indicators between 2019 and 2023 were determined. The weight coefficients of the obtained data were calculated using the ENTROPY method, and subsequently, the performance results of Turkish Airlines were evaluated using the EDAS method.

The concept of entropy was first introduced into the literature by Rudolph Clausius in 1865 as a measure of uncertainty and disorder within a system (H. Zhang et al., 2011). The entropy method is a versatile approach that can be applied across various scales, starting from a single structural group and extending to broader applications, including aesthetic evaluations, where it is recognized as one of the few objective assessment methods (Akçakanat et al., 2017).

The EDAS method, developed by Keshavarz Ghorabaee et al. (2015), is a multi-criteria decision-making approach known as "Evaluation Based on the Distance from the Average Solution" (EDAS) (Keshavarz Ghorabaee et al., 2015). Due to its efficiency and fewer mathematical computations, the EDAS method is superior to other multi-criteria decision-making methods (Asante et al., 2020).

Results

Table 1 presents the decision matrix and weight degrees for the environmental performance indicators of Turkish Airlines for the years 2019-2023. The weight degrees used in the environmental performance ranking were calculated using the entropy method. A total of 10 performance indicators, which were used in the environmental performance ranking, are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Decision Matrix and Weight Degrees (wj) for Turkish Airlines 2019-2023

	Fuel Efficiency Amount of	Recycled Waste Environmental	Management Costs (USD)	Total Energy Consumption (Gj)	Fuel Consumption
2019	3,26	1402	8211709	247848257	13021100
2020	3,21	1199	11477784	126067694	8060296
2021	3,16	1554	8433014	187326898	10190133
2022	3,1	2231	20062805	252648196	16067179
2023	3,07	2118,82	16827066	289961238	14725605
OPT	max	max	max	min	min
wj	0,000138706	0,016153269	0,036856184	0,020956942	0,016554237

	Electricity Consumption per Employee (GJ/employee)	Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions (tons CO2e)	Total Water Withdrawal (m3) – Mains Water	Water Consumption per Person (m3/person)	Amount of Waste Disposed
2019	11,19	17877124	64903	16,91	1
2020	8,75	9094999	38022	14,73	0,6
2021	8,09	16591244	255238	23,7	0,5
2022	8,89	22983093	364508	13,42	0,9
2023	0,06	27464369,13	206595	6,87	17,907
OPT	min	min	min	min	min
wj	0,126638132	0,033133309	0,135430925	0,038689529	0,575448767

As a result of the calculations, it was found that the Amount of Waste Disposed (0.57544) is the indicator with the highest degree of weight. The Total Water Withdrawal (0.13543) and Electricity Consumption per Employee **(**0.12663) were determined to have the following highest weight degrees.

EDAS Method Application Results

Table 2: Environmental Performance Success Rankings of Turkish Airlines for the Years 2019-2023

	spi	sni	nspi	nsni	asi	Rank
2019	0,52760	0,08933	0,83281	0,95369	1,37010	2
2020	0,63352	0,03227	1,00000	0,98327	1,48327	1
2021	0,51667	0,09872	0,81556	0,94882	1,35660	3
2022	0,48100	0,17104	0,75925	0,91133	1,29096	4
2023	0,16154	1,92897	0,25499	0,00000	0,12749	5

Table 2 presents the environmental performance analysis results of Turkish Airlines for the years 2019-2023. According to the analysis results of this study, which employed the ENTROPY and EDAS methods, it can be observed that 2020 was the most successful year in terms of environmental performance ranking for Turkish Airlines. The least successful year in the performance ranking was determined to be 2023. In 2020, the indicators for the amount of waste disposed, total water withdrawal, fuel consumption, total energy consumption, and total greenhouse gas emissions were closer to optimal values compared to other years, which led to a higher ranking in the environmental performance assessment. In contrast, 2023 being the least successful year can be attributed to these indicators being further from optimal values compared to previous years. The desired outcome for corporate sustainability performance rankings is the emergence of performance results that show improvement over the years. However, it is observed that the environmental performance ranking of Turkish Airlines, as considered in this study, has declined over the years.,

Conclusion

The efforts and measures taken by airline companies to ensure environmental sustainability are vital for the long-term sustainability of tourism. Considering that a significant portion of the carbon footprint of global tourism originates from air transportation, it becomes a priority for airline companies to establish environmental sustainability as a corporate policy.

The environmental sustainability performance of airline companies directly and indirectly affects the tourism sector. Reducing carbon emissions, the effective and efficient use of renewable and non-renewable energy sources and developing strategies for renewable resources are crucial for preserving environmental attractiveness in tourism destinations.

This research measured 10 environmental performance indicators from Turkish Airlines' 2023 sustainability report, covering the years 2019-2023, using the ENTROPY and EDAS methods. The Entropy method was used to calculate the weight degrees (wj) in the environmental sustainability performance measurements, while the EDAS method was employed to estimate the environmental performance success rankings. The calculations revealed that the Amount of Waste Disposed (0.57544) has the highest weight degree. The Total Water Withdrawal (0.13543) and Electricity Consumption per Employee (0.12663) were identified as having the highest weight degrees. It was found that 2020 was the most successful year in Turkish Airlines' environmental performance ranking, with 2023 being the least successful year. In 2020, the indicators for the amount of waste disposed, total water withdrawal, fuel consumption, total energy consumption, and total greenhouse gas emissions were closer to optimal values than in other years, leading to a higher ranking in the environmental performance assessment. In contrast, the distance of these indicators from optimal values in 2023 compared to other years can be considered the reason for it being the least successful year.

Upon reviewing the results, it is evident that Turkish Airlines prioritizes its waste management policies. Additionally, the indicators for Total Water Withdrawal (0.13543) and Electricity Consumption per Employee (0.12663) suggest that Turkish Airlines has adopted innovative practices to enhance energy and water conservation in its operational processes. In this regard, Kharrazi et al. (2022) stated that airlines can reduce operational costs and support environmental sustainability by adopting energy efficiency and waste management policies. However, according to the EDAS analysis, while Turkish Airlines was expected to improve its environmental performance indicators over the years, it was revealed that 2022 and 2023 had the lowest performance rankings, being the fourth and fifth years with the lowest performance. In this context, it cannot be said that Turkish Airlines has continuously improved environmental sustainability over the years. Therefore, it would benefit Turkish Airlines to develop environmental performance monitoring systems to track and constantly improve its environmental performance.

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Circular entrepreneurship acceptance of hospitality employees

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the circular entrepreneurship acceptance of hospitality employees in Muğla in Türkiye. This study also develops an adapted measurement scale for the Turkish context, ensuring its validity and reliability.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study was designed with quantitative methods. The data of the research was collected between January and February 2025 through a survey technique targeting hospitality employees (with 105 valid returns). The questionnaire was designed with a measurement scale, adapted from Dragan et al. (2024), for the acceptance of circular entrepreneurship. In addition to descriptive analysis, exploratory factor analysis and reliability tests were conducted.

Results: The results revealed that hospitality employees showed high acceptance of circular economy practices such as recycling and reusing but had lower acceptance levels for reducing and refurbishing. Additionally, the reliability test of the scale showed high internal consistency.

Originality/value: This study is one of the first to explore the acceptance of circular entrepreneurship in the coastal regions of Türkiye. This emphasises the importance of circular economy practices for sustainability in the tourism sector and provides a basis for future research in this field.

Keywords: Circular entrepreneurship acceptance, Hospitality Employees, Sustainable tourism.

Introduction

Sustainable tourism is increasingly considered an essential element of the worldwide tourism and hospitality industry, responding to the growing awareness of environmental issues, the support of local development, and the demand for responsible travel (WTO-UNEP, 2002; EC, 2007). In other words, the tourism industry is under increasing challenge to adopt sustainable behaviours due to growing environmental concerns, legislative requirements, and rising demand for eco-tourism by consumers. Not only tourists but also tourism entrepreneurs and their employees, as key stakeholders in tourism, have a significant role to play in developing sustainable tourism and ensuring the resilience of the tourism industry (Chan et al., 2023).

As a component of the tourism sector, one of the business areas where the impact of human behavior is most evident is that of hospitality (Barr et al., 2011; Hynes and Wilson, 2016). It has been posited that approximately 75% of the environmental issues arising from hospitality enterprises, including those about water, energy, and food consumption, can be attributed to the unsustainable utilization of natural resources (Aboelmaged, 2018). Tourism and hospitality businesses can contribute to sustainable performance by implementing organizational initiatives, activities, and programs encouraging green behaviors (Ones et al., 2015). The participation of employees as pivotal contributors to business operations is paramount for the seamless implementation of environmental programs and activities (Chan et al., 2014). Consequently, the realization of diverse environmental practices and activities within the workplace is contingent upon employees' cognitive and affective attitudes and behaviors (Kollmus and Agyeman, 2002).

An increasing number of hotels are integrating environmental policies and practices into their operational procedures and educating their employees about environmental issues (Chan et al., 2014). It’s, therefore, imperative to gain an understanding of factors that influence sustainable performance, which in turn affects the willingness and intention of employees to initiate, support, and implement environmental practices in hospitality businesses (Okumuş et al., 2019). Understanding these relationships can provide valuable insights for enhancing sustainability in the tourism sector.

Sustainable development is increasingly becoming a critical concern for tourism enterprises, particularly in coastal areas where environmental sensitivity is paramount (Yu et al., 2024). In their comprehensive study, Chan et al. (2022) highlight that tourism businesses are, clustered in coastal regions where the transition to more sustainable practices may be hindered by highly seasonal nature, physical distance from urban centres, and insufficient access to viable infrastructure, capable of adapting to updated standards and new technologies. Researchers who point out the need to ensure the sustainability and long-term viability of tourism businesses in coastal areas due to the significant and long-term socioeconomic benefits they provide to coastal regions, also indicate the importance of the circular economy to eliminate the obstacles faced by these businesses and to support the development of more sustainable and resilient coastal tourism (Chan et al., 2022). As a key player in the global tourism industry, Türkiye, particularly coastal destinations where mass tourism dominates, faces significant environmental challenges requiring accelerating adoption of sustainable practices.

The circular economy describes the process that involves the cycle of production, use, recovery, and reuse. In contrast, the linear economy refers to the process completed by production, use, and waste (European Parliament, 2023). As an alternative to the linear model, the circular economy considers the fundamental role of the environment, its functions, and interactions between the environment and the economic system (Florido et al., 2019). Rodríguez et al. (2020) stated that the literature on circular economy has been developed predominantly for the manufacturing sector, focusing mainly on engineering and science technologies. They argued that there are limited studies on circular economy in the tourism sector, despite its high energy and water consumption, food waste, congestion problems, and CO_2 emissions and contamination. Similarly, Boluk et al. (2019) posit that the consequences of circularity for the tourism and hospitality sector remain primarily unexamined and under-theorised. However, in considering the concept of 'circularities' within the tourism domain, it appears that a holistic perspective is the only approach that can effectively address the multifaceted transformative practices and thereby achieve the objective of sustainable and resilient tourism development (Fuchs, 2023; Velasco-Muñoz et al., 2025).

Circular economy is defined by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013) as a closed-loop economic system that relies on renewable energy sources, with the objective of ensuring that raw materials, products, and inputs retain their utility and quality for as long as possible. The fundamental objective of circular economy is to detach economic development from the linear model of extraction, use and disposal of limited resources. By adopting circular economy, there is an encouragement of sustainable practices that contribute to both environmental sustainability and economic growth (Velasco-Muñoz et al., 2025). Liu (2014) stated that the circular economy is the most efficient tool to overcome the paradox between tourism development and the conservation of the environment, and specific measures are proposed for its implementation in the tourism attractions. Lu and Hu (2014) point out the importance of the circular tourism model implemented in China in eliminating the negative environmental impacts of tourism developers, tourists, tourism businesses, and local people.

Cullen and Angelis (2021) define circular entrepreneurship as the processes of discovering and exploiting circular economy opportunities, noting that it is recently examining in the circular economy literature and there is limited empirical evidence of its implementation through innovative business approaches. The researchers also found in their study that the case of circular entrepreneurship coincides to some extent with environmental and social entrepreneurship, as environmental and social value is created, as well as the creation of economic value (Cullen and Angelis, 2021). Dantas et al. (2022), recommend that managers of financial institutions adopt a feasible policy to encourage the transformation of current employees with technical knowledge and experience in circular entrepreneurship into circular entrepreneurs. They also argue that the increase in the number of circular entrepreneurs would enhance the widespread impact by leading their families and societies in the field of circular entrepreneurship. Dragan et al. (2024) claim that organisations need their employees' *Acceptance of Circular Entrepreneurship (ACE),* which is based on the 5R model (Reduce, Reuse, Refurbish, Repair, and Recycle) to achieve success in circular economy. Despite the importance of circular entrepreneurship for sustainable tourism development, there is a limited number of empirical studies, particularly from the perspectives of hospitality employees in the relevant literature (Re and Magnoni, 2022; Chan et al., 2023; Dragan et al., 2024). In this context, this study aims to investigate the circular entrepreneurship acceptance among hospitality employees in the coastal regions of Türkiye and to make an empirical contribution to the relevant literature.

Methodology

This paper presents the preliminary results of an ongoing research project that focuses on the acceptance of circular entrepreneurship by employees in the hospitality industry, which will help hospitality businesses evolve towards sustainable performance. This study was designed using quantitative research methods, and the survey technique was used as a data collection tool. At this stage of the research, the aim is to adapt the measurement tool to the Turkish language by ensuring its validity and reliability in order to measure the level of acceptance of circular entrepreneurship among employees in the hospitality industry.

The scale of the acceptance of circular entrepreneurship, which was initially prepared in English, was developed by Dragon et al. (2024). The steps taken to ensure validity and reliability, which are crucial in scale adaptation, are briefly described as follows: To ensure the content validity of the scale to be applied in Turkish, translation and back-translation of the items obtained from international studies were carried out as Brislin (1970) recommended. The scale items were translated into Turkish separately by three researchers who are experts in the field, and the items were evaluated and combined in accordance with the translations by the researchers. The translated (Turkish) items were sent to another three different researchers, and a back-translation was requested. The researcher and another tourism academic evaluated the back-translated items with the original scale items. The translation-back translation process was completed by agreeing that there was no loss or difference in meaning in the Turkish expressions, and the questionnaire was ready for a pilot study.

Within this study, 105 valid data were collected between January and February 2025 from the hospitality employees in Muğla, Türkiye. With the data collected, the construct validity of the research scale was tested by means of factor analysis. In contrast, the reliability of the scale was assessed employing Cronbach's alpha value.

The analysis and findings are explained in the following section. Meanwhile, in accordance with the results of the analysis, research data collection has commenced as part of the main field study from March 2025. It is planned that a further field study will be completed in April with sufficient data to verify the revealed factor structure of the research scale and that the analyses will be carried out and presented to the participants at the congress.

Results

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to ensure construct validity of the scale. Exploratory factor analysis allows complex dimensions to be uncovered, and factors that explain the structure of the measured variable can be obtained by analysing the dataset and testing predictions (Yong and Pearce, 2013). To determine whether the data were suitable for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) criterion for sampling adequacy and Bartlett's degree of sphericity, which indicates the criterion for extracting significant factors from the available data, were calculated. The EFA was carried out using principal component analysis and the Promax oblique rotation technique. The Promax technique was chosen among the oblique rotation methods because the correlation values calculated between the scale and the items were high (>0.3), and the scale factors were related to each other (Pallant, 2017: 201-203). EFA results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis

Items	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalues	% of Variance
ACE1	,482	3,635	51,931
ACE2	,820		
ACE3	,641		
ACE4	,818		
ACE5	,802		
ACE6	,754		
ACE7	,663		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy:			,819
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		282,571
	Df		21
	Sig.		,000

As shown in Table 1, the KMO value (0.819), which was higher than 0.70, showed that the sample size was at an acceptable level. The fact that Bartlett's sphericity test values were statistically significant at the 0.00 level indicated that the data were suitable for the application of factor analysis. As a result of EFA, it was determined that the seven items in the ACE scale were compatible with the single-factor structure of the original scale, explaining 51,931% of the total variance. The factor loadings of the statements ranging from 0.482 to 0.820 were at a high level except for one item.

The scale was also tested for reliability, and the Cronbach alpha value, which indicates the internal consistency reliability of the scale, was assessed. This value, measured to test whether the statements in the measurement tool are consistent with each other, is suggested to be above 0.70 (Gürbüz and Şahin, 2018). The value of the Cronbach alpha based on standardized items (0.839) indicated that the scale was highly reliable. In addition, the item analysis of the scale was examined by calculating the corrected item-total correlation. As a consequence of the analyses undertaken in order to ascertain the scale's validity and reliability, the removal of any of the seven statements was deemed unnecessary.

Descriptive analysis was used to examine the general level of acceptance of circular entrepreneurship (ACE) among hospitality employees (Table 2).

Table 2. Item Means, Standard Deviations of the ACE Scale

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
ACE1	3,51	1,401
ACE2	4,56	,796
ACE3	3,92	1,141
ACE4	4,43	,853
ACE5	4,71	,675
ACE6	4,24	,861
ACE7	4,23	,835
Item Means	4,230	,65540

The results of the descriptive analysis showed that the acceptance of circular entrepreneurship among hospitality employees is high (mean=4.23 out of 5; std. deviation=0.656). When the perceptions of hospitality employees in the statements regarding the acceptance of circular entrepreneurship were examined, it was seen that the highest level of acceptance was related to the fact that recycling is beneficial to the economy and the environment (mean=4.71; std. deviation=0.675), following by the fact that reusing systems are beneficial for the economy and environment (mean=4.56; std. deviation=0.796). However, hotel employees were found to be less accepting of the economic and environmental benefits of reducing (mean=3.51; std. deviation=1.401) and refurbishing (mean=3.92; std. deviation=1.141).

Conclusion

This study is presented based on the results of a pilot study for a more comprehensive research project that is currently in progress. The study provides insights into the acceptance of circular business practices among employees in the hospitality industry, a crucial aspect of promoting sustainable tourism. The high level of acceptance of recycling and reuse systems reflects a growing recognition of their environmental and economic benefits. The preliminary findings also highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach to sustainable tourism. Although recycling and reusing are widely accepted, the other components of the circular economy, particularly reduction and refurbishment, require more targeted efforts. These findings are consistent with the study of Velasco-Muñoz et al. (2025), who claimed that the main challenge in applying circular models to tourism lies in reducing the resources used in a sector characterised by overuse.

In conclusion, while hospitality employees in Muğla show a strong willingness to embrace circular entrepreneurship, challenges remain in achieving full-scale adoption of all aspects of circular economy practices. Future research should focus on exploring the barriers to the acceptance of reducing and refurbishing in the tourism industry, particularly in coastal regions. Additionally, exploring the role of policy interventions and business strategies in overcoming these challenges could be crucial for supporting the transition towards a more sustainable tourism sector. By addressing these variables, tourism businesses can contribute to the long-term sustainability of coastal destinations, benefiting both the environment and local communities.

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Factors Influencing Return Visits and Premium Payment Willingness at Eco-Centric Hotels: Examining Experiential Green Hotel Loyalty

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Abstract

Purpose: The main objective of the study is to test the RI-ELC (Revist Intention-Experiental Loyalty Chain) model. Based on the Threory of Planned behaviour , this study extends the conventional model to examine the influence of tourist satisfaction, emotional attachment, attitudes, WOM subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on revisit intentions, and examines how these intentions affect customers' willingess to spend extra charges , satisfaction with green services/products, and experiental loyalty to Eco Centric Hotels hotels in Antalya.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: A quantitative research approach was employed, collecting data through face-to-face surveys from 348 respondents in Antalya, Turkey—a city known for its environmentally conscious tourism sector.

Results: The preliminary findings highlight that past satisfaction with eco-centric hotel practices, service experiences, and attitudes towards sustainability significantly predict tourists' intention to revisit eco-centric hotels. Additionally, word-of-mouth recommendations and hotel reputation emerged as strong predictors of revisit intention. However, perceived behavioral control and subjective norms—particularly peer influence and social support—were found to have no significant impact on revisit intentions. The study also confirms that key hotel choice factors in the extended model positively influence tourists' willingness to pay more foreco-centric services. Findings further indicate that tourists have developed experiential loyalty towards eco-hotels, reinforcing their long-term commitment and enhancing the sustainability and profitability of the industry.

Originality/Value: This research enhances the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by incorporating several newly validated factors and positions experiential loyalty as an outcome, thus contributing to the expanding literature on sustainable tourism and hospitality management. The study delivers actionable insights for eco-centric hotel owners, managers, marketing, and media planners, as well as green researchers, underscoring the significance of green performance,image, emotional attachment, WOM and guest satisfaction. These antecedents promote repeat visits, a willingness to pay extra charges, and customer retention, which in turn fosters long-term financial sustainability. The Revised Integrative Experiential Loyalty Construct (RI-ELC) model provides a fresh perspective on the elements that drive revisit intentions and price elasticity, as well as determining whether experiential loyalty has been cultivated through such mechanisms.

Keywords: eco-hotel, hotel choice factors, revisit intention, willingness to pay more, experiential loyalty.

Introduction

The hospitality industry is undergoing a significant transformation in response to growing environmental concerns and increasing awareness of sustainable consumption practices. As a sector that accounts for nearly 8% of global carbon emissions (Streimikiene et al., 2021), the tourism industry has come under scrutiny for its environmental impact. Among its various components, the accommodation sector alone contributes approximately 20% of total tourism-related emissions (Merli et al., 2019). This has led to a surge in demand for green hotels, which integrate sustainability-oriented operational strategies, including energy conservation, waste reduction, and responsible resource management (Chen & Peng, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). While these initiatives align with global efforts to mitigate climate change, the economic viability of green hospitality largely depends on consumer behavior—particularly revisit intentions and willingess to spend extra charges for eco-friendly services (Nimri et al., 2020; Yarimoglu & Gunay, 2020).

Despite the rising popularity of sustainability-focused accommodations, research highlights a discrepancy between consumer attitudes and actual purchasing behavior. While many travelers express strong pro-environmental attitudes, their willingness to financially support green hotel initiatives remains inconsistent (Chen et al., 2022). This attitude-behavior gap poses a challenge for green hoteliers striving to justify the additional costs of implementing sustainability practices (Casado-Díaz et al., 2020). Some studies suggest that customers acknowledge the added value of sustainable practices and are willing to pay higher prices (Soni et al., 2022), whereas others indicate that guests expect hotels to absorb these costs rather than passing them on to consumers (Kunchornsirimongkon and Apichai, 2020). Furthermore, cultural and socio-economic factors may influence purchasing behaviors, as collectivist societies tend to prioritize collective well-being and sustainability more than individualistic cultures (Shehawy et al., 2024).

To examine these dynamics, this study expands the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which is commonly applied to predict consumer intentions, by incorporating experiential green loyalty as a crucial factor influencing customer retention. The Revisit Intention-Experiential Loyalty Chain (RI-ELC) proposes that the sustainability and profitability of hospitality businesses are closely linked to guests' satisfaction with eco-friendly services, their willingness to share positive word-of-mouth, and their emotional connection to environmentally conscious hotels (Kunchornsirimongkon and Apichai,2020; Yarimoglu and Gunay, 2020). This framework provides a comprehensive perspective on how consumer attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, satisfaction, and financial commitment interact within sustainable hospitality.

By employing a quantitative research approach, this study seeks to identify the psychological and economic factors influencing return visits and premium payment willingness at eco-centric hotels.

The findings aim to contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism and green consumer behavior, providing actionable insights for hoteliers seeking to enhance their green branding strategies, consumer retention, and long-term profitability.

Methodology

1.1. Variable Measurement

The study evaluates key dimensions of eco-centric hotel experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and customer behavior using established measurement tools. This following table systematically outlines the research constructs used in studying green hotels, the methodologies employed for measuring these constructs, and the sources of these methodologies.

Measurement Approaches and Citations for Green Hotel Research Constructs

Concept	Measurement Approach	Citations
Emotional Attachment in Green Hotels	Derived from or adapted from prior research	(Jang et al., 2014; Hasan, 2023; Wu et al., 2021)
Attitudes Toward Green Hotels	Measurement approaches based on earlier studies	(Haq et al., 2023; Nimri et al., 2020; Verma et al., 2019; Yadav et al., 2019)
Image of Green Hotels	Incorporated validated scales from the literature	(Wang et al., 2018; Sarmiento-Guede et al., 2021)
Effectiveness of Green Practices	Measured using structured scales informed by past research	(Assaker, 2020; Merli et al., 2019; Moise et al., 2020)
Guest Satisfaction in Green hotels	Assessed through a framework integrating elements from existing models	(Assaker, 2020; Merli et al., 2019; Sarmiento-Guede et al., 2021)
Word-of-Mouth (WOM) Behavior about Green Hotels	Captured using refined scales inspired by prior studies	(Augusto & Torres, 2018;
Subjective Norm and Perceived Behavioral Control toward Green Hoeels	Measured using a combination of selected items adapted from earlier models	(Han et al., 2010; Wu & Ai, 2016)

Concept	**Measurement Approach**	**Citations**
Willingness to Pay Additional Charges for Green Hotels	Examined using questions structured around prior frameworks	(Can et al., 2023; Kang et al., 2012; Yadav et al., 2019)
Experiental Loyalty toward Green Hotels	Designed based on scales from previous studies	(Merli et al., 2019)
Revisit Intention to Green Hotels	Determined using a modified version of an established scale	(Han, Hsu & Lee, 2009)

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale. The original questionnaire was developed in English and distributed to tourists by a trained research team under the supervision of one of the authors of this paper.

1.2.Collection of Data

Totally, 61 Eco centric hotels in Antalya had green certification during the study period (TURCEV, 2024). Before the main data collection, a preliminary study involving five tourists was carried out to verify content validity and enhance the precision of the research instruments. The evaluation of measurement scales confirmed their reliability and appropriateness for the study.

The face validity was confirmed after getting positive feedback from the pilot respondents. The survey was conducted face to face with the tourist in the around of the hotel environment like shooping centers, baazars and so forth. . The sample consisted of 348 tourists who had experience at Eco Centric hotels at least 1 time and two nights (previously stayed in green-certified hotels) in Antalya, Turkiye. The questionnaires were self-administered, and respondents were instructed to carefully read and answer all questions.

To maintain data quality, incomplete responses were removed during the sorting process. Ultimately, 348 valid responses were retained for analysis, with approximately 15 questionnaires discarded due to missing or inconsistent data. This systematic approach ensured the integrity and reliability of the dataset, facilitating an in-depth examination of factors influencing consumer behavior in green hospitality settings.

1.3.Data Analysis Methods

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research constructs, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed following established methodological guidelines (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The study assessed both convergent and discriminant validity based on the criteria proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), with the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranging from 0.51 to 0.76, demonstrating the adequacy of the measurement model.

To analyze the relationships between the study variables, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized to test the research hypotheses and examine the interactions between the constructs. Model fit was evaluated using indicators such as the incremental fit index (IFI) and the normalized chi-square (χ^2/df) to ensure alignment between the theoretical framework and empirical data.

All statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS and AMOS software. The reliability of the measurement scales was examined through Cronbach's alpha, confirming internal consistency. Additionally, composite reliability (CR) was assessed to further establish the robustness of the constructs.

By applying these statistical techniques, this study provides a comprehensive examination of the factors influencing revisit intention and willingess to spend extra charges in eco-centric hotels. This methodological approach strengthens the reliability and applicability of the findings within the field of sustainable hospitality research.

Results

We are currently analyzing the pilot data and will be evaluating the large collected data soon. We are expecting the tables will be ready toward the end of next month! Thanks for your understanding. Base on the preliminary tests we tried to serve our abstract and conculusion part due to the requirement of the conference submission .

Conclusion

Using the revisit intention-experiential loyalty chain (RI-ELC) model, this paper explores a new extended theory of planned behavior (TPB) model with validated factors seeking to understand their relevance to tourists' revisit intention (RVI) and willingness to pay more (WPM) for eco-centric hotels. The study also aims to find out whether the visitor shows such experiential devotion to the green hotels in Antalya region of Turkey. The initial results show that return intentions are highly influenced by green attachment, attitudes, image, practices, word of mouth and guest satisfaction. In addition, it highly predicts willingness to pay a surcharge and examines if such a green experiential loyalty (GEL) processed in the customers.

However, the results of the pilot test show that subjective norms (SN) and perceived control (PC) have no significant influence on revisit intention, which means that external social influences and perceived ease of engaging in sustainable tourism are not crucial elements for tourists' decision to return to green hotels. Rather, guests' loyalty and financial commitment to sustainability are determined by personal experience, satisfaction with the green offering and the hotel's reputation. Even though this is not required for green consumers in the latest study, satisfaction seems to be particularly important.

The study underlines the need to improve green performance, image, service quality, WOM, retention and satisfaction, and to promote experiential green loyalty to encourage repeat visits and willingness to pay extra charges for financial sustainability in such businesses. This has practical implications for environmentally conscious hotel operators. Strategies such as emphasizing good guest experiences, educating customers about the benefits of sustainability and leveraging word-of-mouth can help to further increase consumer engagement with green hotels.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study explores and evaluates the determinants of revisit intention within the existing literature, contributing to the advancement of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). In addition, it examines tourists' willingness to pay and demonstrates the value of experienced loyalty in forming environmentally conscious customer behavior. Future studies should address demographic and cultural differences in choosing an eco-centric hotel and examine the long-term financial impact of green customer experience loyalty on the profitability of sustainable travel businesses. This study contributes to a broader discussion on sustainable tourism, visitor loyalty and the financial feasibility of environmentally conscious hotel operations by combining theoretical insights with practical advice.

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The Future of Tourism in Florida: Sustainable Strategies in the Face of Urbanization and Climate Change

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the intricate relationships among climate change, rapid urbanization, and the long-term sustainability of Florida's tourism industry. As tourism remains a cornerstone of the state's economy, gaining insight into how these dynamic factors shape Florida's allure as a premier travel destination is essential for stakeholders and policymakers.

Methodology: This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of historical climate, urbanization, and tourism data with qualitative interviews from key stakeholders. GIS mapping is employed to identify spatial patterns and vulnerabilities at the intersection of urban growth, climate risks, and tourism in Florida.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data were examined using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses to determine the relationships among climate variables, urbanization, and tourism indicators. The influence of temperature anomalies and sea-level rise on tourism demand was specifically modeled. Qualitative interviews were thematically analyzed using NVivo, with major themes encompassing perceived climate threats to tourism infrastructure, community involvement in sustainability, and policy shortcomings in environmental protection. GIS analysis demonstrated a significant overlap between coastal erosion and urban expansion in major tourist destinations, highlighting areas of heightened vulnerability such as Miami Beach and Sarasota.

Discussion: Florida's tourism industry faces a pivotal challenge as climate change and urbanization converge to intensify environmental and economic vulnerabilities. These findings suggest that rising temperatures and extreme weather events have a direct, negative impact on visitor demand, while unchecked urban expansion erodes essential natural barriers, such as wetlands and mangroves, that mitigate climate-related risks. Stakeholder perspectives highlight persistent shortcomings in policy enforcement, particularly in relation to land use in ecologically sensitive regions. Nevertheless, the emergence of sustainable urban planning initiatives—such as the adoption of green infrastructure and low-impact development—signals a positive shift toward resilience. The results emphasize the necessity for integrated governance frameworks that foster collaboration among tourism, environmental, and urban planning authorities. Achieving sustainable tourism in Florida requires a transition from superficial marketing efforts to systemic reforms, community engagement, and a sustained commitment to ecological stewardship.

Keywords: Green Infrastructure, Integrated Governance, Sustainability, Urbanization, Community Well-being, Climate Change, Sea-Level Rise, Resilience

Introduction

Florida, often referred to as the "Sunshine State," stands as a leading tourist destination in the United States, drawing millions of visitors each year to its iconic theme parks, pristine beaches, and unique ecological reserves. However, the long-term sustainability of Florida's tourism industry faces mounting challenges arising from rapid urbanization, climate change, and increasing pressure on natural resources. These intersecting threats are particularly acute for the state's extensive coastal regions, which are both economic engines and ecological hotspots vulnerable to sea-level rise and extreme weather events. Central to addressing these challenges is the adoption of green infrastructure and the establishment of integrated governance frameworks. Green infrastructure—such as constructed wetlands, permeable pavements, and urban green spaces—not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of tourist destinations but also delivers critical ecosystem services, including flood mitigation, water purification, and habitat preservation. By prioritizing the implementation of such nature-based solutions, Florida can bolster the resilience of its tourism sector while simultaneously promoting environmental stewardship. Integrated governance is equally vital in orchestrating effective responses to the multifaceted risks facing Florida's tourism industry. Collaborative policymaking that brings together stakeholders from tourism, urban planning, environmental management, and local communities enables the design and execution of holistic strategies. These strategies facilitate the alignment of economic objectives with social and ecological priorities, ensuring that tourism development does not compromise the well-being of local populations or the integrity of natural systems. Furthermore, advancing sustainable tourism in Florida requires proactive community engagement and the mainstreaming of responsible resource management practices. Initiatives such as nutrient reduction targets, eco-friendly infrastructure, and public education campaigns are essential for safeguarding key attractions, including beaches and marine environments, from pollution and degradation. By fostering a tourism model grounded in ecological balance and community well-being, Florida can secure its status as a premier travel destination for generations to come. This research provides a comprehensive evaluation of the interconnected impacts of climate change and urbanization on tourism sustainability in Florida. By emphasizing the roles of green infrastructure and integrated governance, the study offers actionable insights for policymakers, urban planners, and industry leaders and advances the broader dialogue on harmonizing economic development with environmental conservation in tourism-dependent regions

1. Conceptual Framework

Florida's historical development, ecological diversity, and economic growth provide a foundation for understanding its vulnerability to climate change and urbanization. The state's rich natural resources—extensive coastline, biodiverse ecosystems, and prominent tourism attractions—are increasingly at risk due to rising sea levels, habitat loss, and urban sprawl.

Previous research, such as the Modified Climate Index for Tourism (MCIT) introduced by Yu, Schwartz, and Walsh (2009), highlights the importance of tourism-specific climate assessments. The MCIT enables the evaluation of climate suitability for tourism activities and supports the development of adaptation strategies to enhance tourism sector resilience. Similarly, studies by Geselbracht et al. (2015) and Romañach, Benscoter, and Haider (2020) emphasize the interconnected impacts of sea-level rise, urbanization, and ecosystem degradation on Florida's coastal zones. These works underscore the necessity of integrating ecological perspectives and conservation-focused planning into policy frameworks.

Özlem Küçük's article, "The Effects of Climate Change and Mining on the Sustainable Future of Tourism (Latin American Example)," analyzes the intricate relationship between climate change, mining activities, and sustainable tourism in Latin America, particularly within the Amazon region. The article begins by highlighting the detrimental effects of climate change, such as rising temperatures and altered precipitation patterns, which threaten biodiversity and compromise food and water security. Küçük points to the Amazon rainforest's susceptibility to environmental degradation, exacerbated by historical deforestation linked to agricultural expansion and timber extraction. Mining is presented as a longstanding economic activity in Latin America that significantly contributes to ecosystem damage. The article notes that mining operations, particularly encroaching into protected areas, lead to soil contamination and the displacement of indigenous populations, ultimately undermining nature-based tourism. Despite the financial benefits derived from mining, the socioeconomic conditions of many Latin American countries remain precarious, with persistent poverty and inequality. Küçük argues that the economic advantages of mining have not translated into improved living standards for local communities, perpetuating ongoing cycles of disadvantage. The author advocates for the adoption of sustainable tourism practices as a critical strategy for conserving natural resources and improving local livelihoods. However, the dual threats of climate change and mining complicate the pursuit of sustainable tourism. The article concludes by asserting that without comprehensive strategies addressing these interlinked challenges, the viability of sustainable tourism in Latin America remains at risk. Küçük calls for holistic approaches that prioritize environmental sustainability and social equity to ensure that tourism development yields benefits for both ecosystems and local communities (Küçük, 2023).

The conceptual framework for this study synthesizes these insights to examine how climate change, urban expansion, and ecosystem vulnerability intersect to shape the future of tourism in Florida. It draws on ecological modeling, GIS analyses, and scenario-based projections to assess risks and identify adaptation pathways. By incorporating lessons from recent literature, this framework advocates for proactive adaptation strategies—such as habitat restoration, managed retreat, and climate-resilient urban planning—to safeguard Florida's tourism-dependent environments. The focus is on aligning conservation, community resilience, and sustainable economic development through integrated, evidence-based approaches.

Recent studies also underscore the significance of green infrastructure solutions and integrated, cross-sectoral governance in enhancing adaptive capacity. The inclusion of living shorelines, urban wetlands, and collaborative management frameworks has been shown to deliver both ecological and economic benefits, supporting the long-term resilience of tourism destinations. Moreover, community-based adaptation and stakeholder participation are increasingly recognized as vital components in developing effective, equitable, and context-specific strategies.

2. Sustainable Tourism in Florida: A Transformation Through Green Infrastructure and Community Well-Being

Florida's tourism sector is a cornerstone of the state's economy, ranking consistently among the top contributors to employment and revenue (Visit Florida, 2023). The industry's origins can be traced to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when railroad expansion and targeted promotional campaigns transformed Florida into a premier travel destination (Stipanuk, 2006). In the contemporary era, the state continues to attract millions of domestic and international visitors, drawn by its world-renowned theme parks, extensive coastline, and diverse natural and cultural amenities (FDEP, 2022). Tourism has historically served as the economic cornerstone of Florida, contributing over $100 billion to the economy and accounting for nearly 14% of the state's GDP in 2022. However, this growth has introduced significant environmental challenges, including carbon emissions and waste that damage ecosystems. Increased tourist activity leads to the overuse of natural resources, resulting in soil erosion, habitat destruction, and harm to marine life, particularly coral reefs. Furthermore, marine pollution—driven by the release of hazardous materials into oceans and other water bodies—negatively impacts the blue economy, generating economic costs, health risks, and infrastructure damage that threaten both environmental sustainability and economic viability (Macdonald et al., 2023). This contradiction underscores the urgent need for a new paradigm in tourism management—one that balances economic benefits with ecological integrity and community well-being.

2.1. Contemporary Challenges: Climate Change, Urban Sprawl, and Policy Contradictions

The sustainability of Florida's tourism model is confronted by multiple interconnected threats. Climate change directly endangers coastal infrastructure and natural attractions through sea-level rise and intensifying hurricanes (Atzori & Fyall, 2018). Research by Mondal et al. (2025) confirms a significant increase in the vulnerability of Florida's coastline over thirty years, jeopardizing the very foundation of its tourism industry. These environmental risks are exacerbated by rapid urbanization and unplanned development. Historically, the commodification of the natural environment for resorts and golf courses has been a prevalent trend, as exemplified by the case of Amelia Island (Cosby, 2014). This trend persists today, evidenced by controversial policy decisions such as the transfer of protected lands like the Withlacoochee State Forest to golf course developers, which fragments wildlife corridors and degrades the natural landscapes that attract eco-conscious tourists (Pittman, 2024). Such actions reveal a profound contradiction between the state's professed commitment to sustainability and short-term commercial interests. Global comparisons demonstrate that iconic regions like the Great Barrier Reef and the Amazon face similar pressures, highlighting the critical need for proactive measures in Florida (Rahman et al., 2024; Küçük, 2023).

2.2. A Pathway to a Sustainable Future: Green Infrastructure and Integrated Governance

Addressing these challenges requires a profound strategic transformation to secure the future of tourism. At the core of the solution lie green infrastructure and integrated governance models. Mondal et al. (2025) strongly advocate for a "green-gray infrastructure" approach, which combines traditional engineering solutions with the restoration of natural ecosystems. This includes restoring mangrove wetlands and other natural buffers to stabilize shorelines and provide protection against storm surges. Furthermore, urban green infrastructure applications, such as permeable pavements and green roofs for stormwater management, can reduce pollution and enhance climate resilience. These physical interventions are only effective when supported by robust integrated governance. Chesnes (2024) and Chesnes & Mulligan (2025) emphasize the importance of policy frameworks that foster collaboration between the tourism sector, environmental agencies, and urban planning commissions. Proposals to include more scientists and local officials in the Florida Wildlife Commission aim to better align decision-making with scientific data and concerns for community well-being. Additionally, legislation that incentivizes eco-friendly practices and more strictly regulates land use in ecologically sensitive areas to mitigate the effects of over-tourism is vital. Ultimately, Florida must transition to a model based on ecotourism and community engagement, one that safeguards the state's natural and cultural heritage while supporting the welfare of its residents. This transformation would reposition Florida not merely as a vacation destination but as a living laboratory for sustainability, ensuring the protection of its economy and environment for future generations.

Conclusion

This research highlights the pressing need for sustainable strategies in Florida's tourism sector, as climate change and urbanization increasingly threaten both ecological integrity and economic viability. Through a mixed-methods approach—integrating statistical analysis, stakeholder perspectives, and geospatial mapping—the study reveals how rising temperatures, sea-level rise, and urban expansion converge to undermine tourism infrastructure and natural protective systems. The geospatial findings, in particular, highlight the spatial overlap between vulnerable coastal zones and tourism hotspots, emphasizing the importance of climate-resilient urban planning. Stakeholder interviews further expose gaps in policy enforcement and the need for inclusive governance frameworks that empower community-led sustainability efforts. Table 1 synthesizes these insights, illustrating the multifaceted risks and adaptive responses shaping Florida's tourism future. To navigate these challenges, tourism development must embrace green infrastructure, integrated governance, and resilience-focused planning. By aligning tourism growth with environmental stewardship and community well-being, Florida can preserve its natural and cultural assets while sustaining its status as a premier travel destination.

Table 1. Summary of Mixed-Methods Analysis: Climate Change, Urbanization, and Tourism in Florida

Analysis Method	**Key Variables/Themes Analyzed**	**Primary Findings**	**Implications for Tourism Sustainability**
Quantitative Analysis (Descriptive, Correlation, & Regression)	• Climate Variables: Temperature anomalies, sea-level rise data • Tourism Indicators: Visitor numbers, hotel occupancy, revenue • Urbanization Metrics: Population growth, impervious surface area	• A significant negative correlation was found between temperature anomalies and tourism demand. • Sea-level rise metrics were a significant predictor of decreased visitor numbers in coastal counties. • Urbanization metrics showed a strong positive correlation with increased tourism infrastructure pressure.	Rising temperatures and sea levels directly threaten economic stability. Tourism planning must integrate climate projections to mitigate revenue losses.
Qualitative Analysis (NVivo Thematic Analysis of Stakeholder Interviews)	• Perceived climate threats to infrastructure • Community involvement in sustainability • Policy shortcomings in environmental protection	• Key Theme 1: Widespread concern over coastal infrastructure resilience (e.g., flooding of airports, beaches). • Key Theme 2: Strong support for community-led conservation, but a perceived lack of formal engagement channels. • Key Theme 3: Consistent criticism of fragmented governance and inadequate	Highlights a critical gap between stakeholder concerns and policy action. Effective strategies require inclusive governance and better policy implementation.

Analysis Method	**Key Variables/Themes Analyzed**	**Primary Findings**	**Implications for Tourism Sustainability**
		enforcement of environmental regulations.	
Geospatial (GIS) Analysis (Spatial Overlay & Vulnerability Mapping)	• Coastal erosion rates • Urban expansion patterns • Tourism destination zones	• High erosion risk identified in key tourism zones, especially in low-lying coastal areas. • Urban expansion overlaps with vulnerable ecosystems and tourism hotspots. • Spatial clustering of tourism infrastructure in high-risk flood zones.	Spatial planning must prioritize climate-resilient infrastructure. Zoning regulations should restrict development in erosion-prone areas. GIS tools should be integrated into long-term tourism sustainability strategies.

Mini Case Study: St. Augustine's Resilient Tourism Strategy

St. Augustine, the oldest continuously inhabited European-established settlement in the United States, presents a compelling model of resilience that directly addresses the systemic challenges identified in this study. It serves as a practical implementation of the integrated governance and green infrastructure approaches essential for a sustainable tourism future (City of St. Augustine, 2021).

Faced with threats from sea-level rise and the pressures of urban development, the city has adopted a proactive, multi-faceted strategy:

- **Investment in Green Infrastructure:** The implementation of permeable pavements, rain gardens, and restored wetlands mitigates urban flooding and reduces the heat island effect, enhancing the city's climate resilience (Beatley, 2019).
- **Adaptive Historic Preservation:** Recognizing that its historical assets are its primary tourism draw, the city integrates climate projections into preservation plans to protect heritage sites from storm surges and erosion (Hine et al., 2017).
- **Collaborative Governance:** Through town hall forums and sustainability councils, the strategy fosters **community involvement**, ensuring that local stakeholders are active participants in decision-making processes.

- **Promotion of Low-Impact Tourism:** By marketing walking tours, heritage trails, and nature-based excursions, St. Augustine aligns its economic model with the principles of community well-being and ecological stewardship (Florida Department of State, 2020).

The outcomes observed in St. Augustine validate this approach: increased resilience of critical tourism infrastructure, high levels of visitor satisfaction driven by well-preserved assets, and robust collaboration between public, private, and community sectors. St. Augustine's experience demonstrates that the vulnerabilities posed by climate change and urbanization are not insurmountable. Instead, they can catalyze innovation and collaboration. The city's success offers a tangible, scalable blueprint for sustainable tourism—rooted in integrated planning, green infrastructure, and genuine community engagement—that can safeguard Florida's economic vitality and cultural heritage. By transforming systemic risks into opportunities for resilient growth, St. Augustine exemplifies what a climate-conscious tourism future can look like.

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Energy-Efficiency and Climate Change Mitigation in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry: A Sustainable Development Goals Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines how hotels respond to the call for energy efficiency in response to calls for climate change action under SDG 13. The primary research question focuses on how the tourism and hospitality industry localised SDG 7 (clean energy) and SDG 13 (climate change action) in its daily operations. This study further examines the opportunities and challenges that hotels face in their SDGs implementation programs.

Study design/methodology/approach: Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through key informant interviews and field observations of 40 hotels in the central business district of Cape Town. The data were analysed using the QuestionPro built-in analysis tool and ATLAS.ti.25.

Results: The study found that Hotels implemented various initiatives in their daily operations by incorporating green technologies and infrastructure to ensure energy efficiency and climate change. The most adopted energy-saving technology is the adoption of LED lights, procurement of highly energy-efficient technology, and use of low-flow showerheads, among others. The study also found that the least-adopted measure of climate change action was the payment of carbon offsets by hotel guests.

Originality/value: This study recommends that more budget be allocated to escalate investment in green technology in hotels for the sector to meet its emission reduction targets.

Keywords climate change; energy efficiency; green technology; SDGs; tourism hospitality

Introduction

Tourism production and consumption have both positive and negative implications for communities and the environment (Saarinen 2020). Given the growing pressure that tourism places on local resources such as water and energy, and the severe waste and pollution issues in some regions, there has been growing pressure to address the sector's huge environmental footprint (Moon & Batle, 2018; Mdoda et al., 2024). Some of the largest environmental footprints of hotels and the tourism industry originate from energy and water consumption (Miralles et al. 2023; Dube, 2024). Tourism accounts for approximately 8% of global CO2 emissions (Lenzen et al., 2018). Dube and Nhamo (2018) noted that a significant number of tourists travelling to resorts using roads and air transport contributed to high carbon emissions. The authors argue that the extensive utilisation of airlines means that the carbon footprints of tourist destinations are substantially similar. The transportation sector accounts for 75% of the total emissions, with air travel accounting for 50% (Rahman et al., 2022). The hotel sector accounts for 22% of the total, with the remaining 4% coming from activity-based tourism (Rahman et al. 2022). Thus, this sector is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, which are responsible for global warming and climate change.

Consequently, there is a need for the hospitality industry to address its emissions burden and contribute to sustainability. Among other things, the sector must address its energy demand to ensure sustainability. Aside from significant investments in green renewables, one of the many ways to achieve this is to ensure energy efficiency through retrofitting. The climax of the climate change debate comes when the sector has just emerged from an excruciating pandemic which undermines many enterprises' capacity to invest in climate change action. This study emerges from the need to take stock of the current efforts of hotels in Cape Town to understand progress, challenges, and opportunities in this regard.

Methodology

This study utilises a mixed-method research methodology that focuses on examining hotels in the Cape Town district. The study involved collecting data through interviews, field observations, and completing an online observation questionnaire designed to systematically capture all hotel practices regarding energy efficiency and climate change. Questions centred on the efforts and activities undertaken to ensure energy efficiency in hotels in Cape Town, one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. The questionnaire was completed in approximately 15 minutes on average and was complemented by key informant interviews with hotel management. Initially, 108 hotels were invited to complete a census to identify the hotels in the city. Of those who started the survey, 68 dropped out and 40 valid completions were completed, resulting in a completion rate of 37.04%. Data were analysed using the inbuilt QuestionPro analysis tool and ATLAS.ti25.

Results

The study found that the selected hotels implemented various initiatives in their daily operations to ensure energy efficiency. These initiatives include using hotel keycards to control and manage room lighting and electricity and prioritising the procurement of energy-efficient equipment, such as installing double-glazed windows and automated lights. Table 3.1 shows the various initiatives implemented to localise SDG 7 in selected hotels.

Table 3.1: Energy-Efficiency Measures at Cape Town Hotels

Energy efficiency

Statement	Yes	No	To some extent	To a large extent	We are planning for it	I don't know	Overall
We conduct energy audits	28 75.68%	1 2.7%	2 5.41%	2 5.41%	2 5.41%	2 5.41%	37 100%
We prioritize the procurement of energy-efficient equipment	29 76.32%	1 2.63%	2 5.26%	3 7.89%	2 5.26%	1 2.63%	38 100%
We make use of LED lights	34 87.18%	0 0%	3 7.69%	1 2.56%	1 2.56%	0 0%	39 100%
We make use of hotel keycards	34 87.18%	4 10.26%	1 2.56%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	39 100%
We have centralized heating and cooling	27 69.23%	8 20.51%	3 7.69%	1 2.56%	0 0%	0 0%	39 100%
We make use of smart geysers to reduce energy	28 71.79%	2 5.13%	1 2.56%	0 0%	5 12.82%	3 7.69%	39 100%
We make use of double-glazed windows	21 53.85%	12 30.77%	3 7.69%	0 0%	0 0%	3 7.69%	39 100%
Our building encompasses green building design techniques	16 41.03%	6 15.38%	11 28.21%	1 2.56%	1 2.56%	4 10.26%	39 100%
We make use of low-flow shower heads	31 79.49%	2 5.13%	4 10.26%	1 2.56%	1 2.56%	0 0%	39 100%
We have automated lights	25 64.1%	7 17.95%	3 7.69%	2 5.13%	1 2.56%	1 2.56%	39 100%
Our guest have an option to offset their carbonfootprint	19 48.72%	10 25.64%	4 10.26%	1 2.56%	1 2.56%	4 10.26%	39 100%

The questionnaire survey revealed that most hotels (75.68%) conduct energy audits to account for and manage their electricity usage. Most hotels (87.18%) used LED low-watt lights throughout the hotels or in some parts (7.69%) of the buildings, with only 2.56% of the hotels planning for it. This means that most hotels have made significant strides toward saving energy by improving their efficiency. LED lights are known to substantially reduce energy usage. Periyannan et al. (2023) argued that LED retrofits can lead to 15-30% in energy savings and, by proxy, carbon emissions. The use of automatic lights assists a great deal in saving energy. Investment in automatic lights by more than 64% of the hotels sampled is commendable as it ensures energy savings and property efficiency

The results show that most hotels (87.18%) use keycards to control the lighting and electricity in their rooms. By inserting a keycard into the card reader, lights either automatically go on or are manually switched on, and guests can use devices such as TVs and control automated blinds. All lights and the TV were turned off as soon as the rooms were not occupied and the keycard was removed. Gupta and Vegelin (2016) argue that using hotel key cards offers numerous benefits, including that they assist in ensuring energy savings and efficiency.

Evidence from the Questionnaire survey, as seen in Table 3.1, reveals that most hotels (69%) have installed geothermal ground loops and heating pumps for centralised heating and cooling systems. In comparison, 21% of the hotels' heating and cooling systems remained individually controlled. Some hotels are built using materials that can easily absorb natural heat and cool temperatures, and provide natural ventilation; therefore, there is no need to install air conditioners. Most hotels (72%) have installed smart geysers, which allow hotels to control the amount of electricity used to heat water. Only a few hotels (12%) planned to install smart geysers to reduce energy consumption. Of the 39 hotels, only 16 (41.03%) incorporated green building design techniques such as solar panels, double-glazed windows (53.85%), insulated roofs, insulated ductwork and piping, and wind turbines.

Conclusion

The study found that several hotels in Cape Town conducted energy audits to account for their energy usage. Hotels have further introduced keycards to control and manage the lighting and electronic devices in each room. Most hotels prioritise procuring energy-efficient equipment, such as LED lights, smart geysers, and automated lighting. The study noted a few hotels that have incorporated green building design techniques, such as insulated roofs, double-glazed windows, geothermal ground loops, and heating pumps to provide centralised heating, cooling, and energy storage. Such initiatives assist in addressing the SDG 7. A few hotels encourage guests to offset their carbon footprint. The study found that most hotels still rely on conventional electricity, while only half of the selected hotels have made provisions for alternative sources of energy such as solar energy. Most hotels have invested in petrol and diesel generators for backup electricity with only one investment in wind energy. The study further found that only two hotels introduced electric vehicle charging points and electric shuttles, while the majority of the selected hotels did not have electric vehicles or made provisions for guests with electric vehicles

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Biophilic Design and Sustainability: An Innovative Paradigma or Greenwashing

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Abstract

Purpose: Biophilic design has gained prominence in the hospitality industry as a sustainability-driven approach. However, concerns over its potential for greenwashing persist. This study aims to examine whether biophilic hotel designs genuinely contribute to sustainability or merely serve as a marketing strategy.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study reviews existing literature on biophilic design and sustainability in the hospitality industry. It analyzes case studies of hotel implementations to assess whether biophilic design elements are integrated with sustainable practices or used primarily for aesthetic appeal. Additionally, the research applies greenwashing frameworks to evaluate the transparency and impact of sustainability claims in biophilic hotels.

Results: Findings indicate that while biophilic design offers significant benefits for well-being and environmental quality, many hotel implementations remain superficial. In numerous cases, nature-inspired aesthetics are prioritized over tangible ecological benefits such as energy efficiency, carbon reduction, and responsible resource management. This aligns with greenwashing concerns, particularly when sustainability claims lack transparency and regulatory oversight. However, when biophilic design is applied holistically—integrating biophilic principles with verifiable sustainability practices—it can contribute to meaningful environmental and social benefits.

Originality/value: This study highlights the dual nature of biophilic design in the hospitality industry: while it holds potential as a sustainability innovation, its misuse can mislead consumers. By underscoring the importance of regulatory oversight and consumer awareness, this research contributes to the discourse on sustainable hospitality and greenwashing prevention. It provides insights for industry professionals, policymakers, and scholars seeking to distinguish genuine sustainability efforts from marketing-driven strategies.

Keywords : Biophlic design, greenwashing, hospitality, innovative, sustainability

Introduction

Biophilic design has gained attention for integrating natural elements into human spaces, promoting sustainability and enhancing well-being (Kellert, 2015). Particularly in hospitality, this design approach aims to strengthen guests' connection with nature while minimizing environmental impact (Ryan et al., 2014). However, concerns arise regarding the authenticity of its sustainability claims, as some hotels may adopt biophilic elements as a form of "greenwashing" rather than genuine ecological commitment (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Greenwashing, the misleading portrayal of environmental responsibility, raises doubts about the true contribution of biophilic design to sustainability. While previous studies highlight its benefits for human health and guest experiences (Browning et al., 2014; Ryan et al., 2014), they fall short in assessing its potential misuse. A critical evaluation is necessary to distinguish between authentic sustainability efforts and deceptive marketing tactics.

This study aims to analyze whether biophilic hotel designs represent meaningful sustainability innovations or serve as superficial branding strategies. Investigating tourist perceptions of greenwashing within biophilic hotels will provide empirical insights into this debate. By addressing the gap in literature on biophilic design's legitimacy, this research promotes greater transparency and accountability in industry practices. Ultimately, the study seeks to clarify whether biophilic design genuinely fosters sustainability in hospitality or is merely a tool for strategic image management

Methodology

This study employs bibliometric analysis to examine biophilic hotel design in the context of sustainability and greenwashing. Bibliometric analysis quantitatively assesses publication trends, keyword distributions, research collaborations, and citation impacts. Data were collected from Web of Science and Scopus in January 2025 using the keywords "biophilic design" and "hotel," yielding 16 and 18 publications, respectively. After removing duplicates, the final dataset covered multiple years, disciplines, and journals. Data processing was conducted using Python, with Pandas for data structuring, Matplotlib and Seaborn for visualization, and NetworkX for collaboration analysis. Regular Expressions (Regex) facilitated keyword processing. The analysis identified key research trends, influential authors, leading institutions, and frequently cited studies. By mapping the academic landscape of biophilic hotel design, this study provides insights into sustainability, well-being, and green architecture, highlighting research gaps and guiding future empirical studies.

Results

Between 2019 and 2025, research on biophilic hotel design peaked in 2022 and 2023, followed by a decline in 2024. Web of Science recorded the highest number of publications in 2022, while Scopus peaked in 2023. The decline aligns with the post-pandemic reduction in environmental awareness-driven research.

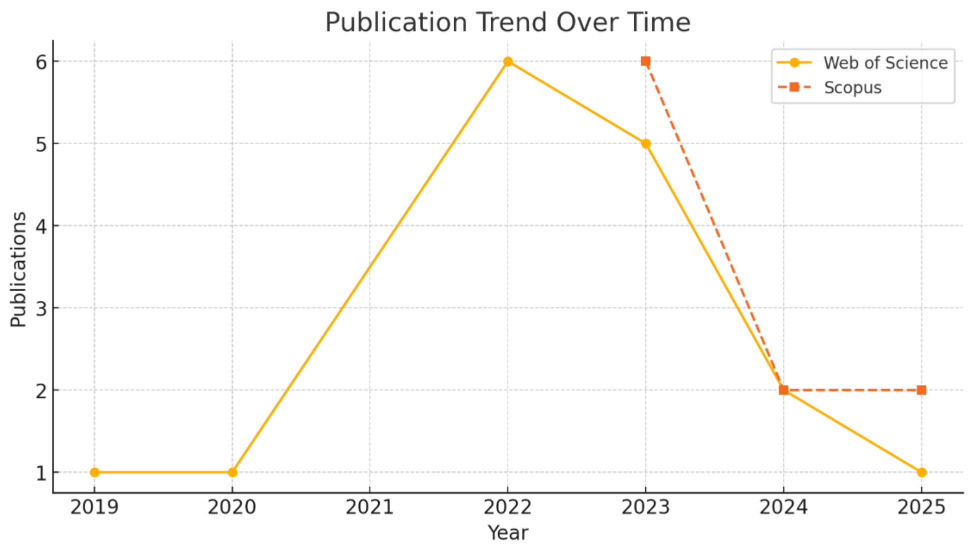

Figure 1. Publication Trend Over Time

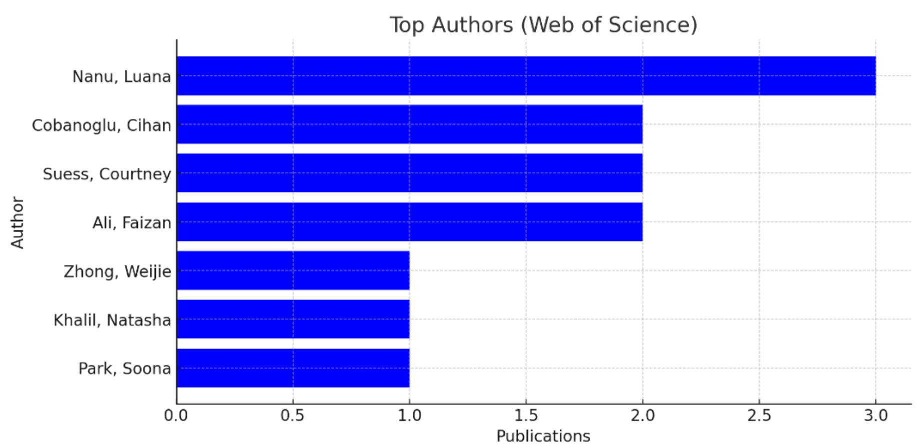

Figure 2: Top Authors (Web of Science)

In Web of Science, Luana Nanu leads with three publications, followed by Cihan Cobanoglu and Courtney Suess with two each. The rest contributed only one. In Scopus, Lee S.H. and Legendre T.S. are the most prolific, each with two publications. The presence of only a few high-contributing authors suggests that biophilic hotel design remains a niche area.

The United States dominates in both databases, followed by China and Egypt in Web of Science. Scopus highlights specific regions and institutions rather than entire countries. The U.S. focus indicates limited global research distribution. Differences in country rankings between databases stem from variations in indexing methodologies.

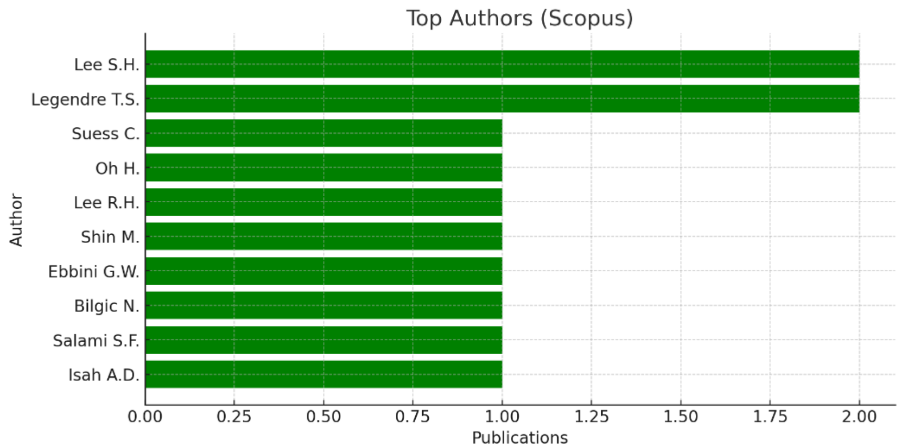

Figure 3: Top Authors (Scopus)

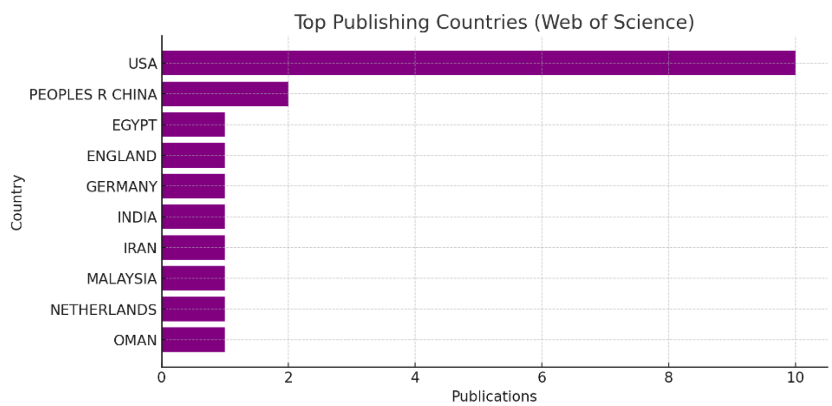

Figure 4: Top Publishing Countries (Web of Science)

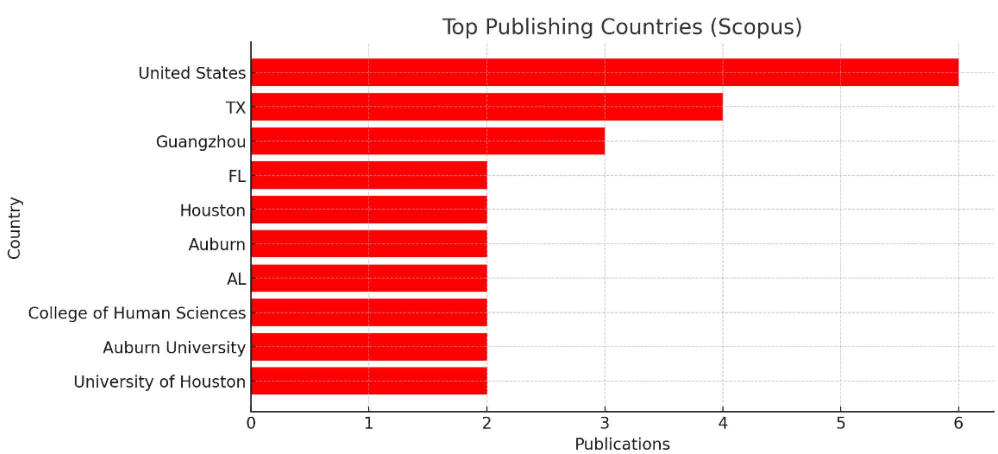

Figure 5: Top Publishing Countries (Scopus)

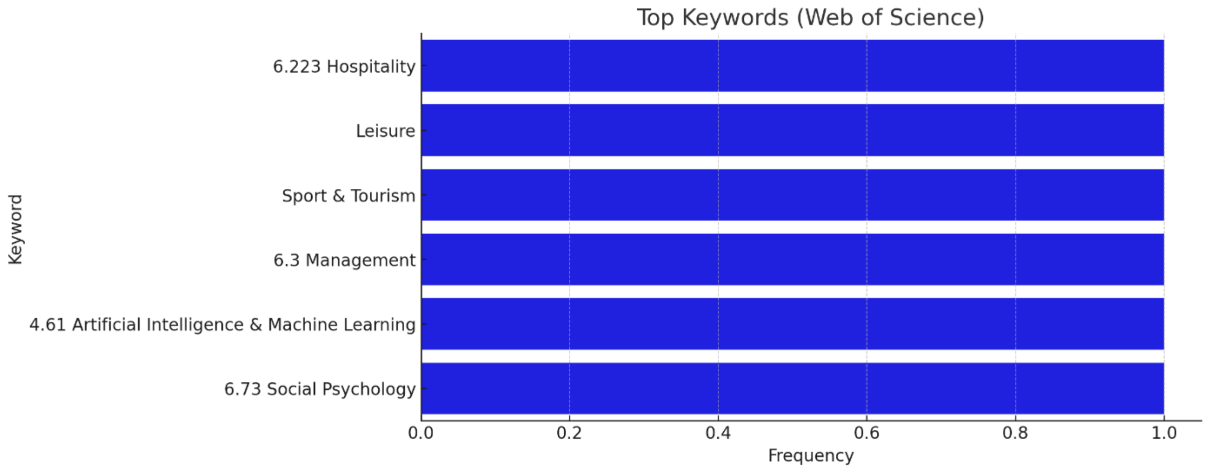

Figure 6: Top Keywords (Web of Science)

Web of Science features interdisciplinary keywords like "hospitality," "management," and "artificial intelligence," reflecting a theoretical and managerial perspective. Scopus, however, emphasizes practical applications with keywords like "biophilic," "design," and "customer," indicating a stronger focus on guest experience. This contrast suggests Web of Science prioritizes conceptual discussions, whereas Scopus highlights operational aspects. Overall, research on biophilic hotel design fluctuates, remains concentrated in specific regions, and varies in focus depending on the database. Future studies should explore the reasons behind these trends and the role of biophilic design in sustainable hospitality beyond its aesthetic appeal.

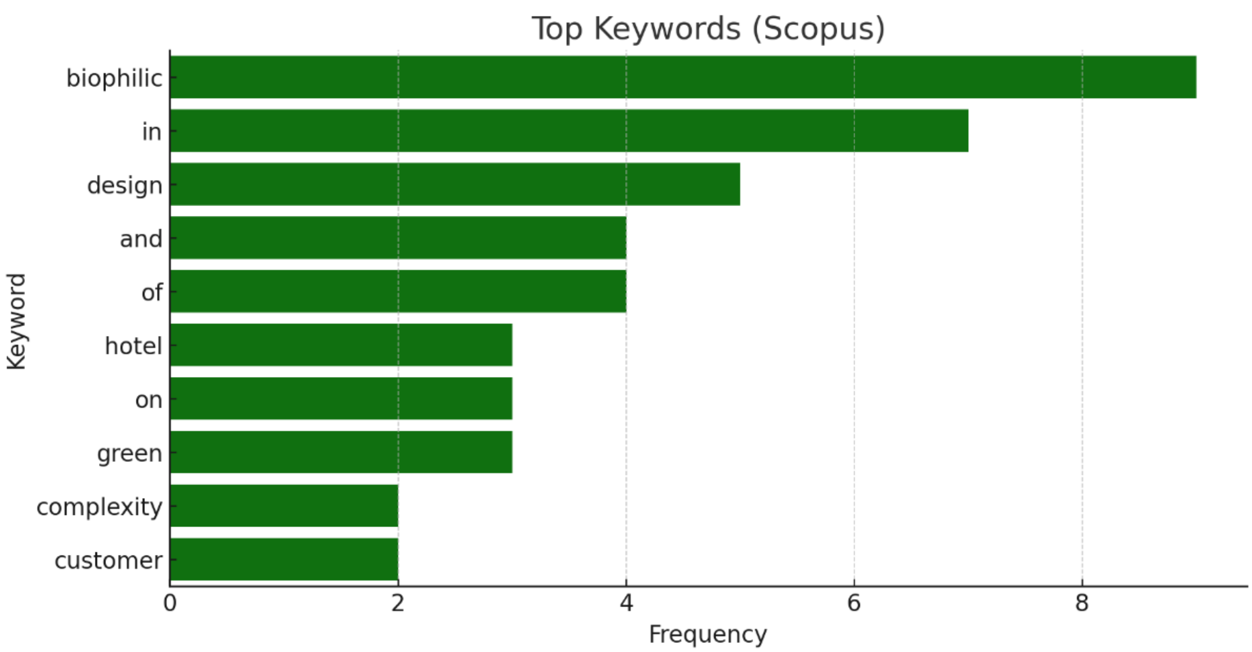

Figure 7: Top Keywords (Scopus)

Conclusion

This study examines whether biophilic hotel designs genuinely promote sustainability or serve as greenwashing. While biophilic design can enhance sustainability and well-being, many implementations remain superficial, focusing on aesthetics rather than real environmental impact. According to TerraChoice's "Six Sins of Greenwashing," some hotels use greenery to appear eco-friendly while neglecting key sustainability factors like energy efficiency and resource management. However, when integrated with genuine sustainable practices, biophilic design can offer meaningful benefits. Ensuring transparency, regulatory oversight, and consumer awareness is essential to prevent biophilic design from becoming a mere marketing trend rather than a true sustainability innovation.

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Sanitizing Legacy Tourism: Sustainable Development Issues and their Policy Challenges

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Abstract

Purpose: Tourism and hospitality are two sectors, combined in this paper and labeled hospitourism (HT). The sector's pre-globalization image is now stained by issues which affect its sustainability. This paper aims to delineate key policy implications of the issues, in order to sanitize HT.

Methodology: The paper is a theoretical exploratory inquiry. It used the evidence-based and narrative literature research techniques to answer three questions. One, what is the nexus between HT and sustainable development (SD)? Two, what issues stain the image of HT? Three, what are policy implications of the issues?

Results: This paper argues that globalization liberalized tourism. Thus, pre-globalization legacy tourism has been stained by issues which also undermine efforts by stakeholders to make HT sustainable. Post-globalization HT has witnessed the rise of adjectival tourism, which is tourism for every conceivable purpose, e.g., medical tourism, dark tourism, etc. The argument that legacy HT needs sanitizing is based on, one, the need to mitigate the negative externalities of HT on nature and the public. Safeguarding the public interest (health, safety, welfare, morals) is the essence of governance. Two is the need to optimize the benefits of sustainable HT. To sanitize HT, policies must require the sector to target five SD pillars. The paper proposed a nuanced model of sustainable HT with 5-E pillars, which are environment, economy, equity, engagement, enlightenment. The paper concludes that policies are required around the 5-E pillars, in order to sanitize the HT.

Value: The paper proposed a 5-E SD framework for policies that would lead to substantive actions by all stakeholders to sanitize the HT sector, make it sustainable and beneficial.

Keywords: Legacy Tourism; Hospitourism; Adjectival Tourism; 5-E Sustainability Pillars

Introduction

Tourism and hospitality are two inextricably intertwined activity sectors that are often depicted interchangeably by scholars, policy makers and the public at large. On nomenclatures, this paper argues that, one, it is a misnomer to label each of the sectors as an industry, since each sector consists of numerous industries (Luther, 2024; Davidson, 2005). Two, the industries in each sector provide more than economic services, perform more than economic functions, hence the use of the term activity sector in this paper. Three, the interchangeable us of the terms tourism and hospitality justifies a unifying neologism which this paper coined as hospitourism (HT).

Across the multidisciplinary literature on HT, the parallel and interchangeable use of the two composite terms points to a normative notion of the nexus of the two sectors. The notion of HT is that of persons who leave or travel from their homes (origins) to visit places (destinations) where they expect services and products that would make their journeys from the origins to their destinations, and their stay and experiences at the destinations pleasurable and memorable. Travelers in this context are said to be engaging in an activity known as tourism, and the services that make their travel pleasurable and memorable are provided by industries in the hospitality sector. The history of HT is said to date back to the first Olympic Games in Greece in the 17^{th} C (Rodriguez, 2020). HT since that period up until the advent of globalization in the last quarter of the 20^{th} C is what this paper refers to as legacy tourism. Globalization liberalized global travel, and this paper contends that various challenges since then have stained the allure of HT. This paper deciphered the stains from the literature, and conjectured the implications of the stains for public policies needed to sanitize the HT sector, in order for HT to facilitate the achievement of SD. To achieve the aim of conjecturing the policy implications of the stains, three questions were addressed. One, what is the nexus between HT and SD? Two, what issues stain the image of HT? Three, what are policy implications of the issues for HT to be sustainable, robust and rewarding?

Both globalization and SD have had, and continue to have, significant influences on the scope and scale of HT from the demand (HT consumers) and supply (HT service providers) sides. Today, tourists travel individually (solo) and in groups (mass or exclusive/customized) for various reasons, leading to a concept proposed in this paper as adjectival tourism. It is now common in HT research and real-life to find endless variants or genres of adjectival tourism, for example, medical tourism, religious tourism, dark tourism, secret tourism, end-of-life tourism, libel tourism; slum tourism; etc. (Waldman, 2024; Stokes, 2012; Davidson, 2005; Gibbs, 2012, Melik, 2012). For every genre, general or customized services are provided by entrepreneurs interested in serving tourists for a profit. Expectedly, there is an endless list of service providers to serve tourists, from the first thrilling step of inquiring about a destination of interest, to the last step, for most, of agonizing for months and years to settle the debts or credits incurred while on tour.

Diverse viewpoints of HT activities, services and typologies provide justification for the various definitions of tourism and hospitality in the literature. For example, a hybrid definition of tourism in this paper is that tourism is "the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence," (Mathieson and Wall, 1982) for a period of "not more than one year" (WTO, 1991), "to seek personal rewards (Gunn and Var, 2002) "other than for exercise of an activity remunerated from the place visited" (WTO, ibid). Also, this paper finds the definition of hospitality by Luther (2024) indicative of its parallelism with tourism. He stated that "the hospitality industry … includes hotels and lodging, food and beverage, travel and tourism and events and recreation companies." He added that "the hospitality industry is made up of a variety of businesses, each with its own particular business model and challenges — from cruise ships and airlines, to bars and restaurants, to hotels and homestay providers, to theme parks and event companies." That tourism and hospitality are two sides of the same coin is basis for coining hospitourism as a neologism.

The HT-SD Nexus

There is stark evidence in the literature that HT provides vast benefits and opportunities, directly and indirectly, for all the stakeholders at HT destinations (Hornholz, 2024; Luther, 2024; Richardson, 2021, Shanks, 2007; Murphy & Price, 2005). Conversely, evidence exists that there are negative impacts and externalities of HT on people, on economies and on the natural environment. In the context of benefits, the contention in this paper is that HT is a potent means for societies to pursue development that is sustainable. This model of development is commonly referred to as sustainable development (SD). The model was adopted by the world leaders at the first Earth Summit in Rio, Brazil in 1992, and its essence is to guide societies to use their natural resources, i.e., the environment, responsibly and judiciously to facilitate economic growth and development that serve citizens equitably, justly and inclusively. The resources should also be conserved for future generations (WCED, 1987). While assessments of SD implementation have shown mixed results across the world, one of the contentions in this paper is that HT as a robust activity sector has the potential to facilitate the five-E pillars of the SD Pentagon (Kolo & Schrouder, 2024). The SD Pentagon is a variant of the three-E pillars of the Brundtland framework adopted at the Rio Summit in 1992. Elkington (2004) referred to the latter as the Triple-Bottom-Line (TBL) framework. Both the Brundtland and Pentagon pillars are shown in Table 2. It is important to state here that the genre of HT known as sustainable tourism is not the focus of this paper. Rather, the focus is on SD as a development policy framework, and how HT, including sustainable tourism, can facilitate its implementation.

Methodology

The paper is a conceptual and an evidence-based exploration of the critical issues that are documented in the conceptual, empirical and gray literature as plaguing the HT sector. The paper used the narrative literature review, evidence-based and desktop research techniques to collect the conceptual and empirical information that was used to show the nexus of HT and both SD and the public interest, to identify the issues that stain the HT sector, and to conjecture the policy implications of the challenges of the HT sector. In essence, the techniques were used to answer three questions posed in this paper. One, what is the nexus between HT and SD? Two, what issues stain the image of HT? Three, what are policy implications of the issues for a sustainable HT sector?

Findings and Discussion: HT Challenges and their Impacts on Society

Part of the argument in this paper is that, with the liberalization of global travel due largely to the gains of globalization, legacy tourism has been plagued increasingly by challenges that stain the sector's image, and undermine efforts by governments and tourism destinations to make the sector sustainable, equitable, inclusive, and beneficial or rewarding for all stakeholders. In essence, the HT sector is not benefiting society (the public interest), and neither is it facilitating the protection of the environment, as effectively and efficiently as it could and should. For too long, HT was for various reasons glamorized to the extent that society 'overlooked' or underestimated its negative externalities. Today, most of the challenges have become politically and socially contentious, leading to anti-tourism sentiments and revolts worldwide (Buckley, 2024). It should be noted that, up until the recent anti-tourism revolts, early warnings about HT's negative impacts were deemed by HT entrepreneurs and advocates as theoretical and anti-economic growth. One classic warning that HT scholars are well aware of is Doxey's (1975) Irritation Index (Irridex), where he postulated that HT destinations would experience pushback from citizens as the negative impacts of HT increased and caused irritation among citizens. The anti-tourism incidents around the world today are irrefutable empirical pieces of evidence in support of the Irridex concept.

There are extensive discussions in the HT literature on the challenges facing and staining the HT sector (Parashar, 2025; Reed, 2025; Davis, 2024; Ede, 2024; Hohnholz, 2024; Luther, 2024. The narrative literature review conducted for this paper resulted in a list of challenges from which those presented in Table 1 were extracted. The summary is a clustering of the challenges based on the elements of the public interest that they affect the most. HT is about and for people and their interests as consumers, investors, employees or producers in the sector. The sector uses society's resources (*res communis*) to provide or produce all the goods and products needed in the HT sector. The fiduciary for the resources lies with government. The motive and rationale for every decision government takes is to protect or safeguard the public interest. Public interest is a political and legal concept or doctrine that is determined by the impact of any action by government, individuals and groups on the overall health, safety, welfare, and morals of society or the general public (Levy, 2017; Randall, 2004, Mulgan, 2009; Lewis, 2006). The connection between HT and the public interest is yet another strong evidence of the HT-SD nexus, since SD, like HT, lies in the domain of public governance.

This paper posits that various challenges have stained, and will continue to wreak havoc on, the HT sector unless policy makers design and implement policies that mobilize and engage all stakeholders to address the challenges. For the SD pillars, the HT sector has enormous potentials to influence each pillar positively. However, creative, aggressive and feasible public policies will be needed to help all stakeholders to play their parts in sanitizing the HT sector, and to make the sector beneficial for people, the economy and the environment. The challenges summarized in Table 1 below are not in any order of importance, severity or priority. They all adversely impact the 'bottom line' for all the stakeholders in HT transactions, from consumers to providers, investors and regulators. The stains are clustered using the public interest elements. The level of each stain on the public interest elements is subjectively rated as High (H), Medium (M) or Low (L). The ratings suggest elements which public policies should prioritize. In Table 2, the policy implications of the stains are conjectured for the 5-E pillars of the SD Pentagon framework.

Table 1: HT Stains and Their Impacts on Society

HT Stains/Challenges	**Rate of Impact on Public Interest**			
	Health	**Safety**	**Welfare**	**Morals**
1. Antisocial and lawless behaviors by tourists	H	H	L	H
2. Price gouging, extortion of tourists at destinations	L	L	L	H
3. Unhygienic conditions of HT facilities (hotels, restaurants, etc.)	H	H	L	L
4. Inadequate public infrastructure for HT-mobility, utilities, amenities, etc.	M	H	H	L
5. Injustice, inequity, discrimination by socio demographics (race, gender, physical status, culture, etc.)	L	H	L	H
6. High labor turnover rate	M	M	H	L
7. Waste generation from overconsumption	H	H	L	M
8. Inadequate, poor public services for tourists- legal, financial, information, public safety, emergency, medical, etc.	H	H	M	L
9. Illegal and illicit transactions at destinations (gambling, trafficking humans and endangered species)	H	H	H	H
10. Overuse and waste of basic utilities – water, energy, etc.	M	H	L	M
11. Overpriced, unaffordable services and products at destination- accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment, transportation, etc.)	M	M	H	M
12. Restrictive, controversial, complex travel policies and laws	L	L	H	M
13. Disruptions by technology, automation, innovation, with negative impacts, e.g., layoffs, reduced service costs and revenues, etc.	L	L	H	L
14. Unequal inclusion, engagement, participation of stakeholders in HT policy-making and planning	L	M	M	M

15. Poor working conditions- low wages, work stress, lack of benefits, etc.	H	H	H	M
16. Insecurity of persons and property at HT facilities	H	H	L	L
17. Technology intrusion and cybersecurity risks for privacy, safety, confidentiality, etc.	H	H	L	H
18. Environmental problems- air, noise, land pollution, etc.	H	H	L	M
19. Customer vulnerability to high-handed service providers, due to poor consumer rights and protection laws	L	L	L	M
20. Weak or poor inter- and intra-sector coordination, collaboration, partnerships	L	M	M	L

The argument that legacy HT is stained and needs sanitizing is made from, and based on, one, the need to prevent, minimize, and/or mitigate the negative externalities of HT on the environment and the public. Safeguarding the public interest (health, safety, welfare, morals) is the essence of governance. Two is the need to optimize and maximize the benefits of HT for society or the public. Due to its history as a 'status-based activity' and its economic and social benefits, HT has been glamorized and deemed to be a 'clean' activity sector. Today, there is evidence that the risks and costs of the negative impacts of the sector are impacting its quality standards, affordability and dividends to society in general. In order to sanitize the HT sectors and make it sustainable, policies should be adopted, requiring activities in the sector to target five pillars of SD. The paper introduced a nuanced model of sustainable HT in which five pillars, dubbed 5-E SD pillars, are environment, economy, equity, engagement and enlightenment. This paper concludes that innovative and stern policies are required around the 5-E pillars, in order to sanitize the HT sector and make it more sustainable.

Table 2: Policy Implications of HT Stains for the 5-E Pillars of a Sustainable HT Sector

HT Stains/Challenges *(Policies to address stains will benefit and strengthen SD pillars marked x)*	**Policy Implications for the 5-E Pillars of a Sustainable HT Sector**				
	Brundtland Commission 3E Pillars			**(3+2) 5E Pentagon Pillars**	
	Environment	**Economy**	**Equity**	**Engagement**	**Enlightenment**
1. Antisocial and lawless behaviors by tourists	**x**	**x**			**x**
2. Price gouging, extortion of		**x**	**x**		

tourists at destinations					
3. Unhygienic conditions at tourism facilities (hotels, restaurants)		**x**	**x**		**x**
4. Grossly inadequate public infrastructure for HT- transportation, utilities, amenities, etc.,	**x**	**x**	**x**		
5. Injustice, inequity, discrimination by socio demographics (race, gender, physical status, culture, etc.)		**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
6. High labor turnover rate		**x**	**x**	**x**	
7. Waste generation from overconsumption	**x**	**x**			**x**
8. Inadequate, poor public services for tourists- legal, financial, information, public safety, emergency, etc.		**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
9. Illegal and illicit transactions at destinations (gambling, trafficking humans and endangered species)	**x**	**x**	**x**		**x**

10. Overuse and waste of basic utilities – water, energy, etc.	**x**	**x**	**x**		**x**
11. Overpriced, unaffordable services and products at destination- accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment, transportation, etc.)		**x**	**x**		**x**
12. Restrictive, controversial, complex travel policies and laws		**x**	**x**		**x**
13. Disruptions by technology, automation, innovation, with negative impacts, e.g., layoffs, reduced service costs and revenues, etc.		**x**	**x**		**x**
14. Unequal inclusion, engagement, participation of stakeholders in HT policy-making and planning	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
15. Poor working conditions- low wages, work stress, lack of benefits, etc.		**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
16. Insecurity of persons and		**x**	**x**		**x**

property at HT facilities					
17. Technology intrusion and cybersecurity risks for privacy, safety, confidentiality, etc.		**x**	**x**		**x**
18. Environmental problems- air, noise, land pollution, etc.	**x**		**x**		**x**
19. Customer vulnerability to high-handed service providers, due to poor consumer rights and protection laws			**x**	**x**	**x**
20. Weak or poor inter- and intra-sector coordination, collaboration, partnerships	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**

Source: Compiled by authors from the literature

Conclusion

The protracted romantic relationship that the world had with legacy HT is quickly becoming toxic, as evidenced by the growing anti-tourism protests around the world. In a media interview, an informant in a community protesting mass tourism stated that tourism in their community had gone "from hospitality to hostility" (Ede (2004). In another exercise of extensive interviews with HT experts around the world, Buckley (2024) documented viewpoints and evidence to show "how it all went wrong for tourism." Key actors in the HT sector and experts from various disciplines acknowledge that the golden years of HT are almost over, and destinations need to reinvent their HT strategies. Hohnholz (2024) discussed six key challenges currently facing the HT sector, and noted that "once a booming industry, it now faces considerable challenges that it must overcome to regain its upward trajectory." Similarly, Luther (2024) noted that "the four major sectors that make up the hospitality industry — hotels and lodging, food and beverage, travel and tourism and events and recreation — face some common challenges."

The postulation in this paper that HT needs sanitizing is based on, one, the need to mitigate the negative externalities of HT on nature and society (the public). Safeguarding the public interest (health, safety, welfare, morals) is the essence of governance. Two is the need to optimize the benefits of sustainable HT for society and the environment. To sanitize HT, policies must require key actors in the sector to target five SD pillars. The paper proposed a nuanced SD model of 5-E pillars, which are environment, economy, equity, engagement, enlightenment. The paper concludes that policies are required to prioritize aspects of the 5-E SD pillars shown in Table 2, in order to sanitize HT and enhance its sustainability, profitability, robustness and inclusivity.

A key value of the findings in this paper is to alert HT stakeholders, especially policy makers, of critical aspects of the sector for which public policies are needed urgently in order to sanitize the sector. The specific policies to be formulated and adopted would vary from one society to another, but should result from the participation of all community stakeholders, and should reflect the political, economic, socio-cultural and other unique realities of each society. For example, focusing on sustainable tourism, Bramwell (2025) underscored the relevance of policy intervention, citing examples of policy instruments appropriate for sustainable tourism. He stated that "the selection of policy instruments by policy makers is, however, only partly a 'technical' question based on identifying which instruments will achieve the desired results most effectively. It is also essentially a moral and political choice that is influenced by diverse economic and societal pressures." Governments should mobilize and engage stakeholders across their jurisdictions in the processes of formulating HT policies and plans. Corporate stakeholders must recognize that their success and profits depend on the goodwill and support of the public, philanthropic and grassroots sectors in their markets. Advocacy groups must recognize that they are voices for the masses, and must advocate for the interests of the masses in terms of HT policies, opportunities and dividends. Grassroots citizens must organize themselves and demand to participate in HT policy and planning processes (Ede, 2025). Academic and research institutions should undertake empirical or applied HT research, and conduct capacity building exercises for grassroots citizens, to enable them to capitalize on opportunities in the HT sector. A dynamic and inclusive HT governance system, whether statutory or ad hoc, should be established to ensure that all stakeholders in the society contribute their best to building a robust, sustainable, rewarding and inclusive HT sector.

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Sustainability, Environment and Corporate Social Responsibility Practices of Airline Catering Companies: Website Content Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the sustainability, environmental, and corporate social responsibility approaches and initiatives of international airline catering companies.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive case study approach. Content analysis was conducted by examining the official websites of airline catering companies.

Results: The official websites of 64 out of 72 airline catering companies were accessed. Within this scope, content was described under three categories: sustainability, environmental responsibility, and corporate social responsibility. These categories were further coded into four subcategories: "environmental responsibility," "community responsibility," "employee welfare & ethical practices," and "sustainability & innovation." The approaches and activities adopted by the airline catering companies were revealed.

Originality/value: The evaluation of the overall efforts of international airline catering companies is highly valuable for understanding the dynamics of the industry. Moreover, the lack of studies in the literature on this topic increases the significance of this research, while making the companies' initiatives in these areas more visible.

Keywords Catering, Airline Catering Company, Sustainability, Environment, Corporate Social Responsibility

Introduction

In recent years, sustainability, environmental responsibility, and corporate social responsibility have gained increasing significance across various industries, including airline catering services. While airlines strive to enhance customer satisfaction and maintain a competitive advantage by prioritizing high-quality in-flight catering, they are also compelled to adopt sustainable and ethical practices (Law et al., 2022). In this context, key issues such as sustainable food sourcing, waste management, carbon footprint reduction, and energy efficiency have become integral components of airline catering operations (Smith and Brown, 2020). Given that airlines allocate approximately 2–3% of their annual expenditures to catering services (Yılmaz and Yücel, 2021), it is evident that innovative and sustainable initiatives in this sector can have significant implications for operational costs, brand reputation, and customer loyalty. Moreover, considering the aviation industry's substantial contribution to carbon emissions, the adoption of comprehensive environmental sustainability strategies has become an unavoidable necessity (Jones et al., 2019). This study examines the sustainability, environmental responsibility, and corporate social responsibility strategies implemented by international airline catering companies. Through an analysis of industry practices, it evaluates the extent to which sustainable food sourcing, waste management, and carbon footprint reduction are integrated into airline catering operations. The findings suggest that while airlines have increasingly adopted strategies such as waste minimization, the incorporation of local and organic ingredients, the use of biodegradable packaging, and carbon emissions reduction, several challenges remain. High operational costs, logistical constraints, and the lack of a standardized regulatory framework continue to hinder the widespread implementation of sustainability initiatives. Consequently, this study underscores the importance of fostering stronger collaborations between airlines, suppliers, and regulatory bodies, as well as the need for comprehensive policies to facilitate the long-term viability of sustainable practices in the airline catering sector.

Catering Services

Historically, with the transition from an agricultural society to an industrial society, various changes have occurred in food production and consumption. During this transitional period, the increase in out-of-home food consumption led to the emergence and development of mass catering systems. Institutions such as hotels, restaurants, and catering companies have become crucial in meeting the need for out-of-home food consumption (Sezgin and Özkaya, 2014). In mass catering systems, the nutritional needs of consumers must be met in at least one meal from physiological, psychological, and social perspectives. The expanding scale of the groups served (such as patients, children, workers, travelers, etc.) makes it essential for mass catering systems to deliver safe food with a high-quality service approach (T.C. Sağlık Bakanlığı Halk Sağlığı Genel Müdürlüğü, 2020, p. 3). Catering companies are defined as businesses within the service sector that provide food and beverage services. Catering services can be utilized in establishments such as hotels, hospitals, airports, passenger ships, or event venues (Chung, Huang, Weng, and Lin, 2022, p. 2). When examining the scope of operations, catering companies are generally categorized into two distinct branches: those that carry out on-site production and those that provide meal delivery services. Some businesses, however, can perform both on-site and delivery services simultaneously (Doğan, 2022, p. 24). Catering businesses that engage in on-site production prepare meals in the kitchens of the establishments they serve. In center kitchen-supported on-site production, the production takes place in the catering company's central kitchen, while only equipment for products that can be prepared in an oven or stove is available at the customer's facility (Doğdubay, Sarıoğlan, and Türkmen, 2023, p. 159). Catering businesses that provide meal delivery services produce meals in the central kitchen according to the customer's expectations and deliver them via vehicles. It is essential that the delivered meals meet customer expectations in terms of taste and quality (Kaya and İlhan, 2018, p. 555). Factors such as climate change, increasing population, and limitations in access to fair and clean food have contributed to the rising importance of the sustainability concept.

The growing food and beverage sector, due to changing living conditions, has had to incorporate sustainability into its operations. Sustainability can be examined in three separate dimensions: environmental, social, and economic. In businesses, practices such as waste control, minimizing food waste, resource usage control, and building bridges between staff and guests are some of the strategies employed (Akay and Yılmaz, 2023, p. 213-214).

Airline Catering Company Services

The aviation sector has experienced rapid growth in recent years, driven by developing economies. As air travel has become more widespread, there has been a noticeable increase in service providers catering to the industry, leading to an intensely competitive environment (Law et al., 2022). With advancements in technology, safety concerns—once a primary issue in the aviation sector—have diminished, bringing service quality to the forefront (Rhoden et al., 2008). To compensate for the revenue loss in air transportation caused by airport taxes and to further increase their income within airports, food, beverage, and shopping opportunities have been expanded to encourage passenger consumption both at airports and during flights. It is now possible to find a wide range of dining options, from fast food and local cuisine restaurants to Michelin-starred fine dining establishments, both at airports and on flights (Castillo-Manzano and López-Valpuesta, 2013). According to data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), airlines allocate approximately 2-3% of their annual expenses to catering services. Rising catering costs, economic crises, and the increasing accessibility of air travel to all socioeconomic groups have led to a surge in low-cost airlines. The restriction of non-essential services by low-cost carriers has directly impacted in-flight catering services (Yılmaz and Yücel, 2021). As passenger consumption preferences become increasingly individualized, cost pressures rise, and concerns about the sustainability of air travel grow day by day, airport catering companies serving international audiences—like all other stakeholders in the industry—are closely following new catering trends and evaluating alternative scenarios (Ernits et al., 2022). Airline catering companies provide a wide range of comprehensive services across various areas. These services include in-flight catering, lounge catering management, VIP and Business Class lounges, restaurants and cafés, duty-free product sales, special event and meeting services, airport staff cafeterias, private jet menus, catering logistics and distribution, as well as food and beverage supply chain management. (www.sancakinflight.com.tr; https://www.airchefs.co.za/; https://www.bta.com.tr/). These listed activities are provided simultaneously and uninterruptedly 24/7 at airports. The services offered by catering companies can be explained as follows:

In-Flight Catering: As a complementary service to air travel, in-flight catering varies between full-service airlines and low-cost carriers. Depending on airline service policies, offerings may range from limited services, such as sandwiches, tea, and coffee—whether complimentary or paid—to extensive à la carte menu options that provide a fine dining experience. Catering companies are responsible for preparing meals in advance according to predetermined schedules and flight procedures, ensuring that food and beverages requiring final preparation and service onboard are loaded onto the aircraft. This service involves a highly comprehensive and complex process for catering companies (O'Hara and Strugnell, 1997; Halizahari et al., 2021). While managing all these processes, catering companies must overcome various complex challenges, including service duration, flight time, flight length, boarding and landing locations, travel class, passenger demographics, airline budget, seasonality of ingredients, labor costs, workforce availability, food consumption processes, cabin odors, heating and cooling capacity, as well as environmental factors such as humidity and pressure that can affect food quality (Jha et al., 2020).

Lounge Catering Management / VIP & Business Class Lounge: As part of airport lounge services designed to meet passengers' needs for relaxation, dining, and rest while waiting for their flights, catering companies provide food and beverage services. In addition to open buffets, special menus, and à la carte dining options, passengers may also enjoy unlimited beverage service depending on the lounge category. The quality and variety of food and beverage offerings in lounges can influence passengers' airline preferences (Nghiêm-Phú, 2018).

Airport Restaurants and Cafes: Catering companies manage restaurants in airports and provide support services to these establishments. These restaurants, operating 24/7 to meet the needs of thousands of passengers waiting for their flights, must ensure high service quality, offer meals and beverages that cater to all nationalities, maintain hygiene standards, and create an atmosphere where passengers are satisfied with their brief stay. Especially considering airport taxes and airport noise, it is essential for these restaurants to establish a good price-performance balance, create an atmosphere that makes airport noise acceptable, and implement effective guest relations management (Albayrak, 2014).

Duty-Free Product Sales: Airline catering companies can also operate as producers or suppliers of food and beverages in airport duty-free stores (https://istanbul-sabiha.shopdutyfree.com/en/182/food-confectionery).

Special Event and Meeting Services: Airline catering companies develop food and beverage experiences for corporate events, conferences, meetings, and weddings organized at airports, airline-related events, or according to third-party requests (https://www.emiratesflightcatering.com/services/food-solutions-foodcraft/events-catering/).

Airport Staff Canteens: Catering companies may be responsible for operating staff canteens at airports, planning, preparing, and serving the menus offered. Given the numerous businesses operating within the airport, the number of staff using the canteen is quite high. Meeting the needs of this large group 24/7 requires a highly complex operation (DHMİ, 2016).

Private Jet Menu: Catering companies can provide in-flight meal services for private jets and charter flights. Similar to in-flight catering, this service features high-quality VIP menus. In this type of service, the catering company may collaborate with various restaurants or renowned chefs. Tailored to the specific requests of private passengers, this service requires a perfectionist approach to minimize errors (Sancak Inflight Service, n.d.).

Catering Logistics and Distribution in Airport: The management of the process of transporting food and beverages from the catering company's production facility to the main service point within the airport, ensuring the necessary equipment and supplies are provided for the service, and executing timely distribution at the loading points is carried out (Yılmaz and Yücel, 2021).

Food and Beverage Supply Chain Management: Catering companies integrate key processes such as sourcing, stocking, and storing materials. Managing the supply chain process is an essential aspect that must be considered separately for the entire operations of airline catering companies (Hussein et al., 2023).

The expansion of new routes and growth in different markets for airline companies can be limited by the lack of support services, such as catering. Therefore, it is common for airline companies and catering firms to collaborate in developing the necessary infrastructure within airports. Airlines manage their catering services smoothly through their own developed catering systems or agreements with catering firms operating at their main hubs. However, for destinations outside their main hubs, it is crucial for airlines to collaborate with catering service providers at those airports in a way that maintains their service quality (Ivanovic and Vujic, 2007).

Airline Catering Services and Sustainability, Environmental and Corporate Social Responsibility Practices

To grasp the concept of *sustainability*, it is essential to refer to its initial definition, which was established by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. The Commission defined sustainability as a form of economic development that meets present needs without hindering the ability of future generations to fulfill their own needs (WCED, 1987). Airline businesses are commonly linked to significant negative environmental impacts, such as air pollution, excessive energy use, noise, waste production, and water damage (Pitt and Brown, 2001). It is crucial for airports to address not only the current environmental consequences but also the future challenges associated with rising passenger numbers. The airline catering industry significantly contributes to waste generation within the air transport sector, with catering operations accounting for the majority of waste produced at airports. Given that global flight kitchens prepare over a million meals annually, effective waste management strategies are essential to mitigate environmental impacts and enhance sustainability in airline catering services (Pitt and Smith, 2003; Chang and Jones, 2007; King, 2001). The sustainability concept is something that contemporary organizations strive to adopt, whether to enhance their public image, boost stock value, improve environmental practices, or achieve all these objectives together. The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include addressing food waste and food waste management. Specifically, Target 12.3 seeks to cut global per capita food waste in half and minimize food losses by 2030, marking food waste as both a national and global priority (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2018).

Organizations within the airline catering industry are increasingly adopting sustainability practices as part of their corporate responsibility strategies. These practices not only enhance their environmental performance but also align with broader corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals. Many catering companies are integrating sustainable food waste management, waste reduction strategies, and eco-friendly packaging initiatives to reduce their carbon footprint. At the same time, they emphasize the importance of ethical sourcing and community-based projects that support local economies. For instance, some companies aim to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2030 and implement circular economy models that prioritize waste reduction and resource efficiency. This approach reflects a commitment to balancing environmental, social, and economic sustainability while promoting responsible consumption and production practices in the food service sector (Mumlu-Karanfil and Karakus, 2024; Ozturk, 2016; Ondoğan Gedikci, 2022).

Methodology

In this study, the descriptive case study method, one of the qualitative research methods, was used to reveal the approaches and practices of airline catering companies regarding sustainability, environmental issues, and corporate social responsibility (Yin, 1984; Duran, 2022). The sample for the study was selected from the 72 airline catering companies listed under the "World Directory of In-Flight Caterers" on the official website of the Airline Catering Association. Although the aim was to access the entire sample, the websites of 8 catering companies could not be reached (Stangor, 2011). Therefore, the websites of a total of 64 airline catering companies were analyzed, and data was collected on March 24-25, 2025. In the content analysis, the written texts, concepts, discourses, visuals, and other elements were evaluated to determine which concepts, events, and ideas were most or least emphasized (Kozak, 2015; Merriam, 2018). Therefore, content analysis was conducted on the data shared with the public on the websites of the airline catering companies to assess their approaches and practices regarding the relevant topics. Data shared by organizations under the themes of Sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Environment has been collected and analyzed in depth by three different coders. When the data collected by the coders was integrated, the following themes were identified: Environment Responsibility (Bakhouche, 2017), Community Responsibility (Blombäck & Wigren-Kristoferson, 2014), Employee Welfare & Ethical Practices (Gosai & Bhonsle, 2025), and Sustainability & Innovation (Hoang et al., 2021). Thus, reliability checks among the coders were ensured.

Findings

Upon reviewing the websites of the 72 airline catering companies that were chosen for the sample, it was discovered that 8 of them were inaccessible. It was noted that among the available websites, catering companies categorized their methods and operations under the terms "environment," "sustainability," and "corporate social responsibility." 15 airline caterers used the term "sustainability," 7 used "environment," and 13 used "corporate social responsibility." It was found that while "Ethiopian Airlines Catering" described its activities under both the "environment" and "corporate social responsibility" titles, "Dnata" and "Servair" used both the "sustainability" and "corporate social responsibility" headings. Furthermore, it was discovered that 32 catering companies had no information about these initiatives on their websites.

Table I: Airline Catering Companies Website Review

No	Name of Catering Company*	Sustaina-bility	Environ-ment	CSR	Null	Not Access Website	Website
1	Gategroup	X					https://www.gategroup.com/sustainability/
2	Aas Catering				X		http://www.aascatering.co.jp/html/iso_en.html
3	Abbyscatering				X		https://abbyscatering.com/category/articles/
4	Aero Angels				X		https://www.aeroangels.net/food-safety/
5	Aerofood ACS				X		https://aerowisatafood.com/en/home/
6	Air Algerie Catering				X		http://www.airalgeriecatering.dz/Pages/IndexFr.aspx
7	Airfayre	X					https://airfayre.com/sustainably-processing-airline-food-waste/
8	Airculinaire Worldwide	X					https://www.airculinaireworldwide.com/about/sustainability-responsibility/
9	Airchef				X		https://www.airchefs.co.za/services.html
10	Air Serbia Catering				X		https://www.airserbia.com/en/explore/services/special-meals
11	Ambassadors' Sky Chef				X		http://www.ambassadorskychef.com/index.html
12	ANA Catering Services	X					https://www.anac.co.jp/en/guide/index.html
13	Bahrain Airport Services			X			https://bas.com.bh/csr
14	Bangkok Air Catering				X		https://www.bangkokaircatering.com/bacgroup

15	BIMAN Flight Catering				X		http://www.bfcc-bd.com/
16	Brahim's SATS Food Services			X			http://brahimsgroup.com/csr/
17	Cambodia Air Catering Services**					X	-
18	Capital Catering & Services				X		https://www.capitalcatering.ae/
19	CAS Food Solution Purantara					X	https://www.casfood.co.id/cgi-sys/suspendedpage.cgi
20	Casino Air Caterers & Flight Services			X			https://www.cafs.in/responsibility
21	Cathay Pacific Catering Services	X					https://www.cathaydining.com/sustainability
22	Cookin Food***		X				https://www.cookin.se/quality-assurance
23	Delisky				X		https://www.delisky.com/about
24	Dnata	X		X			https://www.dnata.com/en/about/environment https://www.dnata.com/en/about/corporate-responsibility
25	Do&co	X					https://www.doco.com/sustainability-page/
26	EgyptAir Inflight Services				X		https://www.egyptair.com/en/about-egyptair/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx
27	Emirates Flight Catering		X				https://www.emiratesflightcatering.com/about-us/
28	Ethiopian Airlines Catering		X	X			https://corporate.ethiopianairlines.com/company/responsibility
29	Evergreen Sky Catering Corp.					X	-
30	Fine Foods Catering		X				https://ffcatering.com/services.php

31	Finnair				X		https://company.finnair.com/en/careers/kitchen
32	Fleury Michon Catering Aérien			X			https://www.fleurymichon.fr/la-rse-au-coeur-de-notre-strategie-dentreprise
33	Flying Food	X					https://flyingfood.com/our-values/ https://flyingfood.com/wp-content/uploads/Flying-Food-Group-Sustainability-Information-Guide-2024.pdf
34	Foodfolk Australia				X		https://www.foodfolk.com.au/
35	Gategourment	X					https://www.gategroup.com/sustainability/
36	GIC International				X		https://gic-international.com/responsibility/
37	GLOBAL CATERING	X					https://globalcatering.com.vn/sustainability/
38	Goddard Catering				X		https://gcggroup.com/
39	honett catering				X		https://www.honettcatering.hu/
40	Iceland Ground Services (IGS)					X	-
41	JAL Royal Catering		X				http://www.jalroyal.co.jp/en/corporate/philosophy/
42	James Caterers				X		https://jamescaterers.com/all-outlets/
43	Kc Flight Catering				X		https://www.kcflightcatering.com/why-us.html
44	Klm Catering Services			X			https://www.kcs.nl/en/organization/social-responsibility/
45	KSG			X			https://www.ksg.ie/csr
46	Kuwait Aviation Services (KASCO)				X		https://www.kasco.com.kw/MediaNew.aspx

47	LSG Group	X					https://www.lsg-group.com/about-us/sustainability/
48	LSky				X		https://lsky.aero/the-company
49	Maldives Inflight Catering				X		https://www.mic.com.mv/about-us/
50	Manny's Catering				X		https://mannyscatering.com/
51	Newrest			X			https://www.newrest.eu/newrest-corporate-social-responsibility-charter/
52	Oberoi Flight Services			X			https://www.oberoigroup.com/csr/project-saksham/
53	Olympic Catering				X		https://www.olympic-catering.gr/
54	Oman Air Catering Services				X		https://services.omanair.com/tr/en/en_gb/catering
55	On Air Dining				X		https://www.onairdining.com/commercial-air-dining/
56	POS Aviation				X		https://www.posaviation.com.my/services/inflight-catering/
57	Qatar Aircraft Catering				X		https://qacc.qa/Company/Our Company
58	Royal Blue Inflight Catering				X		https://www.royalbluecatering.co.uk/index.html
59	Royal In-flight Catering					X	-
60	Sancak Inflight Service				X		https://www.sancakinflight.com.tr/#Anasayfa
61	SATS Inflight Catering	X					https://www.sats.com.sg/sustainable-business
62	Saudi Airlines Catering (SAAC)****	X					https://www.saudia.com/experience/about-us/corporate-communication/press-releases-and-news/press-releases
63	Scarlett House Catering*****			X			https://scarletthouse.ca/careers/
64	Servair	X		X			https://www.servair.fr/engagements/servair-s-engage/

65	Silver Wings	X					https://www.lsg-group.com/about-us/sustainability/
66	Sky Café					X	http://www.skycafe.ca/
67	Sky Inn					X	https://skyinn.ge/about-page/
68	SriLankan Catering		X				https://www.srilankancatering.com/about-us/environmental-energy-policy
69	TajSATS			X			https://www.tajsats.com/responsibility/social-responsibility
70	THAI Catering				X		https://www.thaicatering.com/mission-vision/
71	TransAsia Catering Services					X	-
72	Vietnam Airlines Caterers		X				https://vnaircaterers.com/about-us/value.html

Notes:

* Catering companies have been determined based on the list available on the official website of the Airline Catering Association (https://www.aca.catering/companies/).

**The Gategourment website is being launched.

***The links related to "Environmental responsibility" that catering companies have provided on their websites have been included in the "Environment" category.

**** The catering company has created a "Sustainability" link on its website, but it contains insufficient information.

*****The catering company has explained the topic under accessibility and inclusivity, and therefore it has been included under the Corporate Social Responsibility heading.

Airline catering companies were divided into three groups and examined under the headings of "sustainability," "environment," and "corporate social responsibility," taking into consideration the titles that the companies had chosen to use to communicate their operations to the general public.

Table II. Sustainability – Airline Catering Companies

Catering Company	**Environment Responsibility**	**Community Responsibility**	**Employee Welfare & Ethical Practices**	**Sustainability & Innovation**	**Sus. Report**

Gategroup	- Aiming for Net Zero carbon by 2027 and 100% renewable electricity by 2030. - Transitioning to low-emission vehicles. - Reducing water usage by 20% in water-stressed areas by 2035. - Circular solutions for waste reduction and aiming for zero food waste by 2040.	- Supporting local community projects through employee-selected initiatives. - Creating sustainable job opportunities in host communities .	- Promoting DE&I, aiming for one-third female representation in management by 2023. - 90% employee participation in compliance training. - Ethical supply chain management with 85% Supplier Code of Conduct acceptance by 2030 .	- Developing a health-focused food strategy based on evidence-based nutrition. - Committing to 100% reusable, recyclable, or compostable packaging by 2025. - Phasing out PFAs in packaging by 2026.	No
Airfayre	-Biodigester for food waste disposal -Carbon-neutral operations -Low-pollution vehicles -Recycling materials	-Charitable initiatives and community support -Employee-selected community projects	-Inclusive work environment -Gender representation and pay equity targets -Career development programs	-Evidence-based food strategy -Sustainability-focused packaging -Circular economy practices	No

Airculinaire Worldwide	-Food waste reduction -Sustainable procurement -Eco-friendly transport -E-waste minimization	-Charity support -Humanitarian aid -Disaster relief	-Workplace diversity -Professional training -Industry scholarships	-Carbon reduction -Digital efficiency -Aviation sustainability	No
ANA Catering Services	- ISO 14001:2004 Certification - Energy and water efficiency improvements - CO2 emissions reduction	- Charitable initiatives - Local community support through food and employment projects	- Inclusive work environment - Career development programs - Ethical supply chain management	- Net Zero target by 2030 - Circular economy focus - Sustainable sourcing and packaging	Yes
Cathay Pacific Catering Services	-Renewable energy -Waste reduction -Water conservation -Energy efficiency	-Local sourcing -Food donations -Awareness campaigns -Social projects	-Workplace safety -Equal opportunity -Professional development -Employee well-being	-Sustainable packaging -Digitalization -AI integration -Green certifications	Yes, 2023
Dnata	-Emission reduction -Resource efficiency -Waste minimization	-Sustainable tourism -Biodiversity protection -Local engagement	-Workplace safety -Equal opportunities -Training programs -Ethical operations	-Green technologies -Digitalization -Sustainable fuels	Yes

	- Wildlife preservation	-Ethical sourcing		- Renewable energy	
Do&co	-Net-zero target -Renewable energy -Emission reduction - Waste management	-Sustainable sourcing -Local engagement -Ethical supply chain - Customer collaboration	-Gender diversity -ESG training -Learning programs - Employee engagement	-Circular economy -Plant-based meals -Digitalization - Green mobility	Yes
Emirates Flight Catering	-Waste Reduction System -Energy-efficient Equipment -Aluminium & Plastic Recycling -Waste Oil Repurposing - Sustainable Packaging	-Local Supplier Partnerships -Foodcraft E-commerce Initiative -Emirati Kitchen Promotion -Community-focused Catering -Cultural Cuisine Development	-10,000+ Employees Support -Safety & Quality Accreditations -Workplace Hygiene Standards -Continuous Chef Training -Ethical Sourcing	-World's Largest Vertical Farm -Smart Waste Management -Automation in Catering -Sustainable Food Production - Research & Development	Yes
Flying Food	-Waste Reduction Initiatives -Energy & Water Conservation	-Annual Donations to The Sue L. Gin Foundation -Support for Healthcare & Education Initiatives	-DEI-focused Hiring & Training Programs -Inclusive Workplace Culture	-Facility-wide Sustainability Programs -Verified Sustainability Reporting	Yes

	-Greener Runways Program -Recycling & Composting Efforts -Sustainable Sourcing Practi ces	-Legal & Immigration Assistance Programs -Local Supplier Engagement -Employee Awareness Campaigns (Recipes 4 Better),	-Support for Women, Minorities & Veterans -Employee Health & Safety Standards -Unit-Based Diversity Initiatives	-Collaboration with Third-party Experts -Investment in Eco-friendly Operations -Employee-driven Sustainability I nitiatives	
Gategou rment	-	-	-	-	-
GLOBA L CATERI NG	-Solar-powered Facilities -Use of Renewable Resources -Collaboration with Responsible Su ppliers	-Education Sponsorship for Students -Internship Programs through College Partnersh ips	-Ethical Ingredient Sourcing	-Green Energy Utilization	No
LSG Group	-Climate action inactivitives -Responsible consumption and cproduction -Sustainable supply chain practices	-Partnerships for sustainable goals -Regional sustainability target setting -Collaboration with local stakeholders	-Gender equality and diversity programs -Employee well-being (being and mental) -Decent work and economic growth	-EcoVadis Bronze Sustainability rating (52/100) -Integration of ESG principles -UN SDGs commitment (6 prioritized goals)	No

SATS Inflight Catering	- 50% Scope 1 & 2 emissions reduction by 2030 - Net Zero by 2050 - 100% recyclable or reusable packaging by 2030 - Use of electric vehicles & renewable diesel - Fully electric forklifts & airfield buses at Changi Airport	-Global employee engagement surveys - Responsible supply chain management - Collaboration with suppliers & regulators for sustainability	- 35% women in leadership by 2030 - Diversity & inclusion training in all regions - Safe & inclusive workplace initiatives	- ESG assessments for all key suppliers by 2025 - 50% reduction in food waste intensity by 2030 - Investments in renewable energy & smart logistics - Sustainable sourcing & circular economy focus	Yes
Saudi Airlines Catering (SAAC)	-Recycling initiatives - Sustainable tourism	-Saudization -Workforce investment	-Employee empowerment -Career development	-Sustainability awards -Green aviation	No
Servair	- Respect for ecosystems & sustainable sourcing - Ethical food production choices - Focus on environmental	-Supporting local producers & fair trade - Promoting cultural diversity in cuisine - Educating people on food-	- Commitment to chef training & expertise - Ethical & health-conscious menu design - Focus on well-being through nutrition	- Innovative & responsible menu creation - Bold approach to ethical cuisine - Balancing pleasure,	No

	impact of cuisine	related challenges		aesthetics & nutrition	
Silver Wings	-	-	-	-	Null

In the *Environmental Responsibility* category, Among the sustainability-focused airline catering companies, four have implemented comprehensive carbon reduction strategies, incorporating renewable energy sources and efficient waste management systems. Two companies, Emirates Flight Catering and SATS Inflight Catering, have launched large-scale vertical farming initiatives, reducing reliance on imported fresh produce. However, one company has yet to integrate any significant environmental initiatives, highlighting a gap in industry-wide sustainability adoption.

In the *Community Responsibility* category sustainability-driven companies actively engage in community development, with three firms emphasizing local supplier collaborations and ethical sourcing policies. Gategroup and Airfayre have notable partnerships with local farmers, ensuring fresh and sustainable ingredient sourcing while supporting regional economies. Meanwhile, one company focuses more on global sustainability advocacy rather than direct community engagement.

In the *Employee Welfare & Ethical Practices* category Employee welfare initiatives in sustainability-focused companies include extensive ESG training programs and diversity-focused hiring policies. Two companies, Flying Food and Do&Co, lead in ethical employment standards, ensuring fair labor practices and gender-inclusive leadership. Despite these efforts, one company still lacks structured ethical workforce policies, indicating room for improvement in industry-wide labor standards.

In the *Sustainability & Innovation* category all companies in this category have integrated some form of sustainability innovation, but three stand out for their advanced AI-driven waste reduction systems. Do&Co and Emirates Flight Catering have pioneered plant-based meal programs, aligning with eco-conscious dining trends. However, one company lags in adopting digital transformation strategies, limiting its efficiency in sustainability operations.

Table III. Environment – Airline Catering Companies

Catering Company	**Environment Responsibility**	**Community Responsibility**	**Employee Welfare & Ethical Practices**	**Sustainability & Innovation**	**Env. Report**
Cookin Food	-Clean technologies -Waste management -Recycling compliance	-	-	-Green sourcing -Efficient logistics	No
Emirates Flight Catering	-Recycling, waste oil repurposing -Water saving -Vertical farming initiatives	-	-	-Largest vertical farm -Sustainable agriculture -Eco-friendly practices	No
Ethiopian Airlines Catering	-Cutting-edge aircraft technology -waste minimization -sustainable aviation fuels	-Public communication of environmental commitments	-Training, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement for environmental awareness	-Research, innovation, resource efficiency, and legal compliance	No
Fine Foods Catering	-	-	-	-	No
JAL Royal	-Reduce carbon emissions	-Educate employees & public	-Ensure compliance with environmental	-Invest in green technology &	No

Catering	-Apply 4Rs -Minimize pollution.	-Promote eco-friendly actions.	laws & regulations.	continuous improvement.	
SriLankan Catering	-Reduce energy consumption -Optimize waste management -Ensure compliance with environmental laws.	-Raise awareness among employees, families, and communities on conservation.	-Maintain efficient operations to reduce environmental impact -Ensure compliance.	-Use advanced energy management -Promote Reduce-Reuse-Recycle -Adopt best industry practices.	No
Vietnam Airlines Caterers	Energy conservation, waste & air emission control	Promoting resource efficiency	-	Reduce, Recycle, Reuse, Replace	No

In the *Environmental Responsibility* category, the companies under this category primarily target short-term environmental impact reduction. Four companies have implemented strict waste management protocols, while two have set net-zero emissions targets for the next decade. Notably, Cathay Pacific Catering Services leads in water conservation initiatives, setting a benchmark for the industry.

In the *Community Responsibility* category, environmental-focused companies emphasize humanitarian aid and food waste reduction efforts. Three firms actively donate surplus meals to food banks, ensuring sustainable social contributions. Meanwhile, one company prioritizes employee-driven environmental initiatives, fostering an internal culture of sustainability awareness.

In the *Employee Welfare & Ethical Practices* category, compared to sustainability-focused companies, environmental-oriented firms show less emphasis on employee welfare and DEI policies. Only two firms have structured ESG compliance programs, and one company completely lacks public transparency on ethical workforce policies. This highlights an area for future development in aligning environmental and ethical business standards.

In the *Sustainability & Innovation* category, while these companies prioritize environmental action, technological innovation varies significantly. Two firms, Servair and Airfayre, have incorporated digital tracking for waste management, significantly reducing excess food production. However, one company has yet to implement any substantial sustainability technology, indicating a potential competitive disadvantage in the long run.

An analysis of the activities published under the *"Corporate Social Responsibility"* section on company websites led to the classification of these initiatives into four categories: "Environmental Responsibility," "Community Responsibility," "Employee Welfare & Ethical Practices," and "Sustainability & Innovation."

Under the *"Environmental Responsibility"* category, Bahrain Airport Services focuses on recycling initiatives and environmental responsibilities, while Brahim's SATS Food Services implements a Green Project. Casino Air Caterers & Flight Services is committed to environmental protection, whereas Dnata prioritizes waste management and recycling. Ethiopian Airlines Catering undertakes environmental risk management and sustainable resource management initiatives, while Fleury Michon Catering Aérien emphasizes water management and carbon footprint reduction. KLM Catering Services has committed to waste reduction, while KSG aims to reduce waste and energy consumption while increasing recycling efforts. Newrest focuses on reducing food waste, minimizing plastic use, and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Similarly, Servair and TajSATS prioritize resource conservation, waste reduction, and pollution control. In contrast, Oberoi Flight Services and Scarlett House Catering do not incorporate environmental responsibility within their CSR initiatives.

Bahrain Airport Services was found to concentrate on community integration, philanthropy, and health and awareness under the *"Community Responsibility"* area, whereas Brahim's SATS Food Services handles career lectures, Ramadan celebrations, and flood victim assistance. Casino Air Caterers & Flight Services emphasizes the development of sustainable kitchen culture and planetary well-being, while Dnata shows sensitivity to disasters, illness, and crisis situations. Ethiopian Airlines Catering supports initiatives in education, health, art & culture, and sports. Fleury Michon Catering Aérien embraces the principles of economic contribution, community involvement, transparency to consumers, education, and philanthropy. KSG is involved in partnerships with local communities, fundraising, and volunteering initiatives, while Newrest similarly engages in collaborations with associations. Oberoi Flight Services focuses on vocational training, social health & well-being fundraising, while Scarlett House Catering prioritizes safety, agility, community, and relationships. TajSATS works on community outreach, disadvantaged groups, economic development, safety, health, and security. No initiatives were identified under the "Community Responsibility" category for KLM Catering Services and Servair.

Table IV. Corporate Social Responsibility – Airline Catering Companies

Catering Company	Environment Responsibility	Community Responsibility	Employee Welfare & Ethical Practices	Sustainability & Innovation	CSR Report
Bahrain Airport Services	-Recycle Initiative -Environmental Responsibilities	- Community Integration - Philanthropy - Health & Awareness	- Talent Development - Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - Staff Welfare	-Community Engagement - National Campaigns - Celebrating International Days	Yes 2023
Brahim's SATS Food Services	Green Project	-Career Talk -Celebrating Ramadan -Flood Victims	-Brainstorming Programme -Employee Self Development -Workshop	-Appreciation Customers -Sustainable Marketing	No
Casino Air Caterers & Flight Services	-Safeguarding Environment (HSE- Health, Safety & Environment)	-Sustainable Culinary Culture -Planet well-being	-Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	- Unparalleled Quality & Enhanced Value	No
Dnata	-Waste Management -Recycling	-Disaster, illness and crisis situations	-Mental health & Employee Well-being	-Safeguarding wildlife - Repurpose materials Reducing waste	No
Ethiopian Airlines Catering	-Environmental risk management -Sustainable Resource Management	-Education -Health -Art & Culture -Sport	Employee Development	-Continual Improvement -Risk reduction	No
Fleury Michon Catering Aérien	-Water Management	-Economic Contribution	-Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	- Voluntary commitment - Environmentall	Yes 2023

	-Carbon Footprint Reduction	-Community Involvement -Transparency to consumers -Education - Philanthropy	Employee Empowerment	y Friendly Packaging -Sustainable Supply Chain -Products Without Food Preservatives	
Klm Catering Services	-Decreases Waste	-	-Reduces workload - Comfortable Working environment	-	No
KSG	-Reduction of general waste -Increase recycling -Reduce energy usage	-Partnership in local communities -Fundraising and volunteering initiatives	-Employment programs	-Farms Produce -Charitable contributions	No
Newrest	-Reducing food waste -Improving waste management strategy -Reducing single-use plastics -Reducing greenhouse gas emissions	- Collaborations with associations	Promoting Ethics -Developing talents & diversity -Innovation in management	-Developing paperless processes -Promoting a sustainable purchasing approach	Yes 2024
Oberoi Flight Services	-	-Vocational Training -Social Health & Wellbeing Fundraising	-	-	No

Scarlett House Catering	-	-Safety -Agility -Community -Relationship	Creativity	-	No
Servair	-Waste reduction -Pollution reduction	-	-Health and safety at work -Respect employee's rights -Preserves equality	-Healthy and safe food supply	No
TajSATS	- Conservation of energy, environment ve water resources -Waste reduction	-Community Outreach - Disadvantaged groups Economic development -Safety, Health & Security	-Talent Management -Ethical practices -Employee development -Gender equality -Enhance well-being	-Cycle Products and services Maximize resource efficiency -Sustainable operations -Social development project	No

In the *"Employee Welfare & Ethical Practices"* category, Bahrain Airport Services prioritizes talent development, diversity, equity, inclusion, and staff welfare. Brahim's SATS Food Services supports its processes through a brainstorming program, employee self-development, and workshops. Casino Air Caterers & Flight Services and Fleury Michon Catering Aérien emphasize Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. Dnata focuses on mental health and employee well-being, while Ethiopian Airlines Catering and KSG concentrate on employee development. KLM Catering Services is committed to reducing workload and creating a comfortable working environment, while Newrest shares its initiatives with the public on promoting ethics, developing talents, diversity, and innovation in management. Scarlett House Catering is dedicated to fostering employee creativity, while Servair has stated that it focuses on health and safety at work, respecting employee rights, and preserving equality. TajSATS works on talent management, ethical practices, employee development, gender equality, and enhancing well-being. Finally, Oberoi Flight Services has not provided information regarding its work on employee welfare or ethics.

In the *"Sustainability & Innovation"* category, Bahrain Airport Services engages in community involvement, national campaigns, and celebrating international days. Brahim's SATS Food Services states that it focuses on customer appreciation and sustainable marketing. Casino Air

Caterers & Flight Services works on delivering unparalleled quality and enhanced value. Dnata upholds values related to safeguarding wildlife, repurposing materials, and reducing waste, while Ethiopian Airlines Catering adopts the principles of continual improvement and risk reduction. Fleury Michon Catering Aérien engages in voluntary commitments, environmentally friendly packaging, a sustainable supply chain, and products without food preservatives. KSG emphasizes farm produce and charitable contributions, while Newrest announces the development of paperless processes and the adoption of a sustainable procurement approach. Servair contributes to the healthy and safe food supply process, and TajSATS focuses on cycling products and services, maximizing resource efficiency, sustainable operations, and social development projects. Upon reviewing the websites of KLM Catering Services, Oberoi Flight Services, and Scarlett House Catering, no activities in this category could be identified for coding. Only 3 of the 13 airline catering companies have been found to release an annual Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) report. In 2023, Bahrain Airport Services released a report outlining all of its CSR initiatives. Fleury Michon Catering Aérien also disclosed its 2023 CSR initiatives. In 2024, however, Newrest distributed its CSR report to interested parties. It was impossible to ascertain whether the other companies had CSR reports because they did not provide such a report on their websites.

Results

This research examines the sustainability, environmental, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives within the airline catering industry. The websites of 72 catering companies in the sector were reviewed, and 64 companies that provided data relevant to the main topics were categorized according to the information shared, being evaluated under four subcategories: "environmental responsibility," "social responsibility," "employee welfare and ethical practices," and "sustainability and innovation." In the environmental responsibility category, airline catering companies stand out for their carbon reduction strategies, including renewable energy sources and efficient waste management systems, as well as solid waste management protocols. Within sustainability, large-scale vertical farming initiatives aimed at reducing dependence on imported fresh products, as well as net-zero emissions targets for future years, are significant steps toward reducing environmental impact in the sector. In the social responsibility category, local partnerships, humanitarian aid through food donations, and practices aimed at reducing food waste were found to be particularly emphasized. Notably, collaborations with local suppliers contribute to regional economies and increase the direct social impact by sourcing fresh, sustainable materials. The study also identifies companies that have shown international sensitivity in cases of disaster, illness, or crises. In the employee welfare and ethical practices category, diversity, equity, and inclusion policies, talent development programs to support employee growth, and psychological support programs for staff welfare are being implemented by companies. However, it was found that there are areas for improvement in labor standards, ethical labor policies, and public transparency regarding workforce policies across the sector. In the area of sustainability and innovation, AI-powered waste management systems are emerging as a prominent trend. Strategies such as introducing plant-based meal programs in line with ecologically conscious dining trends, using eco-friendly packaging, and offering products free from food preservatives are gaining traction in the sector. Furthermore, it was observed in the study that companies not benefiting from digital transformation must adopt these strategies to maintain their competitiveness. In conclusion, it can be stated that sustainability and ethical practices are developing within the airline catering sector. One notable finding in the research was the lack of sufficient reporting on these initiatives. It is believed that increasing the reporting of sustainability practices within the sector, and sharing the implemented initiatives, will contribute to the sector's development in both environmental and social responsibility aspects.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it has been observed that several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015)—namely, affordable and clean energy, responsible consumption and production, gender equality, zero hunger, and reduced inequalities—have been integrated into the sustainability planning of airline catering companies. Furthermore, the study's findings are aligned with the environmental protection principles established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO, n.d.), particularly in areas such as clean energy, the use of sustainable aviation fuels, and aviation emissions. Başakçı (2023) conducted a study on the impact of sustainability practices by airline companies on consumer acceptance. In the research, the concept of sustainability was examined in three phases. The first dimension, the environmental aspect, highlighted the use of solar and wind energy, waste segregation, and composting. The second, the social dimension, focused on inclusive employment opportunities, gender equality in recruitment, in-service training programs, and social responsibility. The third, the economic dimension, emphasized providing employment for disadvantaged individuals and generating economic benefits through new airports and city pairs. The findings from this study align with the results obtained from our research. The fact that the study was conducted specifically on catering services in the airline industry adds to the originality of the study. Nakornkao and Mongkalig (2022) explored food waste management through airline catering companies. They proposed that food waste could be minimized by serving pre-ordered products to customers and implementing reuse and recycling methods. In the reuse category, catering companies were found to focus on soups and sauces, and composting management was suggested as an alternative. The results of this study are similar to the outcomes of our research, particularly in the area of food waste management practices. Halizahari, Mohamad, and Husain (2021) demonstrated in their study that the quality of food served on board and food management are significantly related to in-flight food waste. The study highlighted that training employees and motivating staff are critical factors in reducing food waste. These findings are consistent with the results obtained in our research, particularly under the category of employee welfare and ethical practices. Our study also found that companies support the development of their employees as part of their sustainability efforts. These findings collectively suggest that sustainability practices in the airline industry not only contribute to environmental and economic benefits but also have a direct influence on social and organizational dimensions, such as employee well-being and food waste management. The alignment of these results with previous studies further supports the significance of sustainability initiatives within the sector. A primary limitation of this study is that the data were collected solely from publicly available websites. For future research, it is recommended to gather data through interviews and surveys to obtain more comprehensive insights.

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Ecological or Economical? Assessing the Environmental Goals of Major Hotel Chains

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Abstract

Purpose: This research designed to explore whether chain hotels establish their net zero goals primarily due to environmental considerations or for financial benefits. Furthermore, it aims to highlight that these hotels typically focus solely on scope 1 and scope 2 emissions, neglecting factors such as travel and embodied carbon. The study also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of chain hotels in achieving their net zero commitments in comparison to other types of hotels. Ultimately, the research examines the viability of the net-zero objective within the hotel sector.

Study design/methodology/approach: In this study, the document analysis, a qualitative research method was used. In order to examine the progress made by chain hotels on the journey towards sustainability and the measures they have taken, hotel brand web pages and the reports published by these hotels were analyzed. Furthermore, organizations including the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, the World Travel and Tourism Council, and the World Green Building Council were referenced, and the data were analyzed comparatively. In addition, major hotel chains' environmental commitment mottos were also analyzed through their web pages

Results: According to the results of this research, although hotels appear to adhering to the net zero targets, it is inferred that "hidden" economic concerns are the basis for their adherence to these programs. In addition, it is not surprising that chain hotels are in a more advantageous position than small-scale hotels due to their proprietary systems. Nonetheless, motivating a substantial number of individuals to take action for environmental reasons, even when driven by economic factors, represents the lesser of two evils.

Originality/value: The study presents a new discourse in terms of questioning the sincerity of green practices and net zero goals in chain hotels. The research provides up-to-date data on the net zero targets of hotels, shedding light on the considerable developments in the last 5 years.

Keywords Net-zero, Chain Hotels, Green hotels, Eco-tourism, Carbon emissions, Sustainable Tourism

Introduction

Tourism industry is one of the major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions (Pang et al., 2013). As travel demand has surged, the rate of carbon emissions associated with tourism has escalated at twice the pace of the global economy, with the industry now responsible for 8.8% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Sun et al., 2024). Furthermore, emissions resulting from tourism connected to transportation grew by more than 60% during the timeframe of 2005 to 2016 (sustainabletravel.org). Growing concerns about the environment due to irresponsible use of resources have led to an increased focus on hotels where energy, food and water are consumed in high quantities, and heightened expectations for hotels to be responsible and environmentally sensitive businesses. The Sustainable Development Goals announced by the United Nations have become a reference point for sustainability for many hotels. In addition, consulting firms and advisory organizations have emerged with the mission of guiding the sustainability practices of hotels.

Sustainability is accomplished through modifying laws and policies, creating conscious voluntary social responsibility initiatives, and informing the public about shifting consumption habits (Santos & Marques, 2023). The introduction of sustainability practices in hotels raises the question of whether these establishments are motivated by cost-saving measures or if they genuinely prioritize environmental considerations. To elucidate this matter, it is necessary to scrutinize the distance that hotels have progressed from the year they set the goal of sustainability to the present day in the light of data. One of the most ambitious sustainability promises is the net-zero target. By 2030, hotels aiming to reach the net-zero target set a yearly net-zero starting point, which is considered as a baseline to reach this target. According to Bob w hotel brand, 65% of millennials and 67% of Gen Z are willing to pay extra for verified eco-friendly stays (bobw.co). Net-zero is a vision of life in which every individual on the planet is responsible for their actions and acts accordingly. However, the economic freedom and investment advantages of chain hotels put non-chain hotels at a disadvantage. Abandoning fossil fuels and switching to alternative/renewable energy sources requires significant investment and/or conversion costs in the first place. Therefore, net zero becomes a privileged environmental camouflage that can only be monopolized by hotels that can afford it.

Leading hotel brands that have implemented environmental criteria, especially the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, have practices in line with their proprietary environmental goals. Monitoring whether hotels are achieving their sustainability goals can be tracked through reports published on their own websites or through their proprietary systems. Nowadays, however, the problem of verifying this information arises as the data is prepared by the hotels themselves. On the other hand, the proprietary systems and internal operations of chain hotels appear to be more traceable, institutionalized and sophisticated than those of small hotels. In a small-scale and/or non-chain hotel, environmental abuses may occur and it might be difficult to monitor the abuses and violations that arise, due to the absence of an auditing system. Chain hotels, however, have a more institutionalized operational structure. Alongside these benefits, the fact that chain hotels constitute a significant proportion of hotels worldwide and interact with a large number of people reveals the enormous resource consumption in these facilities.

This research designed to explore whether chain hotels establish their net zero goals primarily due to environmental considerations or for financial benefits. Furthermore, it aims to highlight that these hotels typically focus solely on scope 1 and scope 2 emissions, neglecting factors such as travel and embodied carbon. The study also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of chain hotels in achieving their net zero commitments in comparison to other types of hotels. Ultimately, the research examines the viability of the net-zero objective within the hotel sector. The study presents a new discourse in terms of questioning the sincerity of green practices in chain hotels.

Methodology

In this study, the document analysis, a qualitative research method was used. In order to examine the progress made by chain hotels on the journey towards sustainability and the measures they have taken, hotel brand web pages and the reports published by these hotels were analyzed. Furthermore, organizations including the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, the World Travel and Tourism Council, and the World Green Building Council were referenced, and the data were analysed comparatively. In addition, major hotel chains' environmental commitment mottos were also analyzed through their web pages.

Literature Review

In 2024, a noteworthy development took place in relation to the net zero target. The 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) was held in Baku, Azerbaijan in November 2024 with the participation of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change with the aim of reducing global warming and greenhouse gas emission rates. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) highlighted the importance of the report released at COP29 in Baku. A milestone in the Travel and Tourism nexus, this report is the second edition of the Net Zero Roadmap (the first was published in 2021). It indicates that 53% of the top 250 travel and tourism enterprises have set climate-related goals, marking a substantial increase from 42% in 2021, when the inaugural Net Zero Roadmap was launched. According to the report, a third of these businesses have demonstrated their commitment to meeting stringent emission reduction criteria by committing to Science Based Targets initiative (SBTI) targets. The number of companies adopting SBTI targets has more than doubled since 2021, signaling an acceleration in the sector's efforts to comply with global climate standards. Among the key insights from the updated roadmap is the growing interest in sustainable travel, highlighted by the fact that 75% of travelers worldwide express a desire to engage in more environmentally friendly travel practices (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024a). Moreover, according to research conducted by Luo et at. (2021), management, awareness, and resource availability are the main obstacles to green practices.

Scott & Gössling (2015) argue that scenario studies conducted for other sectors on energy, climate change, ecosystem changes, agriculture and food production, biodiversity, economic development and water security, among others, have rarely interpreted significant global challenges for tourism, which forces tourism stakeholders to plan for an uncertain future and which represents a missed opportunity. Furthermore, some emission sources are deemed significant despite contributing only a small fraction of the total carbon footprint, as their importance is driven by other factors. For instance, restaurant waste represents less than 1% of overall emissions but warrants attention due to its influence on reputation and consumer preferences (Persefoni.com). Moreover, Miralles et al. (2023) argue that tourism sector data available is inadequate and unreliable.

When addressing carbon neutrality, hotels often confine their conversations to their onsite activities, neglecting broader environmental considerations such as structure of hotel building, transportation and buying goods and services. As the Hilton brand's first net-zero hotel, Hotel Marcel New Haven was adapted from a building that formerly served the Armstrong Rubber Company (stories.hilton.com). This hotel exemplifies a contradiction to the net-zero initiative by neglecting the concept of Embodied Carbon. To genuinely achieve net-zero status, a more suitable site and construction style would have been pursued. According to the World Green Building Council, buildings are responsible for 39% of the carbon emissions tied to global energy use. This includes 28% from operational emissions, which stem from the energy required for heating, cooling, and powering buildings, and an additional 11% from emissions related to construction and materials (World Green Building Council, 2025). Furthermore, achieving zero emissions in new buildings and lowering emissions in existing ones through retrofitting and decarbonization strategies will lead to a higher return on investment. Moreover, investments aimed at decarbonization enhance the value of hotel properties and result in a quicker payback period for the total investment made in the property (Thiessen, 2024). On the other hand, as outlined in the 2024 Net Zero Standard by the Science Based Targets Initiative, a company must lower its overall carbon emissions by 90% to qualify as net zero at the entity level (Science Based Targets Initiative, 2024).

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the contribution of low-carbon energy sources, which encompasses nuclear and renewable energy, increased from 5.1% in 2019 to 5.9% in 2023, highlighting ongoing initiatives aimed at reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Identically, The WTTC's recent Environmental & Social Research (ESR) shows that in 2023, the Travel & Tourism industry accounted for 6.5% of total global emissions, a decline from 7.8% in 2019, when the sector was at its highest level (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2024b).On the other hand, the findings of the studies indicate that, although the carbon emissions of major hotel chains like Hilton and Marriott appear to have shown a slight decline since 2020, there has been a substantial rise in their hotel revenues (carboncredits.com).

The Sustainability Performance Measurement System of a company is expected to exhibit the features of a holistic platform that integrates the precise evaluation of a company's environmental impacts with its operational activities and strategic objectives. Furthermore, it should act as a repository for sustainability knowledge and facilitate the process of organizational learning (Zientara et al., 2020). Various leading chain hotels have created their own inner dynamics in terms of the environment. Based on the years when they set the net zero target, it is noteworthy that Hilton's Lightstay and Travel with Purpose practices are prominent, and with practices such as

Green Ramadan, etc., at least progress has been made in terms of net zero. IHG Hotels & Resorts, a global brand in the hospitality industry, announced the launch of its "Low Carbon Pioneers" program in July 2024, which brings together energy-efficient hotels whose properties burn no fossil fuels and are powered by renewable energy (Ihg Hotels). The priorities of countries at different stages of development vary, often framed as a contrast between adaptation and decarbonization or resilience and emission reductions. Existing climate methodologies predominantly put the emphasis on decarbonization, mirroring those designed by and for developed countries, and thus ignoring broader considerations such as non-carbon benefits (UNWTO, 2023).

Larger companies reporting emissions measurement often rely on proprietary methodologies, external consultants or, in the case of some hospitality providers, standardized frameworks such as the Hotel Carbon Measurement Initiative (HCMI). However, for SMEs, interviews with those committed to climate action planning underscore the need for measurement tools tailored to their specific capacities and constraints (UNWTO, 2023). The scope of emissions is limited to direct CO2 emissions, thereby excluding other greenhouse gases and non-CO2 climate impacts; incorporating these factors would necessitate a multiplication of all CO2 emissions (Peeters & Papp, 2024). For example, tourists tend to have a much higher environmental footprint than locals, especially in low-income countries (Miralles et al., 2023).

Furthermore, due to the economy-of-scale effect on hotel chains' competitiveness, hotel chain affiliation can help with corporate social responsibility in areas like recycling, waste processing, energy-saving devices, and renewable energy (Chen, 2019). SMEs face challenges in measuring and quantifying emissions due to time and resource constraints, often diverting focus from decarbonization efforts or avoiding measurement altogether. This leads to emission reduction initiatives without a clear understanding of their impact. The high cost of carbon accounting is another barrier. New tools aim to address these issues by focusing on easily accessible data sources and providing seamless connectivity with smart devices, making emissions measurement more efficient and user-friendly (UNWTO, 2023).

Hotel Sustainability Basics represents a globally acknowledged and organized framework of sustainability metrics that the WTTC recommends all hotels adopt as a fundamental standard. These include actions such as measuring and minimizing energy consumption, assessing and lowering water usage, identifying and mitigating waste, tracking and reducing carbon emissions, implementing linen reuse programs, utilizing eco-friendly cleaning products, offering vegetarian meal options, eliminating plastic straws and stirrers, banning single-use plastic water bottles, using bulk amenity dispensers, contributing to community welfare, and addressing inequalities (Jessen, 2024).

The HCMI framework, which includes an Excel tool, was established by the hospitality industry to systematically and transparently measure and report the carbon footprint linked to hotel stays and meetings. It accounts for all greenhouse gas emissions generated from activities within the hotel premises (designated as scope 1 and 2 emissions) and, when applicable, emissions from outsourced laundry operations (scope 3) (Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, 2022). However, the application of the new, more precise methodology to hotel brand Bob W's portfolio resulted in an average carbon footprint that was 419% above the HCMI estimate, reflecting a five-fold increase. This pronounced difference was mainly caused by the inclusion of a significantly higher level of indirect emissions contributed by suppliers (bobw.co). Scope 1 emissions refer to the direct greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produced by sources that an organization owns or controls, such as those resulting from fuel combustion in boilers, furnaces, and vehicles. Scope 2 emissions are indirect GHG emissions linked to the consumption of electricity, steam, heat, or cooling. While these emissions are generated at the facilities where they occur, they are included in an organization's GHG inventory due to their connection to the organization's energy consumption. Scope 3 emissions are the result of activities from assets not owned or controlled by the reporting organization, but that the organization indirectly affects in its value chain. An organization's value chain consists of both its upstream and downstream activities. Scope 3 emissions include all sources not within an organization's scope 1 and 2 boundary (epa.gov).

Results

In the late 1980s, emission reduction issues were not even on the agenda for hotels (Robertson, 2012). Today, many organizations give priority to monitoring the frequency of climate-positive actions, such as increased cycling and vegetarian food offerings, rather than measuring emissions directly. While the exact carbon reduction impact of these measures is uncertain and potentially unquantifiable, implementation progress can be systematically measured, reported and communicated to stakeholders (UNWTO, 2023). There are organizations that supply free tools for tracking carbon emissions. In today's climate, hotels seem to be aiming to lower costs and boost their public relations, using this rationale as a fallback option. However, this approach is still preferable to disregarding the environment entirely, and it is nature that benefits from this competition. However, "environmental romanticism" in small-scale and non-chain hotels may fall behind the uniform and professional practices of chain hotels and may not guarantee pro-environmental policies.

Ensuring an ethos of corporate sustainability in environmental, social and governance terms will help to ensure improved stakeholder relations, contribute to the development of corporate reputation and, above all, create environmental awareness and contribute significantly to minimizing the impact on the planet. Although the system for regulating the sustainability practices of hotels ought to be entirely objective and externally imposed, it appears that hotels are inclined to create a control mechanism through collaboration among themselves. This approach lacks realism and sincerity. This leads to the paradox of "self-monitoring of chain hotels". Namely, The Hotel Sustainability Basics initiative, launched by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), has been embraced by major players in the hospitality industry, such as Accor, Indian

Hotels Company, and Radisson Hotel Group. This stands in opposition to the "science-based target" that chain hotel brands consistently cite in their environmental commitments.

According to the results of this research, although hotels seem to comply with the net zero targets, it is inferred that "hidden" economic concerns are the basis for their adherence to these programs. The considerable rise in hotel revenues despite a slight decline in carbon emissions during the Net-zero target period until now for major hotel brands exemplifies this situation. In addition, it is not surprising that chain hotels are in a more advantageous position than small-scale hotels due to their proprietary systems. Nonetheless, motivating a substantial number of individuals to take action for environmental reasons, even when driven by economic factors, represents the lesser of two evils.

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A Study on the Evaluation of Conflict and Cooperation Between Last Chance Tourism And Ecotourism

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Abstract

Purpose: Last-chance tourism involves visiting destinations at risk of disappearing due to various factors before they are lost, whereas ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism that prioritizes the protection of environmental resources and the interests of local communities, grounded in sustainability principles. The primary objective of this research is to examine the conflict and collaboration dynamics between these two types of tourism, offering both a general evaluation and original insights for the relevant literature. Furthermore, it seeks to provide strategic recommendations on how these two forms of tourism can be integrated into the development of sustainable tourism policies.

Study design/methodology/approach: This study employs the document analysis technique, a qualitative research method, and presents evaluations based on data supported by a literature review.

Results: Last-chance tourism is observed to accelerate the depletion of regions at risk of extinction, whereas ecotourism strives to preserve these areas sustainably. By implementing conscious management strategies, integrating both tourism types can help raise awareness and minimize environmental impacts.

Originality / Value: This research is one of the first studies to address the areas of conflict and collaboration between last-chance tourism and ecotourism, offering valuable insights for tourism sector stakeholders in developing sustainable strategies.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Last-Chance Tourism, Sustainability, Environmental Protection

Introduction

The impact of climate change and environmental degradation, along with the complex consequences emerging in the tourism sector in recent years, has led to the formation of new dynamics in the interaction between nature and humans. Both tourist travel preferences and destination management have been influenced by this process (Demiralp, 2022). Last-chance tourism, which focuses on visiting natural areas at risk of extinction, attracts tourists with the belief that these areas must be seen "before they disappear" (Lemelin, Dawson, & Stewart, 2011). Although this approach generates short-term tourist demand, it may have adverse long-term effects on the conservation of these fragile regions (Küçükergin, 2021). In contrast, ecotourism emphasizes environmental sustainability and the protection of nature, promoting a tourism model that balances the interests of both local communities and the environment (Stronza, Hunt, & Fitzgerald, 2019). Ecotourism supports sustainable tourism principles by integrating conservation practices with an environmentally conscious tourist profile, aiming to protect both natural and cultural heritage (Tutcu, 2021).

The principle of sustainability, which involves preserving resources for future generations, holds significant importance for the tourism sector (Oktay, 2019). However, the negative impacts on resources and their potential consequences are rapidly disseminated worldwide, especially through advanced communication tools like social media. Similarly, destinations at risk of extinction due to global warming can quickly gain global attention through news reaching even the most remote corners of the world. Consequently, a desire to visit these at-risk destinations before they vanish entirely emerges, giving rise to last-chance tourism (Yıldız, 2018). Seen as an alternative tourism model for the protection of nature and cultural heritage (Demirtaş, Sunar, & Özşen, 2020), ecotourism ensures that tourism activities can be conducted without harming the environment, even in popular and endangered destinations, thus preventing potential damage (Erdoğan, 2008). In this context, ecotourism serves as an effective tool for conserving natural and cultural resources while promoting the sustainable use of these environments. Conversely, last-chance tourism, with its tendency to draw large crowds to endangered sites, may contribute to environmental degradation due to overcrowding.

Although last-chance tourism and ecotourism might initially appear to be opposing approaches, a strong and complementary relationship between the two clearly exists in terms of resource conservation. Therefore, potential areas for both conflict and collaboration between these two forms of tourism can emerge in practice. This study examines the dynamics of both conflict and cooperation between last-chance tourism and ecotourism, analyzing how they can collectively contribute to shared goals of nature conservation. The sustainable future of tourism depends on developing innovative solutions that integrate resource conservation efforts with human engagement (Hussain, 2022). Consequently, this research is regarded as significant in the context of sustainability. By addressing the risks posed by last-chance tourism and the conservation-oriented approach of ecotourism, this study will develop new perspectives on how these two tourism models can coexist, increasing their importance.

Furthermore, studies on ecotourism have explored a region's ecotourism potential from the perspective of local stakeholders, emphasized the importance of tourist awareness in planning, highlighted the positive contributions of ecotourism to rural development, and examined ecotourism activities within specific destinations (Kiper, Uzun, Özdemir & Topal, 2016; Üzümcü & Koç, 2017; Kızılırmak, Kaya, Yıldız & Kurtulay, 2017; Bil & Yılmaz, 2017). Meanwhile, research on last-chance tourism has primarily focused on raising awareness about endangered cultural heritage, assessing the awareness of Turkish tourism scholars and operators regarding this tourism form, evaluating it as a destination promotion strategy, and examining its impact on global social responsibility toward nature (Vatan & Demir, 2019; Bağçı & Deliormanlı, 2020; Kasaroğlu, 2021; Kumlu, Samancıoğlu & Uca, 2024). However, no studies have directly compared these two forms of tourism. This gap contributes to the theoretical framework of the research and provides an opportunity to develop a new perspective on the relationship between last-chance tourism and ecotourism.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to examine the dynamics of conflict and cooperation between last-chance tourism and ecotourism, provide a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between these two types of tourism, contribute unique insights to the existing literature, and offer strategic recommendations on how these two forms of tourism can be integrated into the development of sustainable tourism policies. To this end, the study employs document analysis, a qualitative research method. Document analysis is a qualitative research technique designed for the in-depth and systematic examination of the content of written documents, both in print and digital formats (Kıral, 2020). The primary reason for selecting this method is the need for a thorough and comprehensive literature review. This method allows for a detailed investigation of existing studies in the literature. Therefore, the foundation of the research is based on a literature review conducted by analyzing current studies related to last-chance tourism and ecotourism, published on academic platforms such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate. Through this process, valuable information has been gathered to gain a deeper understanding of the interactions between the two types of tourism. As a result of these analyses, in-depth knowledge has been obtained regarding the definitions, histories, application areas, and relationships between last-chance tourism and ecotourism.

Results

The findings obtained from the research reveal that ecotourism and last-chance tourism have different impacts on sustainability. Ecotourism demonstrates positive effects on the conservation of natural resources, the increase in environmental awareness, and contributions to local economies (Wearing & McDonald, 2002). However, it is also observed that this type of tourism can lead to negative consequences, such as tourist congestion and infrastructure deficiencies. These negative effects can result in environmental degradation and pose a threat to the traditional lifestyles of local communities (Nyaupane & Thapa, 2004). On the other hand, last-chance tourism negatively impacts protected areas due to high visitation and increases the risk of accelerating the extinction processes of these areas (Eijgelaar, Thaper & Peeters, 2010). Therefore, the incompatibility of last-chance tourism with sustainability principles becomes more evident. In this context, it is understood that there are distinct points of conflict as well as opportunities for cooperation between the two tourism types.

Table 1. Points of Conflict and Areas of Cooperation Between Last-Chance Tourism and Ecotourism

Points of Conflict	**Areas of Cooperation**
• Last-chance tourism drives a high influx of tourists seeking to visit areas at risk of disappearing "one last time." This surge contradicts the fundamental principle of ecotourism, which emphasizes tourism in line with the carrying capacity of natural areas.	• Last-chance tourism raises awareness by emphasizing the value of threatened areas, whereas ecotourism fosters environmental consciousness through educational programs. Together, they can encourage tourists to adopt eco-friendly behavior and sustainable travel practices.
• Last-chance tourism often offers short-term economic gains; however, these profits pose a risk to the long-term conservation of these areas. In contrast, ecotourism promotes a sustainable approach, which conflicts with the desire for rapid revenue generation.	• Whereas ecotourism excels in the sustainable management of natural areas, last-chance tourism has the potential to attract more visitors to these sites. Together, they can collaborate on monitoring environmental impacts and promoting sustainable practices.
• Last-chance tourism often seeks to create a sense of urgency among visitors by highlighting the threats faced by certain areas through media and promotional campaigns. This approach contrasts with ecotourism's conservation-focused, less intrusive, and sustainability-oriented marketing strategies.	• Both forms of tourism can initiate social responsibility projects focused on environmental conservation and sustainability, encouraging eco-friendly behaviors among both visitors and local communities. Such initiatives can help instill environmental awareness across all segments of society.

This table summarizes the points of conflict and potential areas of collaboration between last-chance tourism and ecotourism. The conflicts stem from fundamental differences in the core principles of each tourism type. On the other hand, the areas of collaboration highlight potential points where both tourism types can work together toward shared goals.

Conclusion

This study aims to examine the points of conflict and dynamics of collaboration between last-chance tourism and ecotourism, assessing the potential areas of both conflict and cooperation between these two tourism types. The research highlights that conflicts between last-chance tourism and ecotourism can be addressed through strategic collaboration. Both forms of tourism share common ground in preserving natural areas and promoting environmental sustainability. By developing management strategies that regulate the high visitor influx associated with last-chance tourism, it is possible to integrate it with the low-impact visitor model of ecotourism. Ultimately, the relationship between last-chance tourism and ecotourism can be shaped through cooperative and adaptive strategies rather than conflicts. Such collaboration can contribute not only to the tourism sector but also to the long-term sustainability of ecosystems and local communities. In this context, both last-chance tourism and ecotourism have the potential to work together in protecting natural and cultural heritage. However, for this collaboration to be effective, appropriate policies, management frameworks, and cooperation mechanisms must be established. These strategic partnerships will encourage both local communities and visitors to adopt environmentally responsible behaviors, ensuring that ecosystems are preserved for future generations.

In this regard:

- Integrating last-chance tourism with ecotourism can help establish a broader environmental education and awareness network, as well as promote eco-friendly and sustainable tourism policies. Visitors can be informed not only about the natural beauty of a region but also about the importance of its preservation. Additionally, implementing environmentally conscious practices can encourage tourists to act more responsibly and minimize their impact on the destination.
- The number of tourists, particularly in fragile destinations, should be limited to ensure controlled visitor flow. Regulating visitor numbers will help reduce pressure on ecosystems. Additionally, guided tours can be scheduled within designated time frames to manage access to sensitive areas effectively.
- To ensure a balanced coexistence of these two tourism types, tourism activities should be planned and monitored in collaboration with local stakeholders. The involvement of local communities is crucial for mitigating the environmental impacts of tourism.
- With the help of technology, regions where last-chance tourism and ecotourism activities take place can be directly monitored using digital platforms and tracking devices.
- From a tourism management perspective, an integrated strategy can be developed to protect sensitive ecosystems whereas accommodating both last-chance tourism and ecotourism. In this context, local governments, tourism industry stakeholders, and non-governmental

organizations can collaborate to implement regulations that effectively control tourist density.

Future research could benefit from empirical studies supported by fieldwork on last-chance tourism and ecotourism. Additionally, analyzing visitor motivations and local community perspectives can contribute to a more balanced approach to managing tourism's social and environmental dimensions.

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Decent Work and Work Meaning in Food & Beverage Sector: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the relationship between decent work, job satisfaction, and the meaning of work within food and beverage sector, Türkiye. It aims to understand how decent work conditions—characterized by safe working environments, access to healthcare, fair compensation, reasonable working hours, and organizational values aligned with family and social values—affect employees' job satisfaction and their perception of work's meaningfulness.

Study design/methodology/approach: Utilizing scales validated for the Turkish cultural context, the research explores how decent work influences job satisfaction and how this, in turn, impacts the sense of meaning employees find in their work. The study hypothesizes that decent work positively affects the meaningfulness of work, with job satisfaction serving as a mediator between decent work and perceived work meaning. Data were gathered from 104 employees working in food and beverage sector in Türkiye. The hypotheses were tested using the simple linear regression analysis method, the regression analysis method based on the PROCESS Macro bootstrap method

Results: Decent work has positive influence on job satisfaction, supporting hypothesis 1 and decent work has positive influence on work meaning, supporting hypothesis 2. Furthermore, job satisfaction mediates the relationship between decent work and work meaning, supporting hypothesis 3.

Originality/value: The study contributes to understanding the psychological mechanisms linking decent work to perceived work meaning, offering implications for sustainable HR practices in food and beverage setting.

Keywords: Decent Work, Job Satisfaction, Work Meaning, Food & Beverage Sector.

Introduction

The concept of human dignity emerged as a result of the problems experienced by individuals in their work lives. Although the concept of human dignity was formally introduced by the International Labor Organization in 1999, its content dates back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The Declaration outlines rights that should exist in the workplace, such as the right for individuals to make decisions about their work freely, fair working conditions, receiving adequate compensation, social protection, protection from unemployment, and the right to form and join trade unions (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016). Taking into account the rights that individuals should have in the workplace as outlined in the Declaration, the International Labor Organization introduced the concept of human dignity in 1999, making additions and adjustments to these rights. Duffy et al. (2016) note that human dignity consists of five dimensions:

The text you provided appears to be in Turkish. Here's the translation to English:

(a) Physical and relational safety conditions, (b) access to health services, (c) adequate compensation, (d) free time and rest, (e) the harmony of corporate values with family and social values.

The Psychological Working theory suggests that when all these elements are present, human dignity can be achieved. Job satisfaction is the result of individuals' evaluation of working conditions (Judge et al., 2017) and is a concept positively associated with human dignity. The Psychology of Working Theory posits that job satisfaction is enhanced in environments that uphold these dimensions, thereby increasing employees' perception of work as meaningful (Duffy et al., 2016). When individuals experience dignified working conditions, their intrinsic needs for survival, autonomy, and social contribution are more likely to be met. In the satisfied work area, they see their work as more meaningful. In this context, job satisfaction plays an intermediary role between human dignity and meaning at work (Van Duffy, 2022). This study examines the food and beverage sector to analyze the relationship between decent work, job satisfaction, and perceived work meaning. It also considers the influence of demographic variables.

Based on theoretical background, literature review, and empirical findings, the following hypothesis were derived for food & beverage sector's employee in Türkiye.

Hypothesis1: Decent work has positive influence on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2. Decent work has positive influence on work meaning.

Hypothesis 3: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between decent work and work meaning.

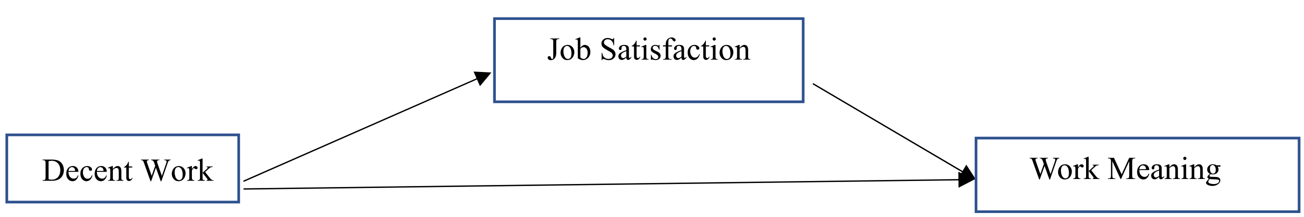

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Method

Participants and Procedure

The data was collected from 104 employees who have been working in food and beverage sector located in Turkiye. The respondents participated in the survey via Internet. Females comprised 51 % of the sample. Most of participants was ranged from 18 to 27 years old, with an average work experience under 5 years. 37.5 % of participants had high-school graduates, 32.7 % had bachelor degree. 82.7% of the participants had formal training in food and beverage services.

Scales

Decent Work Scale

We measured the perceptions of the participants with decent work scale, which was first developed by (Duffy, Allan, England, Blustein, Autin, Douglass...et al., 2017). The validity and reliability studies in Turkish cultural context were conducted by Buyukgoze Kavas and Autin (2019). Decent work has five decent work standards. These are (a)physically and interpersonally safe working conditions, (b) access to healthcare, (c) adequate compensation, (d) hours that allow for free time and rest, (e) organizational values complement family and social values. The scale's internal consistency reliability was reported as 0.80. A high score in the sub-dimensions of the scale indicates a high level of decent work.

Job Satisfaction Scale

We used the shortened 5-item Job Satisfaction Scale measure to assess job satisfaction (Judge et al. 1998). Example items include "I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job" and "I find real enjoyment in my work." Participants responded on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree. Validity and reliability studies were performed by Keser & Bilir (2019). They reported the scale's internal consistency reliability as 0.78

Work Meaning Scale

The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012), which is a 10-item instrument, assesses the level of meaning people feel in their work. This scale is 7-point Likert ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). This scale has three components (positive meaning, meaning making through work, and greater good motivations). A sample item is "I have found a meaningful career". Validity and reliability studies were performed by Akın, Hamedoğlu, Kaya and Sarıçam (2013). They reported the scale's internal consistency reliability was reported as 0.86.

The aim of the present article is to explore the relations among decent work, job satisfaction and work meaning in food-beverage sector. Data was gathered online from 104 employees. The sample consisted of 104 Turkish adults ranging in age from 18 to 58 and over years. Of the participants, 53 (51%) identified as female and 51 (49%) identified as male. Waiters, commis, cooks were the most represented professions among the participants. According to the results obtained from the research, it has been determined that job satisfaction has a mediating role between decent work and work meaning

Results

In this study, the SPSS version 24.0 for Windows operating system was used to perform statistical analyses. The mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between decent work and work meaning was tested via the multiple regression analysis and a PROCESS macro. Decent work total scale produced the highest correlation with job satisfaction ($r=.526$; $p < .01$) and work meaning ($r=.571$, $p < .01$). Decent work subscales revealed that safe working conditions produced the highest correlation with work meaning conditions (r=.458, $p < .01$) and Decent work total scale and job satisfaction were accounted for 50% of the variance in work meaning.

It was calculated 95% bootstrap CI based on 5,000 bootstrapped samples. The results show that decent work had a positive influence on both job satisfaction (B=0.4635, p<0.001) and work meaning (ß = 0.3445, p<0.001), providing support for H1 and H2. When controlling for decent work, job satisfaction has positive influence on work meaning (B = 0.6354, p<0.001). Next, we used PROCESS (V3) Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% percentile bootstrap confidence intervals to evaluate the indirect effect (IE) of decent work on work meaning through job satisfaction (Hayes 2017). The results reveal a statistically significant indirect positive effect of decent work on work meaning through job satisfaction (IE=0.2945; CI [0.1383, 0.4799]. Because bootstrap confidence interval (CI) does not include zero, job satisfaction serves as a mediator in the model (Hayes 2017), thereby providing support for H3

Table 1. Correlations of Decent Work Scale Subscales, Total Scale and Mean, Standard Deviation

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Total DW	1	.707**	.735**	.575**	.513**	.751**	.526**	.571**
Safe working conditions	.707**	1	.448**	.247**	.141	.413**	.385**	.458**
Access to healthcare	.735**	.448**	1	.192	.097	.471**	.321**	.439**
Adequate compensation	.575**	.247**	.192	1	.443**	.236**	.279**	.234**
Free time-rest	.513**	.141	.097	.443**	1	.269**	.370**	.321**
Complementary value	.751**	.413**	.471**	.236**	.269**	1	.404**	.404**
Job satisfaction	.526**	,385**	,321**	,279**	,370**	,404**	1	,661**
Work meaning	.571**	,458**	,439**	,234*	,321**	,404**	,661**	1
Mean	4.31	4.70	4.23	4.44	4.32	3.88	4.14	4.89
SD	1.13	1.74	2.08	1.37	1.32	1.82	.984	1.25

** $p < .01$. n=104

Conclusion

It has been determined decent work is an antecedent of meaningful work and that job satisfaction has a mediating role. Hypotheses were derived from existing literature and tested on employees working in food and beverage sector. Organizations are responsible for providing decent and meaningful work environments—not only for employees' well-being, but also to benefit themselves by improving their satisfaction. Since decent work includes fair pay, good conditions, rest, healthcare, and values (Duffy et al., 2017), it is a comprehensive concept that effectively predicts employees' job satisfaction and then work meaning. Studies have consistently found that individuals working in environments that reflect their interests, values, and abilities tend to experience greater job satisfaction and improved occupational well-being (Bluestein et al., 2017; Inegbedion, 2014)

Decent work positively predicted meaningful work, and positive changes in decent work (e.g., work becoming more decent) predicted positive changes in meaningful work (work becoming more meaningful). Literature show that sub-constructs of decent work predict work meaning (Büyükgoze-Kavas & Autin, 2019; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2019; Dodd et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2017) In all studies, at least two components emerged as significant predictors. The most consistent predictor was values congruence with the organization, followed by safe working conditions and access to health care. This study overlaps with these findings.

The mediating role of job satisfaction suggests that decent work does not directly effects work meaning unless employees have job satisfaction. In other words, job satisfaction serves as a psychological pathway through which structural work conditions influence how employees interpret the value and significance of their work. This mediating effect underscores the importance of not only ensuring decent conditions but also fostering environments that support personal fulfillment and emotional well-being. Moreover, the findings show that employees' satisfaction is not just a result of decent work, but also a key factor that changes how they see their role in the workplace and in society. Job satisfaction can be a powerful tool to increase how meaningful employees find their work and to help keep them motivated and committed—especially in demanding sectors like food and beverage.

From a practical perspective, these findings highlight the responsibility of employers and policymakers to promote decent work standards not merely as obligations but as strategic tools to foster motivation, retention, and purpose-driven performance among workers. Employees must experience a sense of personal recognition and be appreciated not only through fair compensation but also through non-monetary forms of value, such as respect, inclusion, and acknowledgment of their contributions (Winchenbach et al., 2019)

The findings of the study should be taken into consideration in light of a few limitations. Self-reported cross-sectional data is one limitation, no causal interpretations can be made. Besides this, It is useful to get insights from coworkers and employers to enhance the validity and depth of future research on work experiences. One other limitation of this study is that it was quantitative. In future research, it is recommended to study the role of other mediator factors such as employee engagement, organizational culture, and leadership style. Longitudinal research could be applied to assess how these relationships evolve over time. Future studies should attempt a qualitative study and employ in-depth interviews to elicit information from participants.

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What Do Turkish Airlines' In-Flight Meal Visuals Whisper about Turkish Culinary Culture?

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the symbolic meanings embedded in the food and beverages served by Turkish Airlines in Business Class on transatlantic flights as representations of Turkish culinary culture and national identity.

Study design/methodology/approach: The research employs a semiotic analysis grounded in Roland Barthes' theories of denotation and connotation. Six pictures from Turkish Airlines' Business Class on transatlantic flights were selected by criterion sampling and examined through exploratory and descriptive content analysis.

Results: The results reveal that the meals convey values such as luxury, prestige, nourishment, modern presentation, and detailed culinary techniques. These elements not only reflect Turkish culinary traditions but also enhance the passenger experience and contribute to the cultural branding of the airline.

Originality/value: This research contributes to the fields of gastronomic tourism and airline service studies by highlighting how in-flight meals can function as both cultural expressions and strategic tools for enhancing customer satisfaction and promoting national culinary identity in the tourism industry.

Keywords: Turkish culinary culture, Turkish Airlines' in-flight catering, Semiotic analysis

Introduction

The culinary culture, which influences tourists' future behavioral intentions and serves as a significant appeal factor (Cömert, 2014, p. 65; Selwood, 2003, p. 179), differs according to the region's geographical conditions and the resulting agricultural products. Currently, advancements in technology and transportation are crucial in enabling engagement with many culinary cultures. Turkish Airlines (TA) promotes Turkish culinary culture by producing several commercials in addition to transporting passengers (Şekerli, 2021, p. 850). TA's designation as "the airline that flies to the most countries in the World", with 128 countries and 328 destinations (Turkish Airlines, 2024), exemplifies the airline's efficacy in promoting culinary culture.

In the field of air transportation, there are many studies in the local literature regarding in-flight services. These studies have shown that in the evaluation of service quality, in-flight catering is an important criterion (Çırpın and Kurt, 2016; Bakır and Atalık, 2018; Bakır and Alptekin, 2018; Altınkurt and Merdivenci, 2020; Savaş and Duran, 2020; Keşkekçi and Gençer, 2023). Yağız's

(2023) study also supports this belief. The findings have shown that in-flight catering and service significantly and positively affect customer loyalty and customer satisfaction. On the other hand, there are also studies that find in-flight catering to be a cost-increasing factor (Tanrısevdi and Çulha, 2010; Macit, 2019; Kurnaz, 2022). However, research findings (Yabancı, 2018; Savaş and Duran, 2020; Sarılgan and Bakır, 2023) suggest that in airline transportation, in-flight catering is an indispensable element, as it is one of the important factors influencing the choice of airline companies. Another important aspect that stands out regarding in-flight catering is the food served. The study by Dölekoğlu, Veziroğlu, and Keiyinci (2017) showed that while local foods are preferred on domestic flights, Turkish cuisine is preferred on international flights. Şahin (2020) found that despite the potential for using registered geographical indication products in in-flight catering, there was no mention of geographical indication products in the in-flight catering menus.

Including local foods from the destination in in-flight menus undoubtedly contributes significantly to the promotion of the destination's culinary culture. Therefore, delving deeper into the subject by examining studies that explore the role of food in tourism is believed to offer a more profound perspective to this research. For example, Yeboah and Ashie (2024, p. 6) indicate that local dishes serve as promotional tools, help preserve local culture and quality standards, support economic development, and act as attractive elements in destination marketing. Similarly, Kalenjuk-Pivarski et al. (2023) argue that the consumption of local and traditional products in tourism reduces the use of plastic-packaged goods, thereby contributing to environmental sustainability. They also found that incorporating local products into tourism offerings enhances their quality, strengthens socio-cultural factors by enabling local communities to take pride in what they produce, and increases the economic value of meals by raising their price at the destination. Osman and Nazari (2020) state that food plays a role in strengthening the image of a destination, offering authentic experiences, and promoting food tourism. Likewise, Du Rand, Heath, and Alberts (2003, p. 100) emphasize that local food provides authenticity to destinations, fosters agricultural activities, contributes to the creation of destination brand identity, serves as a source of pride for local producers, and supports economic development by acting as an element of attraction (Süzer and Doğdubay, 2022, p. 263).

A lot of research has been done on Turkish Airlines' position and history in the aviation industry. These studies look at things like leadership, quality, service, and image (Gökırmak, 2014; Yurtoğlu, 2016; Şekerli, 2021; Görkem and Yağcı, 2016; Canöz, 2015; Korkmaz et al., 2013; Koçoğlu, 2018; Kuzu, 2018; Ergün, 2001; Kozlu, 1990; Altınay-Özdoğan, 2018; Alagöz and Ekici, 2018; Uslu, Durmuş, and Kolivar, 2013; Dursun et al., 2014; Asma et al., 2018). However, it is significant that research on in-flight services is limited. This research intends to analyze the foods and beverages in Turkish Airlines' in-flight catering through a semiotic lens within the framework of air travel and in-flight services, concentrating on Turkey's national airline. Therefore, we anticipate this research to be a profound study that showcases the application of Turkish culinary tradition in in-flight food.

Methodology

This research has been structured as an instrumental case study approach. Criterion sampling, a method of purposive sampling, was used to pick visuals related to in-flight services on TA's website (TA, 2025) for semiotic analysis conducted from December 23 to 26, 2024. This research includes six in-flight meals inspired by Turkish cuisine, provided in Business Class on Transatlantic flights. The six menus included in the study were selected from those served on transatlantic flights, which are long-haul and extended in duration. It was considered that passengers on such flights would have more time to engage with the meals, allowing for a deeper perception of the symbolic meanings conveyed through the food and its presentation. Therefore, Business Class menus from transatlantic routes were chosen as the sample in alignment with the study's purpose. In the spirit of Roland Barthes' theory of denotation and connotation, both the offers' literal meanings and the authors' interpretations of what they mean in a more general way have been included. The findings were analyzed by exploratory and descriptive content analysis.

Results

Under this heading, images of in-flight catering are provided. Subsequently, the authors included the denotation of the visuals (directly accepted) and their connotations (considering factors such as color and presentation shape, which evoke cultural, emotional, or ideological associations).

Figure 1. Turkish Airlines catering service 1 (Source: TA, 2025).

Denotation: A dish of grilled eggplant accompanied by rigatoni in tomato sauce, a Mediterranean salad, bread, and cheese.

Connotation: In Turkish cuisine, the eggplant, commonly used in the Southeastern Anatolia Region, has resulted in the dish called roasted eggplant with tomato sauce and Rigatoni, a fusion of eggplant and the Italian culinary staples of tomato and pasta (Rigatoni). This also represents the harmony of Italian and Turkish culinary cultures. The salad, with its vibrancy and variety of ingredients, references the Mediterranean culinary culture found along the coasts of Turkey and Italy. Bread and cheese complete the balance of basic food sources like carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. The simplicity of the tableware used, combined with its functionality, plays an effective role in creating a premium feel. However, the round-edged presentation of the equipment gives a feeling of being "suitable for everyone's palate" and a "soft taste."

Figure 2. Turkish Airlines catering service 2 (Source: TA, 2025).

Denotation: A dish platter of eggplants stuffed with minced meat, served with rice, pudding, salad, and bread.

Connotation: The meals provided in business-class aircraft serve as indicators of cultural, socio-economic, and consumption insights, transcending their role as mere sustenance. The presentation of karnıyarık, a famous and renowned dish of Turkish cuisine, along with rice and bread essential components of nearly every Turkish dining table serves to showcase Turkish culinary culture and dining practices. At this juncture, the responsibility of encapsulating the fundamental food components of Turkish culinary culture inside a singular menu becomes paramount. Pudding, conversely, is one of the most renowned sweets worldwide and can attract nearly every demographic. It is significant that Turkish cuisine may be seamlessly integrated with international cuisines. The selected presentation equipment and technique, grounded in minimalism, accentuate the offered dish and emphasize the cuisine.

Figure 3. Turkish Airlines catering service 3 (Source: TA, 2025).

Denotation: Stuffed grape leaves, stuffed eggplant and zucchini, bread, and a sauce-based menu.

Connation: These foods, commonly consumed in Middle Eastern, Balkan, and Mediterranean cuisines, exemplify the promotion of Turkish culinary culture and eating habits. Turkish culinary culture is a cumulative history resulting from the interplay of diverse geographies and cultures.

Conversely, the labor-intensive characteristics of the presented dishes emphasize the detailed and technical elements of Turkish culinary culture. Butter symbolizes the Black Sea Region, spices signify the Mediterranean and Southeastern Anatolia Regions, olive oil signifies the western portion of the country, and bread represents all of Turkey. These dishes are beyond mere sustenance; they represent the cultural, social, and economic framework. The presentation equipment and color employed enhance the dish's prominence by using the power of simplicity.

Figure 4. Turkish Airlines catering service 4 (Source: TA, 2025).

Denotation: Lentil soup, salad, bread, and side dishes.
Connation: A well-known pairing like soup and bread represents an evocative element of Turkish culinary culture and cuisine. It provides snapshots of Turkish culinary culture with a presentation style that can appeal to people from every demographic background. For example, in terms of the side products used, butter represents the Black Sea Region, spices represent the Mediterranean and Southeastern Anatolia Regions, olive oil represents the western part of the country, while bread symbolizes all of Turkey. The adherence to proper table setting rules and the choice of modern and minimalist equipment represent a service approach aimed at a specific customer class. However, it also shows that Turkish cuisine is suitable for individuals who want to maintain weight control.

Figure 5. Turkish Airlines catering service 5 (Source: TA, 2025).

Denotation: Four kinds of sherbet desserts and Turkish tea.

Connation: The cuisine is primarily Middle Eastern and Turkish, originating from Mesopotamia and catering to the sweet habits of the region. This region produces and consumes semolina, which is present in almost all of the desserts in the picture. The phrase also refers to the products produced in these lands and their use in food. Turkish tea is found in every household and consumed in large quantities across Turkish culture. It represents the drinking habits and culinary traditions of the Turkish people, as it is enjoyed in every home regardless of age, gender, or economic status. The absence of plastic in the presentation equipment and packaging symbolizes prestige and the comfort of home. In terms of the colors used, the white plates emphasize purity and cleanliness. On the other hand, the types of desserts and elements, such as serving tea in a glass cup, bear traces of the consumption of syrupy desserts in Turkish cuisine.

Figure 6. Turkish Airlines catering service 6 (Source: TA, 2025).

Denotation: Bulgur pilaf, grilled chicken, tomatoes, roasted peppers, ayran, and bread.

Connation: This image, characteristic of Turkish dining tables, signifies the region's adoption of a diet rich in carbohydrates and proteins. Ayran, regarded as the "National Beverage", represents Turkish culture and dietary practices. Butter signifies the Black Sea Region, spices signify the Mediterranean and Southeastern Anatolia Regions, olive oil symbolizes the western half of the country, and bread symbolizes all of Turkey. The selection of colors for the equipment and materials can impart a premium aesthetic. The diverse hues of the food shown on the plate signify the nutritional abundance of Turkish culinary culture.

Conclusion

This study aims to reveal the meaning symbolized by Turkish dishes and table culture used in in-flight services. In this context, the cultural elements that the meals aim to convey to customers have been explained through six visuals of the food and beverages offered by TA on business-class and transatlantic flights. The findings indicate that the presented food and beverages possess representations of "luxury, prestige, nourishment, modern presentation, and detailed culinary techniques".

Figure 7. The symbols of Turkish food
Source: Produced by the authors

This investigation into the representation of Turkish cuisine in in-flight catering is distinct from prior studies. Conversely, the emphasis on aspects of Turkish cuisine in in-flight catering aligns with the research objectives of the study conducted by Dölekoğlu et al. (2017). Furthermore, Şahin (2020) redirected the research emphasis toward the utilization of geographically indicated items in in-flight catering. Consequently, the studies indicate similarities regarding the incorporation of Turkish cuisine characteristics in in-flight catering. Moreover, in-flight catering is perceived to enhance service quality and augment the value of customers' flight experiences. This research evaluates in-flight food services not as a cost-increasing element but as a feature that enhances customer pleasure, as noted in the literature (Tanrısevdi and Çulha, 2010; Macit, 2019; Kurnaz, 2022).

The evaluation of Turkish culinary culture in in-flight catering through six visuals and the inability to access a detailed menu regarding the food contents constitute the main limitations of this research. Future studies could address these limitations by analyzing different airline companies or a broader variety of meal menus offered by Turkish Airlines. Moreover, research can be extended to include special dietary menus (such as Hindu, kosher, vegan, or vegetarian options) using both semiotic and sensory analysis methods. In addition, it would be beneficial to integrate passenger-centered data such as customer reviews, satisfaction ratings, or direct sensory experiences. For instance, sensory analysis methods like focus groups or structured tastings can be employed to examine how passengers perceive taste, smell, and presentation on board. Likewise, analyzing online passenger reviews may offer valuable insights into how in-flight meals are interpreted and emotionally experienced by different consumer groups. Combining semiotic analysis with consumer feedback could provide a more holistic understanding of the symbolic and experiential dimensions of in-flight catering. Finally, including foreign passengers in the sample group is also recommended for future studies to enhance cross-cultural insights. One limitation of the current study is its exclusive focus on Turkish Airlines. Future research could address this issue by conducting comparative semiotic analyses of in-flight meals from multiple global airlines. Such comparisons would not only reveal how different airlines use culinary elements for brand differentiation but also contribute to the growing literature on food as a tool for cultural representation in international aviation.

Beyond the context of Turkish Airlines, these findings suggest that other airlines may also strategically utilize culinary elements as part of their branding and storytelling efforts. In-flight meals have the potential to serve not only as nourishment but also as symbolic expressions of national culture, heritage, and hospitality, offering an emotionally engaging experience that can enhance brand identity and customer loyalty. It should be noted that the symbolic interpretations presented in this study reflect the authors' perspectives and may vary across passenger demographics. Future studies could incorporate a broader range of viewpoints to explore how passengers from different cultural or social backgrounds engage with in-flight food symbolism.

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Doom Spending Behavior among Generation Z in Türkiye

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to develop and validate a Doom Spending Scale (DSS) to measure the spending behavior of Generation Z in Türkiye in response to economic uncertainties. Doom spending, an emerging concept, refers to impulsive spending driven by a pessimistic outlook on financial stability.

Study design/methodology/approach: A mixed methods approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. Since there is no direct literature on doom spending, a question pool for the interviews will be created based on related concepts. A scale will be developed based on the interview results and will be evaluated by the experts. Once validity and reliability are established, the scale will be tested among 350 people belonging to Generation Z, followed by factor analysis to confirm validity and reliability.

Results: The findings will identify key psychological and social factors influencing doom spending among Generation Z. Although this study focuses on Turkish Generation Z, future research should examine its applicability across different demographics and regions.

Originality/value: DSS will fill a critical gap in consumer behavior research, providing practical implications for businesses, policymakers, and financial advisors. This scale offers valuable insights into consumer behavior during economic uncertainty, contributing to marketing, behavioral economics, and financial planning.

Keywords Doom Spending, Generation Z, Economic Uncertainties, Consumer Behavior, Spending Habits

Introduction

Uncertainties about the future have led to trust issues among people, significantly influencing their consumption and spending habits. According to the literature, during periods of economic uncertainty, individuals tend to consider saving as a rational response, prioritizing their basic needs (Al-Thaqeb & Algharabali, 2019; Bande et al., 2021; Broadway & Haisken-DeNew, 2017; Guariglia, 2001; Leland, 1968). However, recent observations suggest that economic uncertainties, contrary to traditional behavior patterns, also trigger alternative spending practices. This phenomenon has been referred to as the emerging concept of "doom spending." While the term "doom spending" is widely used on social media platforms, it has yet to be explored in academic studies. This gap underscores the need to develop a reliable scale to measure and analyze doom spending behavior.

Doom spending can be defined in two distinct ways. The first refers to individuals with limited financial resources who, upon acquiring some money, immediately spend it with the mindset of "I have no hope of becoming wealthy anyway." This behavior makes it nearly impossible for low-income individuals to save, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. The second definition relates to individuals in high-inflation economies who tend to spend their income rapidly, driven by the belief that prices will rise tomorrow, making goods unaffordable. This concept is often associated with Generation Z and millennials, as noted in recent popular media discussions (e.g., NY Post and CNBC).

Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s (Dimock, 2018) exhibits distinct spending behaviors shaped by their digital nativity and socioeconomic context. This cohort prioritizes experiences over material possessions (Khan and Belk, 2024), often allocating funds to travel, concerts, and dining out. They are savvy online shoppers (Aji and Adawiyah, 2022), leveraging social media platforms and influencer recommendations to make purchasing decisions. Generation Z consumers value sustainability and ethical practices, often favoring brands that align with their social and environmental values (Dragolea et al, 2023). They are more likely to engage in collaborative consumption models, such as sharing economy services and secondhand marketplaces. Additionally, this generation demonstrates a strong inclination towards mobile payment methods and digital wallets, preferring cashless transactions. Despite their young age, many Generation Z individuals show a heightened awareness of financial literacy, influenced by witnessing economic challenges during their formative years (Rodriguez et al., 2024).

On the other hand, compared to previous generations Generation Z has greater concerns about their future (Khan and Belk, 2024). Global pandemics such as COVID-19 (Azimi, Andonova & Schewe, 2021), concerns about climate change and sustainability (Bogueva & Marinova, 2022), and economic worries (Tasaki & Kameyama, 2024) contribute to Generation Z's negative perception of the future. It can be foreseen that this emerging negative outlook will also impact Generation Z's consumption habits. This growing sense of uncertainty is likely to influence their consumption habits, making them more susceptible to alternative financial behaviors such as doom spending.

Turkey has been one of the countries experiencing high inflation rates and economic fluctuations in recent years, which has directly affected consumer behavior. In a high-inflation environment, consumption decisions tend to accelerate, as individuals are inclined to advance their spending due to concerns about rising prices in the future (Burke & Ozdagli, 2023). In this context, understanding how doom spending behavior manifests among Generation Z in Turkey is of significant importance.

To sum up, existing researches do not explore the relationship between the overarching construct of doom spending and its dimensions. Consequently, both practitioners and scholars require research that (1) defines and measures doom spending behavior, (2) identifies its dimensions, (3) examines its impact on Generation Z in Turkey, and (4) predicts the potential implications of this behavior for the experience industry. Therefore, the primary aim of this study is to develop and validate a scale to measure doom spending behavior comprehensively.

Methodology

This study aims to develop a valid and reliable scale to measure doom spending behavior using a mixed methods approach, incorporating qualitative and quantitative techniques. The literature review identified conflicts or redundancies in existing definitions (Lambert & Newman, 2022). Since no direct literature on doom spending exists, a question pool was created by reviewing related concepts (Lamm et al., 2020), including additional questions expected to influence doom spending. Based on the literature, an interview will be prepared and conducted among people of different ages in the cohort. Researchers will analyze interview results to find out emerging themes and prepare survey questions. Experts will evaluate the questions for clarity and relevance (Dastane & Goi, 2023; Cleveland & Laroche, 2007). Based on their feedback, survey questions will be tested on a small group for comprehensibility and functionality (Yi & Gong, 2013; Lamm et al., 2020). After validity and reliability tests, factor analysis structured the scale and removed redundant items (Lambert & Newman, 2022; Dastane & Goi, 2023; Lamm et al., 2020). After establishing the reliability and validity of the survey, it will be conducted among 350 Generation Z participants.

Results

The expected results of this study are to identify key factors that drive doom spending behavior among Generation Z in Türkiye. The findings will also offer insights into the psychological and social drivers behind doom spending.

Conclusion

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by developing and validating a Doom Spending Scale (DSS) to measure the spending tendencies of Generation Z in Türkiye in response to economic uncertainties and future concerns. Given the absence of a validated scale in the literature, this study fills a significant gap by introducing a reliable and valid measure for doom spending behavior. The developed scale can be utilized by businesses, policymakers, and financial advisors to better understand and address the spending patterns of Generation Z, particularly in times of economic uncertainty. The DSS extends beyond academic settings and can be used to analyze consumer behavior in the experience industry, offering implications for marketing, financial planning, and behavioral economics.

On the other hand, the research focuses exclusively on Generation Z in Türkiye, which may limit its generalizability to other generations or regions with different economic and cultural dynamics. Future studies should apply the scale in different demographic and geographic contexts to enhance its validity.

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